The implicit ideas behind 'Valkompassen'

An ideal type analysis of the democratic presuppositions in Voting Advice Applications

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Abstract:

With Voting Advice Applications changing how people engage in democracy it has become more important to understand the work behind them. Much research has been given to the algorithm and methodology, but less has focused on the ideas that presupposes the development process. The aim of this thesis is to examine and further our understanding of how VAA's as part of the media repertoire affects contemporary democracy. Scholars have denoted that VAA's neutrally transmitting information may not be as neutral as one might think. Indeed, democratic presuppositions of the developers may play a role in shaping the intent of what VAA's intends to do. In order to explore those presuppositions this thesis has interviewed developers of Swedish 'Valkompassen' and their answers have been examined by employing an ideal type analysis of democratic ideals. The results indicate that the democratic presuppositions of the developers seem to be more akin to an electoral democratic ideal.

Keywords: Voting advice applications, Media, Political communication, Democratic presuppositions, Ideal types, Electoral democracy, Participatory democracy, Deliberative democracy.

1. Introduction

"Wahl-o-mat", "StemWijzer", "Valkompassen", chances are that you have come across one of these during the last decade when reading the newspaper, watching a tv broadcast or engaging in social media during a general election campaign. While different in name, the tools all consist of the same phenomena of matching the voter on issue specific policies to a like-minded party. Scientists have recently started to congregate them under the term of "Voting Advice Applications" or "VAA" for short (Munzert & Ramirez-Ruiz, 2021: 692)

Parallely with the rise of the internet and social media as an exacerbating force, VAA's have become an increasingly popular way of gathering information about political parties prior to the act of casting the vote once election day arrives. While the usage of VAA's differ depending on country specific context, it would seem reasonable to assume that ways of gathering information about electoral options are changing. As evidently shown by the statistics of "Valkompassen" conducted by Swedish public service during the 2022 general election, which saw a staggering amount of over half the electorate having engaged with it (SVT, 2022b).

These tools, constructed often by political scientists together with media institutions and journalists, wield a considerable influence over potential voters much depending on how the VAA's are created, by what algorithm it uses, but also by what view of democracy itself they pertain to. The media ever since its inception has always wielded considerable influence over its consumers. Firstly by considering what agenda that is to be set, and secondly how to frame that agenda (Strömbäck, 2014: 99-100, 113-114). These are decisions that editorial staff of news bureaus must consider every single time a publishing goes to print. Likewise so when election season comes and the Voting Advice Applications are marketed.

Within Political communication research, scholars have been describing and theorizing that there has been an increasing power discrepancy between the transmitter that is the media as an institution and between the receiving end (the electorate). Media

institutions can be viewed as being a political entity, being part actor within the democratic system (Strömbäck, 2014: 228-229). Therefore, the research problem seems to evidently become apparent, namely that if an increasing amount of people gather their information on how to act politically and whom to vote for by means of VAA usage, which are published and constructed by the media, both the methodology and ideation *behind* VAA's becomes increasingly important for the state of democracy. This thesis will focus on the latter.

2. Aim and research questions

Provided that the media influences citizens and society politically, the aim of this thesis will be to examine and further our understanding of how VAA's as part of the media repertoire affects contemporary democracy. More specifically the thesis will answer the following research questions

- *How do the developers perceive the intent of VAA's?*
- *What ideas of democracy do the developers' perception of VAA's promote?*

3. Prior Research

Whilst a primitive configuration of Voting advice applications stems all the way back to the 1980's, the contemporary rapid increase in its usage is often attributed to the rise of the internet during the aughts (Garzia & Marschall, 2012: 4-5). Despite the consolidation of voting advice applications in contemporary society the research field is still in its cradle (Munzert & Ramirez-Ruiz, 2021: 702). Yet things have transpired rapidly within the discipline. During the early 2010's the academic topic was gaining attention, but the research field was still seemingly detached and "disconnected" (Garzia & Marschall, 2012: 12) from one another. In a 2012 literature review, scholars Garzia & Marschall (2012) identified different strands of conducted research on the topic. The overarching trend suggests three primary areas examined: *The users of the VAA, the methodology of the VAA and the effects of the VAA.*

The centre of attention for the early researchers mainly targeted the users of the applications, namely the electorate itself and what type of person that tends to use and engage themselves with the application. In a 2016 follow up to their 2012 literature

review, Garzia & Marschall observe that the user characteristic of VAA's tends to skew towards the "young, male, politically highly interested, and highly educated" (Garzia & Marschall, 2016: 381). The debate within the profiling of VAA users has thus concerned the non-representative feature of the electorate (Garzia & Marschall, 2016: 381).

Moreover, the subsequent strand within the field concerns the methodology of the voting advice applications. Depending on how the VAA is designed and how questions and answers are weighted the application results "[...] varies remarkably, even changing the rank order of the parties" (Garzia & Marschall, 2012: 13). Insinuating that "the choice and composition of statements make a difference to the result indicated by a VAA" (Garzia & Marschall, 2016: 383). A current trend concerning the formulation and methodological backbone of VAA's is by employing a combination of both self-reporting by the parties and expert assessment (Garzia & Marschall, 2016: 383).

Lastly, the most heavily researched subfield of VAA's is in regard to their effects, specifically on political and cognitive behavior. In a recent meta-analysis of the research field, scholars Munzert and Ramirez-Ruiz (2021) concludes that there is a trend towards a consolidating "[...] consensus about the power of VAAs to boost turnout and make people reconsider their vote choice" (Munzert & Ramirez-Ruiz, 2021: 702). Indeed, the effect seems to be especially pungent in younger and highly informed persons yet the findings indicate that VAA's do matter in terms of voter turnout and in terms of which party one casts its vote for (Garzia & Marschall, 2016: 381-382). However, there are critics who deem the overarching results to be lacking in terms of causal validity due to a lack of experimentally robust research designs (Munzert & Ramirez-Ruiz, 2021: 702-703). Moreover, the effect noted on persons switching parties due to VAA's differ in different national contexts. For instance, Garzia and Marschall notes that the estimated effect in Belgium is around 3% whilst in Finland that amounts to 10% (Garzia & Marschall, 2016: 381-382).

The reviewed prior research indicates that while many areas have been thoroughly assessed, further research is needed. Not merely within the more popular subfields of VAA-research, but other angle-of-attacks are preferable on the topic as well as in other

country specific contexts (Garzia & Marschall, 2016: 384; Munzert & Ramirez-Ruiz, 2021: 702-703).

Of the areas, relating to VAA's which have been less examined, Garzia and Marschall identified as early as 2012 that normative aspects as well as what they deem to be the "media dimension" (Garzia & Marschall, 2012: 20) are topics in which the research has been lacking. However, in line with the more heavily researched areas of VAA's the normative angle has received more attention in the last couple of years. Scholars Anderson & Fossen asked normative questions concerning VAA's role in the (1) *competence of the citizen*, (2) *political participation* and (3) *democratic representation* (Anderson & Fossen, 2014a: 217-218). Arguing that while developers often claim to be a neutral mediator, the underlying normative assumptions of their implicit perception (e.g. of *the competence of the citizen*) actually assumes a principal normative standpoint about democracy itself.

Therefore, scholars continue to favor more transparency of how the VAA's are made as well as what they aim to achieve, because that very aim may indicate a certain normative standpoint of democracy. Transparency of those presuppositions are thus a desirable and encouraged trait in the publishing of VAA's. Other scholars such as Ladner et al. claim that the importance of transparency is in fact a responsibility of the developers behind them as VAA's "can be more than toys" (Ladner et al, 2010: 117; Anderson & Fossen, 2014a: 225) suggesting that the tools and the developers behind wield considerable and real influence on democracy.

Hence, the prior research has suggested that VAA's are indeed something more than just a 'pop-quiz' as it has actual influence on democracy. Secondly, despite developers of VAA's referring to a robust and 'neutral' methodology grounded in science it is still not enough since the implicit and unconscious presuppositions of what *constitutes* a democracy is *conditioned* on what the developers seek to achieve with the VAA. Yet, those intentions are not always apparent.

In an attempt to increase the transparency scholars Fossen and Anderson (2014b) argued that by assuming that the aim of the current supply of VAA's is to remedy a competence gap in citizens, would in turn indicate the prevalence of a more 'elite' or

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'thin' democratic presupposition. The authors did so by examining the explicit background descriptions that were published in conjunction with the release of VAA's in the Netherlands, specifically "StemWijzer" (and others that were based on that VAA) (Anderson & Fossen, 2014b: 246).

The authors proposed normatively how VAA's should and could be transformed conditioned on different democratic schools of thought on citizen competence (e.g. a democratic presupposition) (Anderson & Fossen, 2014b: 246). Claiming that while the *current* supply pertains to an elite democratic view, it is not the *sole* democratic view available. Thus the aim of a VAA is dynamic in the sense that if other democratic standpoints would presuppose the developer's the aim of what a VAA intends to achieve, it would too simultaneously change. They conclude by stating: "What one takes the point of VAAs to be clearly depends on one's conception of electoral politics and citizen competence*"* (Anderson & Fossen, 2014b: 249).

As such there is an empirical gap in the literature which would suggest that the next course of action is to empirically describe whether those democratic ideas *are* prominent and how to categorize them. Moreover, considering that prior research has been conducted by examining the 'manifestos' in adjunction to the publishing of VAA's in a central European context, it would be beneficial to explore other national contexts and other ways of estimating such perceptions.

Examining other national contexts is interesting topic-wise due to the fact that VAA's such as "StemWijzer" and "Wahl-o-mat" are not a part of the media repertoire. Instead both StemWijzer and the German Wahl-o-mat are third party applications, stand alone products. In the case of the Wahl-o-mat, the VAA is directly supervised under the interior ministry of the federal German government - "Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung" (Marschall & Schmidt, 2010: 65-66). While in the case of the StemWijzer, it has in previous years been marketed by newspapers but has not been affiliated with the media in other capacities. As StemWijzer is one of the oldest VAA's it has instead in contemporary society gained a steadfast grip as a standalone and popular website run by a non-profit organization called "ProDemos" that receives funding and support from the domestic interior ministry (ProDemos, n.d; de Graaf, 2010: 35-36). Thus, as Garzia and Marschall denoted previously, still many VAA researchers have yet to examine the

intervening media effects of where VAA's often reside within, such as in the case of the VAA-tradition in for instance, Northern Europe.

Hence this thesis will examine the prevalence of those democratic ideas that presupposes the publishing of VAA's in a northern European context as it differs from other VAA's previously examined. Moreover, while previous scholars have examined *explicitly* published material ('manifestos') on the basis of citizen competence as a democratic presupposition I will build upon and expand such a framework to broaden the available perspective as well as exploring the implicit ideas of the developers.

4. Theory

4.1. Ideas behind the VAA

The assumption that the democratic presuppositions of the developers of VAA's (including media actors) matter at all is not uncontroversial. Indeed, many developers perceive themselves as solely a mediator or matchmaker between representative and electorate (Anderson & Fossen, 2014b: 225-226). It would therefore be to the benefit of this essay to deconstruct that assumption before engaging with the theoretical backbone of the thesis.

As previously mentioned, scholars engaged in political philosophy warn of the notion to assume that the actor's agency is merely that of the role of a mediator. Scholars Fossen & van den Brink (2015) argue that in order for VAA's to be significant they must be constructed in a sense to "reduce the complex reality of electoral politics to manageable proportions and present this to the user in an easily accessible and understandable way" (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 342). In essence, the VAA and its result seeks to highlight a representation of the political playing field. Such a representation would be akin to a 'mirror', as the scholars describe it themselves. What that insinuates is that the VAA and the user is to be perceived as a reflection of the real political world; "the tool itself remains normatively neutral: it merely provides information*"*(Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 342). It would seem as if this boils down to a discussion of epistemological character, which in a sense it is, however Fossen and van den Brink argues that it is precisely that and *more* (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 342-343). In the epistemological understanding the 'mirror' merely highlights the

foreground and immediate aspects; "the user's policy preferences, parties' positions, and so on" (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 342). Yet the background which concerns "[...] the electoral process and the significance of the act of voting" (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 342) is shrouded. Perceiving a VAA as a mirror would therefore continue to conceal the implicit - "what an election is **about**" (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 343).

The latter part indicates a shift from epistemological character towards a political preference, belonging, or perception. How? Fossen and van den Brink correspond perspicuously by stating that the epistemological concerns (of how to mirror the reality of electoral politics) may be instead better thought of as a "diorama" (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 342, 348) rather than a *mirror* that reflects reality. The authors propose, metaphorically, a view likening to that of a "shoebox theater" (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 342) stating that such an interpretation "[...] brings into view the stage setting that goes on in the background, which structures the foreground elements of the presentation" (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 348). The concept of viewing it as a diorama opens up new opportunities for constitutive reasoning since one can not understand the intention by simply examining the "immediate" playing field of the political scene, as the developers of the VAA's intentionally or unintentionally construct the scene two-foldly. Firstly, by deciding on what issues that are important in the upcoming election and secondly, by nature of framing and highlighting those particular questions. The developer therefore "sets the stage" for what the election is de facto **about** (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 349-351). In Fossen and van den Brink's words: "the claim that the election is about issues is a normative claim" (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 351) it is therefore so due to the necessity of selecting and portraying some issues in favor of excluding and disregarding others.

The notion of selectivity is not controversial per se. In the field of media and communication science scholars have long conceptualized the 'agenda-setting function' as being a feature of media institutes and journalists (Strömbäck, 2014: 99). Indeed, "to be a journalist is to select - and reject" (Strömbäck, 2014: 114). Moreover, the developers behind VAA's are of course aware of the risk of potential bias when constructing them, hence why a rigid methodology and transparency of how the matching algorithm and subsequent issues are phrased, and why they are chosen, are

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often jointly published together with the application. (SVT, 2022a). Is that not a sufficient way to resolve the problem of representing the political reality as Fossen and Van den Brink (2015) then argue? The answer is no, because while the foreground is adequately accounted for in regards to warding of bias, one can not assume the characteristics of a VAA to be induced as a reflecting mirror **without** accounting for the background - the presuppositions and the ideas of democracy (in this instance). The point is that the explicit and implicit can not be seperated but are to be viewed as holistically combined as they are constitutive and dependent on each other.

Ultimately, what an election is ***about*** and the issues that precede it stems from the presuppositions of the developers of the VAA, where the VAA acts as an instrument to unveil the political reality and playing field. Thus if, as Fossen and Van den Brink argue, that VAA's intent conclusively boils down to different ideations about *"the transformation of preferences into policy-outcomes"* (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 345) therefore, those different ideations of democracy are important to explore. Some may pertain to a view akin to democracy where aggregating opinions and 'matching' them to elites is how the diorama should unfold, while others presuppose a deliberative process where opinions evolve dynamically (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 345-346). According to the scholars: "[...] VAA-developers have an active hand in **staging electoral dioramas,** not just in polishing mirrors" (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 353). Conclusively, neither approaches are 'right' or 'wrong' but both are normative and without examining the implicit, the explicit remains veiled.

4.2. Ideals of democracy

Democracy is a notoriously multi-faceted concept with a plethora of different answers depending on which question one might ask. Likewise so is the definition of what a democracy actually *is*. Samuel Huntington famously constituted the definition of democracy by stating that "[...] powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote*"* (Huntington, 1991: 7). Just as the definitions of what constitutes a democracy, likewise so does the ideal of what a 'good' democracy is. In the following segment I will emphasize three different type of ideals as conceptualized and described by scholars Giljam & Hermansson

(2003)[1]. The first will be a description of a minimalist view defined in their own words as *Electoral democracy,* followed by *Participatory democracy* and ending with *Deliberative democracy*.

4.2.1 Electoral democracy

Reminiscent of Huntington's definition, Giljam and Hermansson (2003) denote that the very core theme of electoral democracy is that recurrent and competitive elections are the central mechanism of producing legitimacy (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 14-15). Thus the role of the citizen is consigned to the role of a consumer, picking and choosing between competing parties (Anderson & Fossen, 2014b: 247). The party options that are presented to the voter prior to the election is a main practice in regards to the voters' possibility to affect societal progress, as the mechanism to legitimacy transpires by choosing representatives in elections. Therefore, by design the individual voter subsequently wields little influence in between elections in regards to its agency to impact the political course (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 16). Thus, a more illustrative description of the electoral democracy is that it can be deemed to be the purified ideal version of contemporary representative democracy (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 16), intended to facilitate stability.

The notion of stability is a salient characteristic in many off-springs within the electoral democracy ideal. Alluding to both Hobbesian and Lockean ideals (Premfors, 2000: 25), Schumpeter argued that "Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them*"* (Schumpeter, 2010: 253). The notion that stability is favorable in contrast to popular participation stems from his account that the electorate often tends to be low-informed and disinterested in the political democratic process (Bohman & Rehg, 1999: x-xi). Indeed as a result of this, merely some people ought to devote their time to political life, while the rest are reduced to pickers-and-choosers during election times. The view of the citizen rests on an individualistic ideology that deem all citizens as equal and autonomous, meaning that while all citizens wield the right to vote, their interests are simultaneously "atomistic*"* (Premfors, 2000: 27) meaning individually formed and quite static. Hence, the state is

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[1] Swedish book title is "Demokratins Mekanismer". All quotes and references have thus been translated by the author of this paper. In Swedish the concepts are called: "Valdemokrati", "Deltagardemokrati' and "Samtalsdemokrati".

likewise (as in Hobbesian terms), a means to an end for safeguarding order, life and individual liberties.

The mandate of which the elected represents the individuals of the electorate by, is believed not to necessarily act in accordance with the electorates preferences, but rather the elector ought to act in a way that *aggregates* the preferences of the broader collective preferences within society (Premfors, 2000: 26-27). In other words, politicians and governing bodies gain an immense independent maneuverability in how policy is proposed (Premfors, 2000: 27). However, unlike Hobbes' sovereign the electors may be held accountable, once their term of office comes to an end and a subsequent election is called (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 16-17).

According to Giljam and Hermansson, accountability and political mandate are the two "key words" (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 17) of electoral democracy. Although a political mandate often is deemed to be a way of channeling the 'will of the people', into a so-called "bound mandate" (Esaiasson, 2003: 46), that is indeed a misconception in the view of electoral democracy. Instead as Esaisson (2003) describes it, the *will* of the people is not the salient issue at hand, rather it is the *preferences* of the people, in terms of political representation (Esaiasson, 2003: 46-47). Thus, the preferences of the people are adjusted according to the majority principle, namely that the political output ought to reflect what the majority deems to be desirable (Esaiasson, 2003: 44). But how do the representatives gauge the interests of the people, if they simultaneously are given essentially independent maneuverability during their terms?

Proponents of Electoral democracy have no quarrels if representatives break their election promises, *provided* that they believe they are acting in the 'true' faith of what the majority of the people would deem to be in their own interest'. The accountability of which the representatives are supposed to be judged for happens *a posteriori,* (Esaiasson, 2003: 46-47) after their term has come to end the voting-eligible citizens may decide if their elector's promised or broken propositions were deemed to be in their interest after all, in other words, what the electorate faces on election night is a simple decision of either giving the carrot or the stick, "[...] to reward, alternatively to punish the chosen representatives for the political content that so far has been delivered or not" (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 17).

4.2.2 Participatory democracy

Contrastory to electoral democracy, elections are not the sole mechanism for producing legitimacy. Instead, an ideal of participatory democracy favors an active and engaged citizenry by additional means than merely casting a vote for a representative (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 19). Proponents of participatory democracy view such an ideal as not a replacement to the 'purified' representative system that electoral democracy envisions but rather as a means to amend the warts and short-comings of living under the rule of representatives (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 19). The amendments suggested by participatory democrats, and further described by Giljam and Hermansson, concerns the elements of incorporating characteristics of 'direct-democracy'.

The core theme of participatory democracy is precisely as the name would insinuate: to participate. An author in *Mechanisms of Democracy* (2003); Jan Teorell, denotes that the notion of participating differs both in terms of which democratic ideal one pertains to, but also within the specific participatory democratic ideal. According to Teorell, different advocates within the school of thought may differ in their explicit definition of what constitutes as participatory democracy, yet the consensus is that 'participating' implies being directly involved in the decision-making process (Teorell, 2003: 326). Would this then suggest that a participatory democrat wholly disregards representative democracy? By Teorell's reasoning that would be a misconception, since participatory democrats merely want *additional* forums outside of representative politics to participate within, such an example would be in decentralized forums such as increased democracy in the workplace, through civil societal organizations, through neighborhood watches by means of signing petitions or protesting among others (Teorell, 2003: 326).

In comparison to the electoral democratic view, the participatory definition of political representation is that participation itself is a mechanism towards affecting the political content and agenda prior to and in between elections (Teorell, 2003: 325). Thus participatory actions are "[...] a way for the political representatives to gather information about the public's preferences and needs*"* (Verba, 1996: 1 *in* Teorell, 2003:

325). Indeed as Benjamin Barber[2], one of the more prominent proponents of participatory democracy argues: "it envisions politics not as a way of life but as a way of living" (Barber, 1984: 118). Hence it is assumed that public politics is the primary road towards self-realization, private matters are secondarily and participation therefore fulfills an educating aspect meaning that by participating, arguing, discussing in decentralized forums, in turn enrichens democracy as the will of the people is formulated within those sessions, which subsequently could affect the decision making of the representatives (Amnå, 2003: 108-109).

Therefore, it might not be surprising that the participatory democracy ideal contrasts and rejects the electoral democracy ideal concerning that citizens are low-informed and apathetic towards engaging in politics. However, if they are low-informed that is instead a vice of the institutions and their organizational structure (Jarl, 2003: 127) which an increasingly active citizenry would in turn amend. Hence, it would serve as a self-reinforcing educating power, the participatory democrat would argue, as the citizens successively becomes more and more capable to evaluate, and assess matters in political life the more involved they are (Amnå, 2003: 109). The citizen does not have to be constantly available in order to participate, but it requires citizens to be "on duty" (Amnå, 2003: 119) for when it's needed. Politics is thus ever-present and is a continuous project that constantly forms and are "[...] precisised **by** the citizenry, not **for** them by any representative in their stead" (Amnå, 2003: 109).

The autonomy of the citizen as described is a recurrent theme and once again is something which is reinforced: "[...] created and recreated continuously within society" (Premfors, 2000: 31) through conversational discussions and participation in matters that are commonly and shared within society (Premfors, 2000: 31). Thus, the notion of reaching consensus differentiates from electoral democracy in that the opinions, aggregative preferences, (the 'preferences of the people') may never fully be captured by mere elites accustomed to the principle of majority (Premfors, 2000: 33). Preferences are instead integrative rather than aggregative, horizontal and bottom-up rather than vertical and top-down (Premfors, 2000: 35). "Democracy is not only decision making, it is also doing" (Hendriks, 2010: 107) meaning that preferences are

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[2] Benjamin Barber conceptualized it as "Strong Democracy".

integrated and therefore formulated by the citizenry in for instance a protest and the like, meant to acknowledge a standpoint for the representatives. (Hendriks, 2010: 107-108) It is more extensive compared to electoral democracy. As it is integrative, propositions need to be simultaneously encouraged and facilitated by both representatives, citizens and the media.

4.2.3 Deliberative democracy

The salient feature of the deliberative ideal is that rational discussion and conversation lies at the very center of the political system (Karlsson, 2003: 214; Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 22). Contrastingly to both previous ideals deliberative democrats are not engrossed in the process of constructing individual preferences, rather it is the public discourse - characterized by a will to understand, to assess and to *deliberate* between each other in order to reach an enveloping consensus which ideally would compel other political mechanisms to be redundant (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 22).

Whilst the idea of conversation being a core component to democracy has its tradition within thinkers such as John Stuart Mill, the major contributor to the conceptualization of deliberative democracy has to be ascribed to the philosopher Jürgen Habermas (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 22). Contrariwise, Habermas should not be lumped into the liberal theoretical school of thought, instead many regard him to be a critical theorist. Habermas' theory mainly concerns a reformulation of the 'rationality-iver' persistent in normative theory, lasting since the enlightenment (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 22). Yet, his theoretical work does not concern democracy explicitly, but rather is a philosophical work on epistemic knowledge and communication. Deliberative democracy is instead better thought to be "emanating" (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 22) from his reasoning. Thus while there are (just like in the previous ideals) many different schools of thought within the school of thought, there are a few central notions salient in all.

Giljam and Hermansson recounts: "the fundamental belief is that conversation in groups generates certain effects under certain circumstances" (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 23) What are those effects and circumstances of which the authors assess then? Well, the first concerns legitimacy. By comparing deliberative democracy to electoral democracy where elections are the central mechanism to producing legitimacy, in this

instance scholars have defined it as the following: "[...] the source of legitimacy is not the predetermined will of individuals, but rather the process of its formation, that is, deliberation itself" (Manin, 1987: 352 *in* Floridia, 2018: 41). Thus, as the process of deliberation itself is what produces legitimacy, the focus of the ideal emphasizes the preconditions that *facilitate* necessary conditions in order for society to be able to deliberate (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 23) What, in turn, are those conditions?

In order to disentangle those conditions, scholar Christer Karlsson denotes that one has to ask: *who* is deliberating, *how* many parts are there to the deliberation and *where* is the deliberation taking place? (Karlsson, 2003: 216) In regards to who, deliberation can be employed between citizens, between citizen and representative or between representative and representative. Likewise so, is there no upper limit to how many that directly or indirectly can participate in the discussion, which would facilitate that deliberation can occur in parliament, in media, in protests, etc. (Karlsson, 2003: 216-217). In Habermasian terms it is taking place in what is deemed to be a "public sphere" which ought to be considered as "[...] the political voice of civil society*"* (Chambers, 2018: 65) The deliberative process may thus be considered as defined by Karlsson: "a **process** where **actors** through **communication** based on **rationality** seeks to **reshape** or **shape** preferences*"* (Karlsson, 2003: 220). As the 'will' is not constant and is successively taking shape, it necessitates the actors involved to be rational, to be non-egotistical nor partisan to a certain group's interests as well as to be responsive and keen to admit when confronted with the better argument and therefore willing to change opinion thereafter (Jodal, 2003: 267).

Needless to say, while the preconditions are a necessity in order to be able to deliberate, the very deliberation needs to meet a certain quality as well in order to be legitimate. A deliberative debate must be inclusive and available to all, the arguments proposed need to be unrestricted and should be free of manipulation, both in terms of manipulating facts, and in coercing a consensus (Polletta & Gardner, 2018: 72-73). It is thus imperative that as many people and opinions as possible flow within the public sphere, as long as they are deliberative per previous account (Strömbäck, 2014: 245).

4.3. Theoretical framework

Figure 4.1 summarizes the main themes of each democratic ideal. I have limited what indicates the prevalence of each democratic ideal into three categories which will compose the guiding themes for the construction of an interview-guide (see methodology chapter and Appendix). Moreover, the themes on the left-hand side will serve as the operational indicators for categorizing and assessing the prevalence of the different ideations of democracy within the empirical material.

Figure 4.1. Summary of main themes of Democratic ideals.

Ideal types → Indicators ↓	Electoral Democracy	Participatory Democracy	Deliberative Democracy
Citizen characteristics	Low-informed and apathetic. Consumer that picks and chooses representatives in recurring elections.	Engaged and active if invited to participate. Autonomous "on duty"-citizen that want and need to directly influence.	Rational and open-minded if given the chance to discuss with others. Susceptible and willing to change stance when confronted with a better argument.
Preference formation	Aggregative	Integrative	Procedurally constructed
How?	Preferences of the citizens are formed individually, summarized and handed to the elites to deal with, via the majority principle. (Top-down)	Preferences are precisised by citizens by being directly involved in decision making. (Bottom-up)	Preferences are created in the deliberative process and are gauged by the enveloping consensus formed out of that process. (Bottom-up and discursive)
Where?	In centralized	In decentralized	In public spheres

	forums.	forums (such as within civil society)	(Informal and formal)
When?	During the election campaign.	In between elections, and in everyday life.	It may occur whenever, as long as the necessary preconditions for deliberation facilitate it.
Central mechanism of producing legitimacy	Election (of representatives)	Direct and decentralized participation (of citizenry)	Deliberation (between and within representatives and citizenry)

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5. Methodology

This thesis employs a dual methodology. In order to be able to answer the thesis' research questions:

- *How do the developers perceive the intent of VAA's?*
- *What ideas of democracy do the developers' perception of VAA's promote?*

Semi-structured interviews will be used in order to gather material for being able to answer the first research question. The choice of conducting interviews stems from a lack of available published material on the topic. While all VAA's publish a background description as well as a methodological description it is insufficient for being able to answer the formulated research questions. It is thus imperative to answer the first research question by collecting the material via conducted interviews in order to be able to even ask the second research question. In terms of answering the second question however, an ideal type analysis will be used.

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the Swedish VAA as a case, followed by a discussion on the examined population. Additionally as to how the interviews were

conducted and will end with a discussion of the potential risks and advantages of employing an ideal type analysis.

5.1. The case of Sweden

In this thesis I have opted to use a *purposive* sampling method of both case and subsequent units of analysis. In accordance with the previous research chapter, scholars have concluded that the *effects* of voting advice applications (on for instance, party loyalty) differ in different national contexts (Garzia & Marschall, 2016: 381-382). As less research has been garnered on the *ideas* behind VAA's in different national contexts, one could not conclude whether that is the case or not. However, what one can conclude is that VAA's differ in terms of where and how they are published. For instance, while VAA's in the Netherlands are published in a third-party setting, funded by governmental organizations (ProDemos, n.d), North European VAA's on the other hand, tend to be published by and within media organizations, such as in the case of Finland and in Sweden. Such an *a priori* differentiation between organizational structure is important for how the results of this study will be inferred, interpreted and what it could tell readers about a broader population. It is thus imperative for the discussion of the generalization of results, whether this study can be interpreted to be applicable to other cases.

Qualitative, small-N studies specifically, and with non-random sampling in particular are infamous within social sciences in terms of attaining (statistical) representativity (Esaiasson, et al. 2019: 159). Perhaps the criticism often faced by more quantitatively oriented scientists is rightful if the ambition is to generalize the findings to a larger encompassing population. (Esaiasson, et al. 2019: 158). While this thesis does not make quite such ambitious claims, it would still be beneficial to highlight the feasibility to infer the results to a more specific population other than the one examined.

Once again, as more notice has been given to continental European VAA's, I have opted to examine the case of Sweden. The argument for why is three-folded. Firstly, because I am a native Swedish speaker. As national VAA's are often written in domestic language, being of Swedish descent allows easier access to central sources and actors behind VAA's in that particular context. Critics might ask why solely Sweden then and not for instance Finland, a bilingual country where Swedish is a second official

language? It is a valid point, and was considered, but due to both time constraints, accessibility difficulties with reaching and getting 'Elite' interviewees to accept (and potentially conditioning a physical meeting as others have when writing this essay), and a lack of resources. It was therefore inevitably discarded and will fall within the delimitations of this essay. Secondly, Sweden recently held a general election. As VAA's are published and developed in a timely manner prior to elections, the VAA's examined are contemporary and the developers behind them would have the work and development process vivid in memory.

Lastly, Sweden was selected due to the mitigating effects it could have for issues of generalization. How so then? Well, Sweden and Finland are very similar in terms of how the media-systems (of where VAA's are located) are organized. Likewise, so are all the other Nordic countries. To illustrate, consider the following figure (5.1):

Figure 5.1. Three models of political-communicative systems. (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 70; Strömbäck, 2014: 44)
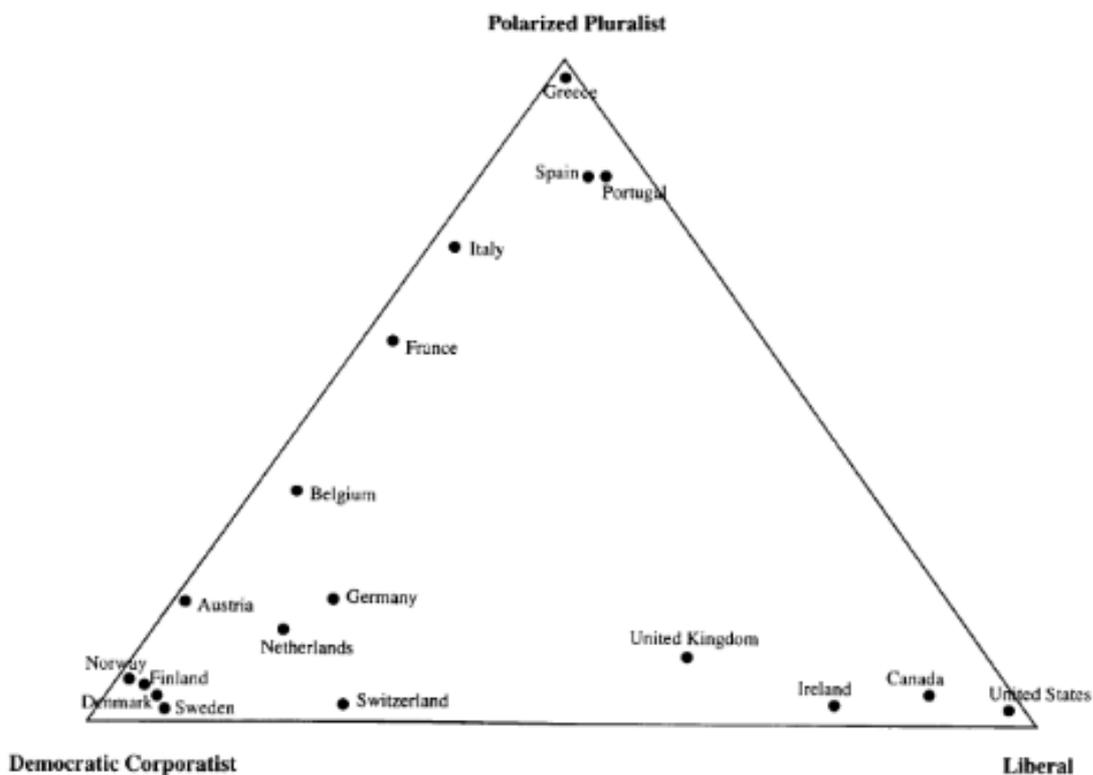
The highlighted model is constructed by scholars Hallin & Mancini (2004) and has been a hallmark for comparative studies within political communication studies (Strömbäck,

2014: 42). Within their model, the scholars differentiate how countries' political-communicative systems differentiate between each other. In the political sphere, their categorization is based on the country's historical advancement, political culture, governmental characteristics, party-system and legal tradition (Strömbäck, 2014: 42-43). While the media-sphere is differentiated on the basis of: "[...] the status of the daily press, the degree of intertwinedness between politics and media, the degree of journalistic professionalization and the role of the state within the media system." (Strömbäck, 2014: 42). Together Hallin & Mancini's (2004) results form figure 5.1.*,* which denotes the differences and similarities between different political-communicative systems. The first dimension is the Liberal; "[...] characterized by a relative dominance of market mechanisms and of commercial media;[...]". The second is the Democratic Corporatist dimension, characterized: "[...] by a historical coexistence of commercial media and media tied to organized social and political groups, and by a relative active but legally limited role of the state [...]". Finally, the Polarized Pluralist model is described: "[...] by integration of the media into party politics, weaker historical development of commercial media, and a strong role of the state."(Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 11 *in* Strömbäck, 2014: 43).

Considering that political-communicative systems tend to be quite stagnant and stable over time (Strömbäck, 2014: 45), and by considering that the systems are differentiated by national context, (and therefore also the context of how and where VAA's are published) one should be wary to assume and therefore draw conclusions, that what is true in the context of Sweden, is simultaneously inferred in other cases outside of the Democratic-corporatist model.

What is being emphasized is the contextual circumstances one has to take into account when seeking to generalize the results. In essence, media and its representatives are formed by its environment which it acts in, in the same way as people in general are. Since VAA's are constructed in that environment one could argue that there is reason to believe that their perceptions of what the intent of VAA's are, would differ depending on the environment of where they are constructed in. Hence it would be a mistake to assume that the reported results of this thesis would be applicable in other countries whose political-communicative systems severely differs from the examined one (Sweden).

However, by the very same logic, the oppositional assumption ought to be made; since the other Nordic countries are precisely so very similar to Sweden, both in regards of the political-communicative dimension, likewise in how and where VAA's are published, the results ought to be assumed to reflect on the non-examined countries within that democratic-corporatist model. Although the sample is not representative in a traditional statistical sense, I would argue that the results of this thesis could facilitate the construction of (at the very least) more qualified hypothesis-formation for further examinations within other Nordic countries.

5.2. The selection of VAA's

Furthermore, it ought to be added that in order to decide on a potential population to examine *within* Sweden, one has to look inward: what *eligible* units are available to analyze then? And units of *what?* (Esaiasson, et al. 2019: 157). Once again, the sovereign state of Sweden itself, does not publish any VAA's, no it is rather media institutions within Sweden that do. Secondly, while VAA's are indeed a part of those very same institution's repertoire it is not the institution itself that creates them, it is a team of developers who bear the ideas that shape them. Therefore, the potential population in Sweden that develops VAA's are quite narrow and finite. For this thesis I have decided upon the three largest VAA's during the 2022 general election in Sweden. The reasoning behind it is that the following units are all developed "in-house", meaning that while other media institutions and newspapers (such as "Svenska Dagbladet") (Brandell, 2022) have published a VAA, it is not really 'their own' as it is instead purchased (by one of the units that will be examined) externally for their readers. Other potential VAA's that have been rejected within the sample are smaller, or developed in a different manner than the 'matching voter to party'-function and often heavily biased VAA's favoring a niche political cause[3].

Therefore, I have settled on three different media institutions being "SVT", "Aftonbladet", and "TT". The units chosen are both homogenous and heterogenous in certain ways. In terms of homogeneity: they have all developed a VAA internally and

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[3] See for instance non-profit organization: "Funktionsrätt Sverige" (FS, 2022) and the Christian newspaper: "Dagen" (Zetterman, 2022).

operate within Sweden. Secondly, they are among the most popular, with both SVT and Aftonbladet boasting millions of active users during the election (Olsson Berg, 2022; SVT, 2022b)

Additionally, the heterogeneity stems from the sense of the categorization as established within the Democratic corporatist model, meaning that the chosen cases are what one may call typical within the model. SVT, is a public service company (Regeringen, 2019), illustrating the connection between state and media. Aftonbladet is a commercialized newspaper with a clear political *editorial* alignment (Aftonbladet, 2020), while TT is a private business-to-business news agency (TT, 2022). As the media institutions differ, one ought to be considerate as to how those differences may affect the results. Since SVT is bound to a broadcasting permit issued by the Government, that institution faces more scrutiny from external sources. As such one may perhaps assume that the representative of SVT would keep those matters in mind more closely than in the other instances. Therefore, when conducting the analysis one must keep a watchful eye and be as transparent as possible if those differences are actualized when presenting the results, likewise so if certain similarities would be revealed.

Moreover, the development of each's VAA goes under the name of "Valkompassen " and is constructed under a development team under supervision of a project-leader. As the samples are contrastory to each other I have settled for reaching out to interview the heads of those development teams of which will be discussed in the following segment.

5.3. Semi-structured interviews

The previous segment discussed and established both case selection, sample and subsequent population available for analysis. The method used in this thesis for collecting data is a semi-structured interview methodology. The immediate question one ought to consider when deciding on a particular methodology ought to be why this particular way is more beneficial than others. In this segment I will argue why the research questions necessitate a qualitative semi-structured interview methodology rather than the alternatives. Consider the following research questions again:

- *"How do the developers perceive the intent of VAA's?"*
- *"What ideas of democracy do the developers' perception of VAA's promote?"*

What can be inferred by asking the established questions are mainly two things in terms of methodology. The first is that one has to estimate the reasoning and thinking of the developers. In other words, a means of assessing the actors' perceptions of the meaning that they themselve ascribe to the phenomena that is being examined (VAA's) (Esaiasson, et al. 2019: 261). Now, there are a number of different ways in how one may do so, for instance through more quantitatively oriented ways such as surveys. Another is by for instance, focus groups for the more qualitatively oriented researchers. Indeed both approaches could be a beneficial way to answer the research questions, as both facilitate a means of estimating the actors' perception.

However, figuring that there only exists a finite amount of VAA's developed in Sweden during the 2022 general election the total possible population is quite small. As focus groups typically range between 6-12 members (Kapiszewski, et al., 2015: 201), while not being a total theoretical impossibility to arrange, it would have been a practical improbability (some development teams involve less people than that). Although, since all VAA's have been developed in conjunction with for instance research institutes and political scientists, one could argue that by extending that sample range to include them as well, it would necessitate the formation of a focus group in terms of numbers of participants.

When researching for potential interviewee candidates by consulting each media institution's own and explicit background and methodology that is published in conjunction with their VAA's, I found that developers differ in designation of developmental work. The political scientist's opinions have been garnered in the project of which questions to include, how the parties deem those very questions, and consultation in how algorithm and methodology is conducted (Ekman, 2022).

In essence, the researching 'side' of the construction of 'Valkompassen' is mainly conducted in the methodology department. Now that may be interesting information in itself, but in accordance with this thesis' aim, one could make the case for it not being particularly relevant. It could however be significant information if one were to ask

questions either in comparative terms, or in terms of assessing for instance, the role of 'experts' within media institutions or in broader society. Hence in accordance with the aim and research questions, the focal intent of VAA's would still be concealed if approached in such a way.

Such a limitation then leaves one with the developers from the media 'side' left. It was at one point considered during the researching phase of this thesis to contact the whole development team involved in the project. This was however ultimately decided against as some are likewise not a central actor. More junior developers would fall into the same pitfall as the external political scientists within the project, namely that they do not possess the information necessary for the thesis' research question, and are instead delegated by the 'touch' or characteristics that enclose the ideas shaping the intent of a VAA by their seniors. In other words, more junior developers lack the central placement within the structure of where VAA's are constructed. In essence, those with a more minor role do not delegate work, but are instead delegated.

Another potential risk with including them in for instance a focus group would be that their responses could reflect whatever their supervisors perceptions are, especially in a face-to-face group setting that includes a person with a surpassing hierarchical position above them, due to fear of potential repercussions after the conducted session (Kapiszewski, et al., 2015: 203-204). A similar argument could also be made for one-on-one interviews, provided that the supervisor infers who has engaged with the interviewer. This is however alleviated by anonymizing the interviewees, yet the risk is never zero for being discovered, as a malign supervisor could deduce who said what by means of personal expressions and so on.

In contrast I have therefore opted for targeting the heads of the project, the informants or what methodology scholars Esaiasson, et al. (2019: 267) denote as "centrally placed sources". Now, the position of a project leader is scarce and that does not leave many centrally placed sources to examine, but one could argue that having been part of the whole process from start to finish, the project-leaders possess such unique information that is of crucial relevance to the initial research questions that one ought to give some leniency towards such notions. Indeed, scholars seem to support such a proposition claiming that while there is no exact limit to the amount of interviewees necessary to

grasp the subject (Esaiasson, et al. 2019: 267), what is instead important is that all the relevant viewpoints have been addressed in order to reach the demand for "theoretical saturation" (Esaiasson, et al. 2019: 168).

Moreover, as to the choice for settling with a semi-structured interview method with those centrally placed sources once again stems from the initial research questions and subsequent theoretical segment. If one wants to really pierce through and make what is implicit explicit, one needs to frankly, ask them. As such, a semi-structured interview suits such a proposition, when one wants to either make visible what is concealed, (Esaiasson, et al. 2019: 261) and when one seeks to examine the intentions and ideations of actors. In Esaiasson et al.'s words: "[...] when we want our results to say something about people's lifeworld's ['livsvärldar'], i.e the meaning people ascribe to different phenomena" (Esaiasson, et al. 2019: 261). Hence, one could make the argument that a more open-ended qualitative approach would be further suitable than the likes of a more close-ended survey.

The next segment will describe and assess how the interviews have been conducted and how the project-leaders have been approached.

5.4. Conducting interviews and interview-guide
To answer the first research question three interviews were conducted with representatives from SVT, Aftonbladet and TT. A consent form (Appendix 1) was sent out to each project leader's email address, stating the intentions of the interview. Unfortunately the project leader of Aftonbladet had to cancel at the last minute, but reassured that an interview with the editor (second-in-command) of the project would suffice, since that person had as much insight in the project as the original interviewee.

Furthermore, 60 minutes was set aside for the interview as that is often deemed the maximum time available in respect to the availability of 'elite-interviewees'. There does not seem to be a consensus as to what defines 'elites', yet the literature seem to denote it as individuals in the top-layer of a project or organization (Esaiasson, et al. 2019: 277). While others argue that it is "[...] individuals prominent in politics, public service or business, who are activists or commentators in the public sphere" (Vromen, 2018: 246). As the individuals interviewed are not in the absolute highest position

within their organization as chief-editor, 'semi-elites' would likely be a more suitable definition, as they still occupy an important and supervising role within the project.

Nevertheless, prior to and during the interviews I was guided by the literature on how to interview elites and followed quite strict guidelines to ward myself of bias by wanting to avoid risking to interfere and possibly affect their answers. As such, when presenting the aim of the study I sought to be transparent enough to not deceive the interviewees, but at the same time sought not to go into further detail than absolutely necessary (Esaiasson, et al. 2019:278), in essence repeating what is formulated in the consent form.

Moreover, all interviews took place at the physical location of each's offices and were recorded on a cellphone and subsequently transcribed. All interviews were conducted in Swedish. The interviewees differed in their approach towards both anonymity and in terms of establishing rapport, in other words by requiring the transcribed material to be sent to them. I fully accepted their requests and asked for their consent to use the material for this thesis. In the analysis all names and organizations will therefore not be named.

In preparation for the interviews an interview-guide (Appendix 2) was constructed that guided the conversation. The different themes follow the theoretical notions presented in the thesis' theory-chapter (Figure 4.1) with subsequent questions aimed to shed light on the thesis' research questions. The interview questions were tested on a fellow course-mate in order to unveil potentially misformulated or diffuse questions. As a result of that, some questions were reformulated and some potential follow-up questions added.

Two of the interviews transpired without issues, albeit in one instance an interviewee garnered a negative response to the questions asked, citing that the person failed to see the point of the interview itself. Inquiring as to what may have garnered such a response no answer was given. Having tested the interview-guide on external persons, my supervisor and other interviewee's prior to the interview I do not deem the questions to be of particularly sensitive nature. A month after the interview was conducted the informant chose to withdraw their participation in the study. Complying with the

request, the interview material gathered from that informant will be omitted from the analysis.

5.5. Ideal type analysis

To be able to answer the second research question an ideal type analysis will be conducted. The theoretical framework (figure 4.1) as presented earlier will serve as the guiding instrument for categorizing the developers' ideas to each ideal type. The indicating themes of each ideal type will serve as the operational indicators in order measure the prevalence of those ideas.

The use of an ideal type analysis serves a couple of beneficial purposes to this thesis. Firstly, the method facilitates a systematic way of guiding the analysis by means of categorizing different prevalent ideas that the developers of VAA's promote. The themes in figure 4.1 (Citizen characteristics, Preference-formation, Mechanism of legitimacy) will serve as operational indicators for interpreting which ideal type of democracy the developers' ideas pertain the most to. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that as a result of the described ideas of democracy being *ideal*-types, it is not meant to be interpreted as a 1:1 fit, but rather to be a "heuristic aid" (Bergström & Svärd, 2018: 148-149). The point is to illustrate the main and recurrent themes that can be gathered in the selected interview-material in order to denote the most crucial aspects of the ideas they proclaim.

A potential risk when conducting an ideal type analysis is if the researcher essentially 'brute-forces' the selected ideal types to suit the examined material, despite there not being anything in particular to suggest the prevalence of such a thing. Consequently if proceeded in such a manner, validity problems may arise if one allows the framework to bend the answer to the research question too much. Thus, in order to mitigate such risks one ought to firstly; carefully and systematically construct the framework in order for it to be as precise as possible. In the theory section, the most crucial aspects of each ideal type's characteristics have been pre-handedly assessed, having been grounded in previous research.

When using ideal types it is also imperative that the framework is encompassing in the sense that they are distinct from one another (Esaiasson, et al. 2019: 283). Although,

despite the ideal types being distinct, they are not exhaustive in the sense that there are no other possible indications of democratic ideals existent. Consequently, some ideas prominent in the interviews could theoretically not be a suitable fit to any of the formulated types. In a remedying effort it will therefore be of importance to be transparent if such instances occur. Likewise so if the informants show any indications for two overlapping ideal types.

Ultimately, as in all qualitative text-analyses, some interpretation will be necessary in order to categorize and conduct the analysis. However, to strengthen the intersubjectivity and therefore the reliability, recurrent and transparent citations from the informants will be quoted for readers, especially if prominent space for alternative interpretations arise.

6. Results and Analysis

The results and subsequent analysis will be presented in conjunction. All responses from the interviewees are anonymized and are denoted as persons "A" and "B". The empirical presentation will begin as an assessment in relation to the first research question: "*How do the developers perceive the intent of VAA's*"? Followed by sections that follow the themes as presented in the theoretical framework in order to assess the second research question: "*What ideas of democracy do the developers' perception of VAA's promote?*". Beginning with a presentation of "Citizen characteristics", followed by "Preference-formation" and the "Central mechanism of legitimacy". Step by step the reader can follow transcribed quotations and the following analysis. As all interviews have been conducted in Swedish the quotes have been translated into English with original quotations in Swedish to be viewed in Appendix (3).

6.1. Intention of VAA's

At the start of the interviews questions concerning each informant's role in the project as well as questions concerning their potential coalition partners were asked as a way of 'warming-up' the informants prior to the actual themes as seen in the interview-guide (Appendix 2). The informants were pleased with the project over-all as well as the cooperation with different scientists that have been involved in the methodology of selecting each question for the VAA.

Moreover, all interviewees were asked about what the intention of their VAA is. Simultaneously all replied that the intention of the VAA essentially boils down to a purpose of *informing*. Yet, being representatives of different media institutions, all journalists at the core seek to inform the public in some sense, but what to inform *about* may differ. Indeed one interviewee ("A") touched upon their role as journalists in relation to the VAA and the intention behind it by stating:

"*Our mission is journalistic at the very core, and there is nothing more important for a journalist working with news in Sweden than the election. And one of the most important things in the role as a journalist is to inform the public about news, about the current situation and try to come as close as possible to some kind of objective description. It is obviously not possible to be 100% objective, but as close as we can come to an objective description, that this **is** the election. And a very important part of that is 'Valkompassen', because we ... it fulfills that thing, that we can accomplish the pure fundamental journalistic mission, but it also fulfills that we can offer a service. [...] We ought to contribute with information that people may use in their everyday-life in order to make it easier to understand their world.*"[1] ("A")

The interviewee therefore emphasizes that while informing the public as objective as possible is the core, and that 'Valkompassen' is a tool to facilitate that objective, it is essentially to inform **about** the election itself that is the intention behind. Indeed, Interviewee "B" supports such a premise as they formulated their answer as the following:

"*The intent of 'Valkompassen' is to offer the citizens a tool to know more about what the parties and politicians think about different important issues. And to sort of be able to "see" how well one coincides with different parties. Based on that to be able to get a ... gain information prior to the election. That is really the main purpose.*"[2] ("B")

As the VAA is perceived as a tool that helps their readers (and in the end, the voter) I asked whether it was an obvious decision to develop one prior to the 2022 general election. One informant ("B") bluntly stated:"*Yes, it was actually obvious*"[3]. When elaborating on the prospect of why it was an obvious decision, the recurrent theme

seemed to indicate that the demand from their readers controlled the decision. Another informant said that while they have developed VAA's in many elections, it does not seem to be obvious in of itself that they must have one in their repertoire. The developers have to consider questions such as : "[...] *why is it needed?, is it worth it?, how much is a reasonable cost?*" 4 ("A").

What can be inferred is therefore that the demand of the readers and voters seem to control the supply, at least by the informants' perceptions. What is the demand which 'Valkompassen' meets then and why does it exist? According to the informants it would seem as if the VAA simply acts as a help for the user to gather information about the parties in an"*efficient, partly manageable and somewhat fun*"5 ("B") manner prior to an election. A starvation of information persistent within the electorate seems to be a recurrent theme prevalent in the interview-material between all informants.

Lastly, the informants simultaneously emphasize a couple of things that are often misunderstood in terms of the intention of their VAA. Firstly as interviewee "B" states:

"*Often one gets an impression when doing the 'compass' that it should be some all-encompassing tool that tells you how to vote. No, we do not tell you how to vote. It is only the questions which we have selected that you should consider. It could be that you have a whole lot of other reasons, perhaps you have family traditions, or that you ideologically believe in something, or lots of other things that affect when you decide how to vote. So it is very important to remember what it is you are doing when using the 'compass.'*"6

What the above quote says is that all informants emphasize that they do not intend to tell someone how to vote, it is therefore not a recommendation. Indeed, the responses mirror what the development team explicitly stated in the published material when launching their respective VAA (Ekman, 2022; SVT 2022a).

From what has been gathered so far the recurrent notions seem to be firstly, that the intention is to meet a demand within the reader-base (and in the end, the voter) which subsequently is in need of information. Secondly, what kind of information does it then portray? It portrays information about the representatives available in the election.

Thirdly, the VAA is solely focused on issues that have been selected by the developers in cooperation with academic institutions to garner confidence in their portrayal of information, as evidently formulated by interviewee "A":

"*A reason that we have a cooperation with [University in Sweden] is for example because people do not have the confidence for [Media-house] to make an objective 'compass'. They do not believe that if it just says [Media-house]'s logo on it, that it is reliable enough. [...] That's why such a cooperation with for instance [University in Sweden] is so important*".[7] ("A")

Lastly, as Fossen & van den Brink (2015) denoted, a perception of the developers being a mediator seems to be a prevalently observed theme in the interviews here as well:

"[...] *Like, a media-company acts like, like moderators … for different issues which the media-company thinks are important in society.* [...]" [8] ("A")

The informants seem to stress the notion of objectivity in terms of how and which issues are presented, ascribing the objectivity by relying on the expertise that have gathered and selected the issues in the VAA. The informants merely pass along the neutral information to the electorate that may in turn do whatever it seems fit with it.

Reconnecting to the theory section, it would seem as if the informant's view of the function of the VAA reflects on Fossen and van den Brink (2015)'s conception of the 'mirror'. Little regard seems to be given to their own role in staging the 'diorama' for the users.

In a follow up question concerning the risk that the voter may use the results of the VAA as a recommendation despite the developers' warning, I asked if the informant felt any responsibility to that concern. The informant responded that they do and emphasized that that is why it is so very important to rely on the expertise to alleviate potential bias if some questions are first formulated in a more favorable manner to either the left- or right on the political spectrum:

"*But as long as you can feel that you make a compass that is balanced and sort of gives a nuanced picture of politics that is not… that sort of 'tilts' to any side. That's what we work with to be able to feel comfortable with publishing the VAA.*

Sebastian: *If I understand you correctly then, it is the methodology that is one of the most important....*

-Absolutely, yes"[9] ("B")

Indeed, little indicates that the developers have given much thought to the VAA as a normative phenomena, and that the idea of the neutral mediator in between voter and representative seems to be prevalent in this case as well. Moreover, the quote is indicative of the concept Fossen and van den Brink highlights, that yes, the developers are careful in portraying how the parties are represented, how the methodology of the algorithm is unbiased to the best of their ability and so on. Hence, the 'foreground' is adequately considered, but the background that structures and gives meaning to "the electoral process and the significance of the act of voting" (Fossen & van den Brink, 2015: 342) is less so.

The following segments of the thesis will examine the more implicit presuppositions that structure that very background, in order to pierce through to the more implicit notions of how those aspects are accounted for.

6.2. Citizen characteristics

As the interviews transpired and questions concerning the needs and characteristics of the voter that uses the application were addressed, a recurrent theme seemed to emerge. As previously mentioned, the VAA seeks to remedy the need for information that exists within the electorate. One interviewee replied to the question about why they believe that Valkompassen has become so popular:

"I believe that it is a ... generally speaking people are not very interested in politics in their everyday life. But during an election year the attention becomes unimaginably large. You can't really hide the fact that it is an election coming up. Then the attention comes to everyone that they may not be truly knowledgeable. [...]"[10] ("A")

The VAA is a means to an end in the sense that while the voter generally is seemingly uninterested about political life in mundane circumstances, an election is the exception.

The need for information simultaneously rises during that window that is the election campaign, and a VAA acts as a simple way of gathering information about the election and the issues that precede it.

Another indicative notion of the low-information preceding the potential users of the VAA, as one interviewee responded:"*I believe there is a craving of wanting to know more at the core*"[11] ("B"), ascribing a change in media climate in a digital age that makes it more natural to use a VAA rather than sitting through TV-debates and other ways of gathering information. It is a more collected way of gaining information about the parties. To follow up, a question of whether the voter is in need of such an instrument the same informant responded by stating that there is a need to know what the parties think and what they believe in particular issues, but it is difficult for many to navigate in a changing media climate.

"*And I believe that many walk around and believe in some things, about 'this-and-that', then an election arrives and: 'Oh, now I have to vote, what do I vote for?' Now I need information here and where do I get that?* [...]"[12] ("B").

The quote is telling in that it would seem assumptive of the voter as somewhat apathetic about political life with exception of the election. The interviewee added that it is telling by the sheer number of people that have finished the VAA, that many people do not know a whole lot about politics and what the different parties represent. Although, that may differ in different voting groups (such as by age) as younger people seemingly tend to be more active and engaged in politics, but not by means of voting according to the interviewee.

A subsequent question was asked to another interviewee, where it was discussed that while voters may differ in terms of how interested they may be, whether there are any preconditions necessary that must inhabit a user in order to absorb the information given. The informant replied that there was an internal discussion surrounding the implementation of a "show-more"-button[4] and a "pros & cons"-button in the design of their VAA but ultimately decided against the latter. The reason being that the former was more appreciated, as:

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[4] A button one can press in the VAA to get additional information about the issue at hand.

"*[...] people in general do not get it. Like, what the hell is... I can't remember the question but, like a municipality... That municipalities block establishing wind-power. They might not even know what "establishing" means. Like they might not ... they don't understand anything. 'What does the municipality have to do with this?', 'What is a municipality?'. Do you see what I mean? It was sort of on that level. But they can still have strong opinions about the election. So you have to try to capture that in some way. As good as you can.*"13 ("A")

An interpretation of the above statement is that because large swathes of the electorate are precisely so uninformed and disinterested about the general notions of political life, it is emphasized that the focal point of the VAA is to transmit information when it is most needed: in the choosing process of representatives. Additionally, while some people may have a bigger interest than others it is still a majority that lacks the necessary information, meaning essentially that the VAA consequently needs to reach and fit the larger masses. The informants indeed continue to touch upon such a subject, that they want the VAA to reach as many as possible, and to be as simple (but not hollow) and inclusive as possible.

Moreover, the informants emphasize that once again, they perceive the VAA as one way of gathering information, their ambition is to inform the voter in such a way that one wants subsequently to expand their knowledge and garner further information by additional means. One interviewee expressed the following to a question about who gets the most out of their VAA:

"*Yes, as I said, we have no ambition that people use [Valkompassen] and then: "Now I know what to vote for" but that they would find out more. So, 1). That they will be informed and hopefully, maybe will seek out even more. [...] we have a mission to promote democracy and inform the voters. So of course one wants people to inform themselves as much as possible. So that's one aspect. If one considers an 'ideal' it would be if we find those that maybe are not keeping up with as much but are ... Here they will find a way in, to be able to find out more and engage themselves more when they will choose [in the election], sort of.*"14 ("B")

The informants once again emphasize that in their view what is of utmost importance is that the information about the issues selected (by the expertise) and how the parties

and representatives relate to those issues are objective and correct, yet what one ultimately ends up doing with that information in turn is of no greater concern from their point of view. Since it is up to the individual person, an interpretation could thus be that a more individualistic perception of the citizen as a more autonomous actor with more atomistic interests surface. The notion that the developers opts out of any 'control' of how the user uses the information, could be inferred just as Premfors (2000) denotes is indicative of an electoral democratic ideal in the sense that the citizen is perceived to wield autonomy - in the sense of an individualistic view which the developers does not want to interfere with.

Based on the previous established quotations, the recurrent theme that is emerging, one could argue, is that which is indicative of an electoral democracy ideal. The characteristics of the citizen are seemingly perceived as being uninformed and less interested in politics in general. However, a perception of the electorate being uninformed could simultaneously be interpreted as ascribing to an ideal of participatory democracy if the structural circumstances around is the factor that is highlighted as the cause of the apathy which is prevalent in the electorate. For example, one of the informants ascribed a changing media climate as being one reason that makes it difficult to navigate.

Would such an instance be indicative of a structural drawback that limits the citizen to fully realize their participatory potential? One could argue that it is, but when one considers what the general sentiment seems to be is that the main focus is an apathy **in general life** about politics, barring the approaching election. While the informant's ambition is to enlighten and inform people it is not necessarily in order to get people to participate in more direct forms of democracy first and foremost, but rather to gain knowledge about where the parties stand in different issues in order to be able to cast their vote for a corresponding representative or party. Thus the role of the citizen would seem to be as formulated in the theoretical framework, reduced to the role of a consumer that can choose from the options that are laid out on the table in front of them which is put forward by the issues preceding the election, forwarded in the VAA.

6.3. Preference-formation

Further into the conversation I asked why the informants specifically chose to publish their VAA during an election campaign. To which they responded in two ways. Firstly,*"Because it is only then, newswise when it is relevant to highlight such a complicated service"*15 ("A") and secondly because the product is so resource-demanding. The conversation so far had focused quite heavily on the VAA's relation to elections in general that I wanted to explore if they perceived it from other perspectives in terms of both participation and how preferences are assessed.

As such a question that incorporated the perspective that politics and democracy is something that occurs all the time and not just in elections and if they had thought about incorporating their VAA in other contexts, was asked. One informant replied:

"No I don't think people would care and then you have no influence. If it were so that we lived in a more direct-democratic society, like Switzerland for instance. Where they have different polls with more specific questions. [...] say that it had been about a ban of minarets or something and that it is maybe related to like 5 decisions… then yeah, of course one would have liked to have it [the VAA]. Like: "What do you think about this question", that you are guided based on that. So a compass connected to the decisions that are to be made. But since people… the reason that people are engaged in the election is because it is they who decide how it will be. Oneself wants to know: 'what should I do with my vote?' people want to go and vote. If no one had thought to go and vote, no one would have cared about Valkompassen. It's that simple, is what I think. [....]*"*16 ("A")

From what one could gather from the above quote is that as a consequence of Sweden not being a direct-democratic society in comparison to Switzerland, the response therefore would seem to insinuate that the sole way of actually gaining real influence is via the election, and because that is the sole way of garnering direct influence, that is likewise the reason why the VAA is published during the election campaign, and why people flock to it during the same time.

Another question was asked if they would have liked to publish it in between elections or during any other time, provided that they would have the resources available. To which another informant said that while it would probably be fun to do, one would have

to weigh the pros and cons and decide prior to which decision or in relation to which questions, one should focus on, meaning that it is a thin line to balance on. But if one were to decide to do it the main function would be:"*to give people a very clear knowledge-base prior to important decisions ... but then it would be more like [giving] information that you already know. You can't really use that information until the next election. Do you see what I mean?* 17("B")

Consider the statement of giving people information prior to decisions. One one hand such an emphasis could at first glance be indicative of the integrative preference-formation, prevalent in the participatory democratic ideal, since the many precursors to the choice at the election booth is more important than the choice of representatives (Amnå, 2003: 109). Yet the emphasis of what follows in the informant's response is that one can not use the information that is being provided until the very choice of representatives.

What follows in the informants response is in direct contrast with the ideal of a participatory democracy as the preferences that could be formed through the information provided by Valkompassen can not essentially be wielded and integrated in other circumstances (for instance, in a protest or something similar), but rather are to be aggregated during the most important mechanism that elites use for assessing preferences, namely the poll that is the result of the election at the end of election day (Amnå, 2003: 121). By such an interpretation the notion is more akin to that of an electoral democratic ideal, pertaining to a view more indicative of the aggregation of preferences. It becomes especially evident when one considers the prior quote (16), as the interviewee ultimately states that the election is how to gain real influence, and not through other means (although the interviewee ascribes it due to the contextual circumstances), but it highlights a more top-down perspective rather than a bottom-up.

Another quotation that illustrates such a top-down perspective is the reply to a question whether their VAA could be considered as a way of either engaging in different forms of participation, or if it could foster such instances:

"[...] *if you are a person that does not participate in informing yourself and such, and if you do it through a [VAA] then it is sort of something democratic in the sense that you inform yourself about what those who actually decide believe and such. Then if ...*

what one does with that information [...] if you go out to protest or if you write a letter or create a youtube-channel ... that's ... that could be left unsaid. But of course a high engagement in the democratic process and debate, that's never wrong. [...]"[18] ("B")

In my interpretation the informant equates the democratic process to that of the choice of representatives. Moreover, the role of the mediator as previously presented, appears once again, meaning that if a person choose to engage in other ways outside of the election, that is simply up to them, but the information gathered via the VAA is democratic in the sense that it informs you about where the representatives, the elite stands in issues. In order for you as citizens to be able to weigh, to the best of your abilities, whether to approve or disapprove of their standpoints that have been presented prior to the next political-term. In other words, the core idea portrayed, is that by using the VAA your preferences are related to those of the elite, the results of the VAA is not in first hand meant to foster further interests in engaging in politics *outside* of the electoral process of choosing representatives (albeit they could be used in that way, but it is not what is emphasized by the informants).

Contrariwise, is there anything that would indicate a perception of the informants towards a more procedurally constructed way towards the preference-formations of the citizenry? As it turns out, when asked if they believed that 'Valkompassen' could inhibit the democratic conversation between citizens and representatives, they responded that it is faulty to assume that the VAA stands in contrast to that first and foremost. Instead, they argued that it could actually be a way of creating discussion between citizens. As an example one informant said:

"I would rather believe that it stimulates [conversation]. Hopefully, if you have a gang of friends who have used a [VAA], they talk about it. [...] One heard it prior to the election from my friends or all kinds [of people]... I was at a dinner. Everyone talked about [Valkompassen]. Either they thought it to be amusing or they thought it to be bad, or whatever it could be. My extremely limited unscientific little recon is probably that it makes you talk more about [The VAA] and that in turn makes you discuss politics. Unconsciously or consciously. That's what I think."[19] ("B")

Another interviewee reflected on that they had internally discussed if they wanted to implement a "share"-button in the application, but quickly realized that people just screenshot their results and share with each other anyways:

"[...] *People discuss it, show it at the dinner-table; 'What did you get?', 'What did I get?', 'That's insane, my dad got KD [Christian Democratic party]', do you see what I mean? It lives in that way. It's not like people only do it in their own world of thought and let it be and then go to vote. People don't work like that."*[20] ("A")

The quotations as presented facilitates an interpretation towards an ideal of deliberative democracy in the sense that the usage of their VAA could transpire into a process of deliberation between and within the electorate. The deliberative ideal perceives preferences not in individual terms, but seeks to shape or reshape preferences by a discursive process. (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 22) Could it then be argued that the responses formulated by the informants are indeed a reflection of a deliberative democratic ideal?

Consider the definition of the deliberative process again: "a **process** where **actors** through **communication** based on **rationality** seeks to **reshape** or **shape** preferences" (Karlsson, 2003: 220). In terms of preferences, they are created in that process with an aim to reach a broader consensus (that would, ideally speaking - make elections redundant) (Giljam & Hermansson, 2003: 22). Moreover, such a process takes place in both formal and informal public spheres. It is unclear whether the informants insinuates that one would use the information provided by the VAA to venture out to public squares, coffee shops and the like and engage in discussion. Another point to take into account is that merely giving rise to discussion is not sufficient, one has to seek to reshape preferences of those one discusses with. It is not clear whether such a notion is evident in the above quotations. The only example provided is at a dinner table, (while some may argue that it could be considered an informal sphere).

Moreover, as the deliberative process necessitates that the actors involved are rational and non-partisan in those discussions, just by the means of using a VAA gives you a partisan result in the sense that it formulates to which party you 'belong' to. In turn, as per the informants you compare those results with others, I do not interpret this as an aim to facilitate a broader consensus, but rather more individualistically as a means to

foster conflict about whether the 'belonging' to a certain party is 'correct' or 'incorrect'. If the informants had replied something along the lines that as a result of the VAA, that people would be more inclined to find common ground in those discussions, I would argue that it would be more indicative of a deliberative ideal, but that is not from what I gather to be the essence of their replies.

On the contrary, I interpret the context as meaning that the conversation is meant to be more akin to a way of marketing the VAA, which in of itself would not have to be incompatible with a deliberative process. However, considering that a deliberative process necessitates certain preconditions in order to facilitate preferences to be formed, which in this instance is not formulated. One would therefore be more inclined to denote, based on previous assessments, that a more comprehensive perception formulated is that of an electoral democratic ideal. Albeit with some notions that could be derived towards a deliberative perception.

6.4. Central mechanism (of legitimacy)

Nearing the end of the interviews in an attempt to uncover perceptions of what the central mechanism of legitimacy is, the discussion steered towards what the function of the VAA fulfills in a broader perspective of our democracy and what they deem to be the most vital part of democracy. One informant responded, stating that while it may be a little presumptuous:

"[...] *the most important [thing] is that people make well-informed choices and vote. That's like a ... it's no duty but it is important. That all votes are worth as much. That you ... can vote based on well-informed choices. A well-informed, that you sort of have collected information and feel: 'This is what I think feels good'. [...] We have no goal to increase electoral participation, but we want people to feel: 'Okay, I have now followed [Media house], and I have received very good information here, now I can make an independent decision based on that information I have received'. That's where we are, sort of. That's how we think.*" [21] ("B")

The informant's response illustrates firstly, that the central mechanism is ascribed to participating in elections, conditioning that while it is not necessarily a duty it is at the very least, important. Secondly, the informant highlights a notion that is prevalent in the electoral democratic ideal, namely that of equality ('all votes are worth as much').

While all ideal-types may claim equality (considering that all ideals concern democracy), they do so in differentiating ways. The electoral democratic ideal emphasizes political equality and the most important mechanism for achieving that is by casting their vote in an election (Kumlin, 2003: 83). The insinuation in the above statement is that the electorate ought to use the VAA to inform themselves about what is at stake **in the election** and what resonates with the options that are laid out on the table.

Another informant suggests a similar notion to the question of how they believe that their VAA makes people relate to politics and democracy on the whole:

"*I believe that they will become more interested. I believe that it attracts interest. That's what I believe. It awakens an interest for parties and politics and in the end also the democratic process. [...]*"[22] ("A")

An explicit question about what the person denotes constitutes as the democratic process was not asked, however in a follow-up to the initial question the informant responded:

"*Hopefully it helps people to feel that things are not just black-and-white. Reality is not as black-and-white as one may often believe. That it helps them to understand an issue that they previously did not quite grasp. And that it may like ... attract interest for them to find out more information about parties that they previously may not have considered.*"[23] ("A")

The interpretation that could be argued from the following statements is that the democratic process is seemingly being equated to the election of representatives. Once again, the focal intent seems to be directed towards information about where the electors stand in certain issues. If the users of the VAA would garner further interests it would be in such a way that would foster knowledge about party policies and the like, and not in a way to for instance, engage in other means of democratic life.

It is with that background in mind one could understand the following formulations, when asked about what they deem to be the most important aspect in a democracy:

"[...] *Popular participation. Popular confident participation that is informed.*"24 ("A")

From what I interpret, it is not in the sense of a participatory democratic meaning, but rather from the standpoint of an electoral democratic insinuation. It is popular participation **in the election**. The 'participating' notion here is not meant in the sense in decentralized forums but rather in centralized.

Although, further into the interview the same informant said something which problematizes such an interpretation somewhat. The conversation steered into a topic whether VAA's in general compete and replace other mediums such as TV-debates and the like, to which the informant argued that the person believed that as TV-debates diminish in importance, the VAA's increases. As a follow-up it was asked if there is something that a VAA can not replace to which the informant responded:

"[...] *It cannot replace the trust. In the end you have to build trust* [...] *I believe that my competitors have a superstition that* [VAA's] *can in the end help voters to, like, know what they should vote for. That's not how it is. Because you vote as much, you vote also based on which party-leader you like, that is a major influence I believe. I also believe that you vote based on how your parents vote. I believe you vote on ideological factors* [...]. *It* [Valkompassen] *should be: 'these questions are important prior to the election, this is where the parties stand, and this is where you stand'. And you can read here what the parties motivate and based on that move on in society and talk in polling huts* [Valstugor] *or your representative or go to the chamber and participate in a debate or watch them on TV, do you see what I mean? Discuss with your friends. All of that is a part of the democratic process. It cannot be replaced with a* [VAA]." 25 ("A")

The above statement is slightly dubious in how it could be interpreted considering the previous statements in mind. On the one hand, it could be interpreted in a way that facilitates an emphasis on a more horizontal ideal of what gives legitimacy, since the informant denotes that the person rejects the 'superstitious' belief that VAA's can replace the meeting between people in the democratic process. Within the deliberative ideal, legitimacy is derived from the deliberative process, where people discursively engage in conversation to shape preferences (Karlsson, 2003: 218). As per the informant's statement that the results of the VAA could facilitate that one engages in a

debate or venture out to polling huts among other things. One could with good argument assume that it is indicative of a deliberative process. However, is it really a deliberative process that is being advocated if one examines it closer?

Considering that the deliberative process necessitates an intention of (re)shaping preferences it presupposes that one deems preferences to be dynamic firstly and that the parts involved are responsive to each other. But as the examples given (going to a polling hut, watching a TV debate, talking with a representative) it would seem as if those are all examples where opinions are actually quite static. What do I mean by this?

As the informant emphasizes that the results of the VAA are interpreted as "*this is where the parties stand, and this is where you stand*" ("A") and considering that the prior reasons that people vote based on primary socialization, ideological cleavages and so forth, all factors that are quite static in nature - they are not easily interchangeable. From a deliberative perspective the emphasis must be on the process that facilitates a reshaping of preferences, only then is it a legitimate deliberation (Karlsson, 2003: 218). The parts involved in the conversation at the polling hut, between a voter and a representative must be susceptible to change standpoints, is it really reasonable then to believe that by engaging in conversation with a representative of a party standing in the polling hut, that that person would change standpoint if confronted with a better argument by deliberating? The same is applicable in terms of engaging in a debate, especially since the informant previously stated that contemporary debates among leaders are often believed by the spectator's to be akin to "*pie-throwing*" (A).

"*One talks about debates becoming more and more a space for party leaders to make a statement. It's more about highlighting their own issue. [...] And that's where I believe that many feel that debates are, it's just 'pie-throwing'. [...] Valkompassen is a systematization of the whole discourse prior to the election. [...] Perhaps it replaces, has to a certain extent replaced what debates once was thought to be. Debates are now more and more a spectacle. Which Valkompassen is not.*"[26] ("A")

To merely converse is not equated as actually deliberating. But how else could one understand the prior statement then? In an attempt to deconstruct this consider quotation (25) again:

Firstly, what does the informant mean by 'trust'? The informant responds by stating that a VAA cannot replace trust, but trust in what? Prior to the above statement the informant stated the following:

"*It is trust that is the thing with VAA's. People will not… if they do not trust… they will not use it if it is badly designed and they will not use it if they do not trust the result.*" ("A")

The users will not use the VAA if they do not trust it. That notion circles back to the beginning of the interview where the informant said it was one of the reasons why they initiated a cooperation with universities and experts in order to garner confidence in their VAA as many users do not believe that media can develop a non-biased and objective VAA. So if one assumes that it is trust in the results of the VAA, one has to ask: what is the result of the VAA then aimed for? As has been argued in the previous segments, it is to inform the electorate. The following question then begs: To inform one-self about what? Well, by the same arguments proposed earlier, it is understood to be about the election, more specifically - about the options in the election.

If one assumes that interpretation, it becomes easier to deconstruct the original statement. Namely that when the informant argues that a person can use the information given by the VAA and subsequently 'move on' in society, into a polling hut, to discuss with your friends etc… It all takes place in the election campaign. A person can use the results as a way of initiating conversation, but that is not equated to a deliberative process. It is simply **one** complementing part of an individual's overarching information-gathering process *prior* to the decision of who you will vote for on election day. If not persuasive enough, consider the previous part of the statement:

"[...] *Because you vote as much, you vote also based on which party-leader you like, that is a major influence I believe. I also believe that you vote based on how your parents vote. I believe you vote on ideological factors* [...]" ("A")

All those characteristics are interpreted to be perceived as different variables that affect your ultimate decision of which party to cast your vote for. Read together I would argue

that it is believed to be understood that the insinuation is in regards to the election of representatives. Those reasons are why I would argue that it is not indicative of a deliberative discursive process of which one may at first glance consider. Scholar Christer Karlsson denoted the following about the deliberative idea of the political process: "It is rather the 'good conversation', rather than the negotiation or the vote, that is the center of interest" (Karlsson, 2003: 214). I would instead argue that it is not deliberation that lies at heart, but rather the vote.

Finally, it is important to note that since the object of interest in this thesis is examining perceptions about **Voting Advice** Applications it might be natural that the major conversational piece would be skewed towards a discussion of an **election** as a mechanism. However, even if a VAA is related to an election, as scholars previously have argued, their view of electoral politics facilitates the possibility for different types of VAA's. As such, for instance by adding questions from civil-societal organizations or the like could be an option that would shift it more into a participatory or deliberative democratic direction. If one considers all previous quotations and the overarching sentiment portrayed throughout the interview as has been presented both in this segment and in previous, one can infer that in the broader context it is the election that seems to be the primary road to legitimacy, therefore indicating a more electoral democratic ideal.

7. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine and further the understanding of how VAA's as part of the media repertoire affects contemporary democracy. It did so by asking the following research questions:

- *How do the developers perceive the intent of VAA's?*
- *What ideas of democracy do the developers' perception of VAA's promote?*

In regards to the first question: The intent of the VAA stems from a demand within their reader-base that is perceived as being in need of information. Thus the intent of the VAA is ultimately to inform. The information portrayed is about the representatives and parties available in the election. The developers intention is to be as objective and

neutral as possible, and relies on expert assessment in order to ward against bias when constructing their VAA. Moreover, the developers perceive themselves more akin to a mediator that merely passes along information given by the VAA, it is perceived to be a neutral tool portrayed to simply give information about the parties' position and the user's relation to them.

As the intent is portrayed in terms of an in-between mediator, such a perception is akin to what previous scholars have denoted as a perception of a 'mirror' reflecting an objective reflection of political reality. Yet what has been the theoretical point of departure in this thesis is that the idea of a neutral position is perhaps not as neutral as one may first believe. Indeed, the democratic presuppositions of the developers are important to examine as they are normative in nature, which in turn can have effects on democracy as more and more people turn to VAA's in contemporary society.

As such, to answer the second research question: The ideas of democracy that the developers' perception of VAA's promote is that of an electoral democratic viewpoint. Such a viewpoint highlights that the citizen is seemingly low-informed and disinterested in political life, barring the election. The results also indicate a perception of more individualistic and static notion in terms of how preferences of the citizens are formed. Finally the most important aspect in terms of legitimacy seems to be the election itself. Thus it would seem as if the intention of the VAA simultaneously is logically consistent in what it intends to do: to inform the electorate prior to the aggregation of preferences in the election. The point is that the perceptions behind are not as neutral as one may believe as those presuppositions promote conceptions about what characterizes the citizen, how preferences are formed and ultimately what is most important in democracy.

Moreover, the results presented would also seem to give support to previous research that has concluded that a majority of the VAA supply currently facilitates such an elite perspective of democracy. Hence, as this essay contributes with more indicators encompassing democratic ideals, and having examined a case where VAA's are published in mediasystems by directly interviewing the top-developers. The results therefore do not seem to differ profoundly from other VAA's that have been developed in other countries or outside of mediasystems. Perhaps an inference could therefore be

that it would not seem to matter all that much in which context the VAA is published within.

Additionally, a word of care should be considered when interpreting the presented results. Firstly, one should refrain from drawing conclusions about what causes the prevalence of the ideas presented, this thesis merely describes and categorizes the notions presented. Secondly, for future research one could consider using a broader material that encompasses all or many parts of media-programs such as SVT:s "Agenda" or other politically focused instruments during the same time period as VAA's are published. It could be that if one analyzes a broader spectrum that the results may be more indicative of another ideal type as presented, one should therefore keep that in mind when considering the thesis' conclusions. Lastly, I want to emphasize that despite the argument being that democratic presuppositions are normative, it should not be interpreted as taking a stand in favor or against any particular type, as all are valid.

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Appendix 1.

Consent form (Swedish)

Jag heter Sebastian Alderblad och studerar ett Masterprogram i Statsvetenskap vid Uppsala Universitet. Jag skriver för närvarande mitt examensarbete om valkompasser. Jag är intresserad av att komma i kontakt med dig som utvecklare av en valkompass och vill höra dina synpunkter kring vad du anser är nyttan och ändamålet med valkompassen. För att förstå det bakomliggande arbetet med valkompassen vill jag gärna pratas vid med dig. Har du möjlighet och intresse av att ställa upp på en intervju? Deltagande i studien beräknas ta cirka 45-60 minuter och samtalet kommer att spelas in. Det inspelade materialet kommer att raderas efter att uppsatsen är färdigställd.

Intervjun och studien kommer inte delas med någon annan än inom utbildningen och universitetets ramar. Möjligheten till att vara anonym erbjuds också. Om du väljer att ställa upp är din medverkan naturligtvis frivillig och du kan avbryta intervjun när som helst under arbetets gång. Jag är flexibel vad gäller både plats och tid för intervjun. Du bestämmer om zoom eller samtal i fysisk person fungerar bäst.

Om du vill ställa upp så föreslår jag att vi hörs av och ser när en möjlig lucka finns som passar oss båda. Tveka inte på att höra av dig till mig om du har några frågor om studien eller mig som person. Tack på förhand!

Vänliga hälsningar,   Handledare:

Sebastian Alderblad   Zohreh Khoban

Student vid Uppsala Universitet   Postdoktor i statskunskap

[TELEPHONE NUMBER]   [SUPERVISOR'S EMAIL]

[EMAIL]

Consent form (English)

My name is Sebastian Alderblad and I am studying a Masters' program in political science at Uppsala University. I am currently writing my thesis about voting advice applications. I am interested to come in contact with you as a developer of a voting advice application and would like to hear your opinions about what you believe is the benefit and purpose of Valkompassen. To be able to understand the underlying development with Valkompassen I would like to speak with you. Are you available and interested in participating in an interview? Participation in the study is estimated to be circa 45-60 minutes and the conversation will be recorded. The recorded material will be deleted after the thesis has been finished.

The interview and study will not be shared with anyone else except for within the frames of the institution and university. The possibility to remain anonymous is also offered. If you choose to opt-in your participation is naturally voluntary and you may interrupt the interview whenever during the process of the thesis. I am flexible in terms of both time and place for the interview. You decide if zoom or conversation in physical person suits best.

If you would like to participate I propose that we keep in touch and find a possible time slot that suits us both. Do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any further questions about the study or me as a person. Thanks in advance!

Kind wishes,   Supervisor:

Sebastian Alderblad   Zohreh Khoban

Student at Uppsala University   Postdoctoral Researcher in Politics

[TELEPHONE NUMBER]   [SUPERVISOR'S EMAIL]

[EMAIL]

Appendix 2.

Interview-guide (Swedish)

<u>Intro:</u>

1. **Vad var din roll i arbetet med valkompassen?**

2. **Valkompassen är ju ett samarbete med statsvetare etc...Vilka parter samarbetade ni med och hur såg det samarbetet ut? Be dem beskriva.**

   -Fungerade det bra?

   -Mindre bra?

3. **Valkompasser rent generellt har ju fått ett ganska stort uppsving de senaste åren och miljontals människor har genomfört dem, kan du beskriva hur tankarna gick kring just att ni valde att "ha" en?**

4. **Kan du beskriva vad syftet är med valkompassen?**

   -Vad ville ni uppnå?

<u>Synen på medborgaren</u>

1. **Varför tror du valkompassen är så populär bland väljarna?**

2. **Valkompassen är som jag tolkar det främst till för (era läsare och tillika) väljaren…anser du att det finns ett behov hos väljaren för ett sådant instrument som valkompassen ändå är?**

   -Varför och vilket ?

   -Tror du att det behovet har ökat? Eller har det alltid funnits där?

   (Om **ja**) -Varför har det isåfall ökat?

3. **Hur tror du att väljaren använder valkompassen?**

   -Tror du att olika väljargrupper använder valkompassen olika?

   -Vilka sätt kan det vara och hur skiljer de sig åt?

4. **Hur tror du väljaren tolkar eller använder sitt resultat?**

   -Finns det risker med det?

   -Finns det fördelar?

5. **Är valkompassen till för alla typer av väljare?**

   -(Om **ja**=Väljare skiljer sig åt i hur de förhåller sig till politik i ren allmänhet. Det finns de som är mer intresserad, vissa som är mindre osv... Skulle du säga att det finns några särskilda egenskaper eller förutsättningar som krävs av en viss typ för att kunna ta till sig informationen som valkompassen förmedlar?)

   -(Om **Nej**= Vilka är den till för?)

6. **Om du tänker dig den perfekta väljaren som får ut mest av valkompassen, hur tänker du dig att den ser ut?**

Åsiktsbildning

1. **Valkompassen matchar som bekant en väljarnas åsikt med ett parti, men ibland kan det ju vara så att man inte är säker på vad man tycker när man svarar på valkompassen.**

   -Hur har ni förhållit er till det?

   -Vad har du för tankar om just det?

   -Ser du några risker/fördelar?

2. **Valkompassen publiceras ju inför och i samband med val. Hur kommer det sig att ni inte använder den inför andra stora politiska händelser eller evenemang (ex inför stora beslut i riksdagen, eller ett klimattoppmöte eller dylikt)?**

   -Varför/Varför inte?

3. **Det finns ju de som även menar på att politik och demokrati är någonting som kräver kontinuerligt engagemang och inte bara under val…**

   - Hur ser du på valkompassens för- och nackdelar utifrån ett sådant perspektiv?

   (Exempel: Är det ett problem om intresset minskar utöver valet?)

4. **Det finns även de som menar på att man kan engagera sig demokratiskt på fler än ett sätt, vissa menar att protester är ett sätt att delta, andra hävdar framförallt genom att rösta i val. Kan man tolka valkompassen som en typ av demokratiskt deltagande eller hur bör man förstå den ur det perspektivet?**

5. **Det finns ett ytterligare perspektiv som menar på att människors åsikter bäst formas i mötet och samtalet sinsemellan, kan du tänka dig några nackdelar respektive fördelar med valkompassen ur ett sådant perspektiv?**

   (Eventuell omformulering: Det finns de som framhäver vikten av att det finns ett levande demokratiskt samtal i samhället, kan du se någon risk att valkompassen kan begränsa det?)

Legitimitets Mekanism

1. I ett lite bredare perspektiv : **Vilken funktion fyller valkompassen i vår demokrati?**

2. **Stärker valkompassen demokratin, i så fall på vilket sätt?**

   -Finns det funktioner i vår demokrati som valkompassen och *val* inte kan eller behöver fylla?

   -Kan det finnas några negativa effekter av valkompassen för vår demokrati?

3. **Hur tror du valkompassen får människor att förhålla sig till politik och demokrati i helhet?**

4. **Slutligen, vad skulle du säga är det viktigaste i en demokrati?**

Interview-guide (English)

<u>**Intro:**</u>

1. **What was your role in the Valkompassen-project?**

2. **Valkompassen is a cooperation between political scientists and others. Which parties did you cooperate with and how was it? Tell them to describe.**
   -Did it work well?
   -Less well?

3. **VAA's in general have had quite a rise the last couple of years and millions of people have used them. Can you describe your thoughts about your decision to "have" one?**

4. **Can you describe what the intention is with Valkompassen**
   -What did you want to achieve?

<u>**Characteristics of the Citizen**</u>

1. **Why do you think that Valkompassen is so popular among the voters?**

2. **Valkompassen is in my interpretation, primarily for (your readers and ultimately)**
   the voter…Do you believe that there is a need for the voter for such an instrument as Valkompassen?
   -Why and if so what?
   - Do you believe such a need has increased? Has it always existed?
   (If **Yes) -** Why has it increased?

3. **How do you think the voter uses Valkompassen?**
   - Do you believe that different voting groups use it differently?
   - In what ways could that be and how do they differ?

4. **How do you think the voter interprets the results?**
   - Are there risks with that?
   - Are there benefits?

5. **Is Valkompassen made for every type of voter?**
   (If **Yes**= Voters differ in how they relate to politics in general. There are those who are more interested, some who are less etc.. Would you say that there are any certain characteristics or presuppositions necessary in order to be able to grasp the information given by Valkompassen?
   (If **No**= What type is it made for?)

6. **If you consider the perfect voter that gets the most out of Valkompassen, how do you perceive that person is?**

<u>**Preference-formation**</u>

1. **Valkompassen, familiary matches a voters opinion to a party, but sometimes one may not be so sure what you believe in prior to using Valkompassen.**
   -How have you related to that?
   -What are your thoughts on that?
   -Do you find any risks or benefits with it?

2. **Valkompassen is published prior and during elections. How come you are not publishing it prior to other major political events? (For instance, prior to major decisions in the parliament or a climate top-meeting or others)?**
   -Why/ Why not?

3. **There are those who suggest that politics and democracy is something that needs continuous engagement and not just during elections…**
   - How do you perceive the pros and cons of Valkompassen from such a perspective?
   (For instance: Is it a problem if the interest diminishes after the election?)

4. **There are also those who suggest that there are more ways to engage democratically, some claim that protests are one way of participating, others primarily by voting in elections. Is it possible to interpret Valkompassen as a way of participating, or how should one understand it from such a perspective?**

5. **Another perspective is that peoples' opinions are formed in the meeting and in conversations between citizens, have you considered any pros and cons respectively with Valkompassen from such a perspective?**
   (Possible reformulation if necessary to elaborate: There are those who emphasize a living democratic conversation in society, is there any risk that Valkompassen could limit that?)

<u>**Mechanism of Legitimacy**</u>

1. In a broader perspective: **What function does Valkompassen fulfill in our democracy?**
2. **Does Valkompassen strengthen democracy? If so how?**

- Are there functions in our democracy which valkompassen and elections can't or doesn't have to fulfill?
- Could there be any negative effects of Valkompassen on our democracy?

3. **How do you think valkompassen makes people relate to politics and democracy as a whole?**

4. **Finally, what would you say is the most important in a democracy?**

Appendix 3.

Quotations in Swedish

1. *"Vårt uppdrag är ju journalistiskt i absoluta grunden och det finns inget viktigare för en journalist som jobbar med nyheter i Sverige än valet. Och en av de viktigaste grejerna i uppdraget som journalist är ju att informera allmänheten om nyheter, om läget och försöka komma så nära någon slags objektiv beskrivning. Det går ju naturligtvis aldrig att vara 100% objektiv men så nära vi kan till en objektiv beskrivning, att det är det här som **är** valet. Och en väldigt viktig del av det är 'valkompassen', därför att vi... Den uppfyller den grejen att vi kan uppfylla det rent journalistiska grunduppdraget, men den uppfyller också att vi kan ge en tjänst. [...] Vi ska bidra med information som människor kan använda sig av i sin vardag som kan göra det lättare att förstå sin värld."*. ("A")

2. *"Syftet med valkompassen är att erbjuda medborgarna ett verktyg för att få veta mer om vad partierna och politikerna tycker i viktiga sakfrågor. Och att liksom kunna "se" hur väl man stämmer överens med olika partier. Sen utifrån det kunna få en...information inför valet. Egentligen är det ju det som är huvudsyftet."* - ("B")

3. *"Ja, det var faktiskt självklart."* - ("B")

4. *"[...] varför behövs det, är det värt det, vad är det rimligt att det ska kosta?"* ("A")

5. *Alltså det är tidseffektivt, förhållandevis, överblickbart och lite kul* - ("B")

6. *Man får lätt ett intryck av att man gör en kompass och att den ska vara något allomfattande verktyg som ska tala om för dig hur du ska rösta. Nej vi talar inte om för dig hur du ska rösta. Och det är bara de här frågorna som vi har valt ut som du ska tänka på. Det kan ju vara så att du har massa andra skäl, du kanske har släkt traditioner, eller du tycker ideologiskt någonting, eller finns massa andra saker som*

påverkar när du bestämmer dig hur du röstar. Så det är väldigt viktigt att komma ihåg vad det är man gör när man gör kompassen. - ("B")

7. *En anledning att vi har samarbete med [Universitet] till exempel är för att människor inte har förtroendet för [Medieföretag] att göra en objektiv valkompass. De tror inte på i fall det bara står [Medieföretag]s logga på den så tror inte de att det här är pålitligt nog. [...] Så att.. det är därför det är ett sånt samarbete med till exempel [Universitet] är så pass viktigt ." ("A")*

8. *"[...] Alltså ett mediaföretag står som liksom, som moderator som...för olika frågor som mediaföretaget tycker är viktiga i samhället [...]" ("A")*

9. *"Men så länge man kan känna att man gör en kompass som är balanserad och ger liksom en allsidig bild av politiken som inte är ... som liksom "tiltar" åt något håll. Det är det vi jobbar med för att vi ska kunna känna oss trygga med att publicera kompassen.*

    Sebastian: Om jag förstår dig rätt då så är det metodologin som är en av de viktigaste...?

    -Absolut, ja." ("B")

10. *Jag tror att det är ett...generellt sätt är människor inte så intresserade av politik i sin vardag. Men under ett valår så blir uppmärksamheten helt ofattbart stor. Det går liksom inte att gömma sig för att det är val. Och alla blir då uppmärksammade på att de kanske inte riktigt vet. [...] ("A")*

11. *"[...] Jag tror det finns ett sug efter att få veta mer i grunden." ("B")*

12. *Sen tror jag att många går runt och tycker lite saker...om ditten-och-datten sen blir det val och "Oj, nu måste jag rösta. Vad ska jag rösta på? Nu behöver jag få information här och var ska jag få den? [...]* ("B")

13. *"[...] folk generellt sett fattar inte. Alltså vad i helvete är...nu kommer jag inte ihåg frågan men, typ ett kommun...Att kommuner blockar vindkraftsetablering. De kanske inte ens vet vad "etablering" är. Alltså de kanske inte...de fattar ingenting. 'Vad har kommuner med det här att göra?' 'Vad är en kommun'? Alltså förstår du vad jag menar? Det kan var liksom på den nivån. Men de kan fortfarande ha jättestarka åsikter om valet. Så då måste man försöka fånga det på något sätt. Så gott det går."* ("A")

14. *"Ja, men som jag sade, vi har ju ingen ambitionen av att folk ska göra en valkompass och sen "Nu vet jag vad jag ska rösta på", utan att de ska få veta mer. Så 1.) Att de ska få bli informerade och förhoppningsvis då kanske liksom ta reda på ännu mer. [...] Vi har ju ett uppdrag att främja demokratin och informera väljarna. Så det är så klart att man vill att folk ska informera sig så mycket som möjligt. Så det finns liksom en sådan aspekt. Om man ska ta en 'dröm' så är det om man hittar dem där som kanske inte hänger med så mycket men som här...Här hittar de en väg in att kunna ta reda på mer och engagera sig mer när de ska välja, liksom."* - ("B")

15. *"Därför det är bara då det nyhetsmässigt är så pass relevant att lyfta en så pass komplicerad tjänst."* - ("A")

16. *"Nej jag tror inte folk skulle bry sig och då har du ingen påverkan. Om det hade varit så att vi levde i ett mer direktdemokratiskt samhälle, typ Schweiz som exempel. Där de har olika omröstningar med mer specifika frågor. [...] säg att det hade varit om ett förbud mot minareter eller något sådant och det kanske är kopplat till typ 5 beslut som...ja, då hade man så klart velat haft den [Valkompassen]. Så här: "Vad tycker du*

i den här frågan?", att man då får landa i en vägledning utifrån det. Alltså en kompass kopplad till dem beslut som ska fattas. Men eftersom att folk inte har...anledningen till att folk är engagerade i valet är för att det är de som bestämmer hur det kommer att bli. Man själv vill veta vad ska jag göra med min röst? För att folk vill gå och rösta. Om ingen hade tänkt gå och rösta hade ingen brytt sig om valkompassen. Alltså så enkelt är det tror jag. [...]" ("A")

17. *"att man ger folk ett väldigt tydlig sakkunskapsunderlag, inför viktiga beslut... men då blir det ju mer liksom en information som man känner till... du kan ju inte använda den informationen förens i nästa val. Förstår du hur jag menar?"* ("B")

18. *"[...] om man är en person som inte alls deltar i att informera sig och sådär och gör det genom en valkompass så är det väl ändå något slags demokratiskt i det i att man informerar sig om vad de som faktiskt bestämmer tycker och så där. Sen om det ... vad man gör med den informationen, [...] om man går ut och protesterar eller om man skriver insändare eller gör en youtube-kanal...alltså det är ju...det kan man låta vara osagt. Men det är klart att ett högt engagemang i den demokratiska processen och i debatten, det är ju aldrig fel. [...]."* ("B")

19. *"Men jag skulle tro att det snarare stimulerar [samtal]. Förhoppningsvis, om du har ett gäng kompisar som har gjort en valkompass, så snackar de om det. [...] det hörde man inför valet av mina kompisar eller alla möjliga liksom...Jag var på en middag. Alla snackade om valkompassen liksom. Antingen tyckte de det var kul eller så tyckte de den var dålig, eller vad det nu var. Så att min extremt begränsade ovetenskapliga lilla spaning är nog ändå att den gör att man pratar mer om kompassen och det gör att man börjar diskutera politik. Omedvetet eller medvetet. Tror jag."* ("B")

20. *[...] Folk diskuterar det, visar upp vid matbordet; 'vad fick du?', 'vad fick jag?'. 'Så jäkla sjukt, min farsa fick KD:are', förstår du hur jag menar? Det lever på det sättet.*

Det är inte bara så att folk gör det bara i sin egen tankevärld och så låter de det vara och sen röstar. Så funkar liksom inte människor. ("A")

21. *"[...] det viktigaste är att folk gör välinformerade val och röstar. Det är liksom en ... det är ju ingen plikt men det är ju viktigt. Alla röster är värda lika mycket. Att man... kan man rösta utifrån välinformerade val. En välinformerad, att man har liksom samlat på sig information och känner att: "Det här tycker jag känns bra". [...] Vi har ju inget mål i sig att vi ska höja valdeltagandet, men vi vill att folk ska känna : "Okej nu har jag följt [Medieföretag] nu har jag faktiskt fått väldigt mycket bra information här, så nu kan jag fatta ett eget självständigt beslut utifrån den information jag fått". Det är ju ändå där vi är liksom. Så som vi tänker.* ("B")

22. *"Jag tror att de blir mer intresserade. Jag tror det väcker intresse. Så tror jag. Det väcker intresse för partier och politik och i slutändan även den demokratiska processen.[...]"* ("A")

23. *"Det hjälper förhoppningsvis människor att känna att saker och ting inte är så svart- vita. Verkligheten är inte så svartvit som man kanske oftast tror. Att det hjälper dem att förstå en fråga som de tidigare inte riktigt begrep. Och att de kanske liksom...väcker intresse för de att ta reda på mer information om partier som de tidigare kanske inte övervägde"* ("A")

24. *"[...]Populärt deltagande. Populärt förtroendefullt deltagande som är informerat."* ("A")

25. *"[...] Den kan inte ersätta förtroendet. Du måste ändå i slutändan bygga ett förtroende, [...] Jag tycker att mina konkurrenter har en övertro på att valkompasser kan i slutändan hjälpa väljaren att liksom veta vad de ska rösta på. Så är det ju inte. Utan du röstar lika mycket, du röstar ju liksom också på vilken partiledare gillar du,*

det har jättestor påverkan tror jag. Jag tror också att du röstar på vad dina föräldrar röstar på. Jag tror du röstar på ideologiska faktorer [...].Utan det ska vara rakt av: "De här frågorna är viktiga inför valet, så här tycker partierna" och "så här tycker du". Och du kan ju läsa här vad partierna motiverar och utifrån det här gå vidare ut i samhället och snacka i valstugorna eller din politiker eller gå till kammaren och var med i en debatt eller se dem på tv, förstår du vad jag menar? Diskutera med dina vänner. Allt det där är en del av den demokratiska processen. Det går inte att ersätta med en kompass." ("A")

26. *"Man pratar ju om att debatter blir mer och mer bara ett utrymme för partiledare att bara göra ett statement. Det handlar mer om att bara lyfta den egna frågan.[...] Och det där tror jag att många känner att debatter, det är bara pajkastning [...]. Valkompassen är ett systematiserande utav hela det som är diskursen inför valet [...]. Det kanske ersätter, har till viss del ersatt det som debatter en gång har tänkt att vara. Nu är ju debatter mer och mer spektakel. Det är ju inte valkompassen liksom."* ("A")

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