

Department Organizing/FBB

## Wahl-O-Mat

The screenshot shows the Wahl-O-Mat interface on a blue background. At the top, there are logos for ZDF.de, bpb: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, and the European Parliament (EUROPÄISCHES PARLAMENT). The main content area is a yellow box with the title "Wahl-O-Mat" and the slogan "EUROPA – eine gute Wahl" with the European Union flag. Below the title, it says "23 von 30 Thesen". The main text of the poll is: "Biometrische Daten (Fingerabdrücke u.a.) sollen von allen Einwohner/innen der EU in den Ausweispapieren erfasst werden." Below this text, there are four response options: "stimme zu", "neutral", "stimme nicht zu", and "weiß nicht". At the bottom of the yellow box, there are links for "FAQ", "E-Mail", and "Info". In the bottom left corner of the interface, there are links for "wichtiger Hinweis" and "Impressum". At the very bottom, there is a navigation bar with numbers 1 through 23, with 23 highlighted in a yellow box.

Information sheet

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## The Wahl-O-Mat

Wahl-O-Mat is the German version of the tool *Stemwijzer* that has been developed in the Netherlands by the *Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek/IPP* (Amsterdam). Since 1985 it has been implemented with great success. The Provider of the idea and principal for the German version is the *Federal Agency for Political Education* (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/bpb) which also owns the rights of this product. In context of the cooperation „the WAHL GANG – promotion of poll” (election of the Bundestag in 2002), the transformation has been developed jointly with students of the *Otto-Suhr-Institut* of the *Freie Universität Berlin*. Since then the Wahl-O-Mat has been developed continuously. E.g. the tool contains didactic hints and methods.

For the first time the Wahl-O-Mat was used during the election of the Bundestag in the year 2002. All in all there were 3,6 million people who used this tool (these are 24 per cent of all households with an internet in Germany). Since this time the Wahl-O-Mat was online at the following elections:

- Election for the Bavarian Landtag in September 2003 (100.000 user)
- National election in Switzerland in October 2003 under the name "Politarena" in the languages German, French and Italian (90.000 user)
- European Election in June 2004, also in the languages Turkish and Russian (800.000 user)
- Election of the Landtag of the Saarland in September 2004 (30.000 user)
- Election of the Landtag of Saxony in September 2004, also in the Sorbian language (50.000 user)

## Quality criteria

In the run up of elections, since years several „election tests“, being more or less serious about it, have been periodically offered in journals respectively in the Internet. Their result focuses on the recommendation for the election of a particular party. This was also the case for the election of the Bundestag 2002 (p.e. a test offered in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*). The quality criteria in terms of which such and kindred „tests“ can be measured, are:

- Party-political neutrality,
- Free from linkage with commercial interests (p.e. on the Internet page, but also within the catalogue of theses respectively questions),
- Continuation of the essential political issues and focuses, namely upon consideration in the middle and in the long term (validity at least for the duration of one legislative period),
- Authentic relation between individual responses / assessments and statements of the parties to be elected,
- Approval of the responses through the executives of the parties (levels of the Bund and the Lands),
- Clear differentiability of the positions of the parties,
- Suited for users in the sense of a simple, uncomplicated application of the tool,

- Concentration upon the gist which has to abstain from any material and/or visual distractions,
- Playful incentive under maintenance of seriousness,
- Transparency of the realisation of the prevailing results,
- Direct comparison between the positions of the users and those of the parties,
- Total ranking of the party preferences,
- Links to serious election websites and suppliers,
- Off- and online standard.

These criteria have been compiled for the development of Wahl-O-Mat, and if one considers the user reaction as measurement, then they were fulfilled. For example 55 per cent of the user state that the Wahl-O-Mat was a help in deciding for a certain political party and just as many say it was a help in discovering the differences between the political parties, more than 60 per cent indicated that the Wahl-O-Mat drew their attention to political themes.

## The target group

The goal is also to get hold of such voters who

- Do not intensively tackle the election platforms,
- Do not know the election and basic platforms of the parties,
- Wish to get a concrete information regarding particular subjects,
- Are looking for a reply to their question "Which party I should give my vote to? After all, they are all the same".

The Wahl-O-Mat initiates many talks between the user and friends, members of the family and colleagues (more than 30 per cent say this) about the result, certain theses and the basic platforms of the parties.

The Wahl-O-Mat consists of editors, who themselves are voters. This method is a guarantee that the people entitled to vote find their themes of interest.

While using as pre-formed responses "Stimme zu" ("Agree"), "Stimme nicht zu" ("Do not agree"), "Neutral" ("Neutral"), "Keine Meinung" ("No opinion"), the program is offering the simple facility for users of the Internet or PC-online at home to impartially give per "mouse click" his or her opinion on multiple political theses.

After one has taken up a definite position on all the theses, it is indicated in which degree the responses of the users match with the account of each of the individual parties. The party which is coming next to the user is displayed by its logo on the screen. The individual ranking of the parties is displayed in form of a diagram. In addition, the user can compare directly each individual of his or her responses with each of the parties.

For those interested there is furthermore available the total ranking list of the parties (that, however, is not a representative one).

The theses were evolved on the basis of initially defined core areas of life (health, education, security – see below) by means of the election platforms of the parties. In order to be able to compare the standpoints of the users with those of the parties, the parties were requested to take up a clear position on the theses for themselves (Yes, No, Indifferent). That matching process took place in an entirely official form on the utmost level of the party executives of the federation (election of the Bundestag and the European election) and of the states of the federation. In such a manner one takes care of preventing that a non-authorized person is interpreting parties and their standpoints.

The criteria for the admission of political parties is the representation in the parliament and, in exceptional cases, a good chance of getting in to the parliament. An important prerequisite is a variety in the basic program of the party in order to show the differences between the political parties to the potential voter.

The advantages of the tool: It can be installed easily, the data are collected at one central office, so that the evaluation can be passed on to the press and the political parties.

## Development of the Wahl-O-Mat

The German version „Wahl-O-Mat“ was created with the help and the advice of the Netherlands' licence holder Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek, IPP, represented by Jochum de Graaf.

In the first step up to one hundred theses are evolved concerning topical and relevant areas of life, namely

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| (1) Criminality, drugs, security                 | (7) Housing / Housing industry           |
| (2) Ethical topics                               | (8) Traffic and environment              |
| (3) Democratization and constitutional amendment | (9) Teaching, sports and culture         |
| (4) Immigration                                  | (10) Financial affairs and taxes         |
| (5) Employment and income                        | (11) International relations and defence |
| (6) Social insurance and welfare services        |  |

For the development of the theses it seems reasonable to carry out a workshop of one and a half days with all the co-operation partners and the editors, who are citizens entitled to vote. The theses are relayed to the parties for taking up their position and approval. After the parties have given their responses, the following theses are sorted out:

- Theses upon which the parties are in agreement so that they do not offer any possibility of distinction.
- Theses on which one or several parties had taken up no position.

In a workshop that takes one day the answers of the political parties are worked on. With the advice of a political scientist the definite decisions concerning the

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themes and theses are made (e.g. the distinguishing between the competence of federation, the states of the federation and Europe). At last not more than 30 theses are set into the tool.

## Partners

The evolution of the contents and the subsequent observation of the [www.wahl-o-mat.de](http://www.wahl-o-mat.de) takes place during co-operation with one or several partners who are interested in the topic. As a matter of priority, the Landeszentralen für politische Bildung (Lands' agencies for political education) are addressed for co-operation, and who are requested to look for additional partners. In this context partners which stem from the university field, from NGO's or the media are worthy of consideration.

Requirements for the cooperation partners:

### 1. Concerning content:

- Examination of the party respectively election platforms (for that reconciliation with the returning officer is recommendable);
- Identification of the currently relevant areas of life and formulation of the theses;
- Reconciliation and approval of the theses with the Lands' executives of the parties;
- Editorial observation of the website bolstered by bpb;
- Reply of requests;
- Press and public relations work in collaboration with bpb;
- Evaluation and final report.

### 2. Concerning organisation:

- Organization of the workshop for evolution of the themes and theses;
- Co-ordination.

### 3. Concerning finances:

Depending upon basis for negotiation, the cooperation partners are expected to make a financial contribution. It should imply the following services:

- A one-off licence for use of Wahl-O-mat for the outstanding election
- Consultation and participation of bpb for installation of *Wahl-O-mat*, as well as for editorial observation and technical questions;
- Preparation of service provider performances.

The co-operation partners are accomplishing the press and public relations work in joint responsibility. For that the following possibilities are principally given:

- Editorial reporting in the (partner-) media (launch, presentation of partners, news / reports of success upon running the tool)
- Branding (exchange of logo, placing of banners and other advertising formats on the websites of the partners, print advertisements)
- Common specials: (winning game: Wahl-O-Mat-Quiz or a prognosis game, prominent action / testimonials (within a live broadcast the prominent of the month votes in the Wahl-O-mat and afterwards he gets into a discussion on his result), first-time voter action: call of all partners, especially for first-time voters, to enter Wahl-O-Mat for being consulted in concern of their voting decision)

## The present partners of the Wahl-O-Mat

Antenne Bayern  
 Arbeitskammer des Saarlandes/SaarLLernnetz  
 Bayerischer Jugendring  
 Europäisches Parlament, Informationsbüro für Deutschland  
 Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek, Amsterdam  
 Landesjugendring Saar  
 Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg  
 Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit Berlin  
 Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hamburg  
 Landeszentrale für politische Bildung des Saarlandes  
 Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk  
 Politischer Jugendring Dresden  
 Saarländischer Rundfunk  
 Sächsische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung  
 Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen

## Expert (political scientist) for advice and assessment

PD Dr. Stefan Marschall, university of Düsseldorf

## **Didactic advice**

Wolf Dittmayer, advisor in the field of organization, IT-developer

## **Extern co-ordination**

Dr. Nobert Taubken, Hamburg

## Contact for further information within the bpb:

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