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This short note is a contribution to the recent work on voter assistance aids (VAAs).\textsuperscript{1} VAAs such as the “Who Should I Vote For Presidential Candidate Quiz” \url{http://www.dumbspot.com} and “Electoral Compass USA” \url{http://electoralcompass.com/} both designed for the 2008 U.S. Presidential election, have become available on the Internet to help voters make election choices.\textsuperscript{2} Customarily these aids work by asking a set of questions about the voter’s policy preferences and then matching the voter’s answers to the presumed policy positions of the candidates or parties, and then devising some method of weighting/combining the various questions so as to develop an overall assessment of voter-candidate or voter party proximity in one or two dimensions. The voter is then advised which candidate or party s/he is closest to.\textsuperscript{3} 

Some VAAs, such as Compass, also include candidate evaluations scales about trust, competence, etc.

Here we offer our own contribution to the VAA literature, one that is rooted in the KISS principle that less is more.\textsuperscript{4} Thus we focus on a single five item discriminator as our preferred VAA for vote choice in the 2008 U.S. Presidential election. Also rather than focusing on policy positions that might be located in candidate position statements or party platforms, to make sense of partisan choice we seek a more indirect and unobtrusive measure. In particular, adapting an idea from the use of instrumental variables in two stage least squares, we chose a variable that is not directly found in any presidential party/candidate platforms, namely attitudes toward moose.\textsuperscript{5} Carefully conducted experiments with both business executives and students\textsuperscript{6} fully validate the predictive power of this instrument.

Respondents were instructed as follows.
HOW TO VOTE IN 2008:
The Moose Opinion-ometer
A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED

I will offer you five statements -- about Moose.

Identify the one you agree with most.

You must pick one -- and not more than one!

And, once you know which one you picked, it will be clear to you how to vote in the 2008 Presidential election.

The five choices are as shown below

THE MOOSE OPINION-OMETER – CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ONE CHOICE

1. The only good moose is a dead moose

2. Helicopters were intelligently designed to carry moose.

3. Field dressing a moose is like putting a sweater on your dog when it gets cold.

4. I never met a (chocolate) mousse I didn’t like.

5. Moose who’ve been in Alaska long enough deserve the right to vote in local elections – especially for governor.

GIVE MOOSE THE VOTE!
Decoding the answers is straightforward. Those who pick either item 1 or item 2 should vote Republican; those who pick either item 4 or item 5 should vote Democratic. Item 3 is added as a reality/reliability check. Anyone who picks that answer should be discarded.
References


1 A Wuffle is an Associate to Professor at UCI. An earlier version of this paper was given at the UCI Department of Political Science “Elections 2008 Panel,” November 3, 2008, and to a group of business executives on September 25, 2008. Our indebtedness to Mooses Maimonides will be apparent to any informed reader. This research was not supported by anyone we are aware of. However, Mark Franklin made the mistake of telling us about VAAs.

2 Electoral Compass is headquartered in the Netherlands and has developed cites in a number of countries, including Portugal; http://www.smartvote.ch/ is a German language website that allows one to access VAAs for a number of elections in Switzerland. Walgrave, Aelst and Nuytemans (2008) study the use of a VAA in Belgium.

3 More sophisticated VAAs also inform voters of the degree of policy proximity to the different candidates/parties.

4 This view is also associated with Mies van der Rohe.

5 We are highly skeptical about most other VAAs since appropriate weighting of issues is not at all obvious and, in any case, probably should be voter-specific, and the assignment of “true” positions to the candidates/parties is likely to be problematic, especially if it is derived from scientific research by political scientists. Also there are potential biases in issue selection. By not bothering to select more than one issue, and focusing on an issue not discussed in platforms, it is clear that we can completely avoid these problems.

6 The n of our combined sample was three. Three businessmen reported the fit of our predictions to their actual preferences; in each case the prediction was perfect. The n for students was, however, zero, since we forgot to collect the completed questionnaires.

7 For the record, field dressing a moose involves gutting it from gullet to anus and then draining the blood. It has nothing to do with sweaters.