Helping citizens to better understand the General Election with online democratic tools

#ge2015

Tim Green, Oxford mySocial, January 2015

Who am I?

- Physicist here in Oxford
- Co-founded Democracy Club in 2010 with Seb Bacon (more later)
- Creator of intermediate election candidate projects: yournextpcc.com, yournextmep.com
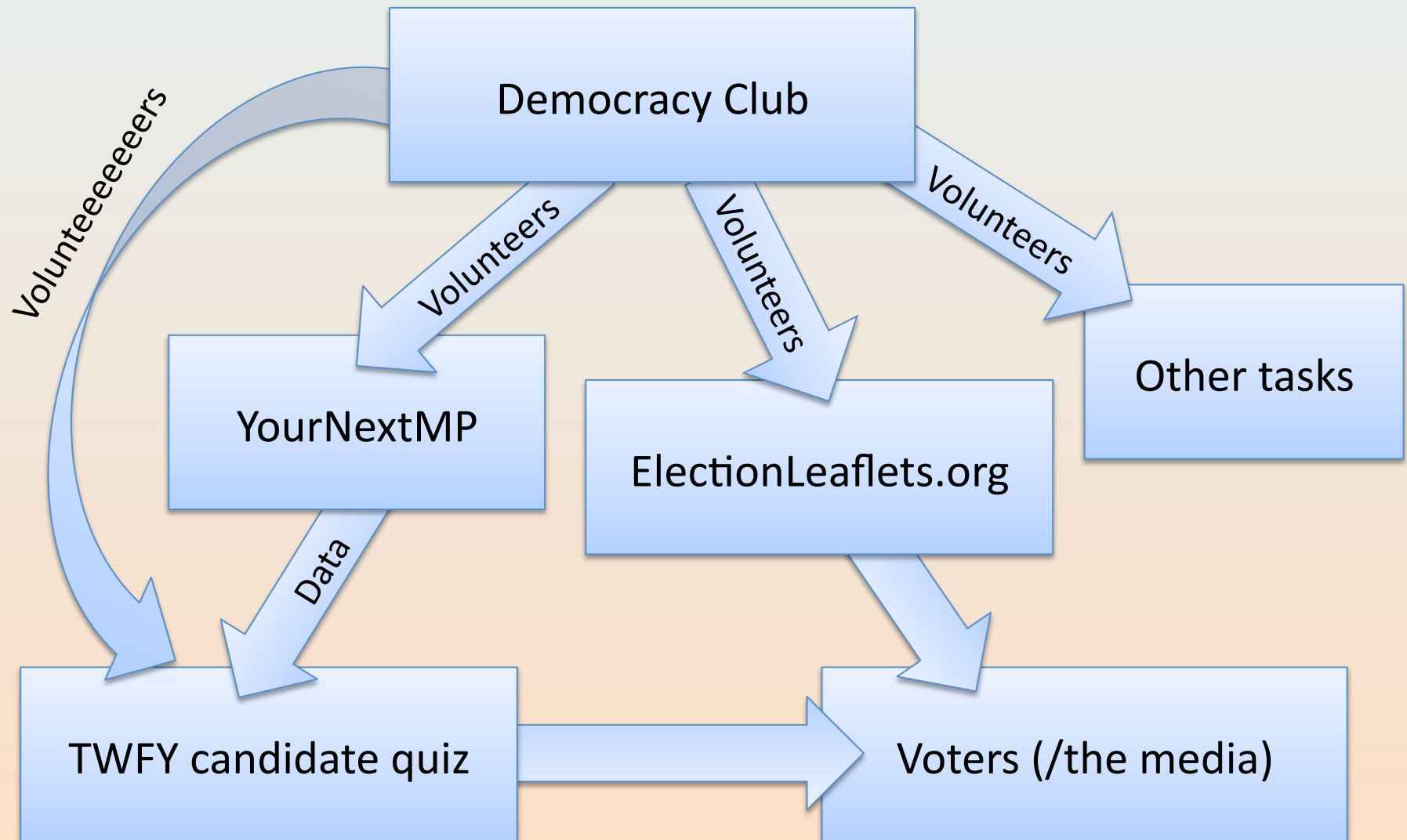- Getting busy again for 2015!

My motivation

- Personal lack of knowledge – frustration at the ballot box!
- High barrier to entry with current tools
- Wanting to see high quality debate

GE 2010: Our loose coalition of sites

- Democracy Club
  - The volunteers
- YourNextMP.com
  - The candidate data
- ElectionLeaflets.org (née The Straight Choice)
  - Election leaflet collection
- Election.TheyWorkForYou.com
  - The candidate survey

Vague structure

Democracy Club

Volunteeeeeers

Volunteers

Volunteers

Volunteers

YourNextMP

ElectionLeaflets.org

Other tasks

Data

TWFY candidate quiz

Voters (/the media)

YourNextMP: Candidate data

- Knowing the candidates is a key part of an election site!

- Frustratingly hard to get – there isn't a national database of them

- Massive effort to collect. Over 4,000 in 2010

- Your time is better spent actually making the cool election site!

- We need an open database that everyone contributes to

Results

- 6,000+ volunteers
- Thousands of leaflets uploaded
- 3,255 local issues submitted
- ~50% response rate to survey, ~90% of candidates contacted
- Complete candidates database – spot check against paid sources indicates that it was more accurate!
- Tens of registered re-users of candidate data
- 100,000+ survey visits in 3 days
- *25% of visitors said it changed their vote*!

Problems

- Launching survey days before election!
- Not getting party buy-in on survey
- Crowdsourcing qualitative/hard to verify data
- Lack of overarching brand for sites
- Major organizations (BBC, newspapers, etc.) still paid for their candidate data
- Overall disputable impact
- Elections are short – how much code was reused?

General election 2015

7th of May 2015

120 DAYS TO GO

Theories of change

- Informed voting
  - Help voters easily find the information they need to make an informed vote.

- Promise tracking
  - Ensure that parties and candidates keep the promises that got them elected.

- Get out the vote
  - Encourage more people to vote.

- Citizen lobbying
  - Help voters influence candidates' and parties' policy.

Democracy Club 2015

- Sym Roe (right) has taken up Democracy Club
- Spoken to lots of people – coordinating action
- Partnered with FullFact.org, political fact checking organisation run by Will Moy
- Overarching brand?
- General election "war room" to be staffed all day during the campaign

Ideas!

From https://github.com/symroe/Election/blob/master/IDEAS.mkd
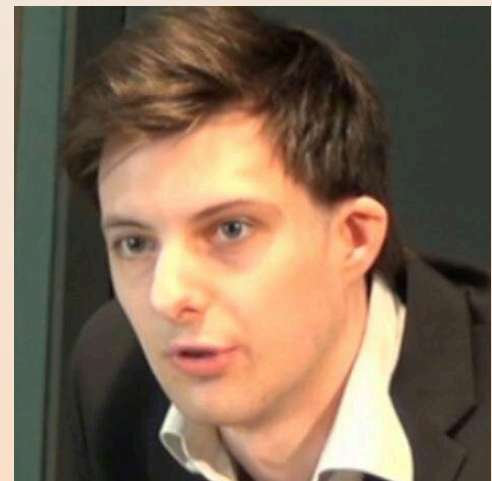
- "Who should I vote for" party survey type sites
- Wikipedia pages for all PPCs
- Database of promises & pledges
- Collect CVs from all candidates
- Hustings mapper
- Github manifestos
- Per-constituency feed/tumblr of *everything* related to the election there
- Polling day information
- Tactical voter swapper

- Not Apathetic – say why you're not voting
- Per candidate survey
- Candidate Q&A
- MP reports – lots of good PublicWhip voting data now!
- Twitter archiver & selfie monitor
- News mention monitor
- Crowdsourced candidate biographies
- ***& more!***

YourNextMP 2015

- Based on PopIt people database component by mySociety
- PopIt gives you an easy to use UI and HTTP REST API for all your people data
- Re-usable candidate data crowdsourcing platform
- Currently worked on by Mark Longair and Sym Roe

yournextmp.com

Signed in as **tfgg**   Log out

Do you know about UK election candidates?

Help build a database of candidates for the 2015 general election!

Enter your postcode:

Show candidates

Or select a constituency

📘 Recent changes

User **Mike2015** created a new candidate
1 hour, 34 minutes ago

User **adambro** removed candidacy for candidate #2573
4 hours, 59 minutes ago

User **Dan1988** updated candidate #5185
14 hours, 37 minutes ago

User **cdhaptomos** updated candidate #5196
19 hours, 30 minutes ago

🏆 Top users this week

RichCBury1   46 edits

mattl   10 edits

tfgg   9 edits

CllrMattBrown   6 edits

aumlaut   5 edits

Sokuto12   5 edits

yournextmp.com/constituency/65564/oxford-west-and-abingdon

YourNextMP API About Constituencies Numbers

Signed in as **tfgg** Log out

Candidates for Oxford West and Abingdon

Known candidates for the 2015 general election

Larry Sanders (Green Party)

Not actually standing?   Edit

Layla Moran (Liberal Democrats)

Not actually standing?   Edit

Sally Copley (Labour Party)

Not actually standing?   Edit

Helen Salisbury (National Health Action Party)

Not actually standing?   Edit

Nicola Blackwood (Conservative Party)

Not actually standing?   Edit

Alan Harris (UK Independence Party (UKIP))

Not actually standing?   Edit

yournextmp.com/person/2447/update

Edit the details of Layla Moran

Full name:

Layla Moran

Email:

Laylamoran1@gmail.com

Gender (e.g. 'male', 'female'):

female

Date of birth (as YYYY-MM-DD):

1982-09-12

Wikipedia URL:

Homepage URL:

http://www.laylamoran.com/

Twitter username:

laylamoran

Facebook profile URL:

https://www.facebook.com/laylalibdem

YourNextMP 2015 so far

- 1,649 candidates (39.7% of final 2010 count)
- 1,219 new candidates
- 451 candidates known to be standing again (will go up!)
- 2,193 edits by users
- 33 edits by the candidates themselves!

CllrMattBrown	30 Dec 2014, 2:24 a.m.	person-update	4775	I am the Candidate

< all articles

Cadan ap Tomos

2015
Liberal Democrats
Cardiff West

2015-01-02
Cadan ap Tomos selected to fight Cardiff West in the General Election www.libdemvoice.org edit

Jo Swinson   Cadan ap Tomos   Jenny Willott   Chris Huhne

Cardiff Central   Cardiff West

Lib Dem researcher selected to stand for the party in Cardiff West at the General Election
www.walesonline.co.uk edit

Cadan ap Tomos

Cardiff West

< all articles

Cadan ap Tomos selected to fight Cardiff West in the General Election

www.libdemvoice.org

People tagged

add person

Name [   ] add

Jo Swinson

2015
Liberal Democrats
East Dunbartonshire

2010
Liberal Democrats
East Dunbartonshire

Tagged, un-tag

Cadan ap Tomos

2015
Liberal Democrats
Cardiff West

Tagged, un-tag

Extracted text | Article

Welsh Liberal Democrat Cadan ap Tomos has been selected to fight the seat of Cardiff West at the General Election.

Fluent Welsh speaker Cadan grew up in Ceredigion and now works in the National Assembly for the party. The University of York graduate said: "I'm delighted to have been selected to fight Cardiff West for the Welsh Lib Dems. Labour has been taking our communities for granted for far too long, and I look forward to running a strong campaign in the run up to next May." She said: "He is a terrific candidate with a breadth of experience who I know will work tirelessly for the people of Cardiff."

Meanwhile, there's praise on the same site for Jenny Willott, dubbed one of the "rising Welsh stars who could be leading figures in the next Parliament."

The Cardiff Central MP is one of just three Liberal Democrats from Wales in the Commons and Labour will fight furiously to oust her from the seat she won in 2005. We can expect Jenny Willott and her local supporters to defend the constituency with vigour and a relentless focus on local issues – and if she returns to Westminster she will have the chance to shape her party's future. She has stepped down as assistant government whip so she can "speak out more publicly" as the election looms but there is every reason to think she would gain a prominent role in a future coalition. Ms Willott quit as parliamentary private secretary to Lib Dem Energy Secretary Chris Huhne in 2010 so she could vote against the increase in tuition fees. But the mother of two joined the whips office in 2012 and later covered Jo Swinson's maternity leave as a minister in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

My possibly unjustified opinionated opinion on what will work

- Tightly focused, single-purpose sites.
- Tells the voter something surprising.
- Or allows the voter to do something surprising.
- Sites that don't require lots of users to be good – no ghost towns!
- Sites that don't rely on a representative sample of voters.
- A little bit of controversy – put candidates & parties in a (legitimate!) difficult position.
- Friendly for sharing on social media: Twitter, Facebook… Snapchat? Tindr?

How can you help?

- Do something!
  - Help crowdsource on an existing site
  - Tell your friends about an existing site
  - Work on your own awesome project
  - Use data in an interesting way
- Tells us!
  - We can help publicise
  - Inform other people about your data
  - Come under our brand

Getting in touch

- https://democracyclub.org.uk/
- Join the mailing list, democracy-club on Google groups
- Talk to Sym, me or anyone else involved!

Discussion