

# Open Rights Group Reveals How UK Political Parties Are Using Data to Profile Voters

By [Derek du Preez](#)

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*It's unsurprising that political parties are becoming more sophisticated in their attempts to use data to profile voters whilst campaigning during elections. However, getting insight into what they think they know about us is often challenging.*

The Open Rights Group (ORG) has conducted some research to shed some light on this by asking the UK's main political parties – 'who do you think we are?'. And the results are quite interesting.

For example, did you know that Experian is selling commercial datasets to the Labour and Conservative Parties for profiling? Or did you know that the Labour Party essentially has massive league tables, ranking you based on how you feel about certain issues?

These are some of the revelations that have been released by the ORG ahead of the upcoming 12th December election. The group was able to pull together the findings by exercising its rights under GDPR to find out what UK political parties are doing with personal data.

Staff and supporters of ORG were asked to write to parties across Britain to find out what personal data they are holding, which has given them a "sketch" of how data is being used to profile, target and shape voters intentions.

The ORG has now [also built a tool](#) that makes it easy for anyone to submit similar data requests to all political parties, which it hopes will help it build a more "detailed portrait".

The group said:

We want to know what exactly is going on with personal data in politics, and at what scale, and use this knowledge to stop shady data practices that break trust and the law, polarise society and damage democracy.

We've created an automated online tool that allows you to easily ask all active UK political parties what data they're holding on you. With a few simple clicks you can discover what parties think about you and who they've decided you are.

Our data requests uncovered some strange and troubling practices. To help you see what your "political data self" might look like, we wanted to share what we've learned so far from the three major parties: Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats.

## Key findings

The ORG's research found that all three major parties – the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrat's – are collecting personal data and doing some kind of internal score to target and/or screen out people.

For example, the Lib Dems are scoring voters on how likely they are to vote for Brexit, how much of a “pragmatic liberal” you are, what connection you have to other parties and whether that means you are likely to swing to the Lib Dems.

The Conservatives, on the other hand, are giving people a “priority” rating which will determine whether they should try to encourage you to vote or not.

Labour is ranking people in massive local league tables based on where they think you stand on issues such as housing, tax, health, austerity and Brexit. For example, ORG found that its Scotland Director was ranked 12,966 out of a possible 65,801 in his whole constituency on the issue of tax.

ORG said:

This “trading and grading” of data is deeply troubling. We think it is going to vary based on where you live, whether in a marginal constituency, or who you are, if you belong to a particular community. This would make sense as some kinds of people and some places are of particular importance to the different parties, and with increased importance will come an increased focus on profiling and scoring.

We will be able to explore this theory with more data from a more diverse range of people. This is one of the reasons we are so keen for lots and lots of people all over the UK to ask parties what personal data they currently hold.

## Inaccuracy

Interestingly, some of the profiling being done by parties is highly inaccurate. For example, ORG's Scotland Director Matthew Rice was found by the Labour Party to likely be retired, over-65, childless and owning the flat he was registered to vote from. None of this is correct.

The ORG said that this will obviously be less than helpful during campaigning:

Parties are still trying to target every voter, not with particularly narrow data but with big wide data that they then tie to everyone in a given area. This isn't accurate but it is invasive. Because it is also wrong, it creates further issues down the line in political campaigns for Matthew and others that live in the same area but may have different views, values or lifestyles.

What Labour's deductions mean ultimately is that they are relying on concocted fictions to make decisions about what messaging to send Matthew, or even whether to include him in a campaign. They're not only wasting both their time and his, but limiting his opportunity to genuinely engage with what their party stands for and how they compare to other political voices.

Finally, the ORG also found that Labour and the Conservatives are using Mosaic codes in their voter profiles. This is a system of household and individual classification owned by

corporate data broker company, Experian. Mosaic contains over 500 variables and segmentation and is traditionally used for targeted commercial advertising.

The Lib Dems are also using commercial datasets to get their scores, but the ORG wasn't able to find out what data sources they rely on.

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