

Research Plan

What Motivates People to Vote Blank, Null, or NOTA?

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The different forms of non-voting have been on the rise in countries with non-compulsory voting systems since the 1970's, where null and blank voting show a much stronger increase than abstention. [Pin2002]

We refer to the act of casting a blank ballot as "blank voting", while "null voting" means to invalidate the ballot in some way, e.g. by crossing it out, drawing or writing something on it, etc. Some countries also offer a "NOTA" ("none of the above") option on the ballot, allowing the voter to officially indicate disagreement with all of the listed options. These acts of non-voting are different from abstention, because the non-voter makes a deliberate effort in order to deliver their statement. This is particularly true when voting is voluntary, where abstention bears no cost. [Sup2014]

Research so far has provided three different explanations for the phenomenon of non-voting.

(1) Early research indicated that non-voting is associated with unfortunate socioeconomic features that lead to voter incompetence and indifference. Basically, this theory assumes that non-voting is performed out of ignorance and that voting participation can be increased by improving education. [Mott1926]

(2) More recent research shows a relationship between social alienation and non-voting. The idea in this model is that people stop voting, because they no longer feel connected to the political system, for instance due to a wealth gap. [Sti1965]

(3) Another recent model explains non-voting as a deliberate form of protest based on data from over 200 elections in Western Europe, Australia, and the Americas. While this model has some overlap with the theory of social alienation, its explanation is based on non-voting as an individual act of protest rather than indifference. [Ugg2008]

This is also indicated by the research of Superti, which shows that different forms of non-voting are correlated with the degree of education of the non-voting individual. Her research indicated that non-voting is frequently used as a form of protest by sophisticated non-mobilized voters.

Especially blank voting was demonstrated to be correlated with a high degree of education, (mobilized) null voting was not correlated, and abstention was negatively correlated. [Sup2014]

Because blank-, null-, and NOTA-voting is increasingly viewed as a political action rather than abstention from the political system, it might be interesting to explore the exact reasons for this kind of participation in the voting process.

Therefore I suggest to conduct a two-phase study: (1) a qualitative survey in order to find more specific reasons for non-voting and (2) a quantitative survey intending to find the proportions of those reasons as well as correlations with the level of education and political views of the participants.

The evaluation of the collected data should provide interesting insights into the dynamics of non-voting in the light of recent research and the fact that non-voting as a form of protest is an increasing phenomenon.

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