

Abstract

Typologies are from Mars, variables are from Venus: which methodology fits best to predict nonvoters?

Keren Tsurriel

In many established democracies turnout has been declining sharply in the past decades and stabilized on low levels, eroding one of the core principles of democracy, representation. To make sense of this bothering phenomenon, researchers asked who are the people who don't vote and why don't they vote. These questions were answered mainly using the variables method, i.e. by comparing nonvoters to the voters according to SES, demographic, political psychology, and political behavior variables.

Comparing groups based on variables carries some flaws: it doesn't reflect more diversified or complex cases, like educated or well-off nonvoters. Additionally, the variables method cannot connect the different variables to create a comprehensive explanation of the research question (Luke, 2005). As an alternative, this research suggests to describe the nonvoters using a clustering based typology. Being an exploratory method, typology classifies the population to subgroups (types) by exposing patterns of latent connections between subjects. Thus typologies can better reflect many diversified cases and offer a basis for new theoretical hypotheses (Uprichard, 2009).

Using latent class analysis, 531 Israeli nonvoters were clustered and four types of nonvoters emerged: The disappointed average, the devoted, the disgusted, and the new activist. The findings were enriched with nonvoters' interviews. Next, a series of regressions compared which of the two methods, variables or cluster analysis, better predicts nonvoting. The findings suggest that although cluster analysis offers a more fine-grained description of nonvoters, the variables method does better work in predicting political behavior, not voting included.