

Electronic Supplementary Materials of the Manuscript: “What Can We Learn from Open Questions in Surveys? A Case Study on Non-Voting Reported in the German Longitudinal Election Survey 2013”

Electronic Supplementary Material 1: Coding Categories for Reasons for Non-Voting

The classification scheme was based on the original German classification scheme (see *GLÉS 2013: Kategorienschema und Hinweise für die Codierung der Gründe für die Nichtwahl* [GLÉS 2013: Classification Scheme and Instructions for Coding the Reasons for Non-Voting], <https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/download.asp?id=58280>).

Categories

1 Dissatisfaction with the political system and democracy

All statements that mentioned dissatisfaction with the political system in general were coded into this category. It also covers statements regarding the inability of politicians to solve problems or the lack of representation of the respondent's interests. Answers relating to dissatisfaction in general, without specifying a reason, and to the perception that parties or politicians are indistinguishable were also coded into this category.

Delimitation from other categories

If the answer refers to the inadequate implementation of measures (e.g., “I don't believe, that announced measures will be implemented.”) or empty promises (e.g. "They didn't keep their promises.”), it is coded into Category 4 (“Egotism on the part of political parties and politicians”).

Examples

- “No party will introduce any improvements in politics.”
- “No party is able to solve our country's problems.”
- “Nothing gets better, no matter who is in power.”
- “Can't see any differences between the parties.”
- “No party has the right concept for my interests.”
- “No trust.”
- “Parties are dependent on industry.”

This category comprises the following original categories:

- 13 Dissatisfaction with the political system
- 14 No trust in politics
- 15 Disappointed with politics (in general)
- 16 Disenchantment with politics (explicit use of this term)

- 22 Performance of politicians/parties (no professional expertise, incompetent, do nothing, unable to solve problems)
- 46 Parties/politicians are too alike; no recognizable differences
- 47 No political party represents my interests. Nobody helps me. No party meets my expectations

2 Low political involvement and lack of political influence

This category was used when the respondent reported a lack of motivation to vote, irrespective of whether any reason was given. Statements to the effect that the respondent's own party had no chances for success, or that the respondent's vote had no influence on the outcome of the election, were also coded into this category, as were references to stagnation in politics, without explicitly naming parties or politicians.

Delimitation from other categories

If the statement referred explicitly to the parties or politicians responsible, it was coded into Category 4 (“Egotism of parties and politicians”).

Examples

- “Nothing will change for me anyway”
- “I have voted too often, I don't want to vote anymore”
- “Even if I vote, nothing will change.”
- “My vote doesn't count.”
- “Voting is not important to me.”
- “I don't vote as a matter of principle.”
- “No positive outcome.”

This category comprises the following original categories:

- 41 My vote doesn't count./little influence/ little political participation
- 42 Nothing changes./It doesn't make any difference whether you vote or not./ stagnation/ superfluous/achieves nothing
- 44 My party has no chance anyway.
- 51 No motivation/no desire to vote
- 52 Undecided/ Don't know who to vote for.

3 Lack of political interest and political knowledge

All statements that cited a lack of political interest and knowledge as the reason for not voting were coded into this category. Answers in which the respondent mentioned that he or she had no interest in participation at all or did not know who to vote for (without giving additional reasons) were also coded into this category.

Examples

- “I am not interested anymore.”
- “I am not interested in politics.”
- “I know nothing about politics.”

“I don't know which party [to vote for].”

“I can't decide.”

This category comprises the following original categories:

53 I don't understand the election system./I don't know anything about politics.
and all other answers that explicitly mention a lack of interest or knowledge

4 Egotism of parties and politicians

All statements that mentioned the egotism of politicians and political parties and their lust for political power were coded into this category. Also coded into this category were statements that suggested that politicians or parties did not take the interests of voters, or specific subgroups of voters, into account, as well as statements that mentioned that promises had not been kept.

Examples

“Politicians promise a lot but they are unable to keep to their promises.”

“They just do what they want.”

“They only want to make money.”

“I don't trust parties—they only do what they want and they don't care about ordinary people.”

This category comprises the following original categories:

21 Politicians/parties are power-hungry, selfish, think only of themselves, only want votes, are liars/ cheaters/ criminals; try to kid the people.

23 Election promises aren't/weren't kept.

24 Lack of representation/ distorted representation of group interests: politicians don't care about the needs of ordinary people, they serve only the interests of industry/capital/ big companies.

5 Specific circumstances during the election

All statements that mentioned personal reasons for not voting that were related to Election Day and were independent of the respondent's political motivation and political position were coded into this category.

Examples

“There were too many steps up to the polling station and I'm not able to climb steps.”

“I'm not physically fit.”

“I was away.”

“I had time problems”

“I missed the postal vote.”

This category comprised the following original categories:

61 Did not receive my voting form./Forgot my documents./Forgot my passport.

62 Away/on holiday/ abroad/ moved house

- 63 No time/ too busy/ forgot/ work/ family commitments
- 64 Sick/confined to bed/mobility-disabled/ too old
- 65 Not eligible to vote

6 Other

All statements that could not be assigned to one of the other five categories were coded into this category. It covers specific reasons as well as refusals to answer the question.

Examples

- “Jehovah's Witness”
- “My religion doesn't allow voting.”
- “Don't know”
- “Angry”

This category comprises the following original categories:

- 31 Dissatisfied with/disappointed by specific parties/politicians (mentioned by name)
- 33 Election programs and concepts are not convincing.
- 71 Personal reasons (e.g., Jehovah's Witness)
- 73 Don't know
- 74 Other reasons

Coding rules

1. A maximum of three codes could be assigned to each answer.
2. All codes were assigned in the order of the appearance of the topics in the answer.
3. All topics that were mentioned were coded separately. For example, Codes 1 and 2 were assigned if a respondent's answer was as follows: “All parties do the same. Nothing changes anyway.” Codes 5 and 2 were assigned to the answer “I'm too old and can't change anything.” If the answer was “Politicians are worthless, they all promise the same things but do nothing,” Code 1 was assigned to “politicians are worthless” and Code 4 to “they all promise the same things but do nothing.”