

# **Who Stops Voting and Why?**

## **Party Ideology Shift and Voter Demobilisation**

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### **Abstract**

The number of citizens participating at the elections is shrinking. The crisis of participation is one of the most important problems of the contemporary democracies. The new cohorts of voters participate less, but also the number of voters that used to vote and stop voting is increasing. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the reasons why these new non-voters, stop voting. It tends to offer theoretical explanation and empirical evidences for the reasons of these voters to stop casting the ballots.

I argue that spatial model of voting, based on the claim that voters vote for the party which is the closest to their position on the ideological spectrum and thus every shift of the party demands vote swing of the voters and opposite, has limits to explain the behaviour of the new non-voters. Based on the standard revealed preference argument and building on the exit, voice and loyalty model, I argue that instead of voters deciding to shift voting for another party once the party shifts its ideological positions, they decide to exit participation in reaction to the party's inconsistency.

The thesis shows that the number of new non-voters varies among countries. Testing my theoretical model on an individual level, results show evidence in support of my main hypothesis, that ideological inconsistency influences voters to stop voting. Ideology matters and the new non-voters stop voting when parties they used to vote for change their ideological positions. Additionally, younger, poorer, dissatisfied, divorced, and more educated voters with weaker party identification are more eager to become new non-voters.

An in-depth analysis on US voters using panel data confirms the findings of the large N - Analysis. Ideological inconsistency strongly influences voters' decision to stop voting. Digging deeper, testing the ideological shifts in eight different policy areas, the thesis shows that traditional topics have a very strong demobilizing power for electoral participation. Traditional values and shifts in positions on human rights have a very strong impact on the decision of voters to stop casting a ballot.

Results also show that political parties that make more dramatic changes of their ideological positions lose bigger number of their supporters. This is especially clear for parties around the centre, while party families on the extremes lose less of their supporters no matter the change of their ideological positions.

This thesis contributes trilaterally to the state of art. It offers a different theoretical approach in explanation of the voters' behaviour. It focuses on a specific category of voters which has been understudied and offers empirical evidence at individual, party and country level for the new non-voters.



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## **Bio**

Trajche Panov holds a PhD and a Master of Research from the European University Institute. In his doctoral thesis, he looked at the reasons why voters stop voting and how party ideology shifts influence on demobilization of voters.

Trajche is a lecturer in European Politics at James Madison University (Florence), where he teaches courses in the European Union Policy Studies Master Programme. Prior to coming to the EUI, he did his Master's degree in Political Science at the Central European University. He also held a Visiting Scholar position at the Wilf Family Department of Politics, New York University, in 2013.

He has been teaching courses on Comparative Electoral Behaviour, EU Enlargement and Introduction to Quantitative Methods at the HHU Dusseldorf, Monash University–Prato Centre and at the Centre for Research and Policy Making-Skopje, respectively. His research interests include voting behavior, political parties, European integration, political economy and post- communist countries.