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Why Abstain? Trends in and Origins of Indifference and Estrangement in the United States, 1968-2012

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ESTRANGEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES, 1968-2012

by

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Abstention rates have remained quite high in the United States for the last several decades. This thesis explores the trends in and origins of the nonvoters from 1968 to 2012 using a statistical model of abstention in presidential elections. The objective is to determine why nonvoters have chosen to abstain and who are they?

Using data from the American National Elections Studies, four groups of nonvoters are identified – voters who are both alienated and indifferent, voters who are neither alienated nor indifference, voters who are only alienated, and voters who are only indifferent. The two groups exclusively analyzed are the two largest groups of nonvoters: the mixed group (both alienated/estranged and indifferent) and the neither group.

The groups' aggregate responses will be regressed using two set of criteria: first, using an internal efficacy index and an external efficacy index, and second, a series of demographics. Mixed group nonvoters share a lower sense of internal efficacy and are more nonpartisan than the rest of the abstained population. Nonvoters of the neither group, on the other hand, share a higher sense of internal efficacy and are more partisan. The neither group nonvoters are also more likely to be poorer, which challenges conclusions made by scholars studying abstention in the 1960s.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Thesis

Abstention

Abstention[1], the act of not voting, can result from a nonvoter's inability to understand their capacity as a voter or be driven by feelings of opposition. Abstention due to incapability is marked by feeling guideless, powerless, and/or meaningless to the respective statesmen and other viable candidates, political parties, and/or the overwhelming political apparatus itself. Abstention due to opposition, or discontentedness ,is marked by feelings of being dissimilar/different from, dissatisfied with, and/or disillusioned by the politicians, parties, and government as a whole (Olsen, 1969). From 1968 to 2012 voter turnout barely topped 60.7% in 1968 and went as low as 49.0% in 1996 in the Presidential election years according to the U.S. Census (2012). From the 1960s to present, anywhere from 39.3%-51% of the population have abstained from voting. Why are they abstaining and who are they?

A large array of work on voter turnout has already presented the results that abstention is driven by older, nonwhite respondents from smaller communities. These respondents generally have lower incomes and levels of education, are mainly working service related rather than professional/managerial occupations, and attend religious

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[1] For a more detailed expansion of the term "abstention" see the Abstention subsection in chapter 2.

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gatherings less regularly than those who do turnout to vote. This research has also associated these characteristics of abstention with a few efficacy indexes that encompass the identified feelings. (Adams et al., 2006; Finifter, 1970; Olsen, 1969; Timpone, 1998; Weakliem et al., 2006)

Voters abstain for various reasons. Some abstain because they do not understand the US political system or the political parties. Others abstain because they cannot identify with the political parties and candidates. Since much of the research has focused on race, age, location, income, occupational status, religious meetings attendance, and education in association with feelings of incapability and discontentedness, one piece of information that seems to be missing is an understanding of specific differences between nonvoters: how do nonvoters that have no candidacy preferences and no understanding of the political parties or political system differ from nonvoters that do have a preference and understand the parties and political system? These two sets of nonvoters can be differentiated by analyzing their varying feelings of incapability and discontentedness.

This thesis will branch off from a foundational question – who is abstaining and why? – to further seek to differentiate the abstained population's feelings of incapability and discontentedness using the efficacy indexes presented by the American National Election Study (ANES).

Identifying Who and Why

Every nonvoter who has answered questions of the ANES is an isolated node, replete with information. By taking their aggregate responses there is a chance to

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objectively identify why nonvoters are choosing to abstain and who they are. These questions are investigated using data from the presidential election years between 1968 and 2012.

The method proposed in this thesis is a two-step process. For the first step, the nonvoting respondents are split into one of four groups based upon two criteria. First whether or not they had a candidacy preference and second, whether or not the respondents were capable of identifying differences between the two major US political parties: the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. This divides the abstained population into four objective groups.

The second step analyzes the groups' aggregate responses to two sets of questions: first, using the ANES efficacy indexes and, second, demographics. The ANES efficacy indexes are variables that are superior to a combination of variables that were posed by Marvin Olsen's (1969) research, which is a basis for this study. Does Olsen's earlier work fit the framework of modern analysis, and how so? The two efficacy indexes are optimal because they eliminate issues of multicollinearity that are manifested when testing each of the questions associated with Olsen's work.

The IE Model

The first step, as previously identified, will divide nonvoters into one of four groups. The model used to accomplish this is called the Indifference-Estrangement

Model (IE Model)[2] which is related to the Unified Indifference-Alienation Model (IA Model). The IA model is commonly employed by researchers to analyze abstention as a result of how the electorate responds to political policy that has either been formed or may be formed (Zipp, 1985; Plane and Gershtenson, 2004; Adams, Dow, and Merrill, 2006).

Table 1

IA Model, Missing Fourth Outcome

		Is the nonvoter identified in the IA Model as "alienated"?	
		YES	NO
Is the nonvoter identified in the IA Model as "indifferent"?	YES	Result: Both Indifferent and Alienated	Result: Indifferent-only
	NO	Result: Alienated-only	Result: The IA Model cannot produce a fourth result.

The IA Model, however, is only capable of identifying three outcomes resulting from nonvoters' responses to indifference, alienation (known as "estrangement" in the IE Model), and a combined result of the two. This approach omits an important outcome, as present in a simple Punnet square (see table 1). The IA model's thresholds do not allow for it to control for those who may not identify as either estranged or indifferent.

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[2] For further information about the change in term usage: "alienation" to "estrangement", see the Alienation/Estrangement subsection in Chapter 2 and the Modeling subsection in Chapter 3.

The IE Model overcomes this by presenting four groups instead of only three. For the purpose of this thesis, however, only two of the groups are particularly drawn out and critically analyzed: those identified as mixed/both estranged and indifferent, and neither.

Feelings/Efficacy Indexes and Demographics

The feelings of incapability and discontentedness research is based on the sociological work of Marvin Olsen (1969) who studied abstention also using ANES data. He concluded that abstention was a result of these two feelings. The concepts of these feelings are not new to political science literature. Rather, the feeling of incapability, an examination and response of one's self in relation to the political schema, is known as internal political efficacy. Likewise, the feeling of discontentedness, an examination and consideration that one has of the political apparatus' performance, is known as external political efficacy. The ANES offers two particularly combined indexed variables that allow for the study of these indexes to present clearer results: one for internal efficacy, specifically governmental responsiveness, and one for external efficacy governmental trust.

The series of demographics that are explored include race, age, location, family income, occupational status, church attendance, education, and a partisan-nonpartisan scale.

Expectations

        Those who belong to the mixed/both estranged and indifferent group, when compared to all fellow nonvoters, are expected to be characterized as feeling that government is not responsive, that they have no trust in government, to be nonwhite, more elderly, to live in suburban and rural areas, to have lower family incomes, more service-related/non-professional occupations, not to attend church much, and have lower levels of education based upon research later discussed in the research.

        The neither estranged nor indifferent group, on the other hand, is expected to present oppositely when compared to all fellow abstained voters. It is expected that these nonvoters will feel that government is responsive, they will trust government, be white, to be younger overall, to more likely live in cities, to have a greater family income, higher occupation status, to attend church, and to have higher levels of education.

        The demographic variables will also include a partisan-nonpartisan scale which tests whether respondents identify themselves as extremely partisan, partisan, mildly partisan, or nonpartisan. It is expected that nonpartisan nonvoters to identify as part of the mixed estranged and indifferent group since they do not understand the political system, or relate to any parties or candidates. Inversely, it is expected that nonvoters identifying with the neither estranged nor indifferent group to identify as being increasingly partisan in comparison.

Structure

Presentation

Chapter II: Literature Review presents a detail of previous works. Chapter III: Modeling summarizes and readdresses what research has been conducted to date and how this research will be advanced, and the specific hypotheses that will be tested. Chapter IV: Methodology outlines the methodological particulars that are applied to the data for this research. Chapter V: Analysis presents the results of voter abstention. Chapter VI: Discussion and Conclusion revisits the results and hypotheses as earlier presented.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abstention

Voting and Abstaining

Voter turnout was low during the latter half of the last century when compared to historical and international standards (Teixeira, 1992) and this trend has not ceased. Between 1968 and 2012 voter abstention has ranged from a high of 51% in 1996 to a low of 39% in 1968. This trend of poor turnout has had no resolution. Why are so many voters choosing to abstain and who are they?

Trends of Abstention

Higher education and economic security are among the strongest tendencies that lead to an increase in voter turnout, whereas, declining social and political connectedness are tendencies that cause abstention to rise. Weak social connections are more likely to be found among younger prospective voters and those who do not attend any sort of religious gatherings. Weak political connections are more likely to be associated with being psychologically withdrawn from the political sphere and beliefs that the government has become to unresponsive (Teieira, 1992; Timpone, 1998).

The concept to associate social and political connectedness with abstention is not new. It had been commonly believed that it was common for the Democratic Party to capitalize on voters that are often in association with these same features. It was thought

that when voter turnout was higher, the Democratic Party would be at advantage and the Republican Party at a disadvantage (Bennet and Resnick, 1990; Citrin et al., 2003). This thought, however, has come under scrutiny and careful empirical work has demonstrated that it is not true. (DeNardo, 1986)

Alienation/Estrangement

In Political Science

Ada Finifter (1970) utilized a technique to examine alienation which continues to be used, with variations, currently. She defined alienation by identifying four types of criteria: political powerlessness, political meaninglessness, political normlessness, and political isolation – of which powerlessness and normlessness had prevailed as the most significant. The groups most likely to feel political powerlessness are the elderly and poorly educated. The groups most likely to feel political normlessness includes being of Native American or African origins and low income.

Approaches often used by Finifter and those sharing her ideas, including Melvin Seeman, are commonly referred to as Marxian approaches by which the absence of individuals' powers and norms are the critical points of interest to those identified as politically alienated. Another approach that is commonly used in examining alienation is an authority-control study by which the focus is more heavily weighted on the problems of authority, influence, and control of the governing systems: it is a study of partisanship effects and a behavioral approach, as employed by many including Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba, and David Easton. Still yet another approach is a multi-inclusive approach

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by which additional indices are generated to make use of a combination of both the Marxian and behavioral literature. (Mason et al., 1985)

David Weakliem and Casey Borch (2006), also researching alienation, further define it as a "…sense of weakened attachment to the central institutions of society." This approach is aimed at the study of the institutional design that makes up government and the governing bodies. It focuses on whether or not respondents felt any combination of isolation and/or disenchantment in response to how the system is designed and/or the parties in power.

In Sociology

Marvin Olsen (1969) studied the roots of alienation from a sociological framework by identifying two overarching "feelings" that he attributed as the reason why voters felt alienated: the feelings of incapability and the feelings of discontentedness. The feelings of incapability are distinguished as being forced upon an individual by their environment, therefore characterized by feelings of being guideless, powerless, and meaningless. The feelings of discontentedness are distinguished as being *chosen* in some fashion by the individual, such as an individual's acts or mindset, being characterized by feelings of dissimilarity, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment.

Others have also studied alienation from a sociological framework. In another study, the ebbs and flows of alienation are examined as results of economic conditions, levels of social discontent, and governmental performance. (Mack, 1979)

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Use of the Term "Estrangement"

Regardless of the way one approaches the study of alienation; be it behavioral, partisan, institutional, or a sociological one, there have been a number of commonalities. High levels of alienation are frequently characterized by political powerlessness and this is observed in people who have low levels of education, low income, elderly, nonwhite, and having low occupational statuses. Although used in the previously cited literature, the term "alienation" will herein be omitted in this thesis and relabeled "estrangement".[3]

Indifference and Partisanship

Identifying Indifference

Indifference can be the consequence of a respondent's distance to the candidates and/or parties. This is measurable if respondents are queried about the candidates/parties' differences. A respondent that cannot identify differences between the major parties is said to be indifferent because they lack knowledge, therefore ability to identify with, the parties and candidates (Brody and Page, 1973; Adams et al., 2006). This thesis will not seek to determine where, spatially speaking, the groups identify, but is in line with the spatial modeling literature sparked by Anthony Downs (1957). Although an indifferent nonvoter could exist anywhere along the Downsian left-right axis, be it equally displaced between partisan ideologies or far beyond them both to either the far left or far right, the measurement does not test where nonvoters' partisanships stand, rather are they partisan or not.

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[3] The decision to use the term "estrangement" is because "the term *alienation* was used as early as the fifteenth century to describe 'an act of estrangement or state of estrangement...in relation to...a breakdown of relations between a man or a group and some received political authority.' (Williams, 1976)" (Mason et al., 1985)

Partisanship Variable

   The use of indifference in this thesis calls for the addition of another variable that should be considered when identifying why respondents have chosen to abstain. A variable asking whether or not nonvoters identify themselves as partisan (extremely, moderately, and somewhat) and nonpartisan is added to the demographic list. It is expected that a nonvoter with a candidate preference and can identify party difference: some who is neither estranged nor indifferent, will identify more partisan than not. On the other hand, it is expected that nonvoters that are both estranged and indifferent will identify as nonpartisan. (Olsen, 1969)

CHAPTER III

MODEL

Modeling

Who and Why?

To ascertain why so many nonvoters have sought abstention as their choice during

Presidential elections and in an attempt to identify who they are, this thesis will build and

test a two-step process using an altered form of two models that have been used

previously in the study of abstention behavior. As previously mentioned the first step is

to divide nonvoters into four various groups using the Indifference-Estrangement Model

(IE Model). The IE Model is based on the Indifference-Alienation Model (IA Model) as

employed by researchers who use a spatial model of voting to understand abstention

(Brody and Page, 1973; Weisberg and Grofman, 1981; Adams et al., 2006). This first

step will help us to understand where the nonvoters are positioned in spatial relation to

one another. The second step will include the analysis of two of the four groups, to

identify their attitudes toward the system and its participants, and their demographic

information. The study of attitudes is modeled after the sociological research performed

by Marvin Olsen (1968), also using ANES data, in researching alienation.

The IE Model

The IE Model is based on the design of the IA Model, which only accounts for

three possible outcomes: respondents choosing to abstain due to either indifference,

estrangement, or a combination of the two. Indifference occurs when the parties and candidates are too similar to one another to justify the nonvoter's cost to understand their differences, and therefore will not make an attempt to vote. Estrangement occurs when the parties and candidates are too distant from the voter who would otherwise have an opinion, but cannot find any relevant parties or candidates that match their thoughts (Adams et al., 2006).

This model, though well established and widely accepted, does not take into account a fourth viable option that basic logic would suggest is present: a portion of the abstained electorate that may not identify as indifferent, alienated, nor any combination thereof. Therefore, this group will be known as neither.

The four outcomes that the IE Model therefore presents (see table 2) are the indifferent, the estranged, mixed: those that are both indifferent and estranged, and neither: those that are neither indifferent nor estranged.

The four quarters of the IE Model are drawn from two questions that have been commonly used in spatial models of voting, which includes the IA Model. There is a particular ANES question which relates to and identifies indifference; just as there is another ANES question which relates to and identifies estrangement. First, do the respondents see the political parties as different from one another? Second, did the respondents care about who won the election? (Brody and Page, 1973; Weisberg and Grofman, 1981; Adams et al., 2006)

Instead of using the thresholds used by IA Modelers; Adams et al., which only provides three outcomes, the IE Model will use the two indicative ANES questions. The first ANES question, used to identify indifference, is whether or not the respondent could

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identify any amount of differences between the political parties. Respondents that could, as displayed through their ability to distinguish the parties apart, are therefore unable to be labeled as indifferent. On the contrary, those that could not are therefore indifferent. (Ordeshook and Riker, 1968)

The second ANES question, used to identify estrangement, is whether or not respondents had a preference between the two major candidates that were running for public office. Respondents that had a preference are incapable of being too distant from either party side, and are therefore unable to be identified as estranged. (Aldrich et al., 2011).

A standard tabulation of the two ANES questions will suffice when breaking down the IE Model's four groups.

Table 2

Indifference-Estrangement Model

		Did the nonvoter care which who won the Presidential election? [Is ESTRANGEMENT present?]	
		NO [YES]	YES [NO]
Could the nonvoter identify any differences between the parties? [Is INDIFFERENCE present?]	NO [YES]	Mixed: Indifferent and Estranged	Indifferent Only
	YES [NO]	Estranged Only	Neither: Indifferent nor Estranged

Feelings and Efficacy Indexes

Once the nonvoters have been separated into their respective groups, they can be submitted to the second step of the analysis to determine if there are any commonly shared attitudes and/or demographics. For this thesis, however, only two of the four groups will be exclusively analyzed: those mixed estranged and indifferent, and those that are neither estranged nor indifferent.

Following is a brief list of variables that Olsen found to differentiate the feelings of incapability and discontentedness, and the ANES questions associated with each.

Incapability is a respondent's lack of ability to feel any sort of guidance, power, or meaning. Olsen used the following four ANES statements as indicators of incapability.

1. *I believe public officials don't care much what people like me think.*
2. *There is no way other than voting that people like me can influence actions of the government.*
3. *Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that I can't really understand what's going on.*
4. *People like me don't have any say about what the government does.*

These questions all share a mental characteristic that defines a person's incapability to participate because they are involuntarily estranged from the parties and entrants.

Discontentedness is a respondent's feeling of being dissimilar, dissatisfied, or disillusioned by the system itself. The following are the ANES statements that Olsen used as indicators of discontentedness.

1. *These days the government is trying to do too many things.*

2. *For the most part, the government serves the interests of a few organized group, such as business or labor, and isn't very concerned about the needs of people like myself.*

3. *It seems to me that the government often fails to take necessary actions on important matters.*

4. *As the government is now organized and operated, I think it is hopelessly incapable of dealing with all the crucial problems facing the country today.*

Like the characteristics of incapability, these questions all tap in to feelings that define a person's unwillingness to participate because they are discontent and therefore opposed to the political participants and the system.

Each of these questions have a corresponding variable in the 1948-2012 ANES Cumulative File, which will be used for this thesis' empirical analysis but presents a significant multicollinearity issue. This problem is not new to the use of variables, as such the ANES has entered two particular efficacy indexes that are composed of these very questions and more. Each index is scaled 0 to 100.

The first index is the trust in government index (TRUST_GOV), a measurement of internal efficacy, which includes whether or not the respondent feels that they can trust the government to do what is right, whether government is run by a few big interests or for the benefit of all people, whether or not the government wastefully spends tax money, and if/how many governmental officials are corrupt.

The second index is the government responsiveness index (GOV_RESPONSE), a measurement of external efficacy, which includes whether or not respondents feel that

governmental officials care about people like them, whether or not people like the

respondent feel that they have any sort of say in government, how much the respondent

feels that government actually pays any attention to what people think, and how much

elections impact the attention that the government gives to people.

Table 3

ANES Associated Variables: Olsen's Attitudes and ANES Efficacy Indexes

Variables, Attitudes	Incapability	Discontentedness
TOOCOMPLEX	X	
NOSAY	X	
NOCARE	X	
VOTEONLY	X	
TOOINVOLVED		X
BIGINTEREST		X
NOHANDLE		X
OUTOFTOUCH		X
Variables, Efficacy	**Incapability**	**Discontentedness**
TRUST_GOV (Internal Index)	X	
GOV_RESPONSE (External Index)		X

Demographics

Two separate models will be used to evaluate the links between the underlying

reasons of abstention, internal and external efficacy, and demographics: one model will

use the indexes as standalone predictors, a second will use both the indexes and

demographics. The demographics being analyzed include whether or not the participant

is white or non-white (RACE); the respondent's age (AGE); whether or not the

respondent is from a central city, suburban, or rural-like area (LOCATION); family

income grouped by five levels of wealth as indicated by percent (FAMILY INCOME);

the respondents' occupational status (OCCUPATION STATUS); amount of time spent

attending a religious service (ATTENDANCE); each respondent's level of education

grouped into seven groups ranging from less than eight years of school to holding degrees

beyond a bachelor's degree (EDUCATION); and lastly, each respondent's personal

placement of themselves along a modified four point partisan-nonpartisan scale ranging

from extremely partisan to nonpartisan (PARTISAN-NONPARTISAN SCALE).

Integrating the IA Model and IE Model

Concept

Before proceeding with the regression, it is important to verify that the IE Model

would present a similar outcome as the IA Model. Since Adams, Dow, and Merrill's IA

Model only identifies three possible groups: indifferent, estranged, and both indifferent

and estranged (mixed), respondents that identify as neither estranged nor indifferent

group are still present in their results, but have been associated with another group. As

such, there is no way for the IE and IA models to present completely identical. They

should, however, be similar.

The presidential elections years to be compared are 1980, 1984, and 1988. These

particular years have been chosen because they are the years that Adams, Down, and

Merrill (2006) research. After the comparison this research will resume examining 1968-

2012.

Adam et al. (2006) IA Model Results

    The following table, see Table 4, is pertinent information for comparing Adams et

al. (2006) work with this thesis' examination. The percentiles of each year are the

percentage of the electorate that abstained from voting in the provided years.

Table 4

Frequency Distributions, IA Model Responses, 1980,

1984, and 1988, as a Percent of the Total Electorate

Year	Alienated, but not Indifferent	Indifferent, but not Alienated	Alienated and Indifferent	Abstention Rate
1988	19.1%	13.6%	18.1%	50.8%
1984	20.3%	14.2%	11.6%	46.1%
1980	17.0%	13.9%	17.2%	48.1%

    Since Adams et al.'s IA Model results considers percentages of those that abstained

from the overall electorate, it must be adjusted to be compared to the IE Model which

only examines the percentage of the abstained. To do so, each outcome of the IA model,

as presented in Table 4, can be divided by the model's abstention rate, which in return

yields the percentage abstained in each group (see tables 5, 6, and 7).

Table 5

Frequency Distributions, IA Model and IE Model,

1988, as a Percent of the Abstained Voters

1988	37.6%	26.8%	35.6%	N/A
IA Model	**Mixed I/A**	**Alienated**	**Indifferent**	**N/A**
IE Model	**Mixed**	**Estranged**	**Indifferent**	**Neither**
1988	31.3%	27.6%	17.3%	23.7%

Table 6

Frequency Distributions, IA Model and IE Model,

1984, as a Percent of the Abstained Voters

1984	44.0%	30.8%	25.1%	N/A
IA Terms:	**Mixed I/A**	**Alienated**	**Indifferent**	**N/A**
IE Terms:	**Mixed**	**Estranged**	**Indifferent**	**Neither**
1984	24.6%	24.6%	19.4%	31.3%

Table 7

Frequency Distributions, IA Model and IE Model,

1980, as a Percent of the Abstained Voters

1980	35.3%	28.9%	36.0%	N/A
IA Terms:	**Mixed I/A**	**Alienated**	**Indifferent**	**N/A**
IE Terms:	**Mixed**	**Estranged**	**Indifferent**	**Neither**
1980	28.5%	30.6%	14.9%	26.0%

IE Model Results

The distributions of abstained voters across the four IE model categories are summarized in Tables 5, 6, and 7.

Comparing the IA Model and IE Model

The two models integrate well with one another, with some major differences which are explainable by the addition of the neither group in the IE model. Each of the years are displayed separately and contain the comparative results for both models in Tables 5, 6, and 7.

Adding a fourth category did not change the distribution across the other categories very much in 1988 and 1980 (see tables 5 and 7). In 1988 the mixed I/A group is 6.3% greater than the mixed and in 1980 the mixed group is 6.8% greater. In 1988 the alienated are 0.8% less than estranged and in 1980 the alienated are 1.7% less. Likewise, in 1988 the IA model's indifferent group is 18.3% greater than the IE model's indifferent group. The two election years, 1988 and 1980, present remarkably similar results completing the integration with quite similar outcomes for the neither group as well: 23.7% in 1988 and 26.0% in 1980.

The 1984 comparison presents a different outcome from the others, however, there are apparent reasons as to why. In comparing 1984, in Table 6, to the other two years and tables it is immediately apparent that the distribution of the IA model is quite different from the start. In 1984 the mixed I/A group is an average 7.6% greater than the other two years; the alienated group is an average 3.0% greater, and the indifferent group is an average of 10.7% less.

Though the IA model's 1984 results are different, there does seem to be some basis to this difference. With the integration of the IE model's neither group the 1984 results do come into more alignment with 1988 and 1980, but there are still differences.

Comparing the Mixed and Neither Groups

The comparisons of the mixed and neither estranged and indifferent groups will consider how each group individually compares to all other abstained voters (e.g. the comparison of the mixed group is a comparison of that group against all nonvoters that are identifiable as estranged-only, indifferent-only, and neither estranged nor indifferent).

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

IE Model

Building the IE Model

The first step of this thesis is to establish the IE Model by asking:

1. *Did the nonvoter care who won the Presidential election?*

    - If yes, then the nonvoter did not experience estrangement.

    - If no, then the nonvoter experienced estrangement.

2. *Could the nonvoter identify any difference between the Parties?*

    - If yes, then the nonvoter did not experience indifference.

    - If no, then the nonvoter experienced indifference.

The four groups: mixed, indifferent, estranged, and neither, will be factored for

the Presidential election years 1968-2012 by using a simple tabulation of the two

questions. The mixed and neither groups will be further examined in this thesis.

Efficacy Indexes and Demographics

Efficacy Indexes

Marvin Olsen identified a series of questions that resulted in association with

abstention. The pool of questions, however, suffer from multicollinearity. The ANES

datasets have accommodated this issue by building two efficacy indexes. The two

indexes are trust in government (TRUST_GOV), an internal efficacy index, and government responsiveness (GOV_RESPONSE), an external efficacy index.

The questions that have been used to build the trust in government index, which measures respondents' internal feelings of what the government is made up of, include:

1. *Whether or not respondents feel that they can trust the government to do what is right.*

2. *Whether or not the government is run by a few big interests or whether it is run for the benefit of all.*

3. *Whether or not the respondents feel that the government spends tax money wastefully.*

4. *Whether or not the respondents feel that there any amount of public officials are corrupt.*

The questions that have been used to build the government responsiveness, which measures respondents' external observations of how the government reacts to them, include:

1. *Whether or not respondents feel that their government officials care about people like them individually.*

2. *Whether or not the respondents feel that people like them have any sort of say in government.*

3. *How much the respondents, if any, feel that government officials pay any attention to what people think.*

4. *How much the respondents, if any, feel that the elections make officials pay any attention to what people think.*

Building the Demographic Pool

As a second step, the attitudes from the first model will be combined with a set of demographic variables to see how they then impact the outcomes of the mixed and neither groups.

There are nine demographic factors that will be considered (see Appendix B for coding):

1. *Race: Was the nonvoter white or nonwhite?*

2. *Age: What was the respondent's age at the time of polling?*

3. *Did the nonvoter live in either the central city; a suburban area; or a rural area, small town, or outlying/adjacent area?*

4. *Family Income: What range did the nonvoter's family's income fall among: lower 17%, lower-middle 17%, middle 33%, middle-upper 27%, or the upper 5%?*

5. *Occupational Status: What was the nonvoter's occupational status: professional/managerial, clerical/sales, skilled/semi-skilled, laborer, farmer, or homemaker?*

6. *Attendance: How often did the nonvoter attend a religious institution/gathering?*

7. *Education: What was the nonvoter's highest level of education obtained: 8th grade or less, high school without a diploma/equivalent, high school with diploma/equivalent, high school with diploma/equivalent and non-academic training, some college up to an Associate's degree, college with a Bachelor's degree, or college with an advanced degree.*

8. *Partisan-Nonpartisan Scale: How did the nonvoter identify their self on a modified partisan-nonpartisan scale: extremely partisan, partisan, somewhat partisan, or nonpartisan?*

Expectations

Efficacy Hypotheses

If Marvin Olsen (1968) was correct then the following outcomes would be expected to be present. (See table 8)

1. A nonvoter who has no preference in candidates and has no understanding of the parties or governmental apparatus, therefore belonging to the mixed group, will feel incapable and discontented because they are guideless, meaningless, dissatisfied, and dissimilar. Nonvoters that identify with these characteristics will score low on the internal and external efficacy indexes, and should be a member of the "mixed" group, so the coefficient on the efficacy indexes will be negative.

2. A nonvoter who has a preference and can identify party differences, therefore neither, should not present with attitudes of incapability nor discontentedness. Nonvoters with the characteristics will score high on the efficacy indexes, and should be a member of the "neither" group, so the coefficient on the indexes will be positive.

Demographic Hypotheses

Based on previous research there are a number of demographic expectations (see table 8).

1. Racially, Olsen identified nonwhites as more likely to experience the attitudes of incapability and mildly experience the attitudes of discontentedness. Therefore, it is expected that nonwhites will identify more with the mixed group and whites with the neither group. (Adams et al., 2006; Finifter, 1970; Olsen, 1969; Timpone, 1998; Weakliem et al., 2006)

2. The elderly have been identified over and over again as experiencing attitudes of both incapability and discontentedness; thus, like nonwhites, it is expected for the elderly to identify as more "mixed" group than "neither" group, therefore presenting a positive coefficient with the mixed group and negatively with the neither group. (Finifter, 1970; Olsen, 1969)

3. The location to which a person lives could be associated with their level of unbiased knowledge when the Presidential elections come around. It is expected for those living in the cities to identify as more neither estranged nor indifferent, whereas, those from rural and outlying areas to identify more as mixed. (Finifter, 1970; Olsen, 1969)

4. Those with lower levels of income are expected to identify as mixed since they have limited means of success and those with higher levels of income to identify as neither. (Olsen, 1969; Timpone, 1998; Weakliem et al., 2006)

5. Comparatively, by setting professional and managerial occupations as the base when testing occupation statuses, it is expected that nonvoters in with non-professional and non-managerial occupations to identify as part of the mixed estranged and indifferent group. This expectation goes to suggest that those

identified as professional and managerial are more likely to present neither than the rest of the occupational statuses. (Olsen, 1969)

6. Nonvoters that attend religious gatherings are expected to identify as part of the neither group and nonvoters that do not attend them will identify as part of the mixed group. (Olsen, 1969; Timpone, 1998)

Table 8

Hypotheses: Mixed and Neither, and Attitudes and Demographics

| | IE Model Groups | |
Variables	Mixed	Neither
Efficacy Indexes		
TRUST_GOV (Internal)	*Negative*	*Positive*
GOV_RESPONSE (External)	*Negative*	*Positive*
Demographic Variables		
RACE - *Nonwhite*	*Positive*	*Negative*
AGE - *Elderly*	*Positive*	*Negative*
LOCATION – *Suburban/Rural*	*Positive*	*Negative*
FAMILY INCOME	*Negative*	*Positive*
OCC. STATUS - *Nonprofessional*	*Positive*	*Negative*
ATTENDANCE	*Positive*	*Negative*
EDUCATION	*Negative*	*Positive*
PARTISAN-NON SCALE	*Positive*	*Negative*

7. Education is expected, based upon Olsen's work, to identify strongly with the two groups. It is expected that those with low education to identify as mixed; having no preferences and unable to differentiate the parties, therefore presenting a negative trend. On the other hand, those with higher levels of education will

present as more neither, therefore a positive trend. (Adams et al., 2006; Finifter, 1970; Olsen, 1969; Timpone, 1998; Weakliem et al., 2006)

8. Lastly, it is expected for those partisan than to identify as neither estranged nor indifferent because they have preferences and an understanding of the parties, therefore presenting a positive trend. On the other hand, it is expected that those identifying themselves as nonpartisan to present mixed. (Olsen, 1969)

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS

Model Results

IE Model

The ANES 1948-2012 cumulative file includes over 5,000 abstaining voters across the 1968-2012 presidential election years. The distribution of these abstained voters is summarized in Table 9, below.

Table 9

IE Model Results

		Did the nonvoter care which who won the Presidential election? [Is ESTRANGEMENT present?]	
		NO [YES]	YES [NO]
Could the nonvoter identify any differences between the parties? [Is INDIFFERENCE present?]	**NO [YES]**	Mixed 1,652	Indifferent 997
	YES [NO]	Estranged 1,120	Neither 1,452

The two IE Model groups that are being examined are mixed and neither, in comparison to the rest (i.e. the 1,652 mixed against 3,569 other respondents). The mixed group, which equates to the IA Model's combined estranged/indifferent group, presents

1,652 outcomes. The neither group, which is absent as an optional outcome in the IA

Model, presents 1,452. These two groups are the central focus of this thesis.

Test I: Efficacy Indexes Only

The governmental responsiveness index variable, the measurement of internal

efficacy, is statistically significant and in line with Marvin Olsen's claims. Trust in

government, the measurement of external efficacy, was not significant.

The government responsiveness result, which has a small effect of -0.00 for the

mixed group and large effect of 0.00 for neither group, says that abstained voters,

identified as mixed indifferent and estranged are more likely to feel a combination of

government officials not caring about people like them, that they do not have a say in

how government is run, and that officials do not pay attention whether in office or during

an election period. On the other hand, those who are neither indifferent nor estranged are

more likely to feel that officials have some level of concern, that they have a say in how

the government is run, and that officials do pay attention when in office and/or during

elections periods.

The external efficacy item, trust in government (TRUST_GOV), which is not

significant, presents opposite results than expected for the mixed group, but does favor

Olsen's claim of those that have been identified as neither. Both of the efficacy indexes'

coefficients exhibit large effects of 0.00. (See table 10)

Test II: Efficacy Indexes and Demographics

The efficacy indexes remain similar, in effect, when the demographics are tested alongside them. The government responsiveness variable remains statistically significant and in Olsen's favor, which implies a negative external efficacy effect for the mixed group and positive for the neither group. The trust in government variable remains non-significant, contradicting expectation, though the result is minimal: the neither group's coefficient shifted from the expected positive effect, of 0.00, when only testing efficacy indexes to a negative effect, of 0.00, when adding demographics into the test.

The mixed indifferent and estranged group presents only one additional statistically significant result for the partisan-nonpartisan scale from the list of demographics, however, the majority of the expected effects are present. Respondents that are identified as mixed, in line with assumptions that they had no candidacy preference and could not identify differences between the parties, are strongly associated with being nonpartisan.

As for the rest of the demographic variables four present effects as expected and three do not. Those that are in line with Olsen's claim include race, location, occupation status, and church attendance. Results that show the opposite of expectation include age, family income, and education.

The neither indifferent nor estranged group, unlike the mixed group, presents more significant results, though two of the results are inverse to the expectations. Respondents who were in the "neither" group identified as living in cities more than rural areas and attending religious gatherings more frequently than other nonvoters. They also held a higher level of education and presented as partisan. The two variables that were

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significant, but opposite than expected, were age and family income. The significance,

large in effect for age at 0.00 and small in effect for family income at -0.04, suggests that

this group of nonvoters is older, and that their family incomes are less than other

nonvoters.

Table 10

Abstention due to Mixed and Neither, Estrangement and Indifference

IE Group	Mixed[†]		Neither[†]	
	Indexes Only	**Indexes & Demographics**	**Indexes Only**	**Indexes & Demographics**
Variable				
No. of Observations	5,081	1,155	5,081	1,155
Efficacy Indexes				
TRUST_GOV (Internal)	0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.00
GOV_RESPONSE (External)	-0.07*	-0.02*	0.00*	0.01*
Demographics				
RACE[1]		0.63		0.00
AGE		-0.01		0.01*
LOCATION[2]				
Suburban Areas		0.12		-0.06
Rural/Outlying Areas		0.20		-0.56*
FAMILY INCOME		0.25		-0.14*
OCC. STATUS[3]				
Clerical/Sales		0.15		-0.23
Skilled/Semi-Skilled		0.17		-0.34
Laborers		0.21		-0.43
Farmers/Foreman		0.57		-0.71
Homemakers		0.15		-0.32
ATTENDANCE		0.04		-0.13*
EDUCATION		0.23		0.15*
PARTISAN-NON SCALE		0.21*		-0.19*

* Statistically Significant (within .05)
[1] RACE: Dummy variable with base, 0, as White and 1 as Nonwhite.
[2] LOCATION: Variable base, 0, set at Central City.
[3] OCCUPATIONAL STATUS: Variable base, 0, set at Professional and Managerial.
[†] The mixed group is analyzed against all other nonvoters: estranged-only, indifferent-only, and the neither groups; likewise, the neither group is analyzed against all other nonvoters: estranged-only, indifferent-only, and mixed groups.

Occupational status, though not significant, did present the expected effects for all
nonprofessional levels of employment when compared to professional and managerial

statuses. Conversely, race, as with the mixed group, presented opposite than expectations: though the effect was small.

CHAPTER VI

DICUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

Group Differences: Mixed and Estranged

This thesis begins by asking who are abstaining from voting and why. Upon developing the model the question becomes more specific: why are respondents of the mixed/both indifferent and estranged group, and members of the neither indifferent nor estranged group, choosing to abstain and how do they differ from one another when compared to the entire abstained population?

Expectations, based upon previous research, suggest that the two groups would differ significantly – which was confirmed. However, some of the variable effects were different than expected.

Mixed Indifferent and Estranged Group

It was expected that members of the mixed group would present lower levels of internal efficacy shown by the trust in government variable and lower levels of external efficacy shown by the government responsiveness variable. It was anticipated that they would likely be nonwhite, elderly, live in suburban or rural settings, have lower family incomes, be from more service/nonprofessional related occupations, not attend religious gatherings as frequently, have lower levels of education and identify more nonpartisan in comparison to all other nonvoters.

The only characteristics that could be confirmed were that nonvoters identified as mixed did present a lower rate of external efficacy, therefore believing that the government lacks responsiveness, and that they were nonpartisan in comparison. Other variable effects seemed to mostly agree with the previous research, but were not significant.

Neither Indifferent nor Estranged Group

It was expected that members of the neither group would present higher levels of internal and external efficacy and that they would more likely be white, younger than other nonvoters, live in cities, have higher family incomes, work in professional and managerial occupations, attend religious gatherings more frequently, have higher levels of education, and identify as more partisan than the rest of the abstained population.

Seven results came back as statistically significant allowing for a strong analysis of the neither indifferent nor estranged group of nonvoters when compared to all other nonvoters. As expected these nonvoters felt that the government was responsive, that they were more likely to live in cities vs rural areas, to attend religious gatherings more frequently, to have a higher level of education, and to identify as partisan. Two of the outcomes, however, presented differently than expected. The results identified both the *mixed* and *neither* groups as more nonwhite than white, although the *neither* group's effect was quite small at 0.00. It is also striking that respondents of the *neither* group presented more likely to have a lower levels of family income because they had higher levels of education and showed, though not significant, a constant effect of having more

professional and managerial occupations: two variables that one would expect to be associated with higher incomes.

Why is family income inverse to the expectation? Is it possible that some occupations, particularly the skilled labor occupational status, are causing this effect? Since there are many skilled laborers for each of the numerous trade skills then perhaps their presence along with other non-professional and non-managerial occupations are causing the effect to favor non-professional/managerial occupations as richer than professional/managerial occupations.

Conclusion

Questions Not Sought in this Test

There are a series of questions remaining that can be further explored. First, how do the other two groups: the indifferent-only and estranged-only groups, individually compare to the rest of the abstained population? We now know how the mixed estranged and indifferent group, and the neither estranged nor indifferent group compare, but these other two groups still remain untested.

Second, this research has demonstrated that the *neither* group has candidacy preference, the ability to identify party differences, believes the government is responsive, and identified as partisan. The question remains, why do they abstain from voting? What keeps these nonvoters away from the polls?

Third, how do the *mixed* and *neither* groups are compare against one another if the estranged-only and indifferent-only groups are removed from the analysis?

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Questions as a Result of this Test

Since the neither indifferent nor estranged group presented strong as partisan, which end of the Downsian axis do they divided into, alternatively, is there an equal spread of partisanship?

Why does family income present opposite of expectations? This finding is opposite of what Olsen claimed in the late 1960s. Would removing or setting other occupational statuses as the base status change the results? If so, then in what way and how much?

Lastly, since the internal efficacy variable, trust in government, failed to present significantly and opposite of expectations, though small, is there a better variable or set of variables that can be used to build a more statistically significant efficacy question? This could be important because its establishment would provide more precise results.

Closing

Abstained voters have a series of reasons as to why they do not vote. This thesis provides a model by which nonvoters can be differentiated based on whether they are indifferent, estranged/alienated, or any mixed combination of both or neither. It can then be concluded that, of the mixed and neither groups, there are stark differences between them when compared to their fellow nonvoters.

The mixed estranged and indifferent group, nonvoters that have no candidacy preference and cannot identify differences between the political parties, are quite different than the neither estranged nor indifferent group, nonvoters that do have a

preference and can identify party differences. The mixed group is wrought with feelings of discontentedness, identified by their measurement of government responsiveness, and are much more likely to hold nonpartisan beliefs in comparison to the neither estranged nor indifferent group, which is much more content with government responsiveness and much more partisan.

Respondents that are neither estranged nor indifferent are also able to be identified as living in cities more than rural areas, attend religious gatherings more often than the rest of the nonvoter population, hold higher levels of education, but have lower levels of family incomes.

It is important to take away from this research that abstention, which has been marked with high rates for an extensive period of time, has a number of noteworthy groups. The largest of four, the *mixed* group, does not vote because they have become involuntarily withdrawn from the political system, political parties, and candidates. The second largest, the *neither* group, for whatever reasons do not vote, but have strong interests and a firm understanding of the system, parties, and candidates.

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APPENDIX

A.

ANES Variables: Attitude Variables

All of these variables are based on questions and statements presented in the ANES 1948-2012 Cumulative File. However, for the purpose of this thesis, each variable has been recoded as follows:

External Efficacy: Variable of Incapability

GOV_RESPONSE (VCF0649)
0 = Least Responsive .... 100 = Most Responsive

Internal Efficacy: Variable of Discontentedness

TRUST_GOV (VCF0656)
0 = Least Trusting .... 100 = Most Trusting

Demographics

RACE (VCF0071b)
0 = White   1 = Nonwhite

AGE (VCF0101)
17=17 .... 96=96

LOCATION (VCF0111)
1 = Central City*   2 = Suburban Area
3 = Rural, Small Town, Outlying and Adjacent Areas

FAMILY INCOME (VCF0114)
1 = 0 to 16 percentile   2 = 17 to 33 percentile
3 = 34 to 67 percentile   4 = 68 to 95 percentile
5 = 96 to 100 percentile

OCCUPATIONAL STATUS (VCF0115)
1 = Professional and Managerial* 2 = Clerical and Sales Workers
3 = Skilled, Semi-Skilled etc.   4 = Laborers (Except Farmers)
5 = Farmers, Farm Managers, etc. 6 = Homemakers

ATTENDENCE (VCF0130)
1 = Every Week   2 = Almost Every Week
3 = Once or Twice a Month   4 = A Few Times a Year
5 = Never   7 = No Religious Preference

A.

ANES Variables, cont.

EDUCATION (VCF0140a)
1 = 8 Grades or Less   2 = 9-12 Grade, No Diploma/Equivalency
3 = 12 Grades, Diploma/Equiv.   4 = 12 Grades, Diploma/Equiv. plus Training
5 = Some College - AA Degree   6 = BA Degree
7 = Advanced Degree

PARTISAN-NONPARTISAN SCALE (VCF0803)
1 = Extremely Partisan   2 = Partisan
3 = Somewhat Partisan   4 = Non-Partisan

Variable results marked (*) are the base for the logistic regression.

APPENDIX

B.

Stata: Do File

```
keep if VCF0004>1966
keep if VCF0702==1
**IE Model VAR**
recode VCF0311 (0=.) (1 = 0 "IND-Yes, I don't care who wins") (2 = 1 "IND-No, I care
who wins"), gen(INDIFFERENCE)
recode VCF0501 (0=.) (1 = 0 "EST-Yes, I see no differences") (2/9 = 1 "EST-No, I see
differences"), gen(ESTRANGEMENT)
**Incapability VAR**
recode VCF0649 (999=.), gen(GOV_RESP)
recode VCF0656 (999=.), gen(TRUSTGOV)
**Discontent VAR**
recode VCF0648 (999=.), gen(EXTERNAL_EFF)
**Confirm IA Model of Adams et al.**
gen YR1980 = (VCF0004==1980) if (VCF0004==1980)
gen YR1984 = (VCF0004==1984) if (VCF0004==1984)
gen YR1988 = (VCF0004==1988) if (VCF0004==1988)
tab ESTRANGEMENT INDIFFERENCE, summarize(YR1980)
tab ESTRANGEMENT INDIFFERENCE, summarize(YR1984)
tab ESTRANGEMENT INDIFFERENCE, summarize(YR1988)
**The IA & IE Comparative Evaluation**
by YR1980 YR1984 YR1988, sort : tabulate ESTRANGEMENT INDIFFERENCE
**IE MODEL**
gen BOTH=.
replace BOTH=0 if ESTRANGEMENT==1&INDIFFERENCE==1
replace BOTH=1 if ESTRANGEMENT==0&INDIFFERENCE==0 |
ESTRANGEMENT==1&INDIFFERENCE==0 |
ESTRANGEMENT==0&INDIFFERENCE==1
gen NIETHER=.
replace NIETHER=0 if ESTRANGEMENT==0&INDIFFERENCE==0
replace NIETHER=1 if ESTRANGEMENT==1&INDIFFERENCE==1 |
ESTRANGEMENT==1&INDIFFERENCE==0 |
ESTRANGEMENT==0&INDIFFERENCE==1
**tab and checks**
tab ESTRANGEMENT INDIFFERENCE
tab BOTH
tab NIETHER
```

APPENDIX

B.

Stata: Do File, Cont.

```
**BUILDING DEMOGRAPHICS**
recode VCF0071a (1 = 0 "0. White") (2 = 1 "1. Nonwhite") (3 = 1) (4 = 1) (7 = 1) (9 = .),
gen(RACE)
recode VCF0101 00=. 97=. 98=. 99=., gen(AGE)
recode VCF0111 0=., gen(LOCAT)
recode VCF0114 0=., gen(FAM_INC)
recode VCF0115 0=., gen(OCC_STAT)
recode VCF0130 8=. 9=., gen(ATTEND)
recode VCF0140a 8=. 9=., gen(EDUC)
recode VCF0803 7=1 6=2 5=3 9=4 0=., gen(PART_NON)
recode VCF0803 1=1 2=1 3=1 4=2 5=3 6=3 7=3 9=2 0=., gen(LC1)
**LOGIT: BOTH, Without and With Demographics**
logit BOTH GOV_RESP TRUSTGOV
logit BOTH GOV_RESP TRUSTGOV RACE AGE FAM_INC ATTEND EDUC
i.LOCAT i.OCC_STAT PART_NON
**LOGIT: NIETHER, Without and With Demographics**
logit NIETHER GOV_RESP TRUSTGOV
logit NIETHER GOV_RESP TRUSTGOV RACE AGE FAM_INC ATTEND EDUC
i.LOCAT i.OCC_STAT PART_NON
```

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