

Introduction

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior is a theory of behavioral prediction; it refers to the concept that beliefs guide behavior¹. Foremost, the sole determinant of behavior is the intention to act or not to act². This theory states that this intention to act (or not act) is shaped by three factors: attitudes towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived control in performing the behavior. If these three factors create a strong behavioral intention (as opposed to a weak one), the behavior at hand can then be predicted to likely happen. Questions on this survey were presented in groups that would give feedback regarding a particular component of the TPB model seen in Figure 2. Attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control were all analyzed to represent an individual's three main beliefs

TPB Components

- Attitude towards the behavior**
 - positive/negative outcomes
- Subjective norms**
 - one's perception of the social pressure to perform or not perform the action²
- Perceived Behavioral control**
 - the ease or difficulty one has in achieving the desired behavior²

Research Question:

The current study was made to test the ability of the TPB to predict behavior by applying it to student voting intentions and (thus) voting behavior in the 2020 Presidential Election. Our current research question is: **Will the TPB successfully predict whether students who had strong intentions to vote actually did in fact vote**

Methods

Participants

Data were collected from students at Sacred Heart University ($N = 20$). Students eligible to participate in the study were either enrolled in an introductory level psychology course or a part of the undergraduate population. The study was conducted as an online study using SurveyMonkey (a survey and data collecting website).

Procedure (see Figure 1)

1) Demographics

- Gender
- Nationality
- Age
- Academic year and parent's education level
- Social status
- Political party identification
- Past voting behavior

2) Full survey

-Analyzed participants for:

- Perceived norms on voting (reference groups: peers and parents/guardians)
- Perceived behavioral control of voting
- Intentions to vote
- Past voting behaviors

-Question formats:

- Scale rating
- (1-7 where 1 is disagree/unlikely and 7 is agree/likely)

3) Sample Questions

Attitudes

- A**
- My voting in the 2020 presidential election will result in my voice having been heard
 - In the past three months, I have shown interest in potentially voting or politics
 - I think voting in the 2020 presidential election is important to me based on my values

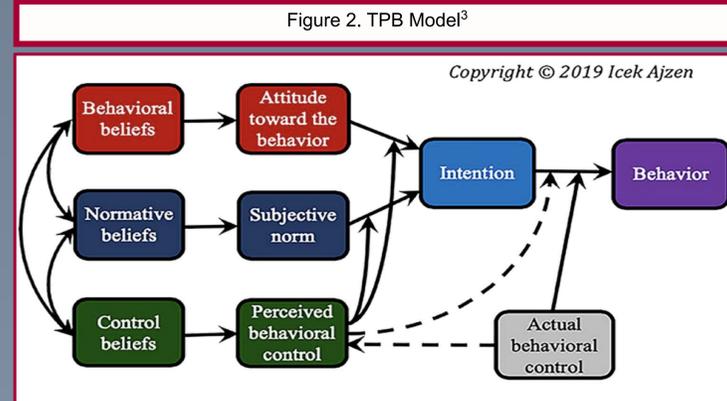
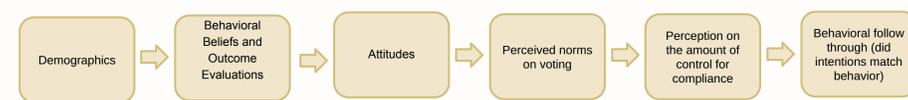
Subjective Norms

- B**
- My parents/guardians (peers) think that I should vote in the upcoming 2020 presidential election
 - When it comes to voting, I want to do what my parents/guardians (peers) think I should do.
 - My parents/guardians (peers) think their vote will matter in the 2020 presidential election
 - Most people who are important to me approve of voting in the 2020 presidential election.

Behavioral Control

- C**
- I expect that I will actually have the ability to vote on election day, Tuesday November 3, 2020.
 - Having an easily accessible way to cast my ballot would enable me to vote in the 2020 election.

Figure 1. Procedure



Results

Table 1

Means, SDs, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Attitude	5.57	1.09	—	.29	.40	.43	.66**	.01
2. Subjective Norms Parents	5.35	.85		—	.58**	.91***	.63**	.34
3. Subjective Norms Peers	4.95	.63			—	.85**	.40	.07
4. Subjective Norms Total	5.24	.64				—	.66***	.25
5. Behavioral Control 1	6.10	1.92					—	.25
6. Behavioral Control 2	5.85	1.69						—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

- To create the Attitude composite score ($\alpha = .776$), we averaged responses to the seven attitude questions.
- To create the Subjective Norms Parents ($\alpha = .579$) and Subjective Norms Peers ($\alpha = .428$) composite scores, we averaged response from the seven subjective norms questions, respectively for each referent group.
- To create the Subjective Norms Total composite score ($\alpha = .712$), we averaged the responses to the parents and peers subjective norms questions plus one additional subjective norm question.
- There was no composite score created for our behavioral control questions because there were only two behavioral control questions in total.
- We originally planned to test our hypothesis using a linear regression predicting intentions to vote from our attitudes composite, subjective norms composite, and behavioral control. However, the intentions question was unintentionally omitted from the original survey.

References

- Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011
- Brannon, L., Feist, J., & Updegraff, J. A. (2018). *Health psychology: An introduction to behavior and health*.
- Ajzen, 2019

Demographics

Demographics		f
Gender	Male	2
	Female	18
Age (in years)	18	11
	19	1
	21	3
	24	1
Race	Native American	1
	Hispanic	1
	White	18
Parent Education Level	High school diploma or equivalent	0
	Some college	2
	A college degree	3
	A graduate degree	8
	Do not know	6

Demographics		f
Political affiliation	Republican	5
	Democrat	5
	Independent	6
	None	4
Political views	Very liberal	2
	Moderately liberal	2
	Somewhat liberal	3
	Neutral	7
	Somewhat conservative	4
	Moderately conservative	3
	Very conservative	0
Previous local election participation	Yes	6
	No	13
	Don't know	1
Previous state election participation	Yes	5
	No	15
	Don't know	1
Previous federal election participation	Yes	4
	No	16
	Don't know	0
Previous presidential election participation	Yes	2
	No	18
	Don't know	0

Discussion

- We want to acknowledge this study was not designed with the circumstances of COVID restrictions in mind. As a result, our ability to recruit participants and publicize our study were limited. Furthermore, our general population where we drew our sample from was very small to begin with (i.e., the undergraduate population at Sacred Heart University).
- Data was adjusted with the removal of two participants because one was not a citizen of the United States and the other was not of age to vote.
- Out of 20 participants, only 5 responded to the follow up survey inquiring whether or not they had voted.
- One limitation of our study is that we could have incorporated more behavioral control questions to ensure a more comprehensive look when examining how each TPB factor³ (attitudes, subjective norms, behavioral control) contributes to a behavioral intention all together.
- A second limitation was that our behavioral intention question ("Are you going to vote in the 2020 presidential election?") was accidentally left out of our initial survey.
- We originally intended to examine both referent groups (parents/guardians and peers) separately thinking this distinction would have an influence on an individual. However, after calculating Cronbach's α for the parents/guardians referent group (Cronbach's $\alpha = .579$) and peers referent group (Cronbach's $\alpha = .428$), we saw their internal reliability was not strong. As a result, we decided to look at these two groups as a whole because the Cronbach's α for both groups combined was much stronger (Cronbach's $\alpha = .712$).

Acknowledgements and Contact information

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