

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Structural Analysis of Voting Intention of Indian Electors in the Framework of Theory of Planned Behaviour

Debashis Chakrabarti ¹, Amaresh Jha ²¹ Researcher Professor and Dean of Mass Communication and Journalism at several universities in India and Abroad.² Professor & Head of the School of Media and Entertainment at GD Goenka University**Corresponding Author:** Debashis

Chakrabarti

Researcher Professor and Dean of Mass Communication and Journalism at several universities in India and Abroad.

Email: editor-ijpm@ijpmonline.com

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Abstract

Is voting a planned behaviour? If so, does the theory of planned behaviour apply to voting intention? This study uses structural equation modelling as a method to analyse the responses of voters to re-test the theory of planned behaviour in the context of Indian elections. The researchers assume that attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control of electors is positively related to voting intention. The participants in the survey are the Indian electors who exercised their right to elect during the 2014 & 2019 Lok Sabha (Parliamentary) elections in India. The findings provide ample evidence to support that voting intention is to large extent a planned behaviour and is shaped largely by attitude, and not much by subjective norms and perceived behavioural control of the electors.

1. Introduction

This study assumes that the voting intention of an elector in a democratic state largely depends on attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Studying the intention of electors is important to understand because the intentions often lead to actions (Ajzen, 1985). Though attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (PCB) all these variables are part of theory of planned behaviour there is a need to verify these assumptions empirically using a theoretical framework to test its applications in Indian context. The study starts with analysing the demographic structure and characteristics of Indian electors to ensure that the factors like gender, equal participation of all section of electors are not barriers in the process of preferred choices. For a study to apply a theory of planned behaviour the major pre-requisite is that the behaviour is largely in control of the individual who has to exercise the rights. Therefore the researcher has taken into account a time frame of study which has witnessed almost equal voter turnout by male and female in India and also increased participation of the sections of society which were earlier not much active or engaged in the process of election.

Voter turnout for men and women in India is almost equal now as per the data of the election commission of India. The female participation has increased since 1962 and during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections for the first time it almost equalled. In 13 states the women voter turnout was better than men. Therefore the preference of electors for the political parties and leaders has no bias of gender participation.

Another crucial factor with Indian electorate was that till the 2004 elections the voter turnout in the Scheduled Tribe

constituencies was lower than the General Constituencies. But now the participation and voter turnout of Scheduled Castes as well as the Scheduled Tribe has increased and is more than the general constituencies. These figures indicate that India is growing as a pluralist state where democratic participation of women and downtrodden has increase over time (Figure 2).

Voter turnout in ST constituencies was 74.2% in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and 67.9% for the SC constituencies. In the General Constituencies the voter turnout was 67%. The equal participation of men and women and the members of different social strata makes the argument stronger that now the voters' preference is more a subject of attitude and intention.

2. Review of Literature

Previous scholarships have tried to get an answer of the vital question- do the electors make rational choices during elections? But answer to this questions is more contextual in nature, because the electors have not got democratic choices in all the countries and hence there hardly remains scope of making rational choices. Even the intention of the electors gets changed or shaped because of the political circumstances, nature of governance and the freedom. So, the question of "rational or deliberative" choices has certain reservations. In the context of democratic states definitely the choices are more rational. The path models analysed by previous researchers for voting preferences have indicated that preferences are a mix of implicit and explicit. Kahneman (2003) had studied the "bounded rationality" to understand the thin line between the "judgment and choices". This study was conducted a decade after the work of Aldrich (1993) who had established a correlation between the rational choices and voter turnout. The basic premises of all these studies

were drawn from the works of Miller (2003) who largely dealt in characteristics and identity of voters and political parties in the context of elections. Another scholar also drew from these studies the premise of “ethnic underpinnings” during the voting preferences. Simon & Klandermans (2001) in their study put forth an assumption that “politicized collective identity” has an impact on preferences of electors. This matches with the assumption of this study that perceived behaviour control shapes the voting intention. Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt (2003, 2010) in their studies analysed the social networks, mass communication and personal communication to find a relation between communication, choices and mobilisations. The cross-sectional studies have hardly led to any theory building in this area and hence the understanding of voting preferences or voting behaviour has largely been case studies of certain elections or the survey to understand the voting preferences of electors. Certain scholars have also conducted studies in quasi-experimental settings to understand the impact or consequences of the electoral system on voters. In the era of social media certain researchers have used big data and algorithms to derive certain insights on voting behaviour and preferences. The regression analysis of voting behaviour has led to certain predictions as well, but the predictions have not proved right always. This problem certainly therefore requires a framework which encompasses empirical finding and theories. The research designs for such studies also need to be developed accordingly to incorporate different units or components of behaviour of electors and consequences of electoral systems to have more impeccable outcomes. The understanding of voting preferences is not possible from the lens of a single discipline and therefore the nature of enquiry should be interdisciplinary which encompasses the social, political, economic and psychological aspects. In Indian political scenario the system of reservation and social strata particularly the caste system has big influence on voting behaviour. The previous scholars have observed that voting behaviour is shaped by multiplicity of factors and decision making in this process is not only complex but contextual. India has also witnessed a transformation in political choices across generations. The provocation of religious sentiments and identities, politics of majorities and minorities, special status of states has remained at the centre of the politics. What is rational may or may not be functional in political scenario and therefore though the politicians talk about issues of development but are more conscious about caste equations. Previous studies have also established relationship between electors’ involvement, ease of use, attitude and confidence with the voter’s participation in electoral process (Lee, 2020). The voting preferences also depend upon the factors like image of party and candidate, issues and awareness, leadership qualities and firmness of leadership on critical issues.

Research Hypotheses:

Though there are several factors which shape the attitude of the electors but for this study since the research design is largely based on the framework of theory of the planned behaviour it is assumed that:

H1. Attitude of electors is positively related to voting intention.

H2. Subjective norm of electors is positively related to voting intention.

H3. Perceived behavioural control of electors is positively related to voting intention.

3. Methodology:

3.1 Population

This study takes into account the electorate of the April-May 2019 elections for 17th Lok Sabha of Indian Parliament. Indian parliament has two houses- Rajyasbaha (the upper house) and Lok Sabha (the lower house). Members of the Lok Sabha are elected through a direct election conducted by Election Commission of India. The elections were held for 543 out of 545 seats of Lok Sabha in which 67.4% of the electors from the electorate of 911,950,734 had turned out to vote. The results of the election were declared on May 23, 2019. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance won 353 seats, The Indian National Congress led United Progress Alliance won 91 seats. Other parties and alliances won 98 seats. The polling for one of the seats was cancelled.

3.2 Data Collection: Survey participants comprised the post graduate students and doctoral scholars of the three Indian Universities who had voted in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The link of the web based questionnaire were distributed to the university students using WhatsApp messaging platform. The final sample comprised 230 respondents resulting in a response rate 40%. 47% of the respondents were male, 53% were female. 65% of the respondents were of 21-30 age-group, and 35% of the respondents were of the age-group 31-40. The data were collected during the month of June 2019 to ensure that the respondents can actively recall their decision.

3.3. Measurements: Since the study uses the constructs based on Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) approach the study and measurement has its own limitations. The actual behaviour of an elector during the election may depend on several other factors like characteristics of a candidate, any agenda or development issue specific to a constituency, caste or religion of candidate. But for the conceptual modelling purposes this study takes into account Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control and Voting intention. Many scholarships in the area of marketing research have found that intention has significant impact on behaviour and with the measurement of intention the behaviour of the customers can be predicted. Taking this into account this study assumes that voting intention may lead to prediction of voting behaviour. There are studies which got enough evidence for their hypotheses that the electors vote as per their intention expressed.

Multiple Item 5-point Likert Scales were developed for the constructs- Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control and Voting Intention. For the construct Attitude the level of agreement of the respondents was measured using four questions on five point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) : I vote for the party of my choice because it matches my attitude (X1), I believe that voting for the same party will be beneficial for India (X2), I believe that voting for the same party will be beneficial for my religion (X3), I believe that voting for the party of my choice will strengthen the ideology I support (X4). For the construct subjective norms two questions were used to measure the level of agreement of respondents using five point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree): Majority of my friends and acquaintances believe that

voting for the party of our choice is a good idea (X5). Majority of my family members think that voting the party of our choice once again is a good idea (X6). For the construct Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) three questions with five point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) were used : I have control over my decisions to vote for the same party (X7), It is difficult for me to vote for a different party (X8), If I change my choice I won't be able to justify why (X9). I will vote for the same party again because I don't have better choice (X10). For the construct voting intention two questions were used to measure the agreement level of respondents. For the question "How likely is it that you will vote for the same party again?"(X11) five point Likert Scale (1 = Very unlikely; 5 = Very likely) was used and for question "I am convinced that I will vote for the same party again" (X12) five point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) was used. Another supplementary question with five point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) "My actual voting behaviour may change just before the election" (X13) was used to make an assessment that how likely is it that the actual voting behaviour may change just before the election.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

Reliability of the survey instrument was ensured through measuring the value of alpha. For the items pertaining to Hypothesis 1 the alpha was 0.83, for the items pertaining to Hypothesis 2 the alpha was 0.79 and for the items pertaining to Hypothesis 3 the alpha was 0.91. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was also performed to extract the factor loading values which resulted in significant values for all the variables. The discriminant value of constructs was also satisfactory and hence the validity was also ensured for the measurements. The value of the goodness of fit index was 0.93 which satisfies the required level of acceptance.

4. Findings:

The three hypotheses under this study were tested using structural estimation of the proposed model which resulted in t values of 3.24, 0.39 and 0.07 for the H1, H2 and H3 respectively. Only the first hypothesis for the pathway Attitude to Voting Intention got enough value of coefficient to accept the hypothesis. The other two pathways for H2 and H3 didn't get enough values of coefficients and it resulted in rejection of H2 and H3.

Voter turnout finally equal for men and women

Female participation has been increasing since 1962

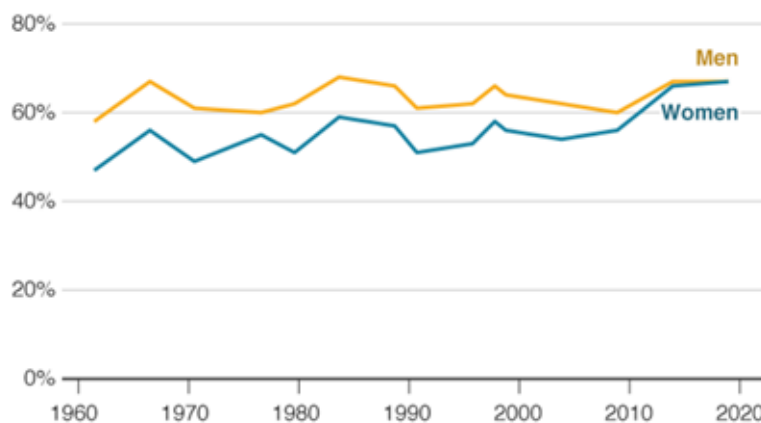


Figure 1: Male and Female turnout (Source: Election Commission of India)

Turnout by constituency type, 1962-2019

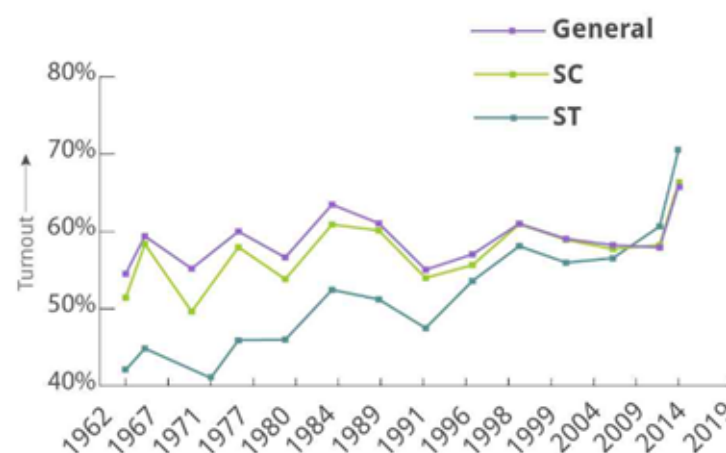


Figure 2: Turnout by Constituency type (Source: Election Commission of India)

Theory of Planned Behaviour

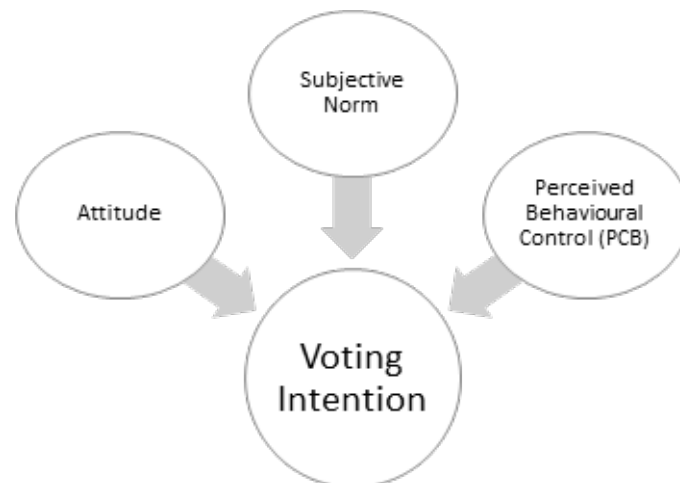


FIGURE 3. THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR (TPB)

Table 1: Discriminant Validity of Construct

Construct	1	2	3	4
Attitude of electors	0.49	----	----	----
Subjective Norms	0.23	0.63	----	----
Perceived Behavioural Control (PCB)	0.41	0.08	0.59	----
Intention	0.69	0.12	0.27	0.71

Table 2: Results of Structural Estimation

Pathway	Coefficient	t-value	Result
Attitude to Voting Intention (H1)	0.81	3.24	Accept
Subjective Norms to Voting Intention (H2)	0.04	0.39	Reject
PCB to Voting Intention (H3)	0.02	0.07	Reject
PCB to Attitude	0.61	3.28	Path was not formulated as hypothesis

5. Conclusion:

There are several factors in Indian context which may be the reason why all the three pathways of the model could not get enough evidence in support of the proposed hypotheses. But the reason why Attitude to Voting Intention pathway could get evidence in support of the hypothesis may be that attitude is a more planned behaviour compared to subjective norms and perceived behaviour control. The individualization of Indian population, independent decision making by the female, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Electors may be another reasons why “subjective norms to voting intention” and “perceived behavioural control to voting intention” pathways could not result in accepting the predicted the relationship. As found by the scholars in their previous studies the value based attitude is the central focus in the process of electoral decision making (Jensen, 2002). This also signifies the importance of values in the context of Indian electors; the values may be driven by the factors of nationalism, ideal personalities or transparency. In any case it is clear from the present study that having a positive attitude towards issues, party or candidate is the most important factor for electors to vote for a political party or a candidate during elections.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research:

The findings clearly indicate that all components of Theory of Planned Behaviour don’t apply uniformly in the context of the current study but the results may vary for other populations. The individualization of the Indian electors may be the crucial factor why Perceived Behavioural Control and Subjective Norms could not affect the intention of Indian electors much. The limited role of agenda-setting by the traditional media may be another reason because the social media provides alternative forum for developing a more independent viewpoint among Indian electors. The future studies may focus on what exactly shapes the attitude of Indian electors which is a prime factor in making electoral choices. A cross-sectional study of voting behaviour may lead to a better theory building in this area.

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