

USING PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY TO PREDICT VOTING INTENTIONS

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Voting is an essential component of civic engagement. To demonstrate the utility of a reasoned action approach to predict voting, we created an instrument that measured non-normative political beliefs and voting intentions. We identified political beliefs and attitudes of the Republican Party, Democratic Party, Libertarian Party, Tea Party, and Occupy Wall Street Movement. A total of 2,637 participants from Mechanical Turk completed the survey using Survey Monkey. We identified the three political belief items best characterizing each political ideology and associated attitudes and beliefs. Regression analysis confirmed the utility of our approach to predict intentions to vote for candidates who were concordant with participants' attitudes, beliefs, and norms. The reasoned action analyses accounted for a majority of the variance in intention to vote for candidates sharing respondent favored political beliefs and specific political positions. The study is the first to demonstrate that reasoned action approach is an effective tool for predicting civic engagement.

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Voting is one of the most researched political behavior given its centrality in representative democracies and may be the most common political behavior with the exception of discursive forms of political action such as talking about a public issue (Jacobs, Cook, & Delli Carpini, 2009). Voting itself is one aspect of "civic engagement," a broader phenomenon that is closely linked to other social activity and is an important element of community involvement and political socialization at all stages of the life cycle (e.g., Delli Carpini, 2000; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Martinson & Minkler, 2006; Torney-Purta, 2002;

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Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Political activity is always a prime component of operational definitions of civic engagement. For example, Adler and Goggin (2005, p. 242) identified 19 core indicators of civic engagement and five related to the electoral process (e.g., voting, volunteer work for specific candidates) and nine related political persuasion (e.g., contacting public officials, protesting, writing petitions).

Similarly, Uslaner and Brown (2005) examined five indicators of civic engagement and three were political: voting, signing petitions, and working for a political party (p. 870). Although there are other benefits to high levels of civic engagement as trust (Costa & Kahn, 2003; Putnam, 1996, 2000), altruism (Purdam & Tranmer, 2012), and community pride (Boeckmann & Tyler, 2002), Davidson and Cotter (1989) found that a “sense of community” was positively associated with three of their five types of political participation: voting, contacting government officials, and working to solve community problems even after controlling for political partisanship (Davidson & Cotter, 1989) and Knack and Kropf (1998) found that civic norms predicted voting even after adjusting for demographic variables such as age, income, and religiosity.

Not surprisingly therefore, classic American research on voting behavior (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944) explains voting as an outcome of group affiliations—religion, ethnicity, and occupation—as well as community and social group norms. Contemporary political research on voting uses more sophisticated multivariate models for understanding how citizens determine candidate preferences that combine respondent demographics, preexisting political positions such as party identification and ideology, issue priorities and preferences, perceptions of candidates’ personality traits, and assessments of past candidate and party performance (Ansolabehere, Meredith, & Snowberg, 2011; Bartels, 1996; Fiorina & Abrams, 2012; Huddy & Cassese, 2013; Kam & Simas, 2012; Ladd & Lenz, 2008; Norrander, 1986).

When these individual choice models are used, there are ambiguities concerning the relative importance of specific variables (e.g., Whiteley, 1988), the amount and type of information citizens need to make choices (e.g., Alvarez, 1998), the impact of campaign-specific media information or historical events (e.g., Kenski, Hardy, & Jamieson, 2010), and the cognitive processes that explain how voters actually determine their choice (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Lodge & Taber, 2013). Thus, these kinds of explanatory political choice models are often quite complicated as well as theoretically haphazard. For example, we find the results of the standard ideology and party preference typology analyses used to predict voting preferences difficult to interpret because the party preference and ideology approach does not *explain why* “strongly conservative republicans” vote for one candidate and “strongly liberal libertarians” vote for a different candidate.

There is also a long tradition of psychological research relating personality variables to political beliefs and political ideology, but curiously this research rarely if ever relates personality factors directly to voter preferences. Early studies correlated general personality traits like “authoritarianism” with outcomes including political policy preferences and militant political orientation (House & Fischer, 1971; Kelman & Barclay, 1963; Titus & Hollander, 1957). Newer versions of these general trait scales such as “Right Wing Authoritarianism” have items such as “The majority of those who criticize proper authorities in government and religion only create useless doubts in people’s minds” that are related to both out-group prejudice and political orientation (Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002; Rattazzi, Bobbio, & Canova, 2007).

More globally, Carney, Jost, Gosling, and Potter (2008) reviewed the literature on predicting political ideology (typically a bipolar item with left and right or liberal and conservative endpoints). Their review included studies that focused on traits such as

Table 1. Polychoric Correlations Between Voting Intention Measures for Five Political Groups

Democratic	Libertarian	Occupy Wall Street	Republican	Tea Party
-.28				
.35	.20			
-.73	.18	-.34		
-.55	.49	-.07	.63	

Note. $N = 2471$; all correlations have $p < .05$.

slovenly, eccentric, expressive, open-minded, tough and masculine, rigid and intolerant, parsimonious, and moralistic (Carney et al., 2008, Table 1, p. 816). The authors concluded that the best theoretical justification for past studies was achieved by interpreting political ideology as a function of two of the “Big Five” (Digman, 1990) personality dimensions: (a) Openness to Experience and (b) Conscientiousness (Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism were less related to political ideology).

Some psychologists contend that beliefs about specific political issues—political beliefs as opposed to stable traits—play a major role in predicting political positions. Under this model, what Ottati, Fishbein, and Middlestadt (1988) label “issue beliefs” and what Krosnick (1988) calls “policy attitudes” determine citizens’ preferences for a given political candidate over and above party preference, liberal-conservative ideology, or their combination (Ottati, Steenbergen, & Riggle, 1992). For example, Devine (2012) argues that policy orientation also predicts ideological position because for most topics (but not all, such as abortion rights) policy issues and ideological position can be made consistent especially when religious beliefs play a role in the implementation or content of a social policy.

In this report we show that individual-level vote choice can be parsimoniously explained by using Fishbein and Ajzen’s (2010) reasoned action approach. Because of the adaptability of this particular theoretical model, its proven effectiveness in a variety of behavioral choice situations, and the close proximity of its explanatory variables to the actual behavior of interest, the reasoned action approach is well-suited for understanding the relative importance of predictor variables that have been of central interest to psychologists, political scientists, and political communication researchers: attitudes, normative influence, ideology, and specific positions on contemporary political issues.

What is a Reasoned Action Approach?

The reasoned action approach is a psychosocial model of behavior that is a synthesis of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), Social-Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), the Health Belief Model (Janz & Becker, 1984), the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2011), and the Integrative Model of Behavior Change (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). The focus of the model is *intention to perform a specific behavior* (the “target behavior”) as both a dependent variable and a predictor of behavior. Reasoned action assumes that behavior is primarily determined by intentions, although one may not always be able to act on one’s intentions because environmental factors or a lack of skills or abilities make performance difficult. When skills and abilities as well as other contextual environmental factors are not measured, then perceived control or self-efficacy is used as a proxy for the factors influencing actual control. Therefore, behavior is a function of both intentions and self-efficacy and control.

Intention to perform a specific behavior is a function of favorableness or unfavorableness towards personally performing the behavior (i.e., attitudes), perceptions about what others think and do with regards to performing the behavior (i.e., normative pressure), and beliefs about ability to perform the behavior assuming that one wanted to do so (i.e., self-efficacy and perceived behavioral control). These three constructs (attitudes, normative pressure, and self-efficacy and control, typically called the “direct measures”) have a standard format for measurement and can be applied to any behavioral outcome. Note that the correlation between intentions and behavior should be lower than the correlation between the three direct measures and intention. Meta-analysis of more than 130 studies and 26,000 respondents over a range of behaviors confirms this prediction (Kim & Hunter, 1993; Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988, Table 6) and other meta-analysis confirms the intention–behavior relationship as well (McEachan, Conner, Taylor, & Lawton, 2011; Sheppard et al., 1988; Webb & Sheeran, 2006).

Direct measures are determined by a corresponding set of salient underlying beliefs. Attitudes are determined by beliefs that performing the behavior will lead to specific consequences (i.e., outcome expectancies). The more one believes that a behavior will lead to positive outcomes or prevent negative outcomes, the more favorable should be the attitude toward the behavior. Normative pressure is determined by beliefs that referents think the individual should or should not perform the target behavior, these are “injunctive” normative beliefs (Manning, 2009), and by beliefs about whether significant others are or are not performing the target behavior, these are “descriptive” normative beliefs (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Ravis & Sheeran, 2003). The more one believes that important others think the individual should perform the behavior and the more the individual believes that important others are performing the behavior, the stronger will be the normative pressure to perform the target behavior. Meta-analyses also show that while descriptive and injunctive norms are correlated, they are not redundant (Manning, 2009).

A third type of belief underlies perceived control or self-efficacy (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Yzer, 2012). These beliefs refer to one’s ability to perform the target behavior when circumstances make performance difficult. The most recent formulation of the distinction (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) treats the self-efficacy and perceived behavioral control measures as reflecting both capacity and autonomy to perform the target behavior. Note that for all three of these predictors of intentions, beliefs are the engine of behavior change because *changes in the underlying beliefs work through the reasoned action model to ultimately affect behavior* (Fishbein, 2008; Fishbein et al., 2002; Fishbein & Yzer, 2003). Ajzen documents the history, theoretical rationale, and psychological mechanics of the reasoned action approach in detail (Ajzen, 2012), and a select bibliography of over 1,400 articles can be found on his homepage (<http://people.umass.edu/ajzen/tpbrefs.html>).

To apply the reasoned action approach in a voting preference context, we must first identify the relevant underlying political beliefs to predict voting intentions. These beliefs with the other theoretical components of the reasoned action items including intention, attitudes, and normative pressure (currently, we do not think that voting self-efficacy is an issue, but because there may be future barriers to voting such as the need for government issued identification cards, this assumption may not be valid in the future) are theoretical relevant and are incorporated here into a multiple decision reasoned action model (Van Hooft, Born, Taris, & Van der Flier, 2006).

METHODS

The Political Belief Measures

To accumulate an initial pool of belief measures, we visited websites related to the Tea Party movement, the Occupy Wall Street movement, the Libertarian Party, and the Republican and Democratic parties. We also noted the political rhetoric on television news and “talking-head” political commentary and also found useful the deconstruction of political advertisements available at FlackCheck.com, a webpage sponsored by the Annenberg Public Policy Center. We wanted to represent a range of political beliefs, from the standard platitudes that make up the majority of media discussion (e.g., American values are best changed slowly and gradually) to more non-normative kinds of political assertions (e.g., Bailouts of failing banks and corporations are schemes of large financial interests to maintain and expand their power).

In practice, there are three different kinds of items: (a) political generalizations (e.g., One of America’s greatest strengths is its racial and ethnic diversity; Illegal immigration is ruining the country); (b) factual assertions about the “true reality” of what are otherwise well understood events (e.g., Before becoming a Christian, President Obama was raised as a Muslim; The Bush administration staged the 9/11 terrorist attacks to justify invading Iraq) are also included because these factual assertions have been shown to be related to both ideology and authoritarianism (e.g., Mirels & Dean, 2006); and (c) statements of support for specific social policies (e.g., Intelligent design should be taught in public schools as an alternative to the theory of evolution; Health care should be free for everyone in the United States). All the measures were coded ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

The Reasoned Action Measures

Intention. The five intention items were “In the next presidential election, how likely is it that you will vote for the presidential candidate supported by the [Group]?” where [Group] was Republican Party, Democratic Party, Libertarian Party, Tea Party, and Occupy Wall Street Movement. These five measures were coded from 1 (*Extremely Unlikely*) to 7 (*Extremely Likely*).

Attitude. The five attitude measures were a sum of two semantic differential measures (Fishbein & Raven, 1962). The stem for both items was as follows: Would you say that voting for the presidential candidate supported by the [Group] would be The first was Bad/Good with the endpoints coded from 1 (*Extremely Bad*) to 7 (*Extremely Good*) and the second was Foolish/Wise with the endpoints coded from 1 (*Extremely Foolish*) to 7 (*Extremely Wise*). The five polychoric correlations between the Bad/Good and the Foolish/Wise items ranged from .90 (Republican Party) to .97 (Democratic Party).

Normative pressure. The five normative pressure measures were the sum of two items. The first item (the injunctive norm) was as follows: Most people who are important to me think that I should vote for the presidential candidate supported by the [Group] in 2012. The second item (the descriptive norm) was as follows: Most people who are important to me will vote for the presidential candidate supported by [GROUP] in 2012. Both items were coded from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The five polychoric correlation

between the injunctive and the descriptive norm items ranged from .89 (Tea Party) to .94 (Occupy Wall Street Movement).

The Online Survey

The survey was constructed using Survey Monkey and comprised standard voting, party, and political ideology measures, the 37 political belief items, the reasoned action theory measures (intention, the two semantic differential attitude measures, and the two norm measures for each of the five political groups), demographic items, and a quality of life measure (Jenkinson et al., 1997). The survey was administered using a Mechanical Turk sample (Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2012; Mason & Suri, 2012; Rand, 2012) from July 16, 2012, through September 10, 2012, limited to residents of the United States. The Turk workers who selected the task were directed to the Survey Money site where they completed the survey, and then they returned to the Mechanical Turk site where they entered a code found on the last page of the survey to verify participation. All workers with valid codes were paid \$.25 cents to complete the task, which took between 9–10 minutes to complete, on average. We used the Mechanical Turk sample because for this study, we valued heterogeneity over representativeness and larger samples over smaller ones given the many non-normative political beliefs in the political belief battery. We ended data collection after approximately 2,600 surveys were collected. The survey was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Pennsylvania.

Respondent Characteristics

Fifty-one percent of respondents were male and the average age was 33 years (standard deviation [*SD*] = 12.63). The two most common educational levels were “some college, no degree” (28%) and “four year college degree” (28%). Thirty-five percent were currently married and 55% had never been married. In terms of political party affiliation, 17% reported Republican, 45% reported Democratic, 32% reported Independent, and 6% reported Libertarian. In terms of ideology, 8% were strongly conservative, 14% were slightly conservative, 23% were moderate, 28% were slightly liberal, and 27% considered themselves as strongly liberal. Finally, 71% were registered to vote in any state and 65% reported that they were “sure” that they voted in the 2008 presidential election (of the registered voters, 72% were “sure” that they voted in the 2008 presidential election).

Like other Mechanical Turk samples (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012), these respondents are somewhat more Democratic, somewhat less Independent, and much less Republican in comparison to nationally representative surveys. In the 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES; a nationally representative rolling cross sectional survey of over 55,000 adults collected between December 2007 and November 2008), 27% reported themselves as Republican, 36% Democrats, and 29% Independents, while other parties were not explicitly identified (Winneg & Jamieson, 2010, p. 250).

In addition, our respondents were ideologically more liberal. For example, again using data from the 2008 NAES, the identical ideological question showed that 14% of the respondents reported being very conservative, 24% were somewhat conservative, 32% were moderate, 18% identified themselves somewhat liberal, and 8% considered themselves strongly liberal (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2010). We prefer these kinds of known biases compared to using younger and more homogenous student samples (Behrend, Sharek, Meade, & Wiebe, 2011), and a large sample is necessary here to capture the range of non-normative political beliefs represented by our belief items.

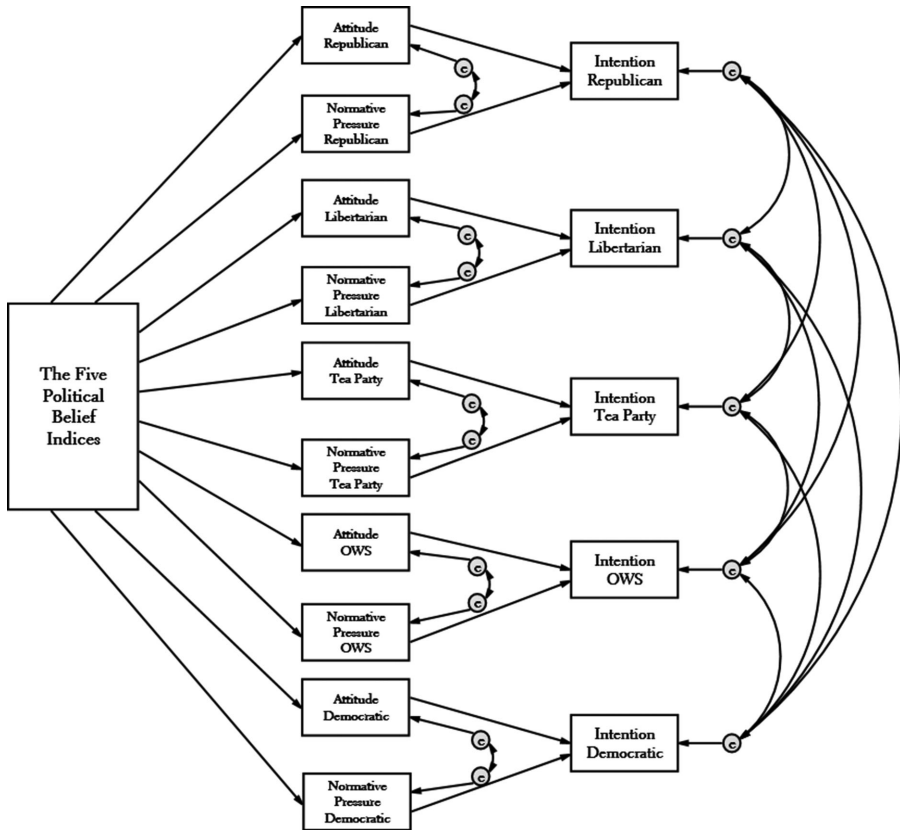


Figure 1. Generic model of analysis of voting intentions by party with reasoned action mediators and underlying belief indices as predictors.

Data Analysis Plan

First, we display the correlations between voting intentions. Then we select a subset of belief items to represent the underlying political beliefs for each of the five political groups using alpha (Streiner, 2003) applied to a polychoric correlation matrix (Holgado-Tello, Chacón-Moscoso, Barbero-García, & Vila-Abad, 2010) and Loewenger’s *H*, a measure of internal consistency based on ordered difficulty (Van Schuur, 2003). We validate the indices by comparing average index values with self-reported party affiliation. Then we use the indices in a reasoned action structural equation model estimated for all five intention outcomes simultaneously so as to not distort the degrees of freedom and inflate Type I error (Thompson, 1995). The underlying belief indices should affect the attitude and normative belief measures differentially as the dependent mediators reflect each of the five different political groups.

The generic analysis model is shown in Figure 1. The intention measures are a function of the direct measures for each candidate. The direct measures for each intention are all determined by the belief indices. In other words, we estimate the reasoned action model for all five intention measures simultaneously. The theory suggests that we should see large differences between the effects of the Republican Index on Republican direct measures and the effects of the Republican Index on the Independent or Democratic

direct measures, because underlying beliefs should affect the direct measures of each intention differentially. We also expected that both attitude and normative pressure predict voting intention. Note that the error terms of each of the direct measures are correlated because the theory does not specify the causal ordering of attitude and normative pressure relative to each other: Correlated errors of the theoretical mediators are a necessary component of any reasoned action analysis (Bleakley & Hennessy, 2012). All analyses were conducted using STATA Version 13 (StataCorp, 2013).

RESULTS

Correlations Between Voting Intentions

Table 1 shows the polychoric correlations between the intention measures for each potential candidate. Democrats and Republicans show the highest negative correlations and Republican and Tea Party the highest positive correlations.

The Political Belief Indices

We identified three items for each type of presidential candidate based on the item correlation with intention and the values of alpha and H. We required that no items were common to the five measures so that common item correlation would not be an explanation for the observed correlations between the measures. The indices, their items (the numbers refer to the items in the Appendix), and internal consistency results are shown in Table 2. Table 3 shows the Pearson correlations between the five belief indices. The highest positive correlation is between Democratic and Occupy Wall Street beliefs and the highest negative correlations are between Democrat and Republican beliefs and Democrat and Libertarian beliefs.

Validating the Political Belief Indices

We validated the indices by looking at their average value by the four party self-identifications. The self-identification was based on the following survey item: "In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or Libertarian, or a supporter of some other political party?" First, an analysis of variance showed that for each self-identification, there were significant differences in the five index values (Democrat Index: $F_{3, 2582} = 316, p < .05$; Republican Index: $F_{3, 2584} = 178, p < .05$; Libertarian Index: $F_{3, 2582} = 337, p < .05$; Occupy Wall Street Index: $F_{3, 2585} = 237, p < .05$; Tea Party Index: $F_{3, 2583} = 230, p < .05$).

We expected that average index values are highest when party self-identification was consistent with the corresponding index and we find this result for each of three self-identified affiliations: The Democrat average index value was highest for self-identified Democrats (5.77) and lowest for self-identified Republicans (3.61); the Republican average index value was highest for self-identified Republicans (4.39) and lowest for self-identified Democrats (2.74); and the Libertarian average index was highest for self-identified Libertarians (5.23) and lowest for self-identified Democrats (2.87). The highest Occupy Wall Street index was for self-identified Democrats (5.48) and the lowest for Republicans (3.58). The highest Tea Party index average was for self-identified Republicans (4.37) and the lowest for Democrats (2.20). Again, all indices were scaled from 1–7.

Table 2. Political Belief Items Defining Political Group Index and Internal Consistency Measures

Political group	Belief items	Polychoric Alpha	Loevinger's H ^a
Republican	12. Big business serves the best interests of most Americans	.76	.49
	27. Unregulated markets are the best way to distribute social and economic goods		
	28. Most wealthy people got that way through hard work and discipline		
Libertarian	24. America is better off with as few government programs as possible	.83	.59
	29. The main problem with American society is the influence of the federal government in daily life		
	37. Charitable organizations like churches, the Knights of Columbus, and the Salvation Army are better able to reduce income inequality than government programs		
Tea Party	13. Barack Obama was not born in the United States	.82	.55
	25. Before becoming a Christian, President Obama was raised as a Muslim		
	30. All illegal immigrants should be deported back to their home countries regardless of the cost		
Occupy Wall Street	5. In America, the rich get richer and the poor are left to fend for themselves	.74	.46
	11. The rags to riches "American dream" is dead		
Democratic	21. Health care should be free for everyone in the United States	.87	.66
	22. The gap between rich and poor in the United States threatens democracy		
	23. Government should play an important role in providing for the economic security of its citizens		
	32. The government should play a larger role in eliminating the gap between the richest people and everybody else		

Note. ^aMokken originally recommended a minimum value of .30 for H, while values between .3 and less than .4 are a weak scale, between .4 and less than .5 a medium scale, and .5 or more as a strong scale (Mokken, 1971, p. 185)

Table 3. Pearson Correlations Between the Belief Indices

Democratic Index				
-.58	Libertarian Index			
.74	-.45	QWS Index		
-.58	.66	-.55	Republican Index	
-.40	.62	-.33	.52	Tea Party

Note. N = 2634; all correlations have *p* < .05.

Results of the SEM Analysis

Table 4 shows the regression results. The top section of the table shows the effects of direct measure mediators on voting intention. We expected that the index for Democratic beliefs would predict the direct measures for Democratic voting intention, the index for Tea Party beliefs would predict the direct measures for Tea Party intention, and so on. This expectation is confirmed for all indices except for Republican. Here, the superior predictor of attitude and normative pressure is not the Republican index but the Tea Party index. All the signs of the effects make intuitive sense: The Democratic beliefs negatively predict Republican attitude and normative pressure (as does the Occupy Wall Street index), while the Tea Party index positively predicted both Tea Party and Republican

Table 4. Results of the SEM Analysis of the Reasoned Action Model

	<i>Dependent variables: Attitude and normative pressure mediators</i>									
	REP Attitude	REP Pressure	LP Attitude	LP Pressure	TP Attitude	TP Pressure	OWS Attitude	OWS Pressure	DEM Attitude	DEM Pressure
REP Index	.21	.10	.03ns	.16	.16	.16	-.11	.07	.14	.10
LP Index	.10	.15	.36	.19	.18	.12	-.08	-.07	-.36	-.19
TP Index	.39	.29	-.08	.08	.29	.28	-.04ns	.02ns	-.34	-.32
OWS Index	-.27	-.18	.12	.12	-.14	-.04ns	.24	.23	.17	.12
DEM Index	-.21	-.12	-.08	.03ns	-.16	-.06	.27	.19	.36	.30
R ²	.54	.30	.12	.10	.46	.30	.27	.11	.52	.31

Dependent variables: Intention measures

	<i>Dependent variables: Intention measures</i>					
	REP Intention	LP Intention	TP Intention	OWS Intention	DEM Intention	DEM Intention
REP Attitude	.82	-	-	-	-	-
REP Pressure	.14	-	-	-	-	-
LP Attitude	-	.55	-	-	-	-
LP Pressure	-	.38	-	-	-	-
TP Attitude	-	-	.53	-	-	-
TP Pressure	-	-	.29	-	-	-
OWS Attitude	-	-	-	.60	-	-
OWS Pressure	-	-	-	.39	-	-
DEM Attitude	-	-	-	-	.87	-
DEM Pressure	-	-	-	-	.17	-
R ²	.63	.53	.62	.67	.69	.69

Note. REP = Republican Party; LP = Libertarian Party; TP = Tea Party; OWS = Occupy Wall Street; DEM = Democratic Party. Entries are unstandardized coefficients. NS = not statistically significant at .05 or less, two-tailed test. *N* = 2518.

attitude and normative pressure, but had no significant effect on those measures for the Occupy Wall Street. R^2 for the attitude and normative pressure direct measures range from 10% to 54%.

The bottom part of Table 5 shows the results of the reasoned action model with the direct measures predicting voting intention for each of the five presidential candidates. Because all the measures had the same scale, the unstandardized coefficients are interpretable as changes in the 1–7 intention scale and are directly comparable without standardization (Greenland, Schlesselman, & Criqui, 1986).

One pattern common to the two major parties is that intention was primarily a function of attitude and less a function of normative pressure: The ratio of the attitude effect relative to the normative pressure effect for Republican intention was almost 6 to 1 and over 5 to 1 for Democratic intention. The R^2 for predicting Republican intention was .63 and for Democratic intention was .69. However, the predictive superiority of attitude relative to normative pressure is not as strong for the other three groups. For Libertarian intention, the ratio of attitude to norm effect was 1.44, for Tea Party intention it was 1.83, and for Occupy Wall Street intention it was 1.54, *indicating that social norms have much more relative salience for those endorsing third party ideologies*. R^2 s for these three intention outcomes ranged from .53 to .69.

DISCUSSION

We found that underlying political beliefs could be classified into meaningful indices, although the nature of the items in the indices varied. For the two established political parties and the Libertarian party, all of the index items comprised political platitudes. Although there were specific policy recommendation types correlated with intention to support Republican, Democratic, and Libertarian candidates, these items never met the internal consistency criteria. This suggests to us that the two established parties (as well the Libertarian Party) are socially heterogeneous and their supporters find it easier to endorse broad politico-philosophical abstractions rather than specific policy recommendations. But this generalization does not hold up as well for the Occupy Wall Street index, which did include a specific policy item and is contradicted completely by the items making up the Tea Party index. The Tea Party index included one explicit policy item and two of the type that question previously well-accepted “truths.”

The belief indices were effective in predicting the two mediators of intention (beliefs and normative pressures), especially for the two established political parties. Libertarian and Occupy Wall Street mediators were more poorly predicted, largely because these mediators do not benefit from the other indices. For example, the belief indices predict Republican attitude and normative pressure using the Republican belief measure (as expected) but also the Tea Party and (negatively) the Democratic and Occupy Wall Street indices. The Libertarian and Occupy Wall Street direct measures do not get this “extra predictive power” from the other indices, suggesting that their adherents are more isolated in the American political landscape. Also note that in every case, the attitude mediator is better predicted than normative pressure.

These findings are consistent with the effect on intention of the direct measures, which shows that intention is largely a function of attitude for Democrats and Republicans but both mediators predict the other three intentional outcomes. Thus, this analysis suggests a stronger normative influence underlying voting intention when the Occupy Wall Street, Libertarian Party, or Tea Party support is evident. Although the normative

factor is significant for Democratic and Republican intention, it is much smaller than for the other three intention measures. *Therefore, it appears that normative affirmation is more salient when one ascribes to a third party ideology in a political environment dominated by a two-party system.*

Here the distinction between “bridging” and “bonding” types of civic engagement is important (Hill & Matsubayashi, 2005). Bridging group members attempt to *span and assimilate* social and political differences as the major political parties often attempt to accommodate political and social differences within them, with internal party factionalism the result of this kind of bridging failure. Thus, for the major parties, the index items are political abstractions such that a majority of party members can endorse them. For the major parties, normative pressures are therefore less important than attitudes. However, the opposite is true for the Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street supporters because these organizations are “bonding” groups that emphasize the *exclusivity and ideological purity* of members. Their index items reflect specific policy preferences and beliefs that clearly define in-group membership and easily identify out-group members (e.g., Health care should be free for everyone in the United States; All illegal immigrants should be deported back to their home countries regardless of the cost). For bonding organizations, normative pressure distinguishes members from non-members, so normative pressure is more important for supporters of the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street organizations.

Finally, note that nothing about the reasoned action approach requires or assumes a rational decision maker (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2004; Blank & Hennessy, 2012). It is true that salient beliefs are the key to predicting behavioral intention, but neither the accuracy nor the rationality of these beliefs has any role, contrary to misconceptions that using a reasoned action approach implies a reliance on rational cognitive processes (Reyna & Farley, 2006, p. 5). All that a reasoned action approach assumes is that the major determinants of intention are constructed from salient underlying beliefs and follow consistently (i.e., are accessible) from them (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000). Reasoned action assigns no privileged status to “rational” processing of the underlying beliefs in producing intentionality compared with “irrational” processing toward the same outcome (Ajzen, 2001). In fact, our findings suggest that strongly held non-normative beliefs are highly predictive of behavioral intention. Identifying salient underlying beliefs, no matter how politically outrageous or misguided, is the first task in predicting voting intention, just as it is to understand any other specific behavior.

CONCLUSION

Our goal was to demonstrate that an influential, theoretically coherent, and widely used cognitive theory of behavior change can be used to predict and help explain civic engagement, endorsement of particular political ideologies and groups, and voting intention in favor of (and opposed to) particular candidates. Our findings confirmed that intention to vote for a particular political candidate are determined by attitudes and beliefs about the expectancies implied by candidates *and* the normative context within which voting occurs. The reasoned action approach is a parsimonious model for voter choice, one based on decades of prior research and that was designed to explain individual behavior across a wide range substantive areas. We also believe that an issue belief approach like reasoned action has potential for training individuals to identify biased political advertising (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Lau, Smith, & Fiske, 1991) and reduce prejudice toward out-groups (Lilienfeld, Ammirati, & Landfield, 2009; Luguri, Napier, & Dovidio, 2012)

through changing underlying political beliefs. Reducing susceptibility to political advertising and lowering out-group prejudice would assist in fostering a more civil political culture.

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APPENDIX

The Original Political Belief Items

1. American values are best changed slowly and gradually
2. Faith and religion are major influences in my life
3. The Federal Reserve should be abolished
4. Democratic societies are best judged by how they treat their least fortunate citizens
5. In America, the rich get richer and the poor are left to fend for themselves
6. One of America’s greatest strengths is its racial and ethnic diversity
7. Illegal immigration is ruining the country
8. Bailouts of failing banks and corporations are schemes of large financial interests to maintain and expand their power
9. Gay and lesbian relationships should not be given any special legal status
10. An income tax where everyone pays the same percentage of their income is a better way for the government to raise revenue than the current system
11. The rags to riches “American dream” is dead
12. Big business serves the best interests of most Americans
13. Barack Obama was not born in the United States
14. Recreational drug use should be legal
15. Intelligent design should be taught in public schools as an alternative to the theory of evolution
16. The 9/11 terrorist attacks were planned and carried out by the United States government
17. The middle class is getting squeezed out of existence

18. An individual's choices about what is right for themselves and their family is no business of government
19. Animals have the same rights as humans
20. The proposed 999 tax plan (that is, 9% income tax, 9% sales tax, 9% corporate payroll tax) is a better way for the government to raise revenue than the current system
21. Health care should be free for everyone in the United States
22. The gap between rich and poor in the United States threatens democracy
23. Government should play an important role in providing for the economic security of its citizens
24. America is better off with as few government programs as possible
25. Before becoming a Christian, President Obama was raised as a Muslim
26. The Bush administration staged the 9/11 terrorist attacks to justify invading Iraq
27. Unregulated markets are the best way to distribute social and economic goods
28. Most wealthy people got that way through hard work and discipline
29. The main problem with American society is the influence of the federal government in daily life
30. All illegal immigrants should be deported back to their home countries regardless of the cost
31. Recently in America, 99% of people bailed out the richest 1% of people
32. The government should play a larger role in eliminating the gap between the richest people and everybody else
33. The United States government has covered up the real explanation for the 9/11 terrorist attacks
34. Corporate bailouts should be made illegal
35. Corporations should be taxed at a higher rate than individuals
36. The main problem with American society is the influence of multinational corporations and large banking monopolies in daily life
37. Charitable organizations like churches, the Knights of Columbus, and the Salvation Army are better able to reduce income inequality than government programs