Short Communication

Personality and political orientation

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A B S T R A C T

This study examined the incremental validity of the Big-Five personality traits over primarily demographic factors in predicting Left-Right political orientation (PO) in a large British adult sample. Gender and trait Openness was most strongly correlated with PO. The regression indicated that females who were better educated, less religious and of higher social class were more Left-Wing. Personality traits doubled the variance accounted for (4% to 9%) indicating that Open, more Agreeable people were more Left-Wing and Introverted, more Conscientious people more Right-Wing. Agreeableness and Neuroticism showed an interaction with social class, such that for high social class, Left-Wing orientation increased with Agreeableness (but not for low social class); and for high social class, Left-Wing orientation increased with Neuroticism, whilst for low social class, Right-Wing orientation increased with Neuroticism.

1. Introduction

There is an extensive, but scattered, literature on the relationship between personality traits and political beliefs and behaviours (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Eysenck & Wilson, 1978; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007). This study is concerned with the incremental validity of the Big Five personality traits over demographic and religious beliefs in explaining self-rated political orientation (PO).

It has been demonstrated that personality traits are logically and demonstrably associated with different (but related) political measures like voting, party membership, general interest in politics, taking part in demonstrations and discussions (Gerber et al., 2011). Mondak and Halperin (2008) found that Openness and Conscientiousness most consistently related to many political variables particularly political *knowledge and participation*. Brandstatter and Opp (2014) reviewed eleven studies on personality and politics and found that Openness was positively, and Agreeableness negatively, correlated with *political protesting*. In an Italian study Leone, Chirumbolo, and Desimoni (2012) found only Extraversion ($r = 0.16$) and Openness ($r = 0.27$) related to an *interest in politics*. The only common factor that these studies seem to show is the predominant role of trait Openness in both an interest, and taking part, in political issues and events.

Many studies in this area have used relatively small student populations (Jonason, 2014) and/or been interested in particular ideologies like Right Wing Authoritarianism (Leone et al., 2012) rather than

general politics. Some have been interested in very particular behaviours like turnout in elections and the way personality mediates the impact of political attitudes (party identification, political interest) with actual voter participation (Schoen & Steinbrecher, 2013). Others have looked at various demographic and experiential factors that mediate or interact with personality factors to influence political ideology, choice and behaviour (Caprara, Schwartz, Capanna, Vecchione, & Barbaranelli, 2006; De Neve, 2015).

There have been various attempts to get cross-cultural evidence of the reliability of the association between traits and political beliefs and participation such as the Korean study which showed Openness positively correlated with protest participation, rally attendance, internet activity and financial contributions; Agreeableness negatively associated with different forms of participation; and Conscientiousness associated positively with some activities (contacting officials, donations) but negatively with others (rally participation) (Ha, Kim, & Jo, 2013).

Other studies have examined personality and politics among specific groups like American State legislators (Dietrich, Lasley, Mondak, Remmel, & Turner, 2012). Fatke (2017) looked at the association between personality and political ideology in 21 countries and conclude the effects differ considerably from country to country. Another recent study explored the interesting question of how personality traits influenced party identification over time (Bakker, Hopmann, & Persson, 2015).

More recently Furnham and Cheng (2017) found Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Openness were significantly and positively

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Table 1
Correlational results.

Scale	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender	0.31 (0.46)	–										
2. Age	35.30 (12.50)	−0.01	–									
3. Education	4.51 (1.35)	0.03	−0.05**	–								
4. Social class	3.65 (1.35)	0.13**	−0.00	0.32**	–							
5. Political Orientation	5.60 (1.80)	−0.09**	−0.01	0.12**	−0.05**	–						
6. Religiousness	3.27 (2.61)	−0.14**	0.06**	0.02	0.00	−0.10**	–					
7. Extraversion	3.06 (0.83)	−0.06**	−0.01	0.04*	0.06**	−0.03*	0.02	–				
8. Agreeableness	3.67 (0.61)	−0.10**	0.04**	−0.01	−0.01	0.07**	0.13**	0.13**	–			
9. Conscientiousness	3.69 (0.68)	−0.10**	0.18**	0.04**	−0.00	−0.09**	0.06**	0.08**	0.17**	–		
10. Neuroticism	2.99 (0.83)	−0.21**	−0.10**	−0.07**	−0.12**	0.04**	0.01	−0.32**	−0.29**	−0.18**	–	
11. Openness	3.59 (0.65)	0.09**	0.02	0.16**	0.15**	0.17**	−0.03	0.20**	0.05	−0.08**	−0.08**	–

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

Table 2
Results from the three regressions.

Model	Beta	t
Model 1		
Gender	−0.10	−6.37***
Age	0.01	0.36
Education	0.16	9.38***
Social class	−0.09	−5.09***
Religiousness	−0.12	−7.31***
$F = 35.98^{***}$, Adj $R^2 = 0.04$		
Model 2		
Gender	−0.12	−7.05***
Age	0.02	1.05
Education	0.14	8.67***
Social class	−0.10	−5.89***
Religiousness	−0.12	−7.66***
Extraversion	−0.07	−4.22***
Agreeableness	0.10	6.08***
Conscientiousness	−0.10	−6.21***
Neuroticism	0.02	1.23
Openness	0.17	10.71***
$F = 40.23^{***}$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.09$		
Model 3		
Gender	−0.11	−6.86***
Age	0.01	0.83
Education	0.14	8.50***
Social class	−0.10	−6.00***
Religiousness	−0.12	−7.78***
Extraversion	−0.07	−4.24***
Agreeableness	0.10	6.08***
Conscientiousness	−0.10	−6.15***
Neuroticism	0.02	1.03
Openness	0.17	10.81***
Extraversion × Social class	0.00	0.16
Agreeableness × Social class	0.06	3.89***
Conscientiousness × Social class	0.01	0.41
Neuroticism × Social class	0.06	3.63***
Openness × Social class	0.02	1.52
$F = 28.67^{***}$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.10$		

*** $p < .001$.

associated with political interest, whereas Conscientiousness was negatively associated with political interest and voting behaviour in a large British sample.

One central issue is how much variance do personality traits account for with some studies indicating as much as a third (Brandstatter & Opp, 2014). There are three issues involved when comparing studies. The *first* is the measure of political beliefs and behaviour. These include voting preference and history; party allegiance and participation; interest and knowledge and orientation. Inevitably different outcome measures lead to different results. *Second*, there are different measures of personality though it should be noted that most measures of the Big Five are closely related, but this too could account for different results. *Third*, there is the sample which could be important because of the different political history in different countries.

In this study we look at PO asking people to rate themselves on a single Left vs Right wing scale which is a familiar concept to the British. We assumed based on previous research (see above studies) that Agreeableness (H1) and Openness (H2) would be associated with left-wing leanings whilst Conscientiousness would be more associated with right wing views (H3) (Brandstatter & Opp, 2014; Furnham & Cheng, 2017). Further, it was also predicted that females more than males (H4), better rather than less educated (H5) and higher rather than lower social class (H6) and less, rather than more religious (H7) participants would rate themselves as more left-wing. It was hypothesised the personality factors would account for as much variance as the demographic factors (H8) (Furnham & Cheng, 2017). Finally, as noted by Mondak and Halperin (2008), *"explanations of political behaviour centred primarily on predictors other than personality may gain considerable additional nuance if analysts give careful attention to the possibility that individuals' traits may magnify or constrain the effects of other processes."* (p. 361). A variable that seems particularly likely to have interactive effects with personality is social class since personality effects which affect degree of alignment with class interests should affect left/right wing orientation differently depending on social class identification. Thus, we also hypothesise (H9) that the effects of personality on political orientation are moderated by social class.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

There were 2644 females and 1210 males. In all 33% were between 18 and 30 years, 45% between 31 and 50 years and the remainder 50 and older. In all 36.4% had A Levels/12th grade or less; 39.9% had a university degree and 23.7% some post-graduate education. They classified themselves as to social class: 3.6% lower working class, 24.6% middle working class, 14.9% upper working class, 22.9% lower middle class, 29.9% middle-middle class, 4.8% upper middle class and 0.3% upper class. They also rated how religious they were on a 10 point scale: 1 = not at all to 10 = extremely. The mean 3.27 (SD = 2.60) with 65% with scores under 3. < 15% gave scores of 7 to 10.

2.2. Measures

Participants rated themselves on a 9 point Strongly Right Wing = 1 to Strongly Left Wing = 10 scale. The mean score was 5.60 (SD = 1.80) and the scores were normally distributed. The response of voting is coded as Yes/No. Personality traits were assessed by the 50 questions from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) (Goldberg, 1999). Responses (5-point, from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree") are