The big five personality factors and mass politics

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Abstract

In this paper, we argue that a stable set of characteristics—personality—can help explain mass political opinions and behavior. By analyzing data collected from over 750 people, we examine the influence of the Five-Factor Model of personality on ideology, partisanship, political efficacy, and two forms of political participation. After controlling for a host of demographic factors, we find that openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion help explain public opinion and political behavior. Neuroticism is the only factor that does not influence political life. We conclude by comparing these results to other findings in the field and suggest directions for future research.

"The political nature of man is indistinguishable from his personality as a whole." (Allport, 1929, p. 238)

Why do political opinions and behaviors vary so greatly? The vast majority of extant research focuses on the effects of demographics, geographic context, and political socialization. After taking these factors into account, however, there remains a great deal we do not know about what makes political opinions and behaviors vary so greatly. Even among people with similar demographic characteristics, contexts, and experiences, political opinions are far from uniform.

 Legendary social scientists such as Gordon Allport (1929), Harold Lasswell (1930), and Fred Greenstein (1969) have long suspected that another stable individual trait, personality, must structure political opinions and activities just as it does in other issue areas. After all, if personality influences how people relate to one another, how people organize the social world, and even the music people put on their iPods (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003), certainly it must also influence whether people are engaged in politics and what they believe about the proper role of government. In fact, the seminal work on voting behavior, the American Voter dedicated an entire chapter to personality and mass behavior, claiming that "...any account of behavior—political as well as social or economic—must lean heavily on personality theories" (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960, p. 499). Despite a general recognition that personality is important, decades of measurement difficulties combined with the lack of a coherent theoretical framework have caused this research to lag behind (Campbell et al., 1960; Lane, 1959; Milbrath, 1965). Only recently have personality studies found their way back into the literature on political attitudes.

 Although scholars are beginning to examine the influence of personality on mass politics, extant work has come to mixed conclusions regarding the specifics of the relationship. It is now generally accepted that personality affects mass political opinions, but we know less about which factor(s) matter and even less about the influence on political behavior. The field is also quite young, calling some prominent scholars to call for replication using different datasets and different measures (Mondak, Hibbing, Cnach, Seligson, & Anderson, 2010). In this paper, we seek to clarify which factors influence political opinions and participation. We also introduce a new personality instrument to the political psychology literature and provide a number of suggestions for future research.

Personality and the five-factor model

The history of psychology includes a number of different theories of personality, many of which stem from the "lexical hypothesis," which notes that "all important individual differences will have been noted by speakers...at some point in the evolution of the language and encoded in trait terms; by decoding these terms we can discover the basic dimensions of personality" (McCrae & John, 1992, p. 184). In an early application of this hypothesis, Allport (1937) found 4,500 different "trait terms" that described 4,500 different aspects of personality. In an effort to distill Allport's list to something more manageable, Cattell (1946) created clusters of synonyms based on the way people used common adjectives. After his
evaluation of language, Cattell discovered 12 (and later 16) distinct personality factors that were marked by “consistency of behavior (across situations and over time)” (Winter, 2003, p. 117).

After some debate, most personality researchers now subscribe to the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality, and the FFM has become commonplace in a number of literatures. Originally realized by reanalyzing Cattell’s work on the 16 factors (Tuple & Christal, 1961), the FFM suggests that personality can be summarized along five distinct factors—extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience (Goldberg, 1981). Although there remain critics of the concept (Pauonon & Jackson, 2000), as well as those who argue that five is too few (Mershon & Gorsuch, 1988) or too many (Block, 2001) factors, most personality scholars now believe that personality differences can be assessed based on an individual’s score on these five factors (McCrae & John, 1992). These factors are relatively stable across a person’s lifetime (Costa & McCrae, 1988), have a significant heritability coefficient (Costa & McCrae, 1992a; Loehlin, 1992), and have been documented in many languages (John & Srivastava, 1999). The convincing evidence for the robustness of the FFM led McCrae and John (1992) to refer to the five factors as “empirical fact, like the fact that there are seven continents or eight American presidents from Virginia” (p. 147).

The first of the five personality factors ranges from introversion at the low end of the scale to extraversion to the high end of the scale.1 This is probably the most commonly recognized factor, as many different models of personality dating from Jung (1923) to the present have used the notion of extraversion to describe differences between people. Extraversion is typically described with traits such as “warmth, gregariousness, positive emotions, and assertiveness” (Schoen & Schumann, 2007, p. 474). Extraverts are upbeat, energetic, active, friendly, talkative, happy, determined, dynamic, and assertive, whereas introverts are reserved and shy (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Zimbardo, 2002). Extraversion has been linked to outcomes including better work performance in customer service industries (Conte & Gintofft, 2005), personal accomplishment (Bakker, Van Der Zee, Lewig, & Dollard, 2006), and even whether someone is a “morning” or an “evening” person (Jackson & Gerard, 1996).

Agreeableness can be described with terms such as “appreciative, forgiving, generous, kind, sympathetic, and trusting” (McCrae & John, 1992, p. 178). People high in agreeableness are altruistic, trusting, soft hearted, authentic, cordial, generous, loyal, sincere, and sympathetic, whereas people low in agreeableness are suspicious, demanding, remote, and hostile (Winter, 2003). Agreeable people are also more benevolent and tend to hold more traditional values (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002).

The conscientiousness factor indicates the degree to which people control their impulses (Schoen & Schumann, 2007). People at the high end of conscientiousness are “thorugh, organized, industrious, ambitious, resourceful, reliable, constant, efficient, scrupulous, responsible, and enterprising” (Schoen & Schumann, 2007, p. 474). People toward the low end of this scale are marked by traits of “immaturity, impatience, laziness, and carelessness” (Schoen & Schumann, 2007, p. 474). Conscientious people have higher levels of academic achievement (Noftle & Robins, 2007), are more likely to be “morning people” (Jackson & Gerard, 1996), and are more likely to conform (Roccas et al., 2002).

People who score high on the neuroticism scale have difficulty with emotional stability and may be unable to control emotions such as “anxiety, anger, depression, discontent, and irritation” (Schoen & Schumann, 2007, p. 474). High scores on this domain represent people who are emotional and prone to worry, whereas low scorers are typically secure, relaxed, and unemotional. People higher in neuroticism tend to have lower social statuses (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001), and are less likely to have high personal achievement (Bakker et al., 2006).

Finaly, openness to experience refers to the exploration of novelty, tolerance of diversity, and breadth of one’s cultural interests. Those who score high in openness to experience are typically “curious, imaginative, creative, sharp, innovative, and original” (Schoen & Schumann, 2007, p. 474). Those who are less open to experience tend to be “rigid and close-minded” (Winter, 2003, p. 118). McCrae (1996) links this distinction to a number of social outcomes including authoritarianism (people who are open to new experiences are less likely to be authoritarian), family roles (people who score high on openness to new experiences adopt less traditional family roles), and friendship patterns (open people are friends with open people and closed people tend to be friends with closed people).

### The FFM and politics

Beginning in the late 1990s, researchers, primarily in psychology, began to explore the relationship between the Big Five and politics. In one of the first examples of this research, Caprara, Barbaranelli, and Zimbardo (1999) studied the relationship between personality and partisanship in Italy. Caprara and colleagues suggest that personality traits may indirectly affect attitudes toward political parties by shaping fundamental predispositions that, in turn, affect opinions about political parties. As a result, voters may be influenced by perceived personality traits of political candidates as much as by the political issues the candidates advance.
As for the influence of specific factors, Caprara et al. (1999) found that those high in extraversion and conscientiousness were more likely to endorse political parties espousing concern about distributive justice (i.e., the center-right platform), and those high on agreeableness and openness to experience were more likely to vote for candidates supporting “free market-oriented libertarians” (i.e., the center-left platform; p. 179). An expansion of this study in 2002 found that extraversion and agreeableness were the primary influences on vote choice and candidate evaluation (Caprara et al., 2002). A later study also revealed substantial evidence of a personality effect on vote choice, finding that high scores in agreeableness and openness to experience and low scores in extraversion and conscientiousness were associated with support for left-leaning candidates (Caprara, Schwartz, Capanna, Vecchione, & Barbaranelli, 2006). An article featuring a few of the same authors (Barbaranelli, Caprara, Vecchione, & Fraley, 2007) found that high agreeableness and openness to experience predicted intention to vote for John Kerry in the presidential election while high extraversion, high conscientiousness, and low neuroticism were associated with the desire to vote for George W. Bush.

Schoen and Schumann’s (2007) study of personality and partisanship in Germany provides further evidence that personality traits have an impact on partisan attitudes. They found that extraversion did not have any effect on partisan attitudes, but high scores on agreeableness and openness to experience, as well as low scores on conscientiousness, were associated with a vote for more liberal parties. Those high on the neuroticism factor were more inclined to support parties that offered shelter against material and cultural challenges; therefore, neuroticism was very influential in shaping voter choice between center-left and center-right parties.

Relying on a variety of data collection techniques, including traditional instruments as well as signs of behavioral residue, Carney, Jost, Gosling, and Potter (2008) and Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, and Morris (2002) found that political ideology can be predicted using two personality traits—conscientiousness and openness to experience. Liberals were lower in the first trait, but higher in the second. This is a far more parsimonious understanding of personality and ideology than what was found in previous studies.

Mondak and Halperin (2008) relied on a series of surveys and found varying results about the influence of personality traits on ideology and partisanship. Only conscientiousness was found to consistently influence ideology, while openness to experience and neuroticism were significant predictors in two of three cases, and extraversion and agreeableness were never found to influence ideology. Similar mixed findings can be found in their work on partisanship where conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience mattered in two of three cases, neuroticism mattered in one of three, and extraversion did not matter in any of their surveys. In later work, Mondak et al. (2010) highlight the importance of the interactions between personality and the environment, finding, for example, that personality and network size interact with one another, and only by considering both in tandem can researchers properly understand why certain people expose themselves to political opinions that diverge from their own. Finally, Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, and Ha (2010) showed that personality is an important influence on political attitudes, but that personality influences opinions on economic issues differently than it does on social issues. Further, they provided some evidence that the influence of personality on political attitudes varies by race.

Although this research agenda has taught us a great deal about the relationship between personality and mass politics, five problems stand out with the extant research. First, existing research has come to a mix of conclusions about the influence of personality traits on ideology and partisanship. There is strong (but not universal) evidence about the influence of conscientiousness and openness to experience but the extant research is far from consistent in its findings on extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Clearly, more work needs to be done to assess the conditions under which specific personality traits influence opinions. Second, the majority of what we know about personality and politics comes from international cases. Although we would expect many things to remain constant across political systems, the ways in which personality relates to specific political attitudes and behaviors may also vary across institutional contexts. Third, although extant studies have addressed how personality affects opinions on politics, we know less about how personality affects behavior and efficacy. Fourth, many (but not all) existing studies model the relationship between political opinions and personality as a bivariate one and do not control for potential confounding factors. Fifth, many of the existing studies use abbreviated measures of the FFM that are ideal for large-scale survey research, but tend to have considerable psychometric limitations (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). As we discuss below, we address all of these critiques in the analysis that follows.

Questions and hypotheses

In this paper, we examine the influence of the FFM on political opinions and behaviors. More specifically, we seek to determine which factors affect (a) ideology; (b) partisanship; (c) political efficacy; (d) voter registration; and (e) talking to friends about politics. We selected the first two dependent variables because ideology and partisanship are the most examined aspects of personality and politics and serve as the building blocks for political opinions and actions. Efficacy is generally considered to be vital to the health of a democracy.

Mondak et al. (2010) note this limitation, stating that although they use brief measures of the Big Five—these measures come at considerable cost.
and is likely influenced by personality traits, but there are few extant studies that model efficacy as a function of personality. Finally, we chose voter registration and talking to friends about politics because both are common political activities and illustrative of political behavior more generally. Based on extant research, we review our hypotheses below, beginning with those with the most empirical support.

**Ideology and partisanship**

Open-mindedness is often associated with being more accepting of a variety of lifestyles and life choices. People who are open minded are more likely to be pro-choice, accepting of alternative lifestyles, and generally more left leaning on a variety of other important social issues, upon which many base their ideology and partisanship. Carney et al. (2008), Gerber et al. (2010), and two of three surveys by Mondak and Halperin (2008) revealed that openness to experience is associated with being an ideological liberal. This leads us to our first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1.** People who score higher on openness to experience are more likely to favor liberal party platforms and ideologies.

We are likewise fairly confident in the influence of conscientiousness on ideology and partisanship. Right-leaning candidates and voters value responsibility, reliability, and industriousness—characteristics often associated with being conscientious. Indeed, much of the economic platform of conservatives and the Republican Party can easily be summarized using these three words. Most existing studies (Caprara et al., 1999, 2006; Carney et al., 2008; Schoen & Schumann, 2007) show that those with lower scores on conscientiousness are more likely to favor left-leaning politics and parties. Mondak and Halperin (2008) also generally support this finding, although one of their surveys does not reveal this relationship. This literature therefore suggests our second hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2.** Conscientious people are more likely to favor conservative party platforms and ideologies.

Similarly, most studies (Caprara et al., 1999, 2006; Schoen & Schumann, 2007) demonstrate that people who score higher on agreeableness tend to support ideologies and political platforms that emphasize "solidarity and collective well-being" (Caprara et al., 1999, p. 180). Across most contexts, this results in support for left-leaning (liberal) ideologies and partisanship (in the United States case, support for the Democratic Party). Although we hypothesize that this logic will hold in our sample, existing research is not unanimous in support of this notion. Carney et al. (2008) and Mondak and Halperin (2008) found no influence of agreeableness on ideology, although Mondak and Halperin did find that agreeableness influences partisanship in two of three cases.

**Hypothesis 3.** Agreeable people are more likely to favor liberal party platforms and ideologies.

The link between ideology, partisanship, and the last two personality factors is much less clear. Early studies (Caprara et al., 1999, 2006) found that extraverted people were more likely to support right-leaning parties, but no study since then has reinforced this link. Similarly, early studies found no influence of neuroticism on ideology or partisanship, although Mondak and Halperin’s (2008) recent work finds that neurotic people are more likely to be Republicans in one of three cases and more likely to be conservatives in two of three cases. Given the ambiguity of the literature on this question, we do not have formal hypotheses for these questions.

**Efficacy**

We believe efficacy is a key dependent variable when exploring the link between personality and politics as it is a key building block of political participation. Perhaps the most complete study of this subject relies on a sample of students at the University of Rome and finds that people who score higher in openness to experience have higher levels of political efficacy (Vecchione & Caprara, 2009). They posit that this relationship occurs because people who score higher in openness to experience tend to score higher in critical thinking—a trait that has been found to be related to efficacy in many areas. Vecchione and Caprara also found that people who score higher in extraversion are more assertive, persuasive, and dominant, and these traits translate directly into political efficacy. Mondak and Halperin (2008) also examined the relationship between personality and efficacy, but came to mixed conclusions, finding that while neuroticism never had an influence on efficacy, extraversion did on one of five cases, agreeableness on three of five cases (although in two of them in opposite directions), conscientiousness on two of five cases, and openness to experience on three of five cases. Although we are open to the possibility of other findings, we derive our expectations from the findings of Vecchione and Caprara and therefore hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 4.** People who are more open to new experiences are more politically efficacious.

**Hypothesis 5.** Extraverted people are more politically efficacious.

**Political behavior**

There is less existing literature to guide our hypotheses about political behaviors, but the basic tendencies of these personalities and some evidence from Mondak and Halperin (2008)
provide some direction and expectations. For instance, agreeable people are generally considered most likely to be motivated by duty and obligation. As a result, our next hypothesis suggests that:

**Hypothesis 6.** People who are more agreeable are more likely to be registered to vote.

Conscientious people tend to place a high priority on reliability and responsibility. In addition to being a necessary condition of voting, registering to vote requires some level of attention to detail, responsibility, and forethought. As a result, we expect that conscientious people would be more likely to be registered to vote. Although we believe that these hypotheses are logical extensions of what we know about conscientiousness and agreeableness, we should note that Mondak and Halperin (2008) found no influence of these traits on voter turnout and limited influence on other forms of political participation.

**Hypothesis 7.** Conscientious people are more likely to be registered to vote.

Our final model examines the frequency with which a person talks to his or her friends about politics. As many studies have indicated, talking about politics is an important component of political life. Here we believe that the key personality factor predicting whether a person talks about politics will be extraversion. Extraverted people are generally much more expressive with their feelings and are more likely to “wrestle with ideas” verbally than their counterparts who are less extraverted. This relationship is born out in two of Mondak and Halperin’s (2008) models ($p < .05$), not found in one, and approaches statistical significance in the fourth ($p < .1$).

**Hypothesis 8.** Extroverted people are more likely to talk to their friends about politics.

**Data and methods**

To test these hypotheses, we rely on a questionnaire given to 760 staff, faculty, and students at a midsized state university. Approximately 50% of the sample had less than a college degree, 68% was female, and 90% was White. Although this certainly qualifies as a convenience sample, we do not believe that this presents a great threat to external validity for three reasons. First, although the distribution of personality across these groups may not mirror society at large, there is no reason to believe that the way in which personality affects opinions and behaviors will be different for these groups than it is in other groups in society (Cooper, McCord, & Socha, 2011). Indeed, if the effects of personality are stable, they should be evident no matter what the group selected. Second, following Kam, Wilking, and Zechmeister (2007), we include staff in our sample as they mirror the larger population across a host of demographic, political, and social indicators, and thus provide a useful (if underused) sampling frame for psychological and political research. Third, we asked respondents to indicate whether they are faculty, staff, or students, allowing us to control for the group when we model our results and ensuring that our results are not merely unique to one of the three groups we study.

The questionnaire included three sections. The first section consists of a personality assessment instrument. Although Costa and McCrae’s (1992b) Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) is perhaps the best-known personality measure based on the FFM, it presents two problems for many researchers. First, it is expensive, rendering it an unrealistic option for some researchers, particularly the ones who are seeking large samples. Second, filling out the 240-question NEO-PI-R can be an onerous task for many participants. As a result, it is simply not feasible for many large-scale uses and is almost impossible to use on a survey that includes other questions. Costa and McCrae have developed a shorter version, known as the NEO-FFI, that only includes 60 items, that addresses some of the length issues, but it, too, is quite expensive.

Fortunately, researchers have developed other tests that measure the five factors of personality and are similar to the NEO-PI-R and the NEO-FFI (which stands for Neuroticism-Extroversion-Openness Five Factor Inventory, but includes all five factors). The M5-336 Personality Questionnaire is one such measure that is available at no cost. The M5-336 is a 336-item questionnaire that measures personality on the five personality domains, and also includes the relevant facets within each broader domain. There are two shortened versions (the M5-50 and M5-100) that are reliable measures of the five factors. Given our quest for a larger sample size and more external validity, we used the M5-50 Personality Questionnaire, a 50-question version of the M5-336 that is relatively easy to complete but does not include the facets. The M5-50 includes ten questions for each of the five factors. For each question, respondents are asked to indicate whether the statement is inaccurate, moderately inaccurate, neither, moderately accurate, or accurate. The answers are then combined to form a score on each factor for each individual ranging from 10 (indicating that the person scores at the lowest level on that trait) to 50 (indicating that the person scores high on that trait). A sample of the questions from this instrument is included in Appendix A.

Next, we pause briefly to consider the reliability of the M5-50 scale of personality. Table 1 presents Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for each of the five factors. As you can see, all factors scale fairly well, with reliability coefficients ranging from .75 to .86—all of which are consistent with minimum suggested scores (Carmine & Zeller, 1979) as well as with similar scales in the field (Caprara et al., 2006). We also con-
ducted a confirmatory factor analysis to further examine the reliability and construct validity of the scale. Here we find a reliability coefficient rho of .82—well within the range of good reliability. The root mean squared error of approximation of .068 also signifies a very good fit. Every question was significant in its proposed factor, providing further evidence of construct validity. The structure coefficients ranged from .417 to .666 for agreeableness, .480 to .726 for conscientiousness, .433 to .685 for extraversion, .452 to .844 for neuroticism, and .295 to .757 for openness to experience. For further evidence of the construction, reliability, and validity of this instrument see Socha, Cooper, and McCord (2010).

The second section of the questionnaire includes questions about partisanship, ideology, efficacy, and participation. All are based on standard questions from the National Election Studies (Sapiro, Rosenstone, & the National Election Studies, 2002). The third and final section of the questionnaire contains demographic questions for gender, race, age, and education. This allows us to control for these variables in our analysis as well as determine if there are any preexisting differences between groups. All of these questions are listed in Appendix A.

**Results**

We begin our analysis by examining the results of a series of pairwise correlations. Table 2 suggests that the factors are correlated. This is, of course, similar to what was found in previous literature. Moving to the relationships between the factors and our dependent variables of interest, only openness to experience is positively associated with party identification in the bivariate context. Recall that we had expected openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness to be associated with ideology and partisanship. Moving to the results for ideology, we see that extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience are all correlated with whether someone is a liberal or conservative. For efficacy, our hypotheses about openness to experience and extraversion are confirmed, but surprisingly, we also find that neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience are positively associated with efficacy. We had expected that people who are more agreeable and conscientious would be more likely to register to vote and both hypotheses are confirmed here. Finally, we had expected that only extraversion
would be associated with whether someone talked to his or her friends about politics, but extraversion and openness to experience were both found to be significant predictors in the bivariate context.

Table 3 presents the results for the first three models predicting liberal ideology, Democratic Party identification, and political efficacy. Recall that our primary hypotheses suggest that openness to experience will be positively associated with all three dependent variables, conscientiousness will be negatively associated with liberal ideology and Democratic partisan identification, and agreeableness will be positively associated with political efficacy. We also include a host of control variables that are generally associated with all three variables including sex, race, and education, and status as faculty, staff, or student.4

The first column of the data presents the results of a model predicting ideology. The dependent variable ranges from 1 to 7, where 1 indicates extremely conservative and 7 indicates extremely liberal. Because the dependent variable is ordinal and not normally distributed, we estimate this model using an ordinal logistic regression model. The cell entries are ordinal logistic regression coefficients and the numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

The results suggest that people who score higher on openness to experience are more likely to be self-identified liberals than those who are less open to new experiences (p < .001). Also, consistent with our hypothesis, conscientiousness is negatively related to liberal ideology (p < .001), suggesting that the more conscientious someone is, the more likely he or she is to be an ideological conservative. Agreeableness appears to be negatively associated with liberal ideology, although the relationship only approaches standard levels of statistical significance (p < .1).

Of course, it is difficult to understand the substantive influence of these variables by looking at the coefficients alone. To estimate effect sizes, we used CLARIFY (Tomz, Wittenberg, & King, 2001) to compute the predicted probability of someone

Table 3 The Effect of Personality on Political Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ideology Ordered logit coefficient (SE)</th>
<th>Party identification Ordered logit coefficient (SE)</th>
<th>Political efficacy Unstandardized regression coefficient (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>.00 (.01)</td>
<td>-.01 (.01)</td>
<td>08*** (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>-.03* (.02)</td>
<td>-.01 (.01)</td>
<td>14*** (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>-.04*** (.01)</td>
<td>-.02** (.01)</td>
<td>.00 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>.00 (.01)</td>
<td>.01 (.01)</td>
<td>-.01 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to experience</td>
<td>.24*** (.02)</td>
<td>.18*** (.01)</td>
<td>-.03 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.24 (.17)</td>
<td>.11 (.14)</td>
<td>.41 (.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.15 (.27)</td>
<td>-.64*** (.22)</td>
<td>.75 (.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.13* (.07)</td>
<td>.13** (.05)</td>
<td>.16 (.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>.17 (.27)</td>
<td>-.25 (.21)</td>
<td>1.24** (.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>-.23 (.22)</td>
<td>-.69*** (.17)</td>
<td>1.54*** (.48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 614 748 748

Note. We do not report the cutpoints for each level of the dependent variable for the ordinal logistic regression models. The F refers only to the efficacy model, which uses ordinary least squares regression.

***p < .01. **p < .05. *p < .1, two-tailed.

4We include all three groups, but to avoid the "dummy variable trap" only two of the groups appear in the model. Staff are in the model as the base term. A positive and significant result on one of these variables would indicate that that group scored higher on the dependent variable than the staff.

4Although the relationship between personality and the outcome variables generally does not vary by group, it is important to note that the distribution of personality is different for faculty, students, and staff. In addition, students are more politically efficacious and more Republican than staff.
being a liberal (a 6 or 7 on the 7-point scale) at each point on the personality scale, while holding all other independent variables at their sample means. Figure 1 plots the predicted probability of someone being a liberal at different levels of the openness to experience scale, while holding all other independent variables at their sample means (King, Tomz, & Wittenberg, 2000). As you can see from looking at the solid line, openness to experience has a strong influence on the probability of being a liberal. While someone who scores at the lowest observed end of the personality scale has essentially no chance of being a liberal, someone who scores a 50 on openness has almost a .40 probability of being a liberal. Figure 1 also plots the probability of being a liberal across different scores of conscientiousness and agreeableness. A person who is at the low range of conscientiousness has almost a .70 probability of being a liberal as opposed to just over a .40 probability for someone who scores at the high end of conscientiousness. We find similar patterns for the influence of agreeableness. These effects are substantively as well as statistically strong.

The second column of the results in Table 3 reveals the results of an ordinal logistic regression model predicting partisan identification. This dependent variable is measured on the traditional 7-point partisan identification scale where higher numbers indicate Democratic leanings. The column entries are ordinal logistic regression coefficients and the numbers in parentheses are standard errors. As we would expect, the model results look fairly similar to those in the ideology model. Consistent with our hypotheses, people who score higher on the openness to experience dimension ($p < .01$) and lower on the conscientiousness dimension ($p < .05$) are more likely to be Democrats.

Figure 2 plots the predicted probability of being a Democrat (a 6 or 7 on the dependent variable) at each level of personality, holding all other independent variables at their sample means. The substantive significance of openness to experience on partisanship is quite strong. A person with a low openness to experience score has virtually no chance of being a Democrat versus a probability of almost .8 for a person with a personality score of 50. Conversely, the probability of being a Democrat drops steadily from about .85 for a person with a low conscientiousness score to just above .70 for a person with a conscientiousness score of 50.

The third column of the results in Table 3 displays the results of the model predicting political efficacy. This dependent variable is made up of the responses to four standard questions about political efficacy, all of which are presented in Appendix A. Questions were standardized so that higher numbers always indicate more efficacy, then added together to form one variable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .72$). The variable ranges from 3 to 28 and is normally distributed, so we estimate this model using OLS regression. Cell entries are OLS coefficients and the numbers in parentheses are standard errors. We had expected people who scored higher on the agreeableness dimension to be more efficacious. The results support this hypothesis ($p < .01$), but also demonstrate that extroverted people are also more likely to be politically efficacious ($p < .01$).

Figure 3 plots the predicted mean political efficacy across each level of the two significant personality dimensions. The
results suggest that both results are substantively important, although the effect of agreeableness is particularly pronounced; moving from a predicted efficacy score of 13 for a person with a low agreeableness score to a prediction of over 17 for someone who displays strong tendencies toward agreeableness.

Table 4 moves from examining attitudes to behaviors, predicting whether someone is registered to vote in the first column of the data and whether he or she talks to his or her friends about politics in the second column. Both dependent variables are dichotomous (1 = registered to vote in the first model; 1 = talk to friends about politics in the second model); therefore, we estimate these models with logistic regression (Menard, 1995).

Consistent with our hypotheses, it appears that people who score higher on the agreeableness and conscientiousness
factors are more likely to be registered to vote \( (p < .01) \). Figure 4 plots the probability of being registered to vote across the range of the three personality scales. Conscientiousness and agreeableness both appear to have strong effects on the probability of being registered to vote. Someone with a low agreeableness score has less than a .20 probability of registering to vote as opposed to a probability of almost .80 for a person with an agreeableness score of 50. Conversely, a person with a low conscientiousness score has a .40 probability of voting compared to a probability of almost .80 for a person with a 50 on conscientiousness.

The final column of the data in Table 4 suggests that, consistent with our expectation, people who are more open to new experiences \( (p < .01) \) and people who are more extroverted are more likely to talk to friends about politics \( (p < .01) \). The predicted probabilities in Figure 5 suggest that this effect is substantively important. A person with an openness to experience score of 19 (the lowest observed score on this scale) has just over a .38 probability of talking to friends about politics, as opposed to over a .70 probability for a person who is very open to new experiences. The results for extraversion are quite similar.

**Table 4** The Effect of Personality on Political Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Registered to vote Logit coefficient (SE)</th>
<th>Talked to friends about politics Logit coefficient (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>.00 (.02)</td>
<td>.05*** (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>.10*** (.03)</td>
<td>-.03 (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>.06** (.02)</td>
<td>.00 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>.03 (.02)</td>
<td>-.01 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to experience</td>
<td>-.05 (.03)</td>
<td>.06*** (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-.13 (.35)</td>
<td>-.40** (.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.55*** (.40)</td>
<td>.38 (.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.27 (.16)</td>
<td>.05 (.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>-.93 (.74)</td>
<td>-.22 (.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>-.54 (.60)</td>
<td>.30 (.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.435 (2.13)</td>
<td>-.222*** (1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \chi^2 )</td>
<td>49.36***</td>
<td>63.03***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ***p < .01. **p < .05. *p < .1, two-tailed.

**Discussion**

After years of debate, personality researchers have coalesced around a single measure of personality, the FFM. In this paper, we have demonstrated that four of the five factors in the FFM can help explain political opinions and behaviors in the United States. Even while controlling for a host of traditional demographic factors, we find that openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion can help explain mass political opinions and behavior with considerable strength. Only neuroticism, a trait that has been found influential in some other studies of personality and politics, is insignificant in all of our models.

To place our findings in the context of previous work, Table 5 summarizes our findings along with relationships that other scholars have found between each factor and the dependent variables we examine in this paper. Only 7 (of 25 possible) relationships are confirmed in every case. We are in
### Table 5  Summary of Results

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<td><strong>Ideology (liberal)</strong></td>
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<td>Previous studies</td>
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<td><strong>Party identification (left-leaning)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous studies</td>
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<td>Previous studies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Talked about politics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous studies</td>
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<td>+</td>
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</table>

**Note.** This table summarizes the results from this study, as well as all previous studies that examined these relationships. A “+” indicates that a study (or a model within a study) found a positive and statistically significant relationship between that factor and the dependent variable. A “−” indicates a negative and statistically significant relationship and a “0” indicates that the study (or model) indicated no relationship between the factor and the dependent variable. Studies examined were Caprara et al. (2002), Caprara et al. (2006), Carney et al. (2008), Gerber et al. (2010), Mondak and Halperin (2008), Schoen and Schumann (2007), and Vecchione and Caprara (2009). “Bivariate” represents the results of the bivariate results in this paper and “Multivariate” summarizes the multivariate results from this paper. An extended version of this paper with specific cites for each entry will be made available on the contact author’s Web site.
agreement with previous published work that people who are open to new experiences and people who are not conscientious are more likely to be ideological liberals. We also agree that extraversion has no influence on party identification, and that extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience have no influence on whether someone is registered to vote. There are a few relationships that only differ in one case. It seems likely that neuroticism does not influence party identification, that agreeableness does not influence ideology, and that higher scores in openness to experience are correlated with a greater likelihood of supporting the left-leaning party. Similarly, most of the evidence suggests that neuroticism does not influence efficacy, but openness to experience does. Finally, most evidence suggests that neuroticism does not influence whether a person talked to his or her friends about politics, but that openness to experience does. The remaining 12 relationships, however, seem to be the source of more controversies. Perhaps these discrepancies are due to different political contexts, different sampling strategies, or differences in personality instruments. Future studies should continue to explore the relationship between personality and politics, paying particular attention to these relationships where findings are more inconsistent.

In addition to helping clarify the specific of the relationship between personality and politics, this paper is also significant because it is the first to introduce the M5-50 to studies of personality and politics. Mondak et al. (2010) cite the importance of considering different instruments to measure personality. The M5-50 is valid and reliable, relatively short, and free. As we demonstrate here, it holds much promise for the study of personality and politics. As political psychologists search through the myriad of personality instruments, they would be well advised to consider the M5-50.

Although we believe this study contributes important insights to the study of personality and politics, it is, of course, not without its limitations. First, and most obviously, this study uses a sample of employees and students at one university. Although we do not believe this sampling strategy invalidates the results, it is clearly less than ideal. In particular, this design does not allow us to determine how the relationship between personality and politics varies across political cultures. Our use of the M5-50 also has its limitations. Although we believe it is important to introduce this measure to the political psychology literature, it makes it more difficult to compare our results to others. Future studies should compare all of the extant personality assessment instruments in the context of personality and politics to determine when and how results can be dependent on the instrument used.

Many other research questions remain about the influence of personality on mass politics. It would be particularly instructive to look for interactions between personality and other individual level traits. Are some personality types affected by peers more than others? As for participation, a natural research question might ask whether people of different personality types respond to different types of motivations. For example, social pressure (Gerber, Green, & Larimer, 2008) might be a more effective strategy to reach agreeable than non-agreeable people, whereas appeals to duty might be more influential for those with high levels of conscientiousness. The next generation of work on personality and politics might also investigate questions about the interactions between personality and political context. Does personality influence efficacy differently in different political systems? Are extraverted people more comfortable with forms of government that promote debate? The potential for research in this area is virtually limitless and whatever the answers are, this research program will help us better understand how people learn political values and how they translate those values into action.

References


Appendix A: Partisanship, Ideology, Efficacy, and Participation Questions

Partisanship
In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?
• Answers range from 1 to 7 where 1 indicates a strong Republican and 7 indicates a strong Democrat

Ideology
We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Where do you place yourself on the following scale?
• Answers range from 1 to 7 where 1 indicates extremely conservative and 7 indicates extremely liberal

Sex
What is your sex?
• Answers were either male or female

Efficacy
People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.
• Answers range from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree)

Registered to vote
Are you registered/eligible so that you could vote in the November election if you wanted to?
• Yes, no, or unsure

Talked about politics
During the current presidential campaign, have you talked to any people and tried to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates?
• Yes, No

Race
What is your ethnicity?
• Answer choices are: African-American or Black/Asian-American/Hispanic or Latino/Middle-Eastern/Native-American/White or Caucasian

Education
What is your highest educational attainment?
• Answer choices are: Some high school/High school diploma/Some college/Associate’s degree/Bachelor’s degree/Master’s degree/Doctoral degree

Appendix B: Sample Questions from the M5-50

Examples of openness to new experiences
Have a vivid imagination
Carry the conversation to a higher level
Enjoy hearing new ideas
• Answers for all personality indicators range from 1 (inaccurate) to 5 (accurate)

Examples of conscientiousness
Pay attention to details
Make plans and stick to them
Am always prepared
• Answers for all personality indicators range from 1 (inaccurate) to 5 (accurate)

Examples of agreeableness
Believe that others have good intentions
Make people feel at ease
Believe that others have good intentions
• Answers for all personality indicators range from 1 (inaccurate) to 5 (accurate)

**Examples of extraversion**
Am skilled in handling social situations
Know how to captivate people
Make friends easily
• Answers for all personality indicators range from 1 (inaccurate) to 5 (accurate)

**Examples of neuroticism**
Am not easily bothered by things
Feel comfortable with myself
Am very pleased with myself
• Answers for all personality indicators range from 1 (inaccurate) to 5 (accurate)