



# Personality correlates of party preference: The Big Five in five big European countries

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## ABSTRACT

The Big Five Model was used to assess the role of personality traits in orienting voting choice across five European countries ( $n = 1288$ ). Findings from Italy, Spain, Germany, Greece, and Poland showed that the Big Five were linked to party preference in theoretically consistent ways. Traits had substantial effects on voting, whereas the socio-demographic characteristics of gender, age, income, and educational level had weaker influences. In each country, voters' traits are seemingly congruent with the policies of their preferred party. The Openness trait has been shown to be the most generalizable predictor of party preference across the examined cultures. Conscientiousness was also a valid predictor, although its effect was less robust and replicable. Similarities and differences across countries were discussed and linked to the nature of the respective political discourses.

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## 1. Introduction

After a long period of relative neglect, personality traits received scholarly attention in research on political behavior in recent years. Leaving aside studies dealing with political participation (Mondak, 2010), scholars found distinct personality profiles on the Big Five (John, 1990) to be associated with preferences for different political parties and ideologies. Among the Big Five, Openness predicts liberal and left-wing political views in a wide range of countries, including Germany (Riemann, Grubich, Hempel, Mergl, & Richter, 1993; Schoen & Schumann, 2007), Italy (Caprara, Schwartz, Capanna, Vecchione, & Barbaranelli, 2006; Caprara, Schwartz, Vecchione, & Barbaranelli, 2008), Belgium and Poland (Van Hiel, Kossowska, & Mervielde, 2000), and the US (Barbaranelli, Caprara, Vecchione, & Fraley, 2007; Carney, Jost, Gosling, Niederhoffer, & Potter, 2008; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003; Jost, 2006). The Conscientiousness trait predicts conservative and right-wing political views. Unlike Openness and Conscientiousness, Energy/Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability have weaker and less consistent relationships with political orientation. Yet, prior

research is limited to specific political settings and mostly focused on measures of political conservatism and/or liberalism and ideological self-placement.

The current study expands on past work by examining the effect of the Big Five on vote choice in five European countries that differ widely in terms of cultural and historical roots. We build on the notion that personality traits serve as distal predictors of vote choice. Traits are stable dispositions that are partially inherited and formed early in life. In interaction with environmental factors, these dispositions shape socio-political attitudes, value orientation, and policy preferences (Caprara, Vecchione, & Schwartz, 2009; Lee, Ashton, Ogunfowora, Bourdage, & Shin, 2010; McCrae, 1996; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008), which in turn affect vote choice. Voters, *inter alia*, aim at voting for a party that does not contradict their ideological and policy predisposition. In a nutshell, vote choice is rooted in personality traits since citizens vote for parties whose ideological and policy stances fit their ideological preferences, that in turn are affected by basic personality dispositions.

We examined the impact of traits on voting in five European countries, by exploring whether findings are consistent across nations that differ considerably in terms of political systems, party systems, and democratic tradition. We first studied Italy, Spain, Germany, and Greece. In these four countries, the political system

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is essentially organized around two ideological poles (left and right) and includes two dominant center-left and center-right parties. We then extended the study to Poland, where the current electoral competition is taking place between two main right-wing parties. This represents a rather unusual case in the European political scene. Taken together, this analysis may contribute to deepen our understanding of voting behavior in a cross-national perspective, which is a central theme of political science (Mondak, 2010).

In each country, we focused on the choice between the two main parties around which most of the electoral competition revolves. We then included voters of minor parties, when the number of cases was large enough to obtain reliable estimates. Thereby, we expand on prior research which mostly ignored third parties' voters or conflated them with the voters of main parties. Both strategies are flawed because third parties have gained in political significance and have specific ideological and policy stances that distinguish them from main parties.

## 2. Hypotheses

In specifying hypotheses on the impact of traits on voting, we rely on the notion that high scores on personality traits increase the likelihood of casting a vote for parties with a specific ideological and policy profile. Two dimensions give structure to political competition in a variety of countries. The socio-economic, or left–right, dimension refers to the role of government in the economy with left-wing citizens being supportive of state intervention into the economy. The second dimension refers to social issues with left-wing citizens being tolerant of new life-styles and conservatives championing traditional values (Benoit & Laver, 2006). In Italy, Spain, Germany, and Greece, the main parties are center-right or center-left on both dimensions. In Poland, the two main parties are both center-right, although the Civic Platform party (PO) is more left-wing on social issues than the Law and Justice party (PiS), which is more left-wing on economic issues than its main competitor. Since in the current Polish political debate social issues are dominating over economic ones, we henceforth treat PO as center-left party and PiS as a center-right. The third parties included in our analysis resemble each other in policy terms because they are left-wing on both dimensions but differ from traditional center-left parties in that they put special emphasis on social issues.

We hypothesized that high scores on Openness increase the likelihood of casting a vote for parties that hold left-wing stances on social issues. This trait predicts support for change and tolerance of new ideas and has been shown to be negatively related with Right-Wing Authoritarianism (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008), and with Hierarchy (vs. Equality) Orientation and Social Conformity (vs. Change) Orientation, two broad dimensions of socio-political attitudes strongly related to individuals' preference for right-wing ideologies (Lee et al., 2010). We therefore expect that high scores on this trait are associated with voting for center-left parties. Moreover, we propose large effects of Openness on vote choice for the minor left parties, which put particular emphasis on their liberal stance on social issues.

High scorers on Conscientiousness are inclined to obey social rules calling for impulse control. As a result, Conscientiousness should increase the likelihood of casting a vote for center-right parties, which have a conservative stance on social issues. This also comports with the view that conservatives are more motivated than liberals by norm attainment, order, and support of the status quo (Jost, 2006). We also expect that high scores on Agreeableness increase the likelihood of casting a vote for left parties, which support the welfare state. The Agreeableness trait is indeed negatively related with social dominance orientation, namely a general attitudinal orientation toward intergroup relations reflecting the extent

to which one prefers hierarchical relations in the society and an unequal distribution of resources (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Given the emphasis Italy's main center-right party puts on free-enterprise, we expect that Energy/Extraversion predicts a preference for this party (Caprara et al., 2006, 2008). Finally, we do not expect any specific effect of Emotional Stability on vote choice because this trait does not appear to relate to a specific policy dimension.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Participants and procedures

Self-report questionnaires were administered to members of the adult population eligible to vote in Italy ( $n = 458$ ), Spain ( $n = 146$ ), Germany ( $n = 147$ ), Greece ( $n = 211$ ), and Poland ( $n = 316$ ). In each country, data were gathered by university students who were briefed on the general aims of the research and instructed on how to administer the questionnaires. Each student earned course credits for his/her participation, which consisted in filling out the questionnaires and collecting data from two to four people, balancing age and gender. All participants were informed and consented to participate in the study. They were assured that their responses were anonymous. Data were collected as part of a course assignment at the universities of Rome (Italy), Burgos (Spain), Mainz (Germany), Athens (Greece), and Warsaw (Poland). Response rates in the various countries ranged from 85% (Spain) to 91% (Italy).

#### 3.1.1. Italy

The mean age of participants was 37.7 years ( $SD = 14.7$ ); 43.2% were male. Three percent of the participants had an elementary school education, 8% had a junior high school, 41% a high school diploma, and 47% a college degree. The annual income mode was 'from 29,000 to 35,000 Euro' (48.8%).

#### 3.1.2. Spain

Age  $M = 31.9$  years ( $SD = 13.3$ ); 38.7% male; 15% elementary school education, 44% junior high school, 33% high school, 8% college; annual income mode = '<5000 Euro' (38.1%).

#### 3.1.3. Germany

Age  $M = 39.3$  years ( $SD = 17.0$ ); 49.0% male; 13% elementary school education, 50% junior high school, 20% high school, 17% college.

#### 3.1.4. Greece

Age  $M = 38.1$  years ( $SD = 15.1$ ); 45.9% male; 2% elementary school education, 45% junior high school, 23% high school, 30% college; annual income mode = '5000–10,000 Euro' (25.9%).

#### 3.1.5. Poland

Age  $M = 35.1$  years ( $SD = 12.2$ ); 43.2% male; 9% elementary school education, 9% junior high school, 45% high school, 37% college; annual income mode = '10,000–15,000 Euro' (30.5%).

### 3.2. Measures

#### 3.2.1. Personality traits

In Italy, Spain and Poland, we used a shortened version of the Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ). The native language versions of the BFQ have been previously validated in Italy (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Perugini, 1993) and Spain (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Borgogni, 1995); in Poland the BFQ was translated and back-translated by native bilingual researchers. In Germany and Greece,

we used the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), a 60-item short version of the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992). High correlations between the analogous scales of the BFQ and the NEO-PI confirmed their convergent validity (Caprara et al., 1993). Table 1 presents means, standard deviations and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the scales. For ease of comparison, NEO-FFI Neuroticism has been reversed and labeled Emotional Stability.

### 3.2.2. Voting

We measured political choice directly by asking participants which party they had voted for in the most recent national election. In Italy, we included the two largest national parties, the center-rightist People of Freedom Party (PDL,  $n = 150$ ) and the center-leftist Democratic Party (PD,  $n = 251$ ). We also included voters of Italy of Values ( $n = 34$ ), a liberal, populist and anti-corruption party, and the Rainbow left ( $n = 23$ ), a federation of parties which includes ex-communists and the Greens. In Spain we considered the conservative Popular Party (PP,  $n = 60$ ) and the social-democrat Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE,  $n = 86$ ). In Germany, the examined parties were the right-wing Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU,  $n = 49$ ), the left-wing Social Democrats (SPD,  $n = 55$ ), and the Greens ( $n = 43$ ). Greek parties were the liberal-conservative New Democracy (ND,  $n = 110$ ), and the social-democratic Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK,  $n = 70$ ). We also included the orthodox communists (KKE,  $n = 21$ ) and the radical left (SYRIZA,  $n = 20$ ). In Poland, we included voters of PiS ( $n = 99$ ) and PO ( $n = 217$ ), the two center-right parties currently dominating the political scene.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Bivariate correlations

We first computed point-biserial correlations to assess the association between individuals' socio-demographic characteristics and their choice between the two main national parties. We then used partial correlations to examine relations of traits to voting, controlling for socio-demographic characteristics. In each country, we coded vote (0) for parties that are located more on the right of the political spectrum and (1) for parties that are located more on the left. As shown in the top section of Table 2, education was related to a preference for center-left in Italy, whereas income was related to a preference for center-left in Poland. The rest of the coefficients were lower than .15, when significant. Among traits (bottom section of Table 2), Openness was related to a preference for center-left in Italy, Spain, Germany, and Poland, but not in Greece. Agreeableness was related to a preference for center-left in Spain. Conscientiousness was related to a preference for center-right in Germany. Energy/Extraversion was related to a preference for center-right in Italy, though more weakly. Emotional Stability was unrelated to party preferences in all examined countries.

### 4.2. Regression analyses

Hierarchical logistic regression with binary outcomes (0 = center-right, 1 = center-left) was used to examine the contribution of

**Table 2**

Pearson correlations of socio-demographic variables and personality traits with voting for center-right vs. center-left.

	Italy	Spain	Germany	Greece	Poland
<i>Demographics</i>					
Gender	.11*	-.03	-.13	.03	.09
Age	-.11*	-.15	-.01	-.06	-.14*
Education	.17**	.03	.02	.11	.03
Income	.06	-.09	NA	-.08	.21**
<i>Traits</i>					
Energy/Extraversion	-.09*	.12	-.15	-.06	.09
Agreeableness	.09	.22*	.15	.10	.04
Conscientiousness	-.07	-.03	-.21*	.04	.03
Emotional Stability	-.01	.08	-.12	-.03	.01
Openness	.15**	.22*	.24**	-.07	.18**

Correlations with traits are partialled on the demographic variables.

NA = Not Available.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

traits to voting. In each country, we entered the demographic variables as a first block of predictors, followed by the five traits as a second block. The regression coefficients we report are odds ratios (OR). They indicate the effect of a one-unit change in a predictor on the odds that a person preferred a left-wing party, holding all other predictors constant. Coefficients greater than 1 indicate that the higher participants score on the independent variable the greater the odds that they are left-wing voters. Coefficients smaller than 1 indicate that the higher the score on the independent variable the greater the odds that participants are right-wing voters. The Nagelkerke pseudo  $R$ -square was used as a measure of overall model fit. Table 3 summarizes the results from each country.

In Italy, Germany, and Greece, additional analyses were performed including respondents who had voted for third parties. To this aim, we employed multinomial logistic regression, which allows one to handle dependent variables with three or more unordered categories. Table 4 reports the ORs which refer to the choice between all pairs of competing parties in each country, while controlling for socio-demographic characteristics. For ease of reference, parties more on the right of the political spectrum were included as reference categories, so that ORs  $> 1$  indicate that traits predict a preference for more leftist parties. In Spain and Poland, we limited the analyses to the two main parties, given the insufficient number of participants who voted for third parties.

#### 4.2.1. Italy

Demographic variables significantly predicted voting,  $\Delta\chi^2(4df) = 17.52$ ,  $p < .01$ . Education had a significant effect: the higher the educational level, the higher the likelihood to vote for center-left (OR = 1.49,  $p < .05$ ). Nagelkerke  $R$ -square for the initial model including only the demographics was .06. Adding personality traits in the second block further improved prediction,  $\Delta\chi^2(5df) = 23.38$ ,  $p < .001$ . Conscientiousness (OR = .55,  $p < .05$ ) and Energy/Extraversion (OR = .52,  $p < .05$ ) predicted a preference for center-right; Openness (OR = 2.24,  $p < .001$ ) and Agreeableness (OR = 1.89,  $p < .01$ ) predicted a preference for center-left. The

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the Big Five scales.

	Italy			Spain			Germany			Greece			Poland		
	M	SD	$\alpha$	M	SD	$\alpha$	M	SD	$\alpha$	M	SD	$\alpha$	M	SD	$\alpha$
Energy/Extraversion	3.24	.50	.75	3.11	.44	.60	3.36	.47	.73	3.21	.53	.72	3.28	.50	.70
Agreeableness	3.81	.48	.83	3.49	.49	.75	3.56	.44	.71	3.45	.52	.71	3.33	.46	.67
Conscientiousness	3.65	.49	.77	3.45	.52	.85	3.67	.53	.79	3.78	.55	.80	3.38	.47	.70
Emotional Stability	2.99	.69	.88	3.03	.58	.72	3.27	.58	.80	3.01	.56	.68	3.12	.61	.80
Openness	3.57	.58	.80	3.36	.49	.68	3.38	.56	.81	3.53	.48	.59	3.39	.51	.70

**Table 3**

Logistic regression for the prediction of voting for the two main parties (center-right vs. center left) by demographic variables and personality traits.

	Step 1. Demographics		Step 2. Traits			
	Model $\chi^2(df)$	Total $R^2$	Model $\chi^2(df)$	Change $\Delta\chi^2(df)$	Total $R^2$	Change $\Delta R^2$
Italy	17.52 (4)**	.06	40.90 (9)**	23.38 (5)**	.14	.08
Spain	3.49 (4)	.03	16.61 (9)*	13.12 (5)*	.16	.13
Germany	2.61 (3)	.03	19.83 (8)**	17.22 (5)**	.24	.21
Greece	3.98 (4)	.03	7.60 (9)	3.62 (5)	.06	.03
Poland	24.03 (4)**	.10	34.72 (9)**	10.70 (5)*	.15	.05

\*  $p < .05$ .\*\*  $p < .01$ .**Table 4**

Effects of the Big Five on the choices between each pairs of parties.

	E	A	C	S	O
<i>Italy</i>					
Center-right vs. Center-left	0.52*	1.89*	0.55*	0.89	2.24**
Center-right vs. Italy of Values (radical left)	0.42*	0.62	0.52	0.95	2.20
Italy of Values (radical left) vs. Center-left	1.28	3.10*	0.98	0.93	1.05
Center-right vs. Rainbow left (extreme left)	0.25**	1.82	0.79	1.00	3.02*
Center-left vs. Rainbow left (extreme left)	0.47	0.95	1.55	1.14	1.31
Italy of Values (radical left) vs. Rainbow left (extreme left)	0.60	1.95	1.51	1.05	1.37
<i>Spain</i>					
Center-right vs. Center-left	1.06	2.12	0.39*	1.04	3.14*
<i>Germany</i>					
Center-right vs. Center-left	0.59	3.55*	0.37*	0.42	2.42*
Center-right vs. the Greens (left)	1.00	2.67	0.24**	2.91*	8.07**
Center-left vs. the Greens (left)	1.84	0.67	0.63	0.87	3.32*
<i>Greece</i>					
Center-right vs. Center-left	0.69	1.44	1.20	1.14	0.76
Center-right vs. KKE (extreme left)	0.57	3.14	0.42	0.82	3.30*
Center-right vs. SYRIZA (extreme left)	1.62	2.97	0.16**	0.54	16.27**
Center-left vs. KKE (extreme left)	0.84	1.99	0.34	0.73	4.34*
Center-left vs. SYRIZA (extreme left)	2.40	1.88	0.13*	0.48	21.41**
SYRIZA (extreme left) vs. KKE (extreme left)	0.35	1.06	2.63	1.50	0.32
<i>Poland</i>					
Center-right vs. Center-left	1.18	0.93	0.91	0.94	2.43**

The reported coefficients are ORs. Coefficients >1 indicate that traits predict a preference for leftist parties. E = Energy/Extraversion, A = Agreeableness, C = Conscientiousness, S = Emotional Stability, O = Openness. Center-right parties are PDL (Italy), PP (Spain), CDU/CSU (Germany), ND (Greece). Center-left parties are PD (Italy), PSOE (Spain), SPD (Germany), PASOK (Greece). In Poland, both PiS and PO are center-right, but we treat PO as a center-left party since is more left-wing on social issues than PiS.

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

R-square of the final model including all predictors was .14. The incremental improvement in R-square due to traits was .08.

A multinomial logistic regression was performed including respondents of the Italy of Values and the Rainbow Left. Openness predicted a preference for Rainbow Left vs. center-right ( $OR = 3.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Agreeableness predicted a preference for center-left vs. Italy of Values ( $OR = 3.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Energy/Extraversion predicted a preference for center-right vs. both Italy of Values ( $OR = .42$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Rainbow Left ( $OR = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When third parties were included, the R-square of the final model increased to .18 ( $\Delta R$ -square = .12).

#### 4.2.2. Spain

Demographic variables did not predict voting,  $\Delta\chi^2(4df) = 3.49$ ,  $p = 0.48$  (R-square = .03). Adding traits in the second block significantly improved prediction,  $\Delta\chi^2(5df) = 13.12$ ,  $p < .05$ . Conscientiousness ( $OR = .39$ ,  $p < .05$ ) predicted a preference for center-right, whereas Openness ( $OR = 3.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) predicted a preference for center-left. The Nagelkerke R-square of the final model was .16. The incremental improvement in R-square due to traits was .13.

#### 4.2.3. Germany

Demographic variables did not predict voting,  $\Delta\chi^2(3df) = 2.61$ ,  $p = 0.46$  (R-square = .03). Adding traits in the second block im-

proved prediction,  $\Delta\chi^2(5df) = 17.22$ ,  $p < .01$ . Conscientiousness ( $OR = .37$ ,  $p < .05$ ) predicted a preference for center-right, whereas Openness ( $OR = 2.42$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Agreeableness ( $OR = 3.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ) predicted a preference for center-left. The R-square of the final model was .24. The incremental improvement in R-square due to traits was .21.

When third parties were included, Openness ( $OR = 8.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Emotional Stability ( $OR = 2.91$ ,  $p < .05$ ) predicted a preference for the Greens vs. center-right, whereas Conscientiousness ( $OR = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ ) predicted the opposite preference. Openness increases the likelihood to vote for the Green vs. center-left ( $OR = 3.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). After the Greens were included as third party, the R-square increased to .32 ( $\Delta R$ -square = .29).

#### 4.2.4. Greece

Demographic variables did not predict voting,  $\Delta\chi^2(4df) = 3.98$ ,  $p = 0.41$  (R-square = .03). Adding traits in the second block did not improve prediction,  $\Delta\chi^2(5df) = 3.62$ ,  $p = 0.60$  (R-square = .06). When we included third parties voters, Openness predicted a preference for communists vs. both center-right ( $OR = 3.30$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and center-left ( $OR = 4.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Openness exhibited a significant effect also on the preference for radical left vs. both center-right ( $OR = 16.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and center-left ( $OR = 21.41$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Conscientiousness showed the opposite relation, predicting a preference for both center-right ( $OR = .16$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and center-left ( $OR = 0.13$ ,



$p < .05$ ) vs. radical left. The  $R$ -square of the model which includes third parties was .25 ( $\Delta R$ -square = .19).

#### 4.2.5. Poland

Demographic variables predicted voting,  $\Delta\chi^2(4df) = 24.03$ ,  $p < .001$ . Gender and income had significant effects: Males ( $OR = 1.84$ ,  $p < .05$ ) voted more for center-right. The higher the income, the higher the likelihood to vote for center-left ( $OR = 1.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The Nagelkerke  $R$ -square of this initial model was .10. Adding traits in the second block improved prediction,  $\Delta\chi^2(5df) = 10.70$ ,  $p < .05$ . Openness ( $OR = 2.43$ ,  $p < .01$ ) predicted a preference for center-left. The  $R$ -square of the final model was .15. The incremental improvement in  $R$ -square due to traits was .05.

## 5. Discussion

The present study examined the effects of the Big Five on voting choice in five European countries. Results revealed that deep-seated personality traits can be linked to voting in theoretically consistent ways, over and above basic socio-demographic characteristics. These findings are in accordance with a large literature attesting the role of personality in explaining electoral choice and left–right self-placement (Jost, 2006). The predictive effect of socio-demographic characteristics, instead, was weak (Italy) or insignificant (Spain, Germany, and Greece). One exception is Poland, where income had a strong impact on voting. We found that the likelihood to vote for PiS is higher among people with lower income, in accordance with the economic platform of this party, which promotes free health care and education, higher taxes for the wealthiest individuals, and support for excluded members of society. This reflects the fact that in Poland, like in other post-communist countries, income is still a critical determinant of political preference, even more important than traits. The future will show whether personality traits might outperform income in predicting vote choice as Polish democracy matures, granting the best conditions for the full expression of individuals' preferences and choices.

Findings from this study add to the extant literature by fostering comparisons and contrasts between different countries and political systems. Left- and right-wing voters exhibited distinctive patterns in self-reported traits, which mirror the traditional distinctions between the ideologies of the respective political sides. The Openness trait turned out to be the most generalizable predictor of party preference. Conscientiousness was also a valid predictor, although its effect was less robust and replicable. Differences between nations in the role of traits in affecting vote choice appear to be related to differences in the salience of policy dimensions in political competition. For example, the role of Energy/Extraversion in affecting political choice is a distinctive feature of the Italian case. This trait was clearly related to the primary aims and images conveyed by the center-right, which in the last decades campaigned mostly on entrepreneurship and business freedom (Caprara et al., 2006).

Another noteworthy finding refers to Greece, where personality failed to differentiate between center-left and center-right voters. This result might be accounted for by the decreasing ideological differences between the two main Greek parties (ND and PASOK) that also share common roots in the post-World-War-II civil war which ended with the defeat of the communist army (in fact, PASOK has been repeatedly accused by the communists as adopting a rather center-right profile). The weak effect of traits in Greece also fits with the collectivistic orientation of Greek culture in which extended family networks are still important in many domains (Mylonas, Gari, Giotsa, Pavlopoulos, & Panagiotopoulou, 2006). Likewise, collectivistic factors such as father's political affiliation were found to strongly predict sociopolitical attitudes and

voting preferences (Dobratz & Kouvertaris, 1984), although this tendency is expected to decrease under pressure of modernization and growing individualism. Given this historical and socio-cultural context, it comes as no surprise that individualistic factors, such as personality traits, played a minor role in orienting political preference. Alternatively, the low reliability of the Openness scale in the Greek sample might be considered responsible for its low correlation with voting. We have to keep in mind, however, that in the Greek sample Openness exhibited a considerable effect on vote choice for parties on the extreme left as compared to center-left and center-right parties. Accordingly, low reliability does not suffice to explain the non-findings concerning the main parties. Moreover, the Greek results on third parties fit nicely with the results from other countries. They suggest that by largely disregarding third parties or conflating them with main parties, prior research might have yielded biased results on the impact of personality on vote choice. The latter conclusion is also backed by our findings on the main parties in Poland and Greece. Openness significantly predicted the choice between two rightist parties with different policy stances, as in Poland, but failed to discriminate between center-right and center-left parties with blurred ideological boundaries, as in Greece.

Finally, one should consider the variability across countries in the strength of the effect that personality traits exert on vote choice. The incremental  $R$ -square change due to traits over and above demographics ranged from .05 (Poland) to .29 (Germany). These differences may stem from the fundamental policy cleavages which characterize each country, as well as from the different numbers and types of parties we took into account. These factors may play a role in conditioning the effects of personality, as small parties like the Greens in Germany mainly deal with social issues that appear to be of particular importance when it comes to link some traits to vote choice (Schoen & Schumann, 2007).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the Big Five factors of personality may underlie citizens' support for different parties, based on the policy issues they advocated. Although voting represents the product of a number of social and cultural factors, such as socialization practices, membership in families, groups, and communities, one should not underestimate the role of basic personality dispositions. Empirical studies, in this regard, suggest that: (a) personality differences between liberals and conservatives begin in early childhood and affect political orientation throughout life (Block & Block, 2006), and (b) political ideologies may be shaped by genetic inheritance (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005). The Big Five, in this regard, can be conceived of as endogenous variables that account for a certain sensitivity towards liberal or conservative ideologies. This may later develop into more specific beliefs or attitudes that lead to support left- or right-wing parties, in dynamic interaction with individual experiences and social circumstances.

A limitation of the current study is the use of samples of convenience, which hinder generalization of results to the respective populations. This might also have attenuated the effects of socio-demographic characteristics on voting. Moreover, the instruments used to measure the Big Five in each country differed. Despite these limitations, the findings were quite stable. This is remarkable, given the host of historical and cultural differences involved. Future studies should focus on the mechanisms which engender personality effects on political behavior. They should aim to unravel the interplay among several levels of analysis, namely the manner in which individual and social factors, along with situational constraints, jointly contribute to party preferences. Other studies should extend our findings in less established democracies outside Europe and North America, which do not have such clearly marked ideological landscapes as in Western democracies and where politics is less individualized.

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