

**Just as WEIRD? Personality Traits and Political Attitudes Among Immigrant
Minorities**

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Data syntax can be retrieved from

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Abstract

A large body of literature has examined how personality traits relate to political attitudes and behavior. However, like many studies in personality psychology, these investigations rely on Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) samples. Whether these findings generalize to minority populations remains underexplored. We address this oversight by studying if the observed correlations between personality traits and political variables using WEIRD respondents are consistent with that observed using immigrant minorities. We use the Immigrant panel (LISS-I panel) in the Netherlands with data on first- and second-generation immigrants from Western and non-Western countries. The results indicate that the association between personality and political outcomes are, with few exceptions, highly similar for immigrant minorities compared to the general population.

Just as WEIRD? Personality Traits and Political Attitudes Among Immigrant Minorities

Most research on the implications of personality traits for behavior has been limited to samples composed of people from societies that are Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD). This narrow focus is problematic for a robust and externally valid personality science, because it might bias our understanding of basic relationships within psychology (Henrich et al., 2010). Such concerns challenge assumptions about the generalizability of findings from a specific sample to a broader population. Nevertheless, almost all published research in leading psychological journals remain composed exclusively of WEIRD samples (Rad et al., 2018).

Many groups remain underrepresented in much research by social and behavioural scientists (e.g., Causadias, Vitriol, & Atkins, 2018) and investigations of the external validity of nonrepresentative samples are uncommon (Vitriol, Larsen, & Ludeke, 2019). The generalizability of observations from WEIRD samples in the political domain to other populations is in need of evaluation. For example, ideas that are observed in WEIRD cultures – such as a positive correlation between social conservatism and free-market ideology – appear to be the exception rather than the rule when a more diverse range of cultures are explored (Malka, Lelkes, & Soto, 2017). Personality traits appear to exhibit replicable (Soto, 2019) and generalizable (Vitriol, Larsen, & Ludeke, 2019) links to political behaviors within the (largely WEIRD) evidence base accumulated thus far. However, direct evaluations of the generalizability of personality-politics links are needed across a more diverse range of populations.

Examining immigrant populations provides the opportunity to explore generalizability beyond WEIRD samples and to investigate, in greater detail, an understudied population that has specific importance as a political group. For example, immigrant populations generally

exhibit lower rates of political participation and engagement, with some of these differences appearing to derive from political norms in their country or region of origin (Alekszowska, 2011; De la Garza, 2004). Understanding how individual differences in political behaviors do or do not connect to personality in ways comparable to those observed in native populations is thus of interest.

To our knowledge, only a few studies have examined correlations between personality traits and political variables for both WEIRD and non-WEIRD respondents (e.g., Alper & Yilmaz, 2019; Duckitt & Sibley 2016).¹ However, these studies are limited by sampling characteristics and a focus on a narrow set of the broader category of political variables that existing research has linked to personality traits. For example, personality traits matter for attitudes towards immigration (Dinesen et al., 2016), but no previous studies have examined how immigrants' personality traits relate to their immigration attitudes or other political attitudes, more generally. As we show in this paper, there are interesting patterns among immigrants that differ from what is commonly reported in the existing literature on this particular question.

There remains a clear need for systematic tests of the similarities and differences in how exactly personality relates to political variables for both Western and non-Western respondents. The current study was intended to address this gap in the literature. The approach we pursued makes use of information on not only whether the respondent is a first- or second-generation immigrant, but also whether the respondent is from a Western or non-Western background.

¹ Fatke (2017) sought to provide a study of how personality and ideology associate across cultures. However, because the personality data used in that study appears to be have zero validity outside of a small number of WEIRD countries (Ludeke & Larsen, 2017), it is yet to be examined what can be learned from those results.

We expected personality-politics relationship to be robust across these populations. While *mean-level differences* in personality traits has been observed across geographic region (Rentfrow, Gosling, & Potter, 2008), the generalizability of personality effects has been substantiated by other investigations of different types of groups both outside (Soto, 2020) and inside the political domain (Vitriol, Larsen, & Ludeke, 2019). Accordingly, we did not expect to observe heterogeneity in the political effects of personality across the groups examined here. However, because there are unique histories and experiences across immigrants and non-immigrants, WEIRD and non-WEIRD, and because cross-cultural studies have observed some noteworthy differences within the political domain (Malka, Lelkes, & Soto, 2017), formal investigations of generalizability to test our expectations are needed. Differences in personality-politics relationships between these groups could inform our theoretical understanding of sources of variability in the relationship between personality traits and social belief or behaviour in real-world contexts, including but not limited to politics.

Current Study

We examined whether the size and direction of the relationship between personality traits and political variables differ for WEIRD respondents compared to different immigrant minority groups. We use data collected within the same study using the same measures on both native citizens, often studied in the field, and first- and second-generation immigrants with either a Western or non-Western background. The data were collected as part of the Immigrant panel (LISS-I panel) in the Netherlands, where users are able to match Big Five personality traits to a series of political outcomes such as ideology, political participation and immigration attitudes.

This approach allows us to obtain directly comparable estimates for the different groups and compare the personality-politics correlations across groups in a systematic manner. Previous research in the Netherlands finds that personality measures are reliable for first-

generation immigrants and majority group members (Nijenhuis et al., 1997). This is paramount as we know that personality measures can in some cases be substantially less reliable across different cultural settings (cf. Ludeke & Larsen, 2017). As we demonstrate below, this is not a concern in the current study.

The present study is not hypothesis-driven, as we suggest that the results will be informative whether or not personality-politics relationships generalize well across the groups studied. Prior work has provided some reasons to expect a substantial degree of generalizability, including studies already noted above (Vitriol, Larsen, & Ludeke, 2019; Soto, 2020) as well as a meta-analysis of personality's links to political ideology, which reported similar effects across studies (Sibley et al., 2012). Also of interest is the finding that immigrants often report political attitudes similar to those expressed by natives, even in regard to immigration policy (Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018). However, substantial cross-cultural divergences for seemingly fundamental features of political life have been observed (Malka, Lelkes, & Soto, 2017), and other studies report on the importance of immigrant background (and first- versus second-generation status) for political attitudes (Dinesen & Hooghe, 2010). The question of whether personality-politics correlations differ in a systematic manner across the groups in questions thus remains an open one in need of direct evaluation.

Methods

Data Source and Participants

To examine heterogeneity in the relationship between personality traits and political variables across different immigrant (vs. non-immigrant) groups, we rely on high-quality survey data fielded in the Netherlands and administered in the Dutch language. Specifically, we utilize the Immigrant panel (LISS-I panel), which consists of approximately 1600 households (2400 individuals) of which 1100 (1700 individuals) were of non-Dutch origin.

We link two separate waves of survey data for the same respondents. The wave with personality questions was in the field May 2014. The political questions were assessed in December 2013. This panel design, in which personality and political variables are assessed in a different wave than the wave, is a major strength of our investigation as it helps minimize biased estimates of the relationship (see Gerber et al., 2011).

The sample was drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands. A group of non-Western immigrants were sampled, namely people with Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese and Antillean background. In addition, there was a group of immigrants with Western European origin. Crucially for our purpose, the sample also included a control group of respondents of Dutch origin to facilitate comparisons.

Our final sample, which uses those taking part in the relevant survey waves, consists of 1086 participants. This includes 373 Dutch respondents, 170 first-generation Western respondents, 198 first-generation non-Western respondents, 224 second-generation Western respondents, and 121 second-generation non-Western respondents. 46% of the respondents are men, the average age is 48 years, 20% of the respondents have a university education and 46% of the respondents are in paid employment. Additional information on the data source is available at <https://www.lissdata.nl/about-panel/>.

Because the present work re-analyzes data collected by others for other purposes, the sample size was not determined with our power analyses in mind. Nevertheless, it does provide significant statistical power. With this sample size, to detect differences in correlations between Western and non-Western respondents, we estimated we had 91.45% power to detect a difference in correlation of modest-to-moderate magnitude (i.e., $r = .20$; specifically, between $r = .00$ and $r = .20$).

Measures

Status as Immigrant and “Westerner.” We rely on the standard definitions of Statistics Netherlands and study five groups in total: (1) Dutch, (2) first generation Western, (3) first generation non-Western, (4) second generation Western and (5) second generation non-Western.

Political Variables. For the political variables of interest, we rely on ten measures of varying lengths:

- 1) anti-immigration attitudes (four items including, “It is good if society consists of people from different cultures”).
- 2) political efficacy (six items on internal and external political efficacy);
- 3) EU integration (single-item using a five-point scale from “European unification has already gone too far” to “European unification should go further”);
- 4) ideology (single-item using an eleven-point scale from “Left” to “Right”);
- 5) political interest (single-item using a three-point scale from “Not interested” to “Very interested”);
- 6) political involvement (assessment of engagement in seven types of political activities);
- 7) media use (assessment of use of four sources of news);
- 8) political participation (single-item assessing voting in most recent parliamentary elections);
- 9) political trust (single-item eleven-point scale from “No confidence at all” to “Full confidence” in the Dutch government); and
- 10) satisfaction with Dutch democracy (single-item eleven-point scale from “Very dissatisfied” to “Very satisfied”).

In Online Appendix A, we present the full English-language question wordings for all measures.

Personality Traits. Personality traits were measured using 50 items from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg et al., 2006). The personality wave was in

the field in May of 2014. To ensure that the personality traits were reliable across the different groups in our analysis, we conducted reliability tests for all traits in the different groups. We found strong Cronbach's alpha coefficients across all groups with a minimum coefficient score of .75 (all reliability scores are available in Online Appendix C).

Analysis

The data and data syntax for this analysis is available at https://osf.io/ps62w/?view_only=2e7b789a4de742af822bbff974addcfd. The analytical approach pursued here show the correlations between personality traits and political variables for different immigrant groups as well as native Dutch. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all variables are available in Appendix B.

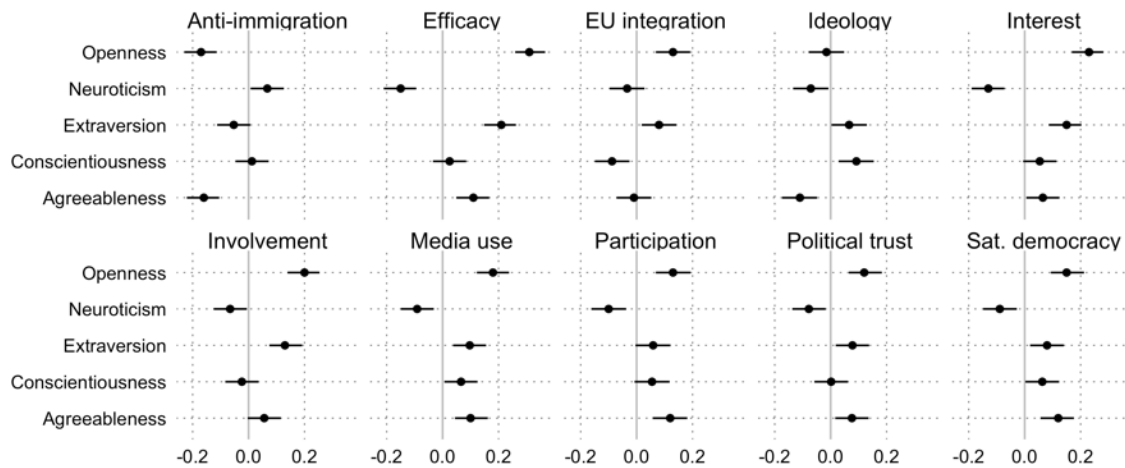
Results

Prior to engaging in any testing of differences in the relationship between personality and politics among different subgroups, we present the overall results of all personality-politics correlations. Figure 1 shows the average correlations between the Big Five personality traits and the ten political measures using the full sample. Importantly, these findings confirm that personality traits meaningfully predict a broad range of outcomes in the political domain. Consistent with prior research, not all traits are of similar consequence within the political domain, with traits like Openness typically providing the most pronounced links.

Next, we show the correlations among all groups. We do this in order to provide an impressionistic overview of the similarity of results across groups. Figure 2 shows the 250 correlations of interest: Five personality traits with ten political measures in the five participant types studied here. Overall, there is little evidence that personality traits and political variables are related in fundamentally different ways between Western and non-Western respondents, or between first- and second-generation immigrants, as most correlations are highly similar and thereby comparable to the results in Figure 1. In other words, across the five groups we find

that the correlations are relatively stable and do not vary in ways that suggest WEIRD respondents differ from non-WEIRD respondents in how their personality connect to their political behaviors and attitudes.

Figure 1: Correlations between personality traits and political measures, full sample

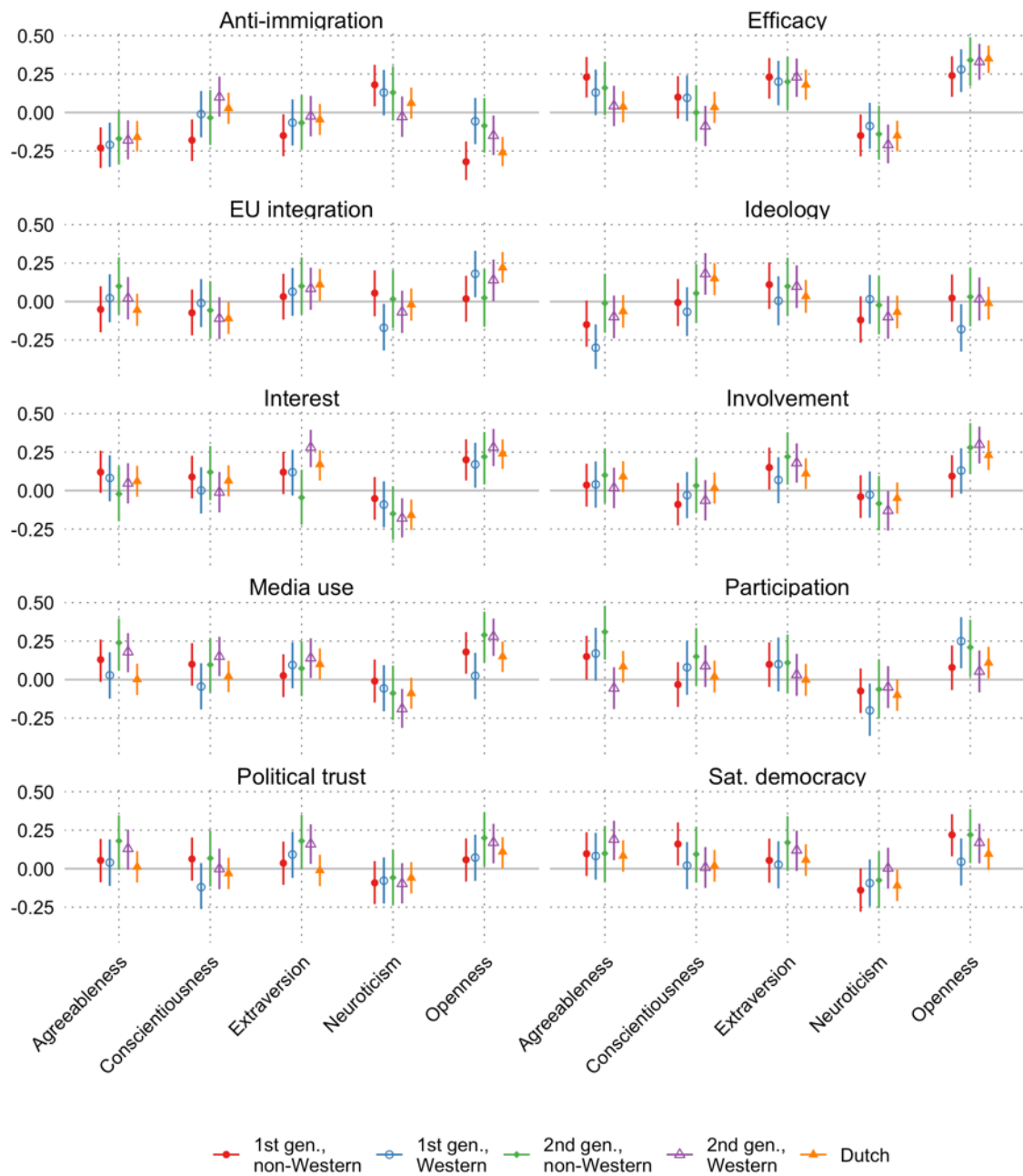


Note: Correlation coefficients between Big Five traits and political outcomes. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Ideology is scored with right-wing responses scoring high.

For example, the single most-pronounced relationship we observed (between Openness and political efficacy) occurs in a relatively constrained range (*r*s .25 to .40) across all groups. This does not appear to be a fluke, as similarly small ranges of effect sizes were observed for the next two most pronounced relationships – that between Extraversion and efficacy, and between Openness and political interest.

However, not all relationships appeared to be uniform. Some apparently divergent results were difficult to interpret and likely represent chance findings, such as the markedly different relationship that Agreeableness had with political participation between 2nd generation Western and non-Western immigrants. But other results were more suggestive and potentially theoretically interesting.

Figure 2: Correlations for Big Five traits and outcomes across immigrant groups



Note: Correlation coefficients between Big Five traits and political outcomes for five different groups. Regression models are reported in Online Appendix D. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Ideology is scored with right-wing responses scoring high.

For example, the relationship between Openness and attitudes towards EU integration were intriguing. Whereas respondents with a Western background matched previous research

in exhibiting a positive relationship between the two (Curtis & Nielsen, 2018), this effect was non-significant (and significantly smaller; $p = .012$) among those with a non-Western background. It is plausible that attitudes on EU integration might have a different origin among those of Western and non-Western backgrounds. This may be especially as those of non-Dutch Western background included many EU citizens who would themselves have made use of EU integration to arrive in the Netherlands. Openness is also a comparatively stronger predictor of satisfaction with Dutch democracy among those of non-Western background ($p = .04$), which might also be desirable to interpret if the salient comparisons for such individuals are less democratic (or less successfully-democratic) governments. A third result of potential interest concerns anti-immigration attitudes: Whereas among those with a Western background these attitudes exhibited the expected positive coefficient with Conscientiousness expected based on previous research (Dinesen et al., 2016), among non-Western immigrants the same coefficient was negative; although neither of these coefficients were significant, the difference between the two was ($p = .025$).

However, the relationship between personality and politics appears largely robust across the different populations assessed. In Online Appendix D we provide OLS regression models with interaction tests to provide formal tests of the group differences. In each regression, we regress the specific outcome on the interaction between each trait and the group indicator in question (controlling for the other group indicator). We run separate models for each trait to ensure that there is sufficient statistical power to find an interaction in the case that there is a heterogenous effect of the personality trait on the political outcome. For example, we can examine whether the correlation between Openness and political interest differ between the Western and non-Western sample, controlling for whether the respondent is a first- or second-generation immigrant. This provides a formal test of whether there are statistically significant differences in how a given personality trait relates to a specific political variable

across the group indicator. Following the main findings from Figure 2, for the large majority of tests, correlations between personality traits and political variables are statistically indistinguishable across groups.

In sum, our analysis produces limited evidence that the correlations between personality and political variables differ between Western and non-Western respondents. While it is important to study heterogeneous samples not limited to WEIRD characteristics, the results substantiate the conclusion that, for personality-politics correlations, relationships are robust and stable.

Discussion

Immigrant minorities have received some attention in the literature. However, most research has focused on explaining native citizens' attitudes towards immigration and immigrants (Kustov et al., 2019). Surprisingly, only a paucity of work has examined the political attitudes of immigrant minorities or how these attitudes differ from native populations. Even less attention has been devoted to the psychological correlates of political attitudes and how they might differ between native citizens and immigrants. Personality-politics relationships among native citizens, especially WEIRD populations, have received substantial attention in the literature. Yet we know little about how (or if) the relevance of individual differences, such as the Big Five personality traits, generalize to underrepresented minority groups. The current work was intended to address this gap.

One reason for this omission concerns the difficulty of obtaining samples with immigrant and other non-WEIRD populations. Here, we use high-quality survey data on both personality traits and various political variables to examine the extent to which personality-politics correlations differ between native citizens and immigrant minority groups. The results show that these correlations are generally robust and stable. In most cases, we find no differences between native citizens and various immigrant groups. Interpreting those results

which were significant must be done with extreme caution, given the number of tests undertaken by our analysis.

Future research is needed to investigate the extent to which our observations in the current study are consistent across additional samples, immigrant groups, and cultural contexts. Some recent work has highlighted one area of modest, but expected, divergence in observed political effects of personality that arise due to variability in the length of Big Five measures. Specifically, recent work has shown that the relationships between personality and political variables is attenuated by the use of brief measures (Bakker & Leikes, 2018). LISS-I assesses the Big Five with five times as many items as most representative samples. So, it is no surprise that the average absolute value of personality-politics correlations in the present sample are about twice as large as reported in a recent meta-analysis of ten representative samples (Vitriol, Larsen, & Ludeke, 2019). This suggests that the failure of the present study to detect differences in personality-politics correlations is unlikely to reflect any deficit in statistical power specifically attributable to abridged measures of personality traits. It is noteworthy that aside from the more pronounced relationships in LISS-I, the pattern of correlation between personality and politics appears highly comparable between LISS-I and those meta-analytic results; for only one result (concerning Openness and Efficacy) is the difference in correlation greater than $|0.20|$, and for 93% of comparisons the correlations differ by less than $|.12|$.

While our results show remarkably similar results across different groups within LISS, they also point towards interesting avenues for future work to better understand differences in how personality traits relate to political outcomes for different groups. One interesting finding is the diverging links Conscientiousness had with immigration attitudes and that Openness had with EU integration and Dutch democracy when comparing those of Western and non-Western backgrounds. This observation demonstrates that some established findings might not

generalize to non-WEIRD respondents, and additional investigations are needed in order to examine the external validity of these relationships.

Our investigation contributes to a growing body of literature moving beyond WEIRD respondents. However, we mostly attend to the distinction of Western and non-Western immigration to WEIRD contexts, and do not address all the WEIRD or non-WEIRD characteristics. Most obviously, our non-WEIRD sample (non-Western immigrants to a WEIRD nation) is distinctive. Immigrants are of course an important population in their own right, and so the present finding of generalizability is as noteworthy for the study of immigrant politics as for issues of WEIRDness. But future work is clearly needed with less WEIRD populations than that used here to more fully evaluate the generalizability of these relationships. Such research will help promote a robust science in the study of individual differences and a more externally valid understanding of the implications of personality traits for political variables and social behavior, more generally.

Author Contributions

E.G. Larsen & S.L. Ludeke is responsible for developing the initial project concept. All authors were responsible for the theoretical framework, but J.A. Vitriol was primarily responsible for drafting the final manuscript and E.G. Larsen was primarily responsible for data analysis and coding. All authors participated in interpreting the results, and each contributed substantively and intellectually to the final product.

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