

Nice guys finish last: personality and political success

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Abstract Is there a link between personality and the electoral and in-office success of politicians? Using the Ten-Item Personality Inventory, we examine whether the Five-Factor Model personality traits are correlated with political success among Belgian elected officials. We look at three different measures of political success, corresponding to different stages of the political career—electoral success, years in office, and access to an elite political position—and find lower levels of agreeableness are systematically correlated with greater success. These results are in line with those found among American and European CEO's (Boudreau et al. in *J Vocat Behav* 58(1):53–81, 2001). This study offers a unique insight in the type of personality voters and party leadership look for and reward among politicians.

Keywords Elites · Political careers · Personality · Elections

Introduction

Politicians are central to politics. They are key players in public deliberation of policy issues, and in policymaking itself. It is not surprising, then, that there has been a long-standing interest in the characteristics of politicians. Much work has focused on the demographic characteristics of politicians, with an interest in “descriptive”

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representation (see, e.g., Mansbridge 1999; Pitkin 1967). Another body of literature has been concerned with the psychological and decision-making characteristics of politicians (see, e.g., DiRenzo 1967; Levy 2013; Sheffer et al. 2018). We seek to add to the latter literature below, through an exploration of the “personality” of elected politicians in Belgium.

Feist and Feist (2009, p. 10) define personality as “a pattern of relatively permanent traits and unique characteristics that give both consistency and individuality to a person’s behavior.” Traits help explain individual differences between people, consistency in behavior over time, and across different situations (Feist and Feist 2009, p. 10). Despite important differences among modern theories and perspectives on personality, most would agree that personality has a biological and genetic base, that individual tendencies are further shaped by a myriad of experiences and environmental factors, and that the resulting behavioral, cognitive, and emotional patterns constitute personality (Cloninger 2009, p. 5). Thus, in as far as each individual is unique, personality provides us with a conceptual framework by which we can describe differences, as well as commonalities among individuals. The Five-Factor Model (FFM), on which this study relies, is claimed by McCrae and Costa (2005, p. vii) as the most important advance in the field of modern personality psychology.

The role of personality in career success and development is a question of central attention from scholars of management and organizational psychology. The same is not true of scholars’ focus on political success, however. The personality traits correlated with successful political careers have received relatively little scholarly attention. This is surely due in part to the inaccessibility of politicians. Traditional personality tests often involve relatively lengthy questionnaires, asking personal, sometimes even intimate, questions. Politicians are difficult to reach in the first place and probably reluctant to answer personal questions in the second.

We argue that this is nevertheless an important line of inquiry. Indeed, political scientists have in recent years exhibited a renewed interest in the role of personality in guiding the behavior of citizens. We argue that this interest should extend to the elites who represent them. In particular, we are focused on understanding how variation in personality traits is related to the success of elected officials. The results we present are correlational rather than causal, but they do give us a sense for the personality traits of elected officials, and that in turn allows us to consider how personality traits might matter for the nature and quality of representation and governance. Personality traits may be correlated with differences in information processing and decision-making, for instance. At the same time, personality traits may reflect the characteristics that voters are most likely to reward. Given that past work suggests that others’ judgments of personality traits covary with self-assessments (Gosling et al. 2003), exploring the personality characteristics of successful politicians may also help us understand both the characteristics rewarded by political parties on the one hand, and voters on the other.

Using the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI), administered to a large number of politicians elected to four Belgian parliaments, this study estimates the links between the “Big Five” personality traits and several indicators of political success, corresponding to different stages of a politician’s career, including but also beyond election to office. We first explore correlations between personality traits and



candidates' electoral success, in terms of vote share, compared to others on their party's electoral list. We then examine links between personality traits and politicians' longevity in parliament, through their number of years in office. Finally, we examine whether there are traits differentiating regular politicians from those who are or have been among the top political elite, like members of the executive, Presidents of a parliamentary Chamber or party leaders.

Results point to the particular importance of *agreeableness*, which is negatively correlated with vote share, longevity, and elite status. Some other traits appear to matter as well, but less consistently. There clearly are advantages of being hard-headed and competitive in politics. It is, after all, a competitive, contentious, and largely zero-sum field. It is notable that our findings are in line with work on American and European executives (Boudreau et al. 2001); although whether our objectives for political leadership should be the same as our objectives for business leadership is another issue.

Our paper proceeds as follows. We first briefly describe the “Big Five” personality traits. We then review the existing literature on personality and professional success. We then turn to a description and analysis of our data. We conclude with a discussion of our results.

The Five-Factor Model and political success

The interest in the relationship between personality and success is not new. A major obstacle in this line of studies is the limited access to political leaders' personality. To circumvent this problem, Rubenzer et al. (2000) used external expert raters—mainly biographers—to assess the personalities of all US presidents. They found US presidents to be, on average, more extraverted, less open, and less agreeable than the general population. Among Presidents, the personality trait most associated with presidential success is Openness to experience (Rubenzer et al. 2000). Building on this rich dataset, further research found a range of indicators of presidential success to be associated with specific personal characteristics, like grandiose narcissism (Watts et al. 2013) and fearless dominance (Lilienfeld et al. 2012). These studies provide useful insights in how American leaders distinguish themselves from the overall population and which personality aspects distinguish successful from regular presidents. They are, however, hard to transpose to a non-American context, particularly in coalition countries where different styles of representation apply and where political success can be contingent upon different aspects.

The FFM, commonly known as the Big Five, regroups individual traits, used to describe personal differences in emotional, interpersonal, experiential, attitudinal, and motivational styles, into five basic dimensions of personality: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (McCrae and John 1992). In the 1980s, the notion started gaining ground that these five factors were the basic dimensions of personality, based on decades of lexical analysis using natural language adjectives and theoretically based personality questionnaires. Put simply, development of the Big Five involved the factoring or grouping of words, mainly adjectives, which people use to describe themselves or others. These descriptors



include words and concepts like ‘sociable,’ ‘active,’ ‘positive,’ ‘dominant,’ and many others. When asked to choose from a list of descriptors, not all of which are positive (including such adjectives as ‘fearful,’ ‘anxious,’ and ‘vulnerable,’ for example), subjects’ choices were found to cluster into five core groups (Raggatt 2006).

These five dimensions have been identified relatively consistently among individuals of all ages and genders, and across different cultures and languages (McCrae and Costa 1997). A large body of research suggests that this personality trait structure is universal, hereditary (Jang et al. 1996), and stable across individuals’ lifespan (Ferguson 2010; Löckenhoff et al. 2008; Terracciano et al. 2010), with only minor changes potentially occurring in early adulthood (McCrae et al. 1999; Roberts et al. 2001; Specht et al. 2011). Over the last decades, the FFM has become one of the most widely explored, prominent frameworks used to assess individuals’ personality.

Briefly, the FFM comprises five traits. Following McCrae and John (1992), those who are low on *extraversion* may be regarded as reserved and serious. They prefer time alone or with a small number of other people. Those who are high on the trait are conceptualized as active and outgoing, preferring to spend time around people. *Agreeableness* is characterized as being compassionate, cooperative, and good-natured, while those who are low on this trait may be regarded as competitive, hard-headed, skeptical, and proud. *Conscientiousness* is characterized by dependability and self-discipline. Conversely, those low on this trait are characterized as easy-going and careless. *Emotional stability* implies being relaxed under stressful conditions, while those who are not emotionally stable (i.e., neurotic) are conceived as sensitive, emotional, and prone to being upset. Finally, *openness* is manifest in having broad interests and being imaginative, while those who are low on openness are thought to be traditional, down to earth, and practical.

Our interest in the relationship between the FFM and the success of political representatives is fueled by two literature studies. First, there is a literature suggesting that, as a stable set of personal dispositions, personality has been found to shape our (political) attitudes and values, beliefs and behavior. Higher levels of openness and agreeableness are generally associated with left-leaning ideology, and higher levels of conscientiousness and extraversion are commonly found among center-right individuals, not only for voters (Barbaranelli et al. 2007; Caprara et al. 1999, 2006; Carney et al. 2008; Vecchione et al. 2011), but among politicians as well (Caprara et al. 2003, 2010; Dietrich et al. 2012; Joly et al. 2018).

Extraverted individuals have also been found to display higher levels of political self-efficacy (Cooper et al. 2013) which, in turn, affects political participation (Vecchione and Caprara 2009). Furthermore, personality traits have also been found to influence people’s political knowledge (Rasmussen 2015), their ability to vote correctly (Ha and Lau 2015)—i.e., to match one’s vote with one’s preferences and convictions—, and even the political information that they consume (Gerber et al. 2011). In sum, there is ample evidence that personality influences a wide range of political attitudes and behavior.

Second, there is a related literature on the FFM and career success. Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2007) offer a review of the field, and an especially useful model of the relationship between personality and career success. The general thrust is that personality affects all stages of one’s career, from job selection, to job performance,



to workplace social interactions. The end result is that salary and promotions are correlated with personality traits. The same factors should apply to successful political careers. It takes certain personal predispositions to engage in politics, or to be approached by political parties, or affiliated organizations, like labor unions. Similarly, politicians differ in the way they behave socially and establish relationships and networks with influential leadership, both within and outside their own party, as well as with members, volunteers, staffers, and other potential voters. Finally, these dispositions lead certain politicians to be more efficient in passing or amending legislation or in brokering deals and compromise between different factions or with other politicians.

It is worth noting that we focus here on one subset of *extrinsic* factors related to career success. The literature on career success has distinguished between measures of extrinsic success, i.e., salary and promotion, and measures of intrinsic success, i.e., how an individual rates their own success. These two dimensions are only slightly correlated (Judge et al. 1999) and are determined by different features (for an overview see Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller 2007). We regard extrinsic success as more critical here—we care about how personality traits are related to who gets and stays in office, after all. We note only that measures of intrinsic success capture a rather different phenomenon, and perhaps one worthy of study elsewhere.

Expectations

Given the lack of previous work on the link between Big Five personality traits and political success, we rely here on work on career success, particularly (but not exclusively) in work focused on elite corporate executives (esp. Boudreau et al. 2001). The literature suggests that one relatively consistent predictor of success is *extraversion*. Extraversion is typically associated with positive moods, more energy and enthusiasm, and more rewarding interpersonal experiences (Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller 2007), and a wide range of studies find higher levels of extraversion to predict higher salary and promotion (Ng et al. 2005; Rode et al. 2008; Seibert and Kraimer 2001; Sutin et al. 2009). In their study among 1885 American and 1871 European executives—particularly relevant to our own study given their high functioning elite subjects—Boudreau et al. (2001) find extraversion to be positively related to both salary and promotion, albeit only among European (but not American) executives.

Similarly, lower levels of *neuroticism* (or higher levels of emotional stability) have been found to positively predict career success (Gelissen and de Graaf 2006; Judge et al. 1999; Ng et al. 2005; Sutin et al. 2009). Characteristics like emotional instability and anxiety are likely to affect job performance, as well as interpersonal interactions, hindering one's career evolution. Among executives, Boudreau et al. (2001) find emotional stability to influence success among American participants for both salary and promotion.

Some studies suggest no significant relationship between *agreeableness* and extrinsic career success (Gelissen and de Graaf 2006; Judge et al. 1999; Sutin et al. 2009); some suggest correlations for certain occupations only (Seibert and Kraimer 2001); and some find agreeableness to be negatively related to salary and promotion (Boudreau et al. 2001; Bozionelos 2004; Ng et al. 2005; Rode et al. 2008).



Intuitively, agreeableness might seem like a quality that would improve interpersonal interactions and how someone is perceived on the work floor. Ng et al. (2005), however, argue that more agreeable individuals might be perceived as more “docile and easily manipulated” and, therefore, receive less sponsorship. Boudreau et al. (2001) find that more agreeable individuals have lower salaries and are less close to their CEO.

The picture is similarly variable for *conscientiousness*, which has been positively associated with professional success in some studies (Judge et al. 1999; Ng et al. 2005; Sutin et al. 2009), and uncorrelated with success in others (Bozionelos 2004; Rode et al. 2008; Seibert and Kraimer 2001). Among European and American executives, Boudreau et al. (2001) do not find any relationship between conscientiousness and either salary or promotion. They do, however, show that conscientious participants in both the European and American samples were more focused on their work.

There does not seem to be a clear relationship between *openness* and professional success. Most studies find no effect (Boudreau et al. 2001; Judge et al. 1999; Rode et al. 2008; Sutin et al. 2009); others find positive (Bozionelos 2004; Ng et al. 2005) or negative (Seibert and Kraimer 2001) effects on salary.

Clearly, the effect of personality traits on job success is variable, contingent on the type of professional activity (Seibert and Kraimer 2001), as well as stage of career, local culture, and customs (Boudreau et al. 2001), and a range of other individual and organizational features. The literature clearly points to the relevance of extraversion, and perhaps also neuroticism; on other personality traits, it provides less guidance. Our work is thus exploratory, and as we shall see, the results we offer do not always fall cleanly in line with the existing literature on corporate success.

Method

This study relies on Belgian interview/survey data gathered during a broader survey study on political representation and information processing in 2015. At the end of an extensive 45-min personal interview, once trust and rapport with the interview subject had been well established, politicians were presented with a short personality test. A total of 413 national and regional politicians, including party leaders and members of the executive, were contacted to participate in our study. We were able to interview a total of 272 (66%) politicians—94 from the Flemish parliament, 31 from the Walloon parliament, 95 from the federal level, and 12 from the Brussels Regional parliament.

Respondents participated in our survey on a computer that our researchers provided. They were given the necessary space to answer our questions while safeguarding their privacy. In all our communications with potential respondents or their staff (email, phone conversations personal contacts), we always emphasized the anonymity of our study. During the meetings, interviewers remained at their disposal for any additional substantial or technical questions. While none of our respondents refused to participate or showed any reluctance answering this part of the survey, 40 respondents failed or refused to answer all ten of the necessary items. This leaves



us with a sample of 232 fully answered TIPI assessments by politicians at different stages of their political career.

To measure respondents' personality traits, we used the TIPI, as shown in the [Appendix](#). Given the length of traditional personality measures, we required a short, yet reliable, way to ascertain the five personality traits among politicians without risking major dropout and without the sometimes invasive questions typical to some personality instruments. Through ten statements, the TIPI assesses respondents' personality on each of the "Big Five" personality traits (2 questions per trait). Respondents indicate on a 7-point Likert scale to which degree each statement applies to them. While this brief measure might be somewhat inferior to personality tests like the NEO-PI, it has been employed and validated across numerous countries and different settings (Ehrhart et al. 2009; Gosling et al. 2003). We presented politicians with the translated adapted Belgian version (Hofmans et al. 2008). The observed distribution for each trait is displayed in Fig. 1.

Measures of political success are not drawn from the survey, but rather from readily available observational data. Our first measure of success captures politicians' electoral performance: starting with the absolute number of votes each MP received at the simultaneous federal and regional elections in 2014,¹ we generate a measure of electoral success that can be compared across electoral districts by calculating the percent vote share of each MP vis-à-vis the total votes their party gained per district. Given how individual politicians benefit from the overall result of their party, this measure looks at the individual performance of each politician, controlling for the party's electoral success.² This provides for a better comparison within the same party and between candidates from different parties. Figure 2 shows the distribution of politicians' individual preference votes, expressed as a percentage of their party's total votes in their electoral district. The average for politicians in our sample is 12%.

A second measure of political success captures how good politicians are at keeping their jobs. While some politicians achieve an extraordinary electoral result for a very brief period of time, others are able to maintain their position in Parliament for several decades. We therefore use the number of consecutive years in office since an MP was first elected to ascertain their longevity as a politician. Figure 3 shows the number of years politicians from our sample have been in office. One-third of our sample was newly elected in the year preceding our interviews; even so, some have been around much longer, and on average our politicians have been in Parliament for 7.4 years.

¹ Election results for each Parliament and constituency can be found here:
<http://www.vlaanderenkiest.be/verkiezingen2014/#/parlement/R02000/uitslagen>,
<http://bru2014.irisnet.be/web5Site/nl/index.html>,
http://bru2014.irisnet.be/web5Site/nl/cha/results/results_start.html,
<http://elections.fgov.be/index.php?id=3265&L=1>,
<http://elections.fgov.be/index.php?id=3266&L=1>,
<http://elections.fgov.be/index.php?id=3273&L=1>.

² Preference vote = individual number of preference votes/total votes of the party in that district * 100.



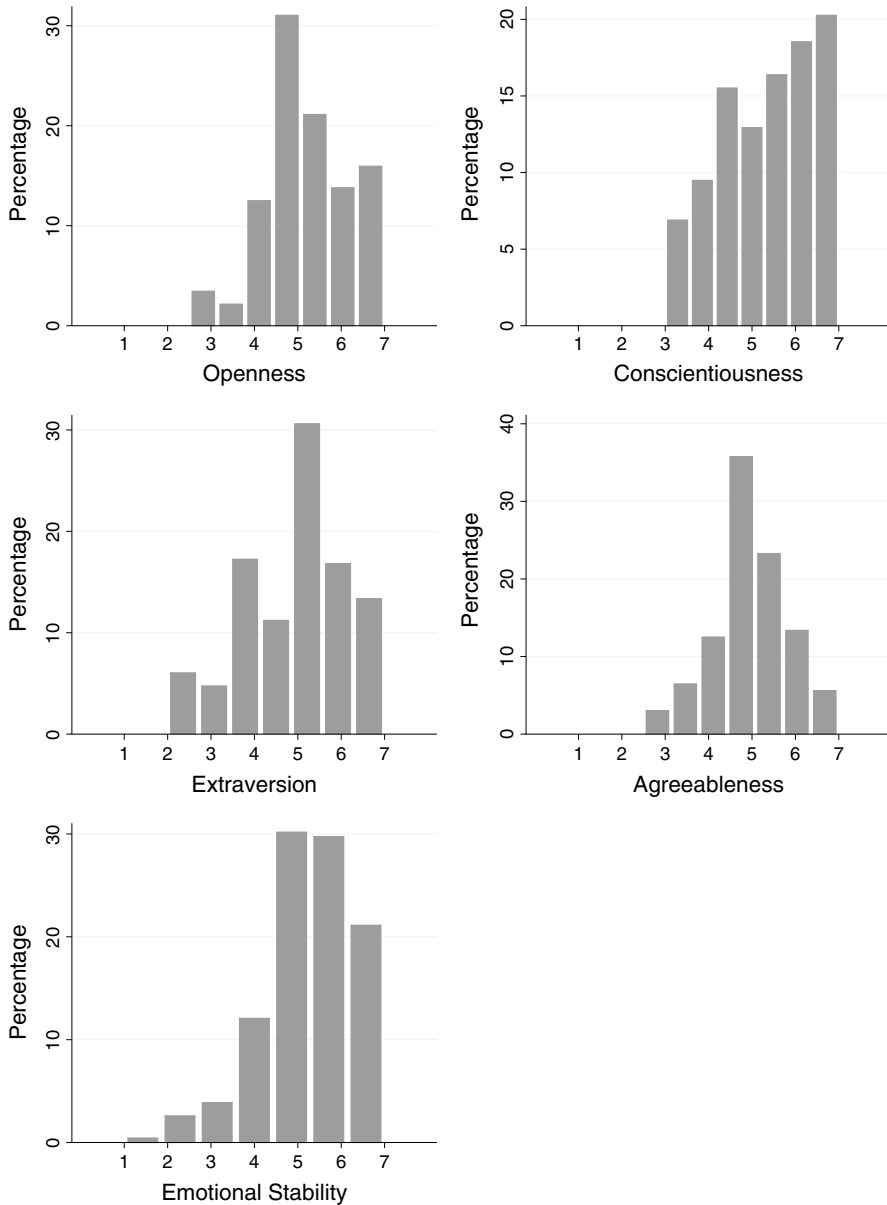


Fig. 1 Distribution of Big Five scores for Belgian politicians

A third measure of political success focuses on representatives' ability to achieve elite status. Elected politicians can hold different positions, in parliament or as members of the executive. Here, we distinguish between regular MPs and those who are—or have previously been—party leader, speaker, parliamentary group leader, minister, or state secretary (junior member of the cabinet). These positions are



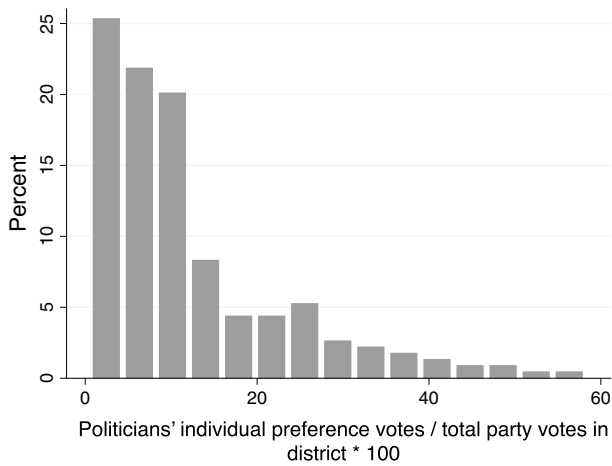


Fig. 2 Distribution of individual preference votes as part of the total party votes in politician’s electoral district

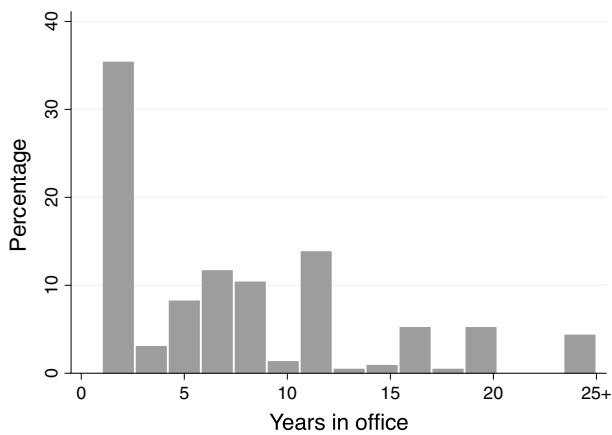


Fig. 3 Distribution of politician’s years in office

associated with more formal power and competences or access to the highest ranks of power, with greater media exposure, and often with higher remuneration—either directly or through expenses. This gives us a total of 53 individuals (23%) categorized as elites among the total group of 232 politicians. 148 of those politicians were male, with 84 females.³

³ It is worth noting that both our sample generally, and our sample of elites versus non-elites, are not biased in terms of political ideology. For instance, using the most recent Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) data (Bakker et al. 2015; Polk et al. 2017), we observe that the average ideological left–right position for elites is 5.4 and 5.6 for non-elites—0 corresponds to the most left and 10 to the most right wing party. The CHES data include local expert assessments on the ideological left (0)–right (10) position for each political party in a given country.



Table 1 OLS regression model of politicians' percentage of preferential votes per party list and district

	Coef.	SE	<i>p</i>
Extraversion	.121	.602	.840
Agreeableness	− 1.503	.830	.072
Conscientiousness	− .068	.705	.923
Emotional stability	1.314	.703	.063
Openness	.322	.712	.651
List position	− .946	.179	.000
Age	.249	.073	.001
Constant	2.505	7.565	.741
Observations	229		
R^2	.175		

Results

We explore the relationship between personality traits and each of our three measures of political success in turn, below.

Preference votes

Table 1 displays ordinary least squares (OLS) regression results explaining the percentage of votes each politician obtained on their party's list in their constituency. The model includes our measure of the Big Five alongside several controls, namely, list position and age. List position is the place on a party list on which each MP appears. Lists are determined at the party level, and since parties generally allocate their parliamentary seats according to list position, the higher one's position, the higher the probability of being elected into office. List position reflects the popularity and prominence of MPs, of course; it is thus an important control variable when considering preference votes. In our sample, the average list position is 3 ($SD = 3.8$); and the coefficient makes clear that as one's position on the list increases (i.e., as they get lower on the list), the number of preference votes decreases.

Age also matters for political success. This is most likely due to the correlation between age and experience (age correlates strongly with numbers of years in office, $r = .42$, $p < .01$). And here, we see that age is powerfully correlated with preference votes.

Even with these factors taken into account, results in Table 1 suggest that politicians who are less agreeable and more emotionally stable receive more preference votes. Coefficients are weakly significant and small. Even so, it is important to note that small effects may have a relatively large impact on the absolute and proportional number of votes politicians receive. A 1-point decrease on agreeableness makes an average difference of 1.5 percentage points of the candidate's total votes within their district. Scores on agreeableness range from 2.5 to the maximum of 7, with a mean of 5. The interquartile range on this measure is roughly 4–6 on this measure,



Table 2 OLS regression model of politicians' longevity in Parliament (years in office)

	Coef.	SE	<i>p</i>
Extraversion	– .397	.361	.272
Agreeableness	– 1.068	.493	.031
Conscientiousness	.014	.423	.974
Emotional stability	.164	.415	.693
Openness	.647	.428	.132
Age	.292	.043	.000
Constant	– 3.159	4.534	.487
Observations	232		
<i>R</i> ²	.205		

and that 2-point shift in agreeableness corresponds to a 3-percentage point shift in preference votes—a notable shift considering the distribution shown in Fig. 2. Conversely, a 1-point increase in emotional stability favors the candidate's votes by 1.3 percentage points. Scores on Emotional stability are more broadly distributed and range between 1 and 7, with an average of 5.2. Again, moving across the interquartile range is associated with a roughly 3-percentage point shift in preference votes.

Longevity

Table 2 examines whether certain personality traits are associated with longer political careers. There can be different reasons for politicians to leave public office, from failure to get re-elected to a loss of interest or the pursuit of a different professional challenge. Accounting for politicians' age, the OLS regression in Table 2 shows that agreeableness also plays a role in the longevity of politicians' parliamentary career. In line with the results in Table 2, lower levels of agreeableness are associated with longer parliamentary careers. A 1-point decrease on agreeableness makes an average difference of 1 year in parliamentary experience. Moving across the interquartile range in this variable is thus associated with a 2-year change in longevity.

Elite status

Finally, we look at the differences in personality between elite politicians, contrasting (former) members of the executive, and regular MPs. Bivariate *t* tests indicate that elites display lower scores on agreeableness and higher scores on openness to experience. On average, our 179 regular politicians have an agreeableness score of 5, whereas the 53 elite politicians have a score of 4.75 ($p < .05$). Conversely, elites have an average openness score of 5.5 compared to an average score of 5.1 for regular MPs ($p < .05$). Given the binary outcome, Table 3 shows results from a logit regression model; this confirms that, even controlling for age, politicians with lower scores on agreeableness are more likely to have made it to an executive position or some position of political leadership (currently or previously). Openness has not



Table 3 Logit regression model of politicians' (former) elite political status

	Coef.	SE	<i>p</i>
Extraversion	.155	.154	.313
Agreeableness	– .348	.195	.074
Conscientiousness	– .131	.173	.450
Emotional stability	.022	.169	.895
Openness	.398	.175	.023
Age	.068	.019	.000
Constant	– 5.041	1.924	.009
Observations	232		232
Pseudo R^2	.100		.100

been significant in previous models, but it does seem to matter here: *ceteris paribus*, higher levels of openness are associated with a greater likelihood of elite status.

Finally, Table 4 displays the results including a number of demographics, like age, gender, and education. As mentioned above, age is the only demographic variable that systematically affects our three measures of success. Gender and education, however, do affect elite status; while higher level of education increases the likelihood of an elite position, now or in the past, women have a lower chance of attaining an elite position. This is not the case in our two other measures of success, due, in part to the high gender quotas⁴ imposed on party lists.⁵

Discussion

Looking at the personalities of Belgian politicians, we find correlations between personality traits and measures of political success. There is some variation across measures of success—openness seems to matter for elite status, and emotional stability shows a correlation with preference votes, for instance. But there is one consistent finding across all measures of success: agreeableness matters. This is not to say that more agreeable politicians fare well; indeed, the opposite is true. *Less* agreeable politicians receive more preference votes, have longer political careers, and are more likely to achieve elite status.

This result is very similar to findings for extrinsic success in general, and particularly among CEO's in the US and Europe (Boudreau et al. 2001). We can only speculate on the causal mechanisms driving this effect, of course. It may be that (Belgian) voters reward candidates who have remained true to their convictions and have not conceded too much, to their own party or to other parties

⁴ Since 2002, electoral lists at the federal and regional levels are required to present an equal number of men and women.

⁵ We also tested for interaction effects between personality and the covariates. We tested this by running models in which each personality trait was interacted (separately) with either sex or age (in the models that control for demographics). In no instance was the interaction statistically significant.



Table 4 Regression models of three measures of success, including gender and education

	(1) Preference votes	(2) Years in office	(3) Elite status
Extra	– 0.060 (0.927)	– 0.518 (0.182)	0.240 (0.163)
Agree	– 1.658 (0.066)	– 1.090 (0.038)	– 0.248 (0.238)
Cons	0.091 (0.903)	– 0.179 (0.686)	– 0.091 (0.615)
Emo	1.288 (0.083)	0.270 (0.529)	0.006 (0.973)
Open	0.557 (0.460)	0.496 (0.266)	0.430 (0.022)
List position	– 0.895 (0.000)	–	–
Age	0.228 (0.004)	0.300 (0.000)	0.060 (0.003)
Gender	– 0.098 (0.951)	– 0.062 (0.947)	– 0.772 (0.067)
Education	1.012 (0.530)	0.683 (0.465)	1.112 (0.018)
Constant	0.522 (0.956)	– 3.249 (0.557)	– 8.805 (0.001)
Observations	208	211	211
R^2	0.176	0.233	

p values in parentheses

and stakeholders. Perhaps politicians with lower levels of agreeableness are less likely to sacrifice or compromise their own careers for the greater benefit of the party, and this has electoral advantages. In line with Ng et al. (2005), we suspect that politicians with higher levels of agreeableness may be rated by their peers and superiors as being docile and more easily manipulated. This may not be what party leadership tends to look for when they select candidates for the executive or for other high profile political positions. In executive positions, Ministers and State Secretaries also act as party delegates who need to guarantee policies stay within the confines of the government agreement. Additionally, agreeable individuals might more easily put others or their party before their own interests, and might not seem suited to withstand criticism from opposition parties or express similar criticism to others. Of course, supporting any of these claims requires an analysis of personality traits alongside MP's parliamentary and/or electoral behavior, and we have no such analysis here.

This study nevertheless offers a first glimpse at the personality traits associated with success at different stages of the political career. It may also tell us something about what voters appreciate or expect from their politicians, and/or the



personality traits that party leadership rewards when distributing the most important political positions.

Whether these findings are good or bad for politics is another matter; as is the possibility that different political institutions might encourage/reward rather different personality traits. Is there something peculiar about the Belgian system that is particularly rewarding of not-agreeable candidates? There are reasons to suspect that a proportional, coalition-forming system like the Belgian one might reward rather than penalize agreeableness; perhaps the advantages of not-agreeableness are even stronger in a more oppositional, first-past-the-post system in the UK or US. Does not-agreeableness produce better political representation? On the one hand, insofar as not-agreeable politicians are less likely to negotiate or change their minds on issues, they may actually be more accurate in representing the issue positions that get them elected. On the other hand, an unwillingness to cooperate may lead to political deadlock. These are just some of the questions worth considering in future work, perhaps on the personality traits of politicians across countries. Understanding the personality traits that produce political success, in one country at least, has been the objective above. We hope that future work is able to consider how these traits shift across party structures and political institutions, and consider how this matters for the nature of politics and the quality of political representation.

Appendix: Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI)

The next battery of questions is designed to assess certain aspects of your personality. These questions have been used extensively in a wide variety of international studies. We would like to ask you to score a number of these traits for which there is, of course no right or wrong answer. They may seem contradictory, but this is how the battery has been used successfully in prior research. This is important for us, as we would like to know if, for example, extravert representatives have different information processing styles or other views on how to represent citizens. It is important to note that your answers are anonymous and will never be used in a way that can identify you. We list a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Can you indicate to which extent you agree or disagree with each statement. You should rate the extent to which a pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other. I see myself as:

Disagree strongly	Disagree moderately	Disagree a little	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree mod- erately	Agree strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- 1. Extraverted, enthusiastic
- 2. Critical, quarrelsome
- 3. Dependable, self-disciplined
- 4. Anxious, easily upset
- 5. Open to new experiences, complex



6. Reserved, quiet
7. Sympathetic, warm
8. Disorganized, careless
9. Calm, emotionally stable
10. Conventional, uncreative

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