

**On the psychological roots of populist voting:  
A discussion of Bakker, Rooduijn, and Schumacher (2016)\***

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\* In this paper we make use of data of the LISS (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences) panel administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands).

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## Abstract

In a recently published article in the *European Journal of Political Research*, Bakker et al. (2016) argue that agreeableness, one of the five traits in the now popular five-factor model, affects the probability with which voters choose populist over non-populist parties. Specifically, they contend that individuals characterized by low levels of agreeableness are less trustful and thus, match the anti-elite platform that populist parties run on. In this discussion paper, we raise two issues that have important implications for researchers interested in explaining why voters choose populist parties and scholars who study the relationship between personality traits and electoral behavior in general. First, we argue that the theoretical argument by Bakker et al. remains underspecified in that the paper proposes a direct effect of agreeableness on voting for populist parties. Based on a series of studies that focus on personality traits and electoral behavior, however, we discuss the possibility of an indirect, i.e. mediated, effect. Beyond the theoretical argument, this consideration also has implications for the identification strategy used to test the effect of agreeableness on choosing a populist party. Second, we re-examine the results for the cases of the left-wing populist party chosen by Bakker et al., the German party *Die Linke* in the 2009 German national election. Rather than solely focusing on the vote for the district candidate, we also examine the more important party vote in the German national election. In contrast to the original findings based on the candidate vote, we observe no substantial relationship between agreeableness and voting for *Die Linke*. An extension to the 2013 German national election and a potential second left-wing populist party in the Netherlands, the Socialist Party, strengthen our findings. We discuss the implications for the relationship between personality traits and a populist vote and highlight areas for future research on this question.

## 1. Introduction

Parties and politicians characterized by populism have gradually (re-)established themselves as influential political actors in various regions around the world (La Torre 2015). Not surprisingly therefore, research on factors driving public support of so-called populist parties flourishes. Much of the electoral success of these parties is attributed to frustrated voters expressing their general discontent with politics (e.g., Doyle 2011; van Kessel 2015) and the ideological and positional congruence between voters and these parties (e.g., van der Brug et al. 2000; Norris 2005; Mudde 2007; March & Rommerskirchen 2015). As populist parties come in different forms, ranging from left-wing to right-wing populism (Mudde 2007; March 2011), scholars continue their search of explanations that apply equally to various different types of populist parties. For instance, scholars currently consider how ‘populist attitudes’, as an expression of populism on the demand side (Stanley 2011; Akkerman et al. 2014), affect voters choices to cast their ballot these parties. Similarly, a recent article by Bakker et al. (2016) in the *European Journal of Political Research* considers how personality traits contribute to our understanding of how and when individuals are more likely to vote for populist than non-populist parties. The paper’s central argument is that low levels of agreeableness match with the anti-establishment/anti-elite message of populist parties and therefore, make people inclined to respond to populist appeals of left- and right-wing populist parties.

This is a timely contribution to the discussion of the sources of populist voting. Moreover, it aims at making a contribution to the literature that seeks to understand the role of personality traits in the political arena by highlighting the interplay between personality traits and political supply. In this comment we discuss where the contribution by Bakker et al. (2016) leaves some room for improvement in theoretical terms and provides inconclusive evidence, warranting a closer look at the proposed theoretical mechanisms and the empirical analyses. This comment unfolds as follows. First, we argue that the model is, potentially, underspecified and that this has ramifications for the

identification of populism-specific effects of agreeableness on voting for populist parties. In the second section, we take a closer look at the effects of agreeableness on voting for left-wing populist parties and provide some additional evidence on the German and Dutch case that sheds new light on the conclusions of Bakker et al. (2016). We conclude with a discussion of these findings in which we highlight implications and avenues for future research.

## **2. Model specification and its implications**

In their theoretical analysis, Bakker et al. (2016) contend that lower levels of agreeableness, one of the Big Five Personality traits (Costa et al. 1991), should increase the probability with which a voter casts her vote for a populist party. Two ideas are central to this argument. First, voters prefer those politicians and parties that match the voters' personality. The paper thus relies on the congruency principle which is widely employed in research on the role of personality traits in affecting political preferences (Caprara & Zimbardo 2004). Second, individuals who score low on agreeableness are 'egoistic, distrusting towards others, intolerant, uncooperative and express antagonism towards others' (Bakker et al. 2016: 305; see also McCrae 1996: 329). This, the authors theorize, matches with the anti-establishment/anti-elite message that is central to populist parties (see, for instance, Mudde 2004; Hawkins 2009). Based on empirical analyses from three different countries, the paper concludes that indeed, voters characterized by lower levels of agreeableness are more likely to choose a populist party over other parties. In particular, results on attitudes toward the U.S. Tea Party Movement and vote choice for the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) and the German *Die Linke* are reported as evidence for the claim that low levels of agreeableness make voters more likely to vote for right-wing populist (Tea Party, PVV) and left-wing populist parties (*Die Linke*).

Absent from the theoretical section of the paper, however, is a concrete specification of how agreeableness is linked to voting for populist parties. Bakker et al. (2016) do not discuss intervening

variables that could mediate the impact of agreeableness on voting for populist parties. This suggests that the effect is meant to be direct, i.e. levels of agreeableness directly influence the probability with which voters cast their vote for populist parties. Yet, this specification of the model runs contrary to a large number of studies according to which personality traits are unlikely to exert direct effects on political behavior. Rather, personality traits may affect political behavior indirectly, i.e. mediated by political attitudes and the like (McAdams & Pals 2006; Chirumbolo & Leone 2010; Mondak et al. 2010; Blais & St-Vincent 2011; Gallego & Oberski 2012; Wang 2016).<sup>3</sup>

This is the type of argument the paper relies on when ideology is introduced, i.e. attitudes toward socio-economic and social issues, as control variables. Here, it is argued that personality traits are conducive to certain attitudes toward socio-economic and social issues that in turn affect vote choice. Policy-related attitudes thus serve as intervening variables that mediate the impact of personality traits on voting behavior. Following this line of reasoning, the authors include two measures of policy preferences on socio-economic and social issues as control variables. They form clear expectations about the effect of adding them to the models: ‘If we analyse voting behavior with personality traits *and* ideology, we expect that the effect of personality traits disappears because it is mediated by ideology’ (Bakker et al. 2016: 306–307). This, in turn, would indicate perfect mediation of the effect of personality traits on the voting decision via ideology.

Against this backdrop, it is surprising that the paper does not address the theoretical relationship between agreeableness and voting for populist parties by providing a clear argument for how and why a direct effect or an indirect effect of agreeableness might arise. In substantive terms, indirect effects are plausible. As suggested by Bakker et al. (2016: 305), low levels of agreeableness may be conducive to distrust in politicians and politics as well as low levels of external political efficacy. Changes in these variables in turn may make voters susceptible to appeals by populist parties. An

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<sup>3</sup> But see, for instance, Caprara et al. (1999), Osborne and Sibley (2012) and Vecchione et al. (2011b).

indirect path thus appears more reasonable than a direct one. For example, while distrust in other people is not identical with distrust in ‘the political establishment,’ it may nonetheless affect voting for populist parties insofar as it translates into this specific form of political distrust. On these grounds, one may argue that a mediation model is more plausible than a model suggesting a direct effect of agreeableness on voting for populist parties. In any case, this issue which is at the theoretical core of Bakker et al.’s (2016) paper warrants a thorough discussion.

The decision to leave the model underspecified with respect to indirect effects also has methodological consequences. The key hypothesis is tested by including personality traits and socio-demographics as predictors of voting for populist parties. In addition, attitudes on socio-economic and social issues are included in order to control for mediating effects of ideology. Within this setup, the paper reports all effects (as measured by log odds that pass conventional levels of statistical significance) of agreeableness on populist voting as indicating specific effects arising from the affinity of less agreeable voters to populist parties. The validity of this conclusion rests on two assumptions. First, the indicators of ideology must capture all relevant aspects of this concept validly. Leaving a certain aspect of ideology uncovered, for example, makes conclusions vulnerable to the objection that a direct effect of agreeableness simply reflects this measurement error. Second, the empirical setup yields valid conclusions only if there is (in addition to ideology and the populism mechanisms) not a third or fourth explanation for the statistical association between agreeableness and voting for populist parties. These are non-trivial assumptions that are hard to examine with the data used in the paper. Nonetheless, the paper suggests that the results do not suffer from the above problems as they interpret statistical effects assigned to agreeableness as demonstrating the role of the inclination of voters scoring low on agreeableness to respond to populist appeals.

Things look somewhat different when the paper discusses the results with respect to the remaining personality traits. The evidence indicates that – against the original assumption – these personality

traits make a difference in voting for populist parties even after controlling for ideology. In these cases, different lines of reasoning are employed. While the paper dismisses the result on neuroticism in the 2010 CCES analysis as evidence questioning the robustness of the respective finding from the 2012 ANES analysis, it provides substantive arguments in the remaining cases. The positive association of extraversion to voting for the PVV and *Die Linke* is accounted for by the newness of the party that might be particularly attractive to highly extraverted voters. Regarding the positive effect of openness on voting for *Die Linke*, the authors argue that ‘Openness is often associated with left-wing ideology’ (Bakker et al. 2016: 315). In other words, it is assumed that the indicators of ideology do not sufficiently capture this concept and thus, leave room for a direct effect of openness, mediated by an ideological component not properly measured by the indicators.

In essence, the paper employs alternative explanations that are incompatible with the assumptions on which the identification strategy rests. If the indicators do not sufficiently capture ideology as intervening variable in case of openness, however, we should also remain skeptical with respect to the extent that they work perfectly fine in the case of agreeableness. Likewise, if there is another explanatory path linking extraversion to vote choice, the question arises if there is also an alternative path for agreeableness. These contradicting statements suggest that the paper’s identification strategy leaves some room for improvement. As a consequence, the evidence on the role of low levels of agreeableness in making voters susceptible to populist appeals appears to be not as conclusive as suggested in the paper.

This problem reflects the decision not to specify a model with a *populist* indirect effect of agreeableness. To be sure, including this path would not render all indicators valid and would not exclude the possibility of alternative explanations. However this specification would permit to examine whether the selected intervening variable is related to agreeableness and voting for populist

parties in hypothesized ways. Notwithstanding the methodological problems inherent to this approach, we believe it would be an improvement and return to it below.

### 3. Agreeableness and voting for left-wing populist parties

One of the main goals of Bakker et al. (2016: 313) is ‘to see if Agreeableness is associated with support for populist parties irrespective of the “host” ideology.’ It is thus important to examine the relationship of agreeableness to voting for right- *and* left-wing populist parties. After their discussion of the evidence on the right-wing cases Tea Party (which is actually a faction rather than a party) and PVV, they turn to *Die Linke* as the left-wing case. According to prior research (e.g., Pauwels 2014; van Kessel 2015), this party appears to be reasonable choice.

In the analysis section, the paper provides evidence on vote choice for *Die Linke* in the 2009 German federal election. Here, the focus is on the first vote in the German two-vote system (mixed-member proportional system). The first vote is cast for local candidates and has a small, if any, impact on parties’ parliamentary seat shares. These are determined by the proportion of second votes which are cast for party lists. The paper, unfortunately, does not explain the choice for the first instead of second votes in the analysis.<sup>4</sup> Given its emphasis of the parties’ anti-establishment appeal in the substantive theorizing and the focus on attitudes toward and voting for parties in the US and Dutch cases, we should expect that low levels of agreeableness also make voters more inclined to vote for the party list of *Die Linke*.<sup>5</sup> We thus performed Bakker et al.’s analyses with the party vote for *Die Linke* as dependent variable, using logistic models and retaining all of the original control variables.

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<sup>4</sup> One potential argument that arises from the congruency principal by Caprara and Zimbardo (2004: 590) is that personality traits primarily factor into the choice of political candidates/leaders. In other words, voters select their favorite politicians/leaders first and, in a subsequent step, select their party. For obvious reasons, the selection of candidate and party is hard to distinguish but a focus on candidate-centered elections could be justified but has not been done here.

<sup>5</sup> In the 2009 German post-election study that Bakker et al. (2016) rely on, respondents were explicitly asked for a candidate and a party vote. This strategy alleviates, albeit not solves, problems arising from respondents’ confusion about the meaning of the two votes. From a substantive perspective, protesting with a vote that does not strongly affect parties’ seat shares is relatively easy, but arguably not very effective.



The results from these analyses are reported in Table 1 and 2.<sup>6</sup> To extend the empirical evidence for conclusions, we also ran identical models for the 2013 federal election (see Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix).<sup>7</sup>

The empirical results cast considerable doubt on the role of low levels of agreeableness in making voters more inclined to vote for *Die Linke*. In the 2009 analysis, the coefficient on agreeableness has a positive sign and does not pass conventional levels of statistical significance. In the 2013 analysis, the respective coefficient is negative but does not pass conventional levels of statistical significance. In one of the multiple analyses of the candidate vote in 2013, an effect of agreeableness emerges.<sup>8</sup> We thus conclude that agreeableness is not linked to voting for *Die Linke* in the way Bakker et al. (2016) claimed. Put differently, even if we utilize the identification strategy the evidence does not support the notion that low levels of agreeableness make voters inclined to vote for the left-wing populist party that was chosen for the analysis.

[Table 1 about here]

[Table 2 about here]

Despite various model specifications and additional test, a big caveat remains with respect to the results from our analyses of German voters. The conclusions rest on the assumption that agreeableness is properly measured in this analysis. Because the German Longitudinal Electoral

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<sup>6</sup> As Bakker et al. (2016) did not take into account the oversampling of East Germans in the collection of survey data, we modified the original analyses by employing design weights. In additional analyses, we also tested the effects of transformation weights, of including a dummy variable indicating whether respondents live in East or West Germany, and of employing a post-stratification weight on the results.

<sup>7</sup> For 2013, Lewandowsky et al. (2016) conclude that *Die Linke* does qualify as a populist party. Yet we acknowledge that other studies conceptualize parties such as *Die Linke* as radical left but not specifically populist parties (e.g., March and Rommerskirchen 2015; Ramiro 2016).

<sup>8</sup> The ‘Alternative for Germany’ (AfD) that competed in the 2013 German national election was already considered by some observers as right-wing populist at this point (Lewandowsky et al. 2016; but see Arzheimer 2015). Including this party in the reference category may thus bias results. To avoid bias, we also ran the models while removing AfD voters from the reference category. This does not alter the substantive conclusions (see Table A3).

Study data set (Rattinger et al. 2011; Rattinger et al. 2014) employs a single-item indicator, this is a strong assumption to make. In general, these types of short inventories are widely used in applied research on effects of personality traits in the political realm (e.g., Gerber et al. 2010; Gerber et al. 2011a; Johann et al. 2015; Fatke 2016), including one of the authors of this manuscript (Schoen & Steinbrecher 2013). Wide application, however, does not necessarily prove the validity of indicators and some scholars point out the problems that arise from the selection of one, two, or three items per trait (Gerber et al. 2011b). In any case, this state of affairs suggests considerable caution when interpreting results in substantive terms. Applied to the case at hand, the non-findings on the role of low levels of agreeableness in making voters more inclined to vote for *Die Linke* might simply reflect that the chosen indicator for agreeableness does not capture the trait adequately (e.g., it may measure only one of the six facets). So giving Bakker et al.'s argument the benefit of doubt, we might not easily discard the notion that agreeableness plays the hypothesized role in voting for left-wing populist parties.

In an attempt to further explore this possibility, we shift our focus on the Dutch case using data from the LISS panel (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences) administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, Netherlands).<sup>9</sup> The LISS panel includes a comparatively broad set of indicators of personality traits. Moreover, it comprises concepts that might serve as indicators of political distrust, i.e. potential intervening variables in a model with an indirect, rather than direct, effect of agreeableness on voting for populist parties. In our analysis, we focus on the PVV and the *Socialistische Partij* (SP). The latter is disregarded by Bakker et al. (2016: 318, Fn.7) because 'no consensus exists as to whether this party should be classified as populist.' For some experts, it qualifies as populist in the period Bakker et al. (2016) focus on (Lucardie & Voerman 2012;

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<sup>9</sup> The Dutch LISS panel data were collected by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands) through its MESS project funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. For more information on the LISS Panel, go to [www.lissdata.nl](http://www.lissdata.nl).

Schumacher & Rooduijn 2013; Akkerman et al. 2014; Pauwels 2014; Rooduijn et al. 2016), whereas others – as highlighted by Bakker et al. (2016) – raise some doubts (Rooduijn et al. 2014; Rooduijn 2014). We do not want to adjudicate on this matter that hints at conceptual and methodological issues in the identification of (left-wing) populist parties. Instead, we wish to discuss the implications of these views for the relationship of agreeableness to vote choice as proposed by Bakker et al. (2016). If the former account is right, we should not find an effect of agreeableness on SP voting via political distrust. If the latter view is correct, this kind of effect should emerge.

Given these conditional expectations, we think it is revealing to examine indirect effects of agreeableness on voting for the SP via political distrust as measured by an index capturing trust in politicians and parties.<sup>10</sup> Building on the above notion that socio-economic and social attitudes may also serve as mediators, we performed a mediation analysis to explore the role of socio-economic and social attitudes as well as trust in politicians and parties in mediating the impact of agreeableness on voting for PVV and SP. To this end, we employ the KHB method (Kohler et al. 2011; Breen et al. 2013). We point out that for several reasons this strategy is not perfect and thus can yield only approximations. We cannot test the validity of all indicators and do not pretend that our analysis includes all potential mediators. That would require more theorizing, a task beyond the scope of this comment. Instead, we include indicators for the three focal mediators in the original analysis by Bakker et al. (2016). Moreover, we follow them by controlling for a series of potential confounders. Yet, the precision of estimating mediation effects is subject to strict identification rules that we simply cannot reconstruct based on the data at hand (for more a more detailed discussion, see Hicks & Tingley (2011), Imai et al. (2010), and Imai et al. (2011)). In Table 3, we report the results from the analysis.

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<sup>10</sup> These concepts were measured in the same wave of the LISS panel as the dependent variable.

[Table 3 about here]

The results suggest that voting for PVV and SP is associated with agreeableness in different ways. According to the total effect estimates, high levels of agreeableness are positively related to voting SP and negatively with choosing the PVV (KHB1 and KHB2). These differences are nicely reflected by the main mediators in both of the models. The negative effect on PVV voting is mainly driven by a negative indirect effect via social attitudes, i.e. high levels of agreeableness make people less critical of immigration which in turn decreases the likelihood of voting for the PVV. Turning to the SP vote, high levels of agreeableness are associated with an inclination to support redistribution which, in turn, is conducive to voting for the SP. Turning to the role of trust in politicians and parties (using the combined additive index here) the evidence suggests that they exert negative mediating effects on voting for both PVV and SP. In line with Bakker et al. (2016), the evidence suggests that high levels of agreeableness increase trust in parties and politicians. This, in turn, makes voters less inclined to vote for PVV and SP as compared to other parties. Comparing both parties, agreeableness appears to exert an effect on the probability of choosing the PVV over the SP, both via social attitudes and distrust in politicians and parties.

Finally, the selected intervening variables do not completely mediate the impact of agreeableness on voting for PVV and SP instead of one of the remaining parties. While there remains a negative tendency for PVV voting, we find a positively signed direct effect of agreeableness on voting for the SP. Building on the notion that personality traits affect political behavior indirectly, rather than directly, these results suggest that the models do not include sufficient intervening variables. There is probably some room for improvement in the indicators for socio-economic and social attitudes as well as indicators capturing political support, trust, efficacy, and related concepts. For the present purposes, the crucial question is whether improving the models in this regard affects the estimates of

the specific mediating effects of trust in politicians and parties. These specific effects may vanish which would give rise to the conclusion that the effect proposed by Bakker et al. does not exist at all. One could also imagine that the effect on SP voting vanishes whereas the mediating effect on PVV voting remains robust. This result would square well with Bakker et al.'s (2016) reluctance to classify the SP as a populist party. Together with non-findings about the impact of agreeableness on voting for *Die Linke*, however, it would also cast serious doubts on the claim that there is a specific appeal of both left- *and* right-wing populist parties to less agreeable voters via political distrust. Leaving aside the opposite pattern, we would like to shed some light on the possibility that even theoretically and methodologically sophisticated analyses confirmed both mediating effects of political distrust. This outcome would bolster Bakker et al.'s (2016) conclusion concerning the PVV vote. But it would also raise the question why political trust exerts a negatively signed mediation effect on voting for a party that the original paper did not classify as populist. By implication, one would have to reconsider the role of populism in attracting voters scoring low on agreeableness or to reconsider whether the SP qualifies as a populist party.

With the data at hand, this methodological setup does not allow us to draw any firm conclusions about populism-specific effects of agreeableness on voting for populist parties. Still, we think it is an improvement to suggest it and provides scholars with an incentive to derive specific hypotheses that lend themselves to rigorous testing, provided suitable data. Future research may thus benefit from pursuing this avenue further.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this comment, we discuss the argument, the findings, and the conclusions of the article 'The psychological roots of populist voting' by Bakker et al. (2016). They introduced the notion that low levels of agreeableness make citizens susceptible to populist appeals and in consequence are inclined

to cast a vote for left- and right-wing populist parties. This is an important suggestion. Yet, we argued that the original model builds on questionable assumptions and is theoretically underspecified. Moreover, the evidence they presented does not provide sufficient support to the paper's substantive conclusions. Therefore, we argue that further research is required before it is reasonable to accept the notion that agreeableness affects voting for populist parties in the way suggested by Bakker et al. (2016). In an attempt to stimulate future research, we provided evidence from mediation analyses on voting for the Dutch PVV and SP. Our findings suggest that a lack of trust in parties and politicians plays a role in linking agreeableness to vote choice. These analyses may encourage more scholars to address the substantive questions raised by Bakker et al. (2016).

Despite the theoretical and methodological problems in the original paper, we think it draws attention to important issues in scholarship on populism and personality. First, it demonstrates the importance of adequately theorizing the role that personality traits play in affecting political behavior. Scholars should clearly state whether they propose a model with direct or indirect effects and provide justifications for their choice. Otherwise, it becomes difficult to state testable hypotheses in the first place. We do not imply that the suggested mediation model is the only reasonable choice. One may also consider more complex arguments. It is worthwhile, e.g., to address the question to what extent policy opinions and political trust affect voting behavior either independently or interactively. Second, the paper highlights conceptual and methodological issues for the broader literature on the role of personality traits and political behavior. Short inventories of personality traits naturally focus on a few sub-dimensions of broad traits. This, however, implies problems for testing hypotheses on broad traits using these indicators. At the same time, substantive arguments may focus on a specific facet rather than a broad trait. For some arguments, e.g., the facet 'trust' might be important, whereas another facet of the trait 'agreeableness' may prove important for other arguments (e.g., Hirsh et al. 2010). If applicable, scholars therefore should specify relevant facets and employ suitable measures.

Third, our discussion hints at issues in the analysis of populism. Cases like the Dutch SP on which populism experts disagree highlight the importance of clearly spelling out conceptualizations of ‘populism’ and measurement strategies. By improving research in this regard, scholars might become able to provide valid measures of parties’ populism at different points in time. This kind of information might serve as a stepping stone for analyses of how voters with certain dispositions respond to changes in the level of populism of political parties. Scholars thus could address hypotheses that directly flow from the disposition by situation framework (e.g., Funder 2008). We think this type of analysis would be a major improvement. Finally, Bakker et al. (2016) introduced the Congruency Model of Politics by Caprara & Zimbardo (2004) to link voters to populist parties. While the model attempts to link personality to parties, most of its reasoning is built on the congruence between a voter’s and the respective candidates’ personality. This may be the key to understanding the role of populist leaders for which we, at this point, lack evidence that they matter to voters (see van der Brug & Mughan 2007; Aardal & Binder 2011; Kestilä-Kekkonen & Söderlund 2014). As personalization of politics continues (cf. McAllister 2007), evaluating the role of personality in choosing populist leaders and, ultimately, voting for these parties may provide further insight into the relationship between personality and populist voting (see, e.g., Vecchione et al. (2011a)). In summary, we conclude that the study by Bakker et al. (2016) has moved the discussion of why some voters choose to vote for a populist party while others do not into an interesting direction. It hints at important conceptual, theoretical, and methodological issues and may thus prove valuable in improving scholarship on personality traits in politics and populism as well as at the intersection of these subfields.

## Appendix

Table A1: The Effect of Agreeableness on the Decisions to Vote for *Die Linke* in the 2013 German National Election – Candidate Vote

	Model A1 (Original)	Model A2 (East/West Weight)	Model A3 (Transformati on Weight)	Model A4 (East Dummy)	Model A5 (Post- Stratification Weight)
Agreeableness	0.71 (0.26)	0.59 (0.25)	0.43 (0.20)	0.81 (0.31)	0.41* (0.19)
Openness	1.05 (0.42)	1.16 (0.55)	1.29 (0.67)	1.89 (0.79)	1.36 (0.78)
Conscientious- ness	0.82 (0.43)	0.52 (0.28)	0.58 (0.30)	0.67 (0.37)	0.57 (0.30)
Extraversion	1.98 (0.71)	1.82 (0.72)	2.23 (0.96)	1.53 (0.58)	1.68 (0.74)
Neuroticism	1.20 (0.49)	1.04 (0.50)	1.48 (0.78)	1.33 (0.56)	1.42 (0.85)
Female	0.76 (0.15)	0.86 (0.18)	0.97 (0.22)	0.70 (0.14)	0.96 (0.23)
Age	5.16 (9.25)	11.69 (21.53)	3.18 (7.07)	2.37 (4.44)	2.25 (5.21)
Age <sup>2</sup>	0.13 (0.24)	0.03 (0.05)	0.13 (0.29)	0.24 (0.46)	0.17 (0.42)
Education	0.94 (0.08)	0.93 (0.09)	0.93 (0.09)	0.92 (0.09)	0.90 (0.10)
Economic Attitudes	0.14*** (0.06)	0.19*** (0.09)	0.17*** (0.09)	0.17*** (0.07)	0.17*** (0.09)
Social Attitudes	1.70 (0.65)	2.41* (1.04)	2.60 (1.27)	0.91 (0.37)	2.57 (1.31)
East Dummy				5.38*** (1.12)	



Constant	0.21 (0.17)	0.19* (0.16)	0.17* (0.15)	0.14* (0.12)	0.23 (0.21)
Observations	1341	1341	1341	1341	1341
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.12	0.04
Chi <sup>2</sup>	35.64	34.90	30.47	107.84	27.71
Log likelihood	-424.46	-349.36	-344.19	-388.35	-336.40

*Note:* \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; Entries are odds ratios from logistic regressions; standard errors in parentheses.

Table A2: The Effect of Agreeableness on the Decisions to Vote for *Die Linke* in the 2013 German National Election – Party Vote

	Model A6 (Original)	Model A7 (East/West Weight)	Model A8 (Transformation Weight)	Model A9 (East Dummy)	Model A10 (Post- Stratification Weight)
Agreeableness	0.88 (0.31)	0.73 (0.31)	0.89 (0.37)	0.99 (0.36)	0.71 (0.32)
Openness	1.17 (0.46)	1.52 (0.66)	1.15 (0.52)	1.99 (0.81)	1.55 (0.82)
Conscientious- ness	0.73 (0.37)	0.43 (0.23)	0.88 (0.47)	0.60 (0.32)	0.63 (0.33)
Extraversion	2.28* (0.79)	2.26* (0.84)	2.39* (0.92)	1.79 (0.65)	1.97 (0.84)
Neuroticism	1.05 (0.42)	0.95 (0.44)	1.31 (0.62)	1.13 (0.46)	1.28 (0.75)
Female	0.88 (0.16)	0.93 (0.18)	0.93 (0.18)	0.83 (0.16)	0.93 (0.20)
Age	6.11 (10.52)	12.37 (24.06)	4.21 (8.19)	2.74 (4.92)	2.72 (6.04)
Age <sup>2</sup>	0.16 (0.28)	0.05 (0.10)	0.30 (0.59)	0.29 (0.52)	0.32 (0.70)
Education	0.94 (0.08)	0.97 (0.09)	0.97 (0.08)	0.93 (0.09)	0.96 (0.09)
Economic Attitudes	0.11*** (0.04)	0.14*** (0.07)	0.09*** (0.05)	0.13*** (0.05)	0.15*** (0.08)
Social Attitudes	1.33 (0.49)	1.60 (0.62)	1.26 (0.55)	0.70 (0.28)	1.37 (0.64)
East Dummy				4.87*** (0.96)	
Constant	0.21* (0.17)	0.17* (0.13)	0.15* (0.13)	0.16* (0.13)	0.15* (0.13)
Observations	1340	1340	1340	1340	1340
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.12	0.03

Chi <sup>2</sup>	42.45	33.85	34.68	111.86	20.48
Log likelihood	-450.58	-381.68	-439.88	-415.88	-355.91

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*Note.* \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; Entries are odds ratios from logistic regressions; standard errors in parentheses.

Table A3: Multinomial Logit Model – Choosing *Die Linke* in 2013 German National Election Studies over all other parties (reference category)

	Candidate Vote		Party Vote	
	Choosing AfD over all other parties (but <i>Die Linke</i> )	Choosing <i>Die Linke</i> over all other parties (but AfD)	Choosing AfD over all other parties (but <i>Die Linke</i> )	Choosing <i>Die Linke</i> over all other parties (but AfD)
Agreeableness	0.84 (0.39)	0.58 (0.25)	0.48 (0.22)	0.70 (0.29)
Openness	9.84* (9.82)	1.24 (0.59)	3.74* (2.45)	1.63 (0.71)
Conscientiousness	0.08* (0.09)	0.47 (0.26)	0.37 (0.32)	0.40 (0.22)
Extraversion	0.19* (0.14)	1.73 (0.69)	0.29* (0.16)	2.11* (0.79)
Neuroticism	0.27 (0.20)	1.00 (0.48)	0.89 (0.56)	0.95 (0.44)
Female	0.29** (0.13)	0.83 (0.18)	0.32*** (0.11)	0.88 (0.18)
Age	58790.38* (256667.26)	15.04 (27.90)	7.76 (21.37)	12.82 (25.03)
Age <sup>2</sup>	0.00** (0.00)	0.02* (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.04 (0.09)
Education	0.88 (0.20)	0.93 (0.09)	1.04 (0.15)	0.98 (0.09)
Economic Attitudes	1.06 (0.93)	0.19*** (0.09)	1.71 (1.21)	0.14*** (0.07)
Social Attitudes	19.42*** (16.44)	2.63* (1.14)	13.55*** (8.56)	1.83 (0.72)
Constant	0.01** (0.01)	0.19 (0.17)	0.04** (0.04)	0.18* (0.14)
Observations	1341		1340	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.08		0.08	
Chi <sup>2</sup>	73.36		102.41	
Log likelihood	-478.12		-602.81	

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; Entries are odds ratios from multinomial regressions; standard errors in parentheses. Data is weighted with East/West weight to account for sample discrepancies between East and West Germany. Applying different weighting schemes does not alter the substantive conclusions.

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## Tables

**Table 1:** The Effect of Agreeableness on the Decisions to Vote for *Die Linke* in the 2009 German National Election – Candidate Vote

	Model 1 (Original)	Model 2 (East/West Weight)	Model 3 (Transformati on Weight)	Model 4 (East Dummy)	Model 5 (Post- Stratification Weight)
Agreeableness	0.53* (0.17)	0.48* (0.16)	0.55 (0.21)	0.62 (0.20)	0.55 (0.21)
Openness	1.76 (0.60)	2.24* (0.76)	1.98 (0.75)	1.75 (0.61)	2.16* (0.81)
Conscientious- ness	0.47 (0.20)	0.43* (0.18)	0.39* (0.17)	0.50 (0.22)	0.39* (0.18)
Extraversion	2.14* (0.65)	1.90 (0.63)	1.87 (0.69)	1.71 (0.53)	1.86 (0.69)
Neuroticism	1.21 (0.42)	1.31 (0.46)	0.97 (0.36)	1.30 (0.47)	1.01 (0.40)
Female	0.82 (0.13)	0.74 (0.12)	0.71 (0.13)	0.77 (0.12)	0.71 (0.13)
Age	4.34 (5.93)	3.58 (5.08)	3.88 (5.98)	3.67 (5.17)	4.71 (7.40)
Age <sup>2</sup>	0.24 (0.35)	0.17 (0.26)	0.19 (0.31)	0.22 (0.34)	0.17 (0.29)
Education	0.86 (0.07)	0.88 (0.07)	0.89 (0.08)	0.84* (0.07)	0.89 (0.08)
East Dummy				3.83*** (0.60)	
Constant	0.24* (0.14)	0.23* (0.15)	0.25 (0.18)	0.16** (0.10)	0.23* (0.17)
Observations	1495	1495	1495	1495	1495
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.08	0.02
Chi <sup>2</sup>	22.16	29.61	22.59	97.53	23.07
Log likelihood	-595.61	-537.60	-537.18	-557.93	-533.89

*Note:* \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; Entries are odds ratios from logistic regressions; standard errors in parentheses.



**Table 2:** The Effect of Agreeableness on the Decisions to Vote for *Die Linke* in the 2009 German National Election – Party Vote

	Model 6 (Original)	Model 7 (East/West Weight)	Model 8 (Transformation Weight)	Model 9 (East Dummy)	Model 10 (Post- Stratification Weight)
Agreeableness	1.20 (0.36)	1.20 (0.40)	1.45 (0.54)	1.43 (0.46)	1.37 (0.51)
Openness	1.96* (0.65)	2.15* (0.68)	2.33* (0.78)	1.89 (0.63)	2.64** (0.90)
Conscientiousness	0.68 (0.29)	0.67 (0.27)	0.53 (0.23)	0.73 (0.32)	0.55 (0.25)
Extraversion	1.76 (0.52)	1.71 (0.56)	1.50 (0.57)	1.52 (0.46)	1.51 (0.61)
Neuroticism	0.90 (0.31)	0.91 (0.32)	0.54 (0.21)	0.96 (0.34)	0.55 (0.23)
Female	0.84 (0.13)	0.78 (0.12)	0.74 (0.13)	0.82 (0.12)	0.74 (0.13)
Age	2.08 (2.71)	1.81 (2.46)	2.43 (3.47)	1.81 (2.42)	2.58 (3.76)
Age <sup>2</sup>	0.29 (0.42)	0.19 (0.29)	0.17 (0.26)	0.28 (0.41)	0.16 (0.26)
Education	0.86 (0.07)	0.85* (0.07)	0.89 (0.08)	0.85* (0.07)	0.88 (0.08)
East Dummy				2.86*** (0.43)	
Constant	0.17** (0.10)	0.18** (0.11)	0.19* (0.13)	0.12*** (0.07)	0.18* (0.13)
Observations	1501	1501	1501	1501	1501
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.02
Chi <sup>2</sup>	16.97	27.50	27.92	65.69	29.50
Log likelihood	-622.26	-577.42	-578.75	-597.90	-579.51

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; Entries are odds ratios from logistic regressions; standard errors in parentheses.

**Table 3:** Decomposing the Total Effect of Agreeableness on Choosing PVV and SP over Non-Populist Parties into the Direct and Indirect Effects via Trust in Politicians/Parties and Social and Economic Attitudes

<i>Model Name</i>	Choosing PVV over Non-Populist Parties (KHB 1)		Choosing SP over Non-Populist Parties (KHB 2)		Choosing SP over PVV (KHB 3)	
	Coef.	(S.E.)	Coef.	(S.E.)	Coef.	(S.E.)
Total Effect	-1.69***	(0.44)	1.45***	(0.43)	1.70***	(0.44)
Direct Effect	-0.66	(0.43)	0.94*	(0.43)	0.66	(0.43)
Indirect Effect						
via Social Attitudes	-0.59***	(0.12)	0.06	(0.04)	0.59***	(0.12)
via Economic Attitudes	0.07	(0.06)	0.73***	(0.12)	-0.07	(0.06)
via Political Trust	-0.51***	(0.11)	-0.27***	(0.07)	0.51***	(0.11)

*Notes:* \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; Reported p-values are based on two-tailed significance tests; decomposition is performed on 4,002 respondents. We adjusted the model for Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Neuroticism, Gender (Dummy for Female), Age, Age-squared, Level of Education, Economic Attitudes, Social Attitudes. Underlying model is a multinomial model and entries are log odds. For 1 and 2, the base-outcome was all non-populist parties. For 3, we re-ran the model but used the PVV as the baseline category for purposes of better comparison between the two (potential) populist parties.