The Psychological Roots of Populist Voting: Evidence from the United States, the Netherlands and Germany

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Abstract

What are the psychological roots of support for populist parties or outfits such as the Tea Party, the Dutch Freedom Party or Germany's *Die Linke*? Populist parties have as common denominator that they employ an anti-establishment message, which they combine with some 'host' ideology. Building on the congruency model of political preference we expect that a voter's personality should match with the message and position of her party. We theorize that a low score on the personality trait Agreeableness matches with the anti-establishment message and should predict voting for populist parties. We find evidence for this hypothesis in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany. The relationship between low Agreeableness and voting for populist parties is robust controlling for other personality traits, authoritarianism, socio-demographic characteristics and ideology. Thus, explanations of the success of populism should take personality traits into account.

Keywords: Populism, Personality, Agreeableness, Voting behaviour.

The cover of the first 2014 issue of *The Economist* (2014) featured a floating tea pot carrying three European populist politicians accompanied by the comment 'Europe's Tea Parties'. The journal's leading article describes that on both sides of the Atlantic populist parties[1] are experiencing electoral success and gaining political clout. Tea Party candidates, the Dutch and Austrian Freedom Parties, the Danish People's Party, the French *Front National*, and Germany's *Die Linke* are all examples of successful populists (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). These parties differ in terms of ideology. Some are pro-gay marriage while others abhor it. Some worship the invisible hand of the market but others sanctify the universal welfare state. The essential common denominator of these parties is their anti-establishment message (Rooduijn 2014), which they combine with a 'host' ideology – and which depends on the particular political context. Thus, what these parties have in common is their portrayal of the political elite – in Washington, The Hague, Berlin, etc. – as evil, working for their own gain, and disinterested in the common people (Mudde 2004).

This anti-establishment message explains some of the electoral success of populist parties, as political cynicism (Bergh 2004; Schumacher & Rooduijn 2013) and populist anti-establishment attitudes (Akkerman et al. 2013) are identified along with ideological proximity (van der Brug et al. 2000) and low social and economic status (Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Betz 1994; Lubbers and Scheepers 2000; Lubbers et al. 2002) as explanatory factors of populist voting.

According to political psychology research, ideology and cynicism are rooted in personality (Gerber et al. 2010; Jost et al. 2003; Mondak and Halperin 2008). The *congruency model of political preference* holds that voters seek politicians and parties similar to their own personality, and that successful politicians "speak the language of personality (…) by identifying and conveying those individual characteristics that are most appealing (…) to a

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[1] The Tea Party is a faction within a party.

particular constituency" (Caprara and Zimbardo 2004, 581). We expand this argument and theorize that a person is drawn to a populist party when the anti-establishment message of this party, and its leader, is congruent with one's personality. When assessing personality, researchers often use the Big Five personality traits, which is a taxonomy of temperament and behavior that identifies five traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism (Digman 1990). We push this research one step further by hypothesizing that voting for populists is rooted in low Agreeableness. Because low agreeable individuals are inclined to be highly skeptical of the behavior of others, they are highly sensitive to populist parties' anti-establishment message and therefore more inclined to support these parties.

We test our argument with survey evidence from the United States, the Netherlands and Germany. Together, these countries have a diverse set of successful populists: the anti-government Tea Party (US), the welfare chauvinist and anti-immigrant Freedom Party (Netherlands) and the left-wing *Die Linke* (Germany). We report negative correlations between Agreeableness and support for each of these populist parties. We control for a host of additional interpretations – ideology, socio-economic background, authoritarianism and the other Big Five traits – but find systematic evidence for an *independent* effect of Agreeableness on populist voting. This is an important finding, because we demonstrate: (1) that populist voters do not have an authoritarian personality such as supporters of fascist outfits; and (2) that populist voting is not irrational protest voting as some have claimed (Billiet and de Witte 1995; Mayer and Perrineau 1992), because protest is an action congruent with one's personality. Hence, the populist vote (for a right- or left-wing populist party or movement) can only fully be understood once the personality of the voter is taken into consideration.

What is Populism?

Scholars increasingly agree on a substantive, 'ideational' definition of populism (Hawkins 2009; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012), because prototypical populists do not have a particular style of practising politics or a specific form of organization in common. Instead, it is the *message* they express that distinguishes them from other parties (Rooduijn 2014). Specifically, populism is "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2004, 543). What exactly is meant by 'the people' or 'the elite' depends on the particular political context within which a populist party rallies (Canovan 1981). The elite – arrogant, greedy, lazy, corrupt, unresponsive to ordinary people, and absorbed by self-interest (Mudde 2004) – might be a political elite (politicians and parties), an economic elite (bankers and 'the rich'), a cultural elite (academics and writers), a media elite (journalists) or a legal elite (judges).

According to this definition, populism is neither left nor right, neither progressive nor conservative. Populism can be combined with many different 'host ideologies'. The Tea Party – with its romantic vision of the original, lean state – combines conservatism with an anti-establishment message (Parker & Barreto 2013; Skocpol & Williamson 2013). On the website Teaparty.org (accessed 6 July 2015) it is claimed that citizens have become increasingly frustrated with "politics as usual". Indeed "[u]nderlying many specific Tea Party worries is distrust of politicians, the sense that the political class is not responsive or accountable to 'average Americans'" (Williamson et al. 2011, 34). The Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) criticizes the elite for its multiculturalism and for selling out national interests to the benefit of Brussels or immigrants. For example, in its 2006 election manifesto the party writes that the "political elite systematically ignores citizens' interests and problems" (Freedom Party 2006,

1). According to Vossen (2011), the party leader, Wilders, increasingly adopted populist rhetoric since 2006. Germany's *Die Linke* denounces in its most recent election manifesto "elitist backroom politics" (*Die Linke* 2013, 49). According to Hough and Koss (2009, 78), The party "regularly talks in the language of elites betraying the population at large, and it is frequently disdainful of the wider political process". Some populist parties change over time. In the 1980s and 1990s the French *Front National* combined nationalist appeals with a neo-liberal outlook (Kitschelt 1995), but has now taken over the welfare chauvinism of its successful Dutch counterpart (Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2014). In sum, whether, for example, populists exclude outsiders, or whether they endorse a strong welfare state is dependent on the 'host ideology' to which the populist party attaches itself.

Previous research has shown that the message of populist parties indeed differs from the messages of mainstream parties. Based on a systematic content analysis of election manifestos of parties in five Western European countries, Rooduijn, de Lange and van der Brug (2014) demonstrate that populist parties are more inclined to make the claim that the Good people are exploited by an Evil elite than mainstream parties. In sum, all prototypical populist parties have in common that they express a specific anti-establishment message but differ in the host ideology they have adopted (Mudde 2004). Personality should thus match with this anti-establishment message *across* countries.

Personality and Voting for Populist Parties

To analyze the link between personality and populism we make use of the "congruency principle", which holds that voters "select politicians whose traits match their own traits (Caprara and Zimbardo 2004, 581)". This model assumes congruency between a voter's personality and the image of the party and the leader s/he votes for. On this basis we expect to find congruency between a voter's personality traits and the *message* expressed by the

populist.[2] Voters need information about parties and politicians in order to make the connection between their own personality and their vote choice. Caprara and Zimbardo (2004, 584) explain that "a crucial skill for politicians is learning to speak the language of personality namely, to navigate properly in the domain of personality attributes by identifying and conveying those individual characteristics that are most appealing at a certain time to a particular constituency". In other words, politicians need to *communicate* those individual characteristics that appeal to a specific group of voters by sending a message congruent with these features.

"A similar conception" of the congruence principle is – according to Caprara and Zimbardo (2004, 590) – the elective affinity model introduced by Jost and colleagues (Jost et al. 2009).[3] The elective affinity metaphor puts forward that there is a "functional match" – between the symbolic nature and substance of a belief system and the psychological dispositions of their supporters. Thus, individuals support a party if their personality matches with the party's – ideological – message.

With the anti-establishment message as a central characteristic of populist parties, we expect that for populist party supporters the content, structure or symbols of this anti-establishment message should be congruent with some personality trait and, accordingly, leading to support for a populist party. To develop this prediction we turn to a commonly used categorization of psychological dispositions: the Big Five model of personality. Originating in

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[2] This congruency should also express itself in individuals seeing the party's *leader* as similar in terms of personality traits. This could be the case for populist parties too, but we do not have the information to test this.

[3] Jost and colleagues (2009, 320) acknowledge that "insights derived from the 'congruency model' suggest new ways of identifying the occurrence of elective affinities in the area of political psychology."

the lexical tradition of personality psychology, the Big Five identifies five continuous psychological dispositions that describe differences in the temperament and behavior of individuals: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism (Digman 1990) We use the Big Five model of personality because they encapsulate a wide variety of individual differences, have a genetic component, develop in early childhood, and are relatively stable over time (Mondak 2010, chap. 2). These dispositions are correlated with – among other things – health behavior and academic achievement (Ozer and Benet-Martínez 2006) as well as political attitudes (Gerber et al. 2010; Jost et al. 2003) and vote choice (Bakker et al. 2015; Barbaranelli et al. 2007; Schoen and Schumann 2007).

We expect that the anti-establishment message is congruent with individuals scoring low on *Agreeableness*. Agreeableness is a trait characterized by altruism, trust towards others, soft-heartedness, modesty, tolerance, and cooperativeness (Costa et al. 1991). Individuals that score low on Agreeableness are thus egoistic, distrusting towards others, intolerant, uncooperative, and they express antagonism towards others (McCrae 1996, 329). In the political domain low agreeable individuals are: more distrusting of politicians (Mondak and Halperin 2008) and politics (Dinesen et al. 2014); less efficacious (Mondak and Halperin 2008); and more likely to believe in conspiracy theories (Swami et al. 2010). The populist anti-establishment message – accusing the political elite of incompetence, insubordination and profiteering at the expense of the common people – matches with a distrusting, though-minded, cynical and intolerant personality.

Various studies indeed verify that persuasive appeals are especially effective when the message resonates with psychological dispositions such as personality (Hirsh et al. 2012). For instance, authoritarians that receive a threatening message express less tolerance towards out-group members (Feldman & Stenner 1997), are more likely to vote (Lavine et al. 1999), and are more likely to process information in a biased manner (Lavine et al. 2005). These studies

suggest that matches between persuasive messages and personality indeed lead to strong behavioral responses from the recipient.

To conclude, we hypothesize that individuals low on Agreeableness are likely to be susceptible to populist anti-establishment messages, and therefore they should be more likely to support populist parties.

Additional Explanations of Voting for Populist Parties

We now consider four additional explanations of the relationship between personality and voting for populist parties: (1) right-wing ideology; (2) authoritarianism and social dominance orientation; (3) the effect of the four other Big Five traits; and (4) socio-economic background variables.

The first explanation is that the low agreeable are right-wing and therefore vote for a populist party. Individuals with a social-conservative ideology have been described as low agreeable (Gerber et al. 2010). Also, the low agreeable are more likely to vote for right-wing parties (Schoen and Schumann 2007). Moreover, other ideological constructs such as social dominance orientation or right-wing authoritarianism have been associated with support for the radical right (Duckitt and Sibley 2010). However, not every populist party hosts a right-wing, conservative agenda. Populist parties combine an anti-establishment message with a 'host' ideology that could be right-wing (Tea Party) or radical left-wing (*Die Linke*), conservative (Danish People's Party) or neo-liberal (Front National, in 1980s). We therefore expect right-wing ideology to predict populist voting for radical-right populist parties but not for populists with another host ideology. Following this reasoning we expect low Agreeableness to explain populist party voting across countries, even when controlling for ideology.

Second, the roots of the study of personality lie in explaining why people supported fascist parties and condoned widespread violence against their own population (Adorno et al. 1950). This research is about authoritarian personalities (Altemeyer 1997), which is conceptualized as a preference for conventionalism, moral absolutism, obedience to authority and cynicism (Napier and Jost 2008) or as a dimension with social conformity on the one hand and autonomy on the other hand (Feldman 2003). As argued in our section on populism, a populist party might have authoritarian standpoints, but this is not the common denominator of populist parties. Indeed, some studies find a positive correlation between (right-wing) authoritarianism and support for populist parties such as the Tea Party in the US (Arceneaux and Nicholson 2012) as well populist parties in Denmark and Switzerland (Dunn 2013). However, authoritarianism is not correlated to support for populist parties in Austria, the Netherlands and Belgium (Dunn 2013). Conceptually, a tension exists between the anti-establishment core of populism and authoritarianism. It is difficult to see how an individual is obedient to authority by supporting a party that opposes the authorities. In sum, authoritarianism matches with the 'host' ideology of some populist parties, but there is a tension with the anti-establishment posture – the common denominator of populist parties.

Third, we add the full set of other personality traits from the Big Five model – Openness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Extroversion – to control for other potential associations with populist parties. Openness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and to a lesser degree Extroversion have been associated with political ideology (Gerber et al. 2010; Jost et al. 2003; Mondak and Halperin 2008). We therefore expect to find an association between these four personality traits and the support for populist parties when we do not control for ideology. If we analyze voting behavior with personality traits *and* ideology, we expect that the effect of personality traits disappear because it is mediated by ideology. Here we briefly discuss the association between the four Big Five traits and ideology.

Openness is a trait characterized by a preference for new activities, ideas and the willingness to reconsider held beliefs (Digman 1990). Low levels of Openness relate to conservatism and voting for right-wing parties (Gerber et al. 2010; Schoen and Schumann 2007). Specifically, we expect to observe a negative association between Openness and the support for populist parties with a right-wing 'host' ideology (i.e., the Tea Party and Freedom Party), whereas we expect a positive association between Openness and populist parties with a left-wing 'host' ideology (i.e., *Die Linke*).

Conscientiousness is characterized by a strong preference for order, structure, self-discipline and achievement striving (Digman 1990). Conscientious individuals have conservative/right-wing attitudes in both the economic and the social domains of politics (Gerber et al. 2010). Therefore we expect a positive association between Conscientiousness and support for the Tea Party as well as the Freedom Party but a negative association with *Die Linke* if we do not control for ideology.

Neuroticism relates to the experience of negative affect such as anger, anxiety and depression as well as self-consciousness and the experience of stress (Digman 1990). In the US Neuroticism correlates positively to voting for the Democrats (Barbaranelli et al. 2007) and economic liberalism (Gerber et al. 2010). Likewise, in Germany, Neuroticism relates to support for political "parties that offer shelter against material and cultural challenges" (Schoen and Schumann 2007: 492). Therefore, we expect a negative association between Neuroticism and the support for populist parties with a right-wing 'host' ideology but a positive association between Neuroticism and populist parties with a left-wing 'host' ideology. *Extroversion* relates to excitement seeking, outgoing and social behavior and is inconsistently associated with voting and ideology (Gerber et al. 2010; Mondak and Halperin 2008).

Fourth, voting for populists has often been linked to socio-demographic characteristics of voters, such as age, education and gender (Lipset 1960). Typical populist voters are both older and younger, lowly educated, and men (Arzheimer 2009; Lubbers et al. 2002). Therefore, we control for these variables.

Research Design

We test our hypothesis in three countries: the United States (Tea Party), the Netherlands (Freedom Party) and Germany (*Die Linke*). These three parties have different host-ideologies. The Tea Party is a populist faction (Skocpol & Williamson 2013) in the Republican party that can be labeled as conservative (Gervais and Morris 2012; Parker and Barreto 2013). *Die Linke* can be labeled as socialist, and the Freedom Party as radical right (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012) (see section "What is Populism?" for a more elaborate discussion). We selected ideologically heterogeneous populist parties to underline the fact that the anti-establishment message is the common denominator of populist parties – not their 'host' ideology. A recent content analysis of election manifestos indicates that both *Die Linke* and the Freedom Party employ a populist discourse (Rooduijn et al. 2014).

We draw from different data sets in the US (American National Election Studies [ANES] 2012, and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study [CCES] 2010), the Netherlands (Longitudinal Internet Studies for Social Science Research 2010) and Germany (German Post Election Study 2009). An obvious drawback of using different data sets is that theoretical concepts cannot always be measured by the same variables. However, we take care

to achieve measurement equivalence across our dependent and independent variables.[4] Table 1 provides an overview of the samples and measures used in the three studies.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Study 1: Agreeableness and Populism in the US: Tea Party Support

Materials and Methods

We employ two U.S. samples. The first sample is a pre-election survey part of the 2012 American National Election Survey (ANES 2014). The second sample was gathered as part of the Cooperative Congressional Election Studies 2010 (CCES; Ansolabehere 2010). A random sub-sample of the CCES was recruited to answer a series of psychological measures in the first and the second wave of the survey. We relied upon the second wave of the survey because there we could combine the measures of personality with the support for the Tea Party variable.

In the ANES 2012 we use an item measuring support for the Tea Party that ranges from "strong support" (1) through "strong opposition" (7). In the CCES 2010 we relied on the item which asks people to express "their favorability of the Tea Party". This item ranged from "very positive" (1) through "very negative" (5). We reversed both items to range from very negative attitudes towards the Tea Party (0) through very positive attitudes towards the Tea Party (1).

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[4] The correlations between the independent variables in our analyses are in the same directions and, most often, of the same magnitude across the samples (see SI Table A.3 [ANES], Table B.3 [CCES], Table D.3 [Netherlands] and Table E.3 [Germany]).

In both samples, personality traits were measured using the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) which measures each trait with two items (Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann 2003). We controlled for gender, age, age-squared, race, education, authoritarianism, and social and economic attitudes. The item wording of the independent variables, the descriptive statistics and the correlations between the independent variables can be found in the Supporting Information (SI) A (ANES; Table A.1-3) and SI B (CCES; Table B.1-3).

Results

Due to the ordinal nature of this dependent variable we ran a series of ordered logistic regression models with clustered standard errors at the state level. In Table 2 (left-hand column) we present the model where we control for the other four personality traits, gender, age, education, and race and a second model where we also include authoritarianism and our ideological variables. Starting with the ANES 2012, we observe that Agreeableness is consistently associated with support for the Tea Party. Figure 1 (upper panel) presents the predicted support for the Tea Party while holding all other variables at their central tendencies. We observe that, in line with the expectations, low scorers on Agreeableness (5th percentile) are more likely to support the Tea Party (0.13 [95% CI = 0.11, 0.15]) compared to high scorers (95th percentile) on Agreeableness (0.10 [95% CI = 0.09, 0.11]). The effect of Agreeableness is at par with the effect of Authoritarianism on support for the Tea Party as low scorers on authoritarianism (5th percentile) are less likely to support the Tea Party (0.08 [95% CI = 0.07, 0.10]) compared with high scorers (95th percentile) on authoritarianism (0.13 [95% CI = 0.12, 0.14]). The effects of Agreeableness are, however, modest compared to the effects of the attitudinal dimensions on the probability of voting for the Tea Party. Specifically, respondents with left-wing economic attitudes (5th percentile) are much less likely to have favorable attitudes towards the Tea Party (0.02 [95% CI = 0.02, 0.03]) compared to

respondents with right-wing (95th percentile) economic attitudes (0.23 [95% CI = 0.21, 0.25]).

Turning to the CCES 2010, we analyze favorability to the Tea Party. Like in our analyses of the ANES (2012), we present in Table 2 (right-hand column) the results of two ordered logistic regression models. The lower panel of Figure 1 projects the predicted sympathy for the Tea Party while keeping all other variables at their central tendency. Respondents with low levels of Agreeableness (5th percentile) are more likely to have very positive evaluations of the Tea Party (0.38 [95% CI = 0.35, 0.41]) compared with high scorers (95th percentile) on Agreeableness (0.32 [95% CI = 0.28, 0.32]). Again the effect of Agreeableness is grossly at par with the effect of Authoritarianism but considerably smaller compared with the effects of the ideological variables.[5]

[Insert Table 2 and Figure 1 here]

Moving to our additional explanations, we find in both samples that support for the Tea Party is (1) associated with low levels of Openness but high levels of Conscientiousness in the models without attitudinal covariates (i.e., models 1). However, in both samples the effects of these personality traits disappear when authoritarianism as well as the social and economic attitudes were included. The effects of the other two traits are not consistent across the samples. In the ANES 2012, Extroversion is positively associated with support for the Tea Party, whereas Neuroticism is negatively associated with support for the Tea Party. These associations disappear when the attitudinal controls are included. Importantly, we do not replicate these findings in the CCES 2010 which questions the robustness of these particular associations. (2) Conservative economic and social attitudes strongly predict support for the

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[5] SI C shows the discriminant validity of our findings in the US.

Tea Party. (3) Authoritarianism is a strong predictor for Tea Party support in the ANES 2012 (Arceneaux & Nicholson 2012), yet, this effect is not replicated in the CCES 2010. (4) In both samples, the socio-economic background variables show a pattern with earlier research, whereby African Americans and higher educated are less likely to support the Tea Party (Arceneaux and Nicholson 2012).

Conclusion

To summarize, Agreeableness is a substantive predictor of the support for the Tea Party even when controlling for a host of other predictors of support for the Tea Party. But is this finding unique to the Tea Party? To address that issue we turn to two European polities.

Study 2: Agreeableness and Populism in the Netherlands: Voting for the Freedom Party

Materials and methods

The Dutch sample in study 2 is drawn from the longstanding Dutch LISS panel. We rely upon the *politics and values wave* of this panel (2009-2010). Respondents were asked "Which party would you vote for if elections were held today?" In this sample we analyze the vote for the Freedom Party.[6] We created a dummy variable with: vote for the Freedom Party (1) and all other parties (0).

Personality traits were measured using 50-item International Personality Item Pool – Five Factor Model (IPIP-FFM) which measures each trait using 10 items (Ehrhart et al. 2008; Goldberg et al. 2006). We control for gender, age, age-squared, education, and social and

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[6] We do not include the Socialist Party (NL) in our analysis as no consensus exists as to whether this party should be classified as populist (Lucardie and Voerman 2012; Rooduijn 2014).

economic attitudes. The item wording of all independent variables, the descriptive statistics and the correlations between the independent variables are in the SI D (Table D.1-3).

Results

First, we start with the comparisons of the mean levels of Agreeableness based upon the intention to support the Freedom Party or not. A one sample t-test indicates that the vote intention for the Freedom Party is associated with a significant lower ($t(653) = -3.87$, $p < 0.001$) level of Agreeableness ($M = 0.64$, $SD = 0.16$) compared to the mean of the sample ($M = 0.66$). In Table 3, we observe that Agreeableness is a predictor of the vote intention for the Freedom Party. Respondents low on Agreeableness (5th percentile) were more likely to vote for the Freedom Party (0.16 [95% CI = 0.14, 0.18]) compared to respondents high (95th percentile) on Agreeableness (0.11 [95% CI = 0.09, 0.13]). This effect is substantive, yet, not at par with the effect of social attitudes on vote intention for the Freedom Party. Respondents with left-wing social attitudes (5th percentile) are much less likely to vote for the Freedom Party (0.01 [95% CI = 0.01, 0.01]) compared with respondents with right wing (95th percentile) social attitudes (0.29 [95% CI = 0.26, 0.31]).[7]

[Insert Table 3 and Figure 2 here]

Now we look at the additional explanations for which we introduced control variables. First, high levels of Conscientiousness predict voting for the Freedom Party in our model without the two ideological variables (model 1, Table 3). These two ideological variables also predict conservative attitudes (Gerber et al. 2010). Hence, and secondly, this explains why we do not find statistically significant effects for Conscientiousness when we control for our two

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[7] We find no evidence that support for the Freedom Party is equivalent to supporting conservative parties (SI F) or opposition parties (SI I).

ideological variables in model 2 (Table 3). Second, Extroversion is associated with the vote intention for the Freedom Party. Specifically, extroverts (95th percentile) are more likely to vote for the Freedom Party (0.16 [95% CI = 0.14, 0.19]) compared with introverted (5th percentile) respondents (0.11 [95% CI = 0.09, 0.13]). The Freedom Party is a new party and this could explain why extroverts are more likely to be drawn to this new party. Third, Openness and Neuroticism are unrelated to vote intention for the Freedom Party. Fourth, we find that the lower educated, men and the young are more likely to vote for the Freedom Party.

Conclusion

Also in our Dutch sample we find robust evidence for the relationship between Agreeableness and voting for a populist party. Yet, like the Tea Party, the Freedom Party is a right-wing party. We turn to a populist party with a left-wing 'host' ideology in order to see if Agreeableness is associated with support for populist parties irrespective of the 'host' ideology.

Study 3: Agreeableness and Populism in Germany: Voting for *Die Linke*

Materials and Methods

The German sample is based on the German Post Election Study of the year 2009 (Rattinger et al. 2011). Participants were asked which party they voted for in their local constituency during the national elections. We analyze voting for *Die Linke*. We created a dummy variable with: vote for *Die Linke* (1) and all other parties (0).

Personality was measured with a 5-item personality inventory. Short measures of personality generally are reliable and valid (Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann 2003). The item

wording of all independent variables, the descriptive statistics and the correlations between the independent variables are in the SI E (Table E.1-3). We controlled for gender, age, age-squared, education (model 1) and also control for the social and economic attitude dimensions (model 2).

Results

First, we compare means of Agreeableness of *Die Linke* voters and other voters. We observe that voters for *Die Linke* score lower (t(213) = -1.63, p = 0.05) on Agreeableness (M = 0.54, SD = 0.26) compared to the mean of the sample (M = 0.57). Turning to the regression analyses, we confirm that lower levels of Agreeableness are related to a higher probability of voting for *Die Linke* and these results are robust across model specifications (see Table 4). Looking more in detail at these findings, we calculated the predicted probabilities of voting for the populist party among voters low (5th percentile) and high (95th percentile) on Agreeableness. We observe that the low scorers on Agreeableness are more likely to vote for populist parties (0.16 [95% CI= 0.12, 0.19]) compared to the high scorers on Agreeableness (0.10 [95% CI = 0.07, 0.13]).[8] This effect is substantive but not as large as the effect of economic attitudes on voting for the populist party. Specifically, respondents with left-wing economic attitudes (5th percentile) are more likely to vote for *Die Linke* (0.28 [95% CI = 0.21,

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[8] Bakker et al. (2015) reported no association between Agreeableness and identification with *Die Linke*. The nature of these different findings is hard to explain. Yet, because of conceptual and operational differences between party identification and vote intention (Thomassen and Rosema 2009) we should not expect that they have necessarily the same psychological antecedents. Future research should address this issue.

0.34]) compared with respondents with right-wing economic attitudes (95th percentile) who are not very likely to vote for *Die Linke* (0.05 [95% CI = 0.03, 0.07]).[9]

[Insert Table 4 and Figure 3 here]

Moving to our additional explanations, we find that (1) high Openness and high Extroversion relates to voting for *Die Linke*. Openness is often associated with left-wing ideology (Gerber et al. 2010; Jost et al. 2003) and extroverts might find it exciting to vote for a new party (Kam & Simas 2012). *Die Linke* was new in the 2009 elections, although the party is a merger of two parties that previously did participate in elections. Note that the effects for Extroversion and Openness are grossly at par with the effects of Agreeableness. Furthermore we find that Conscientiousness and Neuroticism do not relate to voting for *Die Linke*. (2) Left-wing economic attitudes are strongly associated with the vote for *Die Linke*, but social attitudes are not. (3) We find no relationship between gender, age, age-squared and education and voting for *Die Linke*.

Conclusion

In sum, we find a negative relationship between Agreeableness and voting for *Die Linke*. This confirms that Agreeableness is associated with support for populist parties irrespective of the 'host' ideology.

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[9] Again, we also compared vote intention for *Die Linke* with support for progressive and conservative parties in Germany. Vote intention for *Die Linke* is associated with lower levels of Agreeableness compared to the vote intention for the conservative parties but does not differ from voting for progressive parties (SI F). Moreover, voters for Die Linke score lower on Agreeableness compared to voters for both government and opposition parties (SI I).

Discussion

The political psychology literature has for long analyzed the psychological roots of political radicalism or extremism (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1997; Duckitt and Sibley 2010; Feldman 2003; Van Hiel 2012; Lipset 1960). This paper fits into this tradition but focuses on the more contemporary phenomenon of populist parties such as the American Tea Party, the Austrian and Dutch Freedom Parties, the Danish People's Party, the French *Front National*, and *Die Linke* in Germany. Populist parties combine an anti-establishment message with some 'host' ideology of which the content depends on the specific political context. Building on the state-of-the-art in political psychology (e.g. Caprara and Zimbardo 2004) we expect individuals to support a party if there is congruency between their personality and the party's message. Arguing that Agreeableness is the best candidate for this 'congruency model', we hypothesized that individuals low on Agreeableness are more likely to support populist parties.

We find evidence for our hypothesis across two continents, three countries (US, the Netherlands and Germany), four independent samples (in total 12,420 respondents) and three ideologically heterogeneous populist parties (see table 5). Also, our findings are robust against a number of other plausible explanations.[10] The effect of Agreeableness is substantive across samples but smaller than the effects of ideology on support for populist parties. This is

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[10] Agreeableness might interact with Openness and Conscientiousness in predicting support for populist parties. We find no evidence for this hypothesis (see SI G). Moreover, the effects of Agreeableness on support for populist parties could be conditional on ideology. We do not find evidence for this alternative explanation in the US. Yet, in the Dutch and German sample low agreeable voters are likely to vote for the populist party when they hold right-wing social attitudes (see SI H).

not surprising as personality arguably is a more distant antecedent of support for political parties compared to ideology. At the same time it is likely that ideological proximity to populist parties is biased due to a desire to explain political behavior from one's political values (Bakker et al. 2015, Caprara and Zimbardo 2004).

[Insert Table 5 – around here]

By demonstrating the psychological antecedents of populist voting our paper also provides a richer, psychological micro-foundation for the support of populist parties. Oftentimes voting for populist parties is seen as irrational (Billiet and de Witte 1995; Mayer and Perrineau 1992): a blunt vote against the political establishment (Bergh 2004) with no real purpose. But it is not irrational to express discontent if that is one's purpose (van der Eijk et al. 1996). Individuals low on Agreeableness perceive others as not trustworthy and unreliable (Costa et al. 1991). A party that claims that the political establishment cannot be trusted and is dishonest speaks the language of these low agreeable voters.

New findings always beg new questions. First, *which psychological needs and motivations link Agreeableness to populist voting?* Jost and co-authors (2009) identify epistemic, existential and relational motives – which satisfy specific needs – that explain the link between the Big Five and general left-right ideology. At this point, future research should identify the exact nature of the causal relations between personality traits, individual needs, motivations and support for populist parties and remain open to theories that differ in conceptualization and causal order (Corr et al. 2013; Denissen and Penke 2008; Fleeson and Jayawickreme 2014).

Second, *in which political and economic context is populism likely to flourish?* Our study cannot predict the ebb and flow in support for populist parties over time. In order for

low agreeable individuals to be exposed to anti-establishment messages: (1) there has to be a populist party in the first place; (2) the media should pay (much) attention to the messages of these parties (Vliegenthart et al. 2012); (3) mainstream parties should engage in debate with these parties (Arzheimer & Carter 2006); and (4) cultural and socio-economic conditions should make the issues of the populist party salient (Arzheimer 2009). By designing experiments in which the political or economic context is manipulated we could identify what exactly activates low agreeable individuals and separate contextual factors that increase support for the populist 'host' ideology and contextual factors that increase anti-establishment support. Duckitt and Sibley's (2010) Dual Process Model can be an important guide here, as it claims that support for related ideological constructs (social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism) is a function of the combination of a specific context and personality.

Third, *how solid is the link between Agreeableness and populist voting over time?* Do populist voters become less agreeable? And do they continue supporting the party if it becomes integrated into the political establishment? Voters do adjust their attitudes in line with their vote choice (Beasley and Joslyn 2001) and voting for populist parties does fuel political dissatisfaction (Van der Brug 2003; Rooduijn 2013) and a closer identification with the party's operational 'host' ideology (Bakker et al. 2015). Following this last finding, populist voters may over time become policy voters instead, and remain party supporter even when the establishment absorbs the populist party. It is, however, unlikely that populist voters become less agreeable, because personality traits are stable over the long run and unaffected by election outcomes (Gerber et al. 2013).

According to Caprara and Zimbardo (2004, 584) "a crucial skill for politicians is learning to speak the language of personality, namely, to navigate properly in the domain of personality attributes by identifying and conveying those individual characteristics that are most appealing at a certain time to a particular constituency". Populists like Le Pen, Wilders,

Palin and Farage have mastered the skill of activating voters with low agreeable personalities. That is what unites them *across* political contexts, what separates them from existing parties *within* political contexts, and what underlies their perhaps unexpected success.

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Table 1. Schematic overview of the studies

	Dependent variable	Big Five	N	Economic Attitudes	Social Attitudes	Authoritarianism
Study 1: US						
ANES 2012	Support for the Tea Party	TIPI (#10)	5,016	Spending preferences (#1)	Moral-traditionalism (#4)	Yes (#3)
CCES 2010	Support for the Tea Party	TIPI (#10)	1,060	Spending preferences (#1)	Abortion attitudes (#4)	Yes (#3)
Study 2: the Netherlands	Vote intention for the Freedom Party	IPIP-FFM (#50)	4,849	Redistribution of income (#1)	Immigration attitudes (#1)	No
Study 3: Germany	Vote for Die Linke	Five-item personality inventory (#5)	1,497	Spending preferences (#1)	Immigration attitudes (#1)	No

(#) signals the number of items used to measure the construct.

Table 2. Agreeableness and Tea Party favorability in 2012 (ANES) and 2010 (CCES)

	ANES 2012		CCES 2010	
	1	2	1	2
Agreeableness	0.73#	0.59*	0.43*	0.46*
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.18)
Openness	0.31*	0.78	0.18*	0.73
	(0.05)	(0.12)	(0.06)	(0.31)
Conscientiousness	2.25*	1.00	5.64*	1.33
	(0.34)	(0.17)	(2.49)	(0.55)
Extraversion	1.35*	1.15	1.42	1.42
	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.42)	(0.49)
Neuroticism	0.69*	0.78	0.57	0.44*
	(0.09)	(0.12)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Age	0.92	0.67	1.78	0.20
	(0.05)	(0.29)	(2.16)	(0.32)
Age^2	0.71	0.72	1.02	12.76
	(0.25)	(0.29)	(1.24)	(21.97)
Female	1.06	1.07	0.64*	0.92
	(0.35)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.15)
Race				
Black	0.28*	0.39*	0.24*	0.28*
	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.08)
Hispanic	0.74*	1.05	0.84	0.87
	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.14)	(0.23)
Other	0.96	1.17	2.12*	1.26
	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.50)	(0.29)
Education	0.80*	0.81*	0.83*	0.94
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Authoritarianism	-	15.95*	-	1.34
		(2.21)		(0.27)
Economic Attitudes	-	23.96*	-	301.38*
		(3.28)		(102.32)
Social Attitudes	-	1.71*	-	8.69*
		(0.19)		(1.94)
N	5,016	4,210	1,060	987
Pseudo R^2	0.03	0.13	0.06	0.28
Wald Chi^2	441	1,810	194	1,385
Log pseudolikelihood	-7,993	-6,042	-1,448	-1,030

In all models we run ordered logistic regression models with standard errors clustered at the state level.
Proportional odds ratios with standard errors in parentheses are reported. *p < 0.05; # p < 0.1

Table 3. Agreeableness and vote for the Freedom Party (*Dutch Sample*)

	1	2
Agreeableness	0.29*	0.39*
	(0.11)	(0.15)
Openness	0.56	0.75
	(0.18)	(0.25)
Conscientiousness	3.08*	1.43
	(1.02)	(0.50)
Extraversion	3.94*	2.63*
	(1.29)	(0.87)
Neuroticism	1.55	1.45
	(0.46)	(0.39)
Female	0.55*	0.63*
	(0.05)	(0.06)
Age	1.61	1.52
	(1.25)	(1.27)
Age^2	0.23	0.27
	(0.22)	(0.27)
Education	0.73*	0.74*
	(0.02)	(0.03)
Economic Attitudes	-	1.08
		(0.22)
Social Attitudes	-	136.43*
		(45.58)
Constant	1.02	0.02*
	(0.35)	(0.01)
N	4,849	4,655
Pseudo R^2	0.05	0.15
Wald Chi^2	215	389
Log likelihood	-1819	-1565

Logistic regression models, odds ratios reported with standard errors in the parentheses. Observations are clustered at the household level. *$p < 0.05$

Table 4. Agreeableness and vote for Die Linke (*German Sample*)

|	1	2
Agreeableness	0.53*	0.49*
	(0.17)	(0.17)
Openness	1.76	2.69*
	(0.60)	(1.11)
Conscientiousness	0.47	0.57
	(0.20)	(0.28)
Extraversion	2.14*	2.09*
	(0.65)	(0.70)
Neuroticism	1.21	1.38
	(0.42)	(0.53)
Female	0.82	0.80
	(0.13)	(0.14)
Age	4.34	6.76
	(5.93)	(10.39)
Age^2	0.24	0.14
	(0.35)	(0.23)
Education	0.86	0.87
	(0.07)	(0.08)
Economic Attitudes	-	0.14*
		(0.05)
Social Attitudes	-	1.16
		(0.39)
Constant	0.29*	0.38
	(0.18)	(0.29)
N	1,495	1,348
Pseudo R^2	0.02	0.05
LR Chi^2	22	53
Log likelihood	596	488

Logistic regression models, odds ratios reported with standard errors in the parentheses.* $p < 0.05$

Table 5. Overview of the association between personality and voting for populist parties

| | US - Tea Party | | NL- Freedom Party | Germany - Die Linke |
	ANES	CCES		
Openness				+
Conscientiousness				
Extraversion			+	+
Agreeableness	-	-	-	-
Neuroticism		**-**		

The association between the Big Five trait and voting for the populist party in the full model is positive (+), negative (-) or absent (blank space).

Figure 1. Predicted Probability of supporting the Tea Party for different levels of Agreeableness


ANES 2012: Strong Support for the Tea Party

CCES 2010: Strong Support for the Tea Party
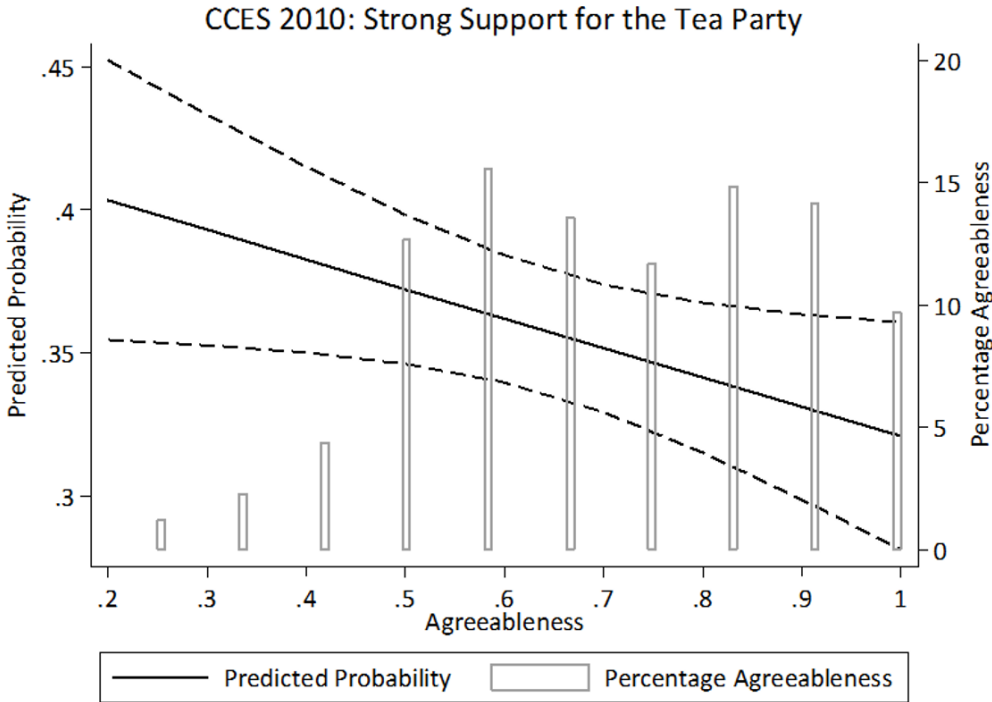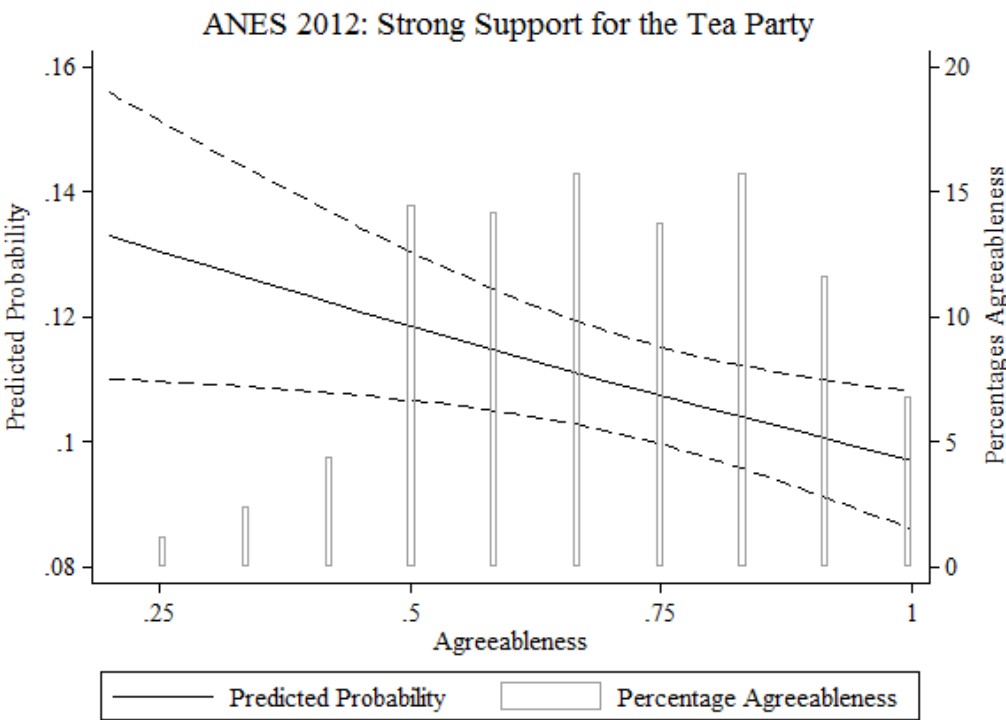
Note: Predicted support for the Tea Party based upon an ordered logistic regression where we keep the covariates at their central tendencies.

Figure 2. Predicted probability of supporting the Freedom Party (*The Netherlands*) for different levels of Agreeableness
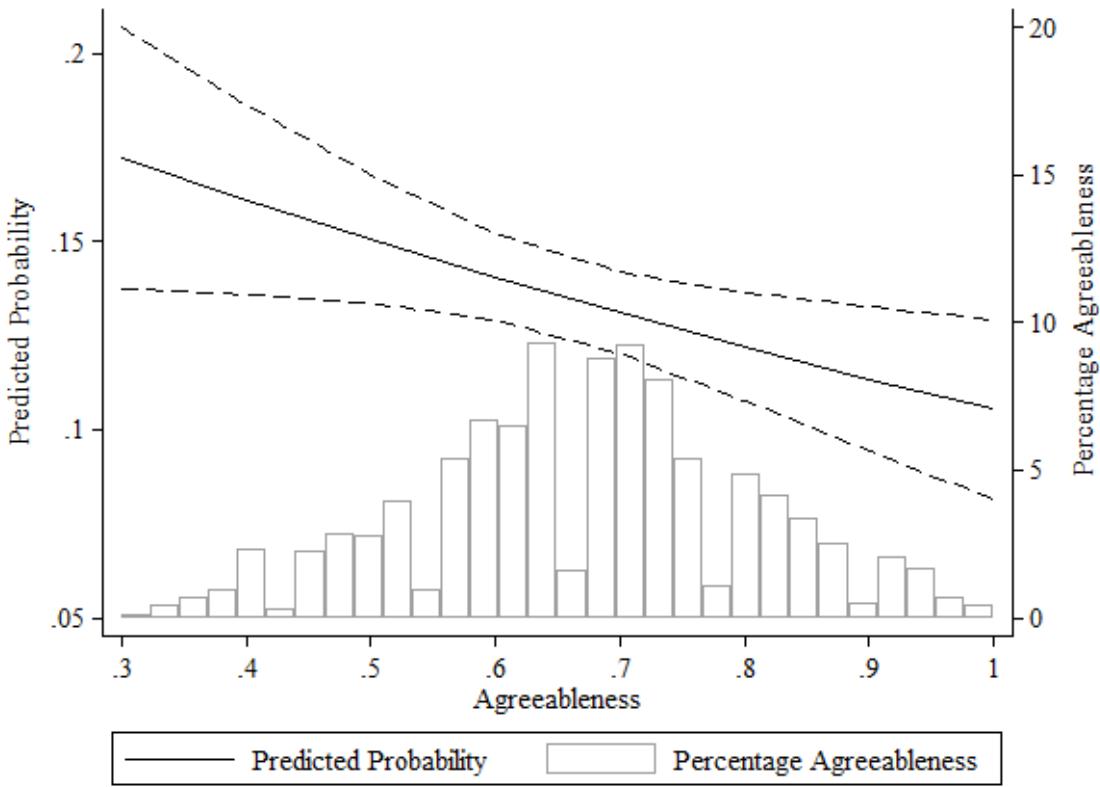
Note: Predicted probabilities based upon a logistic regression where we keep the covariates at their central tendencies.

Figure 3. Predicted probability of supporting Die Linke (*Germany*) for different levels of Agreeableness
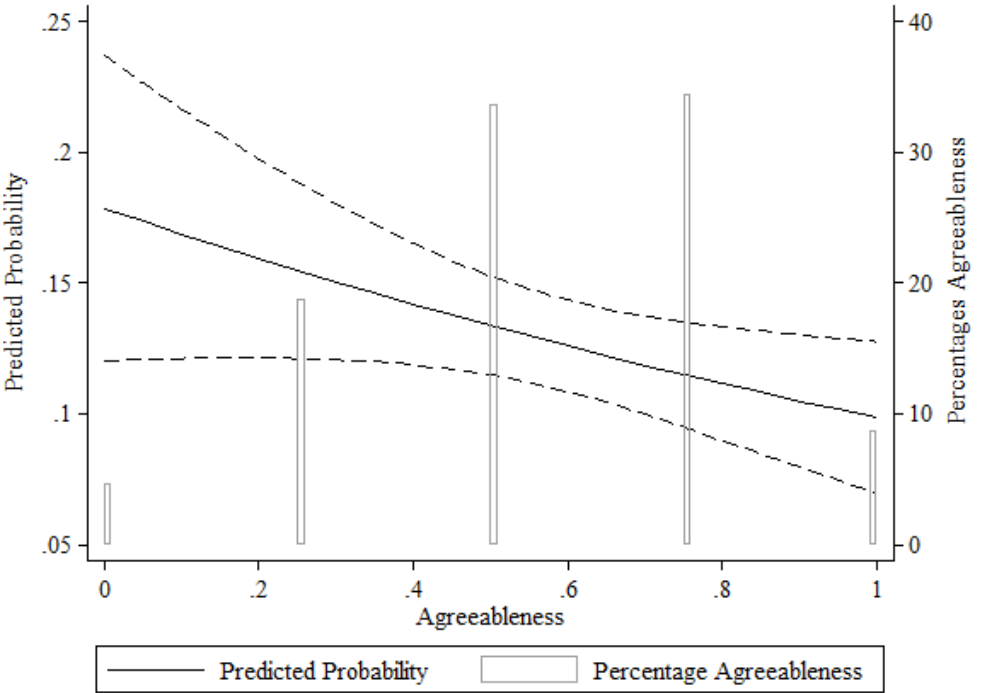
Note: The predicted probabilities are based upon a logistic regression where we keep the covariates at their central tendencies.