



Personality determinants of political participation: The contribution of traits and self-efficacy beliefs

Michele Vecchione*, Gian Vittorio Caprara

"Sapienza" University of Rome, Dipartimento 39 di Psicologia, Via dei Marsi 78, 00185 Rome, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 May 2008

Received in revised form 20 November 2008

Accepted 25 November 2008

Available online 13 January 2009

Keywords:

Five-Factor Model

Mediation

Political self-efficacy

Social-cognitive theory

ABSTRACT

Self- and other-ratings on the Big Five were used to predict political efficacy beliefs and political participation in two studies, using both cross-sectional and longitudinal data. Hierarchical regressions showed that personality traits contribute to political efficacy and participation, beyond the predictive value of socio-demographic variables. Structural equation modeling corroborated a mediational model in which Openness and Energy/Extraversion accounted for significant variance in political self-efficacy beliefs, which in turn accounted for political participation. Whereas both traits have concurrent validity, only Energy/Extraversion remained a significant distal predictor of adult political participation.

© 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Research on personality and politics has gained new impetus in recent years, as political choices seems to depend increasingly on voters' likes and dislikes (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004). Yet, empirical studies have mostly focused on political orientation other than on engagement, pointing to traits and values other than to self-efficacy beliefs. In reality, people are likely to engage in the political arena, whatever their political orientation, if they believe that they can exert some influence over the political process. Citizens who doubt that they can have any effect have no reason to engage in the political game, even in contexts that invite active participation. Instead, citizens who believe that they can influence the political system are likely to take action in the pursuit of their goals even at the cost of personal risk. In this contribution, we focus on perceived political efficacy, namely on the self-beliefs that lead people to feel politically efficacious and to engage actively in politics, and on the role of personality traits in sustaining such beliefs.

2. Personality traits, self-efficacy beliefs and political participation

Traits and self-efficacy beliefs are distinctive components of personality which may account for political behavior to different degrees. Traits are enduring dispositions to behave in habitual ways associated to consistent patterns of thought and feelings.

Self-efficacy beliefs are knowledge structures that reflect the degree of control people exert over the events that affect their lives.

A number of theorists have highlighted the role of personality in determining the extent of political participation (Levinson, 1958). Milbrath (1965) for example, suggested the need to consider the role of personality in models of participation. However, empirical studies about the relationship between personality traits and political participation are few and mostly limited to the role of specific traits. As recently argued by Mondak and Halperin (2008), psychological research on personality has failed to produce concise taxonomies applicable to the study of politics. In this regard, the Five-Factor Model of personality provides a comprehensive framework to address major individual differences in personality that may overcome this limitation, at least in part.

Previous studies have shown that individuals with liberal and left-wing ideologies score higher in Openness than conservative and right-wing individuals, whereas the reverse occurs for Conscientiousness (Jost, 2006). The extent to which individual differences in traits account for political participation remains to be clarified.

A significant number of studies have addressed the role of political efficacy in sustaining political interest and participation (Craig, 1979). Surprisingly, despite the vast literature on political efficacy, little attention has been paid to Bandura's (1986) work on perceived self-efficacy and to social-cognitive theory, which embeds self-efficacy beliefs in a comprehensive theory of personality. The theory posits perceived self-efficacy, namely beliefs people have about their capacity to master tasks and situations, at the root of efficacious behavior and successful adaptation in manifold domains of functioning (Bandura, 1997). Recently, a new measure

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39 64 9917665; fax: +39 64 469115.
E-mail address: michele.vecchione@uniroma1.it (M. Vecchione).

has been conceived to assess political self-efficacy (Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna, & Mebane, *in press*) focusing on the activities that are required to promote one's own ideals among peers, potential followers and adversaries, or in other words, to actively participate in and to compete in the political context of modern representative democracies. Politicians have shown higher scores on perceived political efficacy than party members who in turn, outscored non-partisan voters.

It remains to be clarified how traits and political self-efficacy may operate in concert to account for political behavior. Although, trait theorists and proponents of self-efficacy theory may hold rival views about personality functioning, several studies have attempted to cast a bridge between the Big Five and efficacy beliefs. According to Martocchio and Judge (1997), for example, efficacy beliefs represent the mechanism through which personality traits manifest themselves. Others have argued that self-efficacy mediates the effect of personality dispositions on several outcomes, such as job performance (Kanfer, 1992) and career interest (Nauta, 2004). Yet, we are not aware of any study that has addressed both traits and self-efficacy beliefs in the domain of politics. In this regard, empirical findings capable of elucidating how the above operate in concert may be critical to understanding and promoting citizens' engagement in politics (Caprara, 2008).

3. The current research

The aim of this research is to examine the extent to which and how the Five-Factors of personality and self-efficacy beliefs account for political participation and engagement. This research tests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: We expected that Openness and Energy/Extraversion would be related to both political efficacy and participation. These traits refer to individual tendencies and behaviors that are crucial for success in the political arena.

On the one hand, important ingredients of political activity such as keeping up-to-date with main political events and taking part in community and social activities may benefit from a genuine Openness towards the outside world. Previous results suggest that critical thinking, which is positively related with Openness (Clifford, Boufal, & Kurtz, 2004) encourage political participation enhancing political efficacy and personal control (Guyton, 1988).

On the other hand, several facets of Energy/Extraversion such as assertiveness, persuasiveness and dominance, are crucial to participating and being successful in politics. Previous results suggest that Extraversion is consistently related to leadership across study settings and leadership criteria (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). Other findings have shown that politicians score higher than the general population on Energy/Extraversion (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Consiglio, Picconi, & Zimbardo, 2003).

Hypothesis 2: We hypothesized that Openness and Energy/Extraversion would have higher criterion validity than the other Big Five, for which we offer no hypotheses, given a lack of both theoretical consideration and past empirical findings.

Hypothesis 3: We expected that political self-efficacy would be related to high levels of participation, in accordance with previous studies on internal political efficacy (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995).

Hypothesis 4: We expected that self-efficacy beliefs fully mediate the relations of Openness and Energy/Extraversion traits to political participation. We assigned primacy to traits in accordance with both a vast literature attesting to the significant genetic component of basic traits and with views of traits as habitual responses resulting from chronic person–situation interactions that, once crystallized, operate as automatic behavioral tendencies (Loehlin, McCrae, Costa, & John, 1998).

Hypothesis 5: We expected that individuals with higher education and income would present higher levels of political participation and political efficacy beliefs, in accordance with one of the most established views of political participation that point to both income and education as major determinants of voter disenfranchisement (Milbrath, 1965; Verba et al., 1995).

Hypothesis 6: We expected that females would score lower than males in political participation and perceived political efficacy scales, in accordance with previous findings (Milbrath & Goel, 1977) and given the limited number of women in political offices. In Italy, as in most of European countries, political participation is more likely among males than females (Maraffi, 2007). Moreover, Italian women were granted right to vote only in 1946 and still do not exceed 20% of parliamentary bodies. In this regard, we do not believe that women are less apt than men to engage successfully in politics. Rather, we believe that traditional preclusion and limited opportunities still represent important deterrents that distract women, more than men, from actively engaging in politics.

We present two studies that examine the role of personality traits in predicting political efficacy beliefs and political participation. Section 4 was conducted on a large sample, using a cross-sectional design and a self-reported questionnaire. Section 5 extended the analysis across time, on a small sample of adolescents, using both self- and parent-reports.

4. Study 1

4.1. Aim of the study

The first aim of this study was to assess the relative contributions of the Five-Factors of personality to perceived political efficacy and participation, controlling for basic socio-demographic characteristics. A related aim was to determine whether political self-efficacy mediated the influence of traits on political participation.

4.2. Method

4.2.1. Participants and procedures

A sample of 1353 individuals completed a set of questionnaires that measured traits, political self-efficacy and political participation. Data was gathered by approximately 200 psychology majors as part of a course assignment at the University of Rome. Each student was briefed on the general aims of the research, instructed how to administer the questionnaire and asked to collect data from six people equally distributed across age and gender. The mean age of the sample was 40.5 years (SD = 18.5), with 42% male. Education levels were: elementary school 6.6%, junior high school 10.1%, high school 62.4% and college 21.0%. Annual income ranged from "less than 5000€" (2.8%) to "more than 80,000€" (4.2%), with the modal group being "from 15,000 to 29,000€" (26.8%).

4.2.2. Measures

4.2.2.1. Personality traits. To assess traits we used a short version of the Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Perugini, 1993). It contains 60 items that form five domain scales, with 12 items on each scale. Respondents indicate agreement with the extent to which each item describes them on a 5-point scale ranging from complete disagreement (1 = very false for me) to complete agreement (5 = very true for me). High correlations between the analogous scales in the BFQ and the *NEO-Personality Inventory* (Costa & McCrae, 1985), confirmed the construct validity of the instrument (Caprara et al., 1993). In this sample, Cronbach's α were .84 for Energy/Extraversion, .86 for Agreeableness, .80 for Conscientiousness, .88 for Emotional Instability and .90 for Openness.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات