



Who makes a good citizen? The role of personality

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

HEXACO
Dark Triad
Civic duty
Good citizenship
Political psychology

ABSTRACT

In this paper we explore the link between personality and attitudes towards good citizenship and civic duty. To do so we recruited 371 eligible Canadian voters from a national panel, asking a variety of questions regarding their level of political participation and attitudinal questions regarding the importance of a number of behaviors typically associated with good citizenship (i.e., voting, paying taxes, staying informed, etc.). Importantly, we included two batteries of personality items: the HEXACO, which covers general personality (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience), and the Dark Triad (psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism). The analysis reveals a consistent and important explanatory role for personality, even after controlling for standard explanatory factors such as age, gender, income, education, political interest, knowledge, efficacy, and placement on the left-right scale. Among other findings, we document a positive relationship between the endorsement of good citizenship and narcissism, and a negative relationship for psychopathy.

1. Introduction

Conceptions of what it means to be a “good citizen” have been debated for centuries (Aristotle, 1905; see also Almond & Verba, 1963; Dalton, 2016; Putnam, 2000). As Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal (2007) write, “From Aristotle to Alexis de Tocqueville and Walter Bagehot, civic virtues such as rationality, moral obligation to pursue the common good, social engagement, and political activism have been interpreted as prerequisites of a good society and a good polity” (p. 88). Despite the longstanding debate, there is a growing body of literature that moves beyond normative and philosophical discussions and empirically maps the conceptions/attitudes of what it means to be a good citizen.

Cross-national survey research suggests that there exists a relatively clear profile of what it means to be a good citizen: good citizens vote in elections, pay their taxes, obey the law, and are well informed and active in social/political life (Dalton, 2016; Denters et al., 2007). An essential part of the conception of good citizenship is civic duty. Loewen and Dawes (2012) describe civic duty as “a belief that an individual has an obligation to undertake actions that benefit others even when the actions are costly to themselves. In the context of voting, a sense of a duty to vote will then be based on a belief that one has an obligation to others to vote, even though voting is costly” (p. 364). Duty is not only a component of good citizenship, but many have argued that

it is the *strongest* predictor of voter turnout (Blais, 2000).¹

To what extent, however, do citizens differ in the importance that they attach to good citizenship or civic duty, and what explains these different views? Dalton's (2016) recent book, *The Good Citizen*, reveals important generational differences in the United States, especially around Millennials and older generations, and Denters et al. (2007) find a number of differences across Western democracies, especially related to education. We push the debate further and include explanatory factors beyond country and standard socio-demographics. We are particularly interested in the role of personality. As Blais and Labbé St-Vincent (2011) write, “if one's personality influences how often one smiles, what kind of music one likes and how one dresses... then why should it not have some impact on whether one finds politics interesting or boring and on whether one believes that it is a civic duty to vote” (p. 406)?

The link between personality and political behavior is becoming well established in the literature (Blais & Pruyzers, 2017; Chen & Palmer, 2017; Gerber, Huber, Doherty, & Dowling, 2011; Mondak, 2010; Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Schoen & Schumann, 2007; Vecchione & Caprara, 2009; Weinschenk, 2014). While there is good theoretical reasoning, however, there is limited empirical evidence that specifically links personality to the sense of civic duty and even less to attitudes of good citizenship more generally. Despite the growing personality and

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¹ For more on good citizenship and civic duty see Campbell (2005), Almond and Verba (1963), and Riker and Ordeshook (1968).

politics literature, we are aware of only two studies that have explicitly studied the relationship between personality and a sense of civic duty (Blais & Labbé St.-Vincent, 2011; Weinschenk, 2014) and only one on personality and democratic citizenship (Dinesen, Nørgaard, & Klemmenson, 2014).

This paper makes two important contributions to the personality and politics literature. First, we move the debate beyond civic duty and also explore attitudes towards good citizenship more broadly. Second, we extend the analysis beyond general personality traits (i.e., agreeableness, openness, etc.) to include the Dark Triad. We are unaware of any similar analysis that explores the link between the darker personality traits of psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism on the one hand and attitudes towards good citizenship and a sense of civic duty on the other. The inclusion and further study of the relationship between the Dark Triad and political behavior is particularly important given the rise of the dark traits, particularly narcissism, that has been documented over the last 30 years (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008).

1.1. Personality and political behavior

To begin, personality refers to a set of traits that are present in a given individual from an early age, are deeply rooted, and tend to be remarkably stable over time (McCrae & Costa, 2003). A growing body of research over the last two decades reveals that personality traits help explain differences in a variety of political behaviors as well as attitudes towards politics more generally. This includes differences in political participation (Mondak, 2010; Vecchione & Caprara, 2009), political interest (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, Raso, et al., 2011), vote choice (Barbaranelli, Caprara, Vecchione, & Fraley, 2007; Schoen & Schumann, 2007), political ideology (Chirumbolo & Leone, 2010), political ambition (Blais & Pruyssers, 2017), and trust (Mondak, 2010).

What is the evidence regarding personality and civic duty? Employing a twin study regarding the heritability of voting, Loewen and Dawes (2012) suggest that deeply rooted personal factors (such as genes and personality) influence attitudes towards politics, including a sense of civic duty. However, Loewen and Dawes (2012: 371) do not analyze personality specifically – noting that “we have not identified which of the more general personality traits (e.g., the “Big Five”) may encapsulate a sense of duty.” Blais and Labbé St.-Vincent (2011) attempt to identify which personality traits are related to a sense of civic duty. While the authors do not utilize one of the larger personality taxonomies (i.e., the Big Five), they do consider the specific traits of altruism, shyness, conflict avoidance, and personal efficacy. Their analysis reveals a strong relationship between civic duty and three of the four traits that they included in their study (all but conflict avoidance).

More recently, Weinschenk (2014) pushes the analysis further, exploring the relationship between the Big Five personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability) and civic duty. Weinschenk (2014) finds compelling evidence that agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness have significant effects and concludes that “the effects of personality traits rival, and in some cases, exceed the influence of variables that have typically been used to explain the sense of civic duty” (p. 90). Although conceptualized primarily as trust in other people and participation in voluntary organizations, Dinesen et al. (2014) also find a strong relationship between the Big Five personality traits and what they define as ‘democratic citizenship’.

It is important to note, however, that conceptions of “democratic citizenship” and “good citizenship” are bound by the political and geographical context of the countries where participants are drawn from. All of the studies referenced above use data from the United States, Canada, or Western Europe, in other words, well-established and stable democracies. Our data are no different, as we focus on Canadian respondents. We caution readers, therefore, that our definitions and

expectations surrounding democratic citizenship are tied closely to the cultural fabric of western democracy, as our respondents are products of this political environment. While this does not make our results or expectations invalid, it does suggest that the relationship between personality and civic duty may not be a human universal, but rather a result of personality and cultural context.² With this in mind, we outline our expectations regarding the relationship between good citizenship/civic duty and both general and dark personality traits.

1.2. Dark Triad

The Dark Triad, which consists of psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism, has been described as “short-term, agentic, [and] exploitative” (Jonason & Webster, 2010, p. 420). In general, the Dark Triad personality traits are associated with aggressiveness, impulsivity, and callousness. Interestingly, however, these darker personality traits are also associated with a number of positive outcomes. Aspects of the Dark Triad have been associated with enhanced leadership abilities (Lilienfeld et al., 2012), persuasiveness, and crisis management (Watts et al., 2013). Despite being grouped together in the same scale, however, we do not expect to find the same relationship between these dark personality traits and a sense of civic duty or good citizenship.³

Psychopathy is characterized by impulsivity, antisocial behavior, callousness and a lack of empathy towards others, manipulateness, and grandiosity (Hare, 2003; Salekin, Leistico, & Mullins-Nelson, 2006). Individuals who score high in psychopathy tend to be “destructive for themselves and others” and engage in “misconduct and delinquency” (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012, p. 885; see also Williams, Paulhus, & Hare, 2007). Given that many elements of “good citizenship” are communal and community oriented, we expect to find a negative relationship between psychopathy and the endorsement of good citizenship and civic duty (H1). Their lack of empathy, irresponsibility, and antisocial behavior in particular, should lead to a rejection of these norms and a lower sense of civic duty compared to individuals who score lower on psychopathy.

In contrast to psychopathy, we expect to find a positive relationship between attitudes of civic duty/good citizenship and narcissism. Narcissists tend to show “an aggrandized, overly enhanced self” which is often accompanied with “extreme vanity, self-absorption, arrogance, and entitlement” (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012, p. 884). Embedded with the conception of a “good citizen” are elements of efficacy and agency. Being a good citizen matters, at least in part, because individuals are seen as being able to influence the political system and shape important outcomes. This notion of efficacy and agency is consistent with the self-importance, arrogance, and grandiosity that characterizes those scoring high on narcissism (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Moreover, given their desire for attention, admiration, and praise (Brunell et al., 2008; Twenge, 2006), we expect narcissists to espouse the virtues of good citizenship in an attempt to raise their social status (H2).

Finally, our expectation is that individuals scoring higher in Machiavellianism will be more likely to participate in electoral politics and endorse elements of good citizenship (compared to those scoring lower on Machiavellianism) when there is a high likelihood that their participation will advance their own self-interest. Machiavellians, characterized as being cunning, self-beneficial, less intrinsically motivated, and power oriented (Barker, 1994; Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka,

² For a more general discussion of these issues in psychology, see the debate surrounding WEIRD (Western, educated, industrial, rich, and democratic) countries and the bias this introduces into psychological studies (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Jones, 2010).

³ As Rauthmann and Kolar (2012, p. 884) note, there is still a debate as to whether these traits should be regarded as separate constructs or whether they reflect one global dark personality trait.

2009; McHoskey, 1999), are unlikely to attach an inherent and a priori value to the act of voting or good citizenship. Rather than viewing acts such as voting as inherently good, those scoring higher in Machiavellianism should view such acts as having strategic value: offering the possibility of leading to a favored outcome in some cases and not in others. Thus, depending on the political context and interests of the voter, Machiavellianism may be associated with acts of civic engagement under some conditions, but these acts are driven not by a sense of civic duty but rather by strategic self-interest. Unfortunately, however, our data preclude us from assessing this hypothesis fully as we have not collected data regarding motivation.

1.3. General personality

The HEXACO includes the personality traits of Honesty-Humility (H), Emotionality (E), Extraversion (X), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), and Openness to Experience (O). There are strong empirical and theoretical reasons to expect to find a clear relationship between these general personality traits and attitudes towards good citizenship.⁴ The first general personality trait that is likely related to attitudes towards civic duty is Conscientiousness. Individuals who score higher on this trait typically feel “compelled to abide by rules and norms” (Weinschenk, 2014; see also Mondak, 2010) and feel strongly about obligations and commitments towards others. As Weinschenk (2014, p. 96) notes, conscientious individuals tend to be good citizens in the work place, taking upon extra responsibilities, and helping colleagues. Moreover, given that dutifulness is an aspect of the conscientiousness trait, conscientious individuals should therefore have a stronger sense of civic duty and conform to the model of good citizens (H3).

A similar hypothesis can be made with regards to those who score high on the agreeableness trait. Those who score higher on Agreeableness tend to be prosocial, community oriented, and are trusting/forgiving. We expect these individuals to strongly endorse good citizenship, especially those elements that focus on the community (i.e., paying taxes, obeying the law, etc.). Given their prosocial attitudes and commitment to the community, we expect these individuals to have a strong sense of civic duty as well (H4).

We expect to find a positive relationship in regards to the Honesty-Humility trait and attitudes towards good citizenship and a strong sense of civic duty (H5). Individuals who score higher on Honesty-Humility have a strong sense of honesty, fairness, and tend to avoid fraud and corruption (Ashton, Lee, & de Vries, 2014). Moreover, their tendency towards ‘greed avoidance’ signals a commitment to their larger community rather than their own personal well-being.

There is also reason to expect a positive relationship between Emotionality and both civic duty and good citizenship. This is due to the overlap between Emotionality and altruism (generosity towards others, sense of community responsibility). Although not precisely the same personality structure, altruism has been found to be moderately and significantly related to traits like agreeableness and emotionality (Zettler & Hilbig, 2010). Indeed, altruism is conceptualized within the HEXACO model as a “blend of the H, A, and E factors” (Ashton et al., 2014, p. 141). This is also consistent with the finding that altruistic

⁴ As noted above for the concept of democratic citizenship, personality traits may be more culturally dependent than originally theorized as well. While some (McCrae, Costa, Del Pilar, Rolland, & Parker, 1998) posit that personality traits are a biological universal, evidence suggests caution with this approach. For instance, Bond (1979) demonstrates that what Americans view as “intellect” (a facet/aspect of Openness to Experience) is viewed as a component of Conscientiousness by students in Hong Kong China. Others (Heine, Buchtel, & Norenzayan, 2008; Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002; Peng, Nisbett, & Wong, 1997) raise an issue with the reference group used by respondents when answering personality traits, arguing that the referent is different across cultures.

individuals are more likely to vote (Blais & Labbé St.-Vincent, 2011). Furthermore, one of the facets of Emotionality is sentimentality or feeling strongly bonded to others. This sense of solidarity and community, combined with a greater tendency towards altruism, is expected to result in individuals scoring higher in this trait to endorse items related to being a good citizen and to attach greater importance (i.e., duty) to the act of voting (H6).

Finally, we suspect that extraverts will express higher levels of civic duty and good citizenship (H6). Extraversion has been shown to be related to political participation broadly (Mondak, 2010), which encompasses many of the aspects of good citizenship (i.e., voting, discussing politics, etc.). Moreover, Blais and Labbé St.-Vincent (2011) find that shyness is negatively related to a sense of civic duty whereas Weinschenk (2014) finds that extraversion is positively related. Both studies suggest that those individuals who are less well integrated into the political community are likely to face less social pressure to vote and to fulfil one's civic duty as a citizen. The social connectedness that results from an extraverted lifestyle should therefore produce social pressures towards good citizenship.

The theoretical link between Openness and attitudes towards good citizenship and civic duty are less obvious. Weinschenk (2014), for example, demonstrates that people who score higher on Openness (as measured in the Big Five) have a stronger sense of civic duty. However, the theoretical reason for this relationship is not clear nor well-explained. It may be the result of these individuals being more “intellectual”, however, the intellectual component of Openness is not included within the HEXACO model. Moreover, despite the positive results in the Weinschenk study, the ‘unconventionality’ facet of the Openness trait highlights the nonconforming nature of these individuals and suggests, at least theoretically, that these individuals may be less likely to endorse conventional forms of participation (e.g., voting) or to conform to the notion that voting is a duty. Previous studies have found mixed results with regards to the relationship between democratic participation and the trait of Openness (see, for example, Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, Raso, et al., 2011). Given the mixed empirical results, we offer no specific expectations for Openness to Experience.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited from an established national survey panel maintained by Qualtrics. Respondents completed a 20-minute survey which included several personality questionnaires, demographic questions, and a series of questions regarding their political views and behavior (political participation, civic duty, political ambition, etc.). The survey also included a number of attention check questions and only those who answered correctly remained in the sample. The final sample was made up of 371 Canadians of voting age ($M_{age} = 49.2$, $SD = 15.2$) with a slight majority of participants being women (58%). Data was collected in March 2017.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. HEXACO-60 (HEXACO-60; Ashton & Lee, 2009)

The HEXACO-60 is a 60-item self-report scale that assesses the six factors of the HEXACO model of personality: honesty-humility (H), emotionality (E), extraversion (X), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), and openness to experience (O). The reliability between self- and other-reported scores on the HEXACO has been reported as high (Lee & Ashton, 2006). In the current sample, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were all within the acceptable range (range: 0.70 to 0.83).

2.2.2. The Dark Triad

Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy were measured

using the Short Dark Triad (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The SD3 is a 27-item self-report measure assessing Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. The SD3 has been cross-validated with community and student samples and has demonstrated good reliability (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The internal consistency of the subscales used in the current analyses was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha: Machiavellianism = 0.80; narcissism = 0.76; psychopathy = 0.79).

2.2.3. Control variables

In addition to our personality items, we include a number of control variables. First, we include various sociodemographic questions regarding age, gender, education, and income. We also include a number of attitudinal and political orientation questions such as self-placement on the left-right scale, political interest, and internal political efficacy. Finally, we include a five-item political knowledge battery.⁵

2.2.4. Dependent variables

We are particularly interested in attitudes and orientations towards good citizenship and civic duty. First, we include seven items which ask respondents to identify how important it is to engage in activities which are associated with good citizenship (on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is “very important”). These seven items include activities such as paying taxes, voting in elections, obeying the law, being active in the community, and staying well informed. Although voting is included in the seven-items which measure good citizenship, we drill down deeper to explore the sense of civic duty more specifically. Here we rely on two traditional 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree) civic duty questions that are widely used in the literature: “I would feel guilty if I did not vote in an election” and “It is every citizen's duty to vote in an election” (see, for example, Blais & Labbé St.-Vincent, 2011).

3. Results and discussion

We begin our empirical analysis with attitudes towards good citizenship. While scholars have wrestled with this question for centuries, there are a core set of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that are typically associated with what it means to be a good citizen. We utilize a seven-item battery that included questions regarding how important it is to vote, pay your taxes, stay informed, buy environmentally friendly products, etc., to measure attitudes towards the importance of good citizenship. While these items were chosen to ‘tap’ into the same underlying construct of good citizenship, we must first confirm whether there is in fact more than one underlying factor before we can create a single index to analyze. A factor analysis on the seven items reveals a single factor (see Table 1). This unidimensionality is also reflected in a high Cronbach's Alpha (0.86). Given these results it is appropriate to create a single index and move on to our analysis.

Table 2 reveals the OLS regression results, where the dependent variable is attitudes towards good citizenship - where higher values reflect an endorsement of the items in Table 1 being very important. The table includes three models. In the first, we include standard socio-demographic controls that are typically associated with civic duty and the propensity to vote (Blais & Achen, 2009; Blais & Labbé St.-Vincent, 2011; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, & Whiteley, 2004). This includes age, gender, level of education, income, political interest, political knowledge, efficacy, and placement on the left-right scale. Looking at these control variables, we find a number of statistically significant relationships – all in the

⁵ The political knowledge questions include four multiple choice questions in which respondents were to select the proper individual (identify the Minister of Finance, Governor General, Leader of the Official Opposition, and British Prime Minister) and one open ended question in which respondents identified the Premier of their province.

Table 1
Factor analysis of the items pertaining to good citizenship.

	Good citizenship (factor 1)
Vote in elections	0.745
Pay your taxes	0.776
Obey the law	0.773
Be actively involved in the community	0.722
Develop your own opinions independently from others	0.706
Stay well-informed about what is happening in politics	0.750
Choose environmentally friendly products	0.754
Variance explained (%)	55.7
Eigenvalue	3.9

Note. All items were scored on a 10-point Likert scale where 10 is “very important” and 1 is “not at all important”.
KMO = 0.846.

Table 2
Personality and good citizenship (OLS regression results).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Gender (male)	-3.321***	1.101	-2.437**	1.121	-1.737	1.178
Age	0.078**	0.036	-0.002	0.036	0.040	0.038
Education	-0.086	0.314	-0.087	0.297	-0.151	0.315
Income	0.426	0.428	0.287	0.414	0.474	0.429
Political interest	1.524***	0.230	1.487***	0.229	1.519***	0.237
Knowledge	0.806**	0.365	1.077***	0.348	0.764**	0.370
Efficacy	1.003**	0.474	0.875*	0.456	1.271***	0.483
Ideology	0.406	0.261	0.625**	0.253	0.427	0.273
Machiavellianism					0.048	0.116
Narcissism					0.209**	0.102
Psychopathy					-0.497***	0.120
Honesty-humility			0.181*	0.095		
Emotionality			0.194**	0.096		
Extraversion			0.285***	0.087		
Agreeableness			0.305***	0.092		
Conscientiousness			0.234**	0.103		
Openness to experience			-0.005	0.089		
R ²	0.196		0.352		0.244	

* $p < 0.10$.
** $p < 0.05$.
*** $p < 0.01$.

expected direction. Those who are female, older, more knowledgeable, interested in politics, and have a stronger sense of internal political efficacy are more likely to endorse the qualities of ‘good citizens’ as being highly important.

In model 2, we keep these same control variables and add the HEXACO personality traits. While the patterns regarding the controls remain largely the same, we find a strong relationship between general personality traits and good citizenship. Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness are all positively related to good citizenship. The pro-social, community oriented, and dedication to fairness and greed avoidance that characterize these traits are well-aligned with the values of good citizenship. It is not surprising that individuals scoring higher on these traits endorse staying informed about political life and being actively engaged in the local community. Only one of the HEXACO personality traits is not significantly related to the outcome (Openness to Experience).

Finally, in model 3 we once again include our standard controls but this time we include the Dark Triad rather than the HEXACO. The control variables of political interest, knowledge, and efficacy continue to be positively and significantly related to our outcome. However, unlike model 1, neither age nor gender predict attitudes towards good citizenship when we include the darker personality traits. Consistent

Table 3
Personality and civic duty (OLS regression results).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Gender (male)	−0.640***	0.151	−0.539***	0.169	−0.572***	0.164
Age	0.013***	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.013**	0.005
Education	0.023	0.043	0.034	0.044	0.010	0.043
Income	−0.029	0.059	−0.049	0.063	−0.034	0.060
Political interest	0.286***	0.032	0.284***	0.035	0.272***	0.033
Knowledge	0.171***	0.050	0.193***	0.053	0.168***	0.052
Efficacy	0.155**	0.065	0.128*	0.069	0.149**	0.068
Ideology	−0.010	0.036	−0.016	0.038	−0.036	0.038
Machiavellianism					0.024	0.016
Narcissism					0.029**	0.014
Psychopathy					−0.040**	0.017
Honesty-humility			−0.001	0.014		
Emotionality			0.041***	0.014		
Extraversion			0.056***	0.013		
Agreeableness			0.015	0.014		
Conscientiousness			0.035**	0.016		
Openness to experience			−0.038***	0.014		
R ²	0.314		0.375		0.324	

* $p < 0.10$.

** $p < 0.05$.

*** $p < 0.01$.

with our hypotheses, we find significant relationships for both narcissism and psychopathy. Those who score higher on narcissism are more likely to endorse notions of good citizenship whereas those who score higher on psychopathy are less likely to do so. We find no relationship between Machiavellianism and good citizenship.

We also explore the relationship between personality and civic duty as traditionally conceived. Here we rely on two traditional civic duty questions (“I would feel guilty if I did not vote in an election” and “It is every citizen's duty to vote in an election”). Responses on these questions were summed with higher scores indicating more agreement with the statements (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80). Table 3 re-produces the results of Table 2, except with the dependent variable being the more traditional conception of civic duty. In general, we find a very similar pattern of results. As was the case in the first model of Table 2, those who are female, older, more knowledgeable, interested in politics, and have a stronger sense of internal political efficacy are more likely to have a strong sense of civic duty (see Table 3). Model 3, which includes controls and the Dark Triad traits reveals the same personality profile as reported in Table 2. Higher levels of psychopathy are negatively related to a sense of civic duty whereas higher scores of narcissism are positively related. Again, we find no relationship between Machiavellianism and a sense of civic duty.

Model 2, where we include controls and HEXACO personality traits, is where we find the only meaningful difference between the two tables. The HEXACO traits of Conscientiousness, Emotionality, and Extraversion are all positively related to a sense of civic duty. Contrary to our expectations, however, we find no relationship between civic duty and the traits of Agreeableness and Honesty-Humility. This is interesting not only because of our theoretical expectations but also because we found a positive relationship between these traits and attitudes towards good citizenship more broadly. This, of course, reinforces the importance of looking at both outcomes and not simply defining good citizenship as civic duty.

Interestingly, we also find a negative relationship with regards to Openness to Experience which is contrary to Weinschenk (2014). This goes further than the null finding in the previous table. While there is no relationship between Openness and attitudes towards good citizenship (Table 2), the relationship between the Openness trait and civic duty is significant and negative (Table 3). When examining lexical evidence for the HEXACO conception of Openness to Experience, this

factor is described as imagination and unconventionality (Ashton & Lee, 2008). In fact, of the 10 items assessing openness on the HEXACO-60, three specifically tap into the idea of unconventionality (e.g., “I like people who have unconventional views”; Ashton & Lee, 2009). Therefore, it is not entirely surprising to find that those scoring higher on this factor are less likely to engage in (and attach importance to) conventional activities such as voting. These results add to the ongoing debate regarding the relationship between Openness and political participation more generally.

3.1. Conclusions

The results in this article reveal a number of important findings regarding personality and political behavior. First, as has been found with other political behaviors, personality adds significantly and incrementally to the prediction of good citizenship and civic duty. Second, we make an important contribution by considering the dark personality traits of psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism in addition to considering more general personality traits. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we reveal that those who score higher on psychopathy (and are therefore more likely to be cold, calculating, callous, and impulsive) are less likely to endorse good citizenship practices as being important. These individuals, who tend to be anti-social, are also significantly less likely to express a strong sense of civic duty and attach little importance to voting.

Interestingly, however, not all of the effects regarding the Dark Triad are negative. Consistent with our expectations, we find a positive relationship between narcissism and both civic duty and good citizenship. While the precise mechanism needs to be developed further, we suspect this is a result of a desire to seek praise and admiration from fellow citizens. Furthermore, in an age when voter turnout is on the decline across most western democracies (Franklin, 2004), taking part in the social media buzz (e.g., #ivoted) and engaging in ‘voting selfies’ may be a way for those scoring higher on narcissism to garner both attention and praise. Understanding the relationship between narcissism and political behavior is particularly relevant as the rise of narcissism has been well-documented over the last three decades (Twenge et al., 2008). While much more study is required, it may be the case that the rise of narcissism has tempered the decline in turnout and duty in western democracies. Regardless of the precise motivation, the findings demonstrate that these darker personality traits, specifically narcissism, are not entirely problematic when it comes to political behavior or our normative expectations regarding good citizenship and civic duty.

While this study marks an important advancement, there are also limitations that must be mentioned. In particular, we again caution readers to interpret our findings within the cultural context of Canada and, perhaps, other WEIRD countries. While we believe these results to be illustrative of patterns of behavior in Canada, we stress that more study is needed before we can confidently conclude that these patterns hold across different cultural contexts, especially in non-western countries. Additionally, studying the link between traits like Machiavellianism and political behavior requires that we also account, to some degree, for the motivations of voters. Future studies should consider this in their initial design.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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