Personality traits and party identification over time

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Abstract. Why do some people stably identify with a party while others do not? This study tests whether and how the direction, stability and strength of party identification are associated with big five personality traits, using panel data from a representative sample of German citizens. First, the study confirms that personality traits are related to identification with different political parties. Second, it moves beyond previous research by showing that personality traits are related to the strength and variation in party identification over time. The implications of the study for the classical perspectives on party identification, as well as the personality and politics literature, are discussed.

Keywords: party identification; personality; German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP)

Introduction

Why do some people stably identify with a party whereas others do not? Party identification has been assumed to be the result of a process of pre-adult socialisation, combined with the updating of major political events (Campbell et al. 1960). Others have argued that voters update party identification based upon new information (Achen 1992, 2002; Fiorina 1981). Regardless of the theoretical perspective, it remains unclear why some people stably identify with a specific party, while for others partisanship is subject to change.

In this article we argue that the direction, strength and stability of partisanship are associated with personality traits. We focus upon the 'big five' personality traits: openness (to experience), conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism (Costa & McCrae 1992). We rely upon the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) to study the dynamics of party identification in Germany (Kroh & Selb 2009; Neundorf et al. 2011; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006; Zuckerman 2005; Zuckerman et al. 2007). To our knowledge, we report the results of the first study that uses individual-level data from a high-quality, nationally representative panel study to address to what extent personality traits are associated with the direction, strength and stability of party identification over time. In line with previous studies, we show that identification with left-wing parties is characterised by higher levels of openness and lower levels of conscientiousness, whereas identification with the conservative parties is characterised by higher levels of extraversion but not conscientiousness (Gerber et al. 2012; Mondak & Halperin 2008). The strength of party identification has received considerably less attention in the literature, with, for example, the study by Gerber and colleagues being a notable exception. Moreover, by using panel data to evaluate change and stability in party identification, we move beyond previous research

that has been dominated by cross-sectional studies. We theorise and confirm that the affectively charged trait extraversion is positively associated with a strong (Gerber et al. 2012) and stable party identification. Moreover, we find that conscientiousness and neuroticism are associated with the tendency not to identify with any political party.

In the next section, we review previous research that has focused on personality traits and party identification. Thereafter, we present the data and the methods we use and our results, and conclude with a discussion about the implications of our findings and new directions for future research.

Stability and changes in party identification

Our understanding of stability and change in party identification is shaped by three dominant theoretical perspectives. Dating back to Campbell et al.'s (1960) seminal work, scholars have assumed that party identification emerges during a process of pre-adult political socialisation and that major political events are the most common catalysts for change in party identification (cf. Jennings & Niemi 1968). According to the alternative rational choice update model, party identification is an endogenous variable that is subject to changes when voters receive new information (Achen 1992, 2002). A more recent concept of partisanship holds that some people stably identify with a party (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006), whereas others are 'bounded' partisans (Clarke & McCutcheon 2009; Clarke & Suzuki 1994; Zuckerman et al. 2007). These latter voters have a restricted range of choices; they rarely switch between parties and instead switch between identification with a particular party and non-identification. A third and substantial group of people do not identify with any party (Neundorf et al. 2011).

Regardless of the theoretical perspective of why people differ in the stability and strength of their party identification, research has focused on the classical socioeconomic explanatory variables (such as gender, age and education) and at times acknowledged the influence of social context. The findings can be summarised as follows. First, party identification becomes more stable when age increases (Campbell et al. 1960; Dalton 2002). Second, women tend to have less stable party identification (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006). Third, higher levels of education might lead to weaker attachments to parties as the higher educated do not have to rely upon cues or attachments to form their opinions about politics (Dalton 2002). Alternatively, however, it has been argued that the higher educated are less likely to switch between parties (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006; Zuckerman & Kroh 2006).

In this study we theorise that some of the stability and change in party identification is affected by personality traits. The big five personality traits are heritable and relatively stable over time, and thus personality should predictably shape behaviour (see, for a discussion, Mondak & Halperin 2008). While various studies have focused upon the direction of partisanship, there are only a few studies that addressed the association between personality traits and the strength of party identification (e.g., Gerber et al. 2012; Mössner 2005; Schoen & Schumann 2005). Moreover, no panel study has focused upon the association between personality traits and the stability of party identification.

Our contribution to the field is primarily that we study the relationship between personality and party identification over time. Within research dealing with change and

stability in party identification, there is a debate between traditionalists and revisionists (cf. Bartels et al. 2011). Traditionalists view party identification primarily as a group identity formed early in life and stable over time (Campbell et al. 1960). Revisionists, on the other hand, regard party identification as a concept that could change and be updated on the basis of current affairs, candidates and issues (Achen 1992, 2002; Fiorina 1981). Hence, according to revisionists, party identification is regularly updated during one's lifetime. Our aim is not to take any side in this discussion. Rather, our analyses help to nuance the debate by showing that for individuals with some personality traits party identification is stable, while for individuals with other personality traits party identification is more subject to change. In reality it might not be as clear cut as that one side is correct and the other is wrong: the traditionalist view might be a correct description of persons with some personality traits, while the revisionist view might be a correct description of persons with other traits. In other words, the amount of change in party identification might vary with personality traits. In that manner, our analyses will help to enrich our understanding of the debate between traditionalists and revisionists. Even more obviously, the direction of party identification is, of course, not its only characteristic – changes in party identification might cause major consequences for electoral outcomes.

Why is it important for research on personality and party identification to determine whether the change in partisanship strength/direction over time is related to personality traits? The answer is that the probability of obtaining a solid estimate of the effect of personality on party identification, that is stable over time, might be lower for persons with some traits. This would be the case if we could show that some relationships between personality traits and party identification are more robust over time than others. For instance, if neurotic individuals have a low stability in their party identification over time (as we expect) then the estimate of the association between this trait and party identification is not robust using a cross-sectional research design. But if no such relationship is found, then the estimates of this trait with party identification will be robust when using cross-sectional data. Our results provide important information on how we should interpret results from previous studies. Hence, it is of importance to understand to what extent such changes might be driven by personality traits.

Personality and party identification

Before we formulate testable hypotheses about the association between personality traits and the stability and change in party identification, we will discuss how personality traits have been related to partisanship in previous studies. Note that some of the recent studies directly focusing upon the association between personality and party identification have been conducted in the United States (see, Gerber et al. 2012; Mondak & Halperin 2008). In Europe, this field of research has received less attention (but see Kunz 2005; Mössner 2005; Schoen & Schumann 2005). We also turn to studies addressing the association between personality and vote choice in order to formulate testable expectations about the association between personality and party identification. We expect that the direction of the association between personality and vote choice will not differ from the direction of the associations between personality and party identification.

Individuals with high levels of openness are imaginative, curious, open to new ideas and willing to re-evaluate values, whereas low scorers have a practical and rigid approach, accept authority and value traditions (Costa & McCrae 1992). McCrae (1996: 325) explains that 'open individuals have an affinity for liberal, progressive, left-wing political views, whereas closed individuals prefer conservative, traditional, right-wing views'. Indeed, openness is positively associated with preferences for left-wing parties (Barbaranelli et al. 2007; Caprara et al. 1999; Gerber et al. 2012; Kunz 2005; Mondak & Halperin 2008; Mössner 2005; Schoen & Schumann 2007; Vecchione et al. 2011).

High scorers on conscientiousness are orderly, self-disciplined and strive for achievement (Costa & McCrae 1992) – characteristics that are evident in conservatives (Gerber et al. 2010, 2011). Indeed, conscientiousness has been positively associated with preferences for right-wing or conservative parties (Barbaranelli et al. 2007; Caprara et al. 1999; Gerber et al. 2012; Mondak & Halperin 2008; Schoen & Schumann 2007; Vecchione et al. 2011).

Extraverts are action-oriented, outgoing and seek excitement (Costa & McCrae 1992). Extraversion has sometimes been related to preferences for right-wing parties (Barbaranelli et al. 2007; Caprara et al. 1999; Vecchione et al. 2011), but others failed to find an association (Gerber et al. 2012; Mondak & Halperin 2008; Schoen & Schumann 2007). Yet, the association between extraversion and party preferences has not been fully understood.

Agreeableness refers to modest, sympathetic and altruistic behaviour that is pro-social and cooperative (Costa & McCrae 1992). Individuals with a left-wing ideology have been described as being more trusting, tender-minded and altruistic (McClosky 1958; Zettler & Hilbig 2010). So far, there is empirical evidence suggesting that preferences for left-wing parties are associated with higher levels of agreeableness (Barbaranelli et al. 2007; Caprara et al. 1999; Kunz 2005; Mondak & Halperin 2008; Schoen & Schumann, 2007; but see Gerber et al. 2012).

Neuroticism is related to the tendency to experience anxiety, anger and sadness (Costa & McCrae 1992). There is a consistent association of neuroticism with left-wing ideology (Sibley et al. 2012) as well as left-wing economic attitudes (Gerber et al. 2010). In this line, various studies have reported a positive association between neuroticism and left-wing parties and candidates (Barbaranelli et al. 2007; Gerber et al. 2012; Mondak & Halperin 2008; Schoen & Schumann 2007; but see Caprara et al. 1999; Mössner 2005). These findings suggest that neuroticism is associated with preferences for left-wing parties.

Personality and stability, change and strength in party identification

Next, we turn to the associations between personality traits and the stability, change and strength in party identification. First, we want to make clear what we mean by stability, change and strength in party identification. With 'stability' we refer to identification with the same party at different time points, and with 'change' we refer to a tendency to identify with different parties (or no party) at different time points. With 'strength' we refer to how strong one's party identification is – in our study this is measured on a Likert-scale from 0 (no party identification) to 5 (strong party identification).

Up to this point, research is cross-sectional and primarily looks at the direction of party identification, rarely taking stability or strength into account. In order to arrive at testable hypotheses about the association between personality, on the one hand, and stability and change in party identification, on the other, we also have to focus upon the strength of party identification. It is likely to expect that those citizens with a weak party identification are most likely to switch party preferences, compared to citizens with a strong party identification.

Previous research has suggested that strength of party identification is rooted in individuals' personality traits. Greene (2000) outlined that the reactions of individuals to political phenomena are largely shaped by their affective responses to those phenomena. Consequently, the affectively charged traits of extraversion and agreeableness are expected to be associated with a stronger party identification. Specifically, extraverts discuss politics more often (Hibbing et al. 2011), are more likely to participate in campaign activities (Mondak & Halperin 2008) and are more committed to organisations (Erdheim et al. 2006). The assertiveness and activity rooted in extraversion makes individuals more likely to express an intention to stay loyal to a party (Farc & Sagarin 2008). Extraverts are thereby also more likely to be partisans (Gerber et al. 2012; but see Mössner 2005). We also expect to observe that extraverts stay loyal to a party. Agreeableness is primarily seen as a pro-social dimension characterised by a tendency to show empathy to other people (Graziano et al. 2007) and the likelihood to volunteer (Carlo et al. 2005). As empathy is related to civic engagement, one could expect that high scorers on agreeableness will be more likely to strongly identify with a party. Accordingly, Gerber et al. (2012) demonstrate that agreeable citizens are more likely to identify with a party (but see Mössner 2005).

Previous findings indicate that high scorers on conscientiousness will have stronger party identification (Gerber et al. 2012; but see also Mössner 2005; Schoen & Schumann 2005). Conscientiousness is related to patterns of dutifulness and compliance as well as a preference for structure and order (Costa & McCrae 1992). A strong party identification will accommodate the preference for structure and order of conscientious citizens by providing an anchor point to make sense of politics and leads to stable identification with a political party.

Openness leads to two competing expectations. First, openness is positively associated with political interest and efficacy (Mondak & Halperin 2008). Political interest and political efficacy are positively associated with a stable party identification (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006; Zuckerman & Kroh 2006). These findings could lead us to expect that high scorers on openness are more likely to stably identify with a party (Mössner 2005). Yet, openness is also positively associated with open-mindedness and a thirst for new ideas and experiences (McCrae 1996). Similarly, high scorers on need for cognition, who are open to new ideas, tend to have more ambivalent partisanship (Rudolph & Popp 2007). Gerber et al. (2012) also reported that high scorers on openness have weaker levels of party identification. Given that openness is related to open-mindedness and willingness to try new activities, we could expect that individuals with higher levels of openness are more likely to switch party identification. We will address both expectations.

Some previous findings did not show an association between neuroticism and the strength of party identification (Gerber et al. 2012) and one found a negative relationship (Mössner 2005). Robinson and Tamir (2005), however, demonstrated that high scorers on neuroticism have more variance in their response times in psychological tasks, which could

Table 1. Overview of expectations in this study

	Party identification (PID)		
	Direction	Strength	Stability
Openness	Left-wing parties	Weak	Stable or unstable
Conscientiousness	Right-wing parties	Strong	Stable
Extraversion	Right-wing parties	Strong	Stable
Agreeableness	Left-wing parties	Strong	Stable
Neuroticism	Left-wing parties	Weak	Unstable

be relevant for the study of party identification. Specifically, high scorers on neuroticism will show low stability in their party identification. We suggest that, following this perspective, high scorers on neuroticism have more instability in their party identification as well as in the strength of party identification.

Our expectations are summarised in Table 1. Research on personality traits and party identification have consistently shown that openness, agreeableness and neuroticism are associated with support for left-wing parties, while conscientiousness and extraversion are associated with identification with right-wing parties. Our expectations on the effects on strength and stability are less clear, but drawing on previous research, we have some reason to expect positive associations between the strength of party identification and the traits conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness.

At this point it should be emphasised that the bulk of research on party identification cited here draws on data from the United States. Some scholars have questioned whether party identification is a meaningful concept in Europe (for a discussion, see Budge et al. 2010). For instance, party identification seems to be less stable compared to vote choice (Thomassen 1976). Extant research has, however, confirmed that party identification in Germany is distinct from vote choice and that party identification has been associated with other political concepts (see Falter et al. 2000; Zuckerman 2005). Building upon this insight, Germany has proven to be a good case for studying the determinants of party identification as various contributions have shown (see Kroh & Selb 2009; Neundorf et al. 2011; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006; Zuckerman 2005; Zuckerman et al. 2007).

Importantly, while some of the cited studies on the association between personality and party identification were based on German data, others analysed it in the United States. It is, of course, an open question how well some findings are generalisable to a country such as Germany. However, we do not regard this as a major problem since we have no *a priori* reason to expect that personality traits do not have fairly similar meanings and effects on the political domain across contexts. This expectation is supported by Sibley et al. (2012), who demonstrated in their meta-analysis that personality is stably associated with political ideology across political contexts. Whether this indeed is the case for the association between personality and party identification is one of the questions to be addressed in the following analyses. Needless to say, the differences in political contexts should be kept in mind when considering the generalisability of the results – a discussion we will return to in the concluding section of this article.

Data

The panel data for this study were provided by the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (GSOEP), which is a longitudinal study in which entire households in Germany have been interviewed annually for the past three decades (Wagner et al. 2007). In this study we focus on the 2005 and 2009 German household panels as party identification and personality traits were assessed at both time points. In addition, the national parliamentary elections were held in Germany in 2005 and 2009. In 2005 and 2009, the full GSOEP sample consisted of 21,105 and 18,157 individuals, respectively. Unlike previous studies (e.g., Neundorf et al. 2011; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006; Zuckerman et al. 2007), we also included East Germany in our analysis. With the reunification of Germany being increasingly distant in history, we had no *a priori* reason to assume differences between East and West Germans today when it comes to how personality traits affect party identification.[1] We thus created a sample of about 18,000 individuals who participated in both waves and were entitled to vote.

In recent years, the German federal party system has evolved into a multiparty system consisting of two larger parties – the Christian Democratic (Social) Union (CDU/CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) – as well three smaller parties – the centre-right FDP, the Greens and The Left (Die Linke, formerly PDS). Party identification in Germany is not measured in exactly the same manner as it is in a two-party system (Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006: 584). First, participants are asked the following question:

> Many people in Germany lean toward a certain political party although from time to time they vote for a different political party. What about you: 'Do you lean – generally speaking – toward a particular party?'

The participants who answer 'yes' are asked to indicate which party they support. Second, we use a variable measuring the strength of party identification, ranging from no party identification (0) to strong party identification (5).

In 2005 a short version of the Big Five Inventory (John et al. 1991) was included in the GSOEP. The Big Five Inventory-Short Version (BFI-S) is a reliable and valid measure of the big five personality traits (Hahn et al. 2012). This version of the inventory consists of three items per personality trait (15 items in all), with a scale ranging from 1 (*does not apply at all*) to 7 (*applies perfectly*). The internal consistencies (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) in 2005, for the traits openness ($\alpha = 0.63$), conscientiousness ($\alpha = 0.62$), extraversion ($\alpha = 0.66$), agreeableness ($\alpha = 0.86$) and neuroticism ($\alpha = 0.51$) are acceptable given the fact that there are only three items per personality trait. In the analyses we recoded the scales to range from 0 (lowest value) to 1 (highest value).

Results

We begin with presenting our analysis on whether personality traits are linked to identification with a specific party while controlling for socioeconomic and contextual variables (age, age squared, gender, years of education and civil status). The associations between

personality traits and party identification are analysed separately for 2005 and 2009 using multinomial logit regression analyses (with no identification as the base category, see Table 2).[2]

As expected, the results show that higher levels of openness are positively related to identification with the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens, and The Left in 2005 and 2009. In line with our expectations, we find a strong negative association between conscientiousness and party identification with all left-wing parties, with the exception of The Left in 2005. Contrary to our expectations, however, conscientiousness is negatively associated with a preference for the centre-right FDP in 2005 and unrelated to the conservative CDU/CSU. Moreover, openness is positively associated with the centre-right party (FDP) in 2005 and 2009.

As for extraversion, the positive associations with right-wing parties align with some earlier research (Barbaranelli et al. 2007; Caprara et al. 1999) but the associations with left-wing parties have not been reported before. In accordance with the dominant understanding in the literature, agreeableness is related to party identification for the SPD and the Greens in 2009, while we do not find any significant relationship with agreeableness and party identification in 2005.

Neuroticism is positively associated with The Left in 2009. The Left tends to represent those who experienced losses as a consequence of Germany's unification and resists dramatic societal changes, preferring a status quo that focuses upon stable institutions and traditions (Walter 2007). The result, therefore, sits comfortably with other recent findings that show that high scores on neuroticism are associated with left-wing economic preferences (Gerber et al. 2010) and support of parties that offer protection against material challenges (Schoen & Schumann 2007).

Since logit coefficients are not directly interpretable, a few words need to be said about the size of the effects, which are of considerable magnitude. The largest coefficients, such as the association between conscientiousness and identification with the SPD in 2005, correspond to a difference of about twelve percentage points in predicted probability of identifying with the SPD, when comparing those who score lowest and highest on conscientiousness. The coefficients which are small in size but still statistically significant, such as the effect of extraversion on identification with CDU/CSU, corresponds to a difference of about five percentage points in the predicted probability of identifying with this party, when comparing those who score lowest and those who score highest on extraversion.

The included controls behave as expected; older respondents are more likely to report a party identification, as are more educated respondents. The finding that party identification is to be found more among men than women lends some support to earlier research. In addition, the results for major life events show that support for the CDU/CSU and SPD is lower when people have gone through a period of interpersonal hardship (i.e., divorce or death of spouse). In short, the results of the associations between personality traits and party identification mirror the hypothesised direction, with the exception of the non-findings for agreeableness in 2005 and the lack of an association between conscientiousness and identification with conservative parties.

Next, we go beyond the analyses of the associations between personality traits and party identification and take a closer look at how personality traits are related to *strength* of party

Table 2. Personality traits and party identification in Germany, 2005 and 2009

	2005					2009				
	The Left	Greens	SPD	CDU/CSU	FDP	The Left	Greens	SPD	CDU/CSU	FDP
Openness	0.83* (0.31)	1.86* (0.24)	0.51* (0.13)	0.24 (0.12)	0.82* (0.35)	0.82* (0.26)	2.14* (0.21)	0.34* (0.14)	0.06 (0.12)	0.63* (0.24)
Conscientiousness	−0.37 (0.38)	−2.84* (0.27)	−1.14* (0.16)	0.10 (0.16)	−1.26* (0.39)	−1.02* (0.31)	−2.36* (0.24)	−0.45* (0.17)	0.25 (0.16)	−0.56 (0.30)
Extraversion	−0.08 (0.33)	−0.25 (0.22)	0.12 (0.13)	0.28* (0.13)	0.29 (0.33)	0.34 (0.27)	−0.88* (0.21)	0.51* (0.14)	0.36* (0.13)	0.68* (0.27)
Agreeableness	−0.06 (0.37)	−0.02 (0.28)	0.02 (0.15)	−0.20 (0.15)	−0.54 (0.38)	−0.13 (0.30)	0.51* (0.25)	0.34* (0.16)	0.24 (0.15)	−0.43 (0.29)
Neuroticism	0.49 (0.26)	−0.44* (0.21)	−0.20 (0.12)	−0.33* (0.11)	−0.83* (0.31)	0.94* (0.23)	−0.46* (0.21)	−0.15 (0.13)	−0.26* (0.11)	−0.68* (0.25)
Years of education	0.22* (0.02)	0.33* (0.01)	0.09* (0.01)	0.13* (0.01)	0.25* (0.02)	0.18* (0.02)	0.33* (0.01)	0.04* (0.01)	0.12* (0.01)	0.26* (0.02)
Age	0.02 (0.02)	0.12* (0.02)	0.05* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.03 (0.02)	0.06* (0.02)	0.05* (0.02)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Age²/100	0.02 (0.02)	−0.12* (0.03)	−0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	−0.00 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.07* (0.02)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Men	0.38* (0.10)	−0.32* (0.07)	0.31* (0.04)	0.36* (0.04)	0.58* (0.11)	0.46* (0.09)	−0.33* (0.07)	0.31* (0.04)	0.29* (0.04)	0.59* (0.08)
Family structure (ref cat: married)										
Separated	0.35* (0.17)	−0.14 (0.27)	−0.40* (0.18)	−0.34 (0.18)	−0.13 (0.40)	−0.18 (0.36)	−0.25 (0.25)	−0.33 (0.18)	−0.51* (0.18)	−0.24 (0.32)
Single	0.27 (0.19)	0.23 (0.12)	−0.14 (0.08)	−0.28* (0.08)	0.20 (0.18)	0.38* (0.14)	−0.17 (0.12)	−0.07 (0.08)	−0.18* (0.08)	−0.03 (0.14)
Divorced	0.19 (0.21)	−0.27 (0.16)	−0.23* (0.09)	−0.52* (0.09)	−0.22 (0.24)	0.38* (0.14)	−0.31* (0.15)	−0.37* (0.09)	−0.68* (0.09)	−0.06 (0.16)
Widowed	−7.99* (0.74)	−0.85* (0.37)	−0.03 (0.10)	−0.26* (0.09)	−0.42 (0.32)	−0.24 (0.20)	−0.30 (0.25)	−0.12 (0.10)	−0.45* (0.09)	−0.11 (0.21)
Constant	−8.10* (0.62)	−7.55* (0.64)	−3.51* (0.33)	−3.79* (0.31)	−6.79* (0.81)	−8.10* (0.62)	−6.43* (0.52)	−4.65* (0.32)	−4.41* (0.30)	−6.81* (0.54)
N	17,359					17,424				
Pseudo R^2	0.06					0.07				

Notes: Multinomial regression analyses with standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$.

Table 3. Personality traits and strength of party identification, 2005 and 2009

	2005	2009
Openness	0.17* (0.03)	0.10* (0.03)
Conscientiousness	−0.01 (0.04)	0.09* (0.03)
Extraversion	0.09* (0.03)	0.08* (0.03)
Agreeableness	−0.08* (0.03)	−0.03 (0.03)
Neuroticism	−0.03 (0.03)	−0.01 (0.03)
Years of education	0.02* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)
Age	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)
Age^2/100	0.00 (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)
Men	0.10* (0.01)	0.09* (0.01)
Family structure (ref cat: married)		
Separated	−0.01 (0.04)	−0.04 (0.04)
Single	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)
Divorced	−0.00 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)
Widowed	−0.03 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)
Political party supported (ref cat: none/other)		
SPD	3.25* (0.01)	3.24* (0.02)
CDU/CSU	3.37* (0.01)	3.38* (0.01)
FDP	3.21* (0.04)	3.33* (0.03)
Greens	3.30* (0.03)	3.37* (0.02)
The Left	3.41* (0.03)	3.34* (0.03)
Constant	−0.18* (0.07)	−0.25* (0.06)
N	17,436	17,420
R^2	0.87	0.87

Notes: OLS regression analysis with standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$.

identification in 2005 and 2009, respectively. Table 3 presents estimates from models with strength of party identification as a dependent variable. We analyse the strength of party identification irrespective of the parties with which the respondents identified. We find it reasonable to treat these variables as continuous and thus use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression.

In keeping with Gerber et al. (2012) and Mössner (2005), individuals who are high on extraversion have stronger party identification at both time points. Moreover, we confirm that at both time points higher levels of openness are related to stronger party identification, suggesting that the trait openness signals a basic attachment in politics. But contrary to our expectation, and the study by Gerber et al. (2012), agreeableness is negatively associated with strength of party identification in 2005 and unrelated to it in 2009. For conscientiousness, we find the expected positive coefficient in 2009 but no association in 2005. These effects have a modest size. The significant coefficients range from 0.08 to 0.17 on the 0–5 scale. This finding means that those respondents with the minimum and maximum values on these traits differ in 1.5 to 3.5 percentage points in their party identification strength.

In the third step we examine the association between personality traits and the *stability* and *change* in party identification over a four-year period. Since the standard indicator of party identification is a multidimensional variable, we use multinomial logit regression. The dependent variable takes the value 0 for persons with no party identification, and the other values indicate party identification with each specific party.[3] In this analysis, the dependent variables indicate change or stability in party identification. Hence, by using the difference scores, our models account for fixed effects (i.e., we use only variation within individuals). In our sample, 23 per cent of the participants identify stably with a party in 2005 and 2009, whereas 31 per cent switch between no identification and the identification with a party, and the remaining 46 per cent have no party identification (neither in 2005 nor in 2009). In Table 4 we present results from multinomial logit models with the category 'no party identification, neither in 2005 nor in 2009' as the base category. We present estimates for this category from a separate logit model in the rightmost column of Table 4.

In accordance with our hypothesis, extraversion is positively associated with stable identification with the two major parties in the German party system; the social-democratic SPD and the conservative CDU/CSU. Further support for the notion that extraversion is associated with partisanship is that extraversion is not positively associated with the tendency to switch party identification. Agreeableness is, however, unrelated to patterns of stable party identification over time.

Table 4 shows that, as expected, conscientiousness is negatively associated with stable preferences for the left-wing parties like the social democratic SPD and the Greens. However, conscientiousness is also negatively associated with stable identification with the centre-right FDP, and there is no association between conscientiousness and a preference for the conservative CDU/CSU. Turning to the analyses of patterns of the changes in party identification, the analyses confirm that high scorers on conscientiousness are less likely to switch party identification.

Higher levels of openness are associated with stable identification for the left-wing parties – namely the social democratic SPD, The Left and the Greens. Individuals with higher levels of openness are also more likely to switch from having a party identification to no party identification and vice versa. The latter pattern is primarily observed among left-wing parties. Turning to neuroticism, we note that it is negatively associated with stably identifying with most of the political parties (e.g., CDU/CSU, FDP and the Greens). In line with our expectations, neurotic people simply have a less stable party identification.

However, it should be noted that the size of these effects are smaller than those reported in Table 2. For example, one of the largest effects, the effect of openness on stable identification with the Greens, corresponds to a difference of about 5.5 percentage points in the probability to stably identifying with the party, when comparing those who score low on openness with those who score high.

Turning to the analyses for non-identification in the last column of Table 4, we observe that higher levels of conscientiousness are strongly related to stably not identifying with any political party in the German multiparty system. Moreover, we observe that high scorers on neuroticism are more likely to have no party identification, whereas people high on extraversion and openness are less likely to have no party identification.

Table 4. Personality traits and change in party identification between 2005 and 2009

Stability and change in party identification

	The Left			Greens			SPD			CDU/CSU			FDP			No PID
	The Left–The Left	No–The Left	The Left–No	Green–Greens	No–Greens	Greens–No	SPD–SPD	No–SPD	SPD–No	CDU–CDU	No–CDU	CDU–No	FDP–FDP	No–FDP	FDP–No	
Openness	1.00* (0.39)	0.82 (0.50)	0.94 (0.59)	2.14* (0.29)	2.70* (0.53)	1.77* (0.47)	0.49* (0.17)	0.83* (0.31)	0.09 (0.24)	0.09 (0.15)	−0.00 (0.26)	0.37 (0.25)	0.63 (0.41)	1.11* (0.50)	1.44 (0.78)	−0.52* (0.11)
Conscientiousness	−0.90 (0.48)	−1.34* (0.58)	−0.91 (0.71)	−2.95* (0.33)	−1.91* (0.61)	−2.51* (0.53)	−0.98* (0.21)	0.09 (0.40)	−1.03* (0.29)	0.06 (0.20)	−0.19 (0.35)	−0.19 (0.32)	−1.55* (0.48)	−0.79 (0.61)	−1.22 (0.91)	0.73* (0.13)
Extraversion	0.01 (0.41)	0.15 (0.53)	−1.23* (0.61)	−0.81* (0.28)	−0.83 (0.52)	0.56 (0.48)	0.44* (0.18)	0.58 (0.34)	0.13 (0.25)	0.48* (0.16)	0.28 (0.28)	0.38 (0.27)	0.08 (0.42)	0.99 (0.53)	−1.78* (0.77)	−0.26* (0.11)
Agreeableness	0.38 (0.47)	−0.41 (0.58)	−0.11 (0.70)	0.23 (0.34)	0.33 (0.63)	−0.22 (0.54)	0.38 (0.20)	−0.15 (0.37)	−0.08 (0.28)	0.05 (0.18)	0.60 (0.32)	−0.10 (0.29)	−0.27 (0.48)	−0.28 (0.58)	0.14 (0.91)	−0.14 (0.13)
Neuroticism	−0.01 (0.37)	1.79* (0.46)	0.51 (0.55)	−0.55* (0.27)	0.07 (0.48)	−0.11 (0.43)	−0.15 (0.16)	0.06 (0.29)	−0.25 (0.22)	−0.35* (0.14)	−0.26 (0.25)	−0.12 (0.23)	−1.36* (0.40)	−0.42 (0.47)	−1.06 (0.73)	0.20* (0.10)
Education (years)	0.26* (0.02)	0.11* (0.04)	0.18* (0.04)	0.38* (0.02)	0.28* (0.03)	0.31* (0.03)	0.15* (0.01)	0.06* (0.02)	0.08* (0.02)	0.18* (0.01)	0.04* (0.02)	0.06* (0.02)	0.33* (0.03)	0.22* (0.03)	0.23* (0.05)	−0.17* (0.01)
Age	0.06* (0.03)	0.11* (0.04)	−0.04 (0.04)	0.12* (0.03)	−0.01 (0.04)	0.17* (0.04)	0.05* (0.01)	−0.02 (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.04)	0.07 (0.05)	−0.02* (0.01)
Age²/100	−0.01 (0.03)	−0.08* (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	−0.12* (0.03)	−0.00 (0.04)	−0.18* (0.05)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.04 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)	0.03* (0.01)	0.04* (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)	0.06* (0.03)	0.00 (0.04)	−0.04 (0.06)	−0.02* (0.01)
Men	0.53* (0.15)	0.39* (0.19)	0.26 (0.23)	−0.22* (0.11)	−0.30 (0.20)	−0.52* (0.18)	0.39* (0.06)	0.18 (0.12)	0.27* (0.09)	0.43* (0.08)	0.01 (0.10)	0.17 (0.10)	0.74* (0.16)	0.41* (0.19)	0.69* (0.30)	−0.28* (0.04)
Separated	0.10 (0.52)	−0.68 (1.01)	0.44 (0.73)	0.30 (0.31)	0.28 (0.61)	0.82* (0.42)	−0.23 (0.24)	−0.43 (0.52)	0.59* (0.25)	−0.17 (0.21)	−0.44 (0.43)	−0.31 (0.37)	0.41 (0.44)	0.15 (0.60)	0.33 (1.03)	0.01 (0.14)
Single	0.39 (0.23)	0.80* (0.27)	0.09 (0.36)	−0.03 (0.15)	0.15 (0.26)	0.66* (0.22)	−0.13 (0.11)	0.12 (0.18)	0.06 (0.14)	−0.33* (0.10)	−0.25 (0.17)	−0.27 (0.16)	−0.37 (0.25)	0.02 (0.28)	1.06* (0.38)	0.08 (0.06)
Divorced	0.21 (0.22)	0.46 (0.27)	0.52 (0.34)	−0.40* (0.19)	−0.44 (0.40)	−0.44 (0.34)	−0.39* (0.11)	−0.23 (0.22)	−0.09 (0.15)	−0.69* (0.11)	−0.52* (0.20)	−0.38* (0.17)	−0.30 (0.28)	0.11 (0.29)	0.42 (0.46)	0.36* (0.07)
Widowed	−0.19 (0.29)	0.35 (0.34)	1.11* (0.36)	−0.68 (0.38)	0.06 (0.56)	−0.31 (0.61)	−0.08 (0.12)	0.21 (0.22)	0.09 (0.18)	−0.49* (0.11)	−0.12 (0.18)	−0.10 (0.18)	−0.18 (0.34)	−0.06 (0.43)	0.24 (0.66)	0.15 (0.08)
Constant	−9.79* (1.02)	−9.12* (1.27)	−5.29* (1.35)	−8.28* (0.72)	−6.82* (1.18)	−10.32* (1.16)	−5.43* (0.43)	−4.34* (0.74)	−3.70* (0.58)	−5.05* (0.39)	−3.51* (0.65)	−3.19* (0.61)	−6.30* (0.98)	−7.72* (1.20)	−8.80* (1.78)	2.96* (0.26)
N				12,728			12,728									12,728
Pseudo R²							0.06									0.08

Notes: Multinomial regression analyses with standard errors in parentheses, while the right-hand column presents the results of a logistic regression. * p < 0.05.

Table 5. Personality traits and change in, and variation in strength of, party identification, 2005 and 2009

	Change in PID (PID-strength 2009– PID-strength 2005)	Variation in PID
Openness	−0.11 (0.07)	0.07* (0.03)
Conscientiousness	0.36* (0.09)	0.07 (0.04)
Extraversion	−0.03 (0.08)	−0.01 (0.03)
Agreeableness	0.02 (0.09)	−0.01 (0.04)
Neuroticism	0.10 (0.07)	0.06* (0.03)
Years of education	−0.06* (0.01)	−0.02* (0.00)
Age	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01* (0.00)
Age^2/100	−0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Men	−0.11* (0.03)	−0.03* (0.01)
Family structure (ref cat: married)		
Separated	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01* (0.00)
Single	−0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Divorced	−0.11* (0.03)	−0.03* (0.01)
Widowed	−0.21* (0.10)	−0.02 (0.04)
Political party supported (ref. None/other)		
SPD	1.30* (0.04)	0.62* (0.02)
CDU/CSU	1.44* (0.04)	0.66* (0.02)
FDP	1.85* (0.07)	0.85* (0.03)
Greens	1.51* (0.06)	0.68* (0.03)
The Left	1.80* (0.07)	0.90* (0.03)
Constant	0.21 (0.17)	0.28* (0.07)
N	12,618	10,081
R^2	0.19	0.28

Notes: OLS regression analysis with standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$.

Finally, we take a closer look at how personality traits are related to variation in *strength* of party identification. The left column in Table 5 presents estimates from a model in which the change score in strength of party identification between 2005 and 2009 is the dependent variable. We find that persons who are high on conscientiousness are more likely to increase their strength of party identification between the two time points. The right-most column in Table 5 shows estimates from an OLS model in which the dependent variable is the variation in strength of party identification (i.e., the amount of change in strength of party identification between the time points disregarding the direction of the change). Interestingly, people with high levels of openness and neuroticism show the greatest variation in the change of the strength of party identification. Hence, personality also affects the variation in strength between different time points. The implication of this finding is clear; when using cross-sectional data, researchers should approach the relationship between party identification and some personality traits – in particular, openness and neuroticism – with a degree

of scepticism because the probability of obtaining a solid estimate that is stable over time is lower for persons who score highly on these two traits.

Discussion

In this study we conclude that stable identification with a political party, as well as switching of party identification, are more common among people who have high levels of openness and extraversion and lower levels of conscientiousness. Confirming the traditionalist view, we show that personality is associated with the direction and stability of party identification. In particular extraverts and open-minded individuals are most likely to identify strongly and stably with a political party. Our conclusion that neuroticism, openness and conscientiousness are associated with the changes in party identification aligns with the revisionists' view that the tendency to change party identification over time is associated with personality traits. Yet, we also observe that there is a substantial group of non-identifiers who are characterised by low levels of openness and extraversion, but high levels of conscientiousness and neuroticism. In the remainder of this section we discuss the documented pattern of associations trait by trait.

Openness is often emphasised in the study of personality and party identification, and in this study we too found a strong positive association with stable identification with most parties left of centre over a four-year time-period as well as stronger party identification. Our findings confirm that openness 'predisposes individuals toward liberal [i.e. left-wing] political views' (McCrae 1996: 327). However, by using panel data we are the first to document that openness is also related to patterns of switching party identification. Specifically, high scorers on openness have the tendency to change between identification with a party and non-identification, or vice versa. We thereby confirm that the open-mindedness rooted in openness make high scorers on openness more willing to reconsider earlier held ideas and change party identification. The results for openness in this study thereby demonstrate the complex role of personality in political behaviour.

In line with the earlier literature, higher levels of conscientiousness are positively associated with a preference for conservative parties and a less likely tendency to associate with left-wing parties (Caprara et al. 1999; Gerber et al. 2012). In addition, conscientiousness is related to change in strength of party identification. However, in this German panel study, conscientiousness seems to be mostly related to lower tendencies to identify with parties left-of-centre, while the expected patterns of stable identification with conservative parties are not confirmed. The absence of the latter association is contrary to findings of research on party identification (Gerber et al. 2012; Mössner 2005; Schoen & Schumann 2005). In addition, we show that higher levels of conscientiousness are especially related to patterns of non-identification. These findings suggest that conscientiousness seems primarily associated with the tendency to identify or not to identify with a party. The role of conscientiousness in the relationship with patterns of party identification might need to be reconsidered. Further research will have to replicate this pattern in other political contexts first.

The association of neuroticism with The Left aligns with recent findings that neuroticism is positively related to economic left-wing preferences (see Gerber et al. 2010) as well as

parties that offer protection against these material challenges (Schoen & Schumann 2007). Moving beyond the cross-sectional analyses, an intriguing finding with regard to neuroticism, and also openness, is that these traits are positively associated with the variance in party identification. Individual differences in neuroticism, and also in openness, might be of more importance in the political domain than suggested in the literature so far. This finding implies that cross-sectional research addressing the association between these traits and the strength of party identification results in unreliable estimates of the association of these personality traits with the strength of party identification. Therefore, scholars should be careful interpreting associations between these traits and party identification based upon cross-sectional data.

The cross-sectional analyses confirmed that extraversion is associated with various right-wing political parties. We also confirm that extraversion is positively related to the strength of party identification as suggested by Gerber et al. (2012) and Mössner (2005). This association could be explained by the more affective components in extraversion which make extraverts more likely to form affective bonds and to identify with groups.

Agreeableness was in line with earlier research, associated with support for left-wing parties in 2009 but not in 2005. Contrary to our expectations, agreeableness is in this study largely unrelated to the strength and stability of party identification (see also Mössner 2005). There are at least two possible explanations for the unexpected null finding. For instance, the measure of personality employed in this study (e.g., BFI-S) differs from the Ten Item Personality Inventory employed in the other study addressing the strength and direction of party identification by Gerber et al. (2012). Both measures of personality have been shown to be valid and reliable measures of the big five traits. We can thereby assume that measures employed in the two studies are grossly equivalent. This could imply that the different findings are not attributable to the different measures employed in the studies. Alternatively, the findings reported in this study point to the contextual differences between Germany and the United States. Possibly, agreeableness could, for unknown reasons, be differentially associated with the strength and stability in Germany while it is an important trait related to the strength of party identification in the United States. Importantly, future studies will have to address both possible explanations.

In this study we have demonstrated that panel data provide novel insights in the understanding of the antecedent of the stability and change in party identification. Moreover, panel data allowed us to demonstrate that the reliability of the relationship between personality traits and party identification varies. For some traits one can obtain reliable estimate using cross-sectional design, whereas the associations in cross-sectional studies are less reliable for other traits (i.e., openness and neuroticism). Future research could extend our argument and test whether the same logic applies to the stability and changes in political ideology.

Moreover, extending the results presented in this article, future studies could examine in more detail the interaction between personality traits and environmental factors. In this study, we have taken into account the role played by life events by including them as controls. A logical next step for research would be a more detailed investigation of whether life events and personality interact in shaping party identification. Finally, this study focused upon one political context – namely Germany. Future research could, employing equivalent

measures of personality across different contexts, set out to explore whether the political context affects the strength and direction of personality and party identification.

In conclusion, by presenting analyses of a unique panel dataset, this study provides new insights into the relationship between personality and party identification. However, this study also adds to the classic literature on party identification. We thereby demonstrate that the study of political behaviour benefits from the inclusion of psychological models – especially when attempting to answer classic, but still highly relevant, questions on the antecedents and stability of partisanship.

Acknowledgements

Appendix Table 1. Big Five Inventory – Short Version: Item wording

Trait	I see myself as someone who . . .
Openness to experience	Is original, comes up with new ideas.
	Values artistic experiences.
	Has an active imagination.
Conscientiousness	Does a thorough job.
	Does things effectively and efficiently.
	Tends to be lazy *(reversed)*.
Extraversion	Is communicative, talkative.
	Is outgoing, sociable.
	Is reserved *(reversed)*.
Agreeableness	Is sometimes somewhat rude to others *(reversed)*.
	Has a forgiving nature.
	Is considerate and kind to others.
Neuroticism	Worries a lot.
	Gets nervous easily.
	Is relaxed, handles stress well *(reversed)*.

Notes

1. As a robustness check, we reran our analyses reported below, including a dummy variable for East Germans interacting with the independent variables of interest. We did not find that personality traits are

related to party identification in any systematic and different way when comparing East and West Germans.

2. In all the analyses we have tested for the interaction between personality traits and age, because personality domains change at different ages (Specht et al. 2011). The analyses, however, did not find any significant interaction effects and are available from the authors upon request.

3. Although one can, as in many other multiparty systems, group the parties in the German party system into two major blocs, we refrain from doing so in our analyses. Clearly, the five parties have different historical backgrounds and voter bases. Hence, splitting the parties into two blocs for the sake of simplicity would simply sacrifice too much of the important variation between parties and their voters.

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