

Personality Traits and Civic Engagement: The Case of South Korea*

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This article expands on previous research on the psychological foundations of civic engagement by evaluating the role of the “Big Five” personality traits with regard to associational membership and volunteering activities. The results of a nationally representative sample of the South Korean population demonstrate a variety of effects of personality on participatory patterns. Individuals high in Agreeableness or Emotional Stability are likely to be active in at least one voluntary civic organization. Meanwhile, individuals high in Openness are likely to be involved in a larger number of organizations and to be more active in volunteering. Extraversion also turns out to be positively associated with the number of voluntary associations with which people are affiliated. These findings are in line with those from previous studies conducted in Western cultures, and therefore contribute to enhancing the external validity of the relationship between personality and civic engagement.

Keywords: *personality, the “Big Five”, voluntary civic associations, volunteering, South Korea*

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Introduction

During the past few decades, voluntary civic associations have been touted as the centerpiece of democracy, where citizens foster interpersonal trust and confidence in institutions (Brehm & Rahn 1997; Wollebæk & Strømsens 2008), enhance positive attitudes toward out-groups (Hooghe & Quintelier 2013; Howard & Gilbert 2008), and hone civic skills, which eventually contribute to active participation in political processes (van der Meer & van Ingen 2009; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady 1995). Scholars have asked what determines associational membership and civic activities, presumably expecting to find a set of results relevant to policy proposals that intend to increase the level of civic engagement. Most of these studies have focused on individual, socio-demographic factors such as income, education, or religion (e.g., Feldman 2010; Huang, van den Brink, & Groot 2009; Lam 2002). Others have paid attention to contextual factors, including, but not limited to, population density, racial segregation, or urbanization (e.g., Haddad 2004; Hooghe & Botterman 2011; Oliver 2010). Reflecting recently revitalized interests in dispositional factors in determining individual attitudes and behaviors, however, another body of research has offered evidence that personality traits—usually measured by the “Big Five” model—play an important role in facilitating civic engagement (Bekkers 2005; Bekkers 2006; Carlo, Okun, Knight, & de Guzman 2005; Dinesen, Nørgaard, & Klemmensen 2014; Okun, Pugliese, & Rook 2007; Omoto, Snyder, & Hackett 2010; Weinschenk 2017). These studies all suggest that promoting civic engagement may be more difficult than expected due to the deeply rooted psychological foundations that differ across individuals.

The present study is in line with recent work on the effects of personality on civic engagement, focusing on its two aspects, i.e., associational membership and volunteering activities. Associational membership indicates whether individuals formally join a voluntary civic organization or not, and it represents interpersonal networks where information is shared and mobilization for action sometimes occurs. Volunteering activities indicate actual pro-social behaviors, which serve as a catalyst for social trust. This article contributes to pre-existing research in two ways. First, this study is one of the first attempts to assess the effects of personality traits on civic engagement in a non-Western context. So far, inquiries have been limited to the United States (Carlo et al. 2005; Okun et al. 2007; Omoto et al. 2010), Denmark (Dinesen et al. 2014), and the Netherlands (Bekkers 2005; Bekkers

2006). Given that well-known determinants of civic engagement, (e.g., education, religion, income, to name a few) also work fairly well in South Korea (Jeong 2010; Kim 2005; Kim, Kang, Lee, & Lee 2007), the results of the present study offer a unique opportunity to evaluate whether the roles of personality in fostering civic activities could also be similar across different cultures. Second, unlike many prior studies that used convenient samples, this study relies on a large-scale, nationally representative survey, and therefore its findings secure higher levels of external validity.

Theory and Hypothesis

In the social sciences, civic engagement is known to contribute to fostering and consolidating democracy. Activities in voluntary civic associations are thought to stimulate lively debates and rational deliberation among members, which presumably lead to democratic consensus. Related to this, organization-based volunteering for the community is supposed to be conducive to civic cooperation. There is an abundance of empirical studies that report the positive effects of civic engagement on many areas, for example, economic development (Knack & Keefer 1997; Portney 2005), efficient government performance (Andrews 2009; Knack 2002), and public confidence in government (Brehm & Rahn 1997; Wollebæk & Strømsens 2008).

Civic engagement is also credited with developing harmonious interpersonal and intergroup relations by nurturing favorable attitudes toward out-groups. This idea—albeit not always taken for granted (Oliver 2010; Putnam 2007)—is based on the assumption that civic engagement, by definition, connotes being connected with other people: individuals who join voluntary civic organizations become involved in an extended interpersonal network, and therefore high levels of mutual understanding among members are guaranteed. Civic engagement may also ameliorate members' attitudes toward out-group members, particularly when the members of voluntary civic associations are socio-economically and racially heterogeneous. In fact, Putnam (2000) shows that, at the aggregate level, civic engagement is positively associated with higher levels of tolerance and trust in the United States. Similar findings are observed in Europe as well (Hooghe & Quintelier 2013; Howard & Gilbert 2008; see Rapp & Freitag 2015 for a dissenting opinion).

In order to understand the nature of civic engagement, a large body of

research has tried to explain its determinants (see Wilson 2012 for a review). Most of them have focused on individual-level factors. For example, the more educated are consistently reported to join a larger number of organizations (Gesthuizen & Scheepers 2010; Huang et al. 2009). Additionally, religious affiliation and attendance (Jeong 2010; Kim et al. 2007; Lam 2002), homeownership (Rotolo, Wilson, & Hughes 2010), and income (Feldman 2010) are all known to be positively associated with civic engagement. Other demographic factors such as race and immigration are also discussed, focusing on civic activities in their own ethnic enclaves (Boyle & Sawyer 2010; Rotolo et al. 2010). Another body of scholars have examined contextual factors such as neighborhood economic conditions (Flanagan & Levine 2010; Oliver 2001) or racial and ethnic composition (Lipford & Yandle 2009; Putnam 2007), suggesting that civic engagement tends to be undermined in poorer neighborhoods or in racially heterogeneous communities.

Thus, it is clear that most research on the determinants of civic engagement has predominantly focused on socio-economic factors, either individual-level or context-level ones. This is presumably because scholars are keenly interested in delineating policy recommendations for the promotion of civic engagement. Assuming that the alleged positive effects of civic engagement are true, identifying socio-economic determinants can easily lead to policy proposals. For instance, findings that support the significance of education can be used to request more government funding for public education in order to foster civic engagement and eventually enhance trust in government. Likewise, studies showing negative correlations between poverty rates of neighborhoods and civic engagement have significant implications in prioritizing agendas of public policies in governments.

However, recent development in psychology suggests that dispositional factors such as personality traits also matter in determining individuals' attitudes and behaviors. In this vein, a number of studies have examined the influence of personality traits on civic engagement and volunteerism (Bekkers 2005; Bekkers 2006; Dinesen et al. 2014; Okun et al. 2007; Omoto et al. 2010). Personality traits are defined as "dimensions of individual differences in tendencies to show consistent patterns of thought, feelings, and actions" (McCrae & Costa 1990, p. 23). In measuring this elusive concept, the five-factor model, i.e., the "Big Five" model, has widely been used since the late 1980s (Goldberg 1990). The "Big Five" model is rooted in a questionnaire-based lexical analysis, which employs factor analysis in order to identify several distinct groups of descriptors of personality characteristics.

By doing so, the “Big Five” model—albeit recently challenged by alternative measures (e.g., Lee & Ashton 2004)—is known to constitute five “broad domains, collectively representing a hierarchy that organizes and summarizes the vast majority of subsidiary traits” (Mondak 2010, p. 25).

These five dimensions of personality are Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience, Extraversion, and Emotional Stability (or, as its opposite, Neuroticism). Agreeableness means being compassionate, modest, accommodating, trusting, and cooperative. Conscientiousness mainly refers to a tendency to act dutifully, to show self-discipline, and to facilitate task-and-goal-directed behavior. Openness deals with the degree to which individuals are open to new experiences. Extraversion refers to a tendency to seek the company of others and external stimulation. Finally, Emotional Stability refers to controlling negative emotions like anxiety, depression, anger, discontent, and irritation (Funder 2008; Funder & Fast 2010).

One can expect that personality traits correlate with membership in voluntary civic associations and volunteering activities for several reasons. First, Openness to Experience, which describes the breadth, depth, and originality of the individual’s mind, is related to information seeking, which requires active engagement in social and political life (Mondak & Halperin 2008). People who score high on Openness to Experience appreciate novelty and respond positively to unconventional and complex stimuli, and therefore will be active in voluntary civic associations, which can offer new experiences. Therefore, the expected relationship between Openness to Experience and associational membership and volunteering activities is positive. There is empirical evidence in support of this hypothesis, reporting that people high in this trait are active in non-political organizations (Bekkers 2005; Dinesen et al. 2014).

Similarly, Extraversion, which implies an energetic approach toward the social world, is expected to show strong and positive effects on civic engagement, especially on those activities that involve face-to-face contact such as attending public meetings and volunteering (Mondak & Halperin 2008). Individuals high in Extraversion are likely to be fully involved in voluntary civic associations, simply because they entertain interactions with other people. Evidence from a prior study suggests that extraverts are actually more likely to be active in political parties (Dinesen et al. 2014) and to go out of their way to help others (Carlo et al. 2005; Omoto et al. 2010).

Agreeableness, which characterizes a prosocial and communal orientation, is known to lead individuals to civic engagement and

volunteering (Bekkers 2005; Carlo et al. 2005; Okun et al. 2007). Persons high in Agreeableness have caring orientations toward other people, and therefore they should be more likely to empathize with socially marginalized groups, for whom many voluntary civic associations work. In fact, previous studies demonstrate that active volunteers usually score high on Agreeableness (Elshaug & Metzger 2001) and those who are agreeable are more likely to donate blood (Bekkers 2006).

Conscientiousness, indicating the tendency to be norm-abiding, organized, and reliable, should be positively related to civic engagement that is typically considered a civic duty. Conscientious individuals are likely to offer assistance to others, especially to the extent that they have been socialized to consider helping and community-oriented behaviors as a necessary condition of good citizenship. Conscientiousness is often related to proactive behavior, a stronger will to achieve, and high self-esteem. These qualities seem to be valuable for citizens who want to engage in voluntary civic associations. Hence, it is hard to imagine that people high in Conscientiousness would “hunker down” without interacting with others, but empirical evidence for this hypothesis is surprisingly scarce. Bekkers (2005) reports that Conscientiousness is negatively associated with associational membership.

Emotional Stability is also expected to hold a positive association with civic engagement. People who are neurotic are less likely to join groups and cannot easily maintain membership if they do. Empirical findings from previous studies report a positive relationship between Emotional Stability and membership of voluntary associations (Bekkers 2005) and a negative relationship between depression—one of the common characteristics of individuals low on Emotional Stability—and civic engagement (Handy & Cnaan 2007; Musick & Wilson 2003).

In sum, the main hypothesis in this article is as follows: All five personality dimensions—Openness as information-seeking attitudes, Agreeableness as prosocial and communal orientation, Conscientiousness as norm-abiding attitudes, Extraversion as gregariousness and leadership, and Emotional Stability as lack of negative affect—are expected to be positively associated with associational membership and volunteering activities, respectively.

Socio-cultural Context of South Korea

As democracy has many different forms depending on the socio-historical contexts, the patterns of civic engagement vary across cultures (Anderson, Curtis, & Grabb 2006; Lowry 2005). Civic engagement in South Korea is peculiar, mainly due to its longstanding exposure to Confucianism (Bidet 2002). Civic engagement is originally based on the experiences of modern Europe, where the idea that individuals have the inalienable rights of life and liberty was conceived. Individual freedom and equality between individuals serve as the main drive for self-help initiatives, which, in turn, contribute to building voluntary civic organizations and promoting pro-social activities such as volunteering. Conversely, Confucian philosophy is based on the dichotomy between elites and ordinary people, where the principle of interactions—caring for the latter by the former and respecting the former by the latter—is considered a duty rather than a right. Thus, Confucianism promotes the creation of organizations strictly controlled from the top (e.g., government, religious leaders, etc.) down.

Whilst most associations in Western cultures are formed in pursuit of a specific interest (e.g., labor unions and professional organizations) or value (e.g., religious group), those in South Korea are built to strengthen primordial affinities such as region-, school-, and family-based relationships (Kim 2011). Since associational membership is narrow and parochial, social networks among members are likely to be composed of homogeneous people of similar backgrounds and tastes. That said, interpersonal networks built by associational membership are more likely to be relevant to “bridging” social capital in Western cultures, whereas they are more likely to correspond to “bonding” social capital in South Korea. Some scholars argue that South Korea has failed to fully develop civic engagement patterns derived from diverse, yet dense, interpersonal networks (Park & Shin 2005).

These noticeable differences between South Korea and Western countries regarding civic engagement notwithstanding, the above-mentioned hypotheses are expected to universally apply to these two contexts. Personality may affect individuals’ choice of one type of voluntary civic organization over another, but given the main interest of this article is associational membership and volunteering activities (i.e., who are more likely to be affiliated with groups and participate in pro-social activities?) regardless of their inner characteristics, previous findings on the relationship between personality traits and civic engagement are expected to be replicated

in South Korea.

Data and Measures

Data

Statistical analysis is performed, using the 2012 Korean General Social Survey (KGSS). The KGSS is a nationally representative, face-to-face interview survey conducted every year since 2003 by the Survey Research Center at Sungkyunkwan University, South Korea. The sampling technique (i.e. the multi-stage area proportional probability sampling method), interview and data collecting procedures are identical to those used by the General Social Survey (GSS) in the USA. The KGSS is composed of (1) a number of core questions, which are generally compatible with those of the GSS, (2) a survey year specific module shared with the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), and (3) its own unique, additional questions. Both key independent and dependent variables in this study belong to the third category of survey questions, being neither part of core questions nor included in the 2012 ISSP module. The total number of respondents in the 2012 KGSS is 1,369, and the response rate is 56%.

The Dependent Variables: Membership and Volunteering Activities

Two sets of the dependent variables are employed in statistical analysis. The first set regards individuals' affiliation with voluntary civic associations. The following voluntary civic associations are included in the survey: (1) clubs for political activities; (2) neighborhood, homeowners, or condominium associations; (3) organizations that provide services to socially marginalized people; (4) consumer organizations or clubs for other social activities; (5) religious organizations; (6) alumni clubs; (7) clubs for sports or cultural activities; (8) labor unions; and (9) business or professional organizations. For each of these organizations, a question is asked regarding the respondent's membership. Three answering options are given: (a) "a formal member and regularly attend the meeting"; (b) "a formal member, but rarely attend the meeting"; and (c) "not a formal member". Based on the responses, a new variable is generated to denote the total number of voluntary civic organizations to which the respondents belong, after having recoded the

original variables to distinguish (a) and (b) from (c).¹ This count variable ranges from 0 to 9 ($M = 1.90$; $SD = 1.79$).

The second set of dependent variables concerns volunteering. The respondents are asked whether they have ever participated in the following activities in the past year: (1) volunteering for local community, e.g., cleaning or patrolling; (2) volunteering for sports or cultural activities, e.g., offering classes or lessons regarding sports, traditional arts or skills; (3) volunteering for social services to marginalized people, including the handicapped, children, the elderly, the poor, or immigrants; and (4) political activities such as signing a petition or participation in rally or protest. These are a set of dummy variables that have just two answering options, i.e., yes or no.² Using this information, a new variable is created to count the total number of volunteering activities, which ranges from 0 to 4 ($M = 0.42$; $SD = 0.84$).

The Independent Variables: Personality Traits

The key independent variables—personality traits—are based on a carefully translated, Korean version of the TIPI (Ten-Item Personality Inventory). The TIPI is composed of twenty adjectives (ten pairs) in total, with two pairs of adjectives assigned to measure each of the five dimensions of personality traits. It measures individuals' personality by asking respondents to report how well ten pairs of traits (e.g., “disorganized, careless”) describe themselves. The five dimensions of personality are constructed as follows: Extraversion (“extraverted, enthusiastic” and “reserved, quiet” [reverse coded]), Agreeableness (“sympathetic, warm” and “critical, quarrelsome” [reverse coded]), Conscientiousness (“dependable, self-disciplined” and “disorganized, careless” [reverse coded]), Emotional Stability (“calm, emotionally stable” and “anxious, easily upset” [reverse coded]), and Openness (“open to new experiences, complex” and “conventional, uncreative” [reverse coded]). Although a significant number of scholars have started to raise concerns about the weaknesses of the TIPI as opposed to other longer survey instruments such as the 44-item BFI, the 240-item Revised NEO-PI-R or the 100-item HEXACO-PI-R (Credé, Harms,

¹ The self-reported affiliation with each of these voluntary civic associations varies: political clubs (7%); neighborhoods associations (35%); social services organizations (22%); consumer groups (9%); religious groups (38%); alumni groups (63%); sports clubs (51%); labor unions (9%); and professional associations (16%).

² The self-reported participation in volunteerism varies: local community (16%); cultural activity (10%); social services (18%); and political activity (7%).

Niehorster, & Gaye-Valentine 2012), the TIPI remains extensively utilized in academic research, primarily because it is short enough to be included in a large-scale, face-to-face survey like the KGSS (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann 2003).

Control Variables

A set of control variables are included in the statistical models: age (and age-squared, to allow for curvilinear effects), gender, education, monthly household income, employment status (currently working, student, homemaker, retired, and unemployed), marital status (married, widowed, separated/divorced, and never married), and religious affiliation (Buddhist, Protestant, Catholic, and No Religion). Studies have shown some of these control variables (e.g., income and education) are partially endogenous to personality (Borghans, Duckworth, Heckman, & ter Weel 2008; Gerber et al. 2010). That said, as these control variables are expected to absorb the effects of personality trait on the dependent variables, any statistically significant, direct relationships between personality and associational membership or volunteering activities should be considered substantial. Descriptive statistics of the variables included in data analysis are available in Table 1.

Results

Table 2 demonstrates the results regarding the effects of personality on associational membership (Model 1) and volunteering activities (Model 2).³ Consistent with the hypothesis, people who scored high on Openness or Extraversion are likely to be involved in a larger number of civic organizations ($b = 0.209$, $se = 0.073$ for Openness; $b = 0.241$, $se = 0.115$ for Extraversion).⁴ One can assume that volunteering is primarily a function of

³ The main dependent variables are count variables (i.e., the number of voluntary civic associations in which the respondents are involved and the number of volunteering activities). And therefore, for Model 1, negative binomial regression is employed as there is evidence for over-dispersion in the data ($\ln(\alpha) = -1.791$, $p < 0.01$). Conversely, since the issue of over-dispersion turns out not to be detected in the model regarding volunteering (Model 2), Poisson regression is used here.

⁴ When analyzing data, the province-level fixed effects are considered to eliminate the possibility that the results are the products of correlations between personality and some unobserved contextual factors (e.g., province-level population density and cultural differences) that might affect affiliation with voluntary civic associations and volunteering. The results also report robust standard

TABLE 1
SUMMARY STATISTICS OF THE VARIABLES INCLUDED IN THE MODELS

Dependent Variables			Independent Variables		
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD
<i>Composite Index</i>			<i>Personality</i>		
Membership (Number, 0-9)	1.90	1.79	Conscientiousness (Scale, 0-1)	0.62	0.20
Volunteering (Number, 0-4)	0.42	0.84	Openness (Scale, 0-1)	0.53	0.21
<i>Voluntary Civic Associations</i>			Agreeableness (Scale, 0-1)	0.64	0.17
Political Club (1=Yes)	0.07	0.26	Emotional Stability (Scale, 0-1)	0.55	0.20
Neighborhoods (1=Yes)	0.35	0.48	Extraversion (Scale, 0-1)	0.53	0.23
Social Services (1=Yes)	0.22	0.41	<i>Demographic Variables</i>		
Consumer Group (1=Yes)	0.09	0.28	Age (in Years)	50.06	17.45
Religious Group (1=Yes)	0.38	0.49	Income (Scale, 1-21)	7.50	5.27
Alumni Club (1=Yes)	0.63	0.48	Female (1=Yes)	0.53	0.50
Sports Club (1=Yes)	0.51	0.50	Education (Scale, 0-7)	3.14	1.63
Labor Unions (1=Yes)	0.09	0.29	Currently Working (1=Yes)	0.58	0.49
Professional (1=Yes)	0.16	0.36	Student (1=Yes)	0.08	0.28
<i>Volunteering</i>			Homemaker (1=Yes)	0.11	0.32
Local Community (1=Yes)	0.16	0.37	Retired (1=Yes)	0.13	0.34
Cultural Activity (1=Yes)	0.10	0.30	Unemployed (1=Yes)	0.09	0.28
Social Services (1=Yes)	0.18	0.39	Married (1=Yes)	0.64	0.48
Political Activity (1=Yes)	0.07	0.25	Widowed (1=Yes)	0.12	0.32
<i>Dichotomous Measure</i>			Separated/Divorced (1=Yes)	0.05	0.22
Membership	0.76	0.43	Never Married (1=Yes)	0.20	0.40
Volunteering	0.25	0.44	Buddhist (1=Yes)	0.28	0.45
			Protestant (1=Yes)	0.23	0.42
			Catholic (1=Yes)	0.10	0.31
			No Religion (1=Yes)	0.38	0.49

TABLE 2
THE EFFECTS OF PERSONALITY TRAITS ON ASSOCIATIONAL MEMBERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERING

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
	Participation in Civic Organizations (number: 0-9)	Volunteering (number: 0-4)
<i>Personality Traits</i>		
Conscientiousness (Scale, 0-1)	0.046 [0.098]	0.466 [0.343]
Openness (Scale, 0-1)	0.209** [0.073]	0.719** [0.202]
Agreeableness (Scale, 0-1)	0.257 [0.149]	-0.169 [0.444]
Emotional Stability (Scale, 0-1)	0.161 [0.137]	0.092 [0.220]
Extraversion (Scale, 0-1)	0.241* [0.115]	0.293 [0.187]
<i>Other Covariates</i>		
Number of Civic Organizations (Scale, 0-9)		0.245** [0.031]
Age (Years)	0.047** [0.013]	0.031 [0.019]
Age2 (Years)	-0.042** [0.012]	-0.026 [0.016]
Income (Scale, 1-21)	0.010 [0.006]	0.017 [0.010]
Female (1=Yes)	-0.208** [0.041]	-0.228* [0.105]
Education (Scale, 0-7)	0.085** [0.020]	0.103** [0.039]
Student+ (1=Yes)	0.064 [0.109]	0.940** [0.192]
Homemaker+ (1=Yes)	-0.093 [0.049]	0.123 [0.208]
Retired+ (1=Yes)	-0.155 [0.099]	-0.041 [0.223]
Unemployed+ (1=Yes)	-0.091 [0.100]	0.236 [0.170]
Married^ (1=Yes)	0.062 [0.112]	-0.166 [0.150]
Widowed^ (1=Yes)	-0.237 [0.129]	-0.354 [0.385]
Separated/Divorced^ (1=Yes)	-0.154 [0.145]	0.303 [0.255]
Buddhist# (1=Yes)	0.250** [0.063]	0.091 [0.176]
Protestant# (1=Yes)	0.509** [0.062]	0.183 [0.187]
Catholic# (1=Yes)	0.418** [0.072]	0.237 [0.162]
Constant	-1.478** [0.320]	-3.242** [0.567]
ln(alpha)	-1.791** [0.210]	
Observations	1,381	1,381

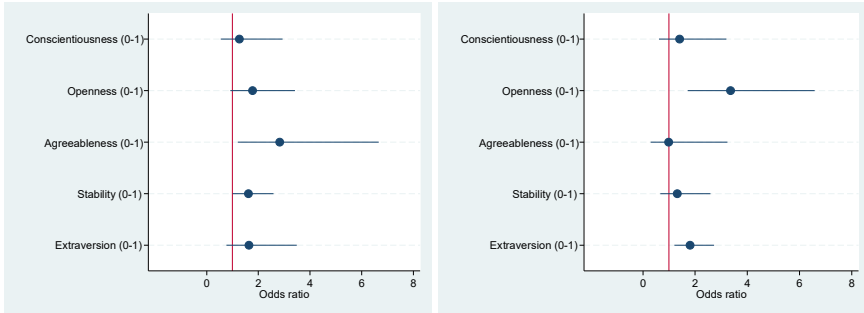
Note: Coefficients and robust standard errors in brackets (clustered by province) come from negative binomial regression (Model 1) and Poisson regression (Model 2); fixed effects at the level of province are considered, but not reported.

+ "Full-time Worker" as a reference category.

^ "Never Married" as a reference category.

"No Religion" as a reference category.

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)



Note: The graphs summarize the results from a set of analysis using participation in *at least one* voluntary civic association and *at least one* volunteering activity (dichotomous measures) as the dependent variable. A logit model has been employed with control variables listed in the main text. Odds ratios with 95% confidence interval are presented with the vertical line indicating odds ratio is equal to 1 (which denotes an insignificant relationship).

FIG. 1. — PERSONALITY AND ASSOCIATIONAL MEMBERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERING (DICHOTOMOUS MEASURE)

associational membership in voluntary civic organizations, because those organizations often mobilize people to be engaged in volunteering activities. Thus, Model 2 has been estimated by including the total number of civic organizations as additional control variable. As expected, the number of civic organizations turns out to be a statistically significant factor ($b = 0.245, se = 0.031$) in determining volunteering activities, but it does not wipe out the effect of Openness ($b = 0.719, se = 0.202$). This finding suggests that Openness exerts an influence on volunteering directly and indirectly (i.e., via associational membership).

However, as a robustness check, when using the dichotomous dependent variables that simply divide members from non-members (the associational membership variable) and participants from non-participants (the volunteering variable), the effects of personality seem to differ.⁵ Figure 1 summarizes these results.⁶ Given that the intervals that contain 1 indicate

errors clustered at the province level to allow for the interdependence of survey respondents in a given province.

⁵ A recoded, dichotomous associational membership variable indicates whether a respondent is affiliated with *at least one* voluntary civic organization or not ($M = 0.76; SD = 0.43$). Another variable regarding volunteering denotes whether a respondent has ever been involved in *at least one* volunteering activity or not ($M = 0.25; SD = 0.44$).

⁶ The results come from a set of logit models with all control variables listed above. Odds ratios with 95% confidence interval are represented by the vertical line indicating that odds ratio is equal to 1 (i.e., no statistically significant effects of personality traits).

statistically non-significant findings, one can see that Agreeableness (OR = 2.83, $se = 1.24$, $p = 0.017$) and Emotional Stability (OR = 1.61, $se = 0.39$, $p = 0.049$) are positively associated with membership in voluntary civic associations, while Openness (OR = 3.36, $se = 1.15$, $p < 0.001$) and Extraversion (OR = 1.81, $se = 0.38$, $p = 0.005$) are positively associated with volunteering activities.

So, four out of five personality dimensions—all except Conscientiousness—turn out to affect civic engagement, but their effects vary depending on how the dependent variables are operationalized. When looking at the scope or strength (i.e., the total number) of associational membership and volunteering activities, Openness (for both associational membership and volunteering) and Extraversion (for associational membership) turn out to be statistically significant predictors. Conversely, when interested in the simple division between members and non-members or between participants and non-participants, Agreeableness and Emotional Stability (in the case of voluntary civic associations) and Openness and Extraversion (in the case of volunteerism) turn out to matter in determining civic engagement.

In order to figure out a more detailed picture regarding these findings, additional analysis has been performed, which presents the effects of personality traits on membership in *each* voluntary civic association and volunteering included in the data. Figure A1 and Figure A2 in the Appendix demonstrate that the results reported in Figure 1 are driven by different types of voluntary civic organizations and volunteering activities. For example, Openness is positively associated with membership in political organizations, social services organizations, and sports/culture clubs, while Agreeableness is positively associated with membership in alumni associations and organizations providing social services (Figure A1). Openness also turns out to be significant in facilitating volunteering activities in local community and those regarding social services (Figure A2). As such, the findings regarding the relationship between personality and civic engagement are so nuanced and complex that they call for careful interpretation.

In sum, four personality traits turn out to affect associational membership; two of them—Openness and Extraversion—determine the strength of participation, measured by the number of civic organizations with which individuals are affiliated, whereas Agreeableness and Emotional Stability can explain who is (or is not) involved in voluntary civic associations. Also, Openness is associated with a wider scope of volunteering, while Extraversion, in addition to Openness, functions as a key psychological determinant of participation in volunteerism. Lack of statistically significant

TABLE 3
SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS FROM SELECTED WORKS: PERSONALITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Authors	Research Site	Sample Size	Dependent Variables	Key Findings
<i>Mondak & Halperin (2008)</i>	USA	404	Volunteering	Extraversion (+) Emotional Stability (+)
<i>Elshaug & Metzger (2001)</i>	Australia	106	Volunteering	Extraversion (+) Agreeableness (+)
<i>Carlo et al. (2005)</i>	USA	796	Volunteering	Extraversion (+) Agreeableness (+)
<i>Okun et al. (2007)</i>	USA	888	Volunteering	Extraversion (+)
<i>Omoto et al. (2010)</i>	USA	624	Associational Membership; Volunteering	Extraversion (+)
<i>Dinesen et al. (2013)</i>	Denmark	3,612	Associational Membership; Volunteering	Extraversion (+) Agreeableness (+) Openness (+) Conscientiousness (+)
<i>Bekkers (2005)</i>	Netherlands	1,587	Associational Membership; Volunteering	Openness (+) Conscientiousness (-)
<i>Bekkers (2006)</i>	Netherlands	1,587	Donation	Extraversion (+) Agreeableness (+) Openness (-)
<i>Weinschenk (2017)</i>	24 Countries	Large N	Associational Membership	Extraversion (+) Conscientiousness (+) Emotional Stability (+)
<i>The Present Study</i>	South Korea	1,396	Associational Membership; Volunteering	Extraversion (+) Agreeableness (+) Openness (+) Emotional Stability (+)

Note: In the case of Weinschenk (2017), the common findings from more than three countries are listed; (+) denotes the positive relationship between personality and civic engagement; (-) indicates the negative relationship between them.

finding for Conscientiousness is somewhat surprising because civic engagement has been considered a duty of citizens, particularly in the South Korean context, but such a non-finding (or non-commonsensual finding) is not unheard before (e.g., Bekkers 2005). Table 3 offers a structured review of

the findings from previous studies and the present study. No noticeable differences regarding the relationship between personality traits and civic engagement are detected between South Korea and Western cultures.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that the “Big Five” personality traits exert a direct influence on associational membership and volunteering activities, independent of socio-economic factors that scholars have intensively examined. The results reported in this article are fairly consistent with many findings from previous studies (Bekkers 2005; Bekkers 2006, Carlo et al. 2005; Dinesen et al. 2014; Okun et al. 2007; Omoto et al. 2010), and therefore strengthen the external validity of the relationships between personality and civic engagement.

The findings of this study will be further elaborated by addressing three issues that have not been covered here. First, one can wonder whether some important meanings of personality measures get lost in translation. It is well-reported that the “Big Five” personality traits, when measured using longer instruments, are reliable across cultures (John, Naumann, & Soto 2008; see Bartram 2013 for a dissenting opinion), but no research has yet examined cross-cultural reliability of the TIPI and other short batteries of personality traits. Thus, one cannot rule out the possibility that the Korean TIPI disproportionately draws from a few “facets” of certain personality traits at the expense of others. For example, the finding that Conscientiousness does not turn out to be correlated with associational membership in South Korea may be because the Korean TIPI underestimates some facets of Conscientiousness—such as dutifulness—which usually facilitate civic engagement. Future research should address this problem by carefully comparing the Korean TIPI to other longer batteries.

Also, it is necessary to examine the relationship between personality traits and organizational structures of voluntary civic associations (e.g., equal status or diversity among members). As shown in the Appendix, the relationship between personality and formal affiliation with each civic organization significantly varies, suggesting that activation of a personality dimension depends on the inner characteristics of a particular civic organization. For example, this study already demonstrates that individuals high in Openness do not necessarily tend to be involved in all types of voluntary civic organizations. What this study does not answer is whether

individuals high in Openness (i.e., those who entertain novelty and diversity) who are more likely to be involved in social services organizations actually prefer organizations whose members are heterogeneous to those whose members are homogeneous. Likewise, one cannot rule out the possibility that people high in Conscientiousness (i.e., those who like order and discipline) are more likely to be involved in an organization with a hierarchical member structure than another organization wherein members share equal status. Hence, additional analysis using an objective measure of organizational structure is necessary to evaluate the validity of these conjectures.

Finally, although the results are reasonably robust, it is still possible that these contextual factors (e.g., poverty rates, unemployment rates, population density, and so on) exert an influence on citizens' participation in voluntary civic associations and volunteering. This suggests that it is necessary to launch another study that examines the effects of both individual-level and context-level factors on civic engagement using hierarchical modeling by collecting reliable and comprehensive socio-economic and political information on communities and neighborhoods, where most civic activities take place.

Overall, the present study—albeit not free from the shortcomings discussed above—offers implications that signal a potentially fruitful direction of civic engagement research, as they clearly suggest personality has significant direct effects on associational membership and volunteering. It is particularly encouraging that the findings from South Korea are quite similar to those from Western cultures (the US, Denmark, and the Netherlands), which indicate that the roles of personality traits in determining individuals' attitudes and behaviors travel well across different social and cultural settings. Some remaining mixed results invite further replications, which will definitely help obtain a better understanding of the relationship between personality and civic engagement.

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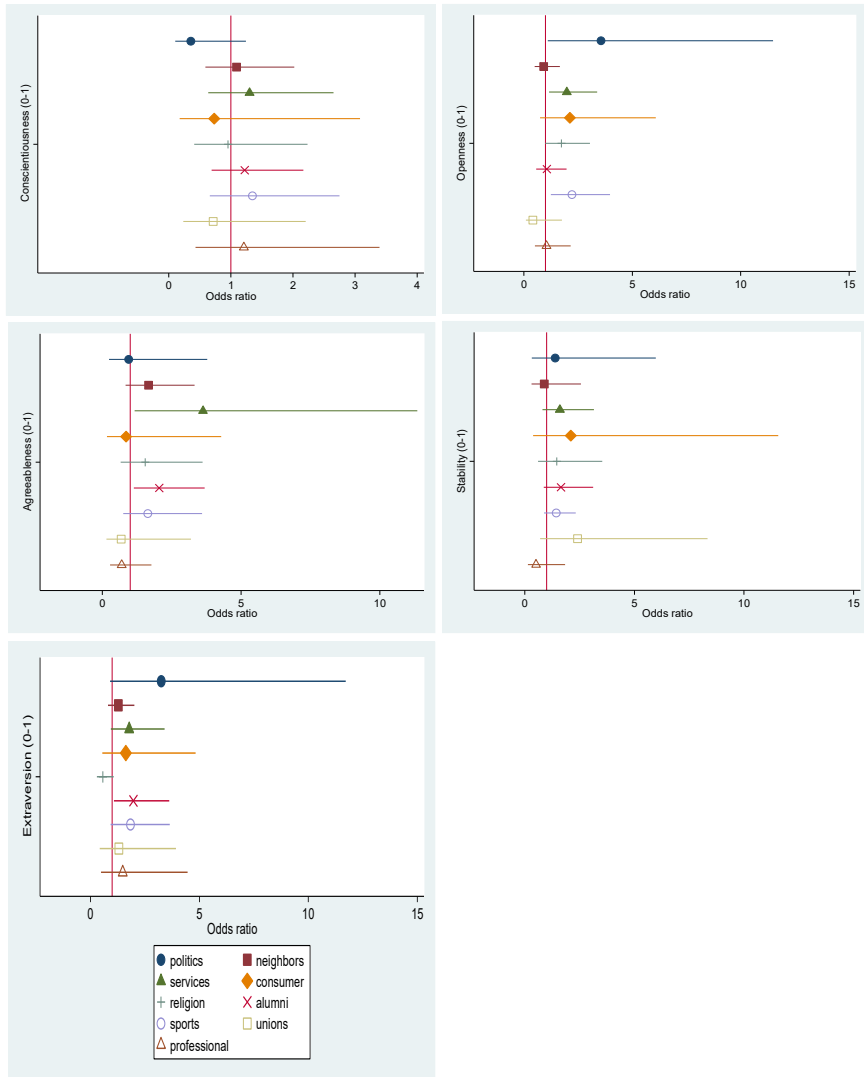
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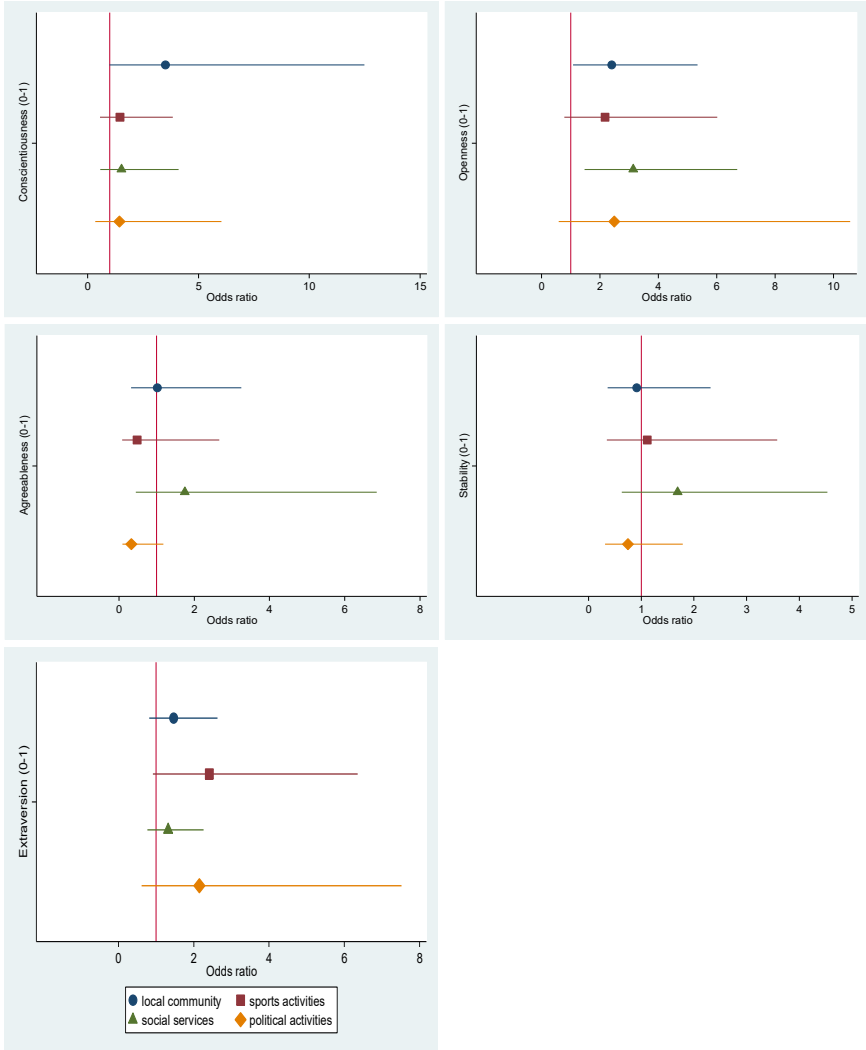
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Appendix



Note.—The graphs summarize the results from a set of analysis that predicts the effects of each personality trait on each type of civic association as the dependent variable. Nine logit models have been used with control variables listed in the main text. Odds ratios with 95% confidence interval are presented with the vertical line indicating odds ratio is equal to 1.

FIG. A1. — PERSONALITY AND ASSOCIATIONAL MEMBERSHIP (FOR EACH ASSOCIATION)



Note.—The graphs summarize the results from a set of analysis that predicts the effects of each personality trait on each type of volunteering as the dependent variable. Four logit models have been used with control variables listed in the main text. Odds ratios with 95% confidence interval are presented with the vertical line indicating odds ratio is equal to 1.

FIG. A2. — PERSONALITY AND VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY (FOR EACH ACTIVITY)

