Personality and political careers: What personality types are likely to run for office and get elected?

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the relationship between personality and political careers. Drawing on a unique survey of municipal candidates from two Canadian provinces ($N = 1193$) and supplemented with survey data from citizens ($N = 1665$), we test for personality differences in candidate recruitment and electoral success. Results reveal significant personality differences between candidates and citizens, as well as between winning and losing candidates. Compared to other citizens, candidates are higher in extraversion, openness to experience, and emotional stability. As for the difference between electoral winners and losers, openness to experience is associated with a slightly higher likelihood of *losing* an election. These differences in personality traits emerge independent of other background characteristics such as age, education, and gender. Ultimately, the psychological dispositions that influence running for office and winning an election are not the same.

1. Introduction

Personality traits are associated with significant variation in political attitudes and behaviors (see Gerber, Huber, Doherty, & Dowling, 2011). One strand of this literature that has grown in recent years is the personality of political elites. Research on the personalities of political leaders has a rich history drawing from a multitude of methodologies, beginning with psychoanalytic approaches and case studies (e.g., Lasswell, 1930) to questionnaires completed by politicians (e.g., Dietrich, Lasley, Mondak, Remmel, & Turner, 2012; Joly, Soroka, & Loewen, 2018).

"The core concept" of the political personality, writes Hennessy (1959, p. 338), "is that certain personality [traits] are in some sense significantly related to political activism – that some people are 'natural' politicians while others are not." Is it the case that 'certain types' of people are more likely than others to run for office? While there is a growing scholarship that explores personality differences between political elites and citizens (e.g., Caprara, Barbaranelli, Consiglio, Picconi, & Zimbardo, 2003; Nørgaard & Klemmensen, 2019), to our knowledge no study has taken the natural step further and examined these differences between electoral winners and losers (but see Joly et al., 2018, who analyze the number of preferential votes received). Among those who stand for election, to what extent are psychological predispositions associated with winning or losing the election?

We build on an emerging literature around personality and running for office by exploring variation in electoral success with data from a large survey of municipal candidates from two Canadian provinces, coupled with data from a large survey of citizens.

1.1. Personality and political ambition

Individual predispositions may shape political aspirations at various stages of the electoral process. The theorizing and psychometric validation of a 'five factor' model of personality (see John & Srivastava, 1999) has been instrumental in enabling political scientists to go beyond small-n case studies and psychoanalytical frameworks of political figures. Research on individual differences in political ambition highlights systematic ways in which the politically ambitious differ from the general public. In one study, Blais and Pruysers (2017), found that higher openness to experience and extraversion among undergraduate students were positively related to desiring a career in politics. Similar results were found by Dynes, Hassell, and Miles (2019), who report respondents with higher levels of extraversion and openness to experience as more likely to consider running for office, while more agreeable and conscientious individuals were less likely to be interested in a political career. These findings highlight important individual differences with respect to citizens' interest in running for election and their level of self-confidence in their own electoral success. To what

extent do these traits differ among political candidates and other citizens?

Research on politicians' personalities has focused on legislators or party leaders from the United States and Europe at various levels of government. In a study of nearly 100 state legislators in the United States, politicians' typically rated themselves high in extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, while scoring low in emotional stability[1] (Dietrich et al., 2012). Similar findings reported by Hanania (2017), who compares a sample of 278 American legislators against an online sample of Americans, show that politicians are higher in extraversion and agreeableness, but also emotional stability and conscientiousness compared to other adults.

Research with European politicians generally replicate these findings. Survey data from a personality questionnaire distributed to 81 Danish Parliamentarians find that legislators are more extraverted, open minded, and conscientious than the average citizen (Nørgaard & Klemmensen, 2019). A related study conducted with an augmented six-factor model of personality adds further nuance, demonstrating Danish MPs score higher on *all* personality facets, including higher honest-humility, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability, than the adult Danish population (Schumacher & Zettler, 2019). Caprara et al. (2003), reporting on the results from a personality inventory distributed to Italian politicians, find that compared to Italian citizens, politicians are higher in 'energy' (operationalized as similar to extraversion), agreeableness, and social desirability, but reported similar levels of emotional stability, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Best (2011) compared 1223 German legislators at European, federal, and state levels with citizens, finding that politicians scored significantly higher in extraversion, openness to experience, and emotional stability, but significantly lower in agreeableness and conscientiousness. Personality differences between politicians and citizens vary across contexts, potentially due to differences in respective political systems (Nørgaard & Klemmensen, 2019). Nevertheless, politicians are consistently shown to score higher on extraversion than other citizens.

1.2. Personality and electoral success

While applications of the five-factor model to the study of personality and politics has grown in recent years, less is known about the extent to which personality plays a role in shaping the outcome of an election. Studies of politicians' personality tend to sample elected officials, with fewer studies sampling candidates as a whole. Best (2011), for example, finds that personality matters for legislative recruitment. While this conclusion may be warranted, without sampling from a full slate of political candidates, we cannot tell whether these personality traits are significant motivators to stand in election, or whether they may be associated with increased likelihood of winning an election, presumably by providing greater psychological resources to cope with the unique stressors of a political campaign. Dietrich et al. (2012) make a similar point, noting elected MPs may differ systematically from the population of political candidates contesting any given election. This would be the case if, for example, the electoral process introduced a source of heterogeneity by systematically favoring candidates with certain personality traits, while disadvantaging others. According to Dietrich et al., (p. 199), we cannot tell whether "winning candidates differ from both the mass public and from losing candidates. A full test of Best's selection hypothesis would require personality data on winning and losing legislative candidates, and perhaps also on prospective candidates." Ultimately, personality research with political elites lacks a proper comparison between electoral winners and losers.

1.3. Measuring personality in citizen and elite surveys

Recent attention to psychological predispositions among political elites has benefitted from the development of short proxy measures for lengthy personality inventories, allowing researchers to collect self-reported data when minimizing instrument length is of the utmost importance. One such measure is the ten-item personality inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). Standard survey instruments modeled after the five-factor model (see John & Srivastava, 1999 for review) are extensive, resource-intensive questionnaires. As Gerber et al. (2011, p. 267) note, "[t]he most important trade-off researchers face when deciding which personality battery to use is between internal reliability and brevity." This consideration is especially important given the time constraints of political elites and the space constraints in large, national surveys. The development of a brief proxy measure for personality batteries allows researchers to overcome some of the practical constraints of conducting survey research on political decision-makers. Such a short measure is certainly not without limitations. For example, some evidence suggests the length of personality inventories may condition results (e.g., Bakker & Lelkes, 2018). However, the TIPI has demonstrated acceptable levels of convergent validity and test-retest reliability (Gosling et al., 2003).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

To test the relationship between personality, candidate recruitment, and electoral success, we draw on a unique dataset of municipal political candidates in two Canadian provinces – British Columbia and Ontario – during their respective 2018 municipal election campaigns. To this data, we add surveys from citizens from both provinces drawn from the 2015 *Canadian Election Study* (CES). Both samples include the TIPI as a common measure of personality. Participants with missing data were excluded from the analysis through listwise deletion.

2.1.1. The Canadian Election Study

A national sample of Canadian adults was drawn from the online, post-election wave of the 2015 CES (Fournier, Cutler, Soroka, & Stolle, 2015). Data for the online sample was collected from a panel of respondents maintained by the polling firm Survey Sampling International during the federal election campaign (between August and October 2015). To correspond more accurately with our candidate sample, we restrict our analyses of the national survey to respondents from the same provinces as the candidates, British Columbia (*n* = 423) and Ontario (*n* = 1242).

2.1.2. The candidate survey

The data from political candidates come from a survey fielded by us during the 2018 municipal elections in British Columbia and Ontario (both held in October). Following the release of official candidate lists in both provinces, publically available email addresses were collected for all candidates.[2] Approximately two weeks prior to each election, email correspondences were sent to 3328 candidates in Ontario, and 1753 candidates from British Columbia. Respondents completed the survey online and 1613 questionnaires were returned (a response rate

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[1] 'Emotional stability' and 'neuroticism' are used interchangeably. An individual high in emotional stability displays low levels of neuroticism, and vice versa.

[2] Our sampling strategy means that the candidates included in the sample are not selected randomly from the population and are limited to those candidates who made their email addresses public. Although this approach has its limitations, it is relatively standard (see for example Sandberg & Öhberg, 2017) and allowed us to contact a large number of candidates in the short period between the release of the official candidate lists and the election. In an effort to increase the response rate, we accepted surveys from candidates up to three weeks after the election.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

Sample		N	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
Candidates	1. Openness to experience	1193	5.87 (0.93)					
	2. Conscientiousness	1193	5.96 (0.93)	0.16***				
	3. Extraversion	1193	5.01 (1.42)	0.24***	0.10***			
	4. Agreeableness	1193	5.39 (1.06)	0.16***	0.23***	0.05		
	5. Emotional stability	1193	5.66 (1.06)	0.17***	0.35***	0.02	0.32***	
	6. Political orientation	1193	4.82 (2.00)	−0.13***	0.15***	0.03	−0.06*	0.10***
CES	1. Openness to experience	1503	4.75 (1.12)					
	2. Conscientiousness	1503	5.43 (1.11)	0.28***				
	3. Extraversion	1503	3.87 (1.30)	0.30***	0.12***			
	4.Agreeableness	1503	5.02 (1.06)	0.27***	0.36***	0.01		
	5. Emotional stability	1503	4.74 (1.22)	0.26***	0.40***	0.15***	0.34***	
	6. Political orientation	1503	5.06 (2.16)	−0.12***	0.00	0.07**	−0.12***	0.01

*** $p < .001$.
** $p < .01$.
* $p < .05$.

of 31.7%). From these surveys, 1193 candidates had completed the TIPI, 496 of whom were elected (41.6%) and nearly two-thirds were male ($n = 775$). The length of politicians' political careers varied considerably. Most respondents' were newcomers to politics, having been involved for less than one year ($n = 454$; 38.1%). Others were seasoned veterans with a decade or more experience ($n = 363$; 30.4%).

2.2. Materials and procedures

2.2.1. The ten-item personality inventory

In both surveys, the ten-item personality inventory was administered. The TIPI consists of ten statements anchored by opposing pairs of adjectives, with two items mapping onto each of the five latent personality dimensions. Bivariate correlations between each pair of indicators were all positive and statistically significant.[3]

2.2.2. Political career paths

Two indicators of political career trajectories are used in the analysis. First, we distinguish candidates from the general sample of adult citizens through a *candidacy* variable scored 1 if the respondent is drawn from our sample of municipal election candidates and 0 if the respondent is drawn from the sample of Canadian citizens. Second, we measure *electoral success* among the candidates by examining official election results for all candidates in the sample, identifying elected candidates with a score of 1 and unelected candidates with a score of 0.

3. Results

3.1. Personality traits among candidates and citizens

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for items in the TIPI along with political orientation. Fig. 1 compares the distributions of self-reported personality traits for respondents from both samples. With the exception of extraversion within the general adult sample, average scores among both groups across these five

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[3] Participants in both surveys were given the same instructions, "We're interested in how you see yourself. Please indicate how well the following pair of words describes you, even if one word describes you better than the other. On the left, 1 means those words describe you extremely poorly; on the right, 7 means those words describe you extremely well." Self-rated adjectives for *openness*: complex, open to new experiences and conventional, uncreative (reversed); *conscientiousness*: dependable, self-disciplined and disorganized, careless (reversed); *extraversion*: enthusiastic, extraverted and reserved, quiet (reversed); *agreeableness*: critical, quarrelsome (reversed) and sympathetic, warm; and, *emotional stability*: anxious, easily upset (reversed) and calm, emotionally stable.

indicators of personality are all above the midpoints of the scale.

Table 2 reports the results of a logistic regression with candidacy status regressed on personality traits with social background characteristics included as covariates. In general, municipal candidates were more likely to be male, have at least some university education, and be older than thirty. Holding each personality trait constant at the sample mean, the predicted probability of a university-educated man between the ages of 30 to 49 being identified as a candidate in the dataset is 0.56 [95CI, 0.51, 0.61], whereas the probability of identifying a female candidate with the same characteristics is 0.36 [95CI, 0.31, 0.41]. In addition to this gender gap, clear personality differences between candidates and other adults are apparent.

The results show that even after controlling for background characteristics, significant personality differences can be detected that distinguishes candidates from other citizens in these provinces. Compared to the wider electorate, candidates in local elections self-reported higher levels of extraversion, openness to experience, and emotional stability. No independent relationships were found between the two samples with respect to agreeableness and conscientiousness. For each additional one-unit increase on the TIPI's seven-point scale, openness to experience increased the odds of being identified as a candidate in the pooled sample by a factor of 2.05 while a similar increase in extraversion and emotional stability increased the odds by factors of 1.54 and 1.49, respectively.

Fig. 2 shows the model's probability of distinguishing a candidate among the pooled sample of adults, as a function of each trait, holding all others at their mean. The difference in the predicted probability of running for election among two university-educated men over the age of 50, one scoring a standard deviation below the mean (4.02) on openness to experience, the other scoring a standard deviation above the mean (6.40), is 0.40. The same individuals, this time scoring a standard deviation above (5.80) and below (2.88) the mean on extraversion, differ by a probability of 0.28. The difference between two men, one a standard deviation above (6.36), the other a standard deviation below (3.88) the mean on emotional stability, being classified as a candidate in the sample is 0.23.

3.2. Personality and electoral success

Next, we turn our attention to whether candidates' chances of getting elected are associated with their personality. Fig. 3 plots the distribution of politicians' self-reported personality by electoral outcome. Table 3 reports the results of a logistic regression model with the election outcome regressed on candidates' personality and social background characteristics. The results show that openness to experience has an independent, negative effect on the probability of winning the election. A unit increase in openness to experience on the seven-
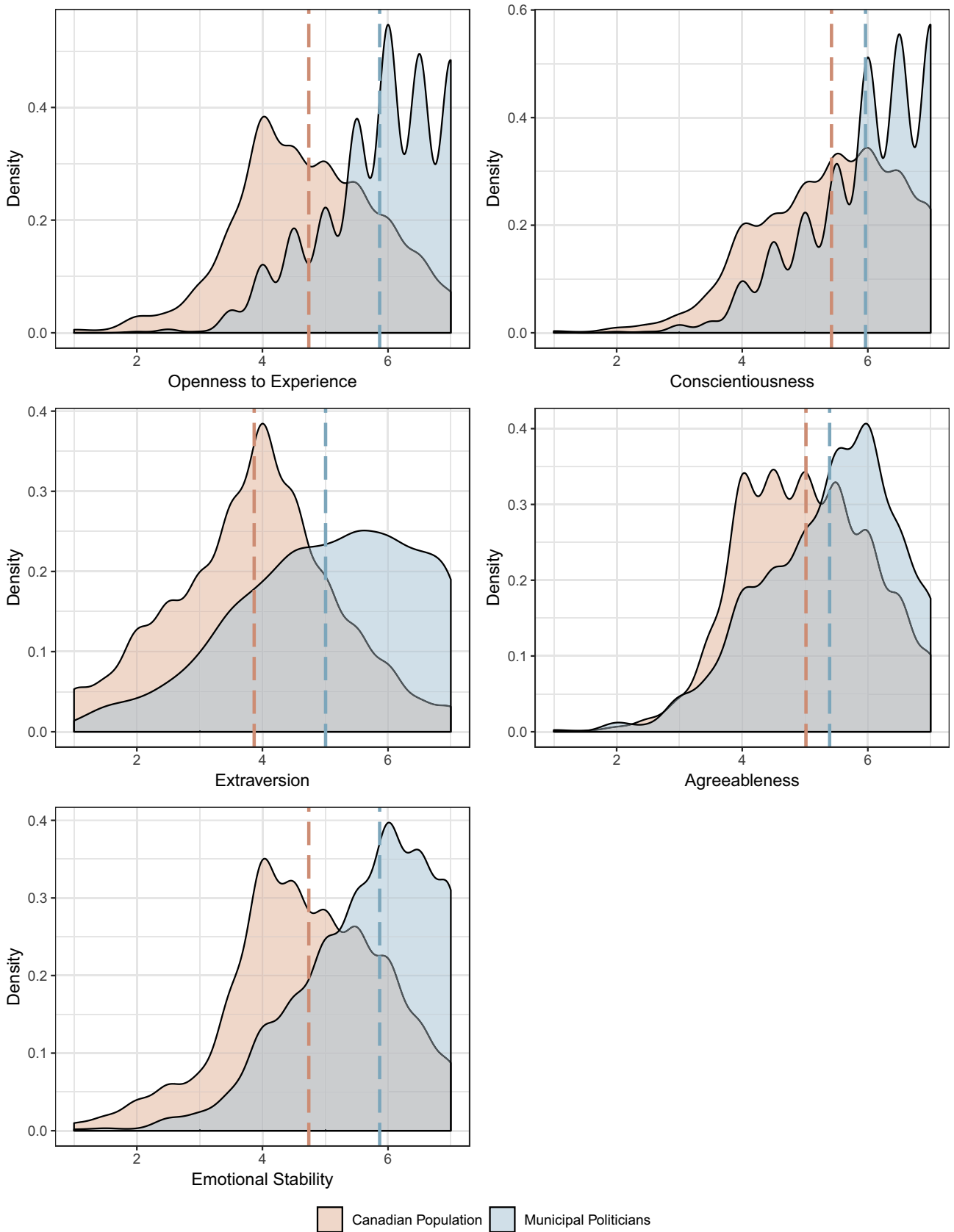
Fig. 1. Distribution of TIPI scores for municipal candidates and the citizens. Dashed lines represent group means. Higher scores reflect higher self-ratings on each trait.

Table 2

Logistic regression coefficients predicting candidacy from personality and background characteristics. Standard errors in parentheses.

	Model 1	Model 2
Openness to experience	0.75*** (0.05)	0.72*** (0.05)
Conscientiousness	0.02 (0.05)	0.06 (0.06)
Extraversion	0.40*** (0.04)	0.43*** (0.04)
Agreeableness	−0.09 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)
Emotional stability	0.51*** (0.05)	0.40*** (0.05)
University		1.11*** (0.10)
Female		−0.81*** (0.10)
Under 30 years old (ref.)		–
30 to 49 years old		1.09*** (0.21)
50 years and older		1.32*** (0.21)
Ontario		−0.58*** (0.11)
Constant	−8.49*** (0.38)	−9.57*** (0.45)
AIC	2869.18	2607.17
BIC	2904.93	2672.71
LL	−1428.59	−1292.59
Nagelkerke's R^2	0.41	0.49
N	2858	2858

Note:
*** $p < .001$.
** $p < .01$.
* $p < .05$.

point scale lowers the odds of winning the election by a factor of 0.69, controlling for other variables in the model. While agreeableness initially shows an association with electoral success independent of other personality traits ($b = 0.15$, $SE = 0.06$), this effect disappears once controls for age, gender, and province of residence are added ($b = 0.11$, $SE = 0.06$).

The results show a slight electoral penalty paid by candidates higher in openness to experience. Candidates who won the election scored, on average, 0.24 units (on a seven-point scale) lower on openness to experience than a candidate who lost the election. This statistically significant difference persists independent of other factors in the model ($b = −0.37$, $SE = 0.07$). Fig. 4 displays the predicted probability of winning the election as a function of openness to experience, holding all other personality characteristics at their mean. The probability of a candidate scoring one standard deviation below the mean on openness to experience (4.93) winning the election is 0.49 [95CI: 0.45, 0.53], while a candidate scoring a standard deviation above the mean (6.80) has a 0.34 [95CI: 0.30, 0.38] probability of winning the election.

Thus, while openness to experience is significantly positively associated with running as a candidate, politicians in municipal elections across Ontario and British Columbia were, all else equal, less likely to win election the higher they scored on openness to experience.

4. Discussion

Are "certain types" of people more likely to run for office; and, among those that do stand for election, do particular personality traits play a role in the sorting of winners and losers at the ballot box? Personality bears significant influence on citizens' political attitudes and behaviors (Gerber et al., 2011). Foundational character traits are also associated with individual differences in political ambition (Blais & Pruysers, 2017) and campaign strategy (Hassell, 2019). In this study, we test whether personality traits are reliably and independently correlated with political career paths; namely, getting on the ballot and winning the election.

Our findings are largely consistent with research showing an association between traits like extraversion and openness to experience with political ambition. In terms of the personality difference between candidates and citizens, our results are somewhat similar to those found by Best (2011) in his comparison of German politicians and citizens. We find a positive statistical difference in Canada for extraversion,

openness to experience, and emotional stability. However, unlike Best's study, we do not find a significant difference between politicians and citizens for agreeableness or conscientiousness. Once again, except for the ubiquitous distinction for extraversion, a context-specific element is highlighted in the differences in personality traits among politicians and other citizens. The fact that extraversion is once more found to distinguish candidates from the general population suggests the trait may be characteristic of those who run for office.

These findings lend additional support to the idea that psychological predispositions are linked with political career paths. Although our analysis finds that openness to experience is associated with running for office, higher levels of openness to experience may not necessarily benefit candidates come Election Day. Indeed, winning candidates scored on average about a quarter-of-a-point *lower* (on a 7-point scale) on openness to experience compared to a losing candidate.

What might explain the electoral penalty levied against open-minded candidates? One possible explanation is that there is an ideological disconnect between candidates and voters in some areas. High openness to experience is characteristic of a left-wing political ideology (Sibley, Osborne, & Duckitt, 2012). If candidates higher in openness to experience ran in ridings that were more right-leaning, we might expect to observe an electoral penalty for these candidates due to the potential for ideological discordance between voters and candidates. Research highlights an ideological divide between urban and rural voters with the latter tending to favor conservative parties (e.g., Gidengil, Blais, Everitt, Fournier, & Nevitte, 2012). While the data does not allow us to test for a discrepancy between candidates and voters in each municipality, aggregate analyses show this divide is an unlikely explanation. To approximate, we collected data on the population size of candidates' municipalities and using a cutoff score of 10,000 residents (which Statistics Canada considers a municipality as a 'rural area or small town'), and test whether the openness penalty is conditionally applied to candidates campaigning in a rural areas.[4] Results do not support this claim. Candidates in rural areas ($M = 5.79$, $SD = 0.91$) do not differ in reported openness to experience, compared with candidates in more urban municipalities ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 0.94$), $t(1174) = −1.82$, $p = .069$, and the penalty applied to candidates higher in openness to experience is not more severe among those in rural municipalities.

A further logistic regression model was estimated, as in Table 3, however, this time a dummy variable for rural municipality interacted with openness to experience was regressed on the electoral outcome along with the remaining variables. The effect of openness to experience remained statistically significant ($b = −0.27$, $SE = 0.13$) and the interaction between openness to experience and rural municipalities was not ($b = −0.12$, $SE = 0.16$). Further tests of the conditional effects of openness to experience on background characteristics show no evidence this penalty is moderated by gender ($b = 0.24$, $SE = 0.14$), nor does it differ when comparing candidates under thirty to those 30 to 49 ($b = 0.21$, $SE = 0.48$) or over 50 ($b = 0.11$, $SE = 0.47$), controlling for other variables in the model.[5]

Another explanation might be related to campaigning, specifically to message consistency. Seeing as individuals with higher levels of openness to experience tend to be more creative and appreciative of novel and alternative ideas (McCrae, 1987), they might be less prone to follow the political mantra of 'sticking to the message'. Given that

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[4] For more information: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/21-006-x/2008008/section/s2-eng.htm?fbclid=IwAR0fJ7TDN45_5DxA6JaoXSt-cwArgkqoHibF7rPa7QnB-yL-seYmDDydXv8.

[5] We further explored the effect of location. First, although the results of a logistic regression with a dummy for rural municipalities regressed on the personality traits show that extraversion has a small but significant association with living in a rural versus an urban area, no other personality differences were found. Second, an additional model that included an interaction term between province and each personality trait demonstrated that the conditional effects of personality on candidacy status do not differ by province.
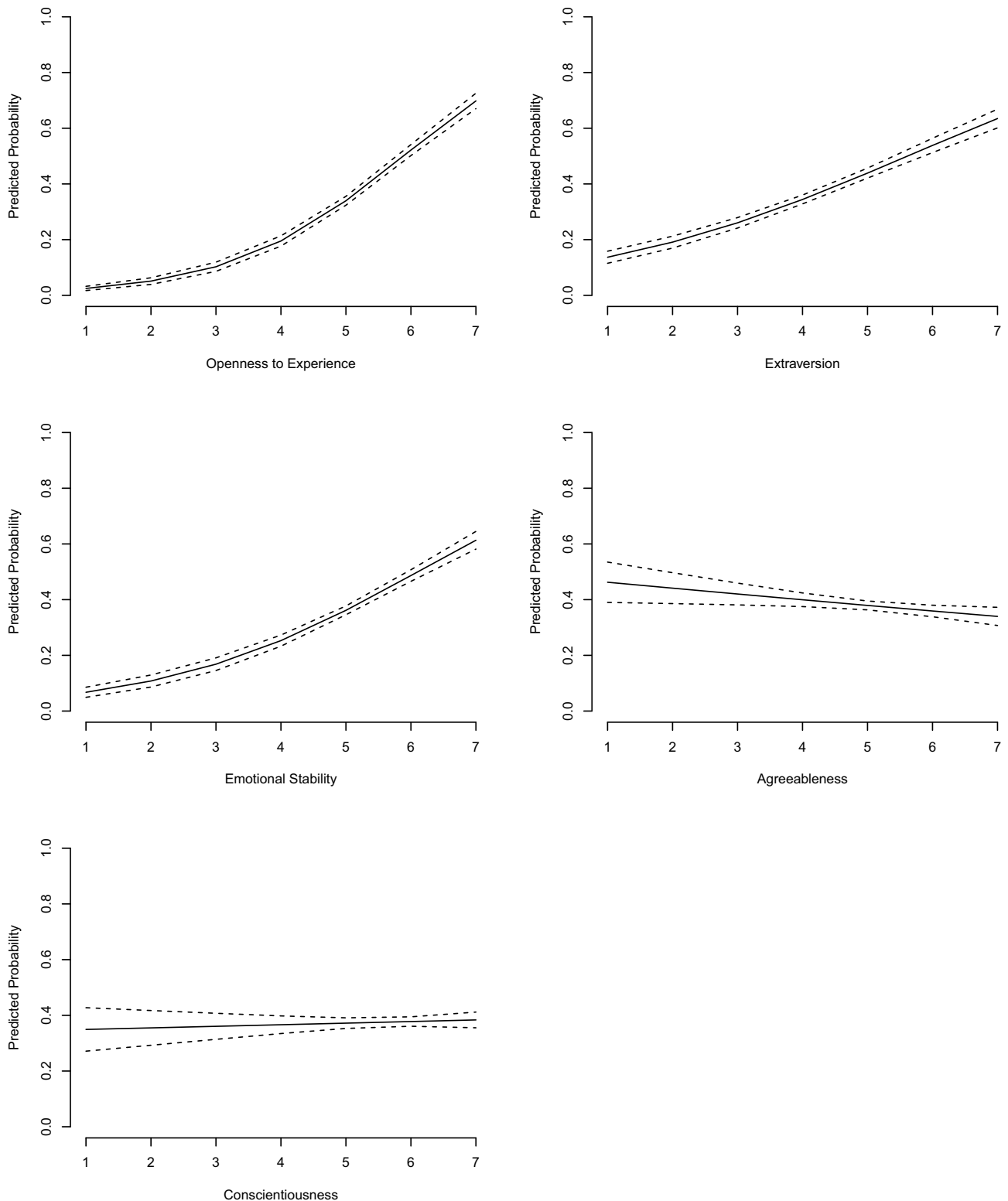
Fig. 2. Predicted probability of distinguishing candidates (scored 1) from the general adult sample. 84% confidence intervals shown, following MacGregor-Fors and Payton (2013).

political message consistency has been linked to helping voters not only distinguish between political offerings, but also to allow them to better recognize and remember a political message (see Robinson, 2010), openness to new ideas might actually disadvantage electoral candidates.

Some research suggests that certain voters prefer candidates with congruent personality traits (Caprara et al., 2003); others find no effect of congruence on legislator approval (Klingler et al., 2019). In Canadian local elections, candidates do not always campaign on a party ticket, and as a result, many candidates may be relatively unknown to voters. In our cases, municipal parties do not exist in Ontario whereas they do in some municipalities in British Columbia. Even where municipal
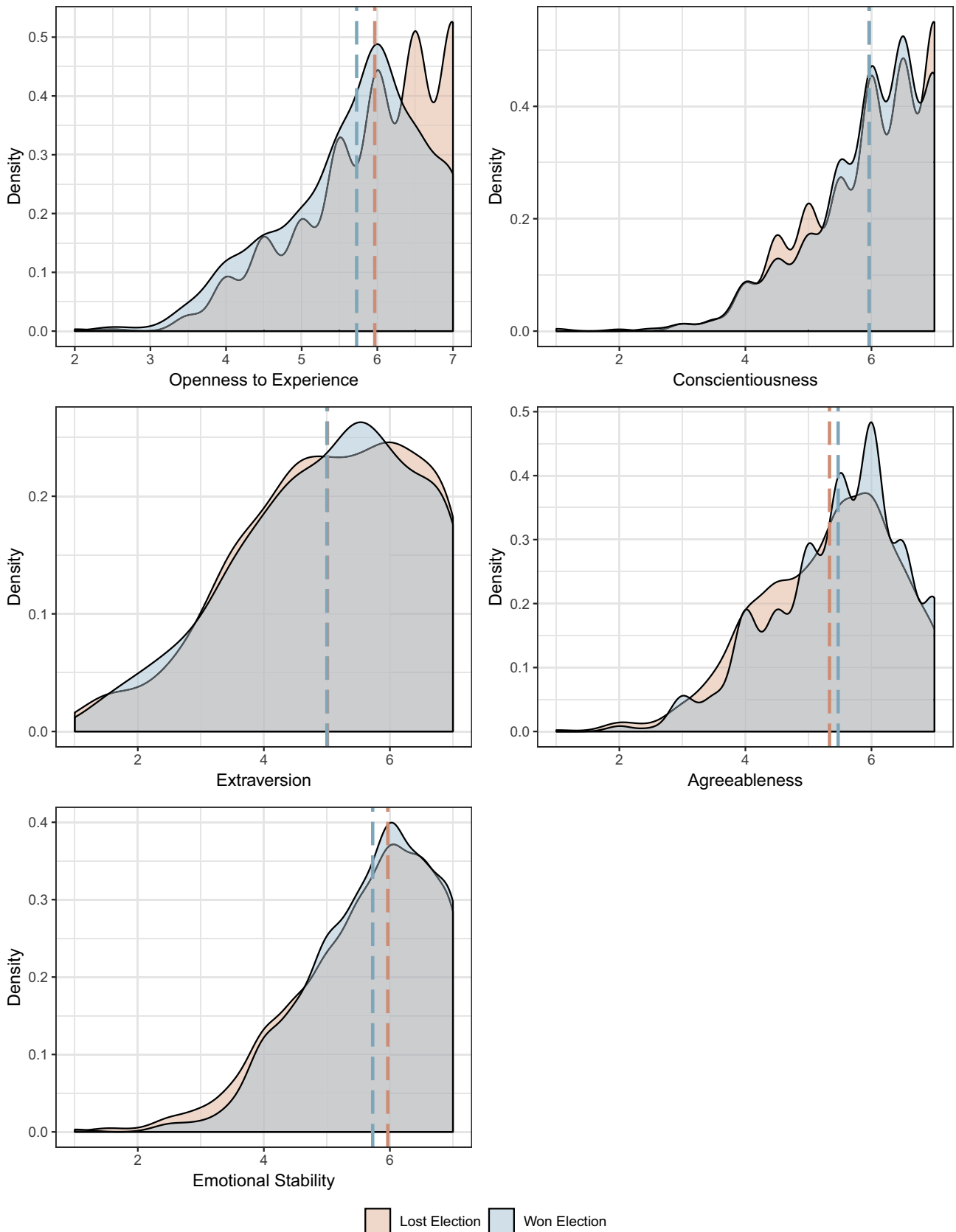
Fig. 3. Mean estimated differences in personality among winning and losing municipal candidates. Higher scores reflect higher self-ratings on each trait.

parties do exist, they tend to be ad hoc local entities without the labels or symbols of federal or provincial parties. In the absence of informative party cues, campaign dynamics may be especially relevant sources of

information from which voters form evaluations and impressions of local candidates. Hassell (2019) finds that personality traits influence campaign strategy, with more extraverted politicians and campaign
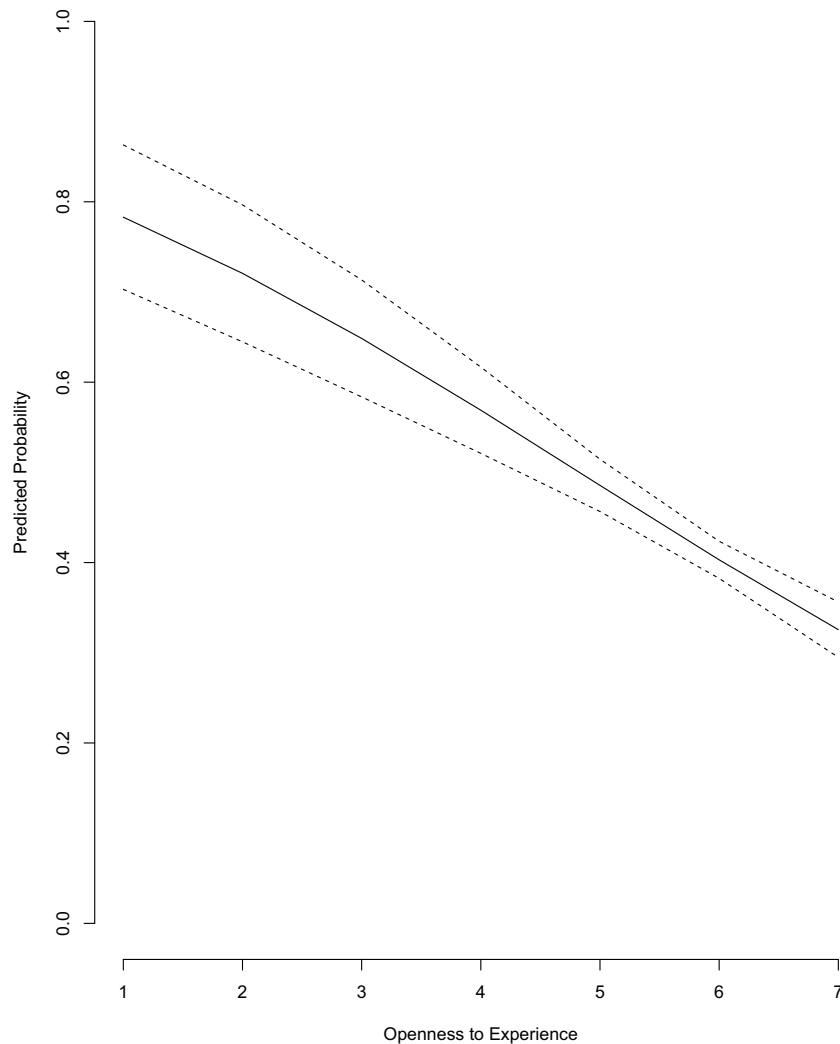
Fig. 4. Predicted probability of winning the election by level of openness to experience, with other personality traits held constant at their mean. 84% confidence interval.

Table 3
Logistic regression coefficients predicting election outcome from personality traits and background characteristics. Standard errors in parentheses.

	Model 1	Model 2
Openness to experience	− 0.34*** (0.07)	− 0.37*** (0.07)
Conscientiousness	− 0.02 (0.07)	− 0.03 (0.07)
Extraversion	0.04 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)
Agreeableness	0.15* (0.06)	0.11 (0.06)
Emotional stability	0.09 (0.06)	0.11 (0.06)
University		0.08 (0.13)
Female		0.21 (0.13)
Under 30 years old (ref.)		–
30 to 49 years old		0.72 (0.37)
50 years and older		0.69 (0.36)
Ontario		− 0.49*** (0.12)
Constant	0.23 (0.55)	− 0.05 (0.66)
AIC	1600.94	1587.89
BIC	1631.44	1643.82
LL	− 794.47	− 782.95
Nagelkerke's R^2	0.03	0.04
N	1193	1193

Note:
*** $p < .001$.
** $p < .01$.
* $p < .05$.

workers embracing combative campaign styles. It is possible this tendency to campaign negatively serves an advantage at the ballot box? Nai (2019) finds that candidates higher in openness to experience (and agreeableness) are associated with positive appeals and less negative campaign styles. Extraversion, on the other hand, tends to be associated with a combative campaign style and is also a trait associated with populist politicians. Whether or not the electoral penalty attributed to openness to experience is a result of incongruence between the personalities of candidates and voters or differences in campaign styles cannot be fully tested here with the data at hand.

Are open-minded candidates less successful because they have less electoral experience? While we cannot test such a causal claim with the observational data reported here, our survey data suggest open-minded candidates were less likely to stand for re-election. A dummy variable for incumbency status was developed in consultation with official election results in 2018.[6] Logistic regression analyses with personality traits regressed on incumbent status do suggest that candidates higher in openness to experience are less experienced than other candidates ($b = -0.05$, SE = 0.01). Controlling for other personality

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[6] This dummy variable can only distinguish those seeking re-election from challengers who did not hold elected office immediately prior to the campaign. We cannot test, with this data, whether an individual was previously a candidate (successful or not) in prior elections.

characteristics, a shift in the full length of the openness measure is associated with a reduction in the odds of being an incumbent (including those seeking re-election to another position) by a factor of 0.95. No other personality characteristics were statistically significant. Given this finding, we further tested whether the electoral penalty for open-minded candidates is conditional on incumbency status by re-running the model reported in Table 3 to include an interaction term between incumbency status and each personality trait. There is no evidence to suggest the openness penalty (or any association between personality and electoral outcome) is conditional on incumbency status ($p > .05$), while openness remains significantly associated with winning the election ($b = -0.28$, SE = 0.08).

4.1. Limitations and future directions

Despite studies having demonstrated that the TIPI is a reliable measure of personality when very brief questionnaires are essential (Gosling et al., 2003), the reduced form of the measure comes at a loss of construct validity. Although confirmatory factor analyses of the TIPI in the candidate sample reported good model fit with a hypothesized five factor structure (analyses not shown), a five factor model was a poorer fit in the CES, due in part to measurement error associated with the latent measure of agreeableness. As such, the finding of no difference between candidates and citizens in agreeableness may need further scrutiny. Furthermore, our sampling strategy, which relied on online surveys distributed to candidates via email, precludes us from generalizing to the entire pool of candidates contesting municipal elections in both provinces, let alone to political candidates more generally. Nonetheless, given the very large size of our candidate sample, and the strong response rate for an elite survey, we remain confident the results provide important insights into the relationship between personality and elections. While these and other lines of inquiry will be fruitful avenues for further research, the findings presented here lend additional insight into how personality characteristics can shape political participation by motivating behaviors like running for office.

5. Conclusions

We report results from large surveys of municipal election candidates and adult citizens in two Canadian provinces. In line with other studies on personality and political ambition, the findings show that personality traits are reliably associated with running for election, independent of other psychological and social background characteristics. Compared to citizens, local candidates self-reported higher levels of openness to experience, extraversion, and emotional stability. This study advances our understanding of the role of personality in elections by exploring the influence of personality on candidate recruitment and electoral success. We find that candidates receive a slight electoral penalty for their relatively higher open-mindedness. Thus, candidates' personalities could substantively influence the results, especially in close elections. Ultimately, our findings demonstrate that the psychological predispositions that help distinguish candidates from other citizens are not necessarily the same as those that may help candidates get elected.

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