

Personality Traits and Political Behavior: A Test of Similarity-Attraction Hypothesis in South Korea

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Similarity-Attraction Hypothesis

People tend to be attracted to others who are similar to themselves.

- Psychology (Byrne 1961; Newcomb 1961; Kurtz & Sherker 2003)
- Sociology (Kandel 1978; McPherson et al. 2001)

“Similarity” in terms of appearances, habits, values, hobbies, socio-economic status, attitudes, personality, etc.

- Causal relationship: identification of similarity → attraction/preferences

Question

Do voters hold favorable attitudes toward political candidates whose personality traits are similar to themselves?

- Caprara, Vecchione, Barbaranelli, & Fraley, 2007
 - Citizens tend to vote for politicians whose personality traits they rate as being most similar to their own in the US and Italy.
- Koppensteiner & Stephan, 2014
 - When only non-verbal information is available, voters prefer political candidates they perceive as having personality traits they value in themselves.

Potential Contributions of This Study

1. Do not ask survey respondents to rate (1) their own personality traits and (2) those of candidates at the same time.

- Randomly split the sample into two sub-groups.

2. Control for several well-known determinants of political behavior to see whether the relationship between similarity and attraction is spurious.

3. Offer a more nuanced hypothesis.

- Extraversion is the most visible trait; one can easily assess whether a person is extravert or introvert “at a distance” (Borkenau & Lieber, 1995; Gosling 2008)

Data

				
Moon Jae-in	Hong Joon-pyo	Ahn Cheol-soo	Yoo Seung-min	Sim Sang-jung
Democratic Party Moderate/Left-wing	Liberty Korea Party Right-wing	People's Party Moderate	Bareun Party Moderate/Right-wing	Justice Party Left-wing
41.1%	24.0%	21.4%	6.8%	6.2%

Data: An online panel survey conducted before/after the 2017 South Korean presidential election (n=3,000; diverse, but non-representative)

Independent Variables

Pre-election survey

- Random split
- Group A – assess respondents' own personality (n = 1,460)
- Group B – assess personality of five presidential candidates (n = 1,540)
- Measurement – TIPI (Ten-Item Personality Inventory); ranges from 0 to 1

- **Similarity in personality**
 - = $1 - \text{abs}(R\text{'s personality} - \text{the mean value of a personality dimension of a candidate})$**

- As the value becomes higher, it means greater similarity in personality between a respondent and a candidate.

Descriptive Statistics (Big Five)

	This Study	KGSS 2009	KGSS 2011	KGSS 2012
Conscientiousness	0.62	0.62	0.62	0.61
	(0.17)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Openness	0.54	0.55	0.55	0.52
	(0.16)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
Agreeableness	0.58	0.63	0.62	0.63
	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Stability	0.53	0.52	0.53	0.54
	(0.17)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
Extraversion	0.46	0.54	0.55	0.53
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.23)
n	1,460	1,569	1,531	1,396

Descriptive Statistics (Big Five)

	Moon	Hong	Ahn	Yoo	Sim
Conscientiousness	0.53	0.39	0.52	0.56	0.58
	(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Openness	0.49	0.39	0.56	0.50	0.59
	(0.17)	(0.21)	(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.17)
Agreeableness	0.54	0.32	0.51	0.45	0.44
	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Stability	0.55	0.35	0.50	0.55	0.54
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Extraversion	0.48	0.67	0.42	0.51	0.65
	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.17)
n	1,540				

Dependent Variables, Control Variables

Dependent Variables

- Feelings toward each candidate (feeling thermometer, 0-100)
- Emotional reactions toward each candidate (hope, disgust, anger, anxiety, fear)
- Vote choice (post-election survey)

Control Variables

- Socio-demographic factors: Age, Gender, Income, Education
- Political factors: Political knowledge, political ideology
- Province-level fixed effect; province-level cluster robust standard error

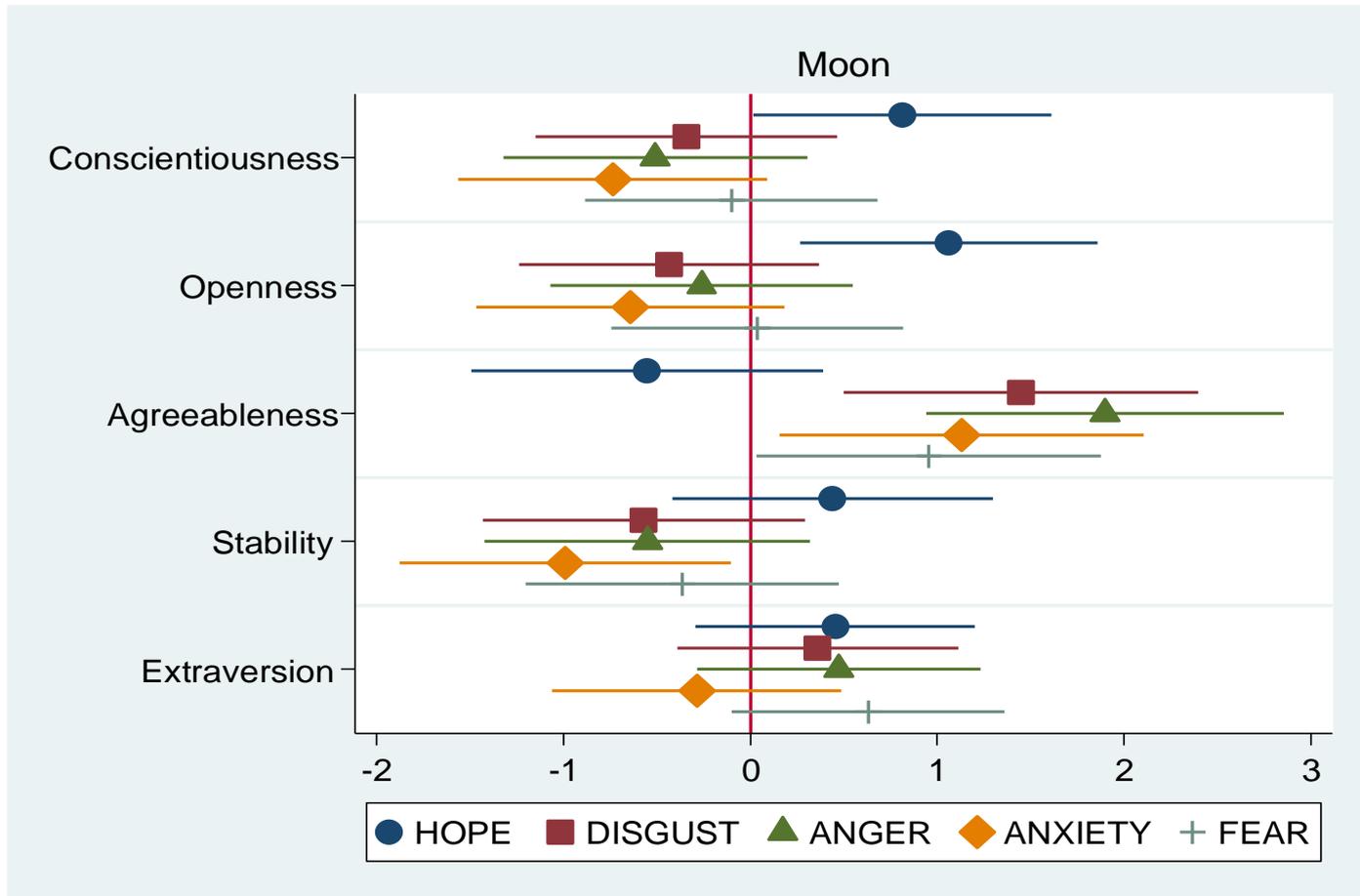
Similarity in Personality and Feelings toward Candidates

	Moon	Ahn	Hong	Yoo	Sim
Conscientiousness	17.460**	-5.946	2.914	-0.554	11.006
	(6.100)	(5.442)	(4.384)	(5.705)	(5.835)
Openness	9.979	-4.105	8.979	0.061	-11.513*
	(6.074)	(5.954)	(4.888)	(5.271)	(5.708)
Agreeableness	-10.300	0.810	3.446	4.392	3.035
	(7.178)	(5.889)	(4.707)	(5.212)	(5.335)
Stability	10.422	-0.351	-0.949	-4.048	-3.462
	(6.535)	(5.729)	(4.876)	(5.743)	(5.846)
Extraversion	0.701	13.362**	14.314**	14.445**	5.035
	(5.697)	(5.035)	(4.189)	(4.861)	(4.374)
n	1,460				
R-squared	0.266	0.038	0.315	0.067	0.210
OLS; control variables considered; (province-level fixed effects + province-level cluster-robust standard errors)					

Similarity in Personality and Emotional Reactions (Hong's case)

	Hope	Disgust	Anger	Anxiety	Fear
Conscientiousness	0.258	-0.265	-0.342	-0.304	0.554
	(0.284)	(0.314)	(0.310)	(0.312)	(0.331)
Openness	0.528	-0.721*	-0.573	-0.799*	-0.612
	(0.317)	(0.350)	(0.345)	(0.348)	(0.369)
Agreeableness	0.333	0.436	0.272	-0.164	-0.255
	(0.305)	(0.337)	(0.333)	(0.335)	(0.356)
Stability	-0.263	0.379	0.246	0.326	0.329
	(0.316)	(0.349)	(0.345)	(0.347)	(0.369)
Extraversion	1.239**	-0.878**	-0.917**	-1.016**	-0.521
	(0.272)	(0.300)	(0.296)	(0.298)	(0.317)
n	1,460				
R-squared	0.273	0.196	0.207	0.181	0.119
OLS; control variables considered; (province-level fixed effects + province-level cluster-robust standard errors)					

Similarity in Personality and Emotional Reactions (Moon's case)



Similarity in Personality and Vote Choice

	Moon	Hong	Ahn	Yoo	Sim
Conscientiousness	Reference Category	-2.975*	-1.888*	-1.564	-0.943
		(1.322)	(0.871)	(1.129)	(1.268)
Openness		1.857	-1.187	1.464	-1.318
		(1.485)	(0.877)	(1.209)	(1.179)
Agreeableness		-0.985	-0.268	-0.224	0.336
		(1.523)	(1.057)	(1.340)	(1.499)
Stability		-0.861	0.638	-1.866	-0.094
		(1.407)	(0.980)	(1.143)	(1.347)
Extraversion		0.672	-0.941	0.544	0.235
		(1.329)	(0.825)	(1.074)	(1.142)
n	936				
Pseudo R-squared	0.167				
Multinomial logit; control variables considered; (province-level fixed effects + province-level cluster-robust standard errors)					

Conclusion

There is a suggestive (limited) evidence in support of similarity-attraction hypothesis regarding the relationship between voters and candidates.

Especially, the role of Extraversion seems to stand out.

But, there are also some unexpected outcomes.

- e.g., the positive relationship between similarity in Agreeableness and negative emotions such as anxiety; key roles of similarity in Conscientiousness in determining vote choice

Need to identify the “causal” mechanism between similarity in personality and attitudes toward candidates/political parties or vote choice.