

Is Politics Downstream from Personality?

The Five Factor Model's Effect on Political
Orientation in Sweden

Abstract

Differences in political orientation are partly rooted in personality, with left-wing political attitudes being predicted by Openness to Experience and right-wing attitudes by Conscientiousness. This has been validated across numerous studies from different countries. This essay adds to that body of research by examining whether personality differences between the political sides also exist in the so far understudied Nordic country of Sweden. It finds evidence for the Big Five domains significantly predicting left-right self-placement, albeit with a modest effect. Specifically, the study showed Swedes further to the political right to be lower in Openness, higher in Conscientiousness, and also lower in Neuroticism. These findings concur with existing research and thereby contribute to broadening the understanding of personality's relation to political attitudes.

Keywords: Big Five, Five Factor Model, personality, political attitudes, political orientation, ideology, BFI-10

Nyckelord: Femfaktormodellen, personlighet, politiska attityder, ideologi

Word Count: 17 476

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1 Introduction

Where do your political views come from? Most of us probably believe that we've arrived at our political positions through a rational deliberation process. We think we have reviewed the political parties' ideologies, track records, and election programmes, and have then made a reasoned decision. Often, we may even feel that we have reached some objective truth about how society should be run. But the left and the right offer very different visions for society, and both sides are equally strong in their conviction. This can result in frustration at dinner-table discussions. Why does your political opponent fail to see what to you is so obviously true? It's as if you're debating with an alien!

Furthermore, this division seems to endure.¹ One could expect that we would have solved the question of how to best run society by now. After all, we've debated the issue for arguably over 2000 years, and have numerous historical case studies of well-run as well as mismanaged countries to learn from.² Shouldn't an "optimal politics" have emerged by now?

The field of political psychology may shed some light on this enduring and seemingly unbridgeable divide between the left and the right. A growing body of scholarship suggests that people over-estimate the degree to which their political views are rationally formed. Instead, political attitudes seem to some extent be rooted in psychology. So, if it seems that you're debating with an alien, it's because on some level, you are: left-wingers and right-wingers are "emotionally, preferentially, psychologically, and biologically distinct."³ The American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson said:

The two parties which divide the state, the party of Conservatism and that of Innovation, are very old, and have disputed the possession of the world ever since it was made. [...] Such an irreconcilable antagonism, of course, must have a correspondent depth of seat in the human constitution. [...] It is the primal antagonism, the appearance in trifles of the two poles of nature.⁴

This sums up the research problem of this essay. To what degree is this irreconcilable political antagonism rooted in the "two poles of nature", meaning the personality differences of the two political sides?

¹ John R. Hibbing, Kevin B. Smith, and John R. Alford, *Predisposed: liberals, conservatives, and the biology of political differences*, Routledge, 2014. P.16.

² *Ibid.* P.16.

³ *Ibid.* P.11.

⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conservative*, <https://emersoncentral.com/texts/nature-addresses-lectures/lectures/the-conservative/>, 1841, (accessed 20/08/2019).

Understanding how political attitudes are shaped is important since it carries a range of implications for democracy. If we were to recognise the impact of personality on political attitudes, we could optimise political campaigning, improve political discourse, and strengthen tolerance between the political sides.

The existing international research, which has mainly been conducted in the anglosphere and in particular in the USA, suggests that there is indeed a link between personality and political attitudes. Although the European literature is slowly catching up, the issue remains severely understudied in the Nordic country of Sweden. The purpose of this essay is therefore to examine if and how Swedes on the left and on the right differ in their personality. The SOM-Institute's survey data is used to see if and how the five personality factors of the Five Factor Model affect subjective self-placement on the left-right scale.

1.1 Research Question

For more than half a century, political psychology has been interested in personality and how it shapes our political attitudes. In Sweden, however, this issue has been less thoroughly explored. The question to be answered is: *What effect does personality have on left-right self-identification in Sweden?*

1.2 Disposition

In order to answer the research question, Chapter 2 begins with giving a literature overview of the historical and contemporary state of research on personality and political attitudes. It also summarises the overall results found by the existing research.

Chapter 3 provides the theoretical background needed for the two variables. Starting with the independent variable, it gives an explanation of the origins of personality, presents a definition of personality, and explains how it can be measured with the Five Factor Model. The section for the dependent variable deals with political attitude formation, gives a definition of attitudes, and explains how political orientation can be measured using the left-right scale. Thereafter, some explanations as for why there are personality differences between the political sides are presented. Then, this essay's contribution, as well as relation to the literature, is explained. After having presented the broader research in the previous chapter, and having detailed the necessary theory, the hypotheses for this study are deduced.

Chapter 4 presents the method and material that has been chosen to test the hypotheses. First, some possible alternative methods are discussed. After a consideration of the advantages of statistical research, the quantitative method is decided to be best fitted for tackling this research problem. After laying out the research plan, the material and measures of the survey sample sets are detailed. The

two methods used to combine the two sample sets are also accounted for. This chapter aims to give the information needed for following the upcoming analysis, as well as to make future replications possible.

Chapter 5 presents the results from the correlation tests and multivariate regression analyses. It details, compares, and contrasts the findings for each of the two sample sets, as well as for their two combinations. Chapter 6 serves as discussion chapter. The first section interprets the results and addresses the hypotheses. It also compares the findings of this study with the broader literature in general, and the previous Swedish findings in particular. The second section discusses some threats to validity, for both the independent and the dependent variable.

The conclusion summarises the findings, answers the research question, and gives some suggestions for future research.

2 Literature Review

This section lays out the origins, the historical developments, and the contemporary state of the research on personality and political attitudes.

Research on whether political attitudes reflect deeper psychological dispositions started gaining traction in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵ The initial motivation was to detect individuals that carried authoritarian personality tendencies, or, in other words, potential fascists. The work was pioneered by the Jewish-German philosopher Theodor Adorno, who, after fleeing Hitler's regime, published the landmark study *The Authoritarian Personality* in 1950.⁶ Adorno attempted to "construct an instrument that would yield an estimate of fascist receptivity at the personality level."⁷ People scoring high on his Fascism Scale (F-Scale) preferred controlled and predictable environments and showed hostility towards out-group members such as minorities, political dissidents, and moral deviants.⁸ Today, his study is considered a methodological failure due to its unreliable measurement of personality that built on Freudian concepts. Still, it was a ground-breaking work since it was the first "systematic empirical investigation into whether there was such a thing as a personality rooted in politics."⁹

Four years later, Hans Eysenck published *The Psychology of Politics*, in which he posited that ideology is affected by two underlying dimensions; namely issue preferences (left-right) and "tendermindedness" or "toughmindedness".¹⁰ He postulated that authoritarians on the left (communists) and the right (fascists) would be more likely to be tough-minded, since they are less concerned with other people's preferences and interests.¹¹

In the 1960s and 1970s, Glenn Wilson and John Patterson developed the Conservatism Scale (C-Scale), which measured social conservatism as an underlying personality trait variable.¹² The interest in right-wing attitudes continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s with among others Robert Altemeyer's right-wing

⁵ Hibbing, Smith, and Alford. P.33.

⁶ T. W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, The authoritarian personality., Oxford, England, Harpers, 1950. Note: Adorno's father was of Jewish heritage but had converted to Protestantism. Due to the classifications of the 1935 Nuremberg laws Adorno was barred from teaching in Germany and therefore emigrated.

⁷ Adorno. P.279.

⁸ Bert N. Bakker, *Personality and Politics: The Direct and Indirect Associations between the Five Factor Model and Political Attitudes*, PhD, University of Southern Denmark, 2014. P.15.

⁹ Hibbing, Smith, and Alford. P.127.

¹⁰ Hans J. Eysenck, *The Psychology of Politics*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954, Available from: cat07147a,

<http://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=catalog07147a&AN=lub.950711&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹¹ Hibbing, Smith, and Alford. P.130.

¹² Glenn D. Wilson and John R. Patterson, 'A new measure of conservatism', *British Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1968.

authoritarianism (RWA) personality test.¹³ Building on and improving Adorno's conceptualisation, it tested for willingness to submit to authorities, willingness to conform to social conventions, and hostility towards those who deviate from social norms.¹⁴

These early attempts to detect personality traits connected to authoritarian tendencies or conservative social values have been contested. The statistical and psychometric validity of the above mentioned scales has been called into question. Critics like John J. Ray and Karen Stenner argue that the tests weren't measuring distinct traits but instead proxies for the attitudes that were being tested.¹⁵ "[...] If attitudes are summed to measure authoritarianism, then it is tautological to employ a measure as a predictor of those same [...] attitudes."¹⁶

Moreover, the interest in primarily right wing attitudes raised questions about the mostly left-leaning academics' potential ideological bias. Ray summarised the "ruling ideology" of Adorno and other thinkers as viewing authoritarianism as an extreme continuation of conservatism, both being explained in Freudian terms as "the outcome of adverse experiences with the father during childhood."¹⁷ Ray remarked that since "Leftist political tenets [...] form part of the culture of modern-day psychology [...] a tendency to draw conclusions that accord with Leftist beliefs is rather to be expected."¹⁸

Most of the above mentioned research on the association between psychological dispositions and political attitudes was conducted by psychologists, not political scientists. Since the work on temperamental differences between conservatives and liberals by political scientist Herbert McClosky in 1958, "studies of personality [...] have been largely absent from political science."¹⁹ There are

¹³ Hibbing, Smith, and Alford. P.131.

¹⁴ Jim A. C. Everett, 'The 12 Item Social and Economic Conservatism Scale (SECS)', *PLOS ONE*, vol. 8, no. 12, 2013. P.2.

¹⁵ J. J. Ray, 'How Good is the Wilson-Patterson Conservatism Scale?', *New Zealand Psychologist*, 1974.

¹⁶ Summarized by Jeffery J. Mondak, *Personality and the Foundations of Political Behavior*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010. P.14.

¹⁷ J. J. Ray, 'The scientific study of ideology is too often more ideological than scientific', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1989.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* P.331.

¹⁹ Herbert McClosky, 'Conservatism and Personality', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2013. Available from: Cambridge Core; John R. Alford, Carolyn L. Funk, and John R. Hibbing, 'Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 99, no. 2, 2005. Available from: Cambridge Core.

Note that this drought applies mainly to the study of mass politics. There has been an interest in personality research when studying leaders and elite behaviour. Examples are psychobiographies, research on common personality traits among leaders, research on presidential performance and links between leader personality and foreign policy behaviour. See e.g. Alexander L. George and Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House, a personality study*, New York, Dover Publications, 1964; James David Barber, *The presidential character : predicting performance in the White House*, New York, Pearson Longman, 2009; Felix J. Thoemmes and Lucian Gideon Conway Iii, 'Integrative Complexity of 41 U.S. Presidents', *Political Psychology*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2007, (accessed 14/08/2019); Mark Schafer, 'The Private-Psychological Sources of a Public War: Why George W. Bush went to war with Saddam', *Conference Papers -- International Studies Association*, 2007. Available from: poh; G. Hermann Margaret, 'Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1980. Available from: edsjsr; S. J. Rubenzer, T. R. Faschingbauer, and D. S. Ones,

several possible explanations for political science's lack of interest in the topic. Political scientists largely assumed that a comprehensive interest in an individual's whole personality was impractical, due to it being difficult and costly to grasp in a survey. Another explanation is the considerable lag time of perhaps between 10-20 years that it takes for innovations from one academic field to spill over into another.²⁰ A third explanation has been the lack of guidance from the field of psychology, as well as the absence of an overarching psychological framework of personality. Paul M. Sniderman commented on this in 1975:

The field of personality and politics has acquired a jerry-built appearance. Observation suggests that political scientists inspect the array of psychological hypotheses, personality theories, and experimental findings like single-minded customers at a bargain counter, each bent on obtaining whatever suits his or her immediate purpose. The upshot is a *mélange* of ideas, borrowed from disparate sources, sometimes tested but more often intuitive and anecdotal in character.²¹

Robert R. McCrae and Paul T. Costa's publication of the Five Factor model of general personality structure (FFM), also called The Big Five, introduced some clarity and consistency to the "jerry-built" field in 1985.²² Today, the FFM holds a singular strength and predominance within psychology.²³ It has been validated across numerous samples in different societies and the field has accepted it with initial consensus as the general taxonomy of personality traits.²⁴ This paves the way for its proper integration within political science research: "The FFM subsumes an impressive variety of psychological dispositions into a hierarchical structure of higher order traits and lower order facets [and] thereby offer[s] a unique holistic model of personality that can be employed in the study of political attitudes", writes Bert N. Bakker.²⁵ Over the last three to four decades, the incorporation of the FFM has become more common and the level of systematic empirical research on personality and political attitudes has improved. Still, the overall amount of research has been described as "disappointing" by Jeffery J. Mondak.²⁶

'Assessing the U.S. presidents using the Revised NEO Personality Inventory', *Assessment*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2000. Available from: cmedm.

²⁰ Mondak. P.12.

²¹ Paul M. Sniderman, *Personality and Democratic Politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975. P.16.

²² Mathias Fatke, Von Natur aus interessiert? Persönlichkeit und politisches Interesse unter Einfluss von Demokratie. , Bachelor's, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 2017. P.4. See also Robert R. McCrae and Paul T. Costa Jr, 'Personality trait structure as a human universal', *American Psychologist*, vol. 52, no. 5, 1997.

²³ A. Widiger Thomas, *The Oxford Handbook of the Five Factor Model*, Oxford University Press, <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199352487.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199352487>. P.1.

²⁴ Oliver P. John, Laura Naumann, and Christopher Soto, 'Paradigm shift to the integrative Big Five taxonomy', 2008, Vol. 3. P.116. See also Hibbing, Smith, and Alford. P.133.

²⁵ Bakker. P.18.

²⁶ Mondak. P.11.

Next, some contemporary work is reviewed. FFM traits-based research on personality and political attitudes, ideology, and political behaviour has been done mostly in the anglosphere. A non-comprehensive list of prominent examples from the fields of psychology, political science, and political psychology may include Jeffery J. Mondak (2008; 2010; 2014), Carney et al. (2008), Alan S. Gerber et al. (2010; 2011), Jordan B. Peterson (2015; 2016), Xiaowen Xu et al. (2010; 2013; 2017), Feldman and Stenner (1997) and Robert McCrae (1996; 2009).²⁷ Research has also been conducted outside the anglosphere. Notable European examples are Rainer Riemann (1993), Van Hiel, Kossowska and Mervielde (2000), Bert N. Bakker (2014; 2015; 2017; 2018); Vecchione et al. (2011), and Matthias Fatke (2017).²⁸

From the contemporary literature emerges an overall picture that suggests that trait Openness is correlated with left-wing political attitudes, whilst trait Conscientiousness is correlated with right-wing conservative attitudes. The other three traits, Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism, seem not to consistently correlate with political attitudes.

²⁷ Jeffery J. Mondak and Karen D. Halperin, *A Framework for the Study of Personality and Political Behavior* 2008, Vol. 38; Mondak; Dana R. Carney et al., 'The Secret Lives of Liberals and Conservatives: Personality Profiles, Interaction Styles, and the Things They Leave Behind', *Political Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 6, 2008, (accessed 30/05/2019); Jeffery J. Mondak and Damaris Canache, 'Personality and Political Culture in the American States', *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2013, (accessed 30/05/2019); Alan S. Gerber et al., 'Personality and Political Attitudes: Relationships across Issue Domains and Political Contexts', *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 104, no. 1, 2010. Available from: JSTOR, (accessed 14/08/2019); Alan S. Gerber et al., 'The Big Five Personality Traits in the Political Arena', *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2011, (accessed 30/05/2019); Caitlin M. Burton, Jason E. Plaks, and Jordan B. Peterson, 'Why Do Conservatives Report Being Happier Than Liberals? The Contribution of Neuroticism', *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2015; Xiaowen Xu, Jason Plaks, and Jordan Peterson, *From Dispositions to Goals to Ideology: Toward a Synthesis of Personality and Social Psychological Approaches to Political Orientation* 2016, Vol. 10; Jacob Hirsh et al., *Compassionate Liberals and Polite Conservatives: Associations of Agreeableness With Political Ideology and Moral Values* 2010, Vol. 36; Xiaowen Xu, Raymond A Mar, and Jordan Peterson, *Does Cultural Exposure Partially Explain the Association Between Personality and Political Orientation?* 2013, Vol. 39; Xiaowen Xu and Jordan B. Peterson, 'Differences in Media Preference Mediate the Link Between Personality and Political Orientation', *Political Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2017, (accessed 30/05/2019); Stanley Feldman and Karen Stenner, 'Perceived Threat and Authoritarianism', *Political Psychology*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1997. Available from: JSTOR; Robert R. McCrae, *Social Consequences of Experiential Openness* 1996, Vol. 120; Robert R. McCrae and Angelina R. Sutin, 'Openness to experience', *Handbook of individual differences in social behavior.*, New York, NY, US, The Guilford Press, 2009.

²⁸ Rainer Riemann et al., 'Personality and attitudes towards current political topics', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1993; Alain van Hiel, Malgorzata Kossowska, and Ivan Mervielde, 'The relationship between Openness to Experience and political ideology', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2000.; Bakker, 2014; Bert N. Bakker, David Nicolas Hopmann, and Mikael Persson, 'Personality traits and party identification over time', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2015, (accessed 30/05/2019); Bert N. Bakker, 'Personality Traits, Income, and Economic Ideology', *Political Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 6, 2017, (accessed 30/05/2019); Bert N. Bakker and Yphtach Lelkes, 'Selling Ourselves Short? How Abbreviated Measures of Personality Change the Way We Think about Personality and Politics', *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2018, (accessed 30/05/2019); Michele Vecchione et al., 'Personality correlates of party preference: The Big Five in five big European countries', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 51, no. 6, 2011; Matthias Fatke, 'Personality Traits and Political Ideology: A First Global Assessment', *Political Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 5, 2017, (accessed 30/05/2019).

The Swedish literature on personality and political attitudes is rather thin. In 2011, Sören Holmberg, Lennart Weibull and Mattias Gunnarson of the SOM-Institute studied the effect of the FFM on left-right identification in Sweden.²⁹ The research design of their short study is similar to what this essay seeks to accomplish, which also uses material from the SOM-Institute's surveys. However, Homberg et al.'s study used a different measurement instrument for the Big Five than does this study. Seeing as their study seems to be the only other mass data study on the topic within the Swedish context, their results will be compared with this essay's results below. Holmberg et al. also wrote a complementary article on measuring personality for the publication of the 2013 SOM-survey, when the BFI-10 instrument was introduced.³⁰ Other related research of note is Oskarsson, Teorell, Johannesson, and Magnusson, who together with American colleagues researched heritability and political preference formation in Sweden. For measuring personality traits they did however not use the FFM but an alternative model.³¹ Moreover, some basic level student theses have been written on the topic.³²

²⁹ Sören Holmberg, Lennart Weibull, and Mattias Gunnarson, 'Personlighet och ideologisk vänster-högerposition', in Sören Holmberg, Lennart Weibull, and Henrik Oscarsson (eds), *Lycksalighetens ö*, Gothenburg, SOM-Institute, University of Gothenburg, 2011.

³⁰ Sören Holmberg, Mattias Gunnarson, and Lennart Weibull, 'Att mäta personlighet', *Mittfåra & marginal*, 2014, (accessed 30/05/2019).

³¹ Sven Oskarsson et al., 'Like parent, like child? Heritability and Theories of Political Preference Formation', *Annual Meeting of the Swedish Political Science Association.*, 2010.

³² Henning Hallin and Emil Stenman, Relationen mellan personlighet, känsla av sammanhang, politiskt intresse och politisk inriktning bland högskolestudenter, Student thesis, 2019. Available from: DiVA, <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:mdh:diva-44055>, (accessed 14/08/2019).

Magnus Olsson and Joachim Malmborg, Personlighetens inverkan på val av politisk partitillhörighet, Student thesis, 2004. Available from: DiVA, <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hh:diva-12265>, (accessed 14/08/2019).

3 Theory

Some theoretical groundwork needs to be established in order to set the stage for this essay's contribution. The first part of this chapter presents the theory relating to the independent variable, personality. It gives a definition of personality and an explanation of the Five Factor model. The second part of this chapter lays out the theory needed for the dependent variable, political orientation, discussing attitude formation and the left-right scale. The third section gives an overview of theories seeking to explain why left-wingers and right-wingers differ in their psychology. The final section explains how this essay relates to the broader literature, and justifies the choice of hypotheses.

3.1 Personality

The ancient Greek philosopher Theophrastus conducted what was perhaps the first study of personality.³³ Calling himself a student of human nature, he was intrigued by the diversity in people's "characters".³⁴ Describing different personality types, he alluded to what has since been confirmed by modern personality research, namely that people's attitudes and behaviours over a range of seemingly unrelated domains form correlated observable patterns.³⁵

In order to be able to research personality, one needs to accept four premises about human nature. These are; (a) personality traits exist and are measurable, (b) these traits vary across individuals, (c) the causes of human behaviour are rooted within the individual (i.e., personality traits affect individual behaviour), and (d) people "can understand themselves and others".³⁶

Premises (a) and (c) are self-explanatory: in order to research personality one needs to acknowledge that such a thing indeed exists, that it is possible to measure it, and that it affects human behaviour. Premise (b) – that personality traits vary across individuals – has historically been disputed. Social science used to believe that even though humans' physical traits vary, "we share the same basic psychological, emotional and cognitive architecture". This is reflected in the theory of behaviourism that dominated for much of the twentieth century.³⁷ Behaviourism

³³ C. 371 – 287 BC. Another early example is Hippokrates' four separate temperaments.

³⁴ Theophrastus, *The Characters of Theophrastus*, <https://www.eudaemonist.com/biblion/characters/>, (accessed 30/05/2019).

³⁵ Gerber et al. P.111.

³⁶ Ibid. P.2.

³⁷ Hibbing, Smith, and Alford. P.39. See also Huddy Leonie, O. Sears David, and S. Levy Jack, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, Oxford University Press,

was “the belief that behavior is entirely a response to specific, recent, manipulable environmental stimuli.”³⁸ Today, however, there is broad consensus within the field of psychology that this view was incorrect and that there is indeed variety in people’s personality traits.³⁹ Premise (d) will be addressed in section 3.1.2 below.

3.1.1 Nature or Nurture?

This essay assumes that one’s personality is shaped prior to one’s political attitude formation – the reverse seems nonsensical. Therefore, before moving on to the definition of personality, it can be beneficial to briefly take one step further back and consider the mechanisms that shape one’s personality. Are they primarily based in genetic predispositions or environmental factors?⁴⁰ The field of behavioural genetics has conducted family studies, twin studies and adoptive studies, and concluded that personality is in large parts determined by genetic makeup, but that environmental influences “have the largest impact on personality”.⁴¹ It is important to note here that it is not the shared family environment that impacts personality, but the idiosyncratic experiences of the individual.⁴²

Heritability for the Big Five dimensions has been measured at around .25 – .5, when self-reports are used. McCrae and Costa have argued that these numbers are too low, pointing to twin studies where self-reports were combined with peer-reports, which produced values between .66 – .79.⁴³ Whatever the exact value of heritability, “the origins of personality are apparently attributable to biology” to a substantial degree.⁴⁴ Still, a large amount of the variance is due to environmental influences. Note that this essay does not rest on personality being based primarily in nature or nurture. Its purpose is to find out whether there are personality differences between the political sides in Sweden – whatever their origin.

3.1.2 Definition Personality

The study of personality has been a central pillar of the field of psychology, and has been explored by central figures as diverse as Freud, Maslow and Skinner.⁴⁵ Still, psychology lacks a concrete, recognised, and universal definition of what

<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199760107.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199760107>. P.5.

³⁸ Jens Blom-Hansen, Martin Baekgaard, and Søren Serritzlew, 'Shaping Political Preferences: Information Effects in Political-Administrative Systems', *Local Government Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2016. Available from: hllh. P.1.

³⁹ Gerber et al. P.111.

⁴⁰ Please note that human personality is a complex field and the scope of this essay does not allow for an extensive account of the nature versus nurture debate.

⁴¹ Charles Stangor and Jennifer Walinga, *Introduction to Psychology – 1st Canadian Edition*, Victoria, BC., BCcampus, 2014, <https://opentextbc.ca/introductiontopsychology/>. P.518.

⁴² Mondak. P.40.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. P.4.

constitutes personality. This essay draws on Jeffery J. Mondak's three-part approach to personality as laid out in his book *Personality and the Foundations of Political Behavior*.⁴⁶ Mondak posits that:

1. One will not be able to find a universally accepted definition of personality, and must instead construct a "plausible, functional view."
2. Developing a conceptualisation of personality must be ends-driven and purposive.
3. As personality itself cannot be directly observed, one must aim to get a "satisfactory sense of the concept [...] through discussion of its component parts and the psychological purposes they serve." In order to do this, Mondak invokes a traits-based approach to personality.⁴⁷

Working towards a plausible, functional view of personality for the purposes of this essay, one can firstly state that personality is complex, made up of many parts (core beliefs, values, emotions, etc.) and "something that exists mostly in our heads, making measurement challenging".⁴⁸ When studying personality one is therefore forced to "engage in inference, because a full, direct operationalization of personality is not possible."⁴⁹ This is done by looking at the observable distinguishable component parts – called traits - that make up personality. These personality traits do not change day by day. Instead there is good evidence that they remain stable in adulthood.⁵⁰

David Winter defines personality traits as "the public, observable element of personality" that "reflect[s] language of 'first impressions', the adjectives and adverbs of everyday language that we use to describe other people."⁵¹ This is in line with the fourth premise (d) mentioned above, namely that "people can understand themselves and others." Winter's definition of traits builds on the lexical hypothesis in personality psychology, which states that languages over time have evolved terms to label fundamental individual differences.⁵² Therefore, everyone intuitively understands what it means for a person to be called an "extrovert" or to be labelled as "highly neurotic". These traits can be observed through experiments in which one puts people in certain situations and examines how they behave. Another method is to conduct survey questionnaires done through observer's ratings, or self-reports, which is how the data for this essay was collected.⁵³

With these issues in mind, this essay will use Mondak's definition of personality as "a multifaceted and enduring internal, or psychological, structure",

⁴⁶ Mondak. P.4.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. P.5. See also Hibbing, Smith, and Alford. P.25.

⁴⁹ Mondak. P.5.

⁵⁰ If this were not the case, it would be very difficult to study personality. Bakker. P.25.

⁵¹ Ibid. P.19.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Leonie, David, and Jack. P.116.

composed of traits, that is “substantially rooted in biology” and “influences behavior”.⁵⁴

3.1.3 The Five Factor Model

The Five Factor Model of Personality (FFM), also called the Big Five, describes personality in terms of five broad factors, or dimensions. These five factors were identified through extensive lexical analysis, a process that involves gathering large amounts of adjectives or phrases that describe “enduring individual-level characteristics”. After subjects rate how well each word or phrase describes themselves or others, researchers use “factor analysis to identify the broad superfactors or trait domains that underlie these responses”.⁵⁵ Although sometimes more than five factors are identified, the FFM finds evidence for the following five: *Openness*, *Conscientiousness*, *Extraversion*, *Agreeableness* and *Neuroticism*. They can easily be remembered through the acronym *OCEAN*. In order to appreciate the characteristics and potential effects of the five factors, a detailed definition of them is given below.

Openness to Experience describes one’s “sensitivity for art, beauty, and feelings, a willingness to try new activities, a tendency to considering new ideas, and to re-evaluate one’s social and political beliefs.”⁵⁶ People who score high on this factor are generally creative, broad-minded, and intellectually curious but also risk-taking, unpredictable, and less focused.⁵⁷ People who score low tend to be pragmatic, “traditional and conventional.”⁵⁸

Conscientiousness refers to one’s tendency to be achievement-striving, competent, deliberate, dutiful, orderly, and self-disciplined.⁵⁹ People who score high are often religious, risk-averse, satisfied with the family, and successful in the workplace.⁶⁰ They are described as stubborn and focused. Low scorers tend to be more easy-going, flexible, and spontaneous, but also less reliable and less exacting in their work.^{61,62}

Extraversion relates to a person’s sociability and outgoingness. It consists of the facets “Activity, Assertiveness, Gregariousness, Excitement Seeking, Positive Emotions and Warmth”.⁶³ High scorers are happy, satisfied with their relationships,

⁵⁴ Mondak. P.6. This definition is in line with the Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology, that describes personality as “a stable individual difference variable that transcends specific situations.” Leonie, David and Jack. P.4.

⁵⁵ Gerber et al. P.266.

⁵⁶ Openness to Experience is sometimes called *Intellect/Imagination*. As summarised by Bakker. P.21. See also McCrae and Costa Jr., McCrae and Sutin., McCrae.

⁵⁷ Bakker. P.21. See also Ben Ambridge, *Psy-Q: You know your IQ - now test your psychological intelligence*, London, Profile Books Ltd, 2014. P.11.

⁵⁸ Open-Source Psychometrics Project, *Big Five Personality Test*, <https://openpsychometrics.org/tests/IPIP-BFFM/>, (accessed 30/05/2019).

⁵⁹ Summarised by Bakker. P.22.

⁶⁰ Daniel Ozer and Veronica Benet, *Personality and the Prediction of Consequential Outcomes*, 2006, Vol. 57.

⁶¹ Ginka Toegel and Jean-Louis Barsoux, *How to Become a Better Leader*, 2012, Vol. 53. P.53.

⁶² Robert R. McCrae and Paul T. Costa Jr, *Personality in Adulthood*, 2006. P.46.

⁶³ Bakker. P.22.

and have a rich social life.⁶⁴ Not to be confused with shyness, aloofness or depression, low scorers tend to be reserved, reflective, and deliberate.⁶⁵

Agreeableness describes one's tendency to be compassionate, trusting, cooperative, and good-natured.⁶⁶ People scoring high can be described as having a selfless, altruistic concern for others, as well as being caring and generous. Low scorers are described as antagonistic, competitive, tough-minded and hard-headed.⁶⁷

*Neuroticism*⁶⁸ refers to a person's emotional instability and the proneness to experience unpleasant and disturbing emotions.⁶⁹ People who score high on Neuroticism tend to be "less happy in personal life or in romantic relationships, and less successful at work compared to persons low on Neuroticism."⁷⁰ Low scorers are instead calm, relaxed and stable.⁷¹

Figure 1. The Five Factors and their facets (and correlated trait adjective)⁷²

<p>Openness to Experience</p> <p>Ideas (curious) Fantasy (imaginative) Aesthetics (artistic) Actions (wide interests) Feelings (excitable) Values (unconventional)</p>	<p>Agreeableness</p> <p>Trust (forgiving) Straightforwardness (not demanding) Altruism (warm) Compliance (not stubborn) Modesty (not show-off) Tender-mindedness (sympathetic)</p>
<p>Conscientiousness</p> <p>Competence (efficient) Order (organized) Dutifulness (not careless) Achievement striving (thorough) Self-discipline (not lazy) Deliberation (not impulsive)</p>	<p>Neuroticism</p> <p>Anxiety (tense) Angry hostility (irritable) Depression (not contented) Self-consciousness (shy) Impulsiveness (moody) Vulnerability (not self-confident)</p>
<p>Extraversion</p> <p>Ideas (curious) Fantasy (imaginative) Aesthetics (artistic) Actions (wide interests) Feelings (excitable) Values (unconventional)</p>	

Note: Based on the BFI- 44. Source: Oliver P. John and S. Srivastava, 'The Big-Five trait taxonomy: History, measurement, and theoretical perspectives.', in L.A. Pervin and Oliver P. John (eds), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*, New York, Guilford Press, 1999, Vol. 2.

⁶⁴ Ozer and Benet.

⁶⁵ Toegel and Barsoux. P.53.

⁶⁶ Ibid. See also McCrae and Costa Jr, *Personality in Adulthood*. P.4.

⁶⁷ Mondak. P.58. McCrae and Costa Jr, *Personality in Adulthood*. P.58.

⁶⁸ Sometimes called Emotional Stability.

⁶⁹ McCrae and Costa Jr, *Personality in Adulthood*. P.46.

⁷⁰ Bakker. P.22. As also shown in Ozer and Benet. P.415.

⁷¹ Mondak. P.61.

⁷² Oliver P. John and S. Srivastava, 'The Big-Five trait taxonomy: History, measurement, and theoretical perspectives.', in L.A. Pervin and Oliver P. John (eds), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*, New York, Guilford Press, 1999, Vol. 2.

3.2 Political Attitudes

Again, there are certain premises that need to be accepted in order to be able to study the effects of personality on political attitudes; namely that citizens' political attitudes are (a) stable and (b) coherent. These are crucial; "If citizens do not have at least some coherence in their political attitudes, it becomes difficult to theorize and demonstrate any association between personality traits and political attitudes."⁷³

In 1964, research by Philip Converse found that the majority of voters have unstable and incoherent political preferences, showing "little ideological constraint from one issue to the next".⁷⁴ In recent years however, this has been challenged by inter alia Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder, as well as Feldman, who pointed out measurement errors in the individual surveys used. Correcting for these revealed that citizens indeed tend to have "well structured and stable" political preferences.⁷⁵ Furthermore, according to research by Conover and Feldman, and Feldman and Johnston, there is also considerable coherence in the political attitudes of voters.⁷⁶ Therefore, it is possible to study the influence of personality on political attitudes.

3.2.1 Political Attitude Formation

The formation of political attitudes has been a key field of research within political science. Historically, research has primarily been conducted on the environmental factors that shape people's political attitudes. Areas of research have included the effect of parental socialisation (Sidanius 1979; Flouri 2004), media (Volgy 1980; St. George 1983; Xu 2017; Boomgarden 2019), social networks (Lazer et al. 2010), culture (Almond 1963; Helgesen 2006), economic evaluations (Sears 1990), and government performance (Maraffi 2014) on political attitudes and behaviour.⁷⁷ In

⁷³ Bakker. P.13.

⁷⁴ Philip E. Converse, 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.', *Ideology and Discontent*, New York, Free Press, 1964; Stephen Ansolabehere, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder, 'The Strength of Issues: Using Multiple Measures to Gauge Preference Stability, Ideological Constraint, and Issue Voting', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 102, no. 2, 2008. Available from: Cambridge Core. P.215.

⁷⁵ Stanley Feldman, *Measuring Issue Preferences: The Problem of Response Instability* 1989, Vol. 1; Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder.

⁷⁶ Pamela Johnston Conover and Stanley Feldman, 'The Origins and Meaning of Liberal/Conservative Self-Identifications', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1981. Available from: JSTOR; Pamela Johnston Conover and Stanley Feldman, 'How People Organize the Political World: A Schematic Model', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1984. Available from: JSTOR; Stanley Feldman and Christopher Johnston, 'Understanding the Determinants of Political Ideology: Implications of Structural Complexity', *Political Psychology*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2014. Available from: edsjrs.

⁷⁷ Jim Sidanius and Bo Ekehammar, 'Political socialization: A multivariate analysis of Swedish political attitude and preference data', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1979. Available from: edb; Eirini Flouri, 'Parental Background and Political Attitudes in British Adults', *Journal of Family & Economic Issues*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2004. Available from: i3h; Arthur St. George and Sandra Robinson-Weber, 'The mass media, political attitudes, and behavior', *Communication Research*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1983; Thomas J. Volgy and John E. Schwarz, 'On Television Viewing

recent years, with the emergence of political psychology as a distinct field, the effect of psychological predispositions as a source of political attitudes has also started to be researched.⁷⁸ This essay falls under that umbrella of research.

3.2.2 Left-Right Scale

The definition of an attitude is “a personal view or orientation (belief, value, or opinion) towards things such as politics, religion, entertainment, or environmental protection.”⁷⁹ There are many ways to classify political attitudes or ideological orientation.⁸⁰ In the survey questionnaires that produced the data for this essay, respondents were asked to place themselves on the left-right political spectrum. Left-right self-placement is a common indicator “serving as an explanatory variable of political attitudes.”⁸¹

Typically, the left-right scale expresses a difference in the willingness for state interference in society at large. One typical interpretation is that the left seeks social justice through redistributive governmental economic and social policies, which the right opposes, seeking instead to defend individualism, lower taxes, capitalism, and private property.⁸²

The unidimensional left-right scale has been criticised as being an inadequate measure of attitudes in the complicated sphere of politics, missing a lot of information.⁸³ Alternative scales have been proposed, such as using two

and Citizens' Political Attitudes, Activity and Knowledge: Another Look at the Impact of Media on Politics', *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 2, 1980. Available from: JSTOR; St. George and Robinson-Weber; Xu and Peterson; Hajo G. Boomgaarden and Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, *The Media and Political Behavior*, edited, Oxford University Press, 2019. Available from: edsore, <http://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsore&AN=edsore.9780190228637.013.621&site=eds-live&scope=site>; David Lazer et al., 'The Coevolution of Networks and Political Attitudes', *Political Communication*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2010; Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton University Press, 1963, Available from: JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183pnr2>; *Politics, culture and self: East Asian and North European attitudes / edited by Geir Helgesen and Søren Risbjerg Thomsen*, NIAS studies in Asian topics ; 40., Edited by Geir Helgesen and Søren Risbjerg Thomsen, Copenhagen, Denmark, NIAS Press, 2006; David O. Sears and Carolyn L. Funk, 'The limited effect of economic self-interest on the political attitudes of the mass public', *Journal of Behavioral Economics*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1990; Marco Maraffi and Paolo Bellucci, *Government Performance and Political Attitudes in the Italian Political Cycle 2011-2013* 2014, Vol. 28.

⁷⁸ See Chapter 2.

⁷⁹ Christian Kandler et al., 'The Genetic Foundations of Attitude Formation: The Case of Left-Right Political Orientations', 2014. P.3.

⁸⁰ Note that this essay uses the terms “political attitudes” and “political orientation” interchangeably.

⁸¹ Cornelia Zuell and Evi Scholz, 'Construct Equivalence of Left-Right Scale Placement in a Cross-National Perspective', *International Journal of Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2019. Available from: sih. P.78.

⁸² Erik Moberg, *The so-called GAL-TAN scale*, <http://www.mobergpublications.se/continued/scale.htm>, (accessed 14/08/2019). Definitions.net, *Political Spectrum*, <https://www.definitions.net/definition/political+spectrum>, 2019, (accessed 12/08/2019).

⁸³ Hyrum Lewis, *It's Time to Retire the Political Spectrum*, <https://quillette.com/2017/05/03/time-retire-political-spectrum/>, 2017, (accessed 02/08/2019).

dimensions, one for economic policies and one for social policies (e.g. from progressive to conservative).⁸⁴ One such scale that has gained prominence in Sweden is the Gal-Tan scale, which keeps the left-right x-axis as an economic measure, and introduces a y-axis where one extreme represents Green, Alternative, and Liberal values, and the other extreme represents Traditional, Authoritarian, and Nationalistic values.⁸⁵ However, this scale has been criticised for its methodological design. The two extremes in the second dimension, Gal-Tan, are not each other's opposites. It has also been accused of being ideologically biased, using descriptor words that may seem charged, such as authoritarian and nationalistic.⁸⁶

It is possible to point out the flaws of the traditional left-right scale, and there may be more accurate alternatives. However, since the data for this essay was gathered through self-response survey questionnaires, it is important to consider whether a more complex or precise scale would produce more accurate results, or in fact obstruct them. Because the respondents – everyday normal Swedish adults – are familiar with and understand the traditional left-right scale, using it is less likely to cause faulty responses than a more complex, and therefore more cumbersome and confusing scale. It was the scale used in the data that was available for this essay. Moreover, the left-right scale is widely used and understandable in virtually all politically free countries.⁸⁷ The labels of “left-wing” and “right-wing” are short, convenient, and convey an intuitive notion of political difference, which is the motivation for using them in this essay.

3.3 Why the Difference?

The literature review concluded with summarising the findings of the contemporary research, namely that trait Openness is correlated with left-wing political attitudes, that trait Conscientiousness is correlated with right-wing conservative attitudes, and that the other three traits, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism, do not consistently correlate with political attitudes. But why do left-wingers and right-wingers differ in their psychology?

As has been touched upon in the literature review, some of the earlier explanatory theories may have suffered from ideological bias. Explaining political differences through personality opens up for painting flattering or unflattering psychological pictures of either side of the political spectrum. Carney et al. note that “[t]he important question, from a scientific point of view, is not whether any

⁸⁴ See for instance Feldman and Stenner. See also Scott C. Flanagan, 'Measuring Value Change in Advanced Industrial Societies: A Rejoinder to Inglehart', *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1982, (accessed 13/08/2019).

⁸⁵ Gary Marks et al., 'Party Competition and European Integration in the East and West: Different Structure, Same Causality', *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2006, (accessed 13/08/2019).

⁸⁶ Moberg.

⁸⁷ Hibbing, Smith, and Alford. P.17.

given theory is gratifying to left-wing or right-wing audiences, but whether it possesses truth value.”⁸⁸

The contemporary theories have primarily discussed the difference between left-wingers and right-wingers in the dimensions of open-mindedness and closed-mindedness. Studies have shown that left-wingers score higher than right-wingers on measures of openness, cognitive flexibility and integrative complexity.⁸⁹ Right-wingers also seem to have a higher personal need for order, structure, closure and decisiveness than do left-wingers.⁹⁰ It was also shown in a path-breaking study by Oxley et al. that conservatives seem to perceive the world to be more threatening and dangerous, compared with liberals.⁹¹

Jost’s uncertainty-threat model of political conservatism, which posits that “psychological needs to manage uncertainty and threat are associated with political orientation”, seeks to integrate the different findings relating to the management of fear and uncertainty into a coherent model of “needs that underlie ideological outcomes.”⁹² “Political conservatism as an ideological belief system [...] is significantly (but not completely) related to motivational concerns having to do with the psychological management of uncertainty and fear.”⁹³ Longitudinal studies have shown that American preschool children who later self-identified as liberals were described by their teachers as “self-reliant, energetic, emotionally expressive, gregarious, and impulsive”.⁹⁴ Children that later self-identified as conservatives were perceived by their teachers as “rigid, inhibited, indecisive, fearful, and overcontrolled”.⁹⁵ This further seems to support the uncertainty-threat model.

However, the model is far from uncontested. Recently, the uncertainty-threat model has been called into question by Bakker and colleagues, whose independent replications of the original Oxley et al. study could not support the notion that conservatives have stronger physiological responses to threat stimuli than liberals.⁹⁶

This section has briefly outlined some prominent theories that seek to explain the observed personality differences between the left and the right. This essay has no ambitions to further delve into these or to apply them to the Swedish context. Its aim is rather to investigate whether these observed personality differences also exist between the Swedish political sides. For the Swedish case, the *if* must firstly be established, and the *why* is a question for potential future research.

⁸⁸ Carney et al. P.809.

⁸⁹ Ibid. P.814.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ John T. Jost et al., 'Are Needs to Manage Uncertainty and Threat Associated With Political Conservatism or Ideological Extremity?', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 33, no. 7, 2007, (accessed 12/08/2019). Jost 2007, p. 990 R. Oxley Douglas et al., 'Political Attitudes Vary with Physiological Traits', *Science*, vol. 321, no. 5896, 2008. Available from: edsjsr.

⁹² Ibid. P.990.

⁹³ Carney et al. P.814.

⁹⁴ Ibid. P.815.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Bert N. Bakker et al., 'Conservatives and Liberals Have Similar Physiological Responses to Threats: Evidence from Three Replications', *PsyArXiv*, 2019.

3.4 Contribution

Despite the recent increase in research on personality and political attitudes, there are still some hurdles facing the field. When personality traits have been incorporated in research on authoritarianism, democratic values, tolerance, and ideology, researchers have mostly observed these in relation to single traits. The research on personality and political orientation is therefore far from systematic, coordinated or cumulative.⁹⁷ Even though the FFM introduced some clarity, some of Sniderman's 1975 concerns about a "jerry-built field" still seem to ring true. See Jeffery J. Mondak's comment:

[W]hen political scientists have introduced measures of traits, they most often have done so with focus on no more than one or two select attributes. This imposes a considerable limitation on the ability to generalize findings and to compare works across studies.⁹⁸

Seeking to solve this, Mondak has called for a "new agenda", that 1. "entails use of a broadscale depiction of trait structure [...] anchored in recognition that biological forces account for much of the differences in personality traits", 2. casts a wider net "when exploring the possible political significance of personality" and 3. takes into account indirect and conditional relationships between traits and various aspects of political behaviour.⁹⁹

As mentioned above, Holmberg et al. conducted the first Swedish study of the effect of personality on political orientation in 2011, using SOM-survey data.¹⁰⁰ This essay seeks to add to and deepen the understanding of this topic within the Swedish context. The present study is based on a different measurement tool for the FFM, uses more recent and larger sample data, and deepens the level of analysis by looking at both the Big Five factors and also some of their lower aspects. Since the effect of personality on political attitudes has so far been under-researched in Sweden, this contribution also serves as a case study of a Nordic country that lies outside the anglosphere where most of the research has so far been conducted.

The scope of this master's thesis does not allow for a full implementation of Mondak's "new agenda". Mondak's points of suggestions did however motivate this essay to be written in English instead of Swedish. That way, a broader readership of researchers interested in the Swedish case may be reached, which can facilitate further cross country comparisons and generalisations.

⁹⁷ Carney et al. P.815.

⁹⁸ Mondak. P.11.

⁹⁹ Ibid. P.17.

¹⁰⁰ Holmberg, Weibull, and Gunnarson.

3.5 Hypotheses

After having reviewed the findings of the international literature, I suspect that the Swedish result will be similar to what has been shown in other countries. I therefore hypothesise that:

H₁ Swedes higher in trait Openness will tend to be on the political left.

H₂ Swedes higher in trait Conscientiousness will tend to be on the political right.

H₃ There will be no significant relationships between the other three trait dimensions and left-right self-identification.

4 Method

After having laid out the theoretical framework, this chapter introduces the method and material that will be used to test the above-mentioned hypotheses. Firstly, it gives an account of the quantitative method and why it is appropriate for this research problem. Then, it presents the research overview, participants, and measures. The purpose of this chapter is to give a presentation of the method and material used and to provide a research plan that makes future replications possible.

4.1 Quantitative Method

It is the research problem that determines the choice of method, and not the other way around.¹⁰¹ Remember, the research question of this essay is *What effect does personality have on left-right self-identification in Sweden?*

Several methods could have been used to study this problem. One could have conducted interviews with people, and asked them what it is that shapes their political attitudes. Compared with the quantitative method, conducting interviews would have given a more nuanced understanding of the motivations that formed each interviewee's political attitudes. Interviews can provide answers and insights that the researcher had not expected or anticipated.¹⁰² However, as indicated in the introduction, this essay is interested in a phenomenon that people are not thinking about all that much. Due to the somewhat abstract nature of the research problem, it would be unrealistic to expect the levels of introspection and political expertise needed for people to talk about how their own personality shapes their politics. Perhaps it isn't even possible, if answers are not coherent or informative. Therefore, such an approach would perhaps not produce interesting results.

It would be possible to complement the interviews with a rating system, meaning that the interviewer would observe the subjects and rate them according to the Five Factor model. Then, however, much of the point of using the interview method would be defeated, and one would have been better off using mass surveys. In any case, the findings of an interview study would be valid only for the few

¹⁰¹ Göran Djurfeldt, Ola Stjärnhagen, and Rolf Larsson, *Statistisk verktyglåda 1 : samhällsvetenskaplig orsaksanalys med kvantitativa metoder*, 2. uppl. edn., Studentlitteratur, 2010, Available from: cat07147a, <http://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat07147a&AN=lub.1890223&site=eds-live&scope=site>. P.19.

¹⁰² Mikael Gilljam, *Metodpraktikan : konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*, 4., [rev.] uppl. edn., Norstedts juridik, 2012, Available from: cat07147a, <http://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat07147a&AN=lub.2164932&site=eds-live&scope=site>. P.251.

people that were interviewed. It would not be possible to make generalisations about the population as a whole.¹⁰³ Such a study would have little meaning, unless the people interviewed were important in some way, which would shift the research problem from the field of mass politics towards the field of elite and leader behaviour.

Another option would have been to conduct an experiment that illuminated the degree of a personality trait of the subject (such as Extroversion), as well as also asking them what their political attitudes were. Alternatively, the subject selection would already be politically defined, by e.g. only using party members. However, it could be hard to isolate the variables in such an experiment.¹⁰⁴ It would also result in a lower number of samples and, due to time and resource limitations, not be very feasible. One could also argue that personality experiments of this kind should be conducted researchers within the field of psychology, who can claim expertise on the matter.

All methods have their advantages and disadvantages. As has been demonstrated, these alternative methods would have altered the research problem somewhat. So, after some consideration of the options, the conclusion was reached that the quantitative method is best fitted for tackling this research problem. This essay is interested in mass politics, and the quantitative method, through its use of representative, large N sample data is able to make generalisations of the kind that the research question requires.

The quantitative research strategy often seeks to investigate reasons “behind certain results and consequences”.¹⁰⁵ Quantitative research follows an established structure, beginning with theory, which motivates the research problem, to the deduction of one or several hypotheses, to the translation of these hypotheses into measurable variables, to data collection through e.g. the use of survey questionnaires, to an analysis that expresses the final results through numbers.¹⁰⁶ Quantitative research is systematic, empirical, and usually tests hypotheses relating to a phenomenon under investigation according to certain theories. Additionally, the quantitative research method allows for studies to be repeated. The ability to compare findings, generalise about a phenomenon, as well as aggregate results are further advantages of this method. Since a large amount of data is used one is able to generalise, which makes possible the practical application “in the management and prognosis of social and political processes.”¹⁰⁷

As with every method, the quantitative method has its drawbacks, which the researcher needs to be aware of. Statistical research is sometimes accused of relying on a “positivist” worldview. The term has different definitions, but is in this context used to describe a form of uncritical empiricism.¹⁰⁸ Political scientists study political constructs that are shaped by humans, and humans are complex. If one

¹⁰³ Ingrida Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė and Sima Rakutienė, 'Writing a Bachelor's Thesis in the Field of Political Science', *Renewal and Internationalization of Bachelor Degree Programmes in History, Ethnology, Philosophy and Political Science*, 2013. P.50.

¹⁰⁴ Gilljam. P.327.

¹⁰⁵ Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė and Rakutienė. P.48.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. See also Gilljam. P.346.

¹⁰⁷ Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė and Rakutienė. P.48.

¹⁰⁸ Djurfeldt, Stjärnhagen, and Larsson. P.25.

applies an uncritical approach, quantitative research alone may not sufficiently take into account people's attitudes, behaviours, preferences, and subjective estimates, thereby falling short of explaining these complicated political phenomena. It is therefore crucial to apply a critical and systematic approach that is based in scientific theories.¹⁰⁹

In some cases, it can be useful to mix methods. For the research question of this essay, interviews could have made for a very good primary investigation, in order to gain an understanding of what types of variables are relevant for a future quantitative study.¹¹⁰ However, this was not necessary in this case. The aim of this essay is to replicate already existing and widely conducted studies, but within another context, namely Sweden. It was therefore sufficient to copy their research design, including the method, and to merely apply it to new material.

4.2 Research Overview

This study examines what effect personality has on political orientation in Sweden. In order to do so, personality as measured by the Five Factor Model is used as the independent variable, and political orientation as measured by the left-right scale serves as the dependent variable. Additionally, gender is introduced as a control variable. The study examines correlations between the Big Five factors and right-wing self-placement. Conducting multivariate regression analyses, it also explores how well the broad Big Five domains predict self-placement on the left-right scale. Further multivariate regression analyses are then conducted to determine which lower order facets are the main drivers of the significant domain-level predictors. These analyses are run on four sample sets, two independent sample sets as well as two different types of combinations of these.

4.3 Material

The data for this essay was taken from the 2013 and 2014 National SOM surveys.¹¹¹ The National SOM surveys are yearly questionnaires that have been conducted by the SOM-Institute at the University of Gothenburg since 1986. Using a large sample size, they aim to identify and measure Swedes' attitudes, values, and behaviours relating to a large range of topics such as Society, Opinion and Media.¹¹² The SOM

¹⁰⁹ Djurfeldt, Stjärnhagen, and Larsson. P.25.

¹¹⁰ Gilljam. P.253.

¹¹¹ Göteborgs universitet, SOM-institutet. *Den nationella SOM-undersökningen 2013*. Svensk nationell datatjänst. Version 1.0. 2015 <https://doi.org/10.5878/002630> and Göteborgs universitet, SOM-institutet. *Den nationella SOM-undersökningen 2014*. Svensk nationell datatjänst. Version 1.0. 2016. <https://doi.org/10.5878/002814>.

¹¹² SOM-Institute, *The National SOM surveys*, https://som.gu.se/som_institute/-surveys/national-som, 2018, (accessed 14/08/2019).

survey's sample size, geographical spread and representativity would have been impossible to achieve independently. They are a popular source for Swedish social scientists, and are broadly recognised as producing valid and trustable data.

Since 2010, the SOM surveys include a short personality battery.¹¹³ In their 2013 and 2014 surveys, the institute decided to introduce the Big Five Inventory 10 (BFI-10), a shortened down ten-item battery that is based on the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI-44).¹¹⁴ After 2014, the usage of this personality battery was discontinued. The surveys of 2013 and 2014 therefore constitute the most recent data sets that used a Five Factor Model instrument, which is why they were chosen as the data material for this study.

4.4 Measures

4.4.1 Sample 1 (2013)

The 2013 SOM survey was sent to a random and nationally representative selection of 17 000 persons in Sweden, ages ranging between 16-85 years. This selection also included foreign citizens. The survey was split into five parallel forms, and sent to 3 400 persons per form. The surveys were sent out as postal surveys, but included the option to be filled out online. Items relating to political attitudes were present in all of the forms, and the items relating to personality were included in Form 3. The share of respondents was 49%.¹¹⁵ Sample 1 had $N = 1470$ after missing values were excluded. 51% of the respondents were women.

In the 2013 questionnaire, the personality item had the respondents indicate their agreement with a statement about themselves on a 4-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (Agree strongly) to 4 (Disagree strongly). It is presented in English in Figure 2 below.

¹¹³ Holmberg, Gunnarson, and Weibull.

¹¹⁴ Beatrice Rammstedt and Oliver P. John, 'Measuring personality in one minute or less: A 10-item short version of the Big Five Inventory in English and German', *Journal of Research in Personality*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2007.

¹¹⁵ Göteborgs universitet, 2015. P.531.

Figure 2. The 2013 BFI-10 Item

F109 How well do the following statements describe your personality?				
I see myself as someone who...	Agree strongly	Agree a little	Disagree a little	Disagree strongly
1 ... is reserved	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
2 ... is generally trusting	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
3 ... tends to be lazy	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
4 ... is relaxed, handles stress well	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
5 ... has few artistic interests	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
6 ... is outgoing, sociable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
7 ... tends to find fault with others	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
8 ... does a thorough job	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
9 ... gets nervous easily	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
10 ... has an active imagination	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
11 ... has a forgiving nature	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

The 2013 version differs slightly from the original BFI-10. The 2013 version is coded from the positive to the negative. Note also that this scale has four points instead of five, having removed the middle option “Neither agree nor disagree”. Note also that the *last question* in this version is an eleventh question that was added by the SOM-Institute and does not belong to the original BFI-10. It was not taken into consideration in this essay. See the Swedish version as it was printed in the survey in Appendix 1.

In order to facilitate interpretation as well as make possible comparisons with Sample 2, the scale was reversed as to range from 1 (Disagree strongly) to 4 (Agree strongly). As each broad Big Five dimension entails two items, the scoring for the BFI-10 scale is done as follows: Openness (Items 5R and 10), Conscientiousness (3R and 8), Extroversion (1R and 6), Agreeableness (2 and 7R) and Neuroticism (4R and 9). The R indicates the reverse-keyed items.

For measuring left-right attitudes, a five point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (Clearly on the left) to 5 (Clearly on the right) was used, as presented in Figure 3 below. See the Swedish version as it was printed in the survey in Appendix 3.

Figure 3. The left-right scale

Sometimes it is argued that political attitudes can be placed on a left-right scale.				
Where would you place yourself on such a scale?				
Clearly on the left	Somewhat on the left	Neither on the left nor on the right	Somewhat on the right	Clearly on the right
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the variables (Sample 1)

	Mean	SD	α
Left-Right Scale (1 Left to 5 Right)	2.97	1.14	
Openness (1 Disagree to 4 Agree)	2.49	.74	.26
O5R	2.22	.72	
O10	2.53	.93	
Conscientiousness (1 to 4)	3.21	.58	.48
C3R	3.10	.80	
C8	3.32	.62	
Extroversion (1 to 4)	2.87	.69	.66
E1R	2.72	.86	
E6	3.01	.74	
Agreeableness (1 to 4)	3.04	.49	.09
A2	3.20	.63	
A7R	2.89	.72	
Neuroticism (1 to 4)	2.15	.63	.58
N4R	2.22	.72	
N9	2.08	.79	

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and Cronbach alpha values for the variables from Sample 1. It displays both the FFM's higher order dimensions, as well as each dimension's two lower order items. Note again that the scale has been reversed to align from 1 (Disagree strongly) to 4 (Agree strongly) and that the reverse-keyed items (R) have been reversed. The internal consistency for the five factors was moderate, with an average Cronbach's alpha of .41. This will be problematised further in section 6.2.

Table 2. Intercorrelations of the Big Five factors (Sample 1)

	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extroversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
Openness		-.11**	.02	-.04	.12**
Conscientiousness	-.11**		.22**	.27**	-.21**
Extroversion	.02	.22**		.16**	-.28**
Agreeableness	-.04	.27**	.16**		-.20**
Neuroticism	.12**	-.21**	-.28**	-.20**	

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson's correlation tested the intercorrelation of all the Big Five factors, showing them to be well differentiated from each other. The highest correlation was .28, and the average correlation was .16.

4.4.2 Sample 2 (2014)

The 2014 SOM survey was sent out under similar conditions to the previous year's survey. It was sent to a random and nationally representative selection of 13 600 persons ages 16-85 years, and split into four parallel forms with 3 400 persons per form. Again, both Swedes and foreign citizens were included. The items relating to personality were again to be found in Form 3. The share of respondents was 51%.¹¹⁶ Sample 2 had N = 1501 after missing values were excluded. 54% of the respondents were women.

In the 2014 survey, the personality item matches the original BFI-10. It is presented in English in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. The 2014 BFI-10 Item

F80 How well do the following statements describe your personality?

I see myself as someone who...	Disagree strongly	Disagree a little	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree strongly
1 ... is reserved	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
2 ... is generally trusting	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
3 ... tends to be lazy	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
4 ... is relaxed, handles stress well	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
5 ... has few artistic interests	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
6 ... is outgoing, sociable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
7 ... tends to find fault with others	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
8 ... does a thorough job	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
9 ... gets nervous easily	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
10 ... has an active imagination	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

The scales are coded in five points from the negative to the positive, ranging from 1 (Disagree strongly) to 5 (Agree strongly). The eleventh item has been removed. See the Swedish version as it was printed in the survey in Appendix 2.

¹¹⁶ Göteborgs universitet, 2016.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for variables (Sample 2)

	Mean	SD	α
Left-Right Scale (1 Left to 5 Right)	3.03	1.21	
Openness (1 Disagree to 5 Agree)	3.05	.94	0.28
O5R	3.02	1.31	
O10	3.07	1.17	
Conscientiousness (1 to 5)	3.99	.75	0.34
C3R	3.83	1.08	
C8	4.16	.81	
Extroversion (1 to 5)	3.59	.91	0.62
E1R	3.39	1.14	
E6	3.77	.97	
Agreeableness (1 to 5)	3.69	.68	0.08
A2	3.93	.89	
A7R	3.44	.98	
Neuroticism (1 to 5)	2.56	.86	0.57
N4R	2.58	.99	
N9	2.54	1.06	

Table 3 displays the means, standard deviations and Cronbach alpha values of Sample 2. The internal consistency for the five factors was again moderate with an average Cronbach's alpha of .38, and was similar to Sample 1. The left-right scale used in Sample 2 was identical to the one used in Sample 1.

Table 4. Intercorrelations of the Big Five factors (Sample 2)

	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extroversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
Openness		-.05*	.09**	-.05*	.12**
Conscientiousness	-.05*		.25**	.25**	-.25**
Extroversion	.09**	.25**		.18**	-.26**
Agreeableness	-.05*	.25**	.18**		-.26**
Neuroticism	.12**	-.25**	-.26**	-.26**	

Note: *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Again, a Pearson's correlation tested the Big Five intercorrelations, yielding a satisfactory result with the highest correlation being -.26 and an average correlation of .15.

4.4.3 Sample 1 and 2 Combined (Methods a and b)

In order to produce an even larger sample set, Samples 1 and 2 were also combined together. The purpose of this study was not to compare differences between the two

sample sets. This is not a longitudinal study, since the samples are only a year apart. Instead, the motivation to use the two sample sets was to research a larger sample in order to gain a more accurate result. As Sample 1 and 2 are only a year apart, they are representative for the same population. Combining them should therefore produce an even more accurate picture.

In order to combine the two sample sets, the variable scales of the two samples must be identical. As detailed above, the scale for the 2013 personality battery was reversed as to match the direction of the 2014 scale – from the negative to the positive. Still, the personality items in Sample 1 only had 4 steps, while Sample 2 had 5 steps. There are two methods of solving this, and both have their drawbacks. They will be referred to as Method (a) and (b).

Method (a) recoded Sample 1's personality scale into 5 steps, by introducing an empty middle option of "Neither agree nor disagree". Combining Samples 1 and 2 according to this method gave N = 2971, 52.4% of which were women. The drawback with Method (a) is that the data from Sample 1 is skewed.

Method (b) reduced the scale of Sample 2's personality items to 4 steps, by removing the middle option "Neither agree nor disagree". This approach gave a reduced Sample 2 size and led to an information loss in Sample 2. Excluding all respondents that ticked the middle option in Sample 2 resulted in N = 212 to be added to Sample 1, which gave a combined Sample 1 and 2 with N = 1682, 51.0% of which were women.

4.4.4 Control Variable - Gender

Given the psychological literature on Big Five personality differences between men and women, as well as the political science literature on differences in political attitudes between the genders, it can be interesting to implement gender as a control variable in this study.¹¹⁷ To do this, the data was split into two groups, one for women and one for men. In order to retain a good sample size, the largest sample set, Sample 1 + 2, Method (a) with N = 2971, was used. Broken up by the sexes, the women's sample set was N = 1558 and the men's sample set was N = 1413.

¹¹⁷ Jason Reed, 'Gender Differences in Political Attitudes and Persuasion', *Race, Gender & Class*, vol. 13, no. 1/2, 2006. Available from: JSTOR. F. Pratto, L. M. Stallworth, and J. Sidanius, 'The gender gap: differences in political attitudes and social dominance orientation', *Br J Soc Psychol*, vol. 36 (Pt 1), 1997; Yanna J. Weisberg, Colin G. Deyoung, and Jacob B. Hirsh, 'Gender Differences in Personality across the Ten Aspects of the Big Five', *Frontiers in psychology*, vol. 2, 2011. Available from: PubMed.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the Big Five (Sample 1 + 2 Method a)

	Women (N = 1558)		Men (N = 1413)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Left- Right Scale (1 Left to 5 Right)	2.92	1.17	3.08	1.18
Openness (1 to 5)	3.07	1.01	2.95	1.02
Conscientiousness (1 to 5)	4.10	.76	3.95	.78
Extroversion (1 to 5)	3.68	.96	3.45	.97
Agreeableness (1 to 5)	3.81	.69	3.73	.72
Neuroticism (1 to 5)	2.63	.93	2.35	.89

As the descriptive statistics show, overall women were slightly more to the political left than men. Women also scored slightly higher than men in all Big Five domains.

5 Results

5.1 Sample 1 (2013)

Pearson correlations revealed that a political self-placement further to the right was related to lower Openness ($r = -.11, p < .01$), higher Conscientiousness ($r = .11, p < .01$), higher Extroversion ($r = .07, p < .01$) and lower Neuroticism ($r = -.15, p < .01$). Agreeableness did not correlate significantly with left-right political attitudes. The correlation between all Big Five factors and right wing political self-placement was $R = .20$.

Table 6. Associations between the broad five factor dimensions and left-right self-placement (Sample 1)

	Left-Right Scale
Openness	-.11**
Conscientiousness	.11**
Extroversion	.07**
Agreeableness	.01
Neuroticism	-.15**

Note: $p^{**} < .01$.

A multivariate regression analysis was then conducted using all broad Big Five factors to predict self-placement on the left-right scale. The overall model significantly predicted left-right self-placement, albeit with a small effect, $R^2 = .038$, $F(5, 1464) = 11.57, p < .01$.

As hypothesised, significant effects were shown for Openness ($\beta = -.13$), $t(1464) = -3.33, p < .01$; and Conscientiousness ($\beta = .15$), $t(1464) = 2.76, p < .01$. A significant effect was also shown for Neuroticism ($\beta = -.23$), $t(1464) = -4.58, p < .01$; but not for Extroversion or Agreeableness.

In order to determine if some items played a more important role in driving the significant predictors, a secondary multivariate regression analysis predicting self-placement on the left-right scale was conducted, containing the two items of all five broad domains. This test revealed that the significant domain-level effect of Openness was mainly driven by item O5R (artistic interests), ($\beta = -.08$), $t(1459) = -2.68, p < .01$, and to a lesser extent item O10 (active imagination), ($\beta = -.06$), $t(1459) = -1.77, p = 0.08$. The effect of Conscientiousness was driven by item C3R (laziness), ($\beta = .11$), $t(1459) = 2.71, p < .01$ but not item C8 (thorough job), ($\beta = .02$), $t(1459) = .32, p = .75$. The effect of Neuroticism was driven by item N4R

(stress-resistance), ($\beta = -.17$), $t(1459) = -3.62$, $p < .01$, and less by item N9 (nervousness), ($\beta = -.07$), $t(1459) = -1.65$, $p = .10$.

Another noteworthy aspect at this level of analysis was that item A7R (judgement), ($\beta = -.114$), $t(1459) = -2.67$, $p < .01$, actually showed to be a significant predictor for left-right self-placement. Together with item A2 (trust), ($\beta = .03$), $t(1459) = .62$, $p = .54$, it makes up the domain Agreeableness.

5.2 Sample 2 (2014)

A Pearson correlation test revealed that a more right-wing placement was related to lower Openness ($r = -.11$, $p < .01$), higher Conscientiousness ($r = .06$, $p < .05$), higher Agreeableness ($r = -.05$, $p < .05$), and lower Neuroticism ($r = -.09$, $p < .01$). In this sample, Extroversion did not correlate significantly with political self-placement. Correlation between all the Big Five factors and right-wing placement was $R = .14$. For the all the five Big Five variables together, as well as variables Openness, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism, the direction of correlation was the same as for Sample 1, and the strengths of the correlations were the same or somewhat lower.

Table 7. Associations between the broad five factor dimensions and left-right self-placement (Sample 2)

	Left-Right Scale
Openness	-.11**
Conscientiousness	.06*
Extroversion	.04
Agreeableness	.05*
Neuroticism	-.09**

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

A multivariate regression analysis was again conducted using all five broad Big Five factors in order to predict self-placement on the political scale. Again, the overall model significantly predicted left-right self-placement, however with a smaller effect than in the previous sample, $R^2 = .020$, $F(5, 1495) = 6.08$, $p < .01$.

As expected, a significant effect was again observed for Openness ($\beta = -.13$), $t(1495) = -3.74$, $p < .01$. However, Conscientiousness failed to significantly predict right-wing self-placement ($\beta = .05$), $t(1495) = 1.05$, $p = .29$. Instead, the only other significant predictor was again Neuroticism ($\beta = -.09$), $t(1495) = -2.27$, $p < .05$. Extroversion and Agreeableness did also not significantly predict left-right self-placement.

Searching for the driving aspects of the two significant domain-level predictors, another multivariate regression analysis predicting self-placement on the left-right scale was conducted, containing the two items of all broad Big Five

factors. The effect of Openness was again mainly driven by item O5R (artistic interests), ($\beta = -.11$), $t(1490) = -4.40$, $p < .01$, and not item O10 (active imagination), ($\beta = -.01$), $t(1490) = -.25$, $p = .80$. As in the previous sample, the effect of Neuroticism was driven by item N4R (stress-resistance), ($\beta = -.09$), $t(1490) = -2.38$, $p < .05$, but not item N9 (nervousness), ($\beta = -.01$), $t(1490) = -.35$, $p = .73$.

Despite Conscientiousness not being a significant domain-level predictor, its item C3R (laziness), ($\beta = .06$), $t(1490) = 1.96$, $p = .05$, was a significant predictor. This was also the case in Sample 1. The second item making up Conscientiousness, item C8 (thorough job), ($\beta = -.03$), $t(1490) = -.63$, $p = .53$, was negatively associated with right wing placement, which was not the case in Sample 1. It also had an unacceptable p -value.

5.3 Comparison

Comparing the results of Sample 1 and 2 further, one can note that Sample 2 yielded slightly lower results. Sample 2 had lower and less significant correlations. Moreover, in Sample 2, only two instead of three Big Five factors could predict left-right self-placement, and to a lesser extent. This is also reflected in the strength of the overall models, where Sample 1 produced $R = .20$, $R^2 = .04$ and Sample 2 produced a lower $R = .14$, $R^2 = .02$. Overall however, Sample 1 and 2 did not produce radically different results.

5.4 Sample 1 and 2 Combined

5.4.1 Method (a)

Table 8. Associations between the broad five factor dimensions and left-right self-placement (Sample 1 + 2 according to Methods a and b)

	Left-Right Scale	
	Method (a)	Method (b)
Openness	-.11**	-.11**
Conscientiousness	.08**	.10**
Extroversion	.06**	.08**
Agreeableness	.03	.03
Neuroticism	-.12**	-.16**

Note: $p^{**} < .01$. $p^* < .05$.

The overall Pearson's correlation between all Big Five factors and political self-placement was $R = .16$, which was lower than Sample 1 and higher than Sample 2. The multivariate regression analysis again used all five broad factors to predict self-

placement on the left-right scale, and yielded a predictive power that was slightly lower than Sample 1, and slightly higher than Sample 2; with $R^2 = .027$, $F(5, 2965) = 16.41$, $p < .01$. The coefficients of the individual Big Five domains did not produce anything substantially different from the above-presented results, and are therefore not discussed further.

5.4.2 Method (b)

A Pearson's correlation test was conducted, showing that the correlation between all the Big Five factors and political self-placement went up to $R = .24$. A multivariate regression analysis was then conducted using all five broad Big Five factors to predict self-placement on the left-right scale. Compared with Sample 1, this model very slightly increased the predicting power, with $R^2 = .039$, $F(5, 1676) = 13.50$, $p < .01$. The coefficients were again not deemed to be noteworthy of discussion.

5.5 Control Variable - Gender

The results so far showed that personality does significantly predict placement on the left-right scale. These effects were however rather small, meaning that there is a large amount of the variance that stands to be explained. A lot of other possible variables go into determining political attitudes than personality. Gender was taken in as a control variable.

Another multivariate regression analysis was run. The results showed that for women, the Big Five significantly predicted political ideology with $R^2 = .021$, $F(5, 1552) = 6.55$, $p < .01$. The Pearson's correlation between all five factors and the left-right scale was $R = .14$. Looking at only men, the Big Five significantly predicted left-right self-placement to a higher degree, $R^2 = .033$, $F(5, 1407) = 9.70$, $p < .01$. The Pearson's correlation between all five factors and the left-right scale was higher, $R = .18$. Again, the coefficients of the Big Five factors will not be discussed in detail as they did not produce anything noteworthy when compared to the previous results.

6 Discussion

The research question of this essay was *What effect does personality have on left-right identification in Sweden?* The first part of this chapter discusses and interprets the results of the analysis. The second part of this chapter discusses some threats to validity.

6.1 Interpretation

Table 9. Hypotheses and results

Hypothesis	Expected result	Result
H ₁	Persons higher in trait Openness will tend to be on the political left.	Supported
H ₂	Persons higher in trait Conscientiousness will tend to be on the political right.	Supported
H ₃	There will be no significant relationships between the other three trait dimensions and left-right self-identification.	Refuted

This study has demonstrated that for the Swedish sample, personality as measured by the Big Five model seems to be significantly associated with political attitudes, ranging between $R = .14$ to $R = .24$. Moreover, the Big Five do significantly predict left-right self-placement, although with a small effect. Thereby, the null hypothesis can be rejected.

Sample 1 showed that scoring further to the right on the left-right scale was related to lower Openness and higher Conscientiousness. Hypotheses H₁ and H₂ could therefore be supported for Sample 1. Unexpectedly, higher Extroversion and lower Neuroticism also correlated with right-wing political attitudes. H₃ must therefore be refuted for Sample 1. Summed up, this analysis showed that people on the political right were lower in Openness and in Neuroticism, and higher in Conscientiousness and in Extroversion.

Sample 2 presented similar results, again showing that a more right-wing placement was associated with lower Openness, higher Conscientiousness (although only significant at the 0.05 level), and lower Neuroticism. This sample also showed positive correlations with Agreeableness (also significant at the 0.05 level), but no association with Extroversion. As for Sample 1, hypotheses H₁ and H₂ could be supported, and H₃ had to be refuted. In other words, Sample 2 showed

that people on the political right scored lower in Openness and in Neuroticism, and higher in Conscientiousness and in Agreeableness.

When comparing Sample 1 and 2, one can note that they did not show radically different results. This seems to support the notion that they were in fact representative for the same population. Still, Sample 2 produced slightly lower correlations. This could be explained with the personality item scale in Sample 2 including a middle option of “Neither agree nor disagree”. Removing this middle option from Sample 2 according to Method (b) did in fact raise the overall correlation between the Big Five factors and the political attitudes to $R = .21$ and its predictive power to $R^2 = .04$, $F(5, 206) = 1.81$, $p = .11$. However, this result was not significant, probably since the removal of the middle option decreased the sample size to $N = 212$.

Combining Sample 1 and 2 according to Method (b) produced the highest correlation values in this study. The combination of Sample 1 and 2 according to Method (a) gave correlation values that were somewhere in the middle of Sample 1 and 2, which was to be expected.

The control variable of gender gave further insights. The descriptive statistics showed that women were slightly further to the political left than men. Women also scored slightly higher in all Big Five dimensions. However, the analysis did not yield dramatic differences between the genders, but showed that for men, personality was a greater predictor of right-wing placement than it was for women.

When discussing the strength of the correlations, one can note that Neuroticism in fact was the strongest across all four sample sets, except for Sample 2. This is noteworthy since the expected result was to not find any correlation between Neuroticism and political attitudes at all. Further, one can state that after Neuroticism, it was Openness and Conscientiousness that were the strongest correlated with political attitudes. The direction of the two hypothesised dimensions Openness and Conscientiousness also went in the same direction as has been shown in the international literature. In the cases were the other two dimensions, Agreeableness and Extroversion, significantly correlated with political attitudes, the relationships were very small, and the significance at times at the 0.05 level only.

One can state that the correlations in this study, as well as the effects, were rather small when compared to similar studies in the international literature. When these results are compared with the previous Swedish research conducted by Holmberg et al., there are some similarities and differences.¹¹⁸ Holmberg’s study also found rather low correlations between personality and political orientation, with the highest dimension being Neuroticism with $r = -.14$. Also in this present study Neuroticism was the highest correlated in all sample sets, except for in Sample 2. Holmberg’s research also found evidence for some of the same patterns that were found in this study, namely that right-wing political leanings are associated with lower Neuroticism, lower Openness, and higher Extroversion. In their study, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness however were not even statistically significant on a bivariate level.¹¹⁹ Their results for using all Big Five

¹¹⁸ Holmberg, Weibull, and Gunnarson.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. P.129.

domains as explanatory factors for left-right self-placement gave $R^2 = .026$, which is also in line with this essay's findings.¹²⁰

6.2 Threats to Validity

6.2.1 Independent Variables

The internal consistency of the Five Factor domains in the two sample sets was moderate, with an average $\alpha = .41$ for Sample 1 and an average $\alpha = .38$ for Sample 2. Especially low consistency was shown for Agreeableness, with .09 (Sample 1) and .08 (Sample 2). The developers of the BFI-10 scale, Rammstedt and John, suggest there may be a deficiency in the Agreeableness scale, and recommend introducing a third item: "Is considerate and kind to almost everyone", which has shown to raise its consistency.¹²¹

Running a Pearson's correlation test on the largest sample set Sample 1 + 2 Method (a) between each Big Five domain's two items showed that some of the domain items had a low intercorrelation. The inter-item correlation of Openness was modest with $r = .15$. As expected, the two items making up Agreeableness barely correlated with $r = .05$. The inter-item correlations for the other dimensions showed Conscientiousness, $r = .23$, Extroversion, $r = .47$ and Neuroticism, $r = .42$. All were significant at the 0.01 level except Agreeableness, which was significant at the 0.05 level.

This was also notable when discussing which item was the main driver for the domain-level predictors. In Sample 1, A7R was negatively associated with right-wing placement, whilst A2 was positively associated with right-wing placement. This divergence, together with the unacceptable p -value of A2, may explain the failure of Agreeableness to significantly predict political attitudes. A similar issue arose for Conscientiousness in Sample 2. Remember that Conscientiousness was not a significant domain-level predictor. Its item C3R however, was a significant predictor, being positively associated with right-wing placement. Its second item C8, was negatively associated with right-wing placement.

Low inter-item correlations and internal consistency is not a problem per se, depending on what it is the items are in fact measuring. If the items are merely each other's controls, then they should be highly correlated, and there should be a high consistency. Ludeke and Larsen go so far as to caution against using the BFI-10 due to its low inter-item correlations:

¹²⁰ Holmberg, Weibull, and Gunnarson. P.131.

¹²¹ Beatrice Balgiu, 'The psychometric properties of the Big Five inventory-10 (BFI-10) including correlations with subjective and psychological well-being', *Global Journal of Psychology Research: New Trends and Issues*, vol. 8, 2018. See also Rammstedt and John.

If two items intended as the sole indicators of a trait do not correlate with each other, there is no reason to suppose that either item provides any meaningful information about that trait in that population. Conclusions from existing published work using this data [...] should be carefully reconsidered in this light.¹²²

Although, if the items are measuring different facets that together make up each Big Five factor, low inter-item correlations and internal consistency are only natural. Besides, lower internal consistency is to be expected given that the BFI-10 is an extra-short scale with only two items per factor. Instruments with a larger amount of items produce higher internal consistencies. The consistency values in this study were in line with the consistency of some other studies using the BFI-10.¹²³

Another threat to validity may be the recoding of the personality battery's scales. The Sample 1 scales were first recoded so as to go from the negative to the positive. Later on, an empty middle option was introduced in order to be able to combine Sample 1 with Sample 2. In the alternative combination method, the middle option was removed from Sample 2. These are alterations of the original information. The survey respondents may be more or less likely to pick an answer depending on if the scale ranges from the negative to the positive, or if it is reversed. The inclusion of the middle option of "Neither agree or agree" makes for a substantially different scale than if it is left out. Another difference between the two sample sets may be the placement of the relevant questions in the form. Depending on how many questions a respondent had already gone through, respondent fatigue may have set in, perhaps even making the middle option more attractive.

The rather low correlations in this study could also be explained by the usage of the short BFI-10. An instrument with more items, such as the BFI-44 or the NEO-PI-R, might be expected to produce higher correlations.

6.2.2 Dependent Variable

Most of the international research, where the correlations showed to be higher, was conducted in the anglosphere, mainly in the USA. Many of these studies used the two main parties; Democrats - Republicans, or proxies thereof; Liberal - Conservative or Left - Right, as their dependent variable, either using a scale or classes. In the context of the Swedish multiparty parliamentary system, problems may arise when using the left-right scale. When presented with a five-point left-right scale, it may be more difficult for the Swedish respondent to place themselves than it is for the American respondent. The complexity of the classification increases as the number of parties increase. Also, whether the Swedish survey respondent interprets the left-right scale as primarily an indicator of economic policies or social policies may also affect her self-placement. Given these differences, it is then fair to expect the Swedish results to become less clear.

¹²² Steven G. Ludeke and Erik Gahner Larsen, 'Problems with the Big Five assessment in the World Values Survey', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 112, 2017. P.105.

¹²³ Balgiu. P.66.

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay has studied the effect of personality on political orientation in Sweden. Prompted by international findings of relationships between some Big Five personality traits and political attitudes, it sought to investigate if and how these findings are also valid for the Swedish population.

Was Ralph Waldo Emerson correct, then, in attributing the “irreconcilable antagonism” between the left and the right to the “human constitution”? In other words, does personality affect political orientation? Based on the results of this study, yes – albeit to a small extent. Summed up, the analyses of the four sample sets showed that Swedes further to the political right were lower in Openness, lower in Neuroticism, and higher in Conscientiousness. It is therefore safe to say that personality factors do have a small effect on political orientation. However, based on this essay’s findings, personality cannot be the only, or even dominant explanatory factor for the divide between the political sides.

The results of this Swedish case concur with the international literature, giving further support to the growing body of research that demonstrates right-wingers to be higher in Conscientiousness and left-wingers to be higher in Openness. On top of that, this study’s results were in agreement with previous Swedish research, as it showed that Swedish right-wingers tend to also be lower in Neuroticism.

Compared with the international literature, the personality differences between the Swedish political sides were of a more modest magnitude. Future research would do well to build on this essay’s findings and explore the Swedish case more thoroughly. Such research would benefit not only from using a lengthier and more accurate measurement instrument for the Five Factor Model, but also from broadening the measure for political orientation, looking at specific measures of social and economic political attitudes, party preference, and ideology. That would determine whether the results presented in this essay are due to Sweden being an outlier, or due to the employed measurements. Given the arguably increasing polarisation between the political left and right in Sweden and abroad, this topic is a valuable and relevant, yet understudied field of research.

8 Bibliography

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9 Appendices

9.1 Big Five Inventory 10 SE 2013

F109 I vilken utsträckning stämmer följande påståenden in på dig?

Jag ser mig själv som någon som:	Stämmer helt	Stämmer ganska bra	Stämmer inte särskilt bra	Stämmer inte alls
... är reserverad	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
... är i allmänhet tillitsfull	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
... tenderar att vara lat	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
... är avspänd, hanterar stress väl	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
... har få konstnärliga intressen	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
... är utåtriktad, sällskaplig	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
... tenderar att hitta fel hos andra	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
... gör ett grundligt jobb	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
... blir lätt nervös	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
... har livlig fantasi	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
... har en förlåtande läggning	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

9.2 Big Five Inventory 10 SE 2014

F80 I vilken utsträckning stämmer följande påståenden in på dig?

Jag ser mig själv som någon som:	Stämmer absolut inte	Stämmer ganska dåligt	Stämmer varken bra eller dåligt	Stämmer ganska bra	Stämmer absolut
... är reserverad	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... är i allmänhet tillitsfull	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... tenderar att vara lat	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... är avspänd, hanterar stress väl	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... har få konstnärliga intressen	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... är utåtriktad, sällskaplig	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... tenderar att hitta fel hos andra	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... gör ett grundligt jobb	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... blir lätt nervös	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... har livlig fantasi	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

9.3 Left – Right Scale SE

**Man talar ibland om att politiska åsikter kan placeras in på en vänster–högerskala.
Var någonstans skulle du placera dig själv på en sådan skala?**

Klart till vänster (1)	Något till vänster (2)	Varken till vänster eller till höger (3)	Något till höger (4)	Klart till höger (5)
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