

Public Servants' Online Political Activity: Investigating the Role of Personality

By

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Abstract: As social media has become a permeating aspect of our lives—including our political relationships with other citizens and the state—several governments, public service commissions and public sector unions in Westminster countries have voiced concerns that political activity online by public sector employees might threaten the reputed impartiality of the public service. While recent studies show that on a glandular level, public sector employees are less politically active online than other citizens, little more is known about this subject. This article advances this literature by moving beyond general trends between public and private sector employees, to focus on explaining variation in public servants' behavior at the individual level stemming from underlying personality traits. Analysis of survey data from Canada, first shows that while public servants are less politically active online, there is substantive variation among public servants' according to their levels of Openness, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness. These findings suggest that personality traits that push public servants to follow, or question, institutional norms in part explain their disposition to engage or refrain from online political activity.

Keywords: Impartiality, Personality trait, Political activity, Public servants, Social media.

For countries whose elected governments rely on the impartial work of a non-partisan public service, the political activity of public servants on social media has become a tricky issue. On the one hand, social media platforms offer citizens a remarkable opportunity to gather political information, express political opinions and discuss public affairs (Jha & Kodila-Tedika, 2020). Yet on the other hand, given the speed and breadth with which content on social media can be shared (Woodley & Silverstri, 2014), the online political activity of citizens who are also public servants has been seen as a potential threat to the reputed impartiality of the public service.

Over the last ten years, in an effort to protect the public service's impartiality, various governments, public service commissions and public sector unions have produced guidelines and held workshops informing public servants about the potential dangers of being politically active on social media behavior (Jacobson and Tufts 2013; Grube, 2017). While these do not forbid public servants from being politically active online, researchers have noted the strong risk-averse tone of these messages (Clarke and Piper 2018; Gray 2018).

Recent studies of public sector employees' online political activity suggests that these cautious messages may be working. Public sector employees appear to be less politically active online than other citizens (Cooper, 2020a; 2022); a stark contrast to past research finding that public sector employees are more active in a variety of traditional offline political deeds (Brewer, 2003; Taylor, 2010; Ertas, 2015; Piatak, 2015). Yet while public servants are seemingly less politically active online, this is not universally the case.

This article advances this literature by moving beyond general trends between public and private sector employees, to focus on explaining variation in *public servants'* online political activity by investigating the role of personality traits. Drawing upon personality trait research, this article considers each Big5 personality trait—Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Openness and Neuroticism—and hypothesizes about whether these might be particularly important in explaining public servants' inclination to be politically active online. Using multivariate regression, this article investigates the online political activity of public servants with survey data from Canada, a country with a Westminster administrative tradition, where non-partisanship and impartiality are embedded public service values (Rhodes et al., 2009; Cooper, 2020).

Initial analysis of the direct effects of the Big5 as well as the direct effect of being a public servant finds relationships consistent with extant research in public administration and political psychology (Mondak, 2010; Mondak and Halperin, 2008; Gerber et al., 2011). Being a public servant significantly and substantively reduces the probability of engaging in online political activity. Meanwhile, Extraversion and Conscientiousness have consistent, significant, and substantive relationships with being politically active online.

Subsequent, more novel analysis, investigating the dynamic between personality traits and being a public servant, however, uncovers a more complex story. Among public servants, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness and Openness are associated with statistically significant and substantive changes in the probability of engaging in some online politically activities. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that the exact nature of the relationship personality traits have with political behavior depends on the institutional context individuals are embedded within (Mondak, 2010). As such, this article contributes to behavioral public administration by paying greater attention to institutional context (Bertelli et al., 2022), and sheds some light on the extent to which the effectiveness of government messages aimed at altering public servants' behavior might vary, or even depend, on employees' underlying personality traits.

The remainder of this article is comprised of four sections. The next section reviews what we know about public sector employees' political activity and the relationship between personality and political behavior. Doing so, it specifies hypotheses concerning the direct effect of being a public servant and the direct effect of each Big5 trait on citizens' online political behavior, and more originally, hypothesizes about the dynamic between personality traits and public servants' online political activity. The second section reviews the data and methods used to test the hypotheses and the third section reports and interprets the empirical results. The conclusion identifies the main theoretical and empirical contributions of this study, considers its limitations, and identifies how these can be addressed in future research.

Theory

Public servants' political behavior. A longstanding finding within public administration is that because public sector employees are more inclined to serve their community and have a greater

interest to be involved in politics and policymaking (Moynihan and Pandey, 2007; Charbonneau and Van Ryzin, 2017) they tend to be more politically active than other citizens (Brewer, 2003; Taylor, 2010; Ertas, 2015; Piatak, 2015).

Noting the prevalence of cautious messages stemming from governments, public service commissions and public service unions about the potential threat online political activity presents to the public servants' reputed impartiality, (Jacobson and Tufts 2013; Grube, 2017; Clarke and Piper 2018; Gray 2018), recent research has questioned whether public sector employment has a positive relationship with political activities online. Studying the political activity of Canadians in 2015, Cooper (2020) finds that while public sector employment is positively associated with traditional offline political activities, unionized public sector employment is negatively related to online activities. Likewise studying the political activity of Australians in 2010, 2013 and 2016, Cooper (2022) finds that public sector employment is negatively related to online political activity, and that this relationship has grown overtime in tandem with increased government messaging about the threat online activities present to the public service's impartiality. Noting these findings, Cooper (2020; 2022) concludes that a central reason why public sector employees have become less politically active online is because public sector employees are mindful of these cautious messages.

Despite these important findings, there are some limitations with the present literature, which this study seeks to address. First, although the theoretical focus of this scholarship has focused on the threat social media presents to the public service's impartiality (Grube, 2017; Clarke and Piper 2018; Gray 2018), to date, empirical research has investigated the behavior of *public sector employees* (Cooper, 2020; Cooper 2022), which is a broader segment of the labor force often comprising professions such as nurses, teachers and social workers, than the more restricted public service. A second limitation is that while extant research shows us that public sector employees are generally speaking less politically active online than other citizens, we know very little about factors that might explain variation in public servants' disposition to be politically active online. This article seeks to address the above two limitations by investigating the role of personality traits among public servants.

Personality and public administration. In 1940 Merton’s *Bureaucratic Structure and Personality*, optimistically concluded that, “the range of theoretically significant and practically important questions [concerning the interaction of bureaucracy and personality] would seem to be limited only by the accessibility of the concrete data” (p. 568). While the dearth of interest public administration scholars have given to personality in the 85 years since his seminal piece would likely disappoint Merton (Nørgaard, 2018), things have recently begun to change (Aarøe et al., 2021; Bromberg and Charbonneau, 2020; van Witteloostuijn et al. 2017; Cooper, 2020b; Hjortskov, 2021). Recent scholarship has drawn upon psychology to understand how personality influences various aspects of public administration, including employees’ job satisfaction (Cooper et al., 2014), decision-making (Filiz and Battagile, 2017), and organizational citizenship behavior (Cooper et al., 2013b).

With respect to better understanding public servants’ online political activity, research in psychology and behavioral political science, provides us with the wherewithal to think about why some public servants might be less politically active online whereas others are not. Our discussion first considers the direct effects these traits might have on citizens propensity to be politically active online before considering how these personality traits might be partially relevant, or not, for public servants. Table 1 summarizes these hypotheses.

Table 1. Summary of hypotheses

Hypothesis	
H1	Being a public servant has a negative relationship with being politically active online.
H2	Extraversion has a positive relationship with being politically active online.
H3	Agreeableness has a negative relationship with being politically active online.
H4	Conscientiousness has a negative relationship with being politically active online.
H5	Neuroticism has a negative relationship with being politically active online.
H6	Openness has a positive relationship with being politically active online.
H7	The relationship personality traits have with online political activity is different for public servants than other citizens.

Personality's direct effects on political behavior. Personality traits are stable psychological characteristics, whose origin stem from both genetics and early socialization, and which affect individuals' behavior (Mondak, 2010). A dominant model of trait personality within psychology (McCrae, 1996; McCrae and Costa, 1987), and researchers in various social sciences (Cooper et al., 2013b; Bergeron & Galipeau, 2021), is the Big5 (also known as the Five-Factor Mode), comprised of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness.

Research in behavioral political science finds that the Big5 are important explanatory component of citizens' political behavior (Mondak, 2010; Gerber et al., 2010), but that each trait varies in its significance and substance. Table 2 summarizes the Big5 traits.

Table 2. The Big5 personality traits

Personality trait	Affirmative lexical description	Negative lexical description
Extraversion	Outgoing; Loquacious	Inward-looking; Reserved
Agreeableness	Cooperative; Sympathetic	Combative; Hostile
Conscientiousness	Responsible; Industrious	Carless; Unreliable
Neuroticism	Anxious; Tense	Unperturbed; Stable
Openness	Non-conformist; Imaginative	Conventional; Conformist

Extraversion. Extraverted individuals exhibit an energized assertiveness and desire to socialize with others (Walker, 2020). Higher levels of extraversion has been shown to be an important predictor of many political activities that contain a social dimension such as attending a political meeting (Mondak, 2010). While it might be the case that the physical solitude of social media could encourage people low in extraversion to be active online, the overall desire to interact with others leads us to hypothesize that extraversion has a positive relationship.

Agreeableness. Individuals with a high level of agreeableness prioritize maintaining positive interpersonal relationships (Tobin and Graziano, 2020). Extant research has theorized that individuals high in agreeableness shy away from some political activities, especially when there is the potential for conflict or disagreement. Research, however, has found mixed results often finding that agreeableness has a negative, or no relationship with political behavior. Following the

theoretical ground of past studies we hypothesize a negative relationship between agreeableness and online political activity.

Conscientiousness. Conscientious individuals are hardworking, reliable and self-controlled (Ken, 2020). Conscientious individuals are seen as responsible citizens upholding society's "moral and social compass" (Ken, 2020 p. 123). Some research has found that Conscientiousness is negatively related political behavior, believed to be because conscientious individuals are so committed to their duties in their personal (e.g. family, religion) and professional lives (career) they do not have a high degree of interest or capacity to participate in political activities (Mondak, 2010).

Neuroticism. Neurotic individuals are uneasy and emotionally unstable, especially in times of uncertainty (Zhang, 2020). As such individuals with a high level of neuroticism tend to cope poorly with stress and tend to be impulsive. Some research has found that Neuroticism has no relationship with being political active whereas others have found a negative relationship.

Openness. Openness is associated with non-conformist and divergent thinking. Open individuals are intellectually curious, imaginative and seek out new experiences, whereas individuals low in openness are more interested in convention and tradition, intellectually firm and at ease with routine (Sparkman, 2020). Extant research has found that Openness is linked to engaging in political activity (Mondak, 2010).

Personality's moderated relationship among public servants. Moving beyond direct effects, others suggests that personality's relationship with political behavior depends on an individual's institutional context (Gerber et al. 2010; Mondak, 2010). This research leads us to expect that personality's affect on the disposition to be politically active online might be different for public servants than other citizens. Importantly, public servants are presently working within an institutional context imbued with messages reiterating the primacy of the public sector value of impartiality and asking public servants to be mindful that political activity on social media may

jeopardize this value. Accordingly, those personality traits associated with respecting authority, displaying institutional loyalty and fulfillment of obligations and duties might have a more pronounced relationship with public servants' disposition to be politically active online than found among the general citizenry.

Extant research leads us to expect that among the Big5 traits, Conscientiousness and Openness might particularly have more pronounced relationships among public servants. Conscientiousness is tied to being loyal and dutiful to the organizations one belongs to, including one's workplace. Accordingly, given the messages reiterating the importance of maintain an image of impartiality, Conscientious public servants might be particularly adverse to being politically active online.

Another personality trait that might have a more pronounced relationship among public servants is Openness. Given that Openness is tied to questioning and challenging traditional conventions and norms, it is possible that servants with a high degree of Openness may not heed the overall messages of caution about the threat to impartiality presented by online political activity. Among public servants, Openness may have a more pronounced positive relationship with online political activity given that political activity on social media is more of a rebellious non-conformist activity within their present institutional context.

Data and Methods

Case selection and data. The hypotheses are tested using survey data from the 2019 Canada Election Study, Online Survey (CES) (Stephenson et al., 2019). The CES is similar to election studies administered in others countries, and since first conducted in 1965 has been frequently used to study citizens' political behavior (Kanji et al., 2012). The 2019 CES, Online Survey is a two wave panel collected just before (September and October) and after (October and November) the 2019 federal election of Canadian citizens and permanent residents of at least 18 years old. The questions measuring our variables of interest limit our use to observations of individuals participating in the post-election. To ensure quality data the CES checked for, and removed, responses for questionable practices such as straight-line respondents, speedy respondents and duplicate respondents.

Variable operationalization. Appendix A outlines the measurement and operationalization of the independent, dependent and control variables. The Big5 traits were each measured on a seven-point scale using a lexical approach with a separate question (one affirmative and one negative) for each trait.

In addition to measuring respondents' sector of employment, the CES asked respondents in an open answer format "What is your main occupation?" Answers to this question were used to identify individuals who work for the public service. Appendix B provides the complete list of occupations coded as public servant. One limitation of this measurement is that it provides a conservative estimate of being a public servant. Some individuals who work for the public service might not have completed the more demanding open answer question format or might have opted to provide an answer reflecting their profession such as lawyer, scientist or accountant rather than identifying themselves as a public servant. The analysis limited itself to individuals who are presently working. Former public servants will not likely be aware and prioritize maintaining a reputation of impartiality as much as employed public servants.

Two separate outcomes are used as dependent variables. The first dependent variable measures whether an individual discussed politics with others on social media at least once within the last 12 months. The second dependent variable measures whether the respondent followed a political candidate and/or a political party on social media at least once within the last 12 months. The models also control for several variables that might affect an individual's ability and desire to participate in politics and social media such as gender, age, education, interest in politics and province of residence. Table 3 provides the summary statistics of all variables. The means and standard deviations are similar to existing studies suggesting a reliable dataset.

Methods. The empirical approach contains two steps. An initial analysis looks at the direct effect of being a public servant and the direct effect of each Big5 trait have on the dependent variables (hypotheses 1-6). Table 4 presents the results from these regression models. Figure 1 displays the predictive probability of engaging in each outcome according to being a public servant or not, and Figures 2-6 display the predictive probability of the dependent variables according to differing values of each Big5 trait.

Table 3. Summary statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max	N
Discussed politics on social media	.31	.46	0	1	1 713
Followed candidate/party on social media	.34	.47	0	1	1 708
Public servant	.03	.16	0	1	1 713
Extraversion	3.83	1.42	1	7	1 713
Agreeableness	5.04	1.09	1	7	1 713
Conscientiousness	5.57	1.08	1	7	1 713
Neuroticism	3.16	1.25	1	7	1 713
Openness	4.82	1.10	1	7	1 713
Union	.32	.47	0	1	1 713
Gender					
• Female	.53	.50	0	1	1 713
• Male	.46	.50	0	1	1 713
• Non-binary	.01	.09	0	1	1 713
Age	45.92	12.70	19	99	1 713
Political interest	6.47	2.40	0	10	1 713
Education					
• High school or less	.12	.32	0	1	1 713
• Some post-secondary	.38	.49	0	1	1 713
• Bachelor's	.34	.47	0	1	1 713
• Graduate	.17	.37	0	1	1 713
Province					
• British Columbia	.13	.34	0	1	1 713
• Alberta	.14	.34	0	1	1 713
• Saskatchewan	.04	.20	0	1	1 713
• Manitoba	.05	.21	0	1	1 713
• Ontario	.41	.49	0	1	1 713
• Quebec	.15	.36	0	1	1 713
• New Brunswick	.03	.16	0	1	1 713
• Nova Scotia	.03	.17	0	1	1 713
• Prince Edward Island	.01	.08	0	1	1 713
• Newfoundland & Labrador	.02	.15	0	1	1 713

The second analysis tests hypothesis 7 and investigates whether the relationship personality traits have with online activity is different for public servants. This is done by including a two-way interaction effect between being a public servant and personality (one separate model for each personality trait). Appendix C shows the results of five moderated models. Predicted probabilities of engaging in each of these online activities according to each personality trait and work environment and are used to interpret the results from these moderated relationships (Figures 7-11).

Results and Discussion

Direct effects: Personality traits and online political activity. The results shown in Table 4 and Figure 1 support hypothesis 1. Being a public servant has a negative significant and substantive association with being politically active online. While this finding is consistent with extant research looking at public sector employees (Cooper, 2020; 2022), it is notable that the difference between public servants and non-public servants is more substantive than these past studies (), which is unsurprising given that the theoretical focus of past research has been on the messages of caution specifically aimed at public servants.

Table 4 and Figures 2-6 show that the Big5 have a direct relationship with citizens online political activity. Providing strong support for hypotheses 2 and 4, Extraversion (Figure 2) and Conscientiousness (Figure 4, consistently have significant and substantive associations with both the probability of discussing politics on social media and following a candidate and/or political party on social media. With the probability of these online political activities increasing with Extraversion and decreasing alongside Conscientiousness. Meanwhile Neuroticism (Figure 5) and Openness (Figure 6) have statistically significant positive relationships with discussing politics on social media but fail to have a significant relationship with following a political candidate and/or a political party. Agreeableness (Figure 3) is the only personality trait that fails to have a significant relationship with either of the dependent variables.

Table 4. Regression models I and II: Direct effects

Model	Social media: Discussed politics		Social media: Followed candidate/party	
	I	II	I	II
	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>
Public servant	.53 ⁺	.19	.48*	.162
Extraversion	1.09*	.047	1.11*	.047
Agreeableness	.93	.057	1.03	.058
Conscientiousness	.85**	.049	.80***	.046
Neuroticism	1.15**	.059	1.05	.05
Openness	1.17**	.069	1.07	.06
Union	1.06	.133	.97	.118
Gender				
• Female	1.12	.137	1.13	.133
• Male	(<i>ref.</i>)		(<i>ref.</i>)	
• Non-binary	.78	.423	.52	.293
Age	.97***	.005	.98***	.005
Political interest	1.38***	.041	1.39***	.041
Education				
• High school or less	(<i>ref.</i>)		(<i>ref.</i>)	
• Some post-secondary	1.06	.204	.92	.175
• Bachelor's	.95	.191	1.01	.198
• Graduate	1.40	.311	.90	.196
Province	Yes		Yes	
N	1 713		1 708	
Pseudo R ²	.13		.11	
Constant	.15**	.092	.24*	.142

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; + p < 0.1.

Reporting Odd ratio (OR).

Figure 1. Public Servants' online political activity

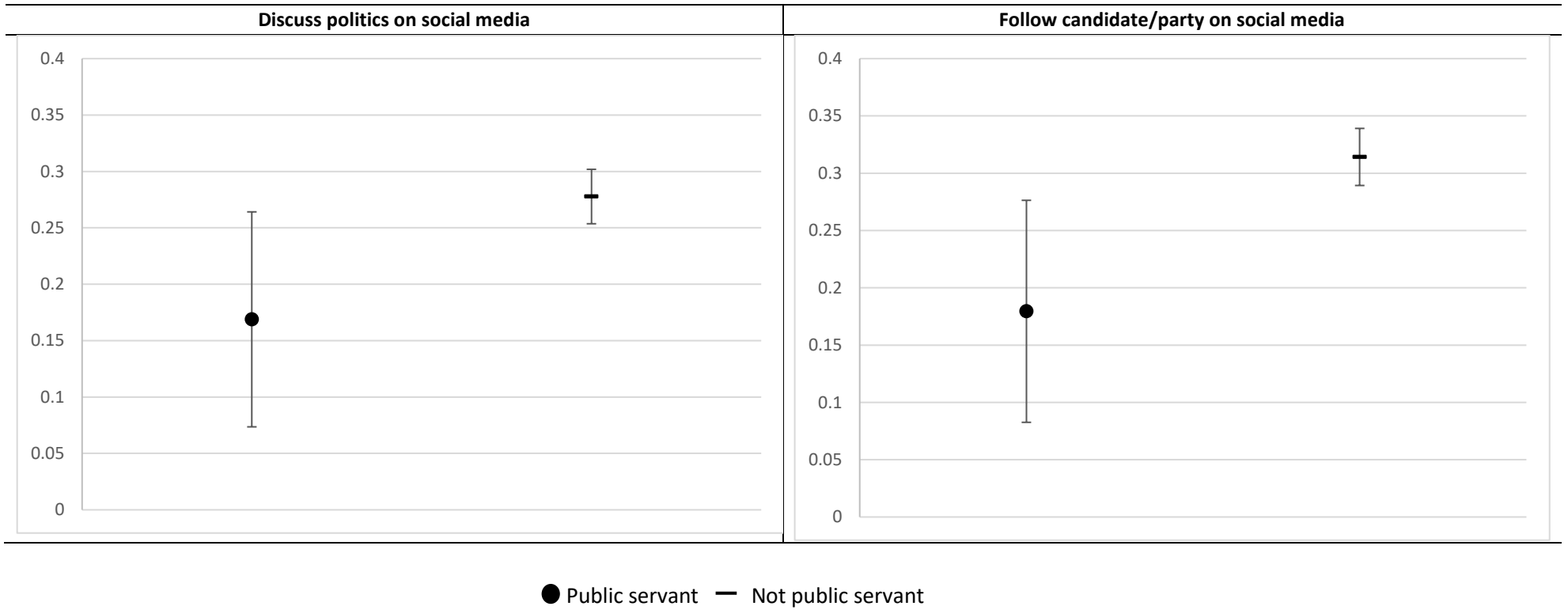


Figure 2. Extraversion and online political activity

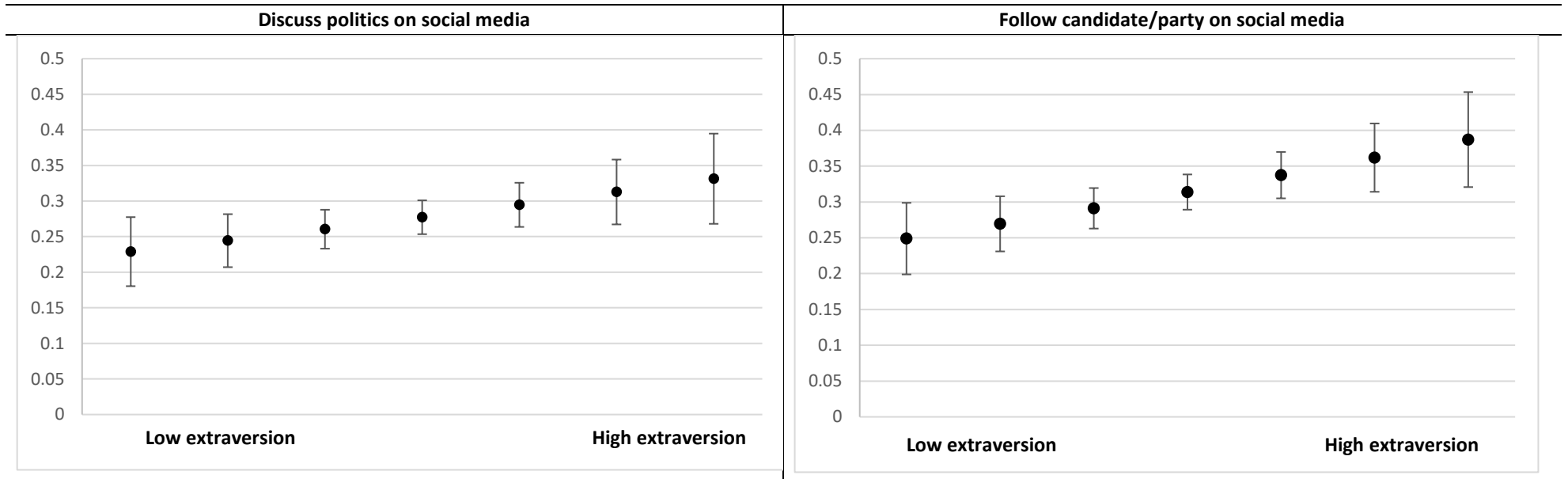


Figure 3. Agreeableness and online political activity

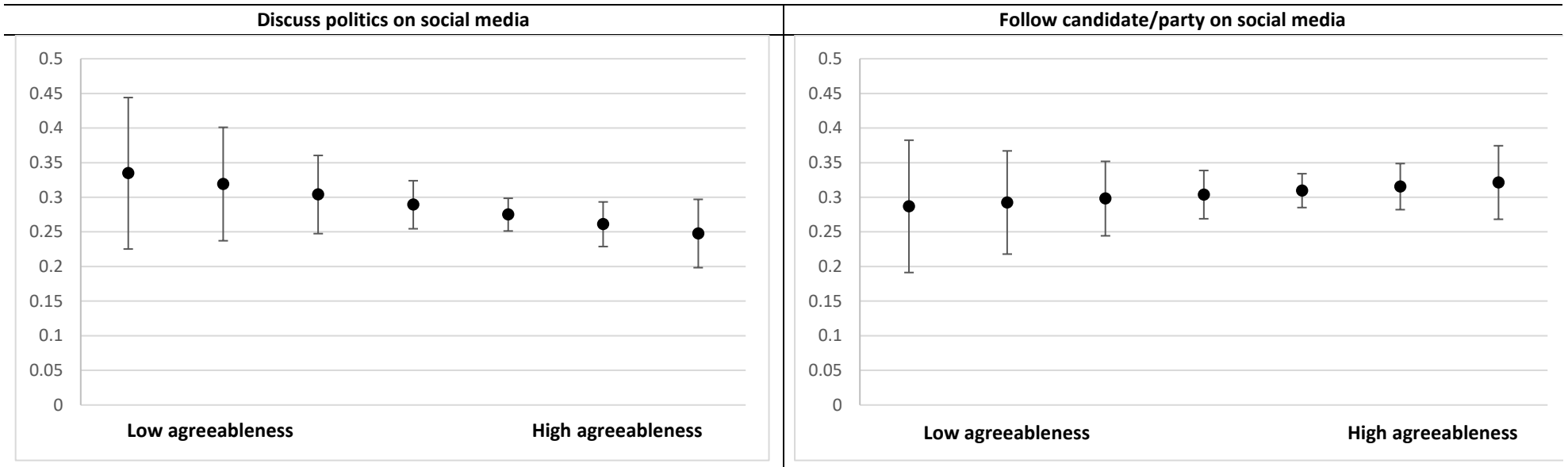


Figure 4. Conscientiousness and online political activity

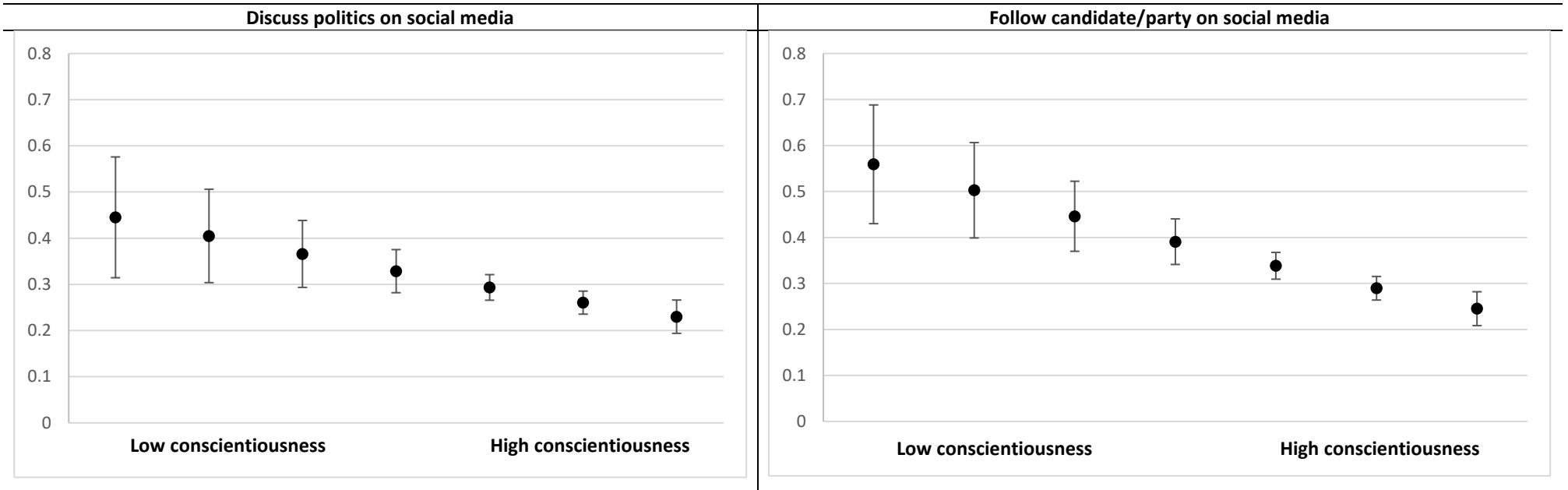


Figure 5. Neuroticism and online political activity

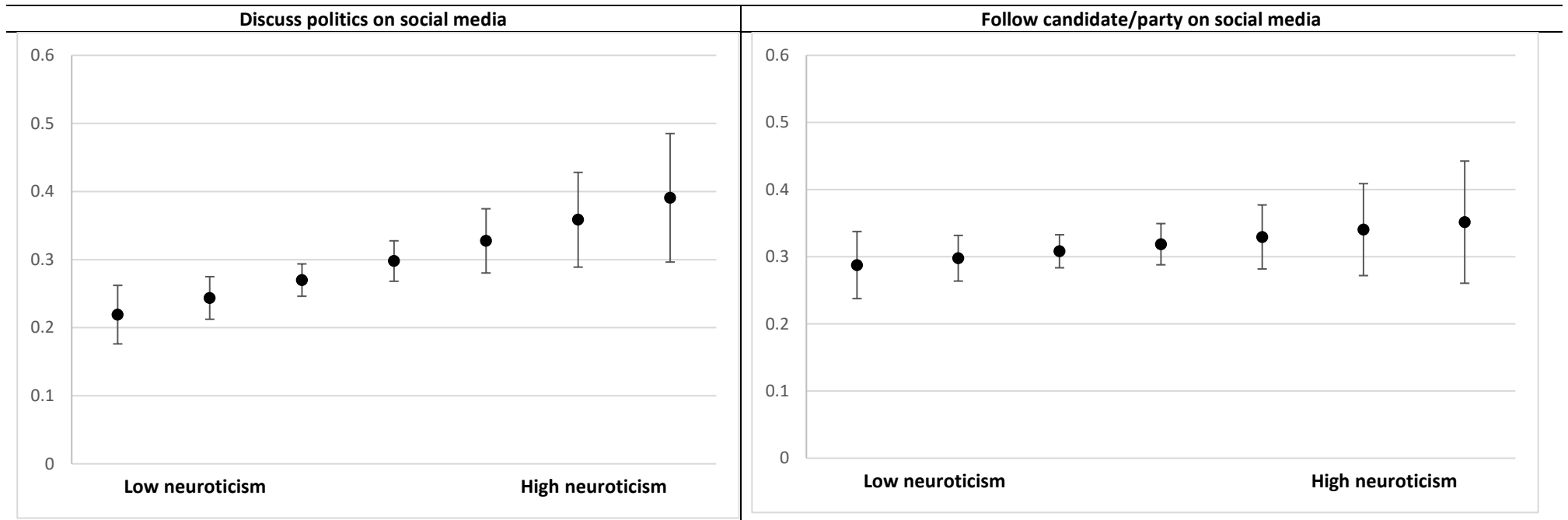
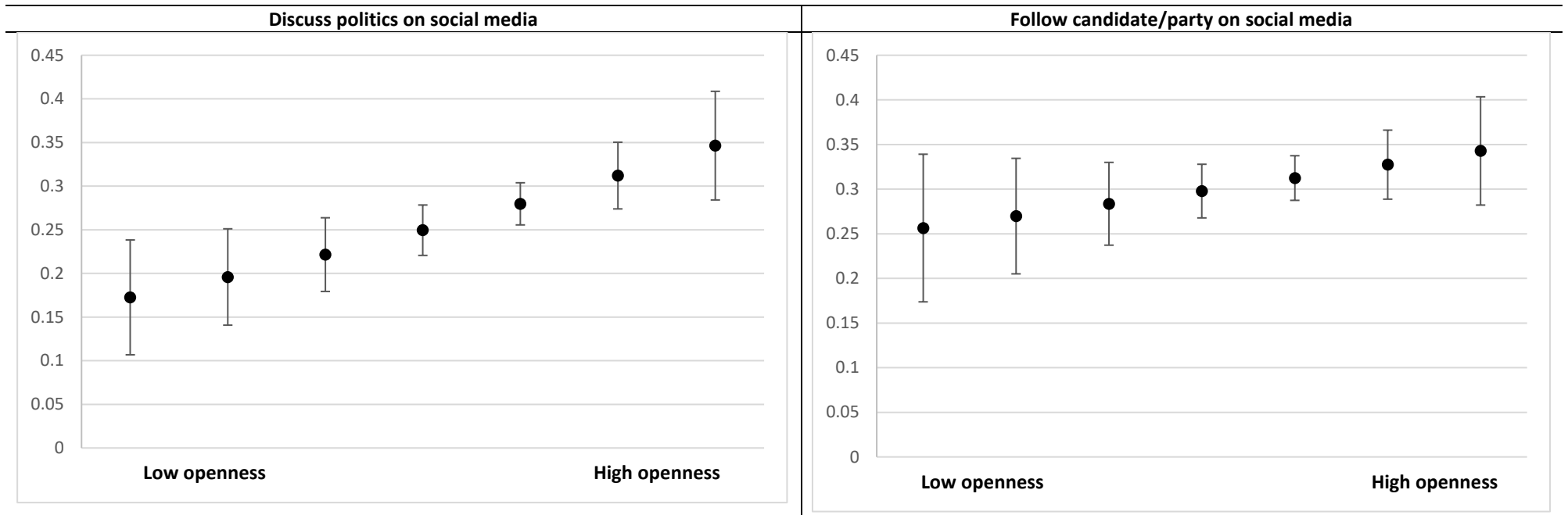


Figure 6. Openness and online political activity



Moderated relationship: Personality traits among public servants.

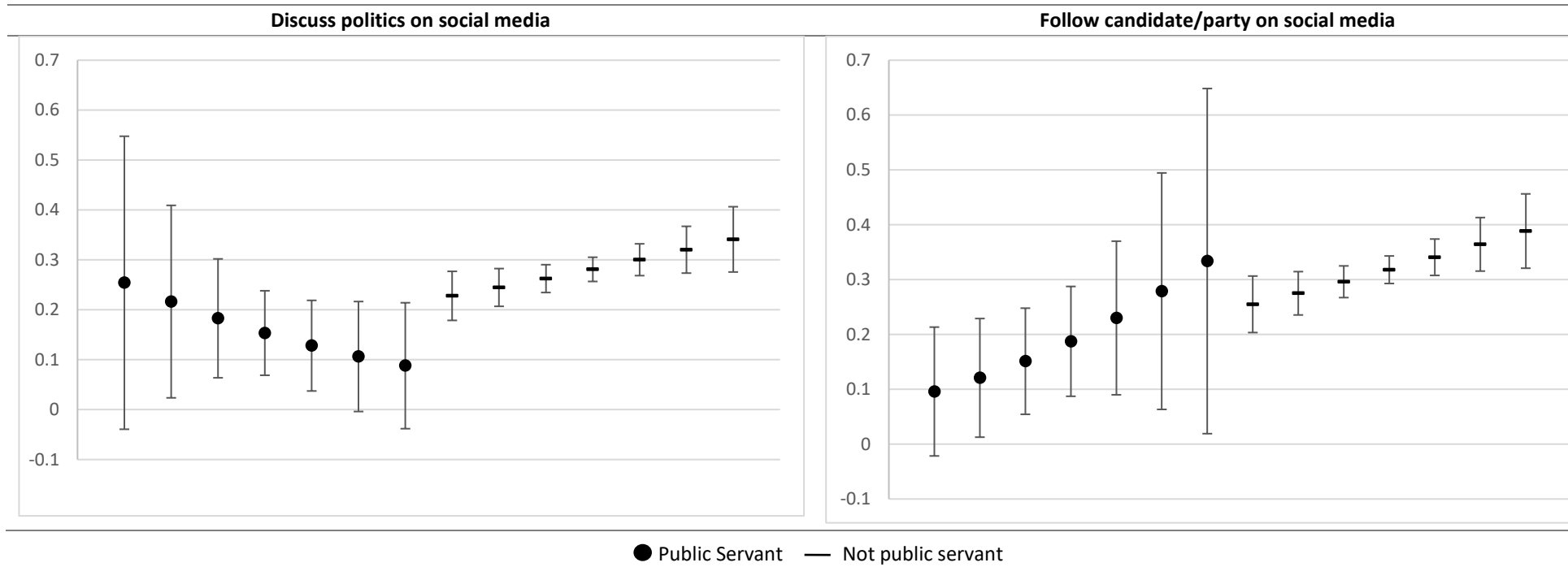
Figures 7-11 provide support for hypothesis 7. The nature of the relationship the Big5 have with online political activity is different for public servants.

While the results presented above found that Extraversion had a statistically significant and substantive relationship with both dependent variables, Figure 7 shows that when it comes to public servants extraversion does not have a statistically significant relationship with either of these outcomes. Meanwhile Figure 9 shows that although Conscientiousness has a negative statistically significant relationship with online political activity among both public servants and non public servants, when it comes to discussing politics on social media increasing levels of Conscientiousness among public servants is associated with very substantive decrease in the probability of this outcome. A public servant with a rock bottom level of Conscientiousness has a 96% probability of discussing politics online whereas a public servant with a sky-high level of Conscientiousness has a probability of 4%.

Figure 11 shows that among public servants Openness also has a more pronounced relationship with following a political candidate and/or a political party. The predicted probability of a public servant with the lowest level of Openness is 0%, a public servant with the highest level of Openness is 66%.

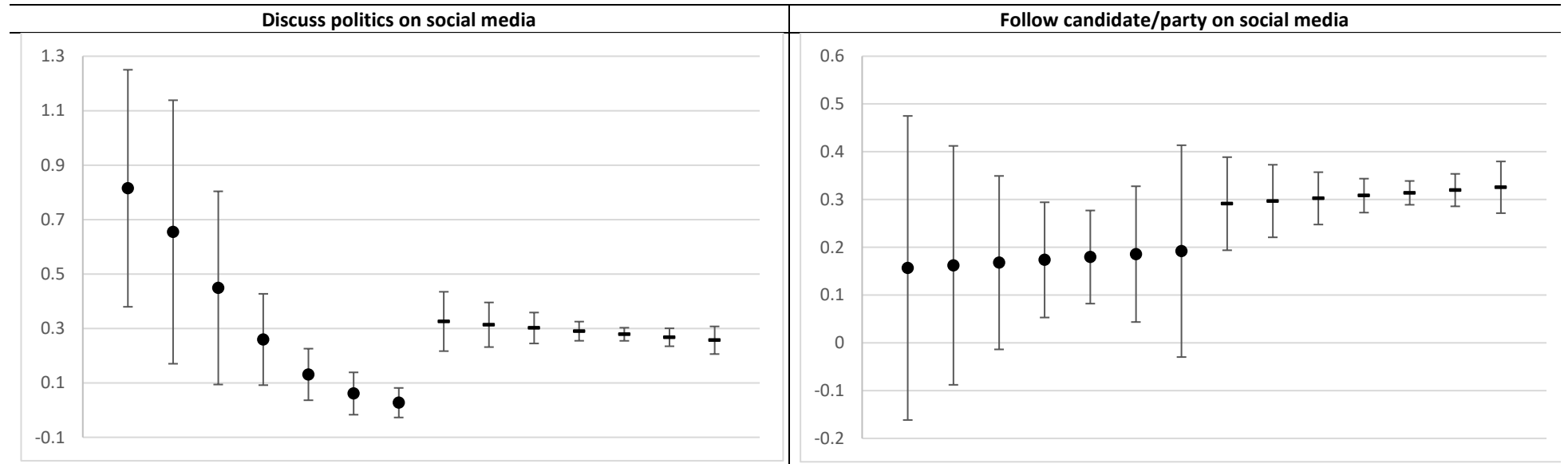
An unexpected finding is that Agreeableness among public servants is associated with very substantive changes in the probability of discussing politics on social media. A public servant with the lowest level of Agreeableness has a 81% probability of discussing politics on social media whereas a public servant with the highest level of Agreeableness has a 3% probability of being politically active online. While this finding was unexpected, and as Table 4 shows, the direct effect of Agreeableness did not have any significant relationship with either type of online activity, the finding that the trait of Agreeableness among public servants is associated with a substantive decrease in discussing politics online might reflect the fact that public servants or are agreeable do not care to go against the wishes of their employer.

Figure 7. Extraversion and online political activity by work environment



Predicted probabilities of online political activity with 95% confidence intervals based on Models 3 and 4. Controls held constant at their mean value. Figures showing from left to right, for public servants and not public servants, respectively, ascending value of extraversion from low (1) to high (7).

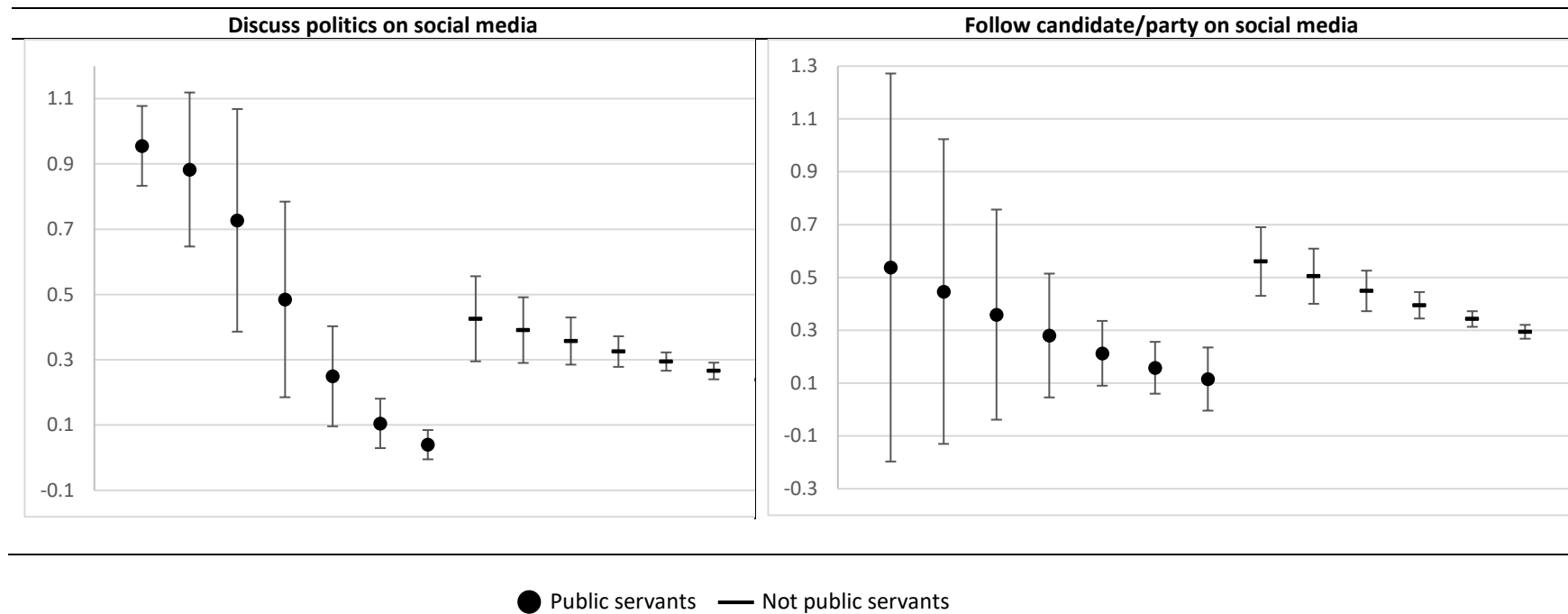
Figure 8. Agreeableness and online political activity by work environment



● Public servant — Not public servant

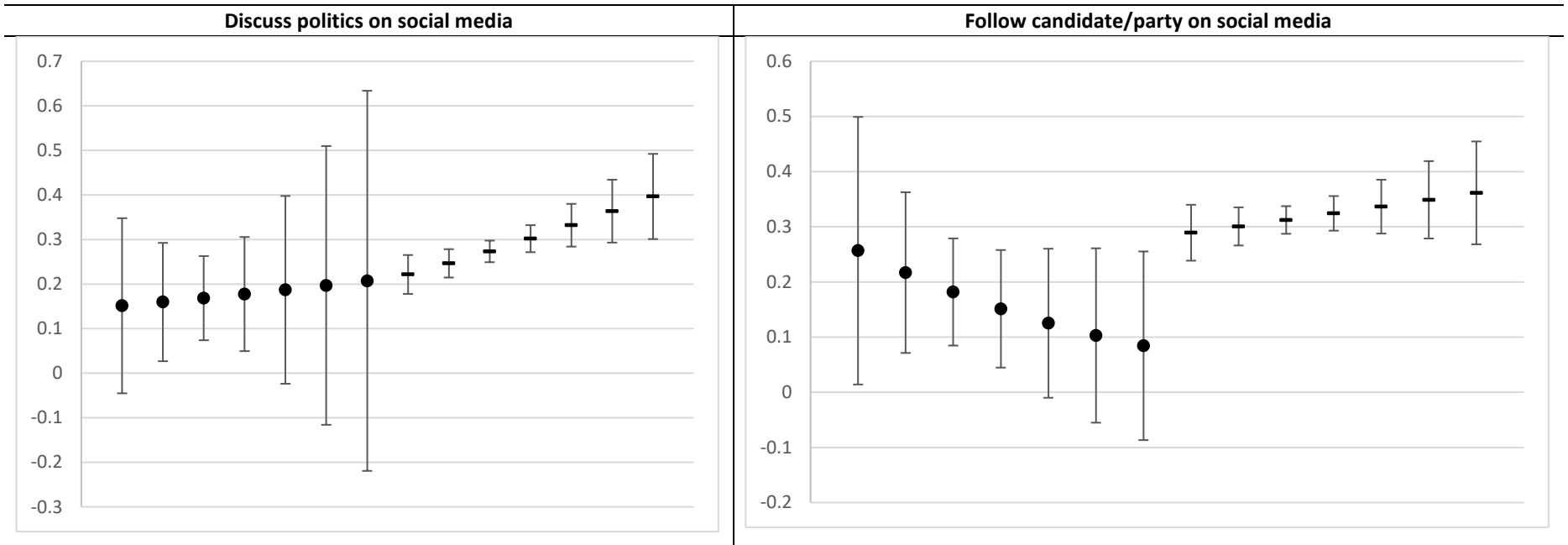
Predicted probabilities of online political activity with 95% confidence intervals based on Models 5 and 6. Controls held constant at their mean value. Figures showing from left to right, for public servants and not public servants, respectively, ascending value of extraversion from low (1) to high (7).

Figure 9. Conscientiousness and online political activity by work environment



Predicted probabilities of online political activity with 95% confidence intervals based on Models 7 and 8. Controls held constant at their mean value. Figures showing from left to right, for public servants and not public servants, respectively, ascending value of extraversion from low (1) to high (7).

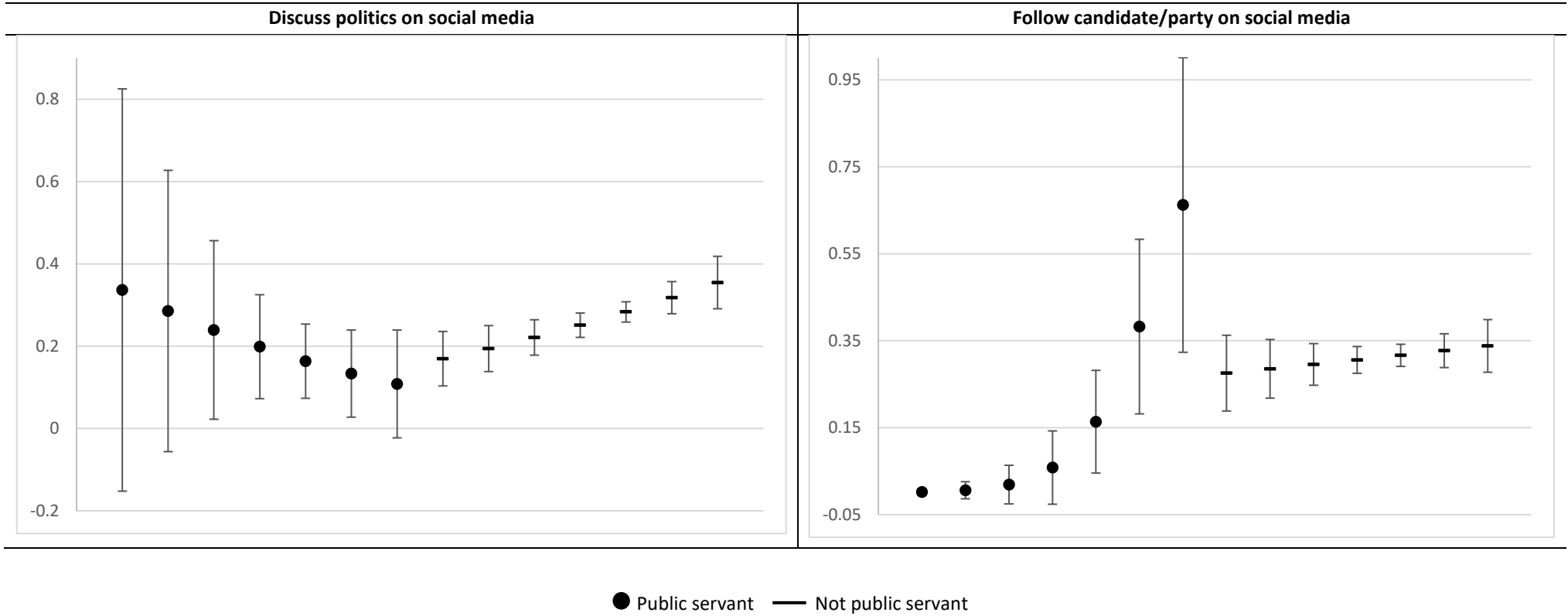
Figure 10: Neuroticism and online political activity by work environment



● Public servant — Not public servant

Predicted probabilities of online political activity with 95% confidence intervals based on Models 9 and 10. Controls held constant at their mean value. Figures showing from left to right, for public servants and not public servants, respectively, ascending value of extraversion from low (1) to high (7).

Figure 11. Openness and online political activity by work environment



Predicted probabilities of online political activity with 95% confidence intervals based on Models 11 and 12. Controls held constant at their mean value. Figures showing from left to right, for public servants and not public servants, respectively, ascending value of extraversion from low (1) to high (7).

Conclusion

Table 5 summarizes each hypothesis, their empirical test(s), and whether the results support the hypothesis. Overall this article extends research studying the online political activity of public servants in two ways. First, rather than focusing on public sector employees this paper empirically measured the activity of public servants. Secondly, drawing upon research in psychology and behavioral political science, this paper theorized about and empirically investigated whether certain personality traits have a particularly meaningful relationship with public servants' disposition to be politically active online. After first examining the direct effects that being a public servant and the Big5 personality traits have with being politically active online, secondary analysis explored the moderated relationships that each Big5 trait has with being a public servant. The results from this analysis showed that indeed certain personality traits have a more pronounced relationship with being politically active among public servants than is observed among other citizens. Specifically, among public servants Conscientiousness, Openness and Agreeableness were shown to have a very substantive relationship with some online political activities. These findings are intriguing as Conscientiousness and Openness have been noted as being traits that are associated, respectively, with loyalty and duty to one's organization (Conscientiousness) and challenging and conventions and norms (Openness).

Table 5. Summary of hypothesis, tests and results

Hypothesis		Empirical tests	Discuss politics	Follow candidate/party
H1	Being a public servant has a negative relationship with being politically active online.	Table 4; Figure 1	Supported	Supported
H2	Extraversion has a positive relationship with being politically active online.	Table 4; Figure 2	Supported	Supported
H3	Agreeableness has a negative relationship with being politically active online.	Table 4; Figure 3	Not supported	Not supported
H4	Conscientiousness has a negative relationship with being politically active online.	Table 4; Figure 4	Supported	Supported
H5	Neuroticism has a negative relationship with being politically active online.	Table 4; Figure 5	Supported	Not supported
H6	Openness has a positive relationship with being politically active online.	Table 4; Figure 6	Supported	Not supported
H7	The relationship personality traits have with online political activity is different for public servants than other citizens.	Tables 5-9; Figures 7-11	Supported	Supported

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Appendix A. Variable Operationalization

Variable	Measurement	Value
Public servant	What is your occupation?	Categorical: (1; 0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public servant • Not public servant
Union	Do you belong to a union?	Categorical: (1; 0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union member • Not union member
Extraversion	Please indicate how well the following pair of words describes you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extraverted/enthusiastic • Reserved/quiet (reverse coded) 	Continuous scale
Agreeableness	Please indicate how well the following pair of words describes you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sympathetic/warm • Critical/quarrelsome (reverse coded) 	Continuous scale
Conscientiousness	Please indicate how well the following pair of words describes you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependable/self-disciplined • Disorganized/careless (reverse coded) 	Continuous scale
Neuroticism	Please indicate how well the following pair of words describes you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm/emotionally stable • Anxious/easily upset (reverse coded) 	Continuous scale
Openness	Please indicate how well the following pair of words describes you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open to new experiences/complex • Conventional/uncreative (reverse coded) 	Continuous scale
Discussed politics on social media	How many times you've done these things over the past 12 months... Used social media to discuss politics or political issues.	Categorical: (1; 0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never • Have done at least one
Followed candidate/party on social media	How many times you've done these things over the past 12 months... Followed any elected officials or candidates for office on social media.	Categorical: (1; 0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never • Have done at least one
Age	In what year were you born?	Continuous
Political interest	How interested are you in politics generally?	Continuous scale
Gender	Are you...	Categorical: (1; 0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female • Male • Non-binary

Education	What is the highest level of education that you have completed?	Categorical: (1; 0) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• High school or less• Some post-secondary• Bachelor's• Graduate
Province	Which province or territory are you currently living in?	Categorical: (1; 0) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• British Columbia• Alberta• Saskatchewan• Manitoba• Ontario• Quebec• New Brunswick• Nova Scotia• Prince Edward Island• Newfoundland & Labrador

Appendix B. Operationalization of Public Servant.

The following responses to the open question “What is your occupation” (pes19_occ_text) were coded as public servant.

- **Admin support BC Govt**
- Administrateur public
- Administration in Federal Gov’t
- Bureaucrat
- Cadre dans la fonction publique fédérale
- Certified local govt manager
- Civil servant
- Clerical at CRA
- Collection contact officer for government of Canada
- Coordinator - Revenue Canada
- Department of National Defence
- Directeur général d'une ville
- Director provincial government
- Employer Services Services Canada
- Employé de bureau municipal
- Employé de l'état
- Enforcement - Ministry of Transportation
- Fed Govt+
- Federal Public Servant
- Fonctionnaire+
- Fonctionnaire fédéral
- Fonctionnaire provincial
- Gestionnaire fonction publique
- **Gouvernement**
- Government
- Government clerk
- Government employee+
- Government Manager
- Municipal government worker
- Policy Analyst*With public sector employee
- Provincial
- Provincial bureaucrat
- Provincial civil servant
- Public Servant
- Public safety* with public sector employee
- Public health*with public sector employee
- Senior Manager, local government
- City worker
- Senior policy advisor*with public sector employee

Appendix C. Moderated regression models.

Extraversion				
Model	Discussed politics, social media		Followed candidate/party, social media	
	III		IV	
	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>
Public servant	1.56	1.607	.27	.237
Extraversion	1.10*	.048	1.11	.048
Agreeableness	.93	.057	1.03	.058
Conscientiousness	.85**	.050	.80***	.046
Neuroticism	1.15**	.059	1.05	.053
Openness	1.17**	.069	1.07	.060
Public servant*Extraversion	.74	.180	1.17	.247
Union	1.06	.132	.40	.252
Gender				
• Female	1.12	.138	1.13	.132
• Male	(<i>ref.</i>)		(<i>ref.</i>)	
• Non-binary	.78	.44	.51	.292
Age	.97***	.005	.98***	.005
Political interest	1.38***	.041	1.39***	.042
Education				
• High school or less	(<i>ref.</i>)		(<i>ref.</i>)	
• Some post-secondary	1.06	.204	.92	.175
• Bachelor's	.96	.191	1.02	.198
• Graduate	1.41	.313	.90	.195
Province	Yes		Yes	
N	1 713		1 708	
Pseudo R ²	.13		.11	
Constant	.14**	.087	.24*	.147

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; + p < 0.1.

Agreeableness

Model	Discussed politics, social media		Followed candidate/party, social media	
	V		VI	
	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>
Public servant	20.03	37.509	.45	.687
Extraversion	1.09*	.047	1.11*	.047
Agreeableness	.95	.058	1.03	.059
Conscientiousness	.85**	.049	.80***	.046
Neuroticism	1.15**	.058	1.05	.053
Openness	1.17*	.069	1.07	.060
Public servant*Agreeableness	.45	.183	1.10	.129
Union	1.06	.133	.97	.118
Gender				
• Female	1.13	.138	1.13	.133
• Male	(<i>ref.</i>)		(<i>ref.</i>)	
• Non-binary	.80	.431	.51	.293
Age	.97***	.005	.98***	.005
Political interest	1.38***	.041	1.39***	.041
Education				
• High school or less	(<i>ref.</i>)		(<i>ref.</i>)	
• Some post-secondary	1.06	.205	.92	.175
• Bachelor's	.96	.192	1.02	.198
• Graduate	1.40	.311	.90	.196
Province	Yes		Yes	
N	1 713		1 708	
Pseudo R ²	.13		.11	
Constant	.14**	.085	.24*	.143

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; + p < 0.1.

Conscientiousness

Model	Discussed politics, social media		Followed candidate/party, social media	
	VII		VIII	
	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>
Public servant	70.87 *	126.999	.87	.287
Extraversion	1.10*	.048	1.11*	.047
Agreeableness	.93	.056	1.03	.058
Conscientiousness	.87*	.050	.80***	.046
Neuroticism	1.15**	.059	1.05	.053
Openness	1.17**	.069	1.07	.060
Public servant* Conscientiousness	.41**	.129	.87	.287
Union	1.07	.134	.98	.118
Gender				
• Female	1.12	.138	1.13	.133
• Male	<i>(ref.)</i>		<i>(ref.)</i>	
• Non-binary	.787	.426	.52	.293
Age	.97***	.005	.98***	.005
Political interest	1.38***	.041	1.39***	.041
Education				
• High school or less	<i>(ref.)</i>		<i>(ref.)</i>	
• Some post-secondary	1.05	.204	.92	.175
• Bachelor's	.96	.192	1.02	.198
• Graduate	1.39	.309	.89	.195
Province	Yes		Yes	
N	1 713		1 708	
Pseudo R ²	.13		.11	
Constant	.13*	.081	.23*	.139

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; + p < 0.1.

Neuroticism

Model	Discussed politics, social media		Followed candidate/party, social media	
	IX		X	
	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>
Public servant	.68**	.740	1.12	1.009
Extraversion	1.09*	.047	1.11*	.047
Agreeableness	.93	.057	1.03	.058
Conscientiousness	.85**	.049	.80***	.046
Neuroticism	1.15**	.059	1.06	.054
Openness	1.17**	.069	1.07	.060
Public servant* Neuroticism	.93	.308	.76	.209
Union	1.06	.133	.98	.118
Gender				
• Female	1.12	.137	1.13	.132
• Male	(<i>ref.</i>)		(<i>ref.</i>)	
• Non-binary	.78	.423	.51	.292
Age	.97***	.005	.98***	.005
Political interest	1.38***	.041	1.39***	.041
Education				
• High school or less	(<i>ref.</i>)		(<i>ref.</i>)	
• Some post-secondary	1.06	.204	.923	.175
• Bachelor's	.95	.191	1.02	.197
• Graduate	1.40	.312	.90	.197
Province	Yes		Yes	
N	1 713		1 708	
Pseudo R ²	.13		.11	
Constant	.15**	.091	.23*	.140

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; + p < 0.1.

Openness

Model	Discussed politics, social media		Followed candidate/party, social media	
	XI		XII	
	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>Se</i>
Public servant	3.71	5.249	.00*	.004
Extraversion	1.09*	.047	1.11*	.047
Agreeableness	.93	.056	1.03	.059
Conscientiousness	.85**	.049	.79***	.045
Neuroticism	1.15**	.058	1.05**	.054
Openness	1.18**	.071	1.05	.059
Public servant*Openness	.67	.190	3.01*	1.380
Union	1.06	.133	.97	.118
Gender				
• Female	1.13	.138	1.11	.131
• Male	(<i>ref.</i>)		(<i>ref.</i>)	
• Non-binary	.78	.42	.51	.294
Age	.97***	.005	.98***	.005
Political interest	1.39***	.042	1.38***	.041
Education				
• High school or less	(<i>ref.</i>)		(<i>ref.</i>)	
• Some post-secondary	1.06	.204	.92	.174
• Bachelor's	.95	.190	1.02	.198
• Graduate	1.41	.312	.89	.195
Province	Yes		Yes	
N	1 713		1 708	
Pseudo R ²	.13		.12	
Constant	.14**	.087	.28**	

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; + p < 0.1.