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Openness as a predictor of political orientation and conventional and unconventional political activism in Western and Eastern Europe.

Arne Roets, Ilse Cornelis, and Alain Van Hiel

Ghent University

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Correspondence should be addressed to Arne Roets, Ilse Cornelis or Alain Van Hiel, PP07, Faculty of Psychology, Henri Dunantlaan 2, B-9000, Ghent, Belgium, Arne.Roets@UGent.be, Ilse.Cornelis@UGent.be, or Alain.VanHiel@UGent.be. This research was supported by post-doctoral research grants of the National Fund for Scientific Research – Flanders awarded to Arne Roets, and of the Special Research Fund of Ghent University, awarded to Ilse Cornelis.

Abstract

The present study provides a comprehensive investigation of the relationship between Openness and political orientation and activism in Europe. Analyses were conducted on the four waves of the European Social Survey, including large representative samples in up to 26 European countries (total $N > 175,000$). In line with previous studies, a robust, positive relationship between Openness and left-wing political orientation was obtained in Western Europe. However, in Eastern Europe, the relationship between Openness and political orientation was weaker, and reversed in three out of four waves. Moreover, Openness yielded significant positive relationships with unconventional activism and to a lesser degree with conventional activism. The magnitude of the relationship between Openness and activism was dependent on political orientation and region. Stronger associations between Openness and activism were found for those having a left-wing orientation in Western Europe, whereas in Eastern Europe, Openness was somewhat stronger related to activism for those having a right-wing orientation. In the discussion we elaborate on the role of the geo-political context in the relationship between Openness and political variables.

The psychological basis of political preferences and attitudes has captured scholarly attention for many years (e.g., Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Zimbardo, 1999; Riemann, Grubich, Hempel, Mergl, & Richter, 1993; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 1996). These studies have consistently shown that high levels of Openness are linked with a left-wing (liberal) political orientation, whereas Closedness has been associated with a right-wing (conservative) political orientation (see, Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). McCrae (1996) therefore stated that: “variations in experiential openness are the major psychological determinant of political polarities” (p. 325). However, it should be noted that most studies on the relationship between Openness and political orientation have been conducted in stable democracies in Northern America and Western Europe and that only limited data are available from other political cultures, like former communist countries. Yet, the few notable studies in Eastern Europe (Van Hiel, Kossowska, & Mervielde, 2000; Thorisdottir, Jost, Liviatan, & Shrout, 2007) indicated that Openness may be differently related to political orientation.

In addition to the role of Openness in political attitudes, recent research has suggested that Openness may also determine the degree to which the individual acts upon his political beliefs, thereby advancing a relationship between Openness and political activism. Direct evidence for this relationship has been provided by Curtin, Stewart, and Duncan (2010) who focused on left-wing political activism and revealed a positive relationship with Openness, mediated by an increased concern with political and societal events. Pattyn, Van Hiel, Dhont, and Onraet (2010) reported indirect evidence on this issue, showing a negative relationship between Openness and Political Powerlessness. Political Powerlessness, in turn, has been related to low activism in the political and social domain (see, Patterson, 2002).

In the present study, we elaborate on the relationship between Openness and political orientation and activism in a comprehensive cross-cultural investigation of Western European countries with an established democratic system and Eastern European countries that have recently transformed their political system from being single-party communist states to politically pluralistic societies. We use the Openness (to change) versus Conservation dimension of Schwartz's (1992) model of personal values as an indicator of Openness and we distinguish between conventional and non-conventional types of political activism.

The relationship between Openness and political attitudes across cultures

Ample evidence shows that people who prefer novelty, variety and intense experience (i.e. high levels of Openness) tend to lean towards the left-wing side of the political spectrum, whereas those who prefer familiarity, routine and tradition (low Openness) tend to endorse right-wing political views. In their meta-analytic integration of studies, Sibley and Duckitt (2008) concluded that Openness is strongly related to left- versus right-wing ideological attitudes.

Most studies relating Openness with political orientation have used the Five-Factor Model of personality (FFM) Openness dimension, either in terms of Costa and McCrae's (1992) NEO-PI-R model (e.g., McCrae, 1996; Riemann et al., 1993; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 1996) or in terms of Big-Five personality descriptive adjectives of Openness (e.g., Caprara et al., 1999; Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997). Additionally, studies that used an Openness measure based on personal values have also substantiated its association with political orientation (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Cohrs, Moschner, Maes, & Kielmann, 2005; Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; Duriez et al., 2005; Feather & McKee, 2008). These latter studies have generally used Schwartz's (1992) well-validated inventory measuring universal values. These values can be organized in a two-dimensional taxonomy with the first dimension reflecting the opposition between Openness (to

change) and Conservation (see Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). Studies using this values inventory have demonstrated that a left-wing political orientation is associated with the Openness pole of the higher order value dimension (including Stimulation and Self-direction values), whereas a right-wing political orientation is associated with the Conservation pole (i.e., Security, Conformity, and Tradition values). In sum, the available evidence from both the FFM and the Values perspective on Openness seems to corroborate McCrae's (1996) observation that an individual's level of Openness is a major determinant of his/her political orientation.

However, it should be noted that most studies linking Openness to left-wing political orientation have been conducted in Northern America and Western Europe. A cross-cultural test of this relationship (Van Hiel, Kossowska, & Mervielde, 2000) revealed stronger relationships between Openness and left-wing orientation in Belgium (Western Europe) than in Poland (Eastern Europe). Thorisdottir and colleagues (2007) even demonstrated a modest positive relationship between Openness and a right-wing political orientation in Eastern Europe. These two studies therefore challenge the generalizability of previous findings and the assumption that Openness has a universal status as a major psychological determinant of left-wing political orientation (McCrae, 1996).

A probable explanation for the divergent findings in Eastern Europe pertains to its recent political history. In particular, most citizens of Eastern European countries have been socialized in a totalitarian, left-wing ideological system (i.e., Communism). Left-wing political attitudes thus reflect the traditional, 'conservative' perspective on political and social issues, which may therefore be less attractive to people high in Openness, who value novelty, being unconstrained by tradition. However, since communism as a system collapsed in Eastern-Europe in the late eighties and early nineties (i.e., the fall of the Berlin wall and the dissolution of the USSR) the

younger generation did not experience this regime during formative (adolescent) years (see, Duriez et al., 2005). It is therefore plausible that a significant relationship between Openness and left-wing political orientation would emerge in younger Eastern Europeans, whereas no such relationship (or even a reversed relationship) should be expected in older generations.

The relationship between Openness and political activism

While research has often focused on the influence of Openness on political attitudes, Openness has recently been suggested to also play a role in political participation and activism. Curtin et al. (2010) have provided direct evidence to bear on this issue, showing higher political activism with increasing levels of Openness. In particular, these authors have shown that Openness relates positively to Personal Political Salience, a variable denoting an increased tendency to attach personal meaning to large-scale sociopolitical events (see, Duncan & Stewart, 2007). Moreover, Personal Political Salience was predictive of political activism and as such fully mediated the relationship between Openness and political activism. In other words, because open people show an increased concern with political and societal events, they are more likely to be politically active.

Pattyn et al. (2010) have recently shown that Openness is negatively related to Political Powerlessness, (i.e., the perception of having no personal input into the political decision-making process), Political Isolation, (i.e., the perception that one does not share political opinions with others), and Political Estrangement, (i.e., the perception of government as irresponsible to the voters' concerns). Obviously, these political perception variables are likely to curb people's tendency to engage in political activism, as revealed in previous research (especially for Political Powerlessness; for an overview, see Patterson, 2002).

In sum, Openness seems to be implicated in how people see and make sense of their social world. Open people examine the sociopolitical world more closely and they feel more personally involved and affected by it, which might increase their political participation levels.

Two types of political activism

Based on the idea that Openness is related to left-wing political orientation in Western societies, Curtin et al. (2010) assessed engagement across eight policy domains typically reflecting left-wing concerns: AIDS, antiwar, civil rights, environment, gay/lesbian rights, homelessness, prochoice, and women's rights. However, the authors also acknowledged their focus on left-leaning political activism as a limitation of their study and conceded that right-leaning activism, such as prolife activism, also aims at social change. Hence, high levels of Openness may be associated with activism for right-wing political ideas as well.

To allow testing for the possibility that Openness also affects activism in right-wing citizens, in the present study we assess political activism without referring to specific topics (i.e., ideology-neutral). Rather, we distinguish between 'conventional' and 'unconventional' forms of political action/participation (Sabucedo & Arce, 1991; van der Meer & van Ingen, 2009). Conventional activism refers to people's efforts to influence policies through representation (i.e. 'party activism') and aims to exert influence within the boundaries of the electoral system, for example by contacting politicians, working for a political party, or wearing a campaign badge. Unconventional political activism, on the other hand, represents attempts to influence the political system 'from the outside' by, for example, participating in demonstrations, signing petitions, or boycotting products. Especially in the context of Openness based activism, the distinction between 'conventional' and 'unconventional' might be meaningful. Indeed, conventional or party activism works through support for and reliance on established political

agents and ideas, whereas unconventional activism is not restricted to existing ideas and structures, which we assume to be more appealing to open individuals. We therefore hypothesize that Openness is particularly associated with unconventional activism, whereas the relationship with conventional activism may be less outspoken.

The present study

The present cross-national study aims to delineate the relationships of Openness with political orientation and involvement in political action, and especially how they are influenced by geo-political context, i.e., the distinction between Western and Eastern Europe. To achieve this goal, data from four waves (independent samples) of the European Social Survey, collected in 19 (wave 1) to 26 (wave 4) European countries¹ are analyzed, including data of over 175,000 respondents in total. Although previous studies have shed some light on the present issues, various methodological issues may hamper the generalizability of their findings.

With respect to the relationship between Openness and political orientation in Western and Eastern Europe, previous studies have analyzed data of only a single Eastern European country (i.e., Van Hiel et al, 2000, included only a Polish sample), or a limited sample of Eastern European countries (i.e., Thorisdottir et al., 2007, included only samples from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia), which does not seem to be truly representative of Eastern-Europe. Moreover, in the study of Thorisdottir et al. (2007), the Openness measure consisted of only two items from the Schwartz Value questionnaire (PVQ), thus only capturing a very limited part of the Openness dimension. To account for these limitations, the present study analyzed data from the four consecutive ESS waves, which contain data from four, seven, eight, and twelve Eastern European countries, respectively, including former USSR states. Importantly,

¹ Data from Turkey and Israel were not included in the present study, because their status as European countries is debatable.

by analyzing independent data from all four waves, we wanted to avoid that our findings might be overly influenced by particular wave characteristics (i.e., which countries are included) or momentary political situations (e.g. the ‘Orange revolution’ in the Ukraine from late November 2004 to January 2005). Analyzing the four different waves, each including data of a different set of countries, collected at different times, will minimize such wave-specific biases and should enable us to detect stable effects.

A second improvement pertains to the measurement of Openness. In particular, we used the equation recently devised by Verkasalo, Lönnqvist, Lipsanen, and Helkema (2009) to assess the broad Openness construct, based on all PVQ items. This measure and equation have been elaborately validated by Verkasalo et al. (2009) across European countries using the ESS data.

The second research question pertained to the relationship between Openness and political activism. We were especially interested in whether Openness is positively associated with political activism. In contrast with previous research (i.e., Curtin et al., 2010), our measure of political activism was devoid of any political content, allowing to investigate the effects of Openness on political activism in left-wing as well as right-wing citizens. Moreover, we distinguished between conventional and unconventional forms of activism.

Method

Participants and procedure

The European Social Survey is a cross-sectional biannual survey covering more than 30 countries. In each country, a representative sample of the adult (15 years and older) population was collected by individual face-to-face interviews. For the present study, we analyzed data from the first four waves (collected in 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics.

Measures

Left-right political orientation. Participants placed themselves on a single left-right continuum, ranging from 0 (extreme left-wing) to 10 (extreme right-wing). This self-placement technique to measure political orientation has been widely used and is considered a valid and reliable measure of general political orientation (see Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976; Roets & Van Hiel, 2009; Thorisdottir et al., 2007).

Openness. Participants completed the 21-item version of the PVQ (Schwartz et al., 2001) with three items tapping into Universalism, and two items measuring each of the other values: Benevolence, Conformity, Tradition, Security, Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation, and Self-direction. The PVQ is based on descriptions of different persons, whose goals, aspirations and wishes are characterized in two sentences. A sample item from the Self-Direction value is: “Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to her. She likes to do things in her own original way.” The respondents answer the question “how much like you is this person” by using a six-point scale ranging from 1 (very much like me) to 6 (not like me at all). All items were reverse scored, so that the higher the numbers, the stronger the agreement with the item. Using the responses on all 21 values items, a single Openness score was calculated based on Verkasalo et al.’s (2009) equation².

Activism. Based on previous work on political participation (e.g. Sabucedo & Arce, 1991; van der Meer & van Ingen, 2009), we distinguished between conventional and unconventional forms of political activism. Conventional activism was measured by three indicators: contacting a politician or government official, working in a political party or action group, and wearing or displaying a campaign badge or sticker. Unconventional activism was also measured by three

² Since with the original equation of Verkasalo et al. (2009), high scores represent low Openness, we reversed the signs within the equation. The intercept is accordingly set to 109.5331 to rescale to a mean of 100.

indicators: signing a petition, taking part in a lawful public demonstration, and boycotting certain products. For each action, respondents indicated whether they had undertaken such action or not during the last 12 months. Principal Components Analyses with Oblimin Rotation in each data wave supported this proposed two-dimensional structure, with rotated eigenvalues ranging between 1.59 and 1.78, and a total explained variance ranging between 50.7 and 51.7 %. The indicators of activism loaded primarily on the relevant component (average loading = .67). We constructed two scores, one for conventional and one for unconventional activism by adding the responses, so that respondents' scores could range from 0 (never been involved in any of these actions) to 3 (having been involved in three activities). Hence, higher scores indicated stronger political activism.

East-West distinction. To make a straightforward distinction between Eastern and Western Europe, we distinguished between countries that have been under communist regime after WWII (i.e., at the eastern side of the Iron Curtain) and countries that have not been under Soviet influence.

Results

We examined to what extent political orientation and activism were predicted by Openness. In order to demonstrate the consistency of our findings and because the four ESS waves comprise different countries, analyses were conducted for each wave separately, using the weighting procedure recommended by the ESS Technical Reports (e.g., Jowell & the Central Coordinating Team, 2009). We conducted multi-level analyses in order to account for the nested nature of our data (respondents are nested within countries) and control for country-specific variation (i.e., variation not related to the East-West distinction). More specifically, full random coefficients regression analyses with country as a level 2 grouping variable were tested. After

adjusting for the effects of demographic variables³, we investigated to what extent differences in left-right political orientation and unconventional and conventional activism are predicted by individual-level Openness (grand mean centered), the country-level predictor Eastern-Western Europe (effects coded), and the cross-level interaction between Openness and the East-West distinction. We report the estimated fixed effects for random intercept models⁴, which allow for between-country differences of the intercepts of the effect of Openness on the dependent variable.

Openness as a predictor of left-right orientation

In Table 2, the estimated fixed effects are reported for each of the four samples. Left-right political orientation was significantly associated with the demographic variables: younger individuals, women, and those with more years of education generally placed themselves more at the left side of the political spectrum.

We found significant (negative) main effects of Openness on left-right political orientation in three of the four waves, but these effects were further qualified by the interaction with the East-West distinction. Simple slope analyses using the computational tools provided by Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006) indicated a considerable, significant effect of Openness on political orientation in Western Europe in all samples, *bs* between $-.037$ and $-.035$, *SEs* $<.003$, *ps* $<.001$ (see also Figure 1). However, in Eastern Europe, three out of four samples demonstrated a significant *reversed* effect of Openness on left-right orientation, *bs* between $.006$ and $.013$, *SEs* $<.003$, *ps* $<.05$, indicating that Open individuals were more inclined to place themselves on the

³ Age, years of education, and gender (all standardized) were included as demographic variables in the fixed effects model. Household income was not available for a number of countries in the ESS files, particularly for the 2006 wave. Analyzing the data while additionally adjusting for income however did not meaningfully change the results.

⁴ We also tested models including both a random country-level intercept as well as random slopes to allow between-country random effects on the slope of Openness. However, these random country-specific effects were not the main focus of our analyses and introducing random slopes failed to significantly change the fit of the model (-2 Log Likelihood) in the majority of our analyses. For reasons of conciseness, we therefore report the estimated fixed effects for the random intercept model only.

right-wing side of the political continuum. In the 2006 sample, the effect was weaker and the slope of Openness had the same directionality as in Western Europe, $b = -.004$, $SE = .002$, $p < .05$.

We also compared the association between Openness and left-right placement in Eastern and Western Europe for those socialized after the fall of communism (born in 1977 or later) with those who were socialized during the era of communist regimes in Eastern Europe (born in 1976 or earlier). Random coefficients analyses on the data of participants born in 1977 or later indicated that respondents in Eastern Europe who were socialized in the post-communism era demonstrate similar patterns of association between Openness and left-right political orientation as their Western counterparts (i.e., Openness being associated with left-wing political orientation), although the associations are weaker (bs in Western Europe between $-.043$ and $-.029$, $SEs < .004$, $ps < .001$; bs in Eastern Europe between $-.024$ and $-.017$, $SEs < .060$, $ps < .05$ except in the 2002 wave, $b = .004$, $SE = .010$, ns). However, for respondents in Eastern Europe who were socialized in the communist era (born before 1977), the link between Openness and left-right self placement is either absent (2002 and 2006 waves), $bs = -.002$ and $.006$, $SEs < .007$, ns , or reversed (2004 and 2008 waves), $bs = .011$ and $.018$, $SE < .005$, $ps < .05$, whereas their Western European counterparts consistently displayed a significant association between Openness and a more left-wing orientation (bs in Western Europe between $-.037$ and $-.034$, $SEs < .002$, $ps < .001$).

Openness as a predictor of unconventional and conventional activism

Tables 3 and 4 report the estimated fixed effects predicting unconventional and conventional activism, respectively. Given that Openness was differently associated with left-right political orientation dependent on the geo-political context, we also included individuals'

left-right orientation, its interactions with Openness and the cross-level interactions with the East-West distinction in our analyses.

For unconventional activism (see Table 3), we consistently found that older individuals, more educated respondents and females tend to participate more in unconventional activism. Significant and consistent main effects for Openness and left-right orientation were further qualified by significant two-way interactions between Openness and the East-West distinction and between left-right political orientation and the East-West distinction, as well as a consistent three-way interaction between Openness, left-right political Orientation and East-West distinction in the four waves. In order to interpret these three-way interactions, we further conducted simple slope analyses where we looked at the effect of Openness on unconventional activism among Leftist (1SD below) and Rightist (1SD above the mean) respondents in Eastern and Western Europe and these results are included in Figure 2. Most notable is that in Western Europe, among people who place themselves on the left side of the political continuum, Openness is particularly predictive of participation in unconventional activism, *bs* between .019 and .026, *SEs* = .001, $p < .001$, whereas in Eastern Europe, Openness had somewhat weaker or even a non-significant association with left-wing unconventional activism, *bs* between .003 and .004, *SEs* < .002, $ps < .05$ or *ns* (in the 2002 wave). In Eastern Europe, the association between Openness and unconventional activism among those on the right-wing side was more pronounced, *bs* between .005 and .008, *SEs* < .002, $p < .001$ (except the 2004 sample, $p < .01$) than among those on the left side, but comparable to the association between Openness and unconventional activism among right-wing West Europeans, *bs* between .005 and .010, *SEs* < .001, $ps < .001$.

Conventional activism (see Table 4) was associated again with the demographic variables, showing the same pattern as unconventional activism, with the exception of an inversed Gender effect, indicating that men reported more ‘party’ activism than women. Openness was significantly and consistently related to conventional activism, whereas left-right political orientation was not consistently associated with party activism. The main effect of Openness was further qualified by a significant two-way interaction with political orientation in three out of the four waves, as well as a significant three-way interaction in all four waves.

Additional simple slope analyses (see Figure 2) indicated that, in line with the previous analysis of unconventional activism, in Western Europe, Openness is particularly predictive of left-wing conventional activism, *bs* between .008 and .012, *SEs* < .001, *p* < .001, but somewhat less predictive of conventional activism among right-wing adherents, *bs* between .000 and .004, *SE* = .001, *ns* in 2004 and 2008 samples, *p* < .001 in the 2004 and 2006 samples. However, in Eastern Europe, Openness is about equally predictive for conventional activism in left-wing, *bs* between .003 and .005, *SEs* < .002, *ps* < .01, and right-wing respondents, *bs* between .004 and .008, *SEs* < .002, *ps* < .01.

Finally, the unstandardized regression coefficients of the Openness effect reported in Tables 3 and 4 also indicate that although Openness is associated with both unconventional and conventional activism overall, its effect is considerably stronger for unconventional than for conventional activism.

Discussion

The present study provided a comprehensive investigation of the relationships between Openness and political orientation and activism in Europe. Analyses were conducted on data of the first four waves of the European Social Survey, including large representative samples in 19

(wave 1) to 26 (wave 4) European countries. Overall, the results convincingly demonstrated a robust positive relationship between Openness and left-wing political orientation in Western Europe, whereas in Eastern Europe, this relationship was generally weaker and even reversed. With regard to the relationship between Openness and political activism, we obtained significant positive relationships for both conventional and unconventional activism, but Openness was clearly most strongly related to the latter form of activism. Overall, Openness and activism were associated in Western and Eastern Europe and in both left- and right wing respondents, but some notable differences also emerged. In the remainder we first elaborate on the relationship between Openness and political orientation, and subsequently we focus on the relationship between Openness and activism.

The relationship between Openness and political attitudes across cultures

Whereas across the four waves, Openness showed a strong positive relationship with left-wing political orientation in Western Europe, this relationship was modestly negative in Eastern Europe in three out of four waves. We argue that this different (i.e., opposite) overall relationship may be explained by the different post-World War II political history and socialization in these two European regions. In particular, in democratic, industrialized countries in Western Europe and Northern America, a left-wing political orientation generally reflects progressive attitudes aimed at societal change (see, Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Not surprisingly then, people high in Openness who value novelty, unconstrained by tradition, find left-wing ideology attractive when living in the Western European political context. Conversely, most Eastern European citizens have spent their formative years under a communist regime and have thus been socialized in a totalitarian and left-wing ideological system. In Eastern Europe, left-wing political attitudes therefore reflect an old, ‘conservative’ political system imposed by an

authoritarian regime, and open people therefore seem to be more attracted to right-wing ideology. In other words, which political view is considered to be conservative depends on the culture of reference (see also, Altemeyer, 1996).

Communism has been described by Rokeach (1973) as an ideology in terms of high importance of the value ‘egalitarianism’ and low importance of the value ‘freedom’. The political system in Western Europe shares to some degree the importance it attaches to egalitarianism, evidenced by for example, smaller income inequalities compared to the US (e.g., Milanovic & Yitzhaki, 2002). However, in contrast to communist regimes, freedom is also highly valued in Western European democracies. Open people seem to be attracted to left-wing principles (only) in political systems that incorporate egalitarianism *and* freedom (i.e., in Western Europe), but left-wing principles lose their appeal to open people who have experienced left-wing regimes that emphasize egalitarianism but downgrade freedom (i.e., in Eastern Europe). Hence, it seems that a political system’s emphasis on freedom, rather than its emphasis on egalitarianism, provides to individuals a context in which a positive relationship between Openness and left-wing political orientation develops.

Importantly, Communism as a political system collapsed in Eastern Europe about 20 years ago and the transition to democracy and free-market trade has dominated the political reality of the younger generations living there. Given the recent shift of the political system in Eastern European countries toward the Western European template, the relationship between Openness and political orientation within the younger generations should be more similar to the relationship found in Western Europe. Our findings corroborated this expectation showing a positive and significant relationship between Openness and left-wing political orientation for the younger generations in Eastern Europe. These findings thus support the idea that with a new

political context, the personality-ideology association in former communist countries slowly shifts towards the structure that is found in the West (see also, Duriez et al., 2005). Overall, it can therefore be concluded that rather than being a universal psychological determinant of left-wing political orientation (see, McCrae, 1996), the influence of Openness on political orientation depends on the dominant political system in which an individual has been socialized.

Openness and political activism

Whereas the relationship between Openness and political orientation has been a topic of interest for many years, research on the relationship between Openness and activism is relatively recent. The literature on political activism has mostly adopted a ‘person-within-group’ perspective, for example focusing on the importance of group identification to explain political activism (e.g., Sturmer & Simon, 2004). Attention for broad personality traits as antecedents of political activism has, however, been largely absent. A notable exception is the recent study by Curtin et al. (2010) who revealed a significant relationship between Openness and left-wing activism. The present study extended this new research field, providing a more comprehensive picture on the role of Openness in political activism. First, we were able to show that the relationship between Openness and activism is not restricted to left-wing political activism, but also emerges for people endorsing a right-wing political ideology. Second, the present study distinguished between conventional or party activism and unconventional activism. As expected, our results demonstrated that Openness is most strongly associated with unconventional forms of activism, at least in Western Europe.

However, the overall engagement in a particular form of activism as well as its association with Openness depends on the geo-political context and the individual’s political orientation. In Western Europe, people who self-identified with left-wing ideology were more

involved in political activism and showed the strongest relationships between Openness and activism, especially unconventional activism. For right-wing respondents, the influence of Openness on unconventional activism was weaker and even virtually absent for conventional activism. In Eastern Europe, Openness was somewhat less predictive of activism, and differences between left and right and between conventional and unconventional activism were also less prominent. Most remarkable, however, was the reversed interaction pattern with political orientation we found in Eastern Europe. People who self-identified with right-wing ideology were generally more involved in activism and showed stronger associations between Openness and activism. Overall, these findings seem to indicate that role of Openness in political activism should not just be considered in terms of the individual's political orientation, but also in terms of *society's* traditional-historical political orientation and policy.

Finally, it can be noted that, whereas unconventional activism seems relatively widespread in Western Europe, it is much less common in Eastern Europe. Possibly, most Eastern European citizens, being raised in a repressive totalitarian one-party regime, may still be inclined to avoid such 'hazardous' acts because they have been 'conditioned' to do so. On the other hand, it can be argued that Eastern European citizens have been relatively unfamiliar with conventional activism as well. Indeed, although Communist regimes encouraged mass participation in political party activities, this participation was not geared towards achieving any influence over political decision making or policy change. Hence, trying to influence politics by directly contacting politicians, working for different political parties or action groups and involvement in election campaigns represent relatively new tactics in Eastern Europe. For Eastern European citizens, these strategies may be just as 'unconventional', rendering the distinction between unconventional and conventional (party) activism less meaningful compared

to Western Europe. Indeed, our findings indicate that, in contrast to Western Europe, unconventional and conventional activism are about equally (un)common and equally influenced by Openness in Eastern Europe.

Limitations and directions for future research

The present study analyzed data from four waves of the European Social Survey and as such provided an investigation of the relationship between Openness and political orientation and activism, unprecedented in terms of sample size and representativeness, covering most European countries. However, some limitations of using the ESS waves for the present research can be noted as well. First, the ESS data only allow for measuring Openness through values. Although this approach has been common in research (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Cohrs, et al., 2005; Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; Feather & McKee, 2008; Thorisdottir et al., 2007), the Openness construct measured through values may show imperfect fit to the Openness personality construct in terms of the Five-Factor Model. Future research may aim to replicate the present findings with FFM measures of Openness. Moreover, especially with regard to the prediction of activism, it may be fruitful to also investigate the potential role of other personality factors, such as Extraversion.

A second limitation pertains to the measurement of political orientation by a single self-placement item. This self-placement scale is well-established as a valid and reliable measure of general political orientation (see e.g., Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976; Thorisdottir et al., 2007), being highly related to more elaborate multi-item measures of political orientation and yielding comparable effects (see e.g., Roets & Van Hiel, 2009). Most importantly in the present context, the measure is universally meaningful in different geo-political contexts. However, the measure does not tap into political orientation regarding more specific (e.g., cultural and economic) issues

separately (see Duriez et al., 2005). Future cross-cultural research may aim to corroborate Openness effects on political orientation in these more specific domains. A third limitation, related to the second one, pertains to political activism also being captured by a limited number of items and the use of such brief scales might have deflated the magnitude of the obtained relationships. Nevertheless, taking into account insights from previous research within specific countries, we believe that the present large-scale study covering most European countries provides an accurate picture of the general role of Openness in political orientation and activism.

Finally, in the present study, we compared Western to Eastern Europe because of their undeniable differences in political history. Moreover, these differences can be straightforwardly mapped in geographical terms, thereby providing an objective way to distinguish between these two regions in the ESS data. This focus on the historical-political context may also provide a useful basis for further cross-cultural research aiming to advance our understanding of the role of individual traits in political orientation and activism in other, yet-unexplored parts of the world. For example, in various Southern American countries such as Chile, Argentina, and Brazil, most of the adult population has been socialized under right-wing military regimes, and only relatively recently democratic governments have been installed. Most citizens of China and Cuba, on the other hand, have only known a totalitarian left-wing (i.e., communist) government. An interesting question arising here is whether our rationale about the effects of historical-political context in Western and Eastern Europe can be extended to predict the relationship between Openness and political orientation and activism in these non-European countries as well. In particular, it may be hypothesized that in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil, Openness will be positively associated with left-wing political orientation, whereas this relationship might be negative in Cuba and China. Also, in the former countries, one might expect Openness to inspire

particularly left-wing activism, whereas in the latter countries, Openness may be primarily associated with right-wing activism.

It may be argued that our conceptual focus on the historical-political context in Europe and the resulting distinction between two vast regions might obscure potential differences between smaller clusters of countries based on other criteria. Indeed, Hofstede (1980) and the GLOBE-project (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) have suggested a number of smaller country-clusters in Western Europe, which can be identified based on ‘cultural values dimensions’. In contrast to our conceptual distinction between Western and Eastern Europe, these smaller clusters have been delineated by a data-driven approach, aggregating individual responses of (non-representative) samples within each country to obtain country-level indices on five (Hofstede) or nine (GLOBE) dimensions of cultural values, such as Power Distance and Future Orientation. These dimensions of cultural values were developed within the domain of Industrial and Organizational psychology and research therefore primarily focused on their impact at an organizational level. Nevertheless, these dimensions can provide useful insights at a societal level as well. Future research may therefore want to investigate the role of each of the cultural value dimensions with regard to the effect of Openness on political orientation and activism at the individual level and assess potential differences between more fine-grained country-clusters.

Conclusion

The present study analyzed the relationship between Openness and political orientation and activism across Europe. Openness demonstrated substantial and robust positive relationships with left-wing political orientation in Western European countries, whereas this relationship was

considerably weaker and even reversed in Eastern Europe. Moreover, Openness showed to be especially relevant for left-wing political activism in Western Europe, whereas in Eastern Europe, it was slightly more associated with right-wing activism. It can therefore be concluded that the role of Openness as a 'political variable' is highly dependent on the geo-political (historical) context.

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Table 1.

Description of countries included in each sample and descriptive statistics averaged over data waves.

	2 0 0 2	2 0 0 4	2 0 0 6	2 0 0 8	net sample size	Gender % females	Age		Openness		Placement on left right scale		Unconventional Activism		Conventional Activism	
							Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Bulgaria			x	x	1807	58	47.94	17.30	95.80	9.39	4.63	2.66	0.12	0.41	0.10	0.41
Croatia				x	1444	57	42.82	16.80	96.24	9.21	5.29	2.48	0.47	0.82	0.17	0.52
Czech Republic	x	x		x	2099	51	46.09	17.24	96.92	8.74	5.48	2.44	0.27	0.59	0.26	0.54
Estonia		x	x	x	1721	58	46.93	19.44	99.30	9.08	5.25	1.97	0.13	0.41	0.17	0.46
Hungary	x	x	x	x	1557	55	46.52	18.36	98.21	8.22	5.22	2.38	0.14	0.45	0.15	0.43
Latvia				x	1980	62	47.27	18.58	97.01	8.90	5.79	2.51	0.17	0.48	0.17	0.46
Poland	x	x	x	x	1789	52	43.32	18.56	94.76	8.46	5.52	2.27	0.13	0.41	0.13	0.43
Romania				x	2115	56	42.21	16.65	95.31	8.01	5.61	2.66	0.10	0.37	0.21	0.56
Russian Federation			x	x	2461	58	43.88	18.40	94.80	9.55	5.22	2.02	0.15	0.47	0.14	0.43
Slovakia		x	x	x	1653	54	44.23	17.82	94.98	7.80	4.92	2.37	0.34	0.61	0.14	0.43
Slovenia	x	x	x	x	1419	54	45.68	18.79	99.06	8.86	4.78	2.36	0.17	0.46	0.19	0.50
Ukraine		x	x	x	1959	61	46.66	18.07	94.37	9.07	5.61	2.38	0.20	0.48	0.21	0.52
Austria	x	x	x		2298	53	41.50	16.98	102.56	10.80	4.67	1.94	0.51	0.77	0.38	0.71
Belgium	x	x	x	x	1786	51	45.38	18.48	101.10	9.11	4.89	1.99	0.47	0.73	0.28	0.59
Cyprus			x	x	1100	51	44.48	17.48	96.57	7.90	5.07	3.05	0.16	0.48	0.36	0.76
Danmark	x	x	x	x	1524	50	47.88	17.72	104.01	10.14	5.43	2.06	0.64	0.79	0.31	0.60
Finland	x	x	x	x	2028	52	47.27	18.74	101.48	9.33	5.70	2.02	0.59	0.75	0.41	0.68
France	x	x	x	x	1841	53	46.54	18.06	103.30	9.95	4.77	2.33	0.76	0.93	0.31	0.61
Germany	x	x	x	x	2823	50	47.23	17.70	101.73	10.05	4.60	1.82	0.65	0.83	0.22	0.53
Greece	x	x		x	2346	55	45.21	17.62	94.93	7.57	5.49	2.19	0.19	0.51	0.21	0.56
Iceland		x			566	53	43.50	18.26	105.97	10.05	5.09	2.16	0.92	0.91	0.79	0.91
Ireland	x	x	x		1995	55	43.94	17.67	98.56	9.64	5.30	1.80	0.43	0.73	0.35	0.64
Netherlands	x	x	x	x	1977	54	46.49	17.12	102.42	8.65	5.21	2.02	0.35	0.63	0.22	0.52
Norway	x	x	x	x	1773	48	45.63	17.56	100.83	9.54	5.24	2.05	0.69	0.84	0.54	0.76
Portugal	x	x	x	x	2037	58	47.35	19.04	98.38	8.04	4.95	2.08	0.12	0.41	0.14	0.45
Spain	x	x	x	x	1950	51	45.66	18.88	97.49	9.51	4.48	2.03	0.53	0.84	0.26	0.60
Sweden	x	x	x	x	1923	50	46.81	18.81	104.14	9.42	5.11	2.28	0.85	0.84	0.34	0.64
Switzerland	x	x	x	x	1949	53	45.88	17.90	103.92	9.92	4.97	1.91	0.73	0.86	0.28	0.59
United Kingdom	x	x	x	x	2161	52	46.25	18.45	100.78	9.34	5.06	1.75	0.66	0.80	0.27	0.56

Note: x = data included in analysis for a particular wave.

Table 2:

Estimated Fixed Effects and Standard Errors from random and fixed effects multilevel models predicting Left-Right Self Placement in four independent samples.

<i>Estimated fixed effects</i>	<i>2002</i>			<i>2004</i>			<i>2006</i>			<i>2008</i>		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Intercept	5.182	.131	***	5.220	.101	***	5.155	.118	***	5.233	.060	***
Education	-.014	.016		-.049	.014	**	-.038	.013	**	-.055	.012	***
Age	.098	.016	***	.077	.015	***	-.017	.014		-.029	.012	*
Gender	-.053	.014	***	-.050	.013	***	-.025	.012	*	-.003	.011	
Openness	-.014	.002	***	-.014	.002	***	-.020	.001	***	-.011	.001	***
EastWest	-.178	.131		-.265	.101	*	-.199	.118		-.248	.060	**
Openness x EastWest	-.021	.002	***	-.020	.002	***	-.016	.001	***	-.024	.001	***
R ² l			.12			.17			.07			.10

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, R²l = marginal pseudo R² statistics (Orelien & Edwards, 2008).

Table 3:

Estimated Fixed Effects and Standard Errors from random and fixed effects multilevel models predicting Unconventional Activism and Conventional Activism in four independent samples.

	2002			2004			2006			2008		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	
UNCONVENTIONAL ACTIVISM												
Intercept	.395	.057	***	.400	.049	***	.341	.036	***	.353	.027	***
Education	.163	.006	***	.159	.005	***	.138	.004	***	.123	.004	***
Age	.013	.006	*	.042	.006	***	.044	.005	***	.047	.004	***
Gender	.016	.005	**	.030	.005	***	.020	.004	***	.017	.004	***
Openness	.010	.001	***	.010	.001	***	.009	.001	***	.010	.000	***
EastWest	.160	.057	*	.139	.049	*	.156	.036	**	.124	.027	***
Left-right	-.018	.004	***	-.008	.003	**	-.016	.002	***	-.016	.002	***
O x East-West	.005	.001	***	.004	.001	***	.004	.000	***	.006	.000	***
O x Left-right	-.002	.000	***	-.001	.000	*	-.002	.000	***	-.002	.000	***
EastWest *Leftright	-.033	.004	***	-.038	.003	***	-.029	.002	***	-.016	.002	***
O x EastWest *Leftright	-.003	.000	***	-.002	.000	***	-.002	.000	***	-.003	.000	***
R ² ₁			.15			.13			.16			.16
CONVENTIONAL ACTIVISM												
Intercept	.292	.028	***	.253	.025	***	.233	.020	***	.212	.012	***
Education	.098	.004	***	.082	.004	***	.073	.003	***	.067	.003	***
Age	.048	.005	***	.038	.004	***	.052	.004	***	.047	.003	***
Gender	-.030	.004	***	-.019	.004	***	-.020	.003	***	-.017	.003	***
Openness	.005	.001	***	.006	.001	***	.005	.000	***	.005	.000	***
EastWest	.014	.028		.031	.025		.030	.020		.018	.012	
Left-right	-.006	.003	*	.007	.002	*	.002	.002		-.002	.001	
O x East-West	.001	.001		-.001	.000		.001	.000	*	.000	.000	
O x Left-right	-.002	.000	***	.000	.000		-.001	.000	***	-.001	.000	***
EastWest *Leftright	-.009	.003	**	-.016	.002	***	-.016	.002	***	-.003	.001	*
O x EastWest *Leftright	-.001	.000	***	-.001	.000	***	-.001	.000	***	-.001	.000	***
R ² ₁			.17			.26			.05			.17

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, R²₁ = marginal pseudo R² statistics.

Figure Captions

Figure 1: Effects of Openness (1SD above and below the mean) on Left-Right Selfplacement in Eastern and Western Europe in four samples.

Figure 2: Effects of Openness (1SD above and below the mean) on Unconventional Activism (top four panels) and Unconventional Activism (bottom four panels) for politically left and right oriented individuals (1SD above and below the mean) in Eastern and Western Europe in four samples.

Figure 1

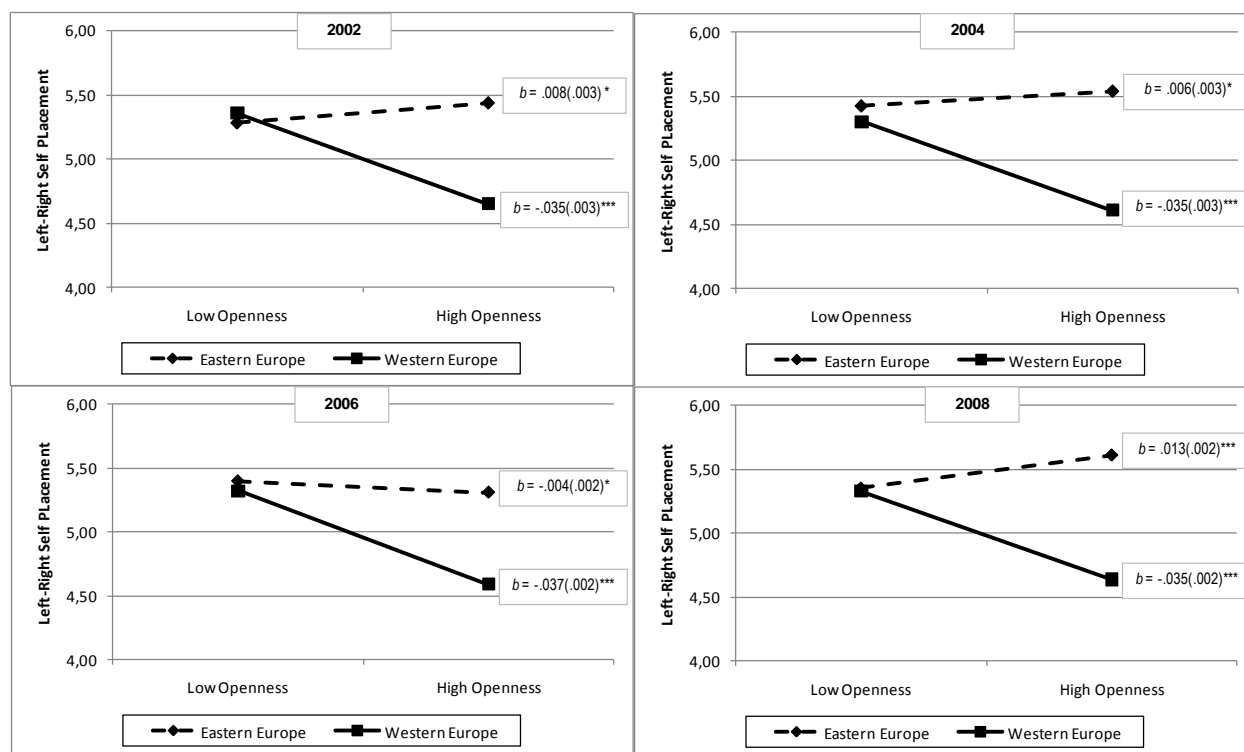


Figure 2

