

The Influence of Extraversion on Political Polarization and Affective Forecasting:

by

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Abstract

In the United States, political division has continually worsened over the years, with the growing divide between the Left and Right leading to increased animosity between members of the two parties. This study explores this expanding division by analyzing the influence of political polarization on individuals' willingness to work for a humanitarian cause. Specifically, we examine if an individual's extraversion rating influences how long they spend on charitable task, or how long they predict they would spend on the task, and if the presence of cues associated with their in-group or out-group would influence their participation as well. This study does so by determining an association between extraversion and the assigned task type (predictor or engager) as well as between extraversion and the party they identify with. It also looked at the correlation of extraversion and time spent on a charitable task supposedly sponsored by a control, co-partisan, or counter-partisan charity organization. Ultimately, we found no association between extraversion and the time spent on the charitable task, nor did it find a link in extraversion and party identification. This study ran into some limitations that may have impacted its overall results – including time constraints and a singular focus placed on the personality trait of extraversion. This study demonstrated the importance of participation within prosocial activities and the implications of activities that influence this participation.

The Influence of Extraversion on Political Polarization and Affective Forecasting

The ever-growing divide between the Left and the Right in the United States has only been hastened by the election of former President Donald J. Trump (Berman, 2022); it has become more important than ever before that we understand the concept of political polarization as well as its many implications. Polarization involves the division into two sharply distinct opposites, the creation of an in-group and out-group (Berman, 2022) – a concept which can be applied to the division present within the political system of the United States, thus *political polarization*. The concept of political polarization is believed to influence an individual's affective forecasting, in other words, their prediction about their own future emotions.

The ideological split between the United States Democrats and Republicans has only worsened in the past two years following the January 6, 2021, attempted coup and the election of President Joseph R. Biden (Morgan, 2022). The hostility displayed by either party towards their opposition has only served to worsen the divide. This divide can be seen not only on the Federal level (in Congress, and between political candidates), but it has also become increasingly common among the general public (Iyengar et al., 2019).

Political Polarization

Research shows that both the Democratic and Republican parties view the other side as hypocritical, selfish, and close-minded. Ordinary Americans today are increasingly unwilling to befriend, partner, or even socialize, with individuals from the 'other side' (Iyengar et al., 2019). This phenomenon discussed by Iyengar and colleagues (2019) is known as affective polarization, which is in line with political polarization. Affective polarization occurs partly as a result of this expanding political polarization. Even on issues that the parties may have once stood together on, that is no longer, as the two parties in Congress grow more homogenous in their own policies while their differences continue expanding (Layman et al., 2006). The further the parties drift

apart in Congress, the more the division within the American public will continue to grow, which further increases the negative attitudes that each party holds about one another.

Within the United States, political polarization has nearly reached its worst state in that it poses a significant threat to the democratic process. Constructive debates between Democrats and Republicans have become more difficult as ordinary people are less willing to engage with one another (Heltzel & Laurin, 2020). This revulsion between the parties runs the risk of potentially destabilizing democracy (Heltzel & Laurin, 2020). With the disdain that the members of each party have for the other side, it would be expected that neither side could be bothered to provide aid to a person aligned with their opposing political view.

This unwillingness is influenced by the actions conducted by the Congress and its members, as has been reported on the wide variety of news stations within the country – most of which have a degree of partisan bias, such as CNN or FOX (Peacock et al., 2020). The polarization and dislike for the opposing party, as portrayed by these news media companies, further exacerbates the issue, leading to a misperception regarding the severity of political polarization between ordinary citizens (Van Boven et al., 2012), a misperception that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Ahler, 2014).

Personality and Political Behavior

An important factor to consider when analyzing political polarization and an individual's susceptibility to it, is to understand the personality of the people involved. Most studies that have looked into personality and its interaction with political affiliation in recent years have relied on the Big Five framework of personality for analysis (Webster, 2018). The Big Five is one of the most common personality frameworks, with the five factors of the framework being: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Openness to experience has been found to be associated with ideological liberalism, while conscientiousness

is typically associated with ideological conservatism (Gerber et al., 2010; Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Mondak, 2010). Of the big five traits measured, these are most reliably predicted because those who score high on openness to experience are more willing to entertain new ideas and different opinions. Whereas those who score high on conscientiousness prefer hierarchies and maintaining the existing social structures. The descriptions of these two traits are spot on for some of the ideals represented by the parties they are most often associated with (Webster, 2018).

In terms of political engagement, party identification, and polarization, some of the strongest driving forces in terms of personality are extraversion and agreeableness. Individuals who rate high in extraversion are more likely to participate in politics, regardless of the medium, as well as are more likely to vote compared to their introverted peers (Gerber et al., 2009). Both extraversion and agreeableness are associated with how strongly someone identifies with their own party. Considering this information, previous studies have concluded that either individuals who score low on extraversion or high on agreeableness are less likely to discuss politics with members of the opposite political party. Also, that people who score lower on agreeableness are more likely to hold a negative view of the opposing party, maintaining a strong negative opinion of the out-party compared to members of their own party who score higher on the personality trait of agreeableness. Understanding the implications of personality within the political arena helps to generate an understanding of how people may believe they would react when faced with a scenario involving members of the opposing party; how their polarization would influence their own affective forecasting.

Affective Forecasting

This concept is significant in that affective forecasting may play a role in the expected difference in time spent on the charitable task based on their assigned condition, of either

predictor or engager. We predicted that participants who were assigned to make predictions regarding how long they believed they or other participants would spend on the task, would take less time than those in the engagement condition. The results of this expectation as well as a more in-depth discussion about these conditions will be covered in the Procedures section of this paper.

Affective forecasting, or more simply the prediction of one's own future emotions, first saw significant focus when researchers recognized that while people may be good at predicting future outcomes, they may not be as good at predicting their feelings associated with the outcome (Gross & Loewenstein, 2014). When it comes to the analysis of affective forecasting, there are four aspects to consider: valence – whether the emotions are negative or positive, the specific emotions experienced, the intensity of the emotions, and the duration of the emotions. In the past, most research regarding a person's predictions were based on the occurrence of future external events or their own behavior. It is not until recently that research has begun on the individual's ability to forecast their own feelings (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). Wilson & Gilbert (2003) also mention the importance of accuracy when using affective forecasting as a proxy to predict a person's mood. They found that people, for the most part, are fairly accurate when it comes to predicting their specific emotions as well as the valence of the specific emotions – much harder to predict, though, are the intensity and duration of the emotions they will experience. As is the primary focus of affective forecasting, people tend to significantly overestimate the intensity and duration of their emotions in the future. It may just be because they mispredicted how quickly the emotion will come and fade; or it could involve a more complex situation that they failed to account for (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003).

Like political polarization, individual affective forecasting can be influenced by the biases present in the many forms of media. Considering most political media that people

consume comes from their own party, it is likely the vast majority of information they receive would not favor their opposing party. This has given rise to the “bandwagon” and “underdog” effects which demonstrate the findings of multiple past studies regarding political polarization, in that partisan news media play a crucial role when it comes to shaping affective assessments (Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al., 2022). Individuals who rely on the media and opinions of others within their in-group to formulate their opinions are not only susceptible to being polarized but also, will most likely, inform their forecasting based on their polarization. While this may not directly influence the accuracy of one’s own affective forecasting, it does impact most of their ability to form their own original affective forecasting.

Beyond the influence of bias impacting a person’s ability to form an independent affective forecast, impact bias can lead to the overestimation of emotional consequences of future events when making affective forecasts (Hoerger et al., 2010). Impact bias, otherwise defined as: the tendency to overestimate the enduring impact that future events will have on our emotional reactions (Gilbert, Driver-Linn, & Wilson, 2002; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). Past studies have found that exaggerated predictions about the future caused *focalism*, which is the tendency to view a future target event as isolated and ignoring peripheral life events which may impact that future event (Wilson et al., 2000). In Hoerger, et al. (2010) found that Democrat voters (Kerry supporters) overestimated how unhappy they would feel two weeks after losing the election; whereas Republican voters (Bush supporters) did not display as much influence from impact bias as it appears to be less salient for positive events. Additionally, the practices which increased the contextualization of the event helped reduce biased affective forecasting. For example, one of these practices used by Hoerger et al. (2010) involved the use of a diary manipulation, where participants were given a questionnaire which asked them how much time

they would spend on various daily activities. This further increased the accuracy of affective forecasting in subsequent tasks for participants who participated in the manipulation.

Affective Forecasting and Personality

Not only does the context of the event influence the accuracy of a person's forecast, but the specific feature of emotion they are predicting also plays an important role. That overestimation was reduced, but not eliminated, when people predicted their overall mood instead of the intensity of their feelings (Lench et al., 2019). When it comes to understanding the significance of affective forecasting, it is important to consider the personality of the people making the predictions. Finding that, of the big five traits, only extraversion and neuroticism were associated with any part of affective forecasting. Extraversion is positively associated with anticipated and experienced emotional reactions; while Neuroticism is more negatively associated with the above emotional reactions (Hoerger & Quirk, 2010). People who score higher on Extraversion are more likely to not only have a higher base mood but also have a stronger anticipation for a positive mood as a result – with the inverse applying to those who score higher on neuroticism. Neuroticism, which describes an individual's overall emotional stability, can affect people's perception of the world; those who score high on Neuroticism are typically more anxious, self-conscious, and vulnerable to stress. Neuroticism has been found to impact people's attitudes and ability to look toward the future.

The big five model is a self-report test used for the study and analysis of individual personality, split up into five traits and rated on a spectrum. Participants who are rated on big five model will be placed somewhere on the spectrum for each of the five traits; scoring high, or low, on any of the traits is not an inherently good or bad outcome. The personality trait being investigated for the purposes of this study is extraversion. Extraversion reflects the tendency to which one seeks interactions with the environment, especially socially, with those who score

high on the trait being more outgoing and sociable (Lim, 2020). Of the five personality traits, extraversion is the only trait where the results were mixed with no significant association in what party they associate with; yet it still functions as a strong predictor in an individual's identification with a major political party (Barbaranelli et al. 2007, Caprara et al. 1999, Mondak, 2010, Mondak & Halperin, 2008, Schoen & Schumann, 2007, Gerber et al. 2011).

Current Study

This study aims to explore whether the trait extraversion moderates people's accuracy when predicting their effort expended on a partisan-associated task for charity, compared with the actual effort expended conducting that task. For the purposes of this study, we define affective forecasting as the difference between how much they predicted they would be willing to help versus how much they help in an actual situation. Specifically, I will look at participants' "affective forecasting" in terms of their willingness to help a charitable organization from the out-group, compared to a charity from their in-group. I hypothesize that extraversion will be associated with a change in the affective forecasting of participants.

Methods

Design

This study was conducted at the University of Colorado Boulder in the Emotion Decision Making Judgement and Identity lab (EDJI). Participants came into the lab and completed an online survey with some of the participants also completing a charitable task (those in the engagement task). Participants were randomly assigned to either complete a charitable task or make predictions about their own and others' predictions on the charitable task, and were also randomly assigned to a Democratic, Republican, or nonpartisan (American) sponsor organization, their political identity was measured via self-report. Participants completed an extraversion scale as part of the post-measures. The outcome measure included effort expended

on the charitable task measured by the time spent working on the charitable task by participants in the engagement condition, or predicted time spent working on the charitable task in the prediction condition. Additionally, participants were asked to rate their personality traits via self-report measures. The results of participants involved in the task sponsored by the non-partisan organization was originally used as a control measure but ended up being removed during data analysis.

Participants

The data used in this study were collected from 62 undergraduate students, but 14 participants who identified as Independents were excluded from the study resulting in 48 undergraduate students (37 females, 11 males) enrolled in SONA at the University of Colorado Boulder. Participants ranged from 18 to 21 years old with a mean age of 18.79 ($SD = 0.89$). Participants received two course credits in exchange for completing the study.

Measures

Partisan affiliation. For this study, we measured partisan affiliation by using a set of questions from the American National Election Studies (ANES; American National Election Studies, 2022). All participants completed the partisan affiliation measure before beginning work on the task. Participants were categorized as either “Democrat”, “Independent”, or “Republican” by answering the question: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?” Participants who answered either “Democrat” or “Republican” were categorized accordingly. If someone answered as “Independent” or “Something Else”, they were then asked, “Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, or neither?” Participants who answer as either “Democrat” or “Republican” in response were categorized accordingly, those who selected “Neither” were categorized as “Independent” and subsequently excluded from this study. Of the

62 participants, 14 were categorized as Independent, 39 were categorized as Democrats, and 9 were categorized as Republican.

Extraversion scale. The extraversion scale was measured as a smaller part of a larger personality inventory, the ten-item personality inventory. Each of the Big Five personality traits were measured using the ten-item personality inventory from Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann (2003). This inventory was completed by participants alongside the other post-measures. The ten-item personality inventory consists of ten questions, with two questions each correlating to one of the big five personality traits. Each question was rated on a Likert scale from 1 = *Disagree Strongly* and 7 = *Agree Strongly*. The questions used for the extraversion scale were: “I see myself as Extraverted, enthusiastic” and “I see myself as Reserved, quiet” (reverse scored). The mean score for extraversion was 4.50 ($SD = 1.42$).

Time spent on charitable task. The charitable task used as part of this study was based on the Finding Letters on Pages (FLP) task from Azar (2019). In this task participants are tasked with finding letters within six blocks of text (illustrated in *Figure 2*) with each block becoming more tedious as the size of the letters in the block decreased. As an example, the task would instruct participants to find the letter in block 3, line 19, position 42 – they would then need to count through the line of text in order to find the specific letter. The FLP task was intentionally designed to be tedious and unenjoyable, and it was designed to serve as an effortful task that persistence was due to factors outside of enjoyment. Effort on the FLP task was determined by the amount of time participants spent on the task (up to a maximum of 55 minutes) in the engager condition, or how long they predicted they (and others) would spend on the task in the predictor condition. The mean time spent on the task was 33.92 ($SD = 15.30$).

Procedure

The data collected for this study was collected as part of a larger study still under data collection. This study was conducted in the EDJI Lab laboratory space with groups of up to four participants at a time, with each group given up to one hour to complete the experiment. This study consisted of two sections, an online survey administered with Qualtrics (www.Qualtrics.com) completed by both the predictor and engager condition as well as a physical charitable task that the engager condition completed by hand. For the results, I used R Studio to analyze all of the collected data.

When the lab started, participants were assigned as a group a hypothetical sponsor organization condition: “Democrats for the Common Good,” “Republicans for the Common Good,” or “Americans for the Common Good.” Participants were also assigned to either an engager condition where they took both the Qualtrics survey and participated in the physical task booklet, or the predictor condition in which participants were just asked to take the Qualtrics survey and asked to make predictions about how they believed others would behave in the engagement task. Each participant was only made aware of the sponsor charity, benefitting organization (Global Water Foundation) and the engager/predictor condition that they were assigned to.

At the start of the study, participants were given verbal instructions as a group introducing them to the experiment and telling them how to complete the assigned tasks. Participants were told to suppose that for each letter correctly identified on the FLP booklet task, \$0.25 would be donated by their assigned sponsor charity to the Global Water Foundation. They were told that they could work on the task for as long, or as little, as they would like and that they would receive credit for their participation regardless of how much of the task that they completed.

Following the reading of instructions, participants were sent to their own cubicle to complete the assigned task. Both conditions began by taking the survey including some pre-measures, engagers were then asked to begin work on the charitable task. Engagers were instructed by the survey to work on the charitable task for as long as they would like, to proceed when they were no longer interested in continuing and to not work on the task once they proceeded with the survey. Participants then completed post-measures which included demographic measures as well as the extraversion scale.

Results

For analysis, we excluded Independents and then collapsed participant partisan affiliation with task-sponsor partisanship into one factor: co-partisan or counter-partisan. To test whether or not the co-partisan/counter-partisan condition affected the amount of time participants spent on their task based off their assigned task, we ran an ANOVA test using type III sums of squares. With the ANOVA test, we got three results for the task (predictor, engager), the political condition (co- or counter-partisan), and the interaction between the two. From these results, the only significant effect was a main effect was task ($F(1, 44) = 4.26, p = 0.045$) while the political condition was not statistically significant ($F(1, 44) = 0.69, p = 0.411$) and neither was the interaction between task or political condition ($F(1, 44) = 0.37, p = 0.544$).

Beyond the ANOVA test, I also conducted two separate t-tests. The first t-test predicted extraversion from the assigned task (predictor or engager) which turned out to not be statistically significant ($p = 0.320$). The mean of extraversion for those in the predictor condition was 4.29, with the mean in the engager predictor being 4.71. The second t-test, predicting extraversion from the participants' identified political party, also proved to be statistically insignificant ($p = 0.520$). In the political identification section, the mean of extraversion for Democrat participants was 4.44, and the mean for Republican participants was 4.78.

The final test we used was a Pearson's product-moment correlation test to determine an association between extraversion and the time participants spent working on the task. The results of this test also had no statistical significance ($p = 0.850$) with little to no correlation between the two data points ($r(46) = 0.03$). These findings indicate that my predictions were not supported: that there is no association between extraversion and political identity, nor is extraversion associated with any influence on the time participants spent working on the charitable task.

Discussion

This current study intended to explore the implications of the personality of participants in their predictions and willingness to work with a charitable organization – either the co-partisan or counter-partisan organization. Past studies looking at the association of personality, and more specifically extraversion, have found that these traits play a role in most everyday life. Yet in the case of acting as a predictor for participation in a charitable task, extraversion fails to act as such (illustrated in *Figure 4*). My hypothesis that extraversion would be associated with affective forecasting (or with their willingness to participate in a charitable task sponsored by an organization) was not supported. We found that participants contributed around the same amount of effort regardless of whether it was with the co-partisan or counter-partisan sponsors; they also expected others to contribute about the same amount of time.

While other personality traits may still play a role as predictors for how long participants were willing to participate in the charitable organization, extraversion appears to play no significant role. Past studies have found that, while the trait may not be directly associated with time spent on a task, it was indirectly related to participation in volunteer activities (Carlo et al., 2005). The findings of our study supported this concept in that there was still no observable link with extraversion, but its influence was very much indirect.

Potential Explanations

This indirect nature of extraversion and its influence on individuals' engagement with charitable, prosocial organizations could be a possible explanation as to why we found no significant association with extraversion. As Gerber and his colleagues (2011) and Hoerger & Quirk (2010) discussed in their studies, extraversion plays a significant role in many facets of everyday life – including the political sphere. People who score high in extraversion are typically a lot more involved in politics and the discussion surrounding it; as such they are more likely to be subjected to, and subsequently influenced by, political bias in the news and media. Even though you may not see this influence on paper, it may still exist in the background. While this is difficult to measure, one way could be through a set of self-report questions asking them to rate how much news, and other political media, they consumed in an average as well as what stations they preferred to get their news from.

The aforementioned news stations (and biased media) and their influence on an individual's political beliefs is another possible explanation for the results of our current study. Similar to extraversion and our participation in the political world, the bias present in our news and social media is not explicitly present in our study and instead acts as an indirect influence. This indirect influence of biased media/news works similarly to the influence of extraversion and political participation – that both contribute to political polarization. Political polarization is very difficult to accurately measure, but it still plays a significant role in the political attitudes of anybody involved; as well as influencing their predictions involved in the political world.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study faced a few limitations that hindered the overall impact of its findings. The first limitation is that the study had a limited period of time for data collection: October 18th to October 26th. As such, we were only able to collect a small pool of participants compared to our original anticipations. We were thus underpowered to find anything but very large effects. Future

studies may benefit from rerunning this same experiment with a larger participant pool to see if an association is apparent with more participants taking part in the experiment.

Future studies could also benefit by having a more diverse set of participants, with a larger representation in specifically Republican participants, as well as to include a more complex results section by including participants who were categorized as Independent as a control. Of the 48 participants who included in the study, 39 of them were categorized as Democrat with Republican participants occupying a significant minority at only nine participants. This rather homogenous participant pool may have skewed the findings as they relate to the co-partisan/counter-partisan portion as well as severely limit the analysis of extraversion as it is related to Republican participants.

The third limitation of this study is that it focused solely on the personality trait of extraversion instead of the other potential big five personality traits. Future studies may have better luck in their experiments if they include more relevant traits, such as neuroticism. As was discussed earlier in this paper, past studies found an association between neuroticism and negative affective forecasts. It would be interesting to see if high, or low, neuroticism scores play a role in influencing accurate affective forecasts, as well as if it impacts the amount of time someone spends on a charitable task run by a counter-partisan organization. This train of thought could be applied to any of the other big five personality traits to determine which, if any, of the traits play a crucial role in the focus of this study.

The final limitation of this study is the fact that a lot of participants in the predictor condition still worked on the FLP task even though the survey explicitly says not to work on the booklet. While this may not directly impact our results, it does raise questions about what other instructions may have been ignored. I think future studies could improve from this limitation by

providing written instructions on exactly what they will need to do based on their assigned condition, printed and placed next to the FLP task to ensure that participants read it.

Implications

The results of this study appear to demonstrate that partisan bias cannot be attributed to charitable decision making nor does extraversion seem to play any role in these behaviors. As past studies have discussed, extraversion plays a role in both political polarization as well as potentially affective forecast, but it does not appear to act as a predictor for willingness to participate in charitable acts. Also, we did not find evidence that prosocial behaviors are significantly influenced by partisan bias which helps to show that people will support charitable organizations regardless of the hypothetical political affiliation of the sponsoring organization.

While past studies seem to suggest that extraversion would indeed play a role in how susceptible people are to things such as political polarization, the findings of this study seem to point to the idea that people will take the time to complete, rather boring, tasks in order to benefit charitable organizations regardless of whether or not the organization is a part of their in-group or out-group.

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Figures



Figure 1. The logos used to represent the three sponsor organizations included in the different versions of the task.

On the following pages different letters are written. In the questions below you are asked to write which letter appears on a certain page, in a certain line, and in a certain position. The position of the letter in the line is counted from left to right. For example, the letter on page 1, line 1, position 3 is s.

1. Page 1 , Line 1 , Position 2
2. Page 1 , Line 5 , Position 6
3. Page 1 , Line 16 , Position 12
4. Page 1 , Line 21 , Position 17
5. Page 2 , Line 3 , Position 21
6. Page 2 , Line 8 , Position 23
7. Page 2 , Line 19 , Position 29
8. Page 2 , Line 23 , Position 31

jfsjqrchonxzezwademicjfvviewprocyxshasjfceivedincjfasedattentionjfce
 ntlyindeedxzejfvviewprocyxsisanimportantjfsjqrchttopickvcausegainingi
 nsightsaboutxzyxtjfngxzsandxzewjqknyxsyxofxzeprocyxscanhelpusc
 hangexzeprocyxsinainsightsaboutxzyxtjfngxzsandxzefdkvneficialwayj
 fsjqrchaboutxjqdvantagyxofdo

Figure 2. An example segment of the Azar (2019) FLP task. This provides an example of the task that participants were presented during the experiment. This jumbled block of letters is what participants had to look through (for a specific letter) as part of the task.

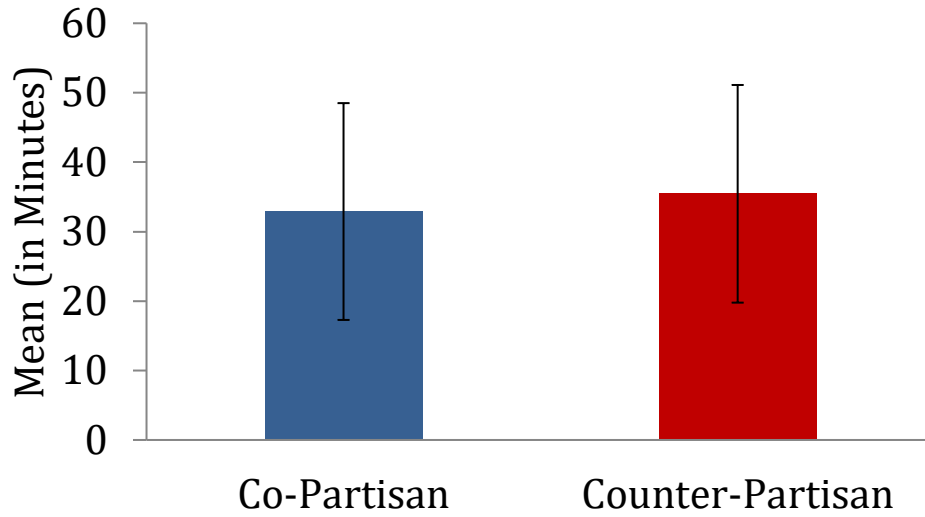


Figure 3. This graph illustrates the mean time that participants spent (or predicted they would spend) on the charitable task dependent on the political condition; little to no difference is observed between the means of these two political conditions.

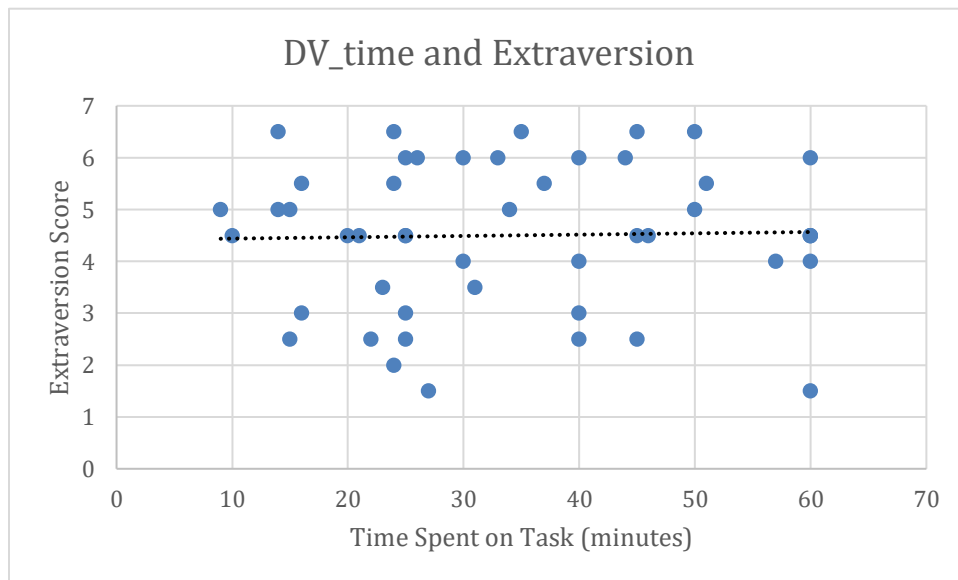


Figure 4. This scatterplot illustrates association between the extraversion score of participants and the time they spent on the charitable task. This graph demonstrates a lack of association between these two factors.

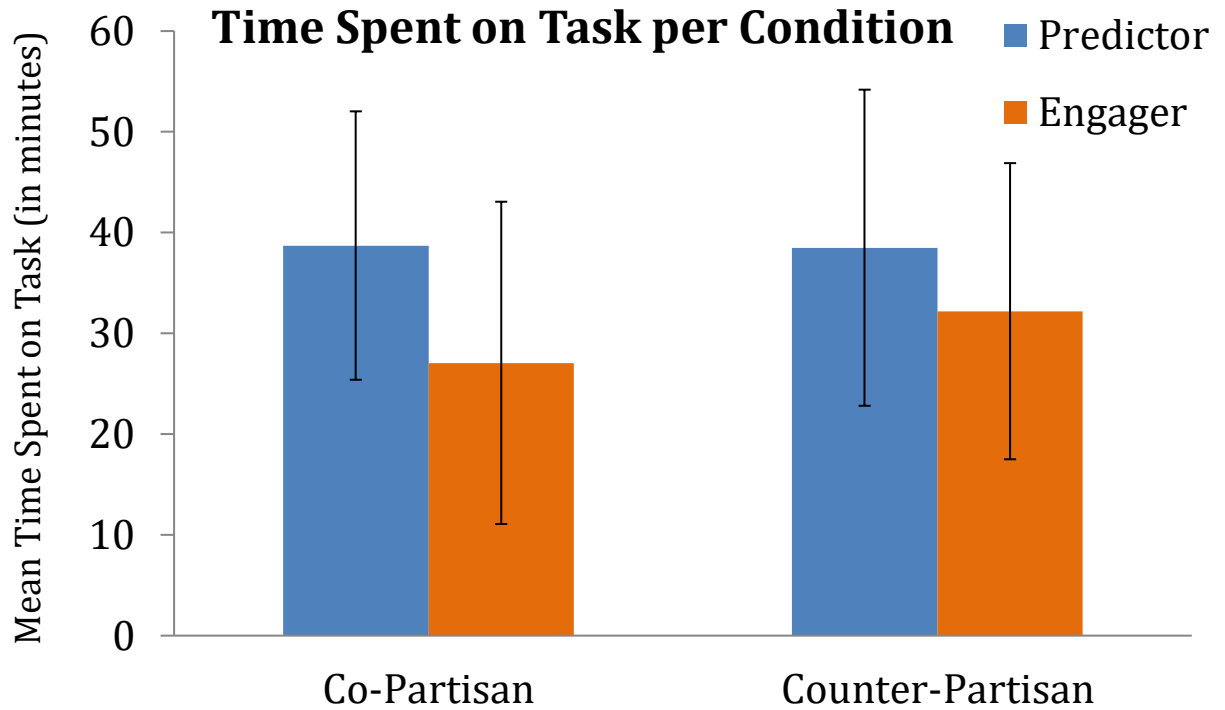


Figure 5. This graph illustrates the association of the mean time spent on the task with the interaction of task condition (Predictor, Engager) and political condition (co-partisan, counter-partisan)