

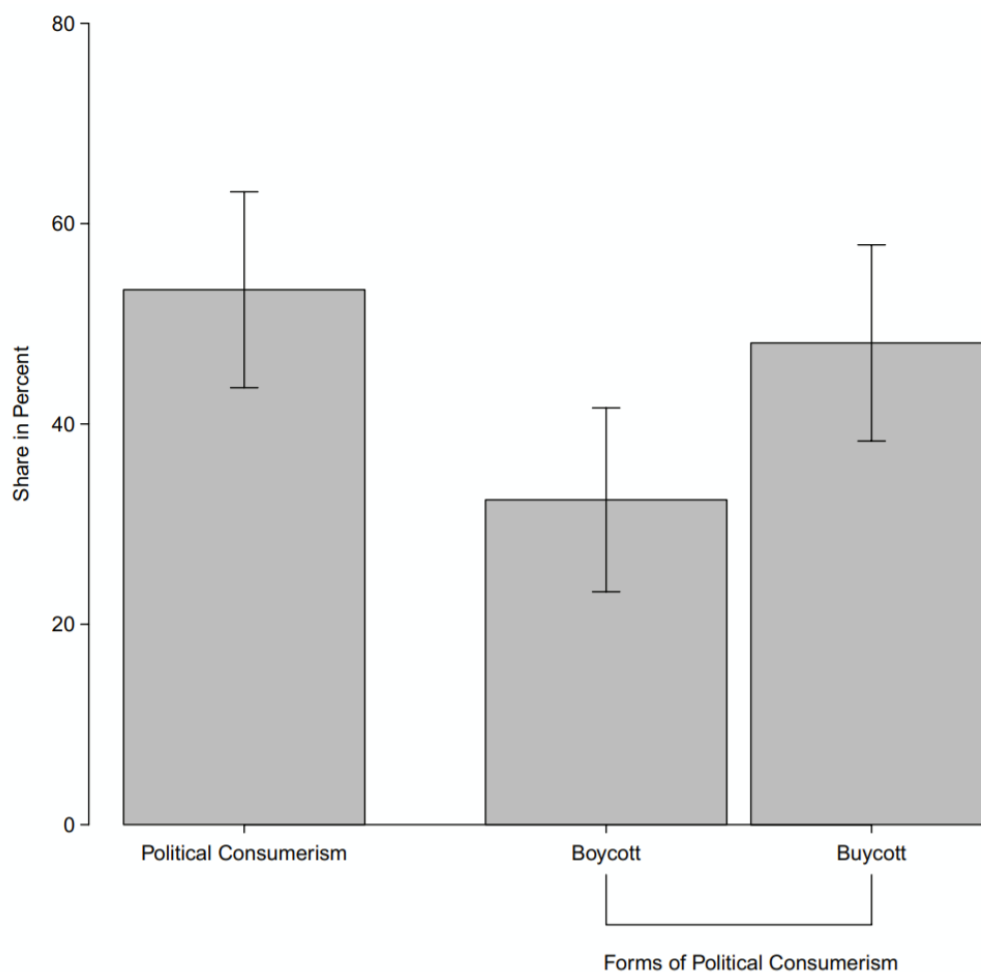
How personality traits shape our tendency to engage in political consumerism

Many people choose to consciously purchase or boycott products for political and ethical reasons. Indeed, as **Kathrin Ackermann** and **Birte Gundelach** explain, political consumerism now ranks as one of the most frequently used forms of political participation in western democracies. Drawing on new evidence from Switzerland, they examine the role of personality traits in shaping the decisions of individuals to engage in this form of political behaviour.

People are increasingly expressing their political opinions through their purchasing decisions. For example, they may consciously buy fair trade chocolate or avoid products made by corporations that are publicly criticised for their production methods. Indeed, the conscious purchase (*buycott*) or non-purchase (*boycott*) of products for political, ethical or ecological reasons now ranks among the most frequently used forms of political participation in western democracies.

In a [new study](#), we examine the psychological roots of this behaviour by focusing on Switzerland, which is one of the countries where political consumption is most widespread. As Figure 1 illustrates, around half of the respondents to a [Swiss Volunteering Survey](#) in 2014 indicated they had made a conscious decision to purchase a product in the previous twelve months for political, ethical or ecological reasons.

Figure 1: Political consumption in Switzerland



Note: The share of respondents in the 'boycott' and 'buycott' groups are not mutually exclusive. Data taken from the Swiss Volunteering Survey 2014. *Source:*

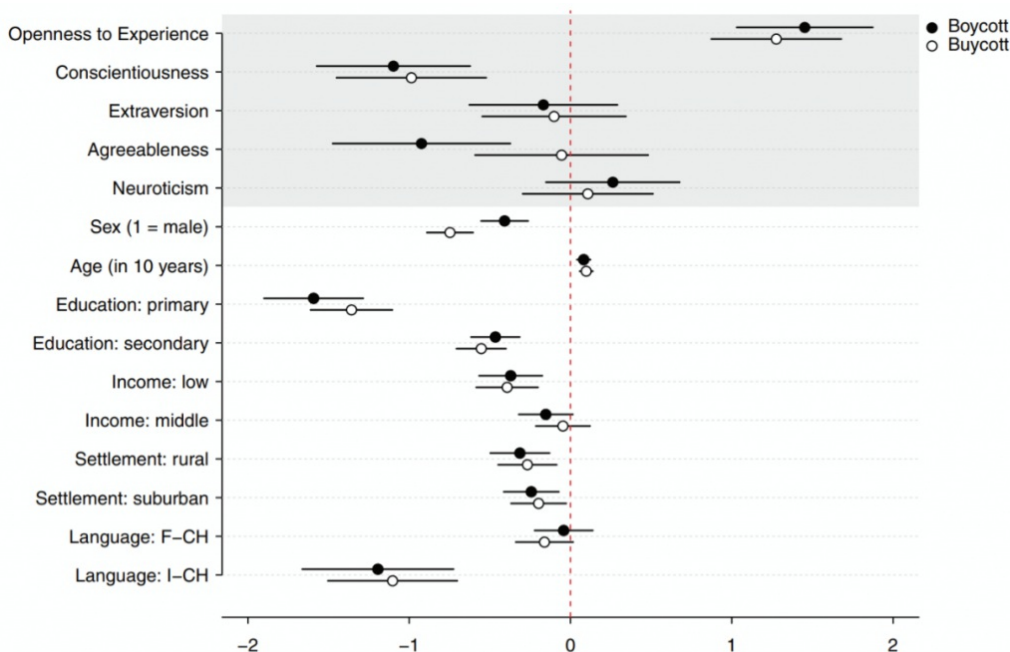
Ackermann and Gundelach (2020)

Compared to participation in demonstrations or involvement in political parties and associations, the conscious decision to buy or avoid a product can be made individually and does not require the involvement of others. Individual characteristics should therefore be particularly relevant in explaining this individualised and issue-oriented form of participation.

To test this argument empirically, we focused on the role of personality traits. In psychology, the so called 'five-factor model' is one of the standard models used to capture an individual's personality. It assumes that individuals and their behavioural tendencies can be distinguished by five personality traits: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. For example, a person who is curious and interested in new things has a high degree of openness to experience. Studies show that personality traits not only influence the everyday behaviour of individuals, but also their thoughts and actions in the political sphere.

To analyse the link between personality traits and political consumerism, we used survey data gathered in the Swiss Volunteering Survey. Our analysis indicates that above all, openness to experience and conscientiousness are related to political consumerism. Those who are open-minded are more likely to consciously purchase or avoid products for political, ethical, or ecological reasons. On the other hand, those who are highly conscientious are less likely to engage in political consumerism. Meanwhile, those who are agreeable are less likely to boycott products, which is intuitive given the conflictual nature of this behaviour.

Figure 2: Personality and political consumerism



Note: The chart is based on the results of a logistic regression analysis. A negative value indicates that individuals in the category displayed on the left were less likely to participate in a 'boycott' or 'buycott' of a product, while a positive value indicates they were more likely to participate in this behaviour. Each horizontal line displays the 95% confidence interval. A relationship is only deemed to be significant if this interval does not include zero (shown as the dotted vertical line). Data is taken from the Swiss Volunteering Survey 2014. *Source:* Ackermann and Gundelach (2020)

In addition to personality traits, there are of course other individual factors associated with the decision to engage in political consumerism. For example, a [recent meta-analysis](#) by Lauren Copeland and Shelley Boulianne found support for the role of social and political attitudes. Various studies have shown that personality traits also influence attitudes and it is therefore possible that these attitudes underpin the link between personality traits and political consumerism.

In additional analyses, we have tested this assumption by considering the role of social and political trust, political interest, and ideology. We found that these attitudes do play a role, but that they cannot fully explain the relationship between personality and political consumerism. Thus, personality traits are relevant factors that help us to understand who consumes politically and who does not.

For more information, see the authors' (open access) accompanying paper in the [International Political Science Review](#). A version of this article was originally published in German at [DeFacto](#).

Note: This article gives the views of the authors, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: [Zac Ong](#) on [Unsplash](#)
