

Uncharted Territories: Introduction to the Theme Bundle on Intranational Variation in Personality

Friedrich M. Götz¹ , Tobias Ebert² 

[1] *Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada.* [2] *Department of Psychology, University of Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany.*

Personality Science, 2023, Vol. 4, Article e10631, <https://doi.org/10.5964/ps.10631>

Published (VoR): 2023-01-20

Corresponding Author: Friedrich M. Götz, Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, 2136 West Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4, Canada. E-mail: friedrich.goetz@ubc.ca

Related: This article is part of the Theme Bundle "Intranational Variation in Personality".

Keywords

regional personality differences, intranational variation in personality, geographical psychology

Powered by the rise of big data, over the past 15 years, an emerging new literature has begun to accumulate evidence for intranational (i.e., within-country) geographical variation in diverse aspects of personality (Rentfrow et al., 2008; Götz et al., 2022). Since then, systematic spatial clustering of personality characteristics has been shown to exist in various countries around the globe, such as China (Talhelm et al., 2014), Germany (Ebert et al., 2022), Japan (Yoshino & Oshio, 2022), Russia (Allik et al., 2009), Switzerland (Götz et al., 2018), the U.K. (Jokela et al., 2015), and the U.S. (Rentfrow, 2010). These intranational personality differences are related to a range of consequential political, economic, social, and health outcomes on both the macro- and the micro-level. Such outcomes range from election results (Garretsen et al., 2018), regional crime rates (Rentfrow et al., 2013), technological innovation (Mewes et al., 2022), and Covid-19 spread (Peters et al., 2022) to individual spending behavior (Ebert et al., 2021) and self-esteem (Bleidorn et al., 2016). With this Theme Bundle we sought to bring together a broad array of researchers, samples, and methodologies to further consolidate and expand the budding field of intranational personality differences.



Articles in the Theme Bundle

Across five papers, the current Theme Bundle breaks new ground by raising and answering new questions about the conceptualisation, composition, and consequences of intranational personality differences.

The first two papers in this Theme Bundle revolve around conceptual and theoretical questions. In a data-driven approach, Kevin [Lanning and colleagues \(2022\)](#) test the extent to which the popular American Nations (i.e., conceptual regions with a shared history and culture; [Woodard, 2011](#)) are meaningful units to capture intranational personality differences within the U.S. While the authors' analyses suggest that some historically derived cultural borders should be redrawn, they find systematic spatial differences across the studied cultural regions (particularly for authoritarian conventionalism, cognitive resilience, and competitiveness). Following this, in a push for theoretical integration and interdisciplinary collaboration, [Will Dunlop and Dulce Wilkinson Westberg \(2022\)¹](#) propose a narrative ecology framework. In this framework, they embed a person's autobiographical identity within their broader geographical and cultural surroundings, hence tying together the study of self, story, and society. With this integrative effort, they pave the way for a deeper understanding of individual and regional identity within its socioecological context.

Complementing these conceptual advances, the second set of papers focuses on applications and real-world outcomes of intranational variation in personality characteristics. Starting off with an investigation of key indicators of reproductive health, Eleanor [Junkins and colleagues \(2021\)](#) examine links between intranational personality differences and fertility across the 50 U.S. states. Employing spatial regressions, the authors find that states with higher levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness—such as Wisconsin—display more traditional fertility patterns (i.e., higher fertility, earlier fertility, more structured practices). In contrast, states with higher levels of openness and neuroticism—such as New York—display more non-traditional fertility patterns. Shifting gears towards the political sphere, Sanaz [Talaifar and colleagues \(2022\)](#) consider a rich set of threatening economic, demographic, psychological, and health conditions to better understand the geography of support for Donald Trump in the 2016 and 2020 U.S. presidential elections. Their results reveal that regions that voted for Trump were characterised by high levels of neuroticism, economic deprivation, and anti-black implicit bias paired with low levels of ethnic diversity. In a similar vein, Elizabeth [Chan and colleagues \(2022\)](#) add to the literature on region-level associations between well-being and voting behavior. The authors employ cross-temporal multi-level modelling for different elections and

1) Like everybody else who had the pleasure of working with Will Dunlop, we were deeply saddened by his untimely passing and truly regret that he was unable to see this paper in print. Will Dunlop was an inspirational and pioneering scholar and a relentless force for good. He will be sorely missed.

spatial levels. Thereby they replicate and extend prior research showing that regions with growing discontent tend to vote for non-incumbents.

Outlook

Together, these five papers paint a colourful picture that instils us with a sense of optimism and confidence. In combination, the papers indicate that the young and growing field of intranational personality differences sets out to leave its childhood behind. The current Theme Bundle not only highlights the conceptual breadth of the research stream, but also the diversity, rigour, and sophistication of its methodological approaches. This richness and diversity are also found in the large-scale samples (taken together, the analyses of this Theme Bundle rest on spatially-aggregated psychological data from over 6 million individuals) and the many spatial levels that are being investigated. In keeping with *Personality Science*'s vision and explicit focus on a broad, inclusive understanding of personality (Rauthmann, 2020), work published in this Theme Bundle looks at constructs as different as honesty-humility (Lanning et al., 2022), narrative identity (Dunlop & Wilkinson Westberg, 2022), the Big Five (Jenkins et al., 2021), implicit bias (Talaifar et al., 2022), and well-being (Chan et al., 2022). Moreover, if the current articles can be seen as an adequate representation of their field (and we believe they can), then the study of intranational personality differences also appears to be a field that (1) unites scholars from different psychological (sub-) disciplines and across all career stages and (2) is committed to open science practices (i.e., all four empirical papers provide open materials, two papers were pre-registered, and two papers share all their data).

Yet, much work remains to be done. Despite our best efforts (and despite a fairly heterogeneous composition of authors from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S.), this Theme Bundle has a strong focus on the Western world. As such, it is representative of the current general research stream on intranational personality differences which—as of today—remains a Western-centric branch of psychology. It is our hope that future work on intranational personality differences will be as inspired and rigorous as it is today, but that the maps and those drawing them will represent a broader share of our world.

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Personality Science (PS) is an official journal of the European Association of Personality Psychology (EAPP).



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