PERSONALITY AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF
POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

*Personality and the Foundations of Political Behavior* is the first study in more than thirty years to investigate the broad significance of personality traits for mass political behavior. Drawing on the Big Five personality trait framework, Jeffery J. Mondak argues that attention to personality provides a valuable means to integrate biological and environmental influences via rich, nuanced theories and empirical tests of the antecedents of political behavior. Development of such holistic accounts is critical, Mondak contends, if inquiry is to move beyond simple “blank slate” environmental depictions of political engagement. Analyses examining multiple facets of political information, political attitudes, and participation reveal that the Big Five trait dimensions – openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability – produce both direct and indirect effects on a wide range of political phenomena.

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Acknowledgments

This book outlines the case for the use of a particular model of personality trait structure, the “Big Five” approach, in research on political behavior. I began thinking about the possible importance of personality for mass politics in 1997, only a few years after psychologists published the first key works on the Big Five. I started gathering data a year later. In the more than a decade since, a great many people have provided numerous forms of assistance. Included are those who have helped in some manner with data acquisition, who have offered feedback on my papers and on this book, and who have joined me as coauthors on related conference papers and journal articles.

Most of the data examined in this study are from original surveys fielded in 1998, 2005, and 2006. The 1998 and 2005 surveys were administered while I was on the faculty at Florida State University. These projects received financial support from the LeRoy Collins Fund and from a Florida State University Developing Scholar Award. Funding for the 2006 survey was provided by the Center on Congress, the Center on American Politics, and the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at Indiana University; the Cline Center for Democracy, directed by Peter Nardulli, at the University of Illinois; the James M. Benson Fund at the University of Illinois; and by the following individuals: Ted Carmines, John Hibbing, Bob Huckfeldt, Gary Jacobson, Walt Stone, and Herb Weisberg. Additional data consulted for this project are from a survey conducted by Mary Anderson as part of her doctoral research at Florida State University, and from a survey directed by Carl McCurley in the state of Washington.

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It is important to stay grounded. I am especially fortunate in this regard, in part because my interrelated hobbies surround me with some of the most creative and entertaining people anywhere. My thanks to Sergio Wals, Alex Stangl, and everyone at Songramp; to Dr. Demento and everyone else who has played my songs; to Christine Lavin for writing with me; to Bruce Lansky and his team at Meadowbrook; and to the thousands of elementary school students who have welcomed my performances, and who often have drowned me out with shouts of “and pizza’s on the way!”

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