

Volitional Personality Change Across 58 Countries

Erica Baranski
[\(ericanbaranski@gmail.com\)](mailto:ericanbaranski@gmail.com)

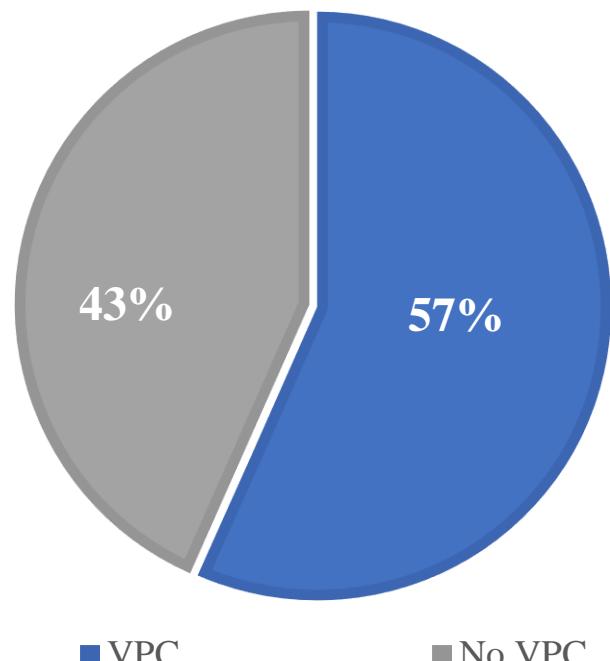
Members of the International Situations Project
David Funder

Background on Volitional Personality Change

1. Do people want to change their personalities?
2. What do they want to change?

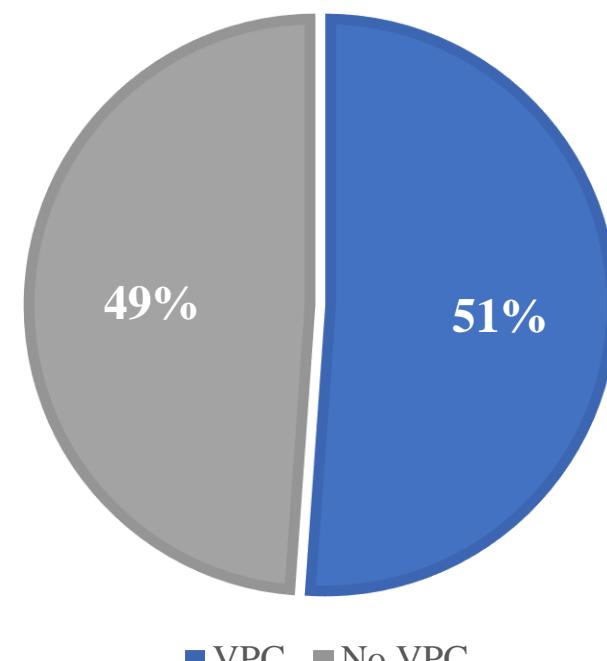
Volitional Personality Change (VPC)

UNDERGRADS



N = 153

MTURK



N = 504

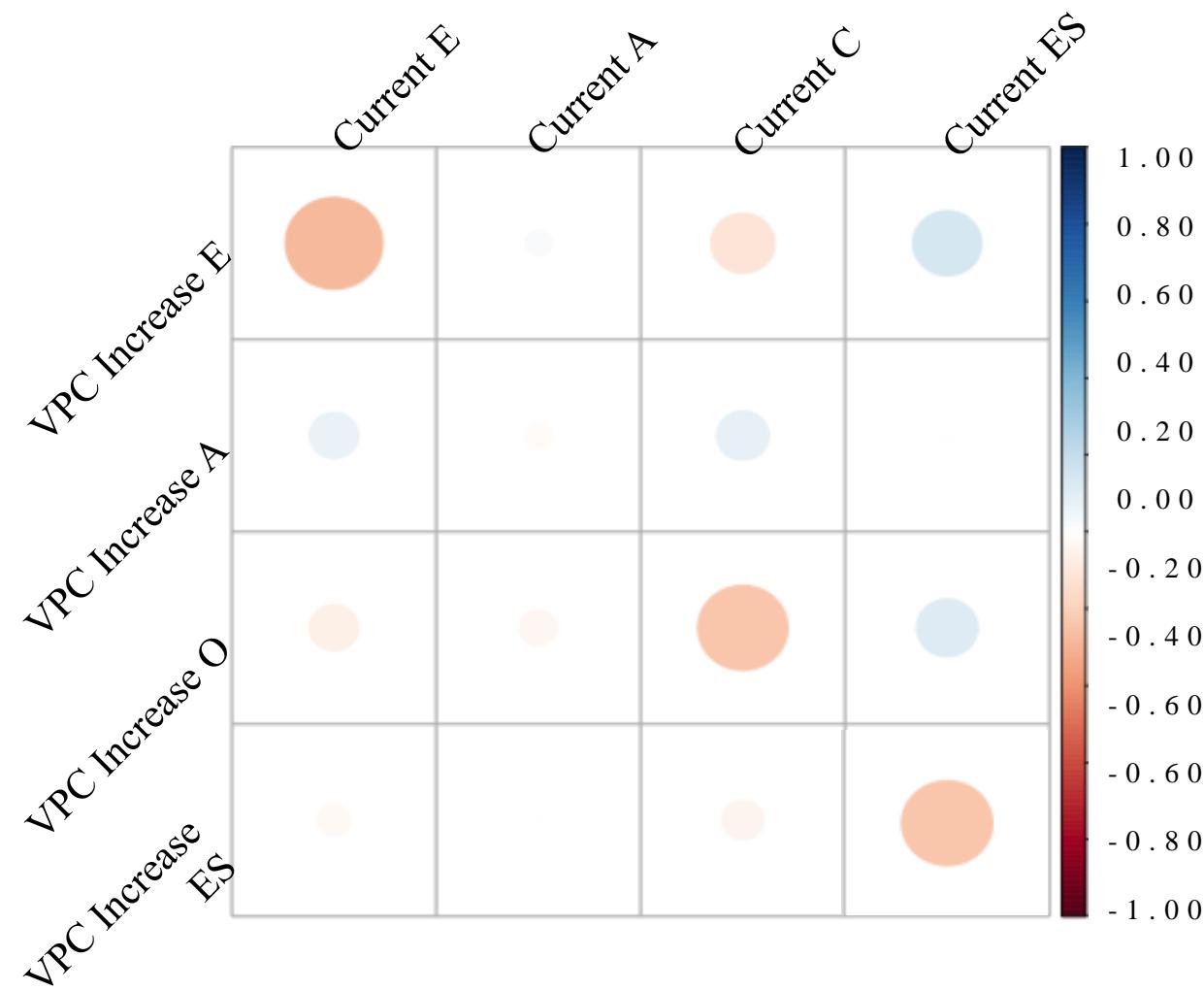
Background on Volitional Personality Change

1. Do people want to change their personalities?

Yes

2. What do they want to change?

Volitional Personality Change (VPC)



Background on Volitional Personality Change

1. Do people want to change their personalities?

Yes

2. What do they want to change?

What they lack

3. How do these trends vary across countries?

The International Situations Project



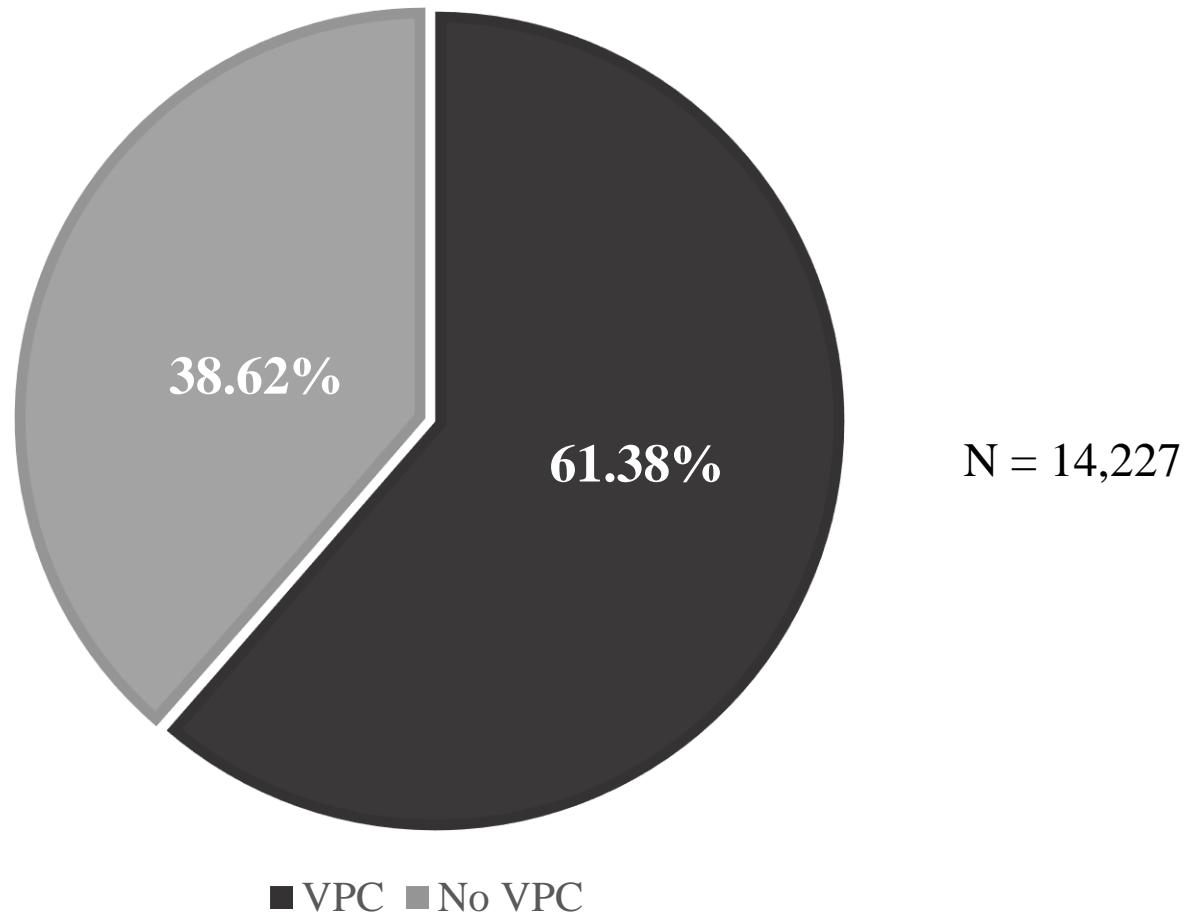
The International Situations Project

- Personality: BFI2
- Honest/Humility: HEXACO subscale
- Optimism: LOT-R
- Happiness: Satisfaction with Life Scale and Subjective Happiness Scale
- Religiosity: Religiosity Scale
- Narcissism: NARC
- Self-construal: SCS
- VPC:
 - Yes/No: “Is there an aspect of your personality that you’re currently trying to change?”
 - Open-ended: “What aspect of your personality are you currently trying to change?”

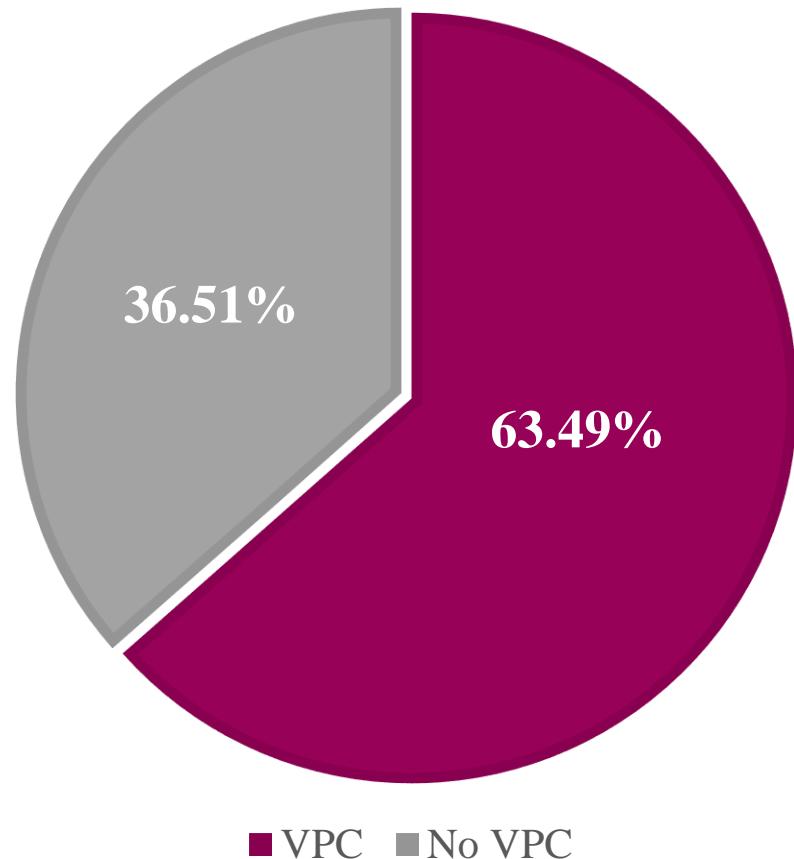
VPC across countries

1. Are individuals around the world currently trying to change their personalities?
2. Who wants to change their personalities?
3. What exactly are individuals around the world currently trying to change about themselves?

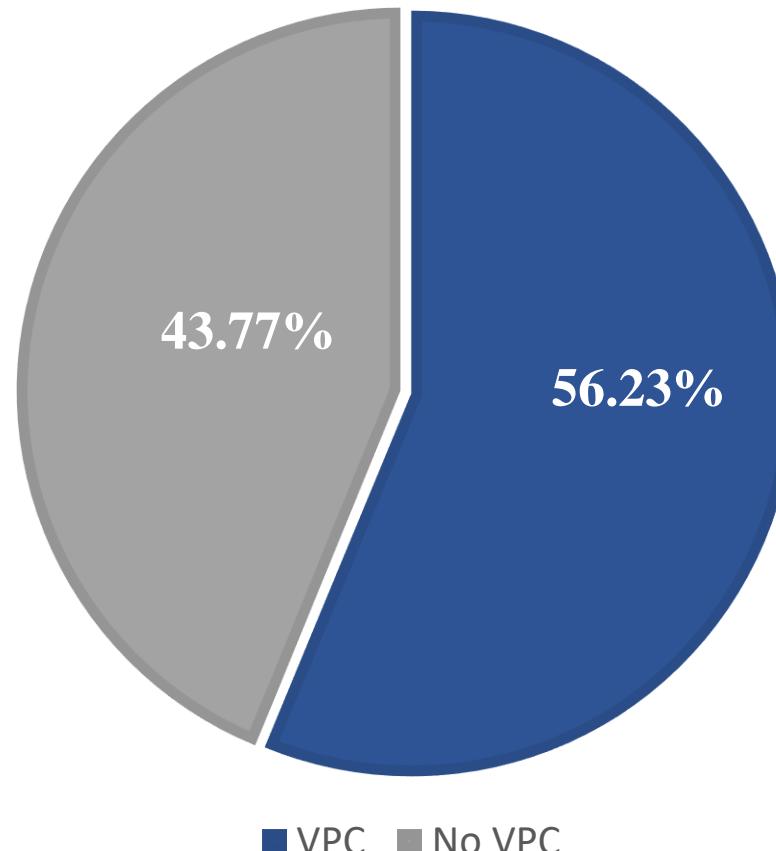
Are individuals around the world currently trying to change their personalities?



Are individuals around the world currently trying to change their personalities?

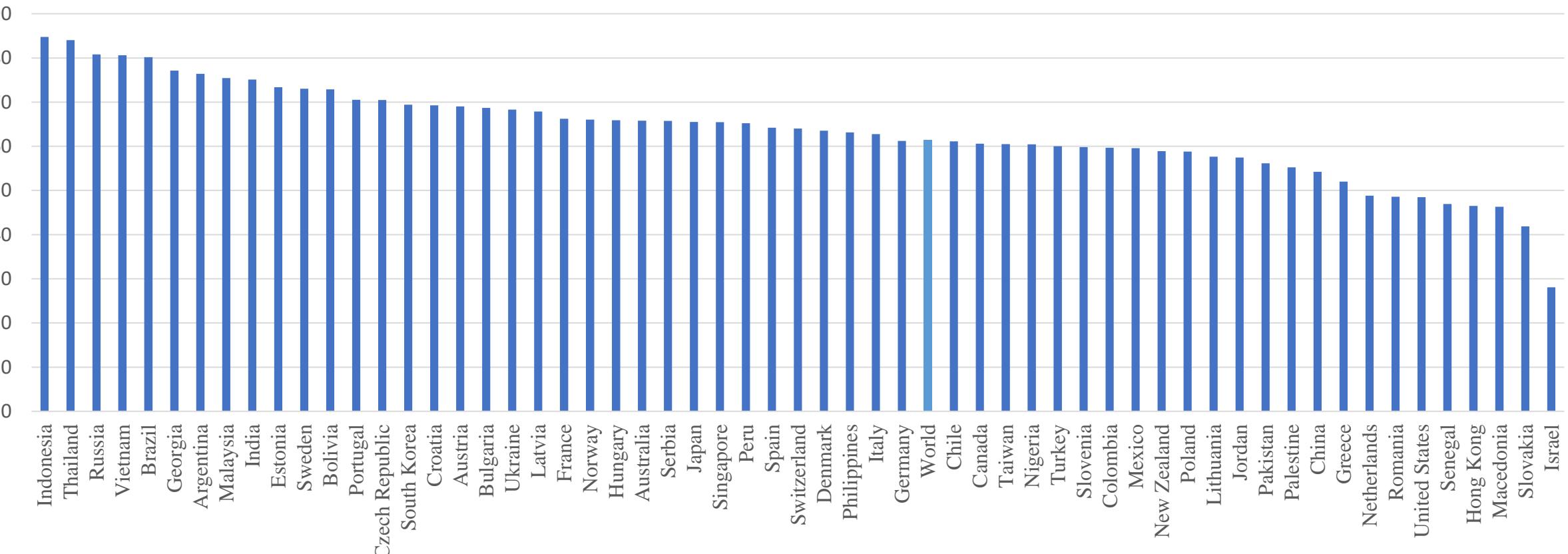


N = 10,086

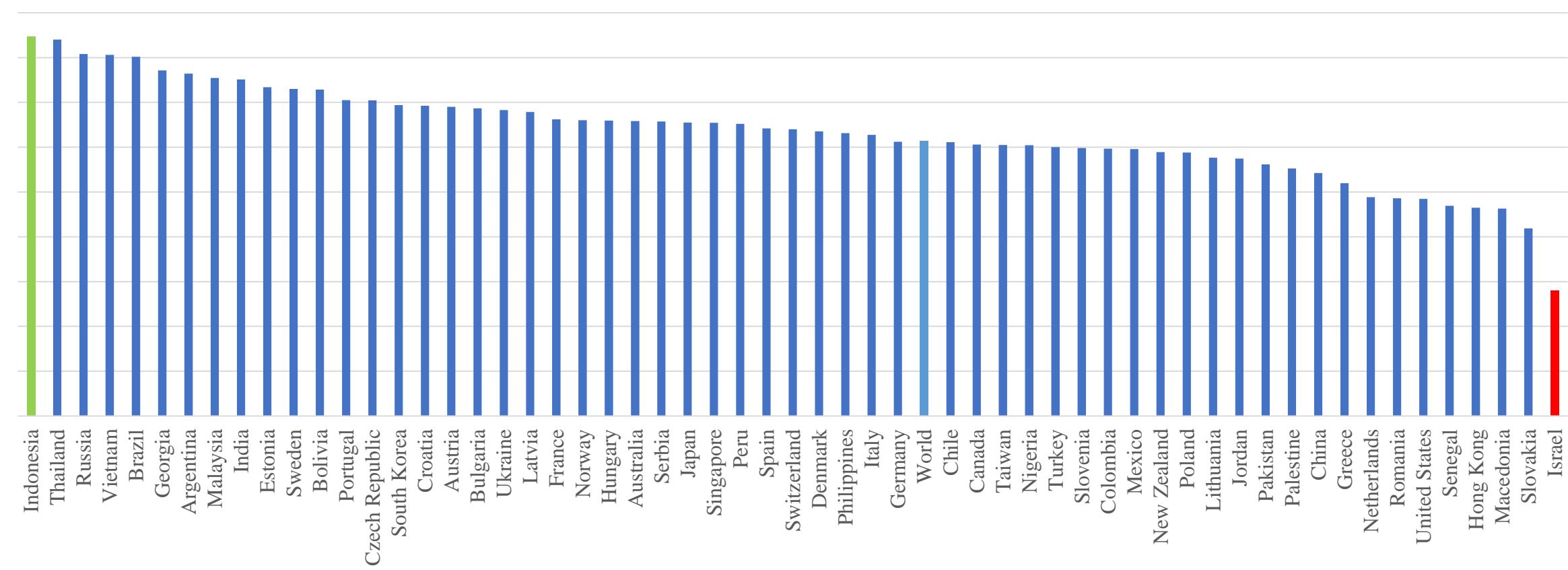


N = 4,141

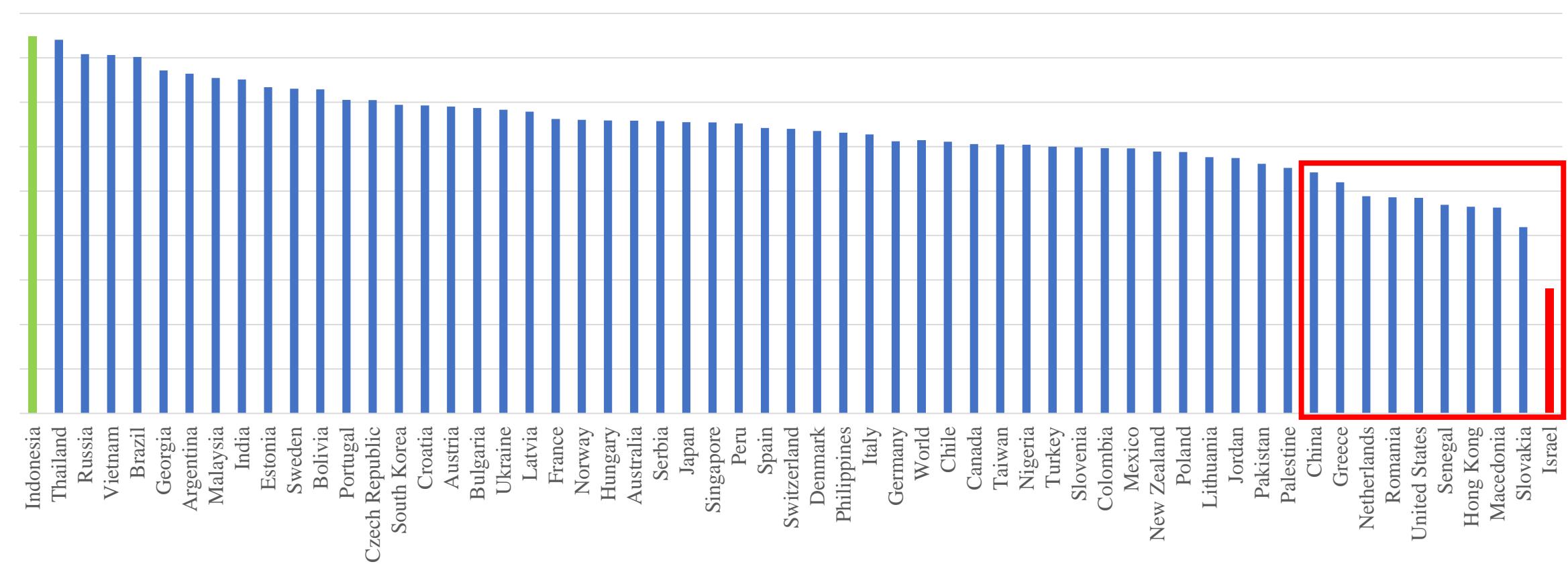
Are individuals around the world currently trying to change their personalities?



Are individuals around the world currently trying to change their personalities?



Are individuals around the world currently trying to change their personalities?



VPC across countries

1. Are individuals around the world currently trying to change their personalities?
2. Who wants to change their personalities?
3. What exactly are individuals around the world currently trying to change about themselves?

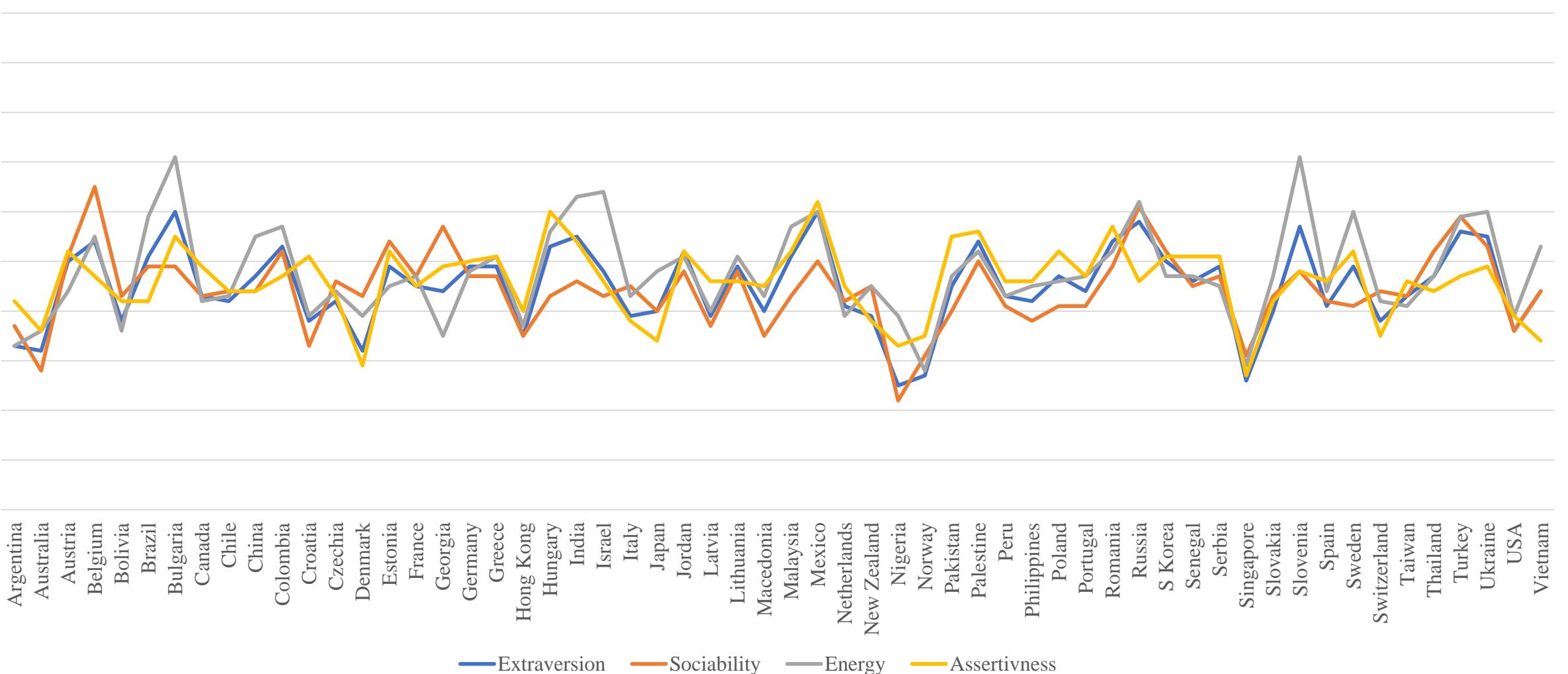
Individual-level predictors of VPC: *Negative Emotionality*



Average trait-VPC correlation

NegEmotion	Anxiety	Depression	Emotionality
0.24	0.22	0.20	0.19

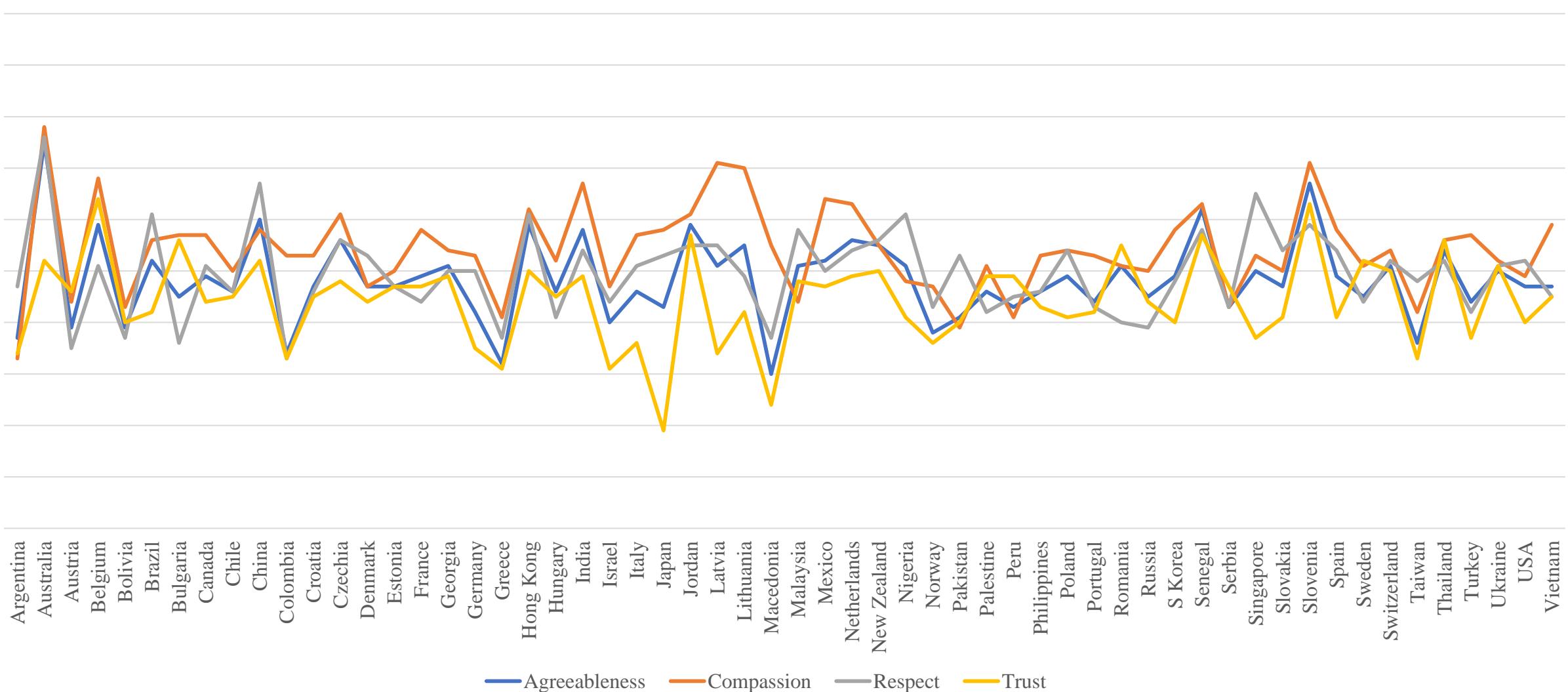
Individual-level predictors of VPC: *Extraversion*



Average trait-VPC correlation

Extraversion	Sociability	Energy	Assertiveness
-0.05	-0.06	-0.02	-0.04

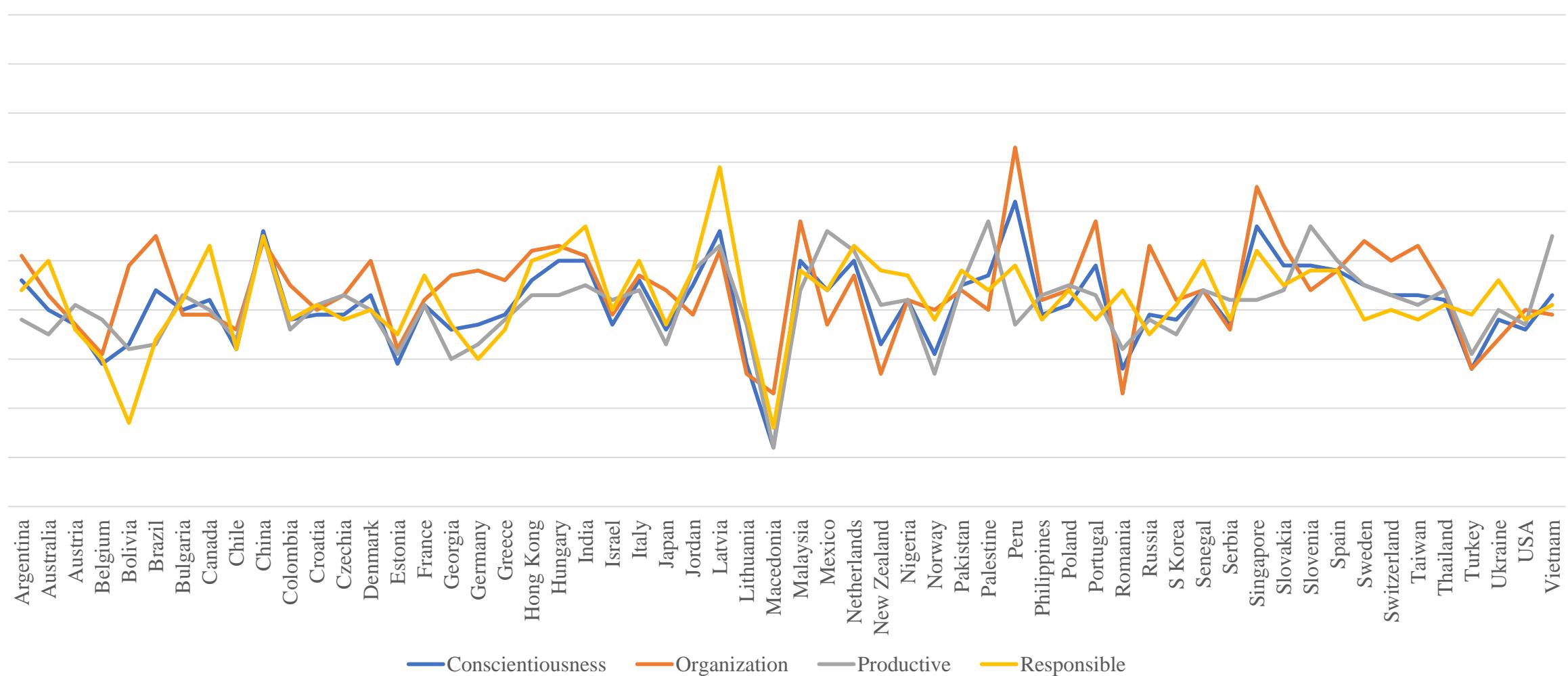
Individual-level predictors of VPC: *Agreeableness*



Average trait-VPC correlation

Agreeableness	Compassion	Respect	Trust
-0.02	0.04	0.00	-0.06

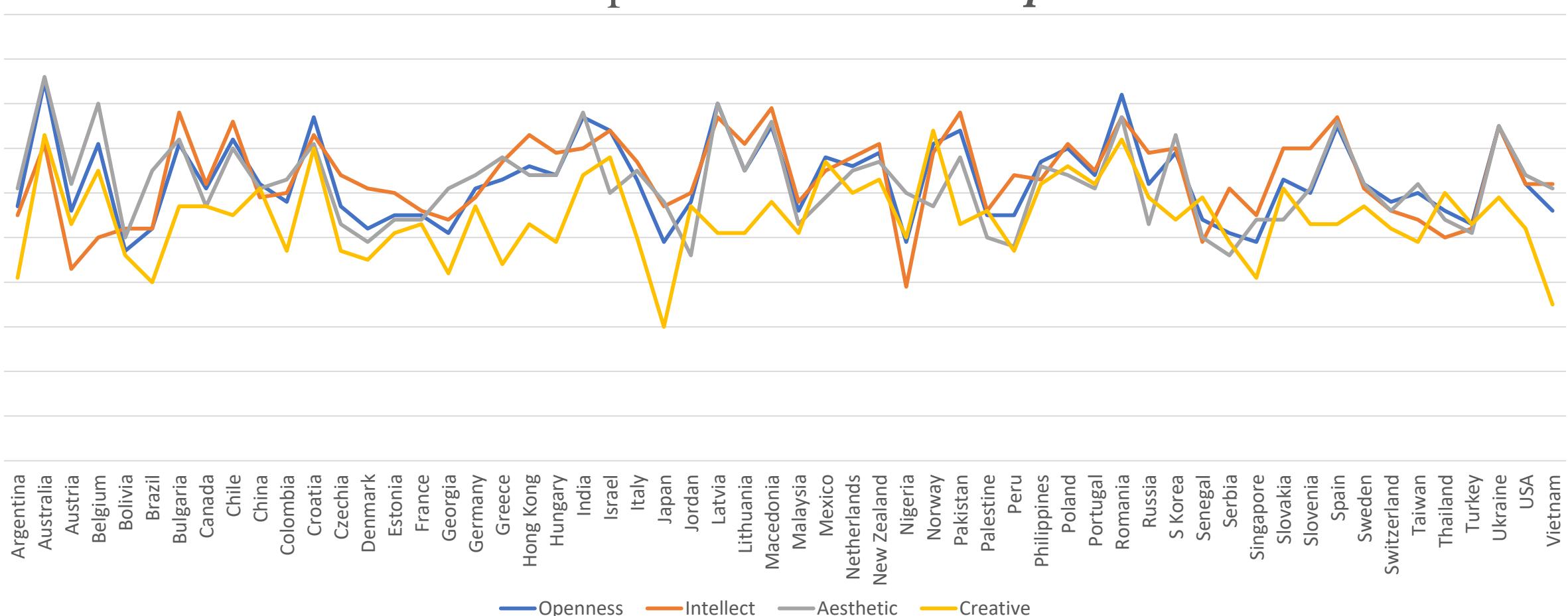
Individual-level predictors of VPC: *Conscientiousness*



Average trait-VPC correlation

Conscientiousness	Organization	Productiveness	Responsibility
-0.09	-0.06	-0.09	-0.08

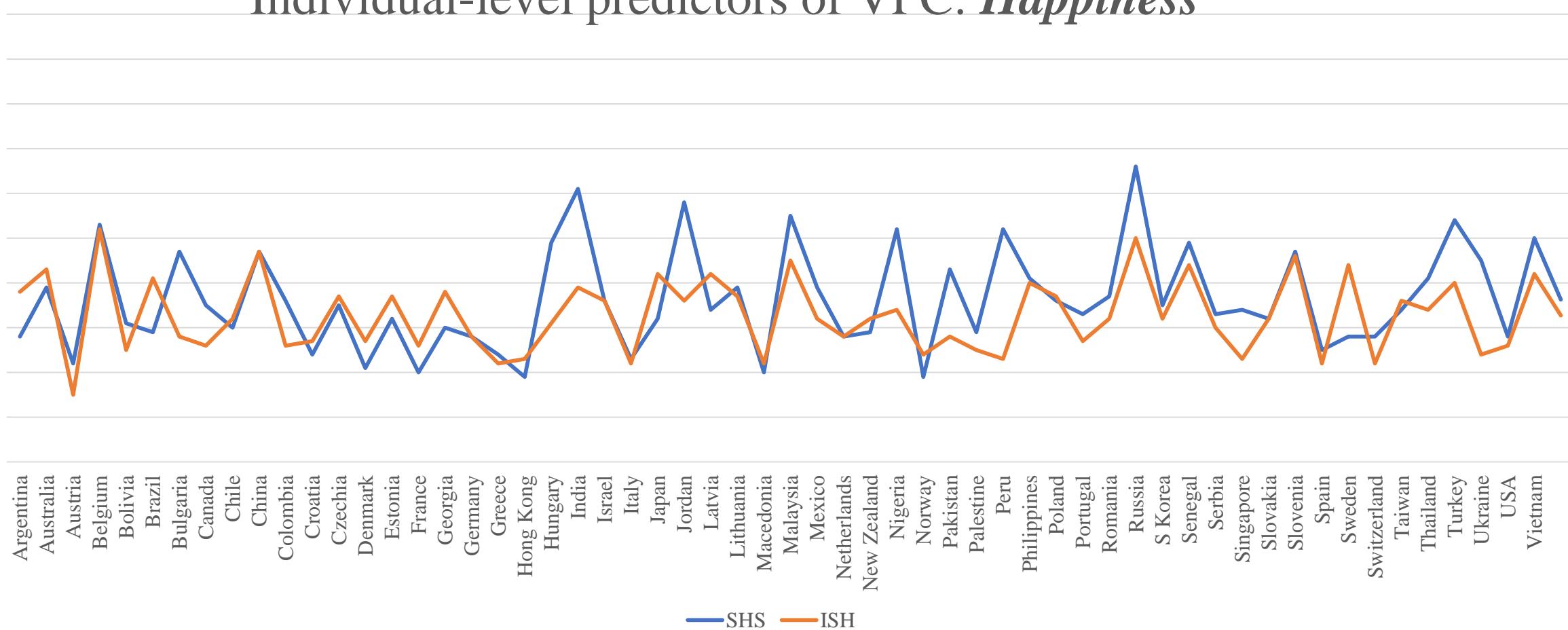
Individual-level predictors of VPC: *Openness*



Average trait-VPC correlation

Openness	Intellect	Aesthetic	Creative
0.13	0.14	0.12	0.05

Individual-level predictors of VPC: *Happiness*



Average trait-VPC correlation

SHS	ISH
-0.14	-0.17

VPC across countries

1. Are individuals around the world currently trying to change their personalities?
2. Who wants to change their personalities?
3. What exactly are individuals around the world currently trying to change about themselves?

What exactly are individuals around the world currently trying to change about themselves?

	Inc ES	Inc C	Inc E	Inc Social	Inc A	Dec Emotion	Inc Product	Dec Depression	Dec Anxiety	Inc Respons
Argentina	27.10	15.89	7.48	3.74	4.67	0.93	2.80	2.80	9.35	2.80
Australia	33.80	19.72	22.54	21.13	11.27	2.82	8.45	12.68	15.49	7.04
Canada	34.21	17.11	23.68	22.37	7.89	13.16	9.21	9.21	9.21	1.32
Chile	24.68	16.45	9.09	6.06	6.06	4.76	2.60	2.60	5.63	5.63
China	26.11	16.81	27.43	22.12	10.62	11.50	9.29	9.73	2.65	6.19
Colombia	26.97	12.36	3.37	3.37	6.74	14.61	1.12	1.12	3.37	7.87
Croatia	33.56	26.17	12.08	10.07	12.08	14.09	17.45	6.04	12.08	5.37
Georgia	39.42	25.00	8.65	3.85	5.77	22.12	21.15	9.62	6.73	3.85
Hong Kong	14.55	25.45	36.36	34.55	14.55	3.64	16.36	9.09	0.00	3.64
Jordan	27.63	13.16	3.95	3.95	9.21	6.58	2.63	1.32	5.26	5.26
Mexico	31.58	12.63	5.26	5.26	17.89	10.53	2.11	8.42	11.58	7.37
New Zealand	38.16	19.74	9.21	5.26	13.16	10.53	10.53	6.58	15.79	5.26
Pakistan	30.65	4.84	16.13	12.90	12.90	14.52	3.23	11.29	1.61	1.61
Philippines	30.43	26.09	12.08	9.18	14.98	8.70	18.84	12.08	9.66	5.80
Romania	17.44	16.28	3.49	1.16	9.30	2.33	0.00	0.00	1.16	9.30
Singapore	24.72	17.98	23.60	17.98	14.61	10.11	14.61	8.99	2.25	2.25
Slovakia	32.76	22.41	18.97	12.07	5.17	10.34	18.97	17.24	1.72	1.72
Taiwan	24.74	11.34	9.28	7.22	5.15	3.09	0.00	0.00	4.12	4.12
Turkey	40.85	15.49	7.04	7.04	14.08	22.54	1.41	2.82	12.68	9.86
USA	27.47	15.78	24.89	20.33	16.08	7.74	8.65	11.23	6.83	3.79
World	28.69	17.62	16.32	13.04	11.66	9.17	8.79	7.90	6.89	4.92

What exactly are individuals around the world trying to change?

	Inc E	Inc Social.	Inc Assert.	Inc A	Inc Compass.	Inc Trust	Inc C	Inc Organize.	Inc Product.	Inc Response.		
Argentina	-0.14	●	-0.08	●	†	0.11	●	†	-0.01	-0.26	●	
Australia	-0.24	●	-0.25	●	-0.10	●	-0.38	●	†	-0.30	●	
Canada	-0.23	●	-0.30	●	-0.04	●	-0.21	●	0.20	●	0.21	
Chile	-0.19	●	-0.17	●	†	-0.21	●	-0.08	●	-0.02	●	
China	-0.36	●	-0.35	●	0.09	●	0.03	●	0.05	●	†	
Colombia	-0.06	●	-0.18	●	†	-0.03	●	†	†	-0.07	●	
Croatia	-0.33	●	-0.30	●	0.00	-0.06	●	0.01	-0.15	●	-0.23	●
Georgia	-0.27	●	-0.32	●	0.01	0.02	●	0.08	●	-0.08	●	
Hong Kong	-0.42	●	-0.41	●	†	0.01	●	†	†	-0.07	●	
Jordan	-0.07	●	-0.10	●	†	0.10	●	†	†	-0.05	●	
Mexico	-0.28	●	-0.25	●	†	-0.20	●	0.19	●	†	-0.18	●
New Zealand	-0.01	●	-0.21	●	-0.09	●	-0.20	●	0.07	●	-0.23	●
Pakistan	-0.12	●	-0.22	●	†	-0.03	●	0.07	●	†	-0.12	●
Philippines	-0.18	●	-0.25	●	0.01	-0.16	●	0.12	●	-0.18	●	
Romania	0.10	●	-0.15	●	†	-0.23	●	†	-0.13	●	-0.06	●
Singapore	-0.21	●	-0.07	●	-0.18	●	-0.32	●	0.01	-0.31	●	
Slovakia	-0.02	●	0.01	●	-0.11	●	-0.05	●	†	-0.15	●	
Taiwan	-0.28	●	-0.30	●	†	-0.27	●	†	†	-0.13	●	
Turkey	-0.32	●	-0.30	●	†	-0.02	●	0.14	●	0.10	●	
United States	-0.31	●	-0.34	●	-0.09	●	-0.10	●	0.07	●	-0.07	●
ΔX^2	2.4	5.76	1.46	2.66	0.22	0	2.08	0.25	2.16	3.41		

What exactly are individuals around the world trying to change?

	Inc ES	Dec Anxiety	Dec Depression	Dec Emotionality
Argentina	-0.06	0.05	-0.03	-0.17
Australia	0.35	0.17	0.19	0.27
Canada	0.48	0.19	0.18	0.42
Chile	0.10	0.03	0.00	0.08
China	0.07	-0.10	0.14	0.09
Colombia	0.00	0.16	0.19	0.15
Croatia	0.31	0.17	0.12	0.23
Georgia	0.34	0.26	0.09	0.21
Hong Kong	0.21	†	0.47	0.02
Jordan	-0.12	0.01	0.00	-0.06
Mexico	0.28	0.16	0.05	0.33
New Zealand	0.51	0.45	0.12	0.24
Pakistan	0.14	0.11	-0.18	0.31
Philippines	0.35	0.23	0.28	0.11
Romania	0.10	0.02	†	0.06
Singapore	0.30	0.01	0.25	0.35
Slovakia	-0.15	-0.10	-0.17	0.11
Taiwan	0.01	0.05	†	0.11
Turkey	0.12	-0.03	-0.08	0.11
United States	0.25	0.19	0.19	0.14
ΔX^2	27.13***	5.53	3.53	0.01

Conclusion

- For both states across the United States and countries around the world, volitional personality change is the rule rather than the exception; consistency is more striking than is any differences.
- Aspects of personality are influential in determining whether individuals around the world are trying to change themselves.
- People tend to try to compensate for what they lack. This tendency may imply a universal ability for self-insight and subsequent motivation towards self-improvement.

Thank you!

Extra slides

VPC content coding

Category	Manual instructions	Example
Increase Extraversion	To be <i>more</i> outgoing, extraverted, assertive social charming, humorous, etc.; <i>less</i> shy, socially inhibited, introverted	
Increase Sociability	To go to more parties or social events or to generally be more outgoing and talkative.	Shyness; interacting with people
Increase Assertiveness	To be more dominant or influential in a social setting.	To manage to impose me and my points of view a bit more at work
Increased Energy	To be more active or have more energy or enthusiasm.	not enthusiastic; too quiet relative bored in character
Decrease Extraversion	To be <i>less</i> talkative, <i>more</i> socially reserved	
Decrease Sociability	To talk less or be the center of attention less often in a social situation.	clinginess
Decrease Assertiveness	To be less pushy in a social situation	I am trying to cut down on interrupting people while they are talking and on using crutch words
Decrease Energy	To slow down and have more restraint in a social situation	The loudness of my personality seems to bug some people i live with

VPC content coding (cont.)

Category	Manual instructions	Example
Increase Agreeableness	To be <i>more</i> forgiving, patient, empathetic, positive, optimistic, approachable, friendly, generous humble; <i>less</i> selfish, judgmental, irritable, angry, jealous, critical, negative	
Increased Compassion	To be more helpful and unselfish to other. To have more sympathy.	Putting people before myself
Increased Trust	To be more forgiving, hold less grudges and assume the best about people.	Trusting others
Increased Respect	To treat others with more respect. To be more polite.	gossiping
Decrease Agreeableness	To be less passive or too laid back. These responses tend to indicate that by focusing on others <i>too much</i> , the participant is neglecting their own needs or is socially inappropriate	
Decrease Compassion	To not be needlessly helpful and self-focused. To be less of a pushover.	weak and incapable of saying no
Decrease Trust	To be more less naive and more guarded	Naivety
Decrease Respect	To be less overly courteous or formal.	Be possessive, demanding, and dependent

VPC content coding (cont.)

Category	Manual instructions	Example
Increase Conscientiousness	To be <i>more</i> self-disciplined, motivated, focused, diligent; <i>less</i> lazy, lethargic or indicate that they would like to finish tasks that they begin.	
Increase Productiveness	To be more systematic, neat and tidy.	Motivation to study
Increase Responsibility	To be more efficient, persistent and less lazy.	discipline
Increase Organization	To be more reliable, dependable, and steady.	being untidy and draggy
Decrease Conscientiousness	To be less hyper-vigilant or obsessive.	
Decrease Productiveness	To be less of a ‘workaholic’	Being too focused on academics that I forgot time for myself and others
Decrease Responsibility	To take more risks.	To not overthink everything
Decrease Organization	To be less compulsively organized	correcting grammar!!! constant planning

VPC content coding (cont.)

Category	Manual instructions	Example
Increase Emotional Stability	To be <i>less</i> depressed, jealous, anxious or out of control, etc.; <i>more</i> emotionally stable, happy, confident, higher self-esteem etc.	
Decrease Anxiety	To be less tense and worried and more relaxed.	My more emotional/neurotic tendency to get overwhelmed in situations resulting in anxiety
Decrease Depression	To be less sad and more optimistic and cheerful.	My self-esteem: becoming more confident and self-assured
Decrease Emotionality	To be less moody and emotional in general.	I am to become less emotional and sensitive
Decrease Emotional Stability	To be more reckless and less emotionally-stable	
Increase Anxiety	To more on-guard and more vigilant	NA
Increase Depression	To be less optimistic and more realistic	being too carefree and happy
Increase Emotionality	To be more emotionally reactive and not as stoic	Suppression and no expression of emotions

VPC content coding (cont.)

Category	Manual instructions	Example
Increased Openness	To be <i>more</i> imaginative, intellectual, open to new experiences, purposeful, more willing to take risks, more socially open etc.; <i>less</i> cynical, close-minded, conservative, judgmental etc.	
Increased Aestheticism	To be more interested in art, music, literature.	to depersonalize the physical from the mental
Increased Creativity	To be more inventive and creative.	Adventurousness
Increased Intellect	To be think deeply and be more curious about intellectual matters.	Intellectual
Decrease Openness	To more ridged in their thinking, more conservative or less curious in general.	
Decrease Aestheticism	To be less concerned or preoccupied with art and beauty	NA
Decrease Creativity	To be more rigid in their thinking	Being more rational
Decrease Intellect	To be less analytical	NA

VPC content coding (cont.)

Category	Manual instructions	Example
Increased Honesty	To be more honest; more rule abiding and morally conscious.	NA
Increased Humility	To be more humble; less concern for or motivated by material or financial gain and less manipulative.	My egocentricity.
Improve Physical Health	To be healthier by increasing physical activity or eating healthier.	too weak and delicate
Resolve Addiction	To become less dependent or addicted to a particular vice	drug use (marijuana)
Other	Either when participants express a vague or non-specific trait change or no desire whatsoever	A few things My personality Nothing

US sample demographics

State	N	Female %	Mean Age
Alabama	178	77.53	18.68
California	542	65.87	19.52
Connecticut	156	63.46	19.44
Idaho	135	72.59	23.19
Illinois	201	56.22	19.41
Texas	148	78.38	20.41
US Sample	1360	67.72	19.85

Are individuals across the US currently trying to change their personalities?

State	Female	Male	Total
Alabama	32%	30%	31%
California	58%	48%	55%
Connecticut	41%	47%	44%
Idaho	53%	41%	50%
Illinois	53%	47%	50%
Texas	49%	44%	48%
US Sample	50%	45%	49%

Correlation between current levels of *Extraversion* (plus facets) and VPC

	VPC Increased Extraversion	VPC Increased Sociality	VPC Increased Assertiveness	VPC Increased Energy
Current Extraversion	-0.31***	-0.30***	-0.06	†
Current Sociality	-0.34***	-0.34***	-0.02	†
Current Assertiveness	-0.25***	-0.23***	-0.09	†
Current Energy	-0.15**	-0.14***	-0.04	†

Note. *** <.001; ** <.01; † = less than 3% of responses falling in the VPC content category

Correlation between current levels of *Agreeableness* (plus facets) and VPC

	VPC Increased Agreeableness	VPC Increased Respect	VPC Increased Trust	VPC Increased Compassion
Current Agreeableness	-0.10	†	-0.02	0.16**
Current Respect	-0.07	†	0.01	0.14**
Current Trust	-0.09	†	-0.07	0.16**
Current Compassion	-0.04	†	0.02	0.07

Note. *** <.001 ; † = less than 3% of responses falling in the VPC content category

Correlation between current levels of *Conscientiousness* (plus facets) and VPC

	VPC Increase Conscientiousness	VPC Increase Responsible	VPC Increase Productiveness	VPC Increase Organization
Current Conscientiousness	-0.23***	-0.12*	-0.17***	-0.09
Current Responsible	-0.17***	-0.14**	0.10	-0.03
Current Productiveness	-0.17***	-0.07	-0.17***	0.04
Current Organization	-0.21***	-0.10	-0.13**	-0.14**

Note. *** <.001; ** <.01; * <.05

Correlation between current levels of *Negative Emotionality* (plus facets) and VPC

	VPC Emotional Stability	VPC Decrease Anxiety	VPC Decrease Depression	VPC Decrease Emotionality/ moodiness
Current Negative Emotionality	0.25***	0.17***	0.14***	0.08
Current Anxiety	0.21***	0.19***	0.11**	0.03
Current Depression	0.22***	0.12**	0.19***	0.02
Current Emotionality/ moodiness	0.22***	0.13**	0.08	0.14**

Note. *** <.001; ** <.01; * <.05

What exactly are individuals across the US trying to change about their personalities?

Category	Percentage
Increase Emotional Stability	27%
Increase Extraversion	25%
Increase Sociability	20%
Increase Agreeableness	16%
Increase Conscientiousness	16%
Decrease Depression	11%
Increase Productiveness	9%
Decrease Emotionality	8%
Decrease Anxiety	7%

Note. Categories that captured less than 5% of participants responses are not listed.

What exactly are individuals across the US trying to change about their personalities?

Category	Total % (N = 659)	Female % (n = 462)	Male % (n = 97)	χ^2
Increase Extraversion	24.89	22.94	29.44	3.06
Increase Sociability	20.33	18.61	24.37	2.75
Increase Assertiveness	3.64	3.90	3.05	0.29
Increase Agreeableness	16.08	17.75	12.18	3.31
Increase Conscientiousness	15.78	12.12	24.37	14.65***
Increase Productiveness	8.65	6.06	14.72	12.07***
Increase Responsibility	3.79	3.46	4.57	0.45
Increase Emotional Stability	27.47	30.09	21.32	5.50*
Decrease Anxiety	6.83	7.58	5.08	1.43
Decrease Depression	11.23	12.55	8.12	2.88
Decrease Emotionality	7.74	8.01	7.11	0.16

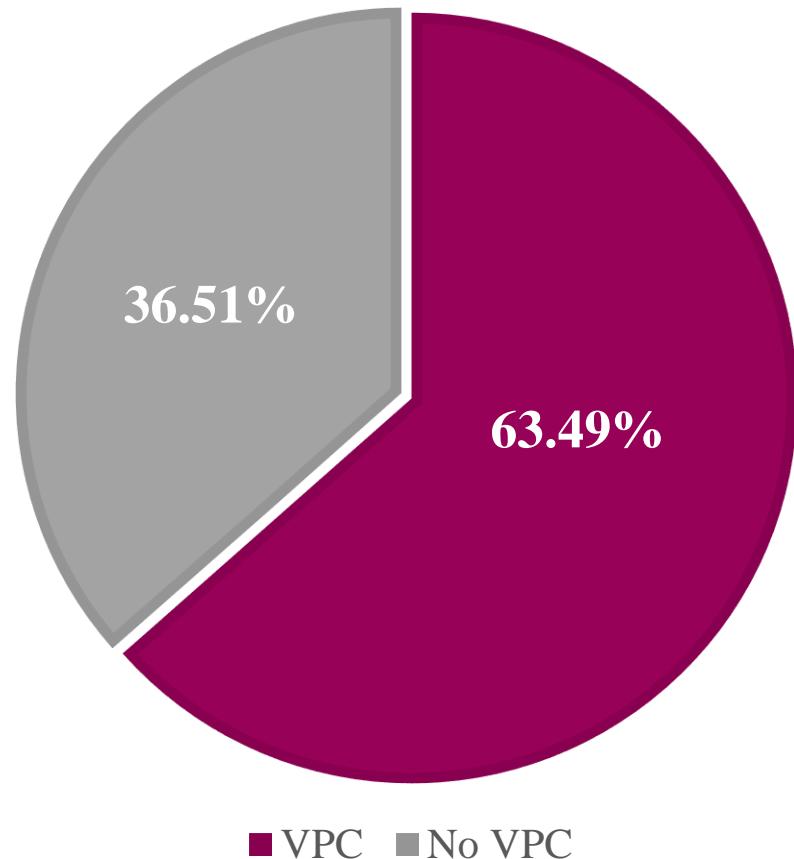
Note. *** < .001, * < .05; Categories that captured less than 3% of participants responses are not listed.

International sample demographics

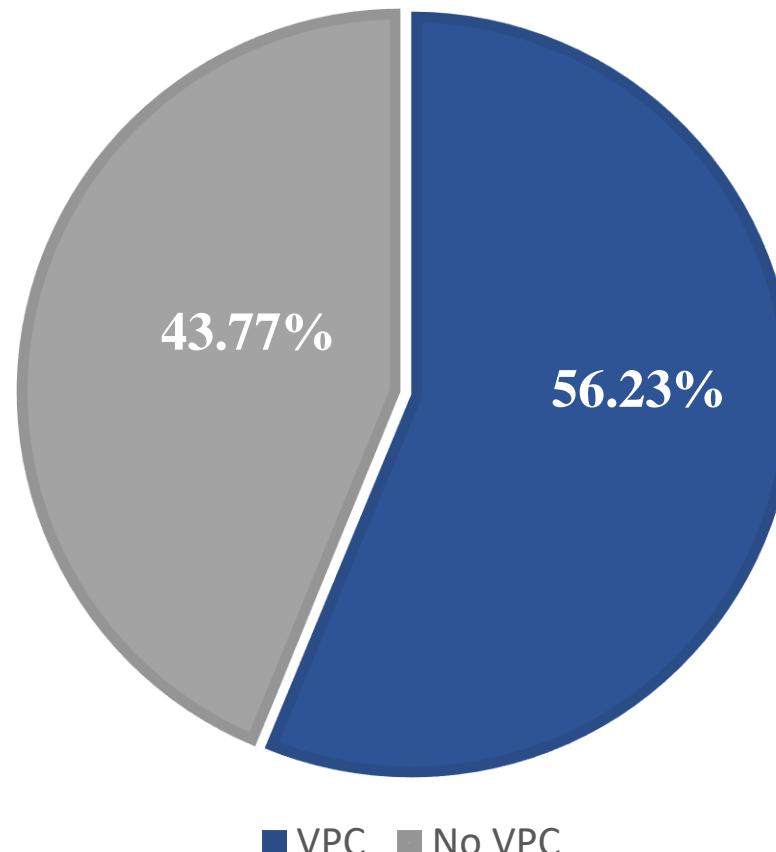
International sample demographic information

Country	Total N	Female %	Mean Age	Country	Total N	Female %	Mean Age
Argentina	140	78.57	24.28	Malaysia	228	71.05	21.53
Australia	196	76.02	19.84	Mexico	245	58.37	23.88
Austria	113	81.42	21.26	Netherlands	299	81.61	20.14
Bolivia	118	61.86	21.09	New Zealand	129	86.05	19.19
Brazil	242	75.21	23.64	Nigeria	134	33.58	24.75
Bulgaria	150	70.67	25.05	Norway	159	74.21	23.89
Canada	302	79.14	21.86	Pakistan	114	50.00	20.61
Chile	383	66.58	21.45	Palestine	248	80.24	22.25
China	426	48.59	22.64	Peru	69	62.32	22.71
Colombia	181	74.03	21.68	Philippines	331	69.18	19.71
Croatia	218	64.68	21.46	Poland	233	83.26	22.36
Czech Republic	193	80.83	22.65	Portugal	156	87.82	21.66
Denmark	244	79.92	22.94	Romania	177	57.06	22.84
Estonia	293	83.96	25.88	Russia	151	82.12	21.85
France	228	85.53	22.60	Senegal	633	47.39	23.32
Georgia	140	80.00	20.29	Serbia	184	86.41	19.73
Germany	454	75.11	24.36	Singapore	136	77.94	20.93
Greece	202	81.19	22.76	Slovakia	148	69.59	22.41
Hong Kong	142	59.15	19.00	Slovenia	122	57.38	20.43
Hungary	176	60.23	21.76	South Korea	281	58.36	22.35
India	221	49.77	22.38	Spain	419	85.20	19.73
Indonesia	59	50.85	23.59	Sweden	126	72.22	68.02
Israel	171	61.40	25.35	Switzerland	750	84.13	22.37
Italy	717	64.57	21.86	Taiwan	162	76.54	19.71
Jordan	141	80.85	19.87	Thailand	188	80.32	19.24
Latvia	168	82.74	24.89	Turkey	310	68.39	21.02
Lithuania	144	78.47	20.26	Ukraine	243	77.37	20.60
World Sample				United States	1360	67.72	19.85
				Vietnam	134	84.33	19.00
				World Sample	14,227	70.90%	22.23

Are individuals around the world currently trying to change their personalities?



N = 10,086



N = 4,141

Correlation between current levels of *Extraversion* (plus facets) and VPC

	VPC Increased Extraversion	VPC Increased Sociality	VPC Increased Assertiveness
Current Extraversion	-0.27***	-0.26***	-0.05
Current Sociality	-0.29***	-0.28***	-0.04
Current Assertiveness	-0.23***	-0.20***	-0.07**
Current Energy	-0.14***	-0.14***	-0.004

Note. *** ≤.001; ** ≤.01; N = 2684

Correlation between current levels of *Agreeableness* (plus facets) and VPC

	VPC Increased Agreeableness	VPC Increased Trust	VPC Increased Compassion
Current Agreeableness	-0.10***	-0.02	-0.06*
Current Respect	-0.08***	-0.01	-0.03
Current Trust	-0.09***	0.001	-0.09
Current Compassion	-0.06*	-0.03	-0.01

Note. *** $\leq .001$; $N = 2684$

Correlation between current levels of *Conscientiousness* (plus facets) and VPC

	VPC Increase Conscientiousness	VPC Increase Responsible	VPC Increase Productiveness	VPC Increase Organization
Current Conscientiousness	-0.16***	-0.04	-0.13***	-0.08***
Current Responsible	-0.10***	-0.03	-0.06**	-0.04
Current Productiveness	-0.14***	-0.02	-0.15**	-0.04
Current Organization	-0.15***	-0.04	-0.10***	-0.10***

Note. *** ≤.001; ** ≤.01; * ≤.05; N = 2684

Correlation between current levels of *Agreeableness* (plus facets) and VPC

	VPC Emotional Stability	VPC Decrease Anxiety	VPC Decrease Depression	VPC Decrease Emotionality
Current Negative Emotionality	0.21***	0.13***	0.12***	0.09***
Current Anxiety	0.17***	0.14***	0.08***	0.04
Current Depression	0.16***	0.09***	0.14***	0.03
Current Emotionality	0.21***	0.10***	0.08***	0.16***

Note. *** ≤.001; ** ≤.01; * ≤.05; N = 2684