

Personality Traits of Judges and Their Locus of Control in Issuing Judgments in Morality-Related Offenses

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Abstract

Understanding judges' personality types and locus of control is not merely an auxiliary skill but constitutes a core component of strategic advocacy. Whether in family litigation, criminal proceedings, international disputes, or immigration cases, such alignment represents a key factor in the effectiveness of legal defense strategies. The present study was conducted with the aim of examining judges' personality traits and locus of control in the issuance of judicial decisions. To this end, a sample of 300 judges was selected through simple random sampling and assessed with respect to the five major personality factors and locus of control. Data were collected using the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) and the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale. Data analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Examination of relationships among variables through Pearson correlation coefficients and multiple regression analysis demonstrated a significant association between personality traits and locus of control, and personality traits significantly predicted locus of control. The findings further indicated that locus of control had a positive and statistically significant correlation with neuroticism ($r = .256, p < .01$) and significant negative correlations with extraversion ($p < .01$), agreeableness ($r = -.096, p < .01$), openness/flexibility ($r = -.204, p < .01$), and conscientiousness ($r = -.279, p < .01$). Moreover, based on analysis of variance and regression statistical indices, the personality traits of neuroticism and responsibility (conscientiousness) showed a significant relationship with external locus of control, with the obtained F value indicating statistical significance. Approximately 10% of the variance related to external locus of control was explained by these two personality dimensions. Accordingly, it is recommended that judicial authorities pay greater attention to the relationship between employees' personality characteristics and their locus of control, and that personnel assignment within judicial institutions be aligned with individual personality profiles.

Keywords: personality traits; judges; locus of control; neuroticism; extraversion; agreeableness; morality-related offenses.

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1. Introduction

Self-control is an internal process within the judge that leads to conscious, committed, and responsible reactions and behaviors in the exercise of judicial duties, aimed at safeguarding the judge, the family, and the judicial institution while preventing or reducing harms, risks, and threats arising from external stimuli such as unethical proposals, bribery attempts, undue influence, and internal temptations. The sensitivity of the judicial position, the extensive authority granted to judges, and the fundamental missions of the judiciary significantly increase the need for self-control as a mechanism for strengthening professional ethics in fair, informed, impartial, and vigilant adjudication. A judge seeking to realize justice must embody ethical values; otherwise, it becomes impossible to move firmly and effectively along the path of justice. Judicial missions therefore require the highest level of professional ethical performance so that judicial efficiency and effectiveness may be realized.

This article is grounded in the assumption that the effectiveness of judicial professional ethics is frequently dependent on the degree of a judge's self-control and that self-control constitutes a desirable and appropriate mechanism for enhancing ethical efficiency in judicial practice. The most important outcomes associated with judicial self-control include improvement of judicial governance, persuasion of public opinion, enhancement of public trust in the judiciary, strengthening judicial insight, and increasing organizational commitment and responsibility among judges (Najjarzadegan Sarabi et al., 2021).

Under such circumstances, the difficulty of judicial work increases, requiring judges to exercise ethical vigilance so as not to fall into the traps of litigants or deviate from the path of justice. Judges simultaneously possess considerable authority and substantial discretionary power. Given this authority and discretion, judicial personality and moral character assume central importance. Particularly in complex cases, the identity of the judge is no less important than the substance of the law itself. When legal rules are applied by a virtuous judge, judicial power and discretion are more likely to be directed toward justice and fairness. For this reason, virtue-based approaches to adjudication have gained prominence, emphasizing that the fate of individuals should be entrusted to judges possessing moral virtues. Essential judicial virtues include legality, legal knowledge, judicial reasoning, courage, self-restraint, humility, impartiality, independence, incorruptibility, professional competence, justice, and compassion. The virtue-based perspective is also compatible with Shiite jurisprudential traditions and enables constructive dialogue between modern virtue theory and classical legal thought. Nevertheless, certain traditional attributes attributed to judges may conflict with modern egalitarian values and therefore require critical reconsideration within contemporary legal systems. The present study examines the theoretical foundations of the virtue-based approach and evaluates its application in judicial selection and promotion, demonstrating that qualitative virtue-based criteria can enrich theories of judicial recruitment, provided that selection mechanisms operate transparently and democratically. Recent discussions in judicial virtue theory likewise emphasize the ethical character of judges as a central component of legitimate adjudication (Samai et al., 2022).

Many personality theorists acknowledge the decisive role of the social environment in personality development. Early theoretical perspectives emphasized factors such as family structure, social context, and historical forces in shaping personality characteristics (Momen, 2004). Trait theorists also confirmed the importance of environmental and social influences in personality formation, arguing that personality emerges from interaction between individual dispositions and contextual experiences (Cooper, 1998). Behavioral theorists further demonstrated that learning processes—including reinforcement mechanisms, successive approximation, and environmental conditioning—play a fundamental role in shaping behavioral patterns commonly interpreted as personality traits. Empirical research has shown that learning experiences influence self-efficacy, locus of control, learned helplessness, and optimism–pessimism orientations, all of which relate to the broader concept of perceived control (Bernestien et al., 1979).

Control occupies a crucial role across different domains of life. Higher levels of perceived control are associated with more effective coping strategies, reduced stress consequences, improved mental and physical health, greater resilience, higher aspirations, stronger self-esteem, lower anxiety, better academic outcomes, and enhanced social competence. Whether conceptualized as perceived efficacy, internal locus of control, or optimism, control is largely shaped by social and environmental factors and thus represents a learned dimension of personality (Greenberger & McLaughlin, 1998). One of the pioneers of locus of control theory, Julian Rotter, proposed that individuals can be located along a continuum ranging from internal to external control orientations. Individuals with an internal orientation tend to experience greater personal agency,

social acceptance, higher self-esteem, superior intuitive judgment, and more competent decision-making, characteristics highly relevant to judicial decision-making (Brannigan et al., 1991). Furthermore, individuals possessing an internal locus of control are less prone to emotional instability, delinquent behavior, and biased judgments and demonstrate greater resilience when confronting stress (Samai et al., 2022).

Conceptually, self-control originates from discussions of control and supervision within managerial and organizational theory. Managers implement internal and external control systems to ensure effective governance; self-control represents the internal dimension of such systems and maintains close conceptual connections with psychology, sociology, management science, and cognitive science. Self-control refers to an individual's capacity to recognize and regulate emotions, impulses, behaviors, and needs in relation to both self and society. Researchers generally conceptualize overall self-control as consisting of intrapersonal regulation, interpersonal regulation, and self-evaluation processes. In the present study, judicial self-control is defined as an internal process through which a judge engages in conscious, responsible, and compassionate conduct while performing judicial duties, thereby protecting personal integrity and institutional legitimacy and resisting unethical pressures such as bribery, influence, and internal temptation (Sadeghmanesh, 1999).

Empirical studies indicate that individuals with an internal locus of control are less likely to engage in misinterpretation, erroneous judgment, or impulsive decision-making (Benassi et al., 1988; Keltikangas-Jarvinen & Raikonen, 1990). Extensive research has also demonstrated a strong association between Rotter's locus of control construct and perceived personal efficacy, suggesting that perceived control significantly influences judgment and behavioral regulation (Gladstone & Kaslow, 1995). Possessing control over one's life contributes positively to judicial decision-making, enhances psychological adaptation, and reduces behavioral and emotional difficulties. Maladaptive attributional styles and external locus of control have been linked to social rejection, excessive approval-seeking, and social anxiety among professionals, factors that may influence judicial reasoning and impartiality (Crick & Ladd, 1993). Additionally, external attribution patterns are associated with impulsivity, elevated neuroticism, antisocial tendencies, and maladaptive behavioral outcomes (Fox et al., 2002).

Clarifying and promoting judicial virtues enables judges lacking certain ethical competencies to develop them through continuous learning and professional modeling, ultimately strengthening the public standing of the judiciary. Consequently, the present research may serve as a theoretical foundation for future studies examining the psychological characteristics of judges and their role in fair adjudication (Karamali, 2000). Appropriate judicial behavior constitutes a prerequisite for fair trial standards. Although many legal systems codify judicial conduct rules, existing domestic regulations primarily provide disciplinary sanctions rather than comprehensive behavioral guidance, thereby leaving room for subjective interpretation. Accordingly, drawing inspiration from international judicial conduct principles and adapting them to national legal values, this study explains desirable standards of judicial behavior within the framework of judicial independence, impartiality, judicial decorum, integrity, equality, competence, and diligence. Judicial independence refers not only to institutional autonomy but also to judges' professional capability and integrity in rendering sound decisions (Moazzan Zadeqan, 2000). Judicial decorum and ethical conduct serve as foundational elements of judicial legitimacy, evaluated from the perspective of a reasonable observer assessing the judge's integrity and honesty (Mousavi Gorgani, 2002). Equal access to an independent and impartial tribunal represents a fundamental requirement of democratic justice systems, ensuring equality of parties in judicial proceedings and reinforcing political equality within society. Competence and diligence therefore remain essential prerequisites for proper performance of judicial responsibilities.

Accordingly, the present study was conducted with the objective of examining judges' personality traits and locus of control in the issuance of judicial decisions.

2. Research Methodology

The statistical population of this study consisted of judges, from whom a sample of 300 participants was selected through random sampling and subsequently assessed.

Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-FFI): This questionnaire measures five major personality dimensions—neuroticism, extraversion, openness (flexibility), agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1986). Reported

Cronbach's alpha coefficients for these five factors ranged between .68 and .87, indicating acceptable reliability (Garousi, 2001).

Rotter Internal–External Locus of Control Scale: This instrument consists of 29 items, each containing two alternative statements from which respondents select one option. Numerous studies have examined the validity and reliability of this scale, demonstrating strong psychometric stability. The initial reliability coefficient calculated using the Kuder–Richardson formula on a sample of university students was reported as .73, with internal consistency estimates ranging from .65 to .79, while studies conducted in Iran reported a reliability coefficient of .75 and a test–retest reliability of .81 (Hosseini, 1998).

3. Findings

The descriptive components of locus of control and the five personality factors are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Findings (Standard Deviation)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
External Locus of Control	10.82	3.77
Neuroticism	21.91	7.95
Extraversion	27.94	5.48
Openness/Flexibility	31.34	5.95
Agreeableness	27.96	4.80
Conscientiousness	33.04	5.54

Table 2. Correlation Coefficients Between Personality Traits and External Locus of Control

Variables	External Locus of Control	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Openness/Flexibility	Conscientiousness
External Locus of Control	1.00	0.256	-0.177	-0.096	-0.204	-0.279
Neuroticism	0.256	1.00	-0.368	-0.016	-0.285	-0.396
Extraversion	-0.177	-0.328	1.00	0.072	0.182	0.348
Agreeableness	-0.096	-0.016	0.072	1.00	0.098	0.094
Openness/Flexibility	-0.204	-0.285	0.182	0.098	1.00	0.388
Conscientiousness	-0.279	-0.396	0.348	0.094	0.388	1.00

*Correlation coefficients are significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed, $p < .01$).

*Correlation coefficients are significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed, $p < .01$).

As shown in Table 2, locus of control demonstrated a positive and statistically significant correlation with neuroticism ($r = 0.256, p < .01$). In contrast, locus of control showed significant negative relationships with extraversion ($r = -0.177, p < .01$), agreeableness ($r = -0.096, p < .01$), openness/flexibility ($r = -0.204, p < .01$), and conscientiousness ($r = -0.279, p < .01$).

Table 3. Regression Model Summary, Analysis of Variance, and Statistical Indicators

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	R	R ²	Std. Error
Model 1: Conscientiousness								
Regression	127.276	1	127.276	19.840	0.000	0.27	0.07	3.73
Residual	3326.355	239	13.918					
Total	3602.481	240						
Model 2: Conscientiousness and Neuroticism								
Regression	356.518	2	178.259	13.070	0.000	0.315	0.09	3.69
Residual	3245.964	238	13.639					
Total	3602.481	240						

Based on the results of the analysis of variance and regression indices, neuroticism and conscientiousness respectively explained approximately 7% and 9% of the variance in external locus of control. When both variables were entered simultaneously into the regression model, the obtained F value was statistically significant, and together these two personality traits accounted for approximately 10% of the variance in external locus of control.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients of Personality Traits Predicting Locus of Control

Regression Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	SEB	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	T	P
Constant	16.704	2.683	—	6.226	0.000
Neuroticism	0.073	0.034	0.151	2.176	0.033

Extraversion	-0.004	0.052	-0.006	-0.085	0.933
Agreeableness	-0.065	0.050	-0.081	-1.291	0.198
Openness/Flexibility	-0.042	0.045	-0.065	-0.950	0.343
Conscientiousness	-0.126	0.049	-0.183	-2.556	0.011

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Decision-making styles among judges are diverse. Each judge reaches decisions through a unique cognitive structure shaped by emotional intelligence, psychological and personality characteristics, tacit legal knowledge, perception of social and legal phenomena, professional attitudes, and accumulated judicial experience. What is commonly referred to as *judicial intuition* can be understood within the framework of intuitive decision-making. This form of judgment emerges through the interaction of cognitive, emotional, experiential, and ethical factors and explains why some judges demonstrate stronger judicial insight than others. Although disagreement exists regarding the legitimacy of intuition-based judicial decisions, examining judicial intuition within contemporary decision-making theory reveals that intuitive reasoning often complements analytical reasoning rather than replacing it.

The purpose of this study was to examine judges' personality traits and locus of control in the issuance of judicial decisions among judges of Hamadan County. The findings demonstrated a meaningful relationship between personality traits and locus of control in judicial decision-making. These results indicate that psychological characteristics play an important role in how judges interpret evidence, evaluate competing narratives, and ultimately issue judgments. Judicial behavior is therefore not solely determined by legal knowledge or statutory interpretation; rather, it reflects the interaction between personality structure and perceived personal control.

According to locus of control theory, individuals with an internal orientation believe that behavioral outcomes are largely determined by personal effort, competence, and responsibility. In contrast, individuals with an external orientation attribute outcomes to luck, chance, or external forces beyond personal influence. Applied to judicial practice, attributional styles influence professional adaptation, interpersonal interaction with litigants and colleagues, problem-solving ability, and the overall quality of judicial reasoning. Judges who demonstrate stronger internal control tend to experience fewer psychological and interpersonal difficulties compared to those who rely primarily on external explanations. A stronger sense of personal control contributes to psychological resilience, professional stability, and balanced decision-making under pressure.

The results further suggest that judges with internal locus of control demonstrate greater autonomy in decision-making, higher professional confidence, stronger social competence, and improved stress management. These judges are less susceptible to emotional instability or impulsive reactions when confronted with complex legal disputes. Reduced neurotic tendencies among internally oriented judges facilitate impartial reasoning and enhance the quality of judicial deliberation. Conversely, repeated exposure to uncontrollable professional failures may foster learned helplessness, increasing vulnerability to emotional exhaustion and neurotic reactions.

Research findings consistently indicate that judges with internal locus of control exhibit better psychological well-being during adjudication compared with judges characterized by external control orientation. Neuroticism, understood as the tendency to experience negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger, guilt, and emotional instability, weakens adaptive functioning and may predispose individuals toward irrational beliefs and impulsive responses. Judges with higher neurotic tendencies therefore encounter greater difficulty regulating emotional reactions and coping with occupational stress. By contrast, judges possessing stronger internal control mechanisms demonstrate more effective emotional regulation, improved professional endurance, and higher resistance to occupational burnout.

The findings of this study reinforce the broader conclusion that judicial competence cannot rely exclusively on legal expertise. Judicial professionalism also requires adherence to professional ethical standards grounded in self-control. A self-regulated judge integrates ethical values into judicial management, ensuring that legal knowledge operates within an ethical framework rather than in isolation from it. Self-control functions as a preventive mechanism protecting judicial integrity against external pressures, unethical influence, and internal temptations.

Because self-control encourages internal monitoring and moral responsibility, its institutional expansion within the judiciary can generate collective motivation and strengthen ethical culture across judicial organizations. When self-control becomes an internalized professional norm, judges utilize their personal capacities responsibly, reducing misconduct, negligence,

corruption, procedural bias, and administrative inefficiency. Self-regulated judges show stronger commitment to lawful conduct, impartial adjudication, and adherence to ethical principles such as equality, dignity, and fairness. They avoid favoritism, discrimination, and procedural injustice while maintaining discipline, completing cases efficiently, and respecting litigants' rights.

Judges characterized by strong self-control contribute to organizational justice and institutional legitimacy. Their ethical conduct promotes workplace respect, innovation, professional motivation, and meritocracy. Cooperation among judicial personnel increases, professional relationships with lawyers, investigators, defendants, complainants, and even family members become more constructive, and the overall atmosphere of judicial institutions improves. Ethical adjudication enhances public satisfaction and strengthens trust in the justice system.

In a broader sense, judicial self-control represents a reformative and preventive concept encompassing ethical awareness, organizational responsibility, realism, goal orientation, and cultural commitment. When systematically integrated into the judicial system, self-control can operate alongside existing supervisory and protective mechanisms as a dynamic complementary safeguard. Such integration increases resilience against threats, reduces the likelihood of judicial misconduct, and strengthens preventive approaches to corruption within the judiciary.

Judges are not only decision-makers but also producers of legal narratives that shape public perception of justice. Under contemporary social conditions characterized by intense media scrutiny and information warfare, judicial conduct carries symbolic significance beyond individual cases. High levels of self-control enable judges to prevent behaviors that might undermine institutional credibility or provide opportunities for misinformation and manipulation. Therefore, strengthening psychological self-regulation among judges contributes not only to fair adjudication but also to institutional stability and public confidence in the justice system.

Practical Recommendations

- This study can serve as a theoretical foundation for future research examining judges' psychological characteristics and their impact on judicial performance.
- Given the validated psychological assessment of locus of control, such measures may be applied as reliable tools in the selection and recruitment process of judicial candidates.

Research Recommendations

- Future studies should examine broader judicial populations to enhance generalizability of findings.
- Standardization of psychological assessment instruments for judges based on Islamic intellectual and ethical frameworks is recommended.
- Subsequent research should compare psychological models derived from Islamic sources with contemporary psychological frameworks.
- Development and implementation of questionnaires based on the perspectives of highly experienced judges are recommended.
- Longitudinal studies assessing judges before and after psychological evaluation processes could provide valuable evidence regarding performance outcomes and professional development over time.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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