

The role of genes in political behavior

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Politics and genetics have traditionally been considered non-overlapping fields, but over the past decade it has become clear that genes can influence political behavior, according to a review published online August 27th in *Trends in Genetics*. This paradigm shift has led to novel insights into why people vary in their political preferences and could have important implications for public policy.

"We're seeing an awakening in the social sciences, and the wall that divided politics and genetics is really starting to fall apart," says review author Peter Hatemi of the University of Sydney. "This is a big advance, because the two fields could inform each other to answer some very complex questions about individual differences in political views."

In the past, [social scientists](#) had assumed that [political preferences](#) were shaped by social learning and environmental factors, but recent studies suggest that genes also strongly influence political traits. Twin studies show that genes have some influence on why people differ on political issues such as the death penalty, unemployment and abortion. Because this field of research is relatively new, only a handful of genes have been implicated in political ideology and partisanship, voter turnout, and [political violence](#).

Future research, including gene-expression and sequencing studies, may lead to deeper insights into genetic influences on political views and have a greater impact on public policy. "Making the public aware of how their mind works and affects their political behavior is critically important," Hatemi says. "This has real implications for the reduction of

discrimination, foreign policy, public health, attitude change and many other political issues."

More information: Hatemi et al.: "The Genetics of Politics: Discovery, Challenges and Progress." www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../ii/S0168952512001114

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