

Voting Your Genes

“Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?” by John R. Alford, Carolyn L. Funk, and John R. Hibbing, in *American Political Science Review* (May 2005), George Washington Univ., Dept. of Political Science, 1922 F St., N.W., Ste. 401A, Washington, D.C. 20052.

Most political scientists don't even want to think about this, but is it possible that conservatives and liberals are *born* that way? It's not quite that simple, say political scientists Alford, Funk, and Hibbing, but evidence from studies of twins indicates that genes play a strong role in shaping individuals' basic political outlooks.

The authors analyzed the responses of nearly 4,500 pairs of twins when they were presented with 28 short social or political terms, such as *school prayer* and *Republicans*, and asked to “agree” or “disagree” with them. The authors then categorized the answers as “liberal” or “conservative.” They found a much higher level of agreement among the identical twins in the survey than among the fraternal twins (who share only 50 percent of their genetic material). Comparing the differences, the authors calculated that genes account for 43 percent of the “variability” between the two groups, while shared environment accounts for only 22 percent. To put it in more concrete terms: The political ideology of individuals is, on average, about half determined by genes.

The authors point out that this makes a great deal of sense if one considers that social scientists have been trying fruitlessly for decades to tease out what *environmental* factors influence political ideology. Opinionated fathers? Long political discussions around the dinner table? Permissive child-rearing? All of these, and many

other factors, have been measured and found lacking in explanatory power.

There is no single “liberal” or “conservative” gene, say Alford, Funk, and Hibbing (of Rice University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and the University of Nebraska, respectively). Instead, many genes, interacting in various ways, are involved in influencing people's political outlooks. But the authors speculate that these interactions tend to tilt people toward one of two basic types of mindsets: *absolutist*, with a taste for order, clear rules, and “in-group unity,” and *contextualist*, with an aversion to hierarchy and unbending rules and a high degree of empathy. Yes, the authors say, that's in effect the same as conservative and liberal.

Still, individuals do seem to make some important political decisions with very little input from their genes. The authors found that heredity has little effect on political party affiliation. Parental views probably count for much more there, as they do in decisions to identify with a particular church.

If all of this is true, one of the interesting questions is, why would evolution care about politics? What is the evolutionary advantage of political diversity? There are several possible explanations, but most appealing to the authors is the thought that diverse approaches keep human society on its toes and ready to adapt, and therefore healthier.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

America's Foreign Fans

“In Search of Pro-Americanism” by Anne Applebaum, in *Foreign Policy* (July–Aug. 2005), 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

It's easy to lose sight of the fact that everybody in the world isn't anti-American. Even in France and Germany, sizable minorities (38 percent and 27 percent, respectively, in one BBC poll this

year) remain convinced that American influence is “positive.” Who are these pro-Americans around the globe? asks Applebaum, a *Washington Post* columnist and the author of *Gulag* (2003).

Periodicals

Variations in pro-American sentiments by age, she says, suggest that personal experience counts and that U.S. foreign policy can have “a direct impact on foreigners’ perceptions,” contrary to the claims of some commentators on anti-Americanism.

In generally pro-American Poland, for example, people ages 30 to 44 are especially likely (59 percent) to regard U.S. influence as “mainly positive,” according to a recent study. Those Poles, as youths in their teens and twenties, “would have been most directly affected by the experience of the Solidarity movement and martial law” under the Communist regime, Applebaum observes, “and they would have the clearest memories of American support for the Polish underground movement.” In contrast, today’s Polish youths, whose chief knowledge of the United States may concern the difficulty of getting visas, are less approving. Only 45 percent of those under 30 see U.S. influence as “mainly positive.”

In Canada, Britain, Italy, and Australia, people older than 60, with memories of the U.S. role during World War II and the Cold War, “have relatively much more positive feelings about the United States than their children and grandchildren [do],” says Applebaum. In Britain, 64 percent of those over 60—but only 32 percent of those under 30—deem U.S. influence “mainly positive.”

Aspirations also count. Many associate the United States with upward mobility, economic progress, and a classless society. In Britain, for instance, the greatest sup-

port for America comes from those with the lowest incomes and the least formal education—a trend that appears in many developed countries.

In some developing countries, such as India, the pattern is reversed. “Indians are much more likely to be pro-American if they are not only younger but wealthier and better educated.” From Indians with very high incomes to those with average incomes to those with very low incomes, the percentage considering U.S. influence “mainly positive” runs steadily downward—from 69 percent, to 43 percent, to 30 percent. “Younger Indians have had the experience of working with American companies and American investors, whereas their parents did not. . . . The poor in India are still untouched by globalization, but the middle and upper-middle classes—those who see for themselves a role in the English-speaking, America-dominated international economy—are aspirational and therefore pro-American.”

Yet another factor in the making of pro-Americans seems to be gender. “In Europe, Asia, and South America, men are far more likely than women to have positive feelings about the United States.” Applebaum can only speculate about why—a female aversion to America’s muscular foreign policy? A greater male interest in power and entrepreneurship?

One thing that Applebaum is sure of, though, is that the United States has many “natural constituents”—and they’re “worth cultivating.”

Overselling Democracy

“The Freedom Crusade” by David C. Hendrickson and Robert W. Tucker, in *The National Interest* (Fall 2005), 1615 L St., N.W., Ste. 1230, Washington, D.C. 20036; “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?” by F. Gregory Gause III, in *Foreign Affairs* (Sept.–Oct. 2005), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Invoking the Founding Fathers and Abraham Lincoln, President George W. Bush declared in his second inaugural address last January that “America’s vital interests and deepest beliefs are now one,” and that henceforth the United States would “seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in

every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.” Bush did not rule out the use of force to achieve this goal.

Far from fulfilling the vision of America’s Founders, the Bush administration’s campaign to promote democracy in the Middle East and the rest of the globe is, rather, at