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Two Genes Predict Voter Turnout

Fowler, Baker, and Dawes (2007) recently showed in two independent studies of twins that voter turnout has very high heritability. Here we investigate two specific genes that may contribute to this heritability via their impact on neurochemical processes that influence social behavior. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, we show that a polymorphism of the MAOA gene significantly increases the likelihood of voting. We also find evidence of a gene-environment interaction between religious attendance and a polymorphism of the 5HTT gene that significantly increases voter turnout. These are the first results to ever link specific genes to political behavior and they suggest that political scientists should take seriously the claim that at least some variation in political behavior is due to innate predispositions.