The Structure of American Political Ideology: Disentangling the importance of psychological predispositions and socially constructions in the organization of political attitudes

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Abstract

The structure of ideological preferences within the American Electorate is contingent on both the environmental conditions that provide the content of the contemporary political debate and internal predispositions that motivate people to hold liberal or conservative policy preferences. In this paper we expand on Jost, Federico and Napier’s (2009) dual process theory of political attitude formation and empirically test some of the broad claims with a genetically informative population sample, to disentangle the social (top-down) and genetic (bottom-up) pathways between different attitude dimensions. In sum, we find a large degree of support for the dual process framework that segregates the environmental and innate influences on political attitudes and identifies a different structure of political attitudes at each level of analysis. By merging psychological, genetic and political science approaches we begin to provide increased insight into the differential structure of political attitudes at different levels of analysis.