



## How Brain Science Supports Democracy

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**Abstract:** The author's goal of the editorial is to emphasize that the ongoing struggles for democratic organization of society can largely be based by findings from neuroscience. The author intentionally limited the argumentation by mainly referring to the insights of just three of the most renowned thinkers exploring the nature of the human psyche, specifically the conclusions of Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, and Jonathan Haidt. By providing only the essence of the significance of neuroscience for the fight for democratic order, the author aimed to make his message as accessible as possible to the general readership. However, by citing his other extensive scientific works on the subject, the author directs readers to an effective way to deepen their understanding of this topic.

To summarize the message of this editorial, it should be highlighted, according to the author, that Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory identifies five core moral values: care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity, which vary between liberals and conservatives. Neuroscientific research supports these differences, showing brain structure correlations with political orientations.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory, especially "Totem and Taboo," explains psychological mechanisms behind authoritarianism. His concepts of symbolic authority figures and taboos parallel modern authoritarian regimes. Neuroscience links these ideas to the brain's fear response, exploited by authoritarian leaders.

Jung's theory of the shadow explains how projection leads to social division and scapegoating. Populist leaders embody archetypes like the Hero or the Ruler, stirring prejudices. Neuroscience supports Jung's ideas by showing brain activation in social cognition during political decision-making.

The author maintains that educational programs fostering critical thinking and empathy, and policies addressing inequalities, can strengthen democracy. By leveraging psychological and neuroscientific insights, we can build more inclusive, empathetic, and resilient democratic societies.

**Keywords:** neuroscience, democracy, authoritarianism, political psychology, Moral Foundations Theory

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of neuroscience and knowledge about the rules of democracy is an emerging field that offers better insights into the functioning of democratic systems [1-5]. Through the lens of brain science, we can better understand the cognitive and psychological underpinnings that support or undermine democratic principles. This editorial will delve into the contributions of notable thinkers such as Jonathan Haidt, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Gustav Jung, to elucidate how their findings can help us comprehend the relationship between neuroscience and democracy.

### 2. JONATHAN HAIDT - MORAL FOUNDATIONS AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Jonathan Haidt's research into moral psychology has provided valuable insights into

the cognitive differences between liberals and conservatives. His Moral Foundations Theory posits that there are five primary moral values: care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity. Liberals tend to prioritize care and fairness, while conservatives give more weight to loyalty, authority, and purity [6].

Haidt's findings are crucial in understanding how these moral foundations influence political ideology and behavior. Neuroscientific studies, such as those by Kanai et al., have shown that political orientations are correlated with brain structure, particularly in regions associated with threat detection and emotional regulation [7]. These structural differences can lead to divergent perceptions of social issues and governance, influencing how individuals engage with democratic processes.

For example, conservatives' heightened purity and their emphasis on loyalty and authority can lead to support for more hierarchical and authoritarian structures, which can challenge democratic norms [4,5]. Conversely, liberals' focus on care and fairness aligns more closely with egalitarian principles and democratic ideals [8,9]. Understanding these cognitive differences can help in crafting policies and dialogues that bridge ideological divides and strengthen democratic engagement [5].

### 3. SIGMUND FREUD - TOTEM AND TABOO IN AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEMS

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly his exploration of totem and taboo, offers a framework for understanding the psychological mechanisms behind authoritarianism. In "Totem and Taboo," Freud discusses how primitive societies use taboos to enforce social cohesion and control behaviors [5,10]. He argues that these taboos carry emotional significance similar to the prohibitions observed in neurotic individuals, rooted in unresolved emotional conflicts and societal norms.

Freud's concept of the totem as a symbolic father figure who embodies authority and control can be applied to modern authoritarian regimes [10]. These regimes often establish themselves by invoking powerful symbols and enforcing strict social norms, much like the totems and taboos in primitive cultures. The emotional charge associated with these symbols can galvanize public support for authoritarian leaders, who promise order and security in times of uncertainty [5].

From a neuroscientific perspective, this can be linked to the brain's response to fear and threat. Authoritarian leaders often exploit these responses, creating a sense of unity against perceived external or internal threats [9]. By understanding these psychological dynamics, democracies can develop strategies to counteract authoritarian tendencies and promote resilience against fear-based manipulation.

### 4. CARL GUSTAV JUNG: - THE SHADOW AND COLLECTIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the shadow provides another layer of understanding regarding the psychological forces at play in democratic and authoritarian societies. The shadow represents the unconscious part of the

psyche that harbors undesirable traits and impulses[5,11]. Jung posited that individuals project these unwanted qualities onto others, which can lead to scapegoating and social division.

In the context of democracy, this projection can manifest in the demonization of political opponents or minority groups, undermining social cohesion and democratic values. Jung's archetypes, particularly the Hero and the Ruler, also play a role in political psychology. Populist leaders often embody these archetypes, presenting themselves as saviors or strong leaders who can restore order and dignity to their followers [5].

Observing the efforts of far-right populist politicians, especially during election campaigns, one gets the impression that they are designed to stir up prejudices, hostilities, and the most hidden instincts that are not usually talked about in everyday life.

Neuroscience supports Jung's ideas by showing how brain regions involved in social cognition and emotion regulation are activated during political decision-making. Studies have demonstrated that individuals with conservative orientations often exhibit greater activation in areas related to threat detection and emotional processing, which can fuel authoritarian attitudes [5]. By recognizing these underlying psychological mechanisms, democratic societies can work towards fostering a more inclusive and empathetic political culture [12].

### 5. FREUD'S AND JUNG'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNDERSTANDING AUTHORITARIANISM

Both Freud and Jung offer valuable perspectives on the psychological underpinnings of authoritarianism. Freud's analysis of totem and taboo explains how societal norms and emotional conflicts can create fertile ground for authoritarian control. Jung's exploration of the shadow highlights how projection and archetypes contribute to the allure of strong, authoritarian leaders.

Neuroscientific research complements these theories by providing empirical evidence of the brain's role in political behavior. For instance, the amygdala, which is crucial for processing fear, is often more reactive in individuals with conservative or authoritarian tendencies. This heightened sensitivity to

threat can make such individuals more susceptible to authoritarian rhetoric that promises security and stability.

By integrating Freud's and Jung's insights with contemporary neuroscience, we can develop a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and neural mechanisms that support or undermine democratic governance. This integrated approach can inform the design of educational and policy interventions aimed at promoting democratic resilience.

### 6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

Understanding the psychological and neuroscientific foundations of political behavior has practical implications for strengthening democracy [13]. Educational programs that foster critical thinking, empathy, and emotional regulation can help mitigate the influence of authoritarian tendencies. Promoting awareness of cognitive biases and the psychological manipulation used by populist leaders can empower citizens to make more informed political decisions.

Moreover, policies that address economic and social inequalities can reduce the fear and insecurity that often drive support for authoritarian regimes. Ensuring that all citizens have access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities can create a more stable and equitable society, which is less susceptible to authoritarian manipulation.

### 7. CONCLUSION

The intersection of neuroscience and psychology provides a rich framework for understanding the complexities of political behavior and the functioning of democratic systems. The contributions of Jonathan Haidt, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Gustav Jung offer valuable insights into the cognitive and emotional dynamics that underpin political ideologies and governance structures.

By leveraging these insights, we can develop strategies to promote democratic resilience and counteract authoritarian tendencies. Educational initiatives, policy reforms, and public awareness campaigns can all play a role in fostering a more inclusive, empathetic, and resilient democratic society. As we continue to explore the connections between brain science

and democracy, we can hope to build stronger, more equitable political systems that truly serve the needs of all citizens.

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