

## **Linking Genes and Contextual Ethnic Diversity: An Initial Exploration of Gene x Environment Interactions**

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One of the cornerstones of political behavior research is the effort to understand why a person's social context and the characteristics of the community in which he or she lives have an effect on political attitudes beyond what would be predicted on the individual's characteristics alone. Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in the effect of the racial and ethnic context on political attitudes and behavior, given the increasing diversification along racial and ethnic lines due to the growing immigrant population in the United States. An important consideration that has been relatively neglected is how individual differences might affect response to changes in the demographic landscape and thus moderate the effect of the size of the racial or ethnic population on political attitudes and ideology. Some people may be more receptive than others to the change and diversity introduced into a community due to a growing minority population, which may make them feel less threatened and less likely to support conservative policies and ideologies.

Using a candidate gene approach to test possible genetic interactions with the racial and ethnic diversity in the context and six genes typed in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, I find limited evidence of moderation affecting political ideology. These findings should be considered preliminary and necessitate replication, but they offer some validation for the exploration of the gene x environment approach. There are strong theoretical reasons for expecting these interactions to be present, even if they are exceedingly difficult to measure.