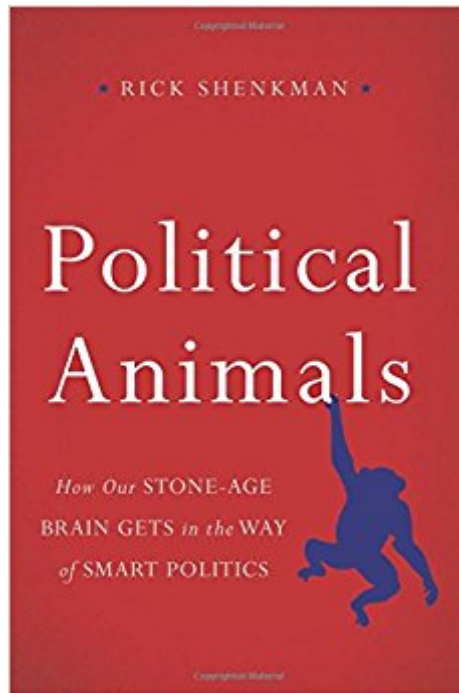


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Political Animals: How Our Stone-Age Brain Gets In The Way Of Smart Politics



Synopsis

Can a football game affect the outcome of an election? What about shark attacks? Or a drought? In a rational world the answer, of course, would be no. But as bestselling historian Rick Shenkman explains in *Political Animals*, our world is anything but rational. Drawing on science, politics, and history, Shenkman explores the hidden forces behind our often illogical choices. *Political Animals* challenges us to go beyond the headlines, which often focus on what politicians do (or say they'll do), and to concentrate instead on what's really important: what shapes our response. Shenkman argues that, contrary to what we tell ourselves, it's our instincts rather than arguments appealing to reason that usually prevail. Pop culture tells us we can trust our instincts, but science is proving that when it comes to politics our Stone Age brain often malfunctions, misfires, and leads us astray. Fortunately, we can learn to make our instincts work in our favor. Shenkman takes readers on a whirlwind tour of laboratories where scientists are exploring how sea slugs remember, chimpanzees practice deception, and patients whose brains have been split in two tell stories. The scientists' findings give us new ways of understanding our history and ourselves—and prove we don't have to be prisoners of our evolutionary past. In this engaging, illuminating, and often riotous chronicle of our political culture, Shenkman probes the depths of the human mind to explore how we can become more political, and less animal.

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Customer Reviews

Generally a good accounting of Evolutionary Psychology as it applies to how we make political decisions. Unfortunately the author appears to succumb to his own biases in the concluding chapter, particularly as it pertains to global warming and climate change. Where an application of his previously outlined ideas might have made more sense, he instead advocates for running TV spots to generate anxiety and motivate people to be more active in trying to prevent the coming climate apocalypse. While anxiety can be an adaptive response to a threat, it is also far too often a maladaptive response to merely a perceived threat, as opposed to a real one. Ironically, this comes right on the heels of telling us how unknowable the future is and how wisdom comes from associating with people who do not think the same as we do. Here, instead of advocating that we do more to educate ourselves about the issue, as he does earlier in the book when it comes to other political issues, he says we "cannot wait for the evidence", thus almost mirroring a reference he made earlier to Condoleezza Rice's warning about not waiting for the smoking gun of a "mushroom cloud" before invading Iraq. Apparently the irony didn't click within the author's own Pleistocene mind as he abruptly tosses system 2 thinking straight out the window. In the case of global warming and in particular the notion of climate change being man made, most advocates would have you believe this is as factual as evolution itself. The only problem being there is actually quite a bit of evidence to contradict it.

This writer thinks that natural disasters not attributable to politicians like shark attacks and drought should not affect voting patterns. In fact they do and this shallow analysis won't change it. Expecting rationality in voting patterns is irrational. Maybe Shenkman is implying that voting in our democracy should be taken out of human hands. He doesn't seem to recognize that much of the problems are a function of size. Nor does he consider the degree to which randomness cancels out. I'm tired of ultra-liberals tabulating American ignorance by derogating education and political knowledge of voters who don't agree with their ideas. Shenkman asserts that knowledgeable voters should know that Obama didn't raise taxes on middle class Americans, but lowered taxes on 95% of us. That doesn't recognize as taxes, currency devaluation, national debt, Social Security, Obamacare penalty tax, and small business killing estate tax. Government controlled inflation and artificially low interest rates represent a tax penalty on middle class savers more than the rich. Each of us carries a heavier debt burden than at the start of the Obama administration. It suggests that Shenkman is far more politically naive than the average voter as he accepts Obama's campaign lie as fact. I doubt that he can find a single middle class rate payer whose real tax level has declined without attendant loss of job or home. A moment's thought about the expansion of government tells any

rational person that it can't be true. Even the relatively unimportant progressive income tax has not been lowered from Bush levels. Among other peculiar thought patterns, he thinks that climate change science should be a matter of public opinion. There's a simplistic view of evolution, citing the bigger brain of Neanderthals.

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