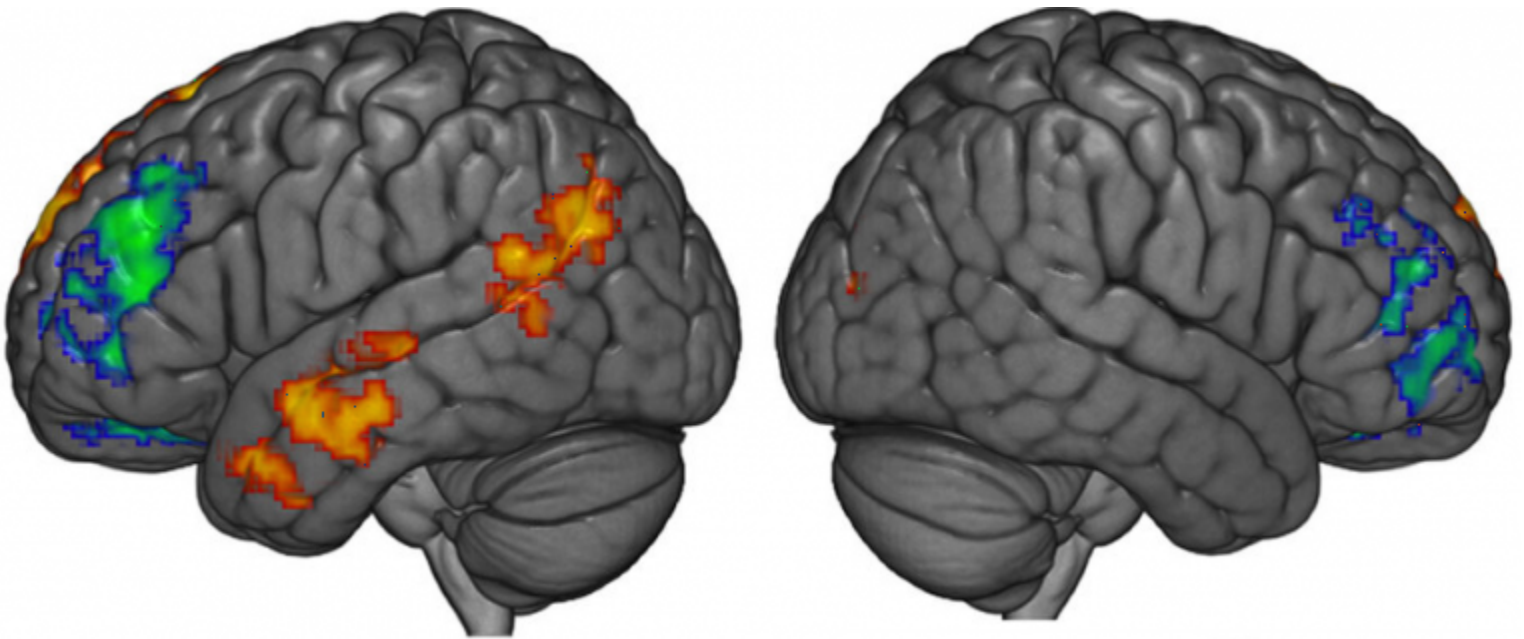


SAM HARRIS

THE BLOG

When the Brain Won't Change Its Mind

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Neural correlates of maintaining one's political beliefs in the face of counterevidence

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Abstract

People often discount evidence that contradicts their firmly held beliefs. However, little is known about the neural mechanisms that govern this behavior. We used neuroimaging to investigate the neural systems involved in maintaining belief in the face of counterevidence, presenting 40 liberals with arguments that contradicted their strongly held political and non-political views. Challenges to political beliefs produced increased activity in the default mode network—a set of interconnected structures associated with self-representation and disengagement from the external world. Trials with greater

belief resistance showed increased response in the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex and decreased activity in the orbitofrontal cortex. We also found that participants who changed their minds more showed less BOLD signal in the insula and the amygdala when evaluating counterevidence. These results highlight the role of emotion in belief-change resistance and offer insight into the neural systems involved in belief maintenance, motivated reasoning, and related phenomena.

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Notes

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