

HOW BELIEFS CONQUER THE HUMAN BRAIN



By Petros Kronis
petros.kronis@gmail.com
www.kronis.tech

As we are going through an election period in which presidential candidates, party representatives and others are trying to influence the beliefs of voters, it would be interesting to understand how beliefs enter and become established in the human brain and how easily they can be overturned and replaced by opposing beliefs.

Initially we form our beliefs for a variety of subjective, personal, emotional, and psychological reasons in the context of environments created by family, friends, colleagues, culture, and society at large. After forming our beliefs, we then defend, justify, and rationalize them with a host of intellectual reasons, persuasive arguments, and rational explanations. Beliefs come first, explanations for beliefs follow.

The process can be likened to a pencil standing upright on its nose. It can hardly stay upright since the slightest forces (views in the case we are considering) throw it left or right, forward or backward. It is easy for our beliefs to take a direction, but once they do, they can hardly be reversed and moved in the opposite direction.

It is impossible to avoid forming beliefs. Our brains evolved to connect the dots of our world into meaningful patterns that explain why things happen. These essential patterns become beliefs. Once these are formed, the brain begins to look for and find corroborating evidence to support these beliefs, which adds an emotional boost of further confidence to the beliefs and thereby speeds up the process of their reinforcement. When presented with views that are against our beliefs, our mind downplays them and dismisses them as unimportant.

As far as presidential elections are concerned, it is therefore difficult to influence party voters. But for those who are not in the party fold, and it seems that these are the ones who determine the outcome of presidential elections, the evaluation of the personal characteristics of the candidates seems to work catalytically. Many would like to think that they judge politicians based on the content of their character and ideas, but research shows that these evaluations are heavily influenced by the signals we perceive at a subconscious level through a candidate's appearance, through his/her body language and even the tone and rhythm of his/her voice. Therefore, to find out who will be the next president, pollsters should add the following to their questions to voters: Who do you consider to be the most attractive candidate?