

# Presidential election outcomes directly influence suicide rates

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Change and hope were central themes to the November 2008 U.S. presidential election. A new longitudinal study published in the September issue of *Social Science Quarterly* analyzes suicide rates at a state level from 1981-2005 and determines that presidential election outcomes directly influence suicide rates among voters.

In states where the majority of voters supported the national election winner suicide rates decreased. However, counter-intuitively, suicide rates decreased even more dramatically in states where the majority of voters supported the election loser (4.6 percent lower for males and 5.3 lower for females). This article is the first in its field to focus on candidate and state-specific outcomes in relation to suicide rates. Prior research on this topic focused on whether the election process itself influenced suicide rates, and found that suicide rates fell during the election season.

Richard A. Dunn, Ph.D., lead author of the study, credits the power of [social cohesion](#), "Sure, supporting the loser stinks, but if everyone around you supported the loser, it isn't as bad because you feel connected to those around you. In other words, it is more comforting to be a Democrat in Massachusetts or Rhode Island when George W. Bush was re-elected than to be the lonely Democrat in Idaho or Oklahoma."

Researchers have commonly thought that people who are less connected to other members of society are more likely to commit suicide. The authors of the study first became interested in this concept when

studying the effect of job loss and unemployment on suicide risk, which theoretically causes people to feel less connected to society. The authors realized that while previous work had explored whether events that brought people together and reaffirmed their shared heritage such as elections, war, religious and secular holidays lowered [suicide rates](#), researchers had generally ignored how the outcomes of these events could also influence suicide risk.

The study holds implications for public health researchers studying the determinants of [suicide risk](#), sociologists studying the role of social cohesion and political scientists studying the rhetoric of political campaigns.

Provided by Wiley

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