

Study links physical activity to political participation

February 1 2011

How is going for a jog like voting for president? As far as our brains are concerned, physical activity and political activity are two sides of the same coin. Scientists found that people who live in more active states are also more likely to vote. And in an experiment, volunteers who were exposed to active words like "go" and "move" said they were more likely to vote than did people who saw words like "relax" and "stop."

The study was inspired by research showing that brains lump all kinds of activity together. For instance, a message that's meant to promote fitness—physical activity—can also trigger people to eat more—another kind of activity, and with the exact opposite result. Kenji Noguchi of the University of Southern Mississippi, Ian M. Handley of Montana State University, and Dolores Albarracín of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign were inspired by the 2008 presidential election to see if the same was true for political activity.

For a new study published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, the researchers pulled together data on how often people exercise, diabetes rates, obesity, and use of amphetamines and other stimulants, to create an "action-tendency index" for the 50 states. They ranked states, from the movers and shakers of Colorado, Alaska, and Oregon to slower-paced Mississippi, West Virginia, and Tennessee. The states' ranking for physical activity roughly corresponded with voter turnout in the 2004 election.

The researchers also tested this link with experiments. In one experiment

before the 2008 election, students completed words with some letters missing—so they were exposed to words like "go" and "active" or "relax" and "paralyze." Students who had encountered active words were more likely to say they would vote in the presidential election than students who worked with words like "freeze."

This link to [physical activity](#) could be used to encourage people to vote, says Albarracín. "It could be anything from promoting voting in a sports context to connecting voting to a self-help context that encourages being proactive—that's a big audience that's thinking about how to improve their own lives and may not otherwise think of doing so politically. This might be easier than getting politically naïve or uninvolved people to vote because they care about politics per se."

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

Citation: Study links physical activity to political participation (2011, February 1) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-02-links-physical-political.html>

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