

Voting in national elections causes stress and emotional arousal, study finds

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With Election Day 2012 just weeks away, a recent study provides scientific evidence that voting in national elections is actually a stressful event with measurable hormonal changes.

"Emotional changes are related and affect various physiological processes, but we were surprised that voting in national democratic elections causes emotional reactions accompanied by such physical and [psychological stress](#) that can easily influence our decision-making," according to Prof. Hagit Cohen from the Anxiety and Stress Research Unit at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev's Faculty of Health Sciences.

The study published in the journal *European Neuropsychopharmacology* that the level of cortisol - a hormone secreted in times of stress to help the body cope with threats—was nearly three times higher just before voting than the [cortisol level](#) of the control group, and nearly twice their level 21 months later. When a person is in a state of stress, threat or emotional distress, the body releases hormones including cortisol, known as the "stress hormone."

The study was conducted on Israel's Election Day in 2009 with people who were on their way to vote. They were asked to give a saliva sample for cortisol testing and to complete a questionnaire examining their emotional arousal at a stand that was placed 30 ft. from the ballot box. The control group consisted of other people from the same area who were asked to give a [saliva test](#) and complete the questionnaire on post-

election day.

The study also found that people were more emotionally aroused just before casting their ballot. "Since we do not like to feel 'stressed out'," adds Prof. Cohen, "It is unclear whether this pressure on Election Day can influence people and cause them not to vote at all. Impact on voter turnout is particularly important given that the [stress levels](#) rise if our preferred party or candidate for whom we want to vote is not popular in the polls."

Provided by American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

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