

# When your body needs calories, you are more inclined to help the poor

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Imagine that you have not eaten anything for the past few hours. It is almost lunch time, and you are getting hungry. You receive an email. It is a survey asking about your political position regarding the welfare state. You answer the questions quickly and head off to lunch. Now imagine a different scenario. You have just come back from lunch. You are feeling full, as you sit down in front of your computer. You receive the same email. You answer the survey quickly and then get back to work. Do you think your answers in these two scenarios would be the same – or different?

An article published in *Psychological Science*, one of the world's leading journals of psychology, suggests that people's responses in these different situations actually differ greatly. Since the Age of Enlightenment we have believed that people make up their minds about politics by considering their options carefully and weighing the pros and cons. Whether you are hungry should not make a difference. Nonetheless, research now shows that people who are hungry are more inclined to be supportive of the welfare state and help the poor.

"We asked a group of [test subjects](#) to fast for four hours after which we gave them a Sprite or a sugar free Sprite Zero. One group had high [blood sugar levels](#), while the other group had low [blood sugar](#)," explains Assistant Professor Lene Aarøe from Aarhus University, who collaborates on the project with her colleague Michael Bang Petersen

"The results show that the group with [low blood sugar](#) levels were more

inclined to support a left-wing welfare policy than the group with [high blood sugar](#) counts. This challenges the traditional notion of what influences us when we take a stance on questions such as modern welfare," says Aarøe.

## **When we grow hungry, we do what our ancestors did**

The extraordinary results suggest that the state of our bodies has a significant influence on our position on specific political issues. In order to understand why, we must look to the origin of our species. Politics also existed in the communities of our ancestors, the hunters and gatherers who roamed the East African savannah, and their ways of handling things have left a mark on us today.

"Over the course of human evolutionary history, a critical issue has always been to secure enough food. We human animals, who live in groups and are exceptionally skilled at managing social situations, always have one extraordinary option if the hunt should fail: we can ask the more fortunate people to share their spoils with us. And if we are to believe a number of anthropological studies, this is precisely what people do across the globe," says Petersen and proceeds:

"The point is that our political opinions are determined by rationality, but it is a rational impulse that has been passed on to us from our ancestors."

## **We want to share, but we have a hidden agenda**

The welfare system is a system of sharing, a contemporary equivalent to the custom of our ancestors. But when hungry people are more inclined to support the welfare system it is not so much a reflection of their concern for the poor; it is rather a strategy for securing further resources

for themselves.

These are the results of a supplementary survey in which Aarøe and Petersen first asked the test subjects to state their position regarding the welfare state – and then they gave them money, which they could choose to keep for themselves or share with a fellow test subject. Despite the fact that the hungry subjects had just confirmed the importance of helping others, which is indeed characteristic of the [welfare state](#), they were no more inclined to share their loot with others when given the chance.

Provided by Aarhus University

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