



Does Sleep Deprivation Cause Political Aggression?

Given the increasingly-aggressive nature of American politics, I'm curious as to whether a lack of sleep plays a role in the frequency of aggressive political behavior on the part of both politicians and their constituents.

There is significant evidence that sleep deprivation can heighten emotional reactivity, which leads individuals to react more strongly to various stimuli — positively or negatively. In a political context, this heightened emotional state could come to fruition in forms of increased aggression, especially in response to perceived threats or challenges. If one feels threatened by a particular political figure, system, or opponent, it's interesting to consider whether they may be more likely to act aggressively if grappling with a lack of sleep. I imagine that this is in fact the case.

However, it's also important to question whether politicians today sleep less than those from periods when politics were less aggressive. Here, certain factors may be at play. Perhaps it is true that, in this modern era of screen addiction, technology has made sleep shorter and less productive, even for politicians. We know that the use of screens objectively worsens sleep quality by affecting natural melatonin production and circadian rhythms. It may be a long shot, but perhaps the rise of technology has made our politicians more aggressive through its role in worsening natural sleep cycles. The same is true for constituents, who face the same sleeping obstacles. It's worth pointing out that the smartphone was invented just prior to the election of Barack Obama, whose presidency marked the beginning of new forms of modern political aggression.