

Republicans: Still Happy Campers

By Paul Taylor,

Pew Research Center

Chin up, Republicans. Despite the imploding stock market, the looming recession, the unpopular president and the dismal political polls, there's very good news in the one realm of life that's always been a special sanctuary for you.

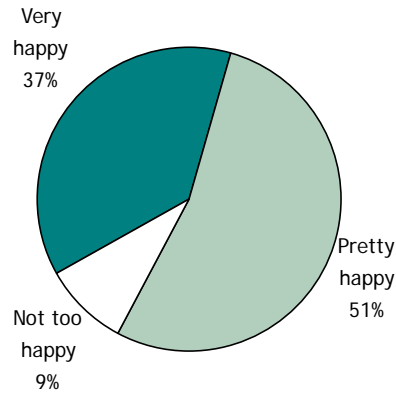
Personal happiness.

Some 37% of you say you're "very happy" with your lives, compared with just 25% of Democrats who feel the same way, according to a new nationwide Pew Research Center survey conducted from Oct. 3 through Oct. 19 – a period that's witnessed a race to the bottom between John McCain's poll numbers and the public's 401(k) account balances.

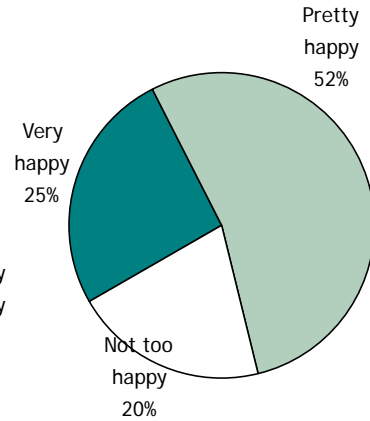
This big GOP edge in life's happiness sweepstakes is not a new phenomenon. Ever since the General Social Survey¹ first asked the question in 1972, Republicans have *always* been happier than Democrats. But the current gap is among the largest on record.

The Partisan Happiness Gap

Republicans



Democrats

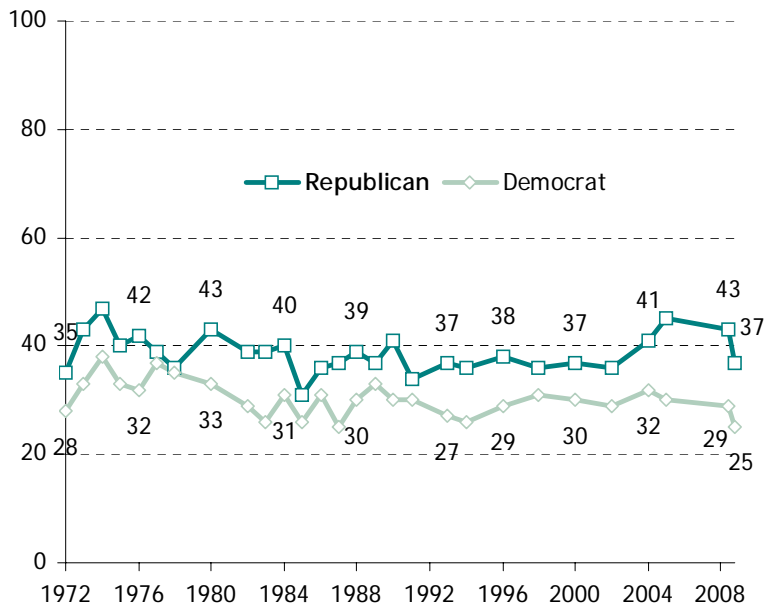


Note: Question wording: Generally, how would you say things are these days in your life ---would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy? "Don't Know/Refused" responses are not shown. Pew Research Center survey, Oct 3-19, 2,260 respondents.

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Republicans Happier Over the Years

Percentage Very Happy by Party Identification



Source: General Social Survey 1972-2004, Pew Research Center Surveys 2005-2008.

¹ A National Science Foundation-funded project that has conducted 26 nationwide surveys since 1972 that explore a range of demographic and attitudinal questions.

What accounts for it? And how has it been able to withstand this fall's avalanche of unhappy political news for the GOP?

Well, Republicans are different from Democrats. How so? Let us count the ways.

- They have more money.²
- They have more friends.³
- They are more religious.⁴
- They are healthier.⁵
- They are more likely to be married.⁶
- They like their communities better.⁷
- They like their jobs more.⁸
- They are more satisfied with their family life.⁹
- They like the weather better.¹⁰
- They have fewer financial worries.¹¹
- They're more likely to see themselves doing better in life than their parents did.¹²
- They're more likely to feel that individuals – rather than outside forces – control their own success or failure.¹³

² Republicans have a median annual family income of \$64,000; Democrats have a median annual family income of \$46,000, according to a February, 2008 Pew survey.

³ Some 31% of Republicans and 26% of Democrats say they have a lot of friends in the community where they live. Also, 15% of Republicans and 26% of Democrats say they don't have many friends, according to an October, 2008 Pew survey.

⁴ Some 51% of Republicans attend religious services once a week or more; only 30% of Democrats do so, according to a February, 2008 Pew survey.

⁵ Some 37% of Republicans report their health condition is excellent, only 25% of Democrats say so, according to a February 2008 Pew survey.

⁶ Some 62% of Republicans and 44% of Democrats are currently married, while 7% of Republicans and 13% of Democrats are currently divorced, according to a February 2008 Pew survey.

⁷ Some 71% of Republicans rate their communities as "excellent" or "very good"; only 54% of Democrats say the same, according to an October, 2008 Pew survey.

⁸ Some 90% of Republicans and 86% of Democrats are completely or mostly satisfied with their job, according to a February 2008 Pew survey. This 4 percentage point difference falls short of statistical significance at the 95% confidence level.

⁹ Some 77% of Republicans and 62% of Democrats are "very satisfied" with their family life, according to a June 2008 Pew survey.

¹⁰ Some 27% of Republicans rate the climate where they live as "excellent"; only 18% of Democrats think so, according to an October, 2008 Pew survey.

¹¹ For more details, see Page 10.

¹² Some 75% of Republicans and 61% of Democrats think that their own standard of living is better than the one their parents had when their parents were the age they are now, according to a February, 2008 Pew survey.

- They have more of what they most value in life. (No, it's not money).¹⁴

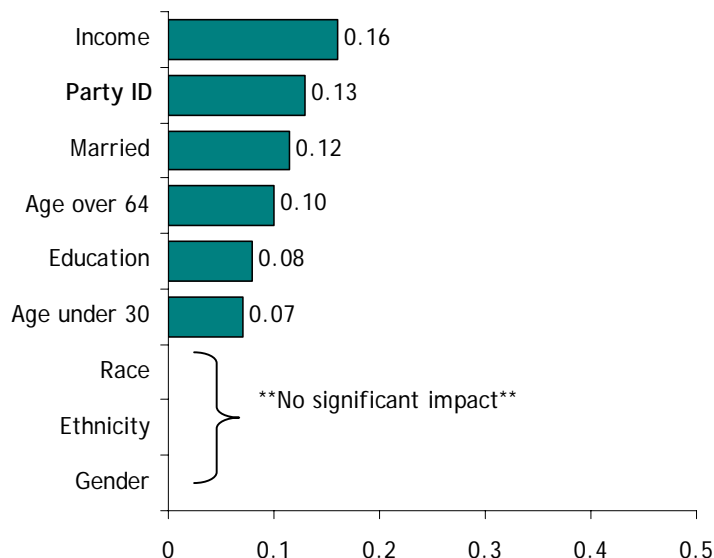
All of these differences are associated with the partisan happiness gap. But a word of caution: It can get very tricky trying to disentangle causes from effects. Even though happiness research has become a cottage industry in recent years, no one has yet been able to nail down all the factors that explain the persistent – and growing -- Republican happiness advantage. No definitive answers will be available here, either. However, a close examination of data from three Pew Research Center surveys taken in 2008 may shed new light on this intriguing gap.

Let's start with some key demographic indicators. As is well known, Republicans, on average, have more money than Democrats. And -- all those lectures from parents, teachers and pastors to the contrary notwithstanding -- it turns out that money and happiness tend to go hand in hand, not just in this country but all over the world.¹⁵

In the latest Pew survey, some 35% of those with family incomes above \$100,000 a year report being very happy, compared with just 27% of those with annual incomes of less than \$50,000. (A June Pew survey had found an even wider happiness gap by income – 46% of the \$100,000-plus income group reported being very happy in that survey, compared with 30% of the under \$50,000 group – perhaps suggesting that the recent stock market miseries have disproportionately intruded on the happiness of those in higher income brackets). Pew surveys also find that Republicans have more money than Democrats – on average, about \$18,000 more a year

Factors that Increase the Odds of Happiness

Regression Model 1



Note: The values next to the bars above represent the estimated impact that a given trait has on the odds that a survey respondent says he or she is "very happy," once all other variables shown in equation have been statistically controlled. This analysis is based on combining findings from two Pew Research Center surveys of nationally representative samples of adults -- one conducted in July, 2008 among 2,250 adults; the other conducted in October, 2005 among 3,014 adults. For more details, see Appendix. The wording of the question is as follows: Generally, how would you say things are these days in your life - would you say that you are you very happy, pretty happy or not too happy?

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¹³ Some 69% of Republicans and 58% of Democrats disagree with the statement that "Success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control," according to a February, 2008 Pew survey.

¹⁴ For more details, see Page 8.

¹⁵ Stevenson, Betsey and Wolfers, Justin, Economic Growth and Subjective Well-Being: Reassessing the Easterlin Paradox, April 16, 2008. www.nber.org/

in annual family income, according to a February survey. And when it comes to household wealth, the Republican advantage over Democrats is even greater.

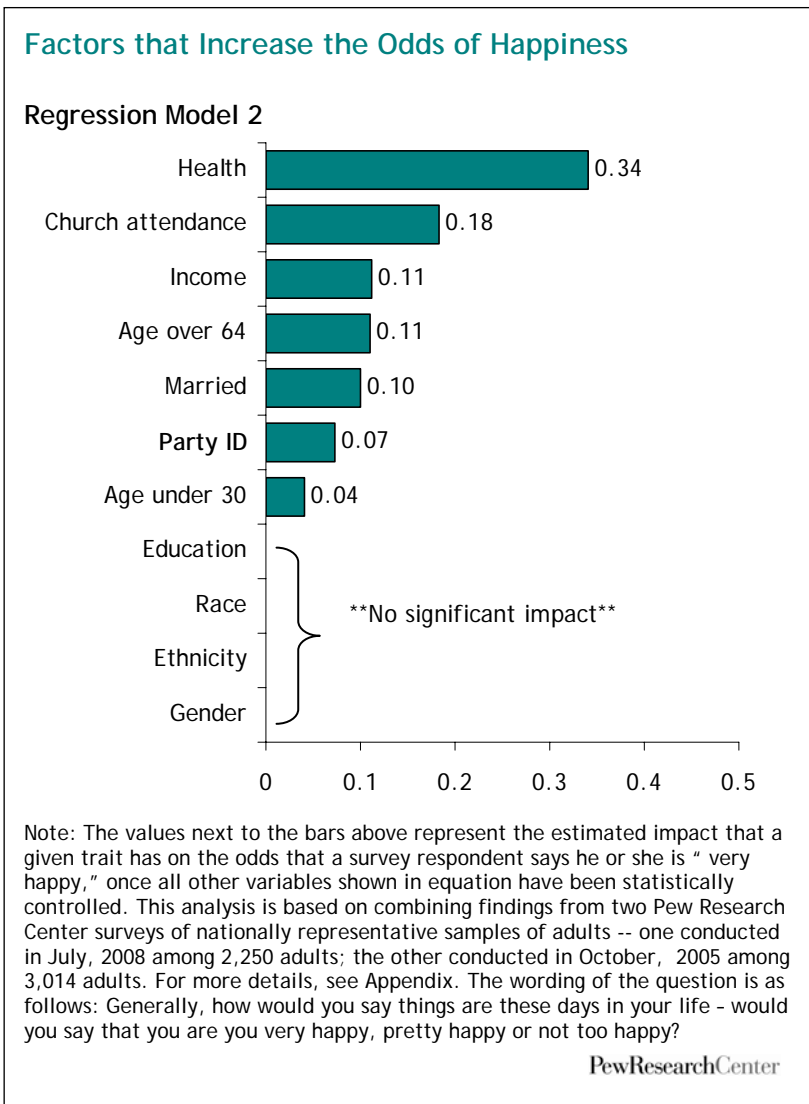
Next up on the demographic checklist is marriage. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to be married, and married adults are more likely than unmarried adults to report that they are very happy – 34% vs. 24%.

But let's stop right here, because these correlations raise as many questions as they answer. Is it that happy people get married, or that married people get happy? Does money lead to happiness, or happiness to money? Or might some unrelated factor be creating correlations which don't actually have any causal connection?

This is where something called regression analysis can be helpful. It is a statistical technique that measures the independent importance of each of a number of variables in predicting a phenomenon of interest -- in this case, the likelihood that someone is very happy.

For the purposes of this analysis, we constructed two regression models from the Pew survey data. The first looks at respondents' party identification along with their basic demographic traits (age, gender, race, ethnicity, income, education, marital status). It then computes the odds that any single one of these traits will have a bearing on a person's likelihood of being very happy, once all of the other variables in the model have been held constant. (For a more thorough explanation, see Appendix).

In Model One, income has the greatest impact on predicting happiness: a high income person has a 16% greater chance than a low income person at being very happy, once all the other characteristics in the model have been held constant. Next on the list in this model is being a Republican rather than a Democrat – this increases someone's odds of being very happy by 13%, once all the demographic variables in this equation have been controlled. In other words, if one were to compare a theoretical Republican and a theoretical Democrat who



had the identical age, ethnicity, race, gender, income, marital status and education level, the Republican would be 13% more likely than the Democrat to be very happy.

To be clear, this does not prove that being a Republican “causes” happiness. But it does demonstrate that, even after setting aside all the demographic traits that separate partisans of the two parties, a Republican is still a bit more likely than a Democrat to be very happy.

Our second regression model (Model Two) throws two additional variables into the equation – church attendance and health status. Neither of these variables is a demographic trait per se, but both have been shown, in surveys taken over the years, to be correlated with happiness. And indeed, as Model Two demonstrates, they are more powerful than

any demographic trait in predicting happiness.

Someone who reports being in excellent/very good health has 34% better odds of being very happy than does someone who reports being in poor health, once all other variables in the equation are held constant. Likewise, someone who attends religious services weekly or more often has an 18% better chance of being very happy than someone who attends services seldom or never.

Adding these two factors to the regression model has the effect of reducing, but not eliminating, the independent impact of partisan identification on happiness – from

13% in the first model to 7% in the second model.

Life Satisfaction, Present, Past and Future, by Party and Class									
	--All--		--UC--		--MC--		--LC--		
	Reps	Dems	Reps	Dems	Reps	Dems	Reps	Dems	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Present									
High (8-10)	42	28	56	43	40	30	19	14	
Medium (6-7)	36	34	37	40	36	37	35	26	
Low (0-5)	21	37	7	16	22	32	47	59	
Mean rating (based on a scale of 0-10)	7.0	6.2	7.6	7.0	6.9	6.5	5.8	5.1	
5 years ago									
High (8-10)	36	30	38	39	37	32	27	22	
Medium (6-7)	31	26	35	26	29	26	26	28	
Low (0-5)	31	42	27	35	31	41	47	49	
Mean rating (based on a scale of 0-10)	6.5	6.1	6.7	6.6	6.6	6.2	5.8	5.6	
5 years from now									
High (8-10)	65	56	79	66	62	60	41	41	
Medium (6-7)	14	17	11	17	13	16	25	19	
Low (0-5)	11	18	5	13	12	14	21	29	
Mean rating (based on a scale of 0-10)	8.0	7.5	8.6	7.9	7.9	7.9	6.9	6.5	
No. of respondents	555	896	172	176	306	449	72	266	
Note: Republicans and Democrats are based on respondents who identify with the party. UC stands for those who self-identify as upper or upper middle-class. MC stands for those who self-identify as middle class. LC stands for those who self-identify as lower or lower-middle class. Pew Research Center survey, Jan.24-Feb.19, 2,413 respondents.									

Seven percent may not sound like much, but it means that someone's party identification has a greater direct bearing on that person's odds of being very happy than does the person's race, ethnicity or gender. In both models, none of those factors has any independent impact someone's chances for happiness, once the regression analysis has done its little magic. (To be sure, those traits may well have an indirect impact on happiness, because they correlate with variables that predict happiness, such as income, marriage and church attendance).

Where does this small but persistent GOP happiness edge come from? A February 2008 Pew Research Center survey looked at differences between Republicans and Democrats in their life priorities, values and experiences, and explored how these differences relate to overall levels of life satisfaction. The story that emerges from the survey data is quite consistent: advantage Republican.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is not the same thing as happiness. The former is an evaluation of one's circumstances; the latter is a measure of one's feelings. Nevertheless, and not surprisingly, the two measures are highly correlated. And, as with happiness, Republicans have a clear advantage on the life satisfaction front.

Some 42% of Republican respondents in the February Pew survey rate their present quality of life on the top three rungs of a ten-step scale; an additional 36% place themselves on the next two rungs, and just 21% place themselves on rung five or below. Among Democrats, by contrast, just 28% rate their life on the top three rungs, while 34% place themselves on the next two rungs and 37% say they are on rung five or lower.

Republicans also give higher rankings than Democrats to the life they were leading five years ago, and to the life they expect to be leading five years from now. This same "ladder of life" battery of questions has been asked in Pew surveys many times over the past decade, and Republicans have always outscored Democrats (though margins vary from year to year).

No doubt, much of the GOP advantage in life satisfaction is tied to their income and wealth advantage over Democrats. In an effort to control for those economic factors, the survey asked respondents to place themselves into one of five socio-economic classes – upper, upper-middle, middle, lower-middle and lower. Even after taking into account this sorting by class, the survey finds that the GOP advantage holds up – that is, upper-class Republicans are more satisfied than upper-class Democrats; middle-class Republicans are more satisfied than middle-class Democrats; and lower-class Republican are more satisfied than lower-class Democrats.

Personal Progress

One pillar of the American dream is the idea that each generation does better than the one that came before. On this measure, Republicans score better than Democrats – some 75% say their standard of living is better than the one their parents had at the age they are now; compared with just 61% of Democrats who say the same thing.

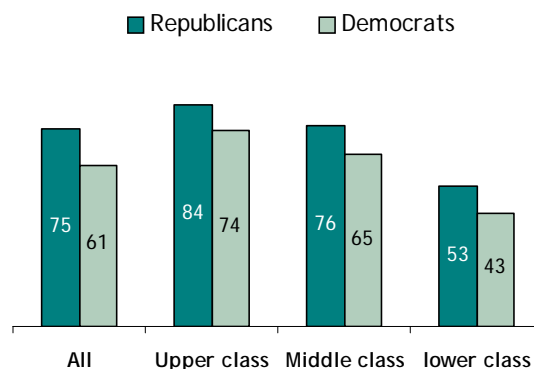
On this question, too, Republicans in each socio-economic class enjoy an edge over their Democratic counterparts in the same socio-economic class. For example, 76% of self-identified middle-class Republicans say they are doing better than their parents, compared with 65% of self-identified middle-class Democrats who say the same thing. The partisan gaps are nearly identical among the lower and upper classes.

There's virtually no partisan gap on the question of whether people believe their own children will have a better standard of living than they themselves have now. Overall, exactly 49% of both Republicans and Democrats say they expect their children to do better in life than they themselves have done.

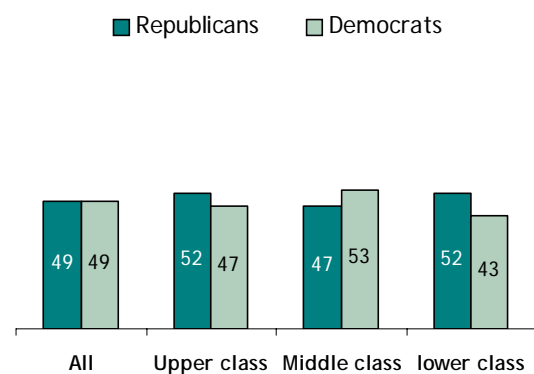
Among the self-identified middle class, Democrats (53%) are slightly more optimistic than Republicans (47%) on this question. However, among the self-identified upper and lower classes, the optimism on this measure tilts slightly in the Republican direction.

Intergenerational Mobility: Looking Backward and Forward

Percentage saying they are "much or somewhat" better off than their parents...



Percentage saying their children will be "much or somewhat" better off than they are now...



Note: Republicans and Democrats are based on respondents who identify with the party. Pew Research Center survey, Jan.24 -Feb.19, 2,413 respondents.

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Life Priorities; Life Circumstances

The February Pew survey found that Republicans are better than Democrats at aligning their life priorities with their life circumstances. Put another way: Republicans, as a group, tend to want what they already have. Democrats, as a group, tend to want what they don't have.

Republicans are more inclined than Democrats to say they place a high value on being married (62% of Republicans say this is a very important priority in their life; 45% of Democrats say the same); on having children (68% of Republicans vs. 56% of Democrats say this is a very important priority) and on living a religious life (64% of Republicans vs. 47% of Democrats say this is a very important priority). And, sure enough, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to be married (62% vs. 44%); and to attend religious services at least once a week (51% vs. 30%). They are also slightly more likely to have children (75% vs. 73%), though this difference is not statistically significant.

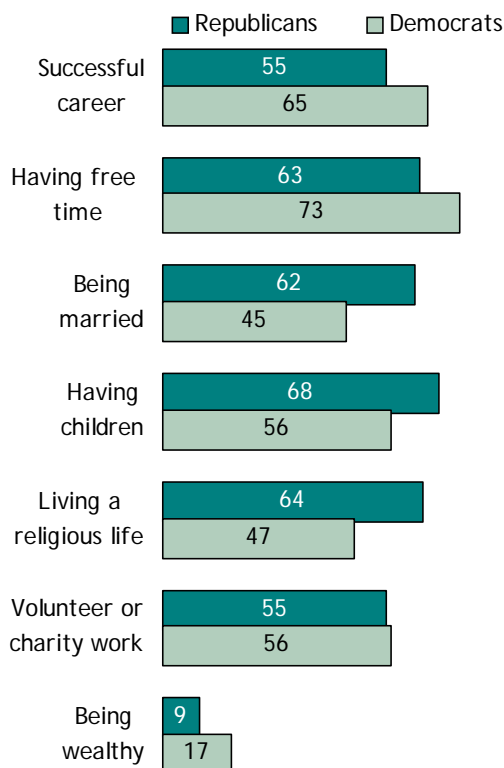
Democrats, by contrast, place more emphasis than Republican do on having a successful career (65% of Democrats vs. 55% of Republicans say this is a very important priority in life); on being wealthy (17% of Democrats vs. 9% of Republicans call this an important priority); and on having free time to do the things they want to do (73% of Democrats vs. 63% of Republicans).

But Democrats do not do as well as Republicans at matching their desires with their circumstances.

For starters, they are not as well-off financially as Republicans. The February Pew survey found that the median annual family income for Republicans is about \$64,000, compared with about \$46,000 for Democrats. Also, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to own a home (74% vs. 61%); the median value of their home is higher (\$223,830 vs. \$199,502); more of them have paid off all the money they owe on their homes (35% vs. 27%); and their home is a smaller percentage of their overall family net worth (just 25% of Republicans, compared with 33% of Democrats, say their home accounts for more than half of their overall family net worth).

Life Priorities, by Party

Percentage saying this priority is very important...



Note: Republicans and Democrats are based on respondents who identify with the party. Don't know responses not shown. Pew Research Center survey, Jan. 24 -Feb. 19, 2,413 respondents.

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Career success and free time are more difficult priorities to quantify. But if one measure of career success is income and wealth, clearly Democrats come up short, relative to Republicans. And if another measure is job satisfaction, here, too, they come up a bit short – some 29% of Democrats say they are completely satisfied with their jobs, compared with 33% of Republicans who say this (a small but not statistically significant difference).

Do Individuals Control Their Own Destiny?

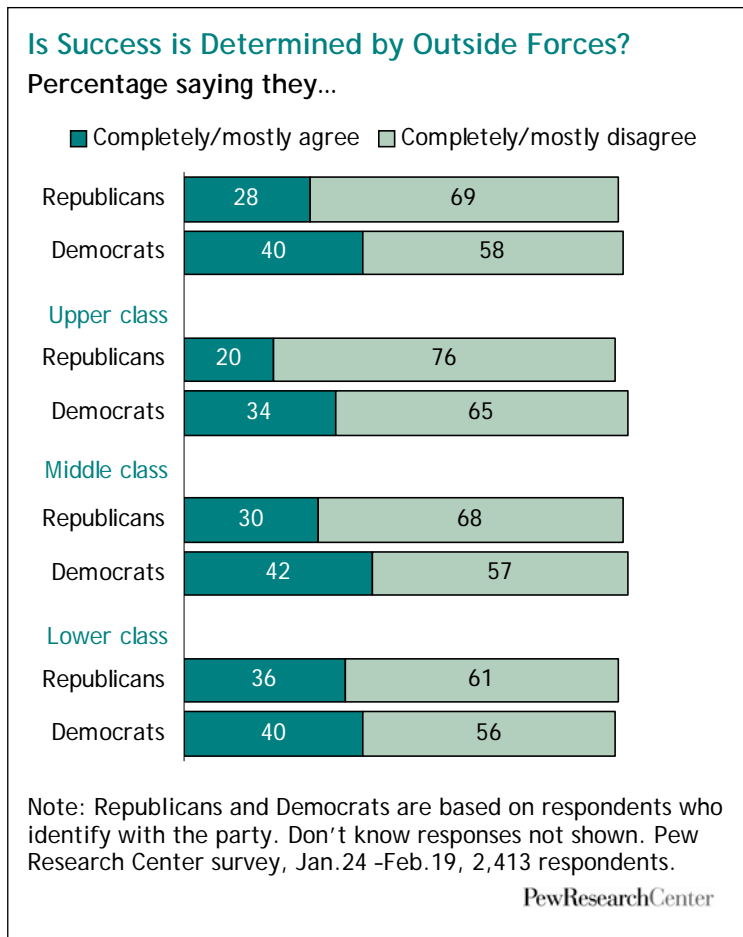
Who or what determines success in life – the individual or outside forces? And how do views on that question line up with life satisfaction?

There's a big partisan gap on the first question. Republicans are less inclined than Democrat to say that success in life is mostly determined by outside forces.

Just 28% of Republicans – compared with 40% of Democrats – hold this view. The partisan difference on this question is biggest among those who identify with the upper classes --- some 34% of Democrats but just 20% of Republicans who call themselves upper or upper middle class say that success in life is mostly due to forces. Among the self-defined middle class, Democrats (42%) are also more inclined than Republicans (30%) to hold this view.

People who say that success is mostly determined by outside forces are less satisfied with their life (average life satisfaction rating: 6.1 on the zero to ten scale) than are those who disagree with that proposition (average rating of 6.6 on the life satisfaction scale).

On a related question – how do the rich become rich – there is a similar partisan gap. Some 59% of Republicans say the rich become rich mainly through their hard work and ambition; just 35% of Democrats agree. The majority of Democrats (52%) say the rich get rich mainly through good connections or being born into it; just 32% of Republican agree. These partisan gaps persist through all levels of self-identified class.



Financial Worries

It may be that one of the key factors that explain the Republican happiness edge is no more complicated than this: Republicans have fewer financial woes than Democrats.

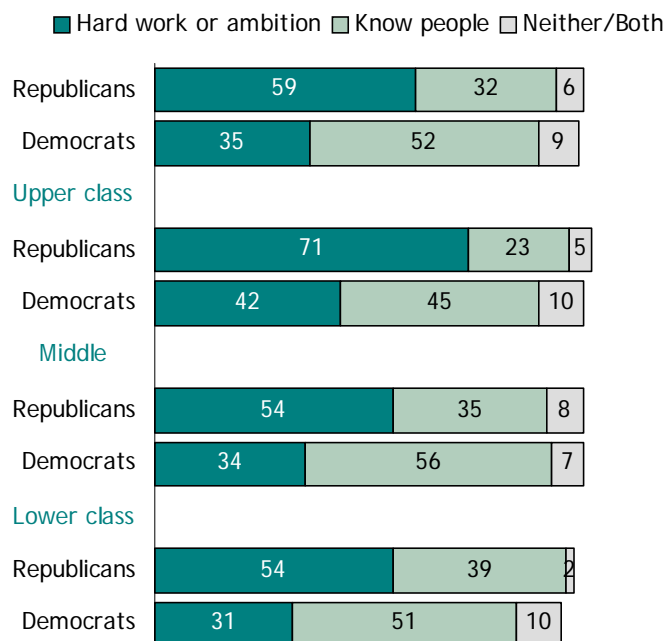
The February survey asked about a range of financial problems that people may have had in the past year – related to employment, household expenses, medical bills, and rent or mortgage payments. On every measure, Republicans reported having had fewer problems than did Democrats. And, once again, the Republican advantage held even when the comparisons were between partisans who self-identify in the same socio-economic class.

The survey also asked respondents whether they anticipate having these kinds of financial problems in the year ahead. Here again, Republicans are significantly less inclined than Democrats to express anxieties about money.

A more recent Pew Research Center survey, taken in mid-October during the height of the current stock market turmoil, found that while about nine in ten Americans rate the national economy as only fair or poor, nearly six in ten Republicans (57%)

How Do Most People Today Get Rich?

Percentage saying...



Note: Republicans and Democrats are based on respondents who identify with the party. Don't know responses not shown. Pew Research Center survey, Jan.24 -Feb.19, 2,413 respondents.

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Financial Troubles, by Class and Party

Percentages that have experienced the following problems in the past year

	--All--		--UC--		--MC--		--LC--	
	Reps	Dems	Reps	Dems	Reps	Dems	Reps	Dems
Had to cutback on household spending	41	59	26	41	43	57	62	75
Had to start work or take an extra job	14	28	4	10	15	27	33	43
Had trouble getting or paying medical care	12	25	6	11	10	19	29	45
Had problems paying rent or mortgage	10	18	2	8	8	14	34	31
Been laid off or lost job	8	14	8	9	5	11	17	24

Source: Pew Research Center survey, Jan.24 -Feb.19, 2,413 respondents.

rate their personal finances as excellent or good. In contrast, just 35% of Democrats give these same positive ratings to their personal finances.¹⁶

Views about Economic Mobility

Given these differences in economic circumstances and attitudes, it's no surprise that Democrats have a much more downbeat view than Republicans about economic mobility in general.

In the February Pew survey, some 67% of Democrats, compared with just 47% of Republicans, say it is harder for people to get ahead today than it was ten years ago. The partisan gap on this question persists through all three self-identified classes, though it is greater among those in the upper classes (a gap of 27 percentage points) than among those in the lower economic classes (a gap of 10 percentage points).

Bottom Line

Public opinion survey research, no matter how exhaustive, can never hope to untangle all the mysteries of personal happiness – to do so would require an impossible journey into the human heart. One obvious limitation of the Pew surveys discussed in this report is that they did not explore respondents' psychological characteristics, which surely have something to say about whether a given individual is happy or not.

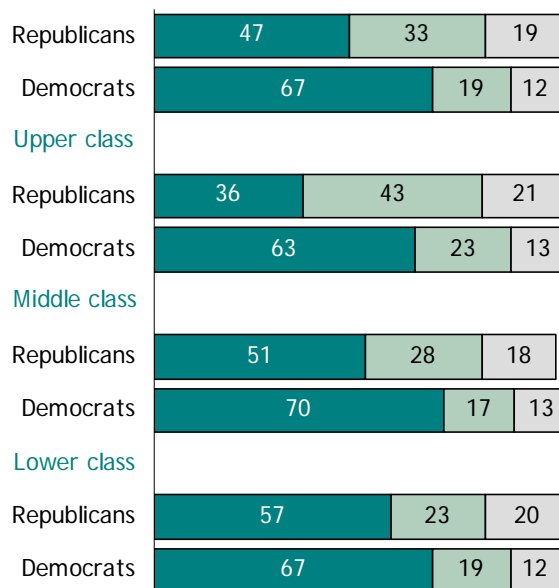
Nevertheless, there is a growing body of scholarly research, not just in this country but around the world, which supports the basic finding of these Pew surveys: that Republicans (or conservatives) are happier than Democrats (or liberals), and that these gaps persist even after basic demographic factors have been controlled.¹⁷

At least in the United States, this partisan happiness gap has widened in recent years. At the moment, in the teeth of a raging economic storm, the Republican happiness edge is roughly as big as it's ever been. Meantime,

Compared with 10 Years Ago, is it Easier or Harder for People to Get Ahead Today?

Percentage saying...

■ Harder to get ahead ■ Same ■ Easier to get ahead



Note: Republicans and Democrats are based on respondents who identify with the party. Don't know responses not shown. Pew Research Center survey, Jan. 24 -Feb. 19, 2,413 respondents.

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¹⁶ See Oct 15, 2008 Pew survey report "Public Not Desperate About Economy or Personal Finances" (<http://people-press.org/report/458/economic-crisis>)

¹⁷ Napier, Jaime L. and Jost, John T., "Why Are Conservatives Happier than Liberals?" *Psychological Science*, Volume 19, Issue 6, Pages 565-572. June 10, 2008.

Democrats this month have sunk to a modern low on the happiness scale – just 25% say they are “very happy” with their lives.

Chin up, Democrats. You’re clearly not feeling too good these days about your lives or your pocket books. So, why not focus instead on politics? With less than two weeks until election day and the polls going your way, there’s got to be a glimmer of happiness out there for you somewhere. No?

Appendices:

I. Explaining the Regression Analyses

A regression analysis is a statistical technique designed to show the relative importance of each of a number of independent variables in predicting a phenomenon of interest – in this case, the likelihood that a respondent is very happy.

For the purpose of this analysis, we constructed two regression models. The first considered party identification along with a series of demographic traits – including age, gender, race, ethnicity, income, educational achievement and marital status. A second model considered all those factors, as well as church attendance and health status, which have long been shown to be correlated with happiness. Predicted probabilities have been computed by varying a given independent variable from its minimum to its maximum value, while holding all other variables in the equation constant (at their mean or modal value). Both regression analyses were performed using a combined data base from two different Pew surveys – one conducted in July, 2008 among 2,250 adults and the other conducted in October, 2005 among 3,014 adults.

The Model One analysis found:

- The probability of a Republican being very happy is 13 percent greater than the probability of a Democrat being very happy, once all other variables in this model are held equal.
- The probability of those at the highest annual income levels (\$150,000 and above) being very happy is 16 percent greater than the probability of those at the lowest income levels (less than \$10,000) being very happy, if all else is held equal.
- The probability of married respondents being very happy is 12 percent greater than the probability of unmarried respondents being very happy, if all else is held equal.
- The probability of someone age 64 and above being very happy is 10 percent greater than the probability of all other adults being very happy, if all else is held equal.
- The probability of someone ages 29 and below being very happy is 7 percent greater than the probability of all other adults being very happy, if all else is held equal.
- The probability of someone who has completed college being very happy is 8 percent greater than the probability of someone who has not completed high school being very happy, if all else is held equal.
- Gender, race and ethnicity have no independent impact on the odds that someone is very happy, once all the other variables in this equation have been controlled.

The Model Two analysis found:

- The probability of those who report they are in excellent health being very happy is 36 percent greater than the probability of those in poor health being very happy, if all else is held equal. (There was a small difference in the 2008 and 2005 surveys in the number of responses categories to the health question.)

To make the measure more comparable across the years, the 2008 sample combined those who said “poor” and “only fair” into one category for this analysis. In the 2005 sample, the lowest health rating was poor.

- The probability of those of who attend religious services more than once a week being very happy is 18 percent greater than the probability of those who never attend religious services being very happy, if all else is held equal.
- In this model, the estimated impact of party identification, marriage, income and age under 30 all decline slightly from their values in Model One, but still stand as predictors of happiness. The value of age over 64 increases slightly from its value in Model One. No other demographic traits have an independent impact on predicted happiness in this model.

We also ran the regression equation with using ideological self-identification (conservative versus liberal) rather than partisan self-identification (Republican versus Democrat) as one of the variables. We found that the impact of being conservative as a predictor of happiness is about the same as the effect of being a Republican. In addition, when we did another analysis that combined both party and ideology on a continuum from liberal Democrat to conservative Republican, we found that the effect of these combined variables on predicting happiness is slightly greater than the effect of either variable on its own.

II. Data Sources

Data	Interview Period	Sample Size	Margin of sampling error
October 2005 Pew Family Survey	Oct.5-Nov.6, 2005	3,014	+ /- 1.9 %
February 2008 Pew Middle Class Survey	Jan.24-Feb.19,2008	2,413	+ /- 2.5 %
June 2008 Pew Gender Survey	Jun.16-Jul.16,2008	2,250	+ /- 2.3%
October 2008 Pew Mobility Survey	Oct.3-Oct.19,2008	2,260	+ /- 2.3%

Acknowledgements

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