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INTERNATIONAL**Polls, wealth and happiness****Where money seems to talk**

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**The rich are different from you and me—and they say they are happier**

EVERY summer, the world has its temperature taken twice—once by climate scientists, literally; a second time by opinion pollsters, metaphorically. This year two new surveys have thrown up a lot of fresh data on how the world really feels. And they have, so the pollsters say, cast some unexpected light on the link between wealth and happiness.

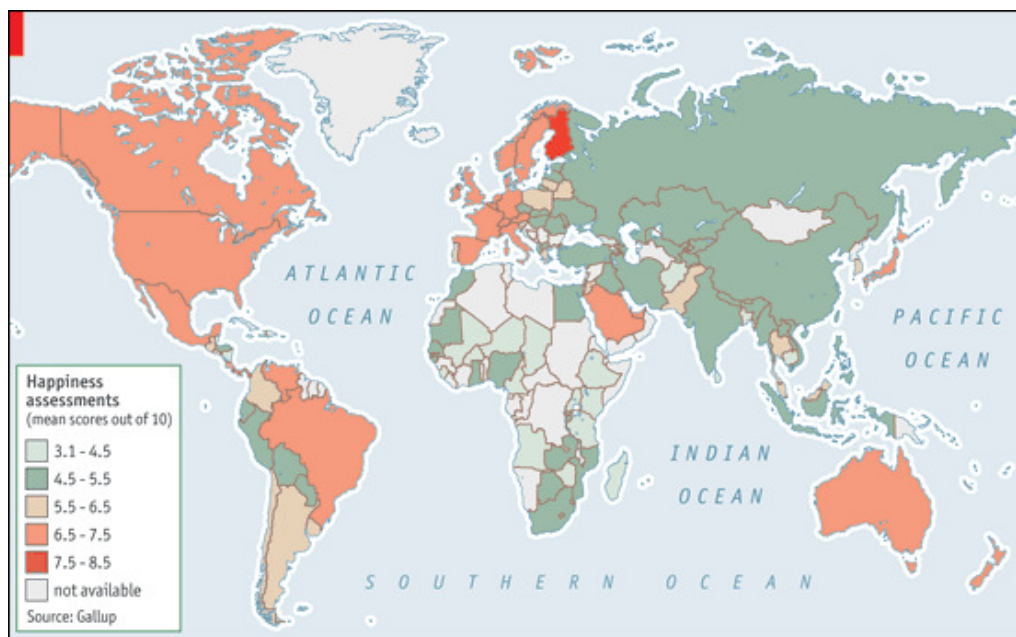
Ever since social scientists at the University of Pennsylvania found that mansion-dwelling American millionaires are barely happier than Masai warriors in huts, some economists have been downplaying the link between cash and contentment. In a 2005 book, Richard Layard, a British scholar, said family circumstances, employment and health all mattered more to a sense of well-being than income. Rich countries might be happier than poor ones, but beyond a threshold, the connection weakens, and more cash would not buy more happiness—so the theory goes.

The new polls cast some doubt on that school of thought. They add weight to the contention that growth and income play a big part in boosting people's satisfaction with life and their attitude to the future.

One of these surveys claims to be the first genuinely global opinion poll. Called World Poll, and conducted by the Gallup organisation, it spans 130 countries, many of which are being polled for the first time. Other surveys are smaller. The respected Global Attitudes Survey of the Pew Research Centre, an offshoot of an American charity, operates annually in just over 50 countries. The World Values Survey run from the University of Michigan is more comprehensive (over 80 countries), but updated only once in five years.

Gallup's pollsters asked a standard question: how satisfied are you with your life, on a scale of nought to ten? In all the rich places (America, Europe, Japan, Saudi Arabia), most people say they are happy. In all the poor ones (mainly in Africa), people say they are not. As Angus Deaton of Princeton University puts it, a map of the results looks like an income plot of the world (see map). There are some exceptions: Georgia and Armenia, though not among the world's poorest states, are among the 20 most miserable. Costa Rica and Venezuela, though middle-income countries, are among the 20 happiest. The Brazilians, pictured above, seem a bit more cheerful than their income level justifies.

But in general, declared levels of happiness are correlated with wealth. The pattern also seems to hold true within countries, as well as between them. Rich Americans are happier than poor ones; rich Brazilians happier than poorer ones.



The other new survey, by Ipsos, confirms the picture. Top of its list of 20 countries ranged by happiness is the rich Netherlands (with Gallup, it is Finland); China is bottom. The survey also asked questions about confidence in the future, whether your children will be better off than you are, and so on. Regardless of countries' current income, there was a close correlation between GDP growth and optimism, with China, India and Russia most optimistic; France, Germany and Italy were the least. If both polls are right, the Chinese are pretty miserable now but they expect a dramatic turn for the better.

The Ipsos poll is not strictly comparable to Gallup's because (for the first time) it asks questions of what Ipsos calls "leaders and shapers of public opinion", mostly business people and politicians. This group has distinctive views—it takes a loftier view than the general population (see table). The gap between elite and popular perceptions is especially sharp in Russia, India and China. In those countries, top people's attitudes are far more upbeat than those of the general population. In Europe and America, the attitudes of the elite are roughly in line with—or slightly more pessimistic than—society as a whole.

In fairness, the "new happiness" economists, such as Mr Layard, never claimed there was no connection at all between money and feeling good. What they have said is that once people climb out of poverty, the link is weak, and may not work at all above a certain point (as one British pundit put it, extra money "is now proved beyond doubt not to deliver greater happiness, nationally or individually"). The evidence for this comes from surveys in most rich countries (such as America's general social survey), which show that happiness has been flat for decades, even though incomes have risen sharply.

On the face of it, the new findings are a counter-point to the earlier data. If the richest countries report greater "happiness" than moderately rich ones, that would suggest there is no quantifiable level of income at which extra cash fails to deliver extra contentment. Still, the latest findings don't invalidate the historic experience of particular countries—like the United States—which have surged to greater levels of wealth without experiencing any rise in general levels of reported happiness.

But if you treat history as bunk and concentrate on the levels of satisfaction that countries feel right now, the results are—in Mr Deaton's view—quite striking. He has compared Gallup's satisfaction score with national income based on purchasing-power parities, and got a close fit.

So what should one make of the contradiction between these surveys and previous evidence? Definitional problems may provide part of the explanation. These are self-reported polls and people mean different

The view from the top		
Those "satisfied with the way things are going" in their country, %, 2007		
Country	Elite opinion*	General population†
India	46	9
China	75	48
Russia	43	20
Brazil	15	11

Source: Ipsos *Ipsos polling †Pew Global Research polling

things by “happiness”. Cultural problems are likely to be much greater when 130 states are involved.

Another possibility is that “happiness” is really a proxy for something else, such as health. Perhaps the main point is that money mitigates poor health, so the rich are happier than the poor mainly because they feel healthier. But that cannot be the whole story. More than half the 20 countries with the lowest level of satisfaction with health are in the ex-Soviet Union or eastern Europe though in statistical terms they seem relatively well off. In contrast, much poorer African countries (with a far higher incidence of HIV/AIDS and other diseases) express higher levels of health satisfaction. Expectations, or memories, may be at work: medical woes in an ex-communist state feel worse because people recall, albeit through rose-tinted spectacles, an era of full health coverage.

Lastly, as the Ipsos poll clearly shows, happiness and optimism are not just different, they can be contradictory. The Chinese are dissatisfied but upbeat; Europeans are happy now but dread tomorrow. Many links between happiness, income and optimism have yet to be teased out. This new data—though not the last word on the subject—should help.

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