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Republican Perspective

By John Littig

The Proud-of-America Gap

A Pew Research Center poll released June 26 reveals a deep divide between liberals and conservatives in their attitudes about America. Not about policy (although there's that, too) but about America itself.

A word or two about Pew's methodology. You can find the entire report by searching Beyond Red vs. Blue: The Political Typology-but be prepared for a long, arduous read. Pew divided respondents into eight categories along a spectrum from conservative to liberal. "Three are strongly ideological, highly politically engaged and overwhelmingly partisan - two on the right and one on the left." The remaining "groups are less partisan...less engaged politically" than the three on the right and left. More on that later.

The two on the right Pew labeled "Steadfast Conservatives" and "Business Conservatives." The one on the left: "Solid Liberals." The distinctions between the conservatives really don't matter here but, again, if you want to get deeply into the details go to the report itself.

Now back to those five disengaged groups for just a moment. Pew asked the question: Which party has a majority in the House and which in the Senate? As if to demonstrate who was engaged and who was not, 54 percent of Steadfast Conservatives, 69 percent of Business Conservatives and 60 percent of Solid Liberals got both answers right, but none of the other groups exceeded 42 percent correct. So those at both ends of the political spectrum are paying the most attention, and it's on those that we'll focus here. Let's look at how our three groups responded to four attitudinal questions.

First: whether "honor and duty are my core values." Saying yes were 68 percent of Steadfast Conservatives, 70 percent of Business Conservatives and 40 percent of Solid Liberals. None of the other groups answered as high as the two conservative groups, none as low as the Solid Liberals.

Second: "think of myself as a typical American." Steadfast Conservatives 75 percent, Business Conservatives 73 percent, Solid Liberals 51 percent. Again, no other group answered as high as the conservatives, none as low as the liberals.

Third: "the United States stands above all other countries." Steadfast Conservatives 46 percent, Business Conservatives 43 percent, Solid Liberals 11 percent. And again, no other group as high as the conservatives, none as low as the liberals.

And fourth: "often feel proud to be an American." Steadfast Conservatives 72 percent, Business Conservatives 81 percent, Solid Liberals 40 percent. And (you guessed it) no other group as high as the conservatives, none as low as the liberals.

You would think (or at least I would) that attitudes toward America would be influenced by whether or not your political party was in power. With the Democrat party controlling the White House for the last five-and-a-half years, wouldn't liberals feel more positive about America and conservatives less so? Wouldn't liberals be proud of an Obama-led America and conservatives not? But Pew's results show exactly the opposite.

So Pew's results are apparently revealing something else. One possible influencing factor could be the First Family's leadership on this point. During the 2008 campaign, Michelle Obama offered that "for the first time in my adult lifetime, I am really proud of my country." She was then 44 years old, so she had had ample time to be proud before that moment. And during his "apology tour" President Obama himself offered this to a European audience: "There have been times when America has shown arrogance and been dismissive, even derisive." These sentiments hardly inspire national pride and admiration, but they do offer a glimpse of how the Obamas see America. This is not lost on the public: such statements anger conservatives, and likely legitimize such an outlook for liberals.

While the Obamas' expressed attitudes may be a factor, they surely can't account for Pew's gap, which shows the conservative groups to be the most admiring of America and the liberals to be the least, of all the groups Pew analyzed-and by a wide margin.

It must be something more, something deeper. Pew Research doesn't tell us the cause-just the disheartening numbers.

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