



# Mood, Basketball, and Politics

The Effect of Unrelated Emotions on Political Opinions

# Rational Man



“ . . . it is the reason, alone, of the public, that ought to control and regulate the government.”

- James Madison





#Linsanity



What is the relationship  
between emotions  
and politics?



# Emotion and Politics

Healy, Malhotra, and Mo (2010)

- A college football win before an election has a positive effect on the percentage of the vote won by an incumbent politician.



# Emotion and Attitudes

- Affective Intelligence Model (Neuman, 2000):



- Cognitive Loop Hypothesis (Isen et al., 1978):

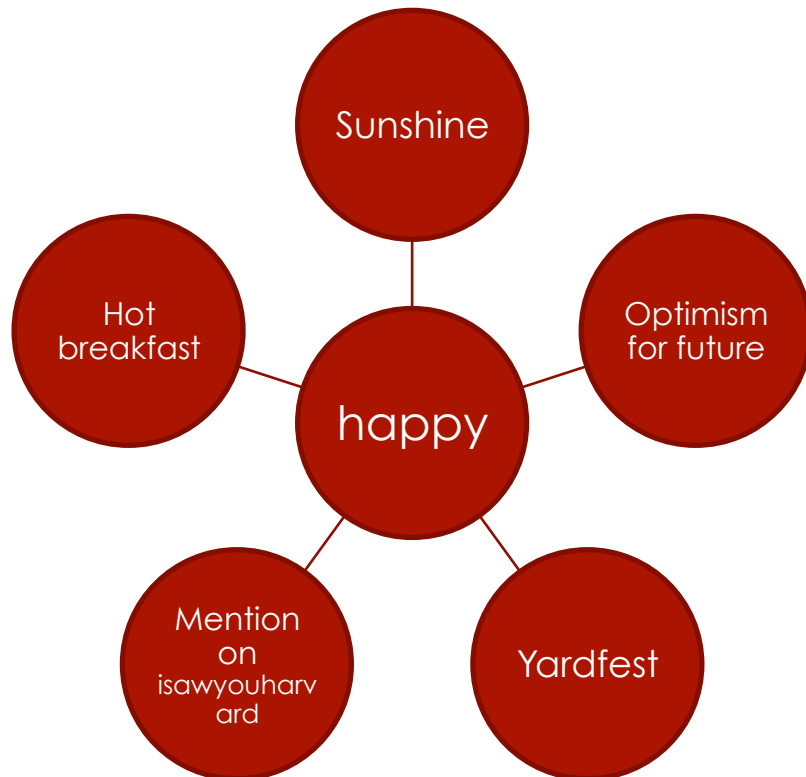
“A positive mood facilitates the retrieval of positive material from memory.”





# Mood-Congruent Network Model (Bower, 1981)

## Positive Stimulus



## Negative Stimulus



# Research Question

- In 2012, the Harvard Men's Basketball Team made its first appearance in the NCAA tournament since 1946
- Final score: Harvard 70, Vanderbilt 79

Does framing Harvard's NCAA appearance in a **positive** versus **negative** light affect Harvard students' opinions of President Obama and the direction of the country?





# How does the framing of an event irrelevant to politics affect political opinions?



Harvard's NCAA Appearance

Emotion



Political Opinions

Stimulus

Emotion

Attitude/  
Behavior



# Hypotheses


- Participants primed with a 'positive' NCAA Crimson article will report greater satisfaction with President Obama / the country
- Participants primed with a 'negative' NCAA Crimson article will report less satisfaction with President Obama / the country
- A 'control' NCAA Crimson article will have no effect





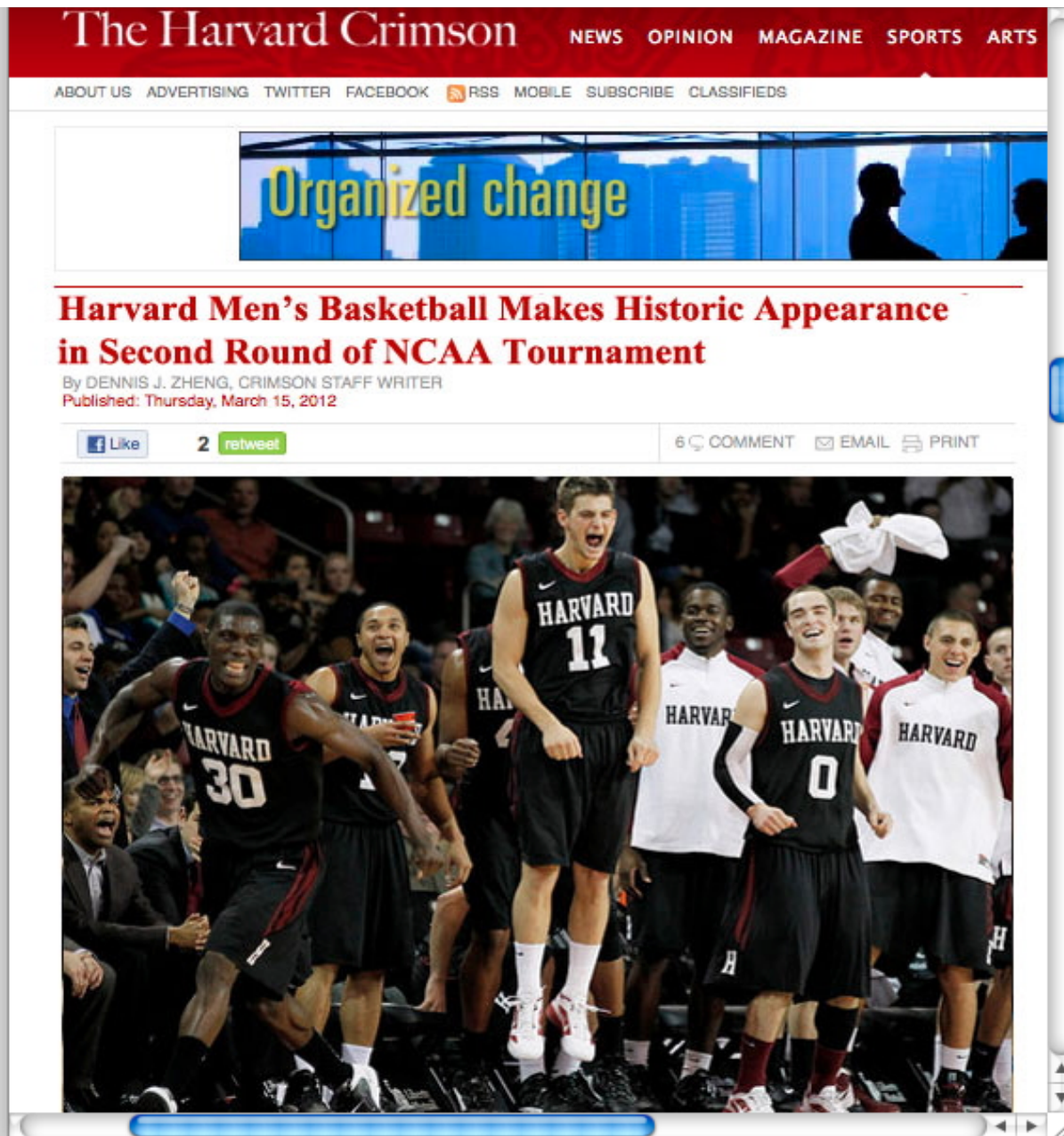
# Methods

# Methods

-  Survey sent to Harvard undergraduates over every House email list and various organization open lists.
- Three Conditions randomly assigned to participants:
  - Positive
  - Negative
  - Neutral (Control)

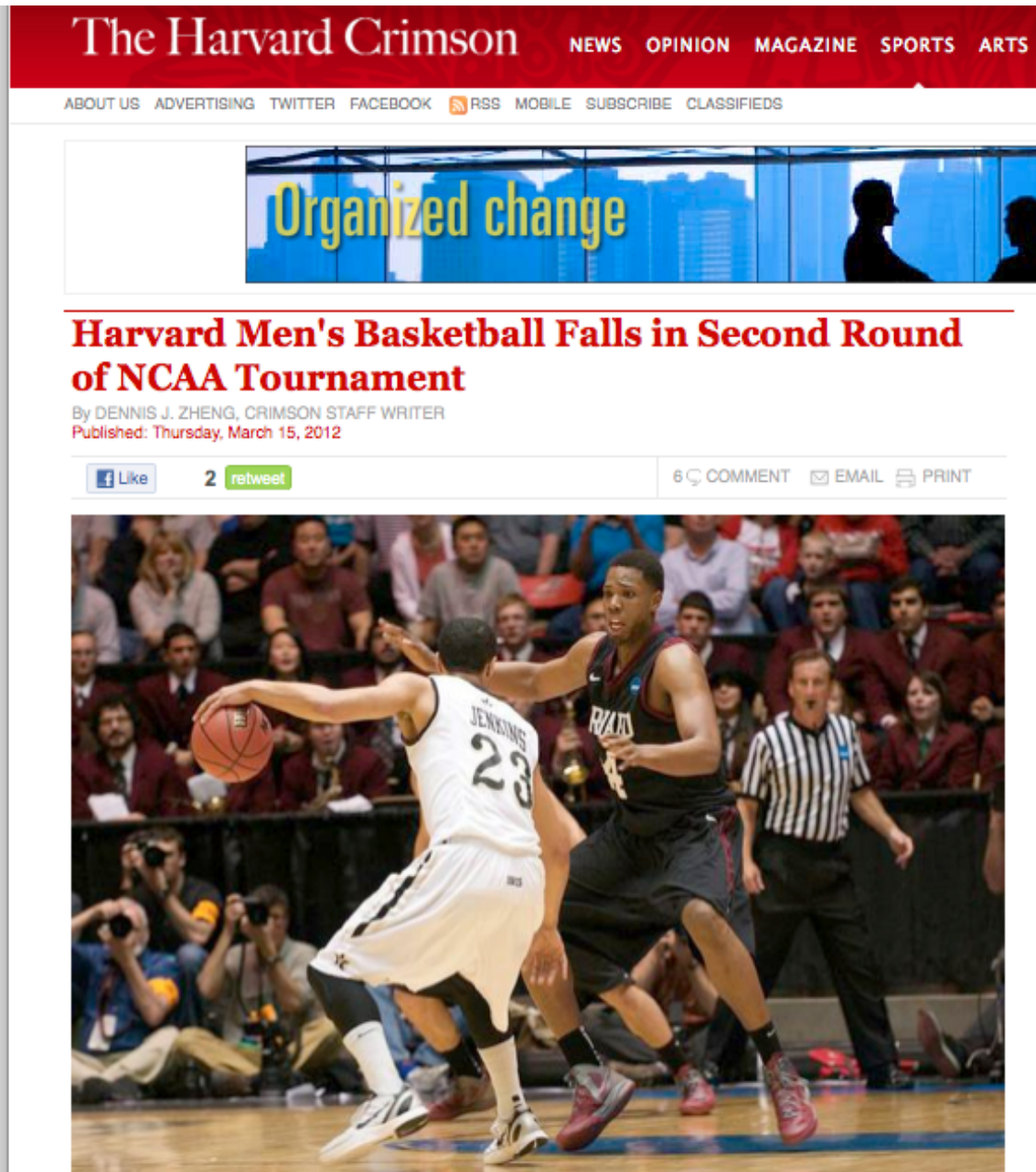


# Positive Condition

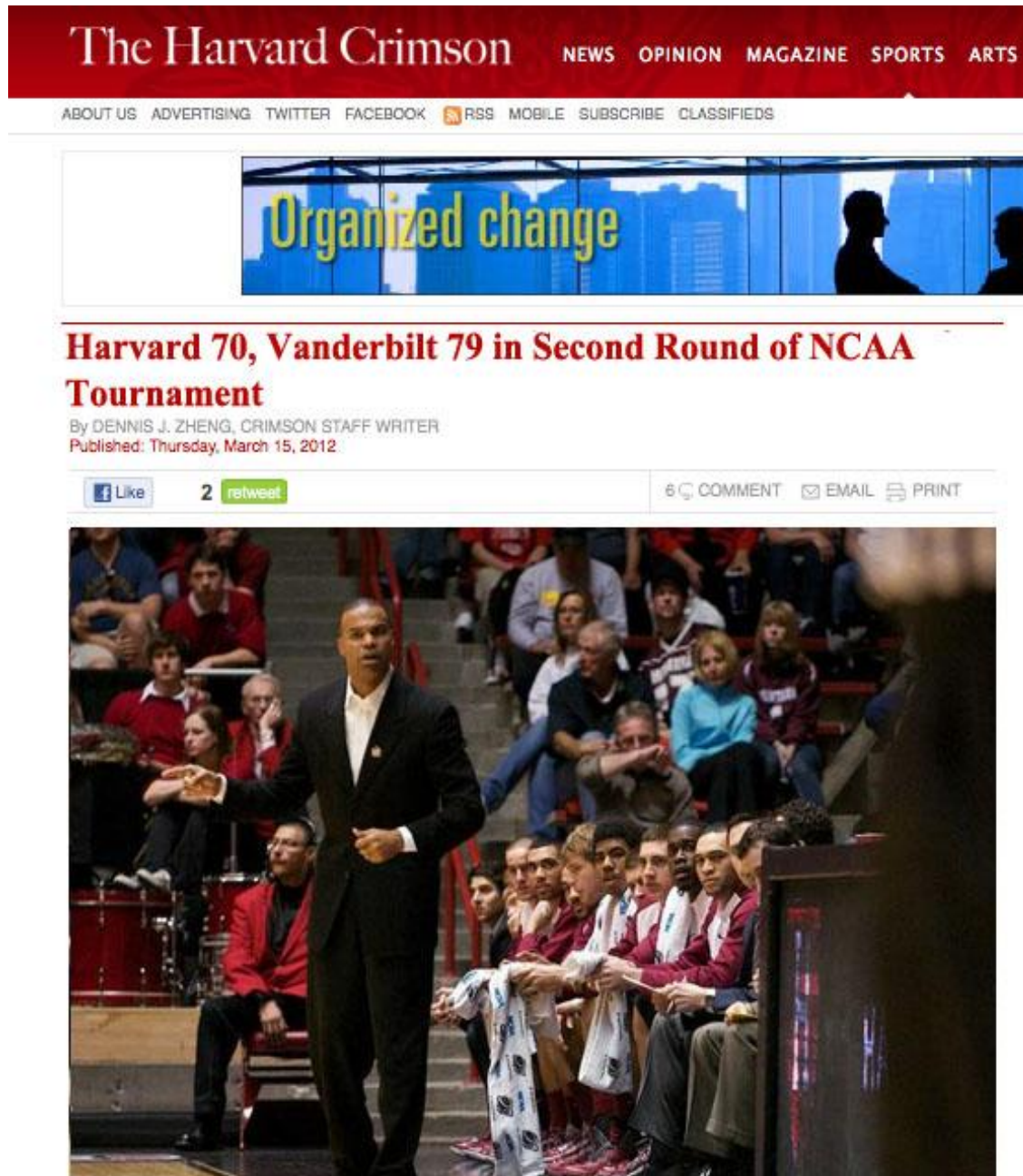




# Negative Condition



# Control Condition





# Dependent Variables

- In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way things are going in the United States at this time?
  - *Country Satisfaction*
- Thinking about Barack Obama, how satisfied are you with the job he is doing as President?
  - *Presidential Satisfaction*
- How likely are you to vote for Obama in the upcoming presidential election?
  - *Likelihood of voting for Obama*



# Background Questions

- Age, Gender, House
- Political Ideology & Affiliation
- Political Knowledge
  - Who of the following is the Speaker of the House?
  - Who of the following is the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court
- Harvard Basketball Knowledge
  - How many games attended?
  - Who of the following is not on the team?



# Sample Size

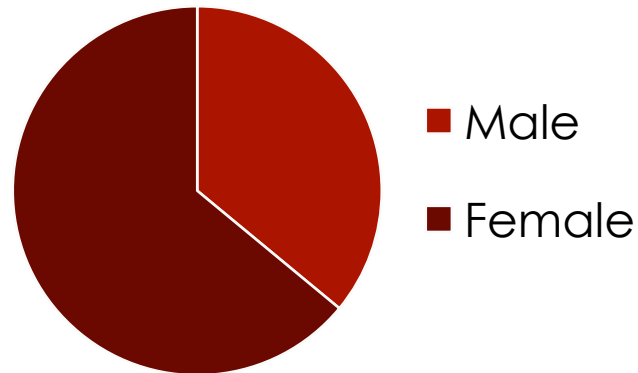
- 329 Harvard undergraduates
  - 4.5% Response Rate



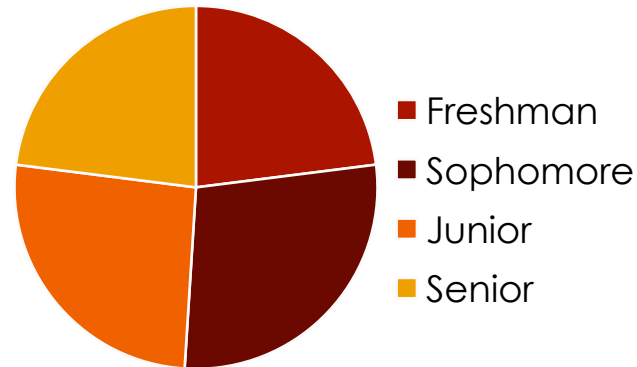
# Sample Demographics



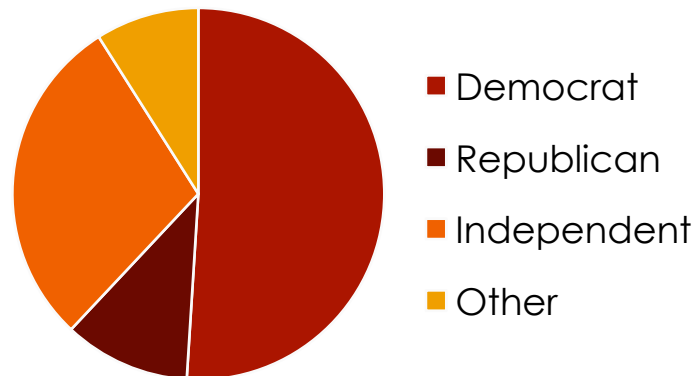
**Gender**



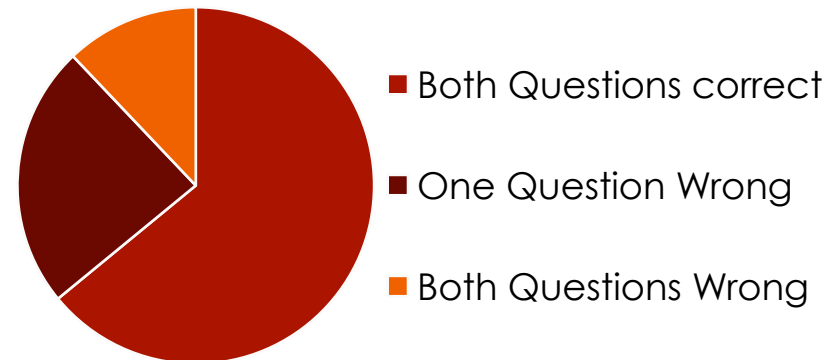
**Class Year**



**Political Affiliation**

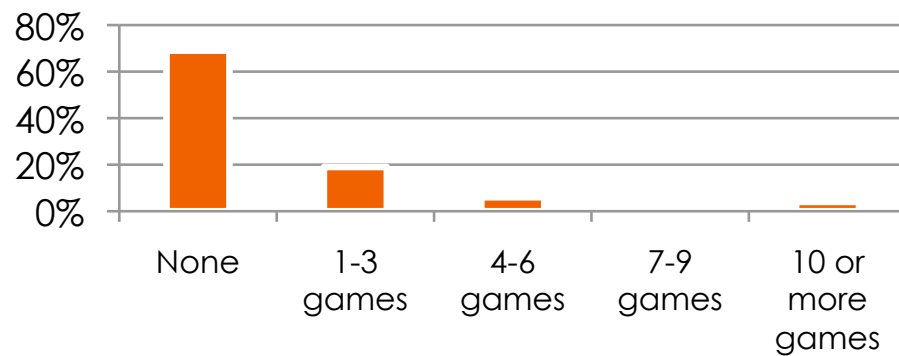


**Political Information levels**

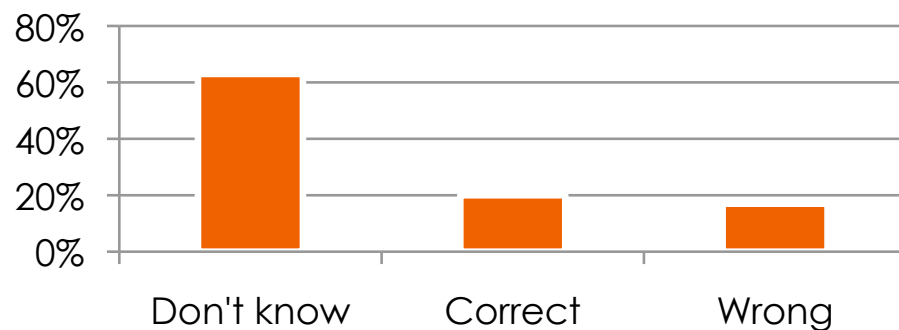


# Sample Basketball Knowledge

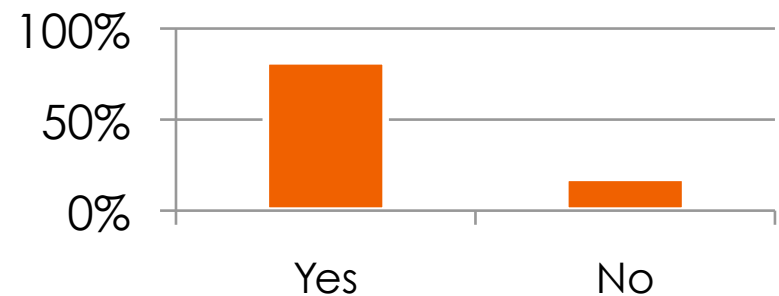
**How many Harvard men's basketball games did you attend?**



**Of the following names, which does NOT belong to a member of the Harvard men's basketball team?**



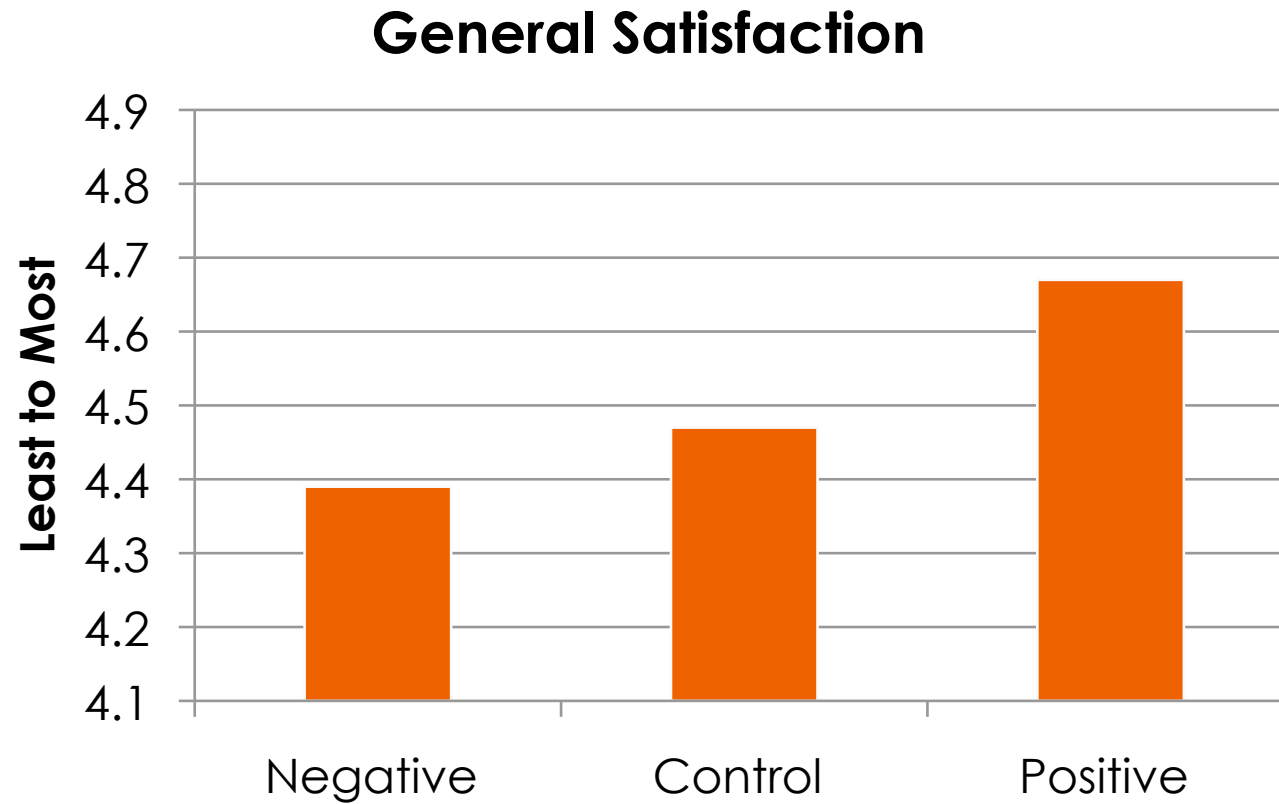
**Did you know the result of Harvard's NCAA Basketball game before you took this survey?**





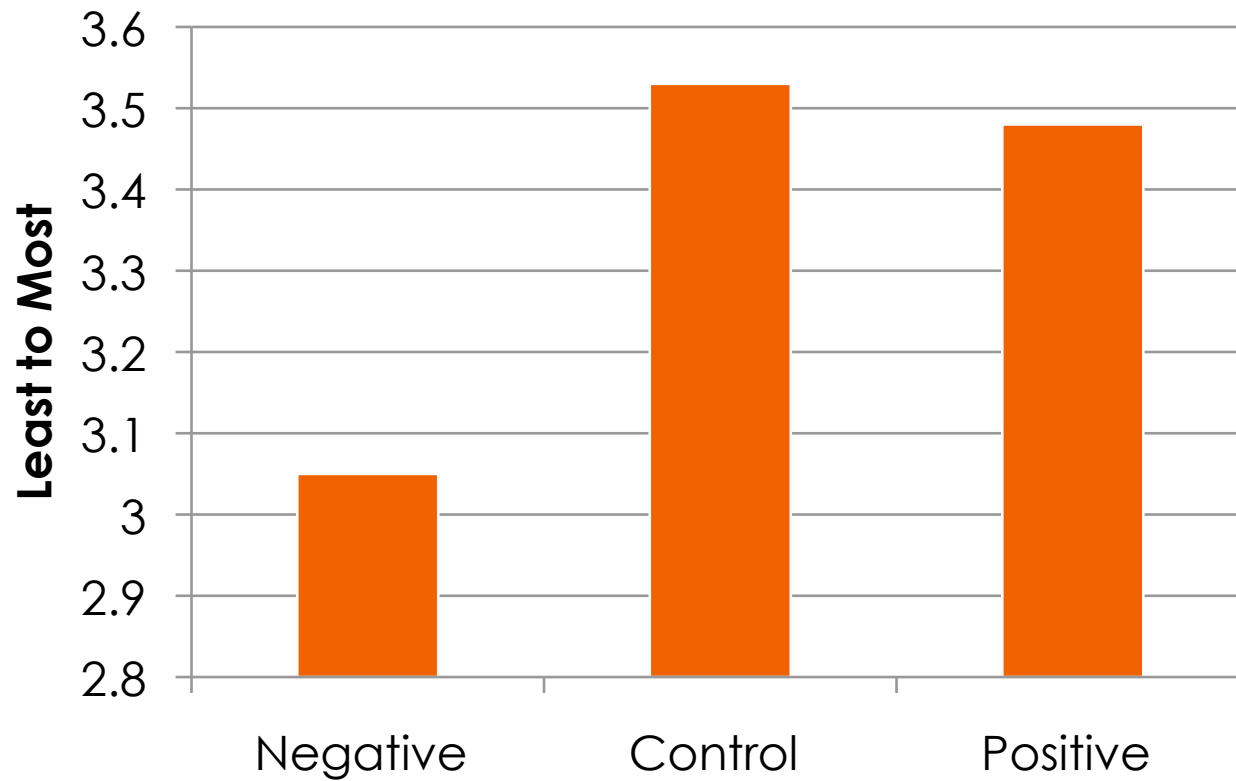
Results

# Composite Results

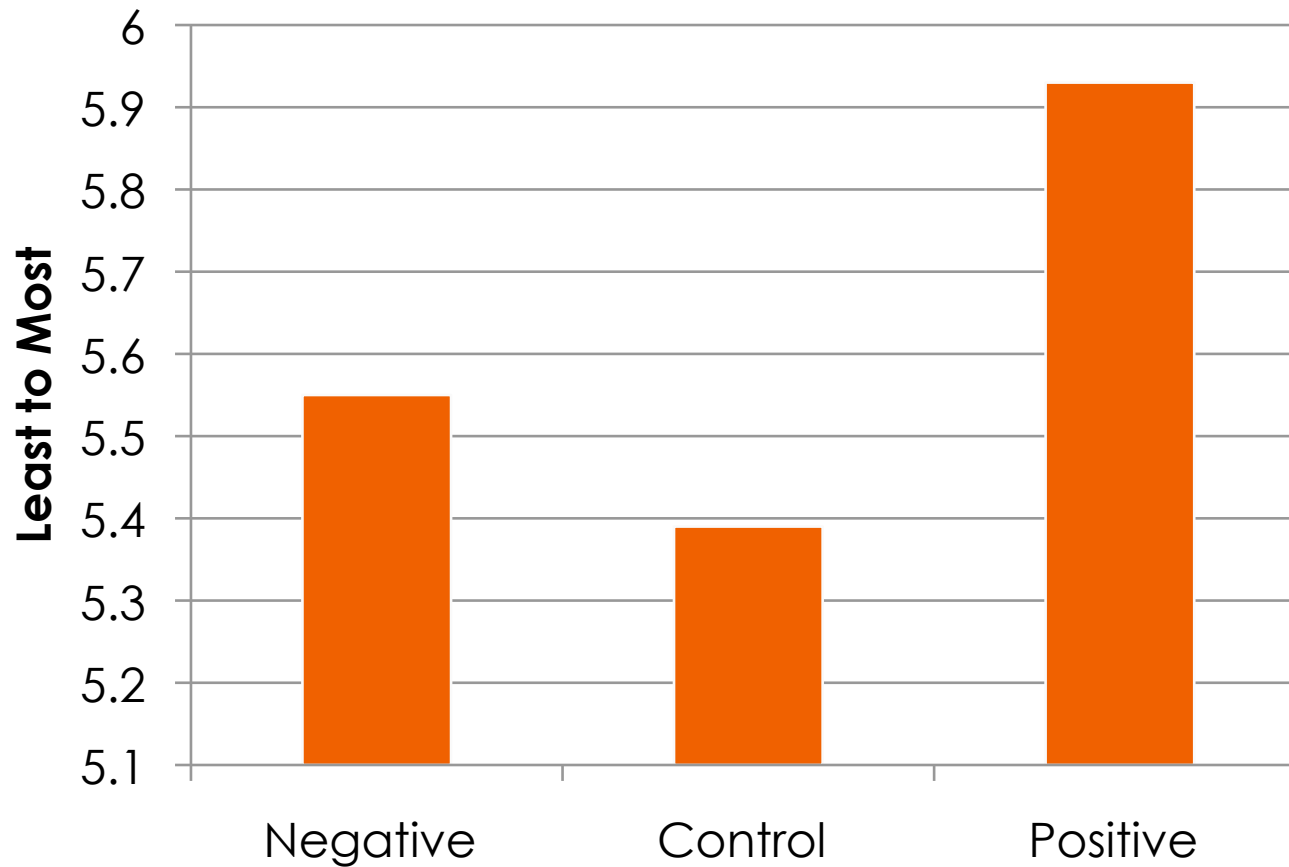


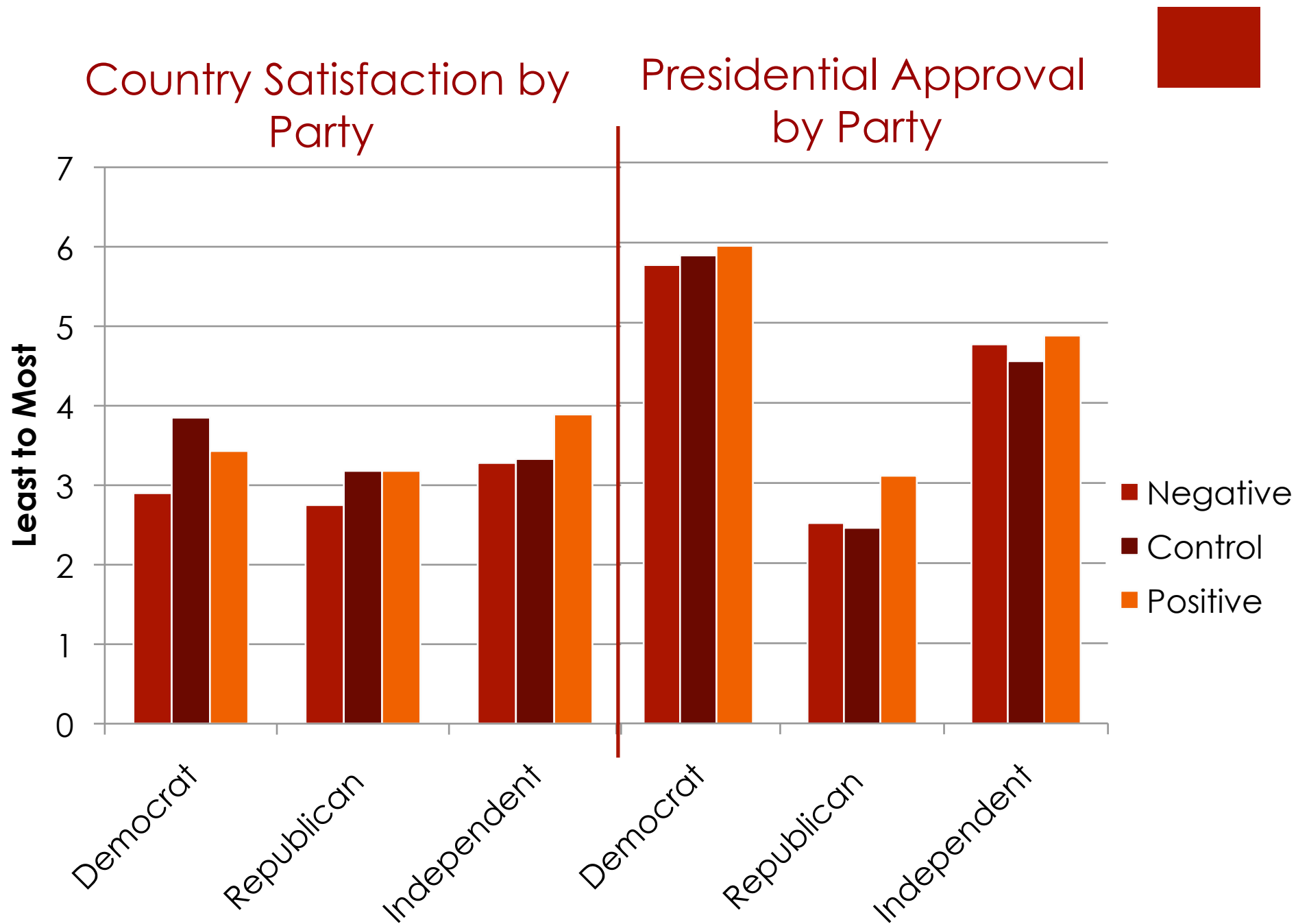


# Country Satisfaction



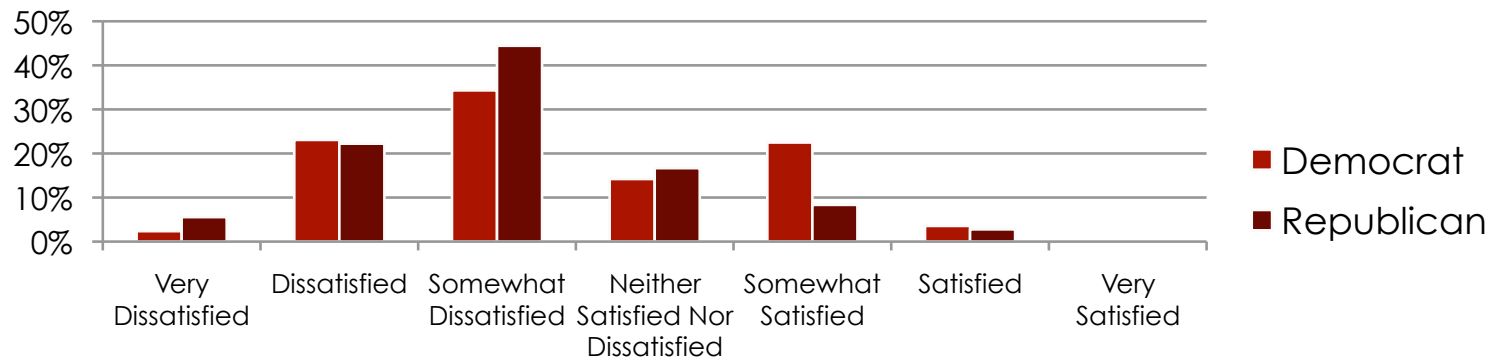
# Presidential Approval Composite



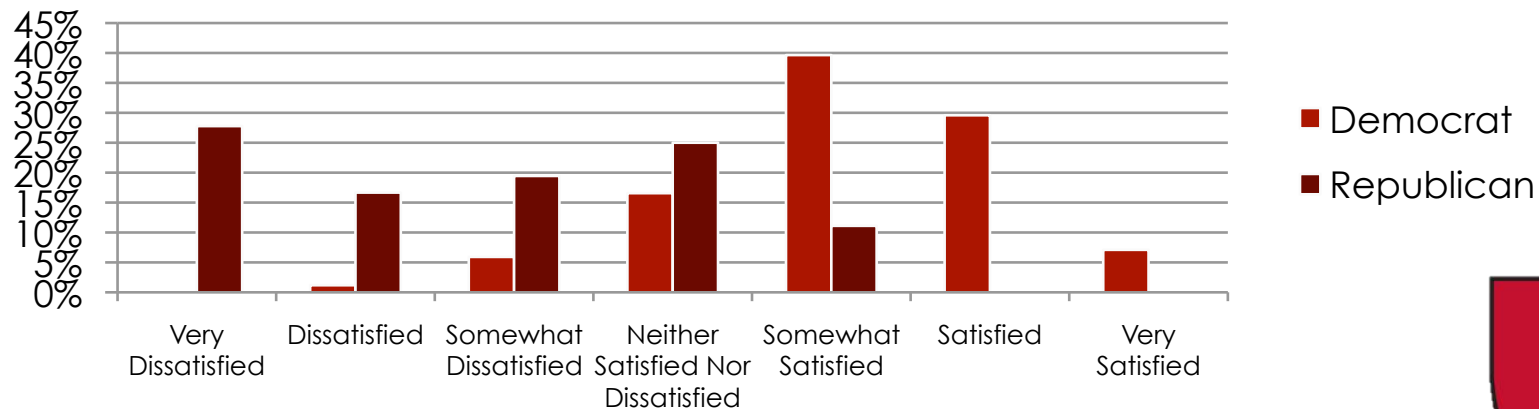


# Political Party

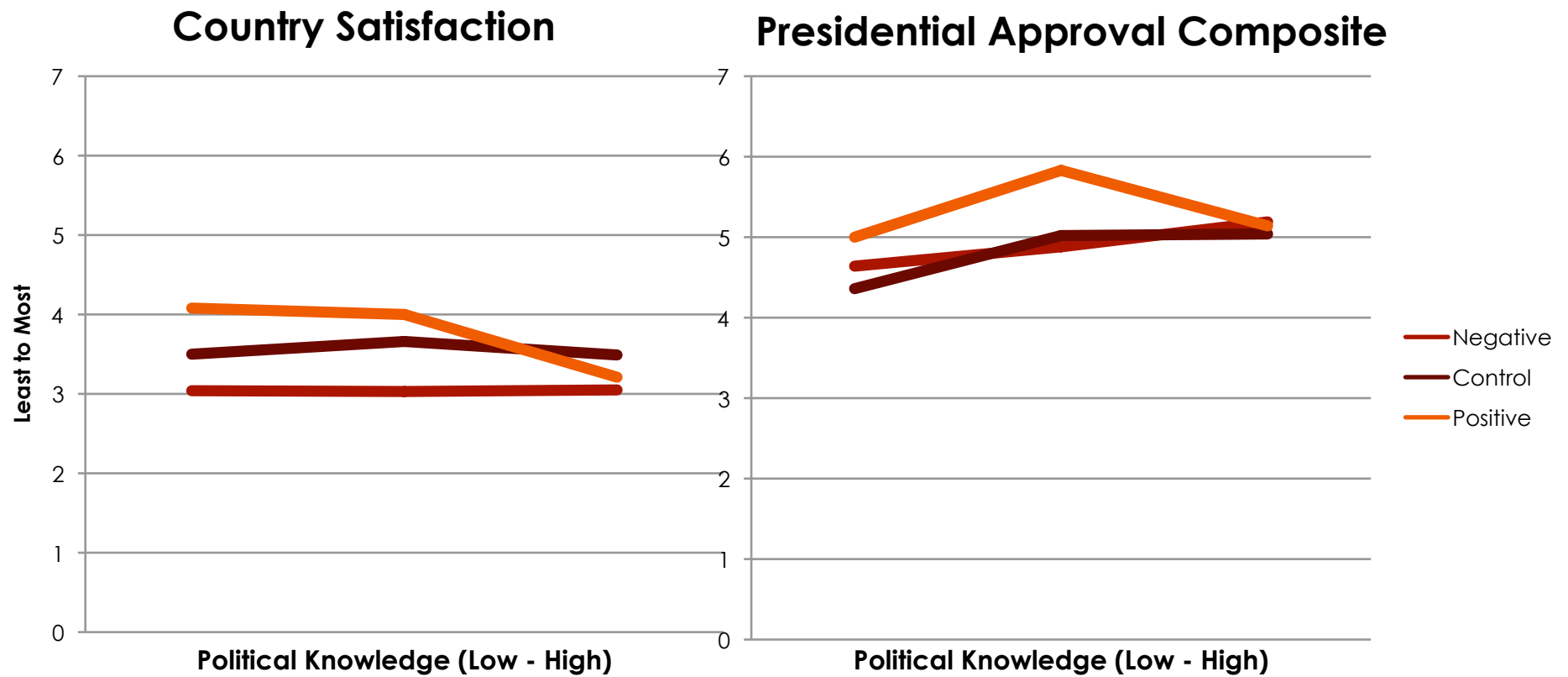
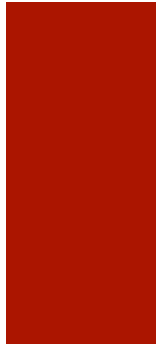
## Country Satisfaction by Party



## Presidential Satisfaction by Party



# Political Knowledge



# Summary



- Negative non-political emotional primes effect political opinions more than positive emotional stimuli.
- Effect of emotion constant across political parties.
- Effect of emotional primes is greater on issues (country satisfaction) that are less associated with partisan predispositions (presidential approval).
- Though not statistically significant, those with higher political knowledge are less effected by emotional primes.





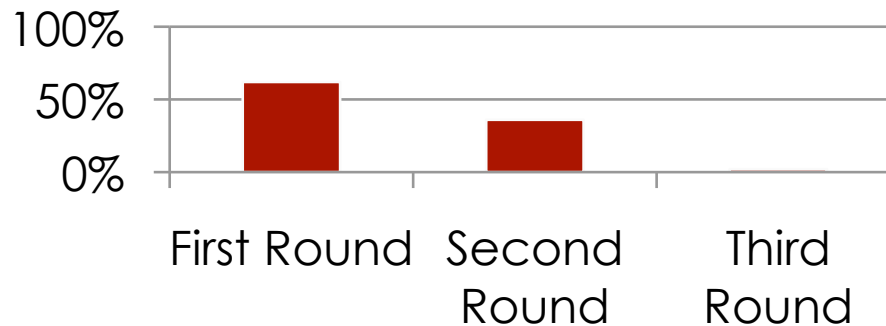
# Discussion



# Internal Validity

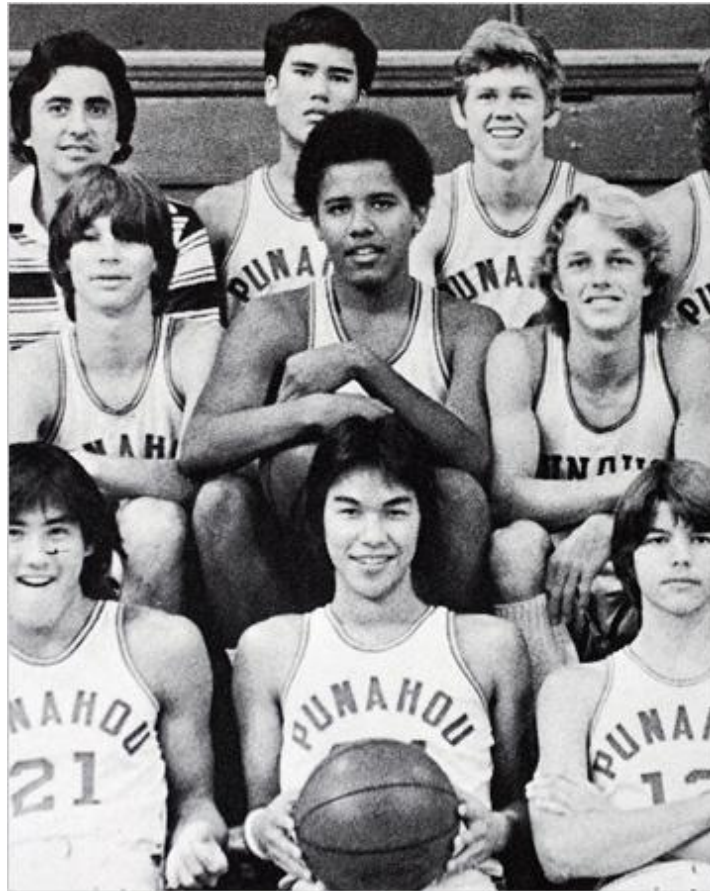
- Manipulation check
- Skewed sample
- Non-Response bias

**In what round of the NCAA tournament did the Harvard men's basketball team play?**



# Internal Validity

- Basketball → Obama



# External Validity

- Generalizability within and beyond Harvard
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Ideology
  - Different sports and political knowledge levels



# Improvements

- Do right before/after sporting event
- Longer exposure to conditions
- More representative sample
  - Gender
  - Political Affiliation
  - Basketball Knowledge



# Implications

**Man is not a completely rational being (sorry Madison)**



- Media
- Negative Unrelated Events
- Partisanship & 2012 Election



