NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Tea Party, Occupy movements fail to capture Americans' hearts

Lauren Markoe Religion News Service | Nov. 17, 2011

Image not found
http://ncronline.org/sites/default/files/stories/images/oldimgs/Occupy.jpg

An Occupy Wall Street demonstrator is arrested by New York City Police during what protest organizers called a "Day of Action" in New York Nov. 17. (CNS photo/Mike Segar, Reuters)

WASHINGTON -- In a war between the Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street movement to capture the hearts of Americans, who wins? According to a new poll, it's a draw.

Less than a third of Americans say either movement represents their values, according to a poll released Wednesday (Nov. 16) by the Public Religion Research Institute in partnership with Religion News Service.

One thing, however, is clear: neither movement can make a strong claim to speak for Americans. Near identical majorities say neither movement represents their values -- 57 percent for the Tea Party, and 56 percent for Occupy Wall Street.

What's more, one in five Americans say each of the movements has a negative impact on society, and about four in 10 Americans see both as largely irrelevant.

"They're mirror images of each other, but the symmetry at the national level hides a very different distribution," said Robert Jones, the research firm's CEO. "Support for the Tea Party is more intensely concentrated among Republicans, but support for the OWS movement is less intense among Democrats and more evenly spread among other groups."

The poll -- designed to gauge Americans' views about economic hardship and the proper responses to it -- also revealed some striking divides and ambivalences, particularly in the way people view opportunity in America.

A significant majority (eight in 10) believes the gap between rich and poor has widened during the past 20 years, a finding that held true across generational, religious and political lines. Nearly half of those polled believe the American Dream -- the idea that if you work hard you'll get ahead -- once held true but no longer does.

And while two-thirds of Americans agree that the government should do more to reduce the gap between rich and poor, an even higher proportion (71 percent) say poor people have become too dependent on government assistance programs.

Jones said that ambivalence speaks to a long-standing conflict between two strongly held beliefs in American culture: people should pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, and the government should provide a safety net.

Overall, he said, people seem to favor raising taxes on the wealthiest Americans and reject the idea of cutting

programs for the poor.

"They feel government has a responsibility not to let people sink," Jones said.

A strong majority (69 percent) says increasing taxes on people who make at least $1 million a year is an appropriate way to decrease the budget deficit.

About the same proportion reject cutting federal money for social programs that help the poor (67 percent) or cutting federal funding for religious organizations that help the poor (66 percent).

When it comes to both their feelings about inequality in America and the Tea Party and OWS movement, Americans break down along clear religious and generational lines:

- White evangelicals are the most likely to say the Tea Party shares their values (49 percent), followed by white mainline Protestants (32 percent), Catholics (26 percent), the religiously unaffiliated (19 percent) and minority Christians (19 percent).
- Occupy Wall Street drew the strongest support from the unaffiliated (38 percent), followed by minority Christians (34 percent), mainline Protestants (30 percent) and Catholics (29 percent).
- Younger Americans, 18 to 29, are much more likely to say the OWS movement shares their values (34 percent) than the Tea Party (26 percent).

The poll also asked Americans whether churches and clergy are doing enough to respond to the economic crisis, and found they are evenly divided, with 46 percent saying they have not provided enough moral leadership on the country's most pressing economic problems, and 45 percent who think they have.

This near-even split is true across all major religious groups except members of minority Protestants: 64 percent say churches and clergy have failed to provide sufficient moral leadership on economic problems.

Jones said it's not surprising that members of African-American churches would feel this way given black pastors' history of taking vocal stands on civil rights and inequality.

"There's a tradition of these clergy taking a strong leadership role on major issues facing society," he said.

The PRRI/RNS Religion News Survey was based on telephone interviews with 1,002 adults between Nov. 10 and 14. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/01/2015 - 21:53*): http://ncronline.org/news/politics/tea-party-occupy-movements-fail-capture-americans-hearts