

AMERICAN VALUES SURVEY IS HYPER-POLITICAL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a new survey that is seriously flawed:

The pollsters were mostly wrong again on Election Day—in some cases by a huge margin—thus making a mockery of psephology, the statistical study of elections. It doesn't have to be this way: statistical models are not the problem; the problem is poor sampling. Unfortunately, much of the survey research done these days is not much better, often allowing the political bent of those conducting it to color the outcomes.

One of the most glaringly hyper-political surveys ever done was just released by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), in partnership with the Brookings Institution. "Competing Visions of America: An Evolving Identity or a Culture Under Attack?" is the title of this year's American Values Survey.

PRRI has a partisan record, so it is not surprising that it would conduct a flawed survey, though this one is by far its worst undertaking. On the other hand, the Brookings Institution has a good reputation, making this co-venture regrettable.

To be sure, there is much about this survey that is quite good, and helpful to sociologists like myself. But there are several aspects to it that are so indefensible as to discredit it.

The report was written in part by the CEO of PRRI, Robert P. Jones. He is not a sociologist; his Ph.D. is in religion. He is most well known for promoting the idea that white Christian men pose an existential threat to American democracy, feeding the left-wing trope that white supremacists are one of the

nation's most pressing problems.

It is not until the latter part of the report that there is a segment on this subject—Trump supporters are singled out for rebuke—but it is front- and-center in the marketing of the survey. Indeed, the first subject in the press release is titled, “Anti-Democratic Beliefs and Support for Political Violence on the Right.”

We just came off a year when left-wing violence almost destroyed Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis and other cities. The spike in crime that affected most big cities is at least partly the result of left-wing mayors and district attorneys taking a hands-off approach to crime, ordering cops to stand down. Meanwhile Antifa and Black Lives Matter killed dozens of innocent people, and trashed so many stores in cities like New York that it turned them into a ghost town for much of the year.

The report, however, has nothing to say about this issue. It is only concerned about right-wing violence, which was miniscule compared to the degree of violence carried out by the left.

Has God granted America a special role in human history? In 2013, 64% said yes, but today the figure has dropped to 44%. That is surely worth exploring. The report simply offers the findings, without drawing any conclusions. Fine. But the press release tells a different story. It says that those who answered affirmatively evince “Christian nationalist sympathies,” citing Republicans as an example (68% of whom agree with the statement).

This is cruel and dishonest. Simply because someone believes that God granted our nation a special role in history does not make him a Christian nationalist, a term employed by Jones as roughly analogous to white supremacists. He's wrong. In fact, his own survey undercuts his narrative. What was not

said in the press release, but is said in the report, is that 67% of Black Protestants agree with the statement. Are they also white supremacists?

The report's coverage of critical race theory also smacks of politics. It offers data on what Americans think about this subject, and then says, "Despite some high-profile flare-ups over this issue in the media," most Americans believe that students should be taught about the nation's "best achievements and worst mistakes."

This is a lousy segue. The latter has nothing to do with the former. Critical race theory teaches students that there are oppressors, namely white people, and the oppressed, namely black people. It makes judgments about people based on their skin pigmentation, not their individual attributes. In short, it is a racist ideology, designed to drive a wedge between whites and blacks.

Many other examples could be given, but what really shows the left-wing bent to this report is the way it treats media sources. Throughout the report it scores respondents who get their news from "Fox News" (cited 28 times) or "far-right" media outlets (asked 31 times). It never defines the latter. Nor does it ask about "left-wing" news sources.

The term "far-right" suggests fascist or Nazi-leaning. In the press release, we learn that the authors of this research believe that Newsmax and One America News are "far-right" sources! On p. 25 of the report, in footnote #10, it defines CNN, MSNBC and public television as examples of "mainstream news." Only someone living in a left-wing bubble thinks this way.

This isn't professional research—it's a left-wing hack job. If CNN, MSNBC and PBS were labeled "far-left" in a survey, it would be written off as a right-wing study. Finally, in keeping with the game plan, "mainstream" CNN hosted a show on

the report. Pity the viewers who believe they were listening to objective social scientists.