

Is Congressional Exploration of U.S. Muslim Extremism a Good Idea?

A majority of Americans believe that planned congressional hearings next month into the alleged extremism in the American Muslim community is a good thing, but more than 70 percent believe Congress should not single out Muslims.

Those are among the findings of the PRRI/RNS Religion News Survey, conducted by Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) in partnership with Religion News Service.

“These findings reveal an American public that is wrestling with both fears and fairness in the post-9/11 context,” says Dr. Robert P. Jones, CEO of PRRI. “Americans believe it is appropriate for Congress to investigate religious extremism, but they do not want to single out the American Muslim community.”

Approval of the hearings varies considerably by political and religious affiliation. Seventy-one percent of Republicans say the hearings are a good idea, compared to only 45% of Democrats and 56% of Independents. Among religious groups, support for the hearings is highest among white evangelical Protestants (70%) and lowest among white Mainline Protestants and the religiously unaffiliated, among whom about half say they are a good idea (50% and 49%, respectively). However, support for broadening the approach beyond the Muslim community is strong across political and religious affiliation groups.

The survey also reveals that the general public holds mixed views of the American Muslim community. On the one hand, a plurality (46%) of the public believe that the American Muslim community has not done enough to oppose extremism in their own

communities, compared to one-third who say they have; and nearly half (49%) do not believe Muslims have been unfairly targeted by law enforcement since 2001. On the other hand, more than 6-in-10 (62%) believe Muslims are an important part of the American religious community, and few (22%) believe assertions that American Muslims want to establish Shari'a or Muslim law as the law of the land in the U.S.

"The survey findings also show a significant correlation between trust in Fox News and negative attitudes about Muslims," says Daniel Cox, PRRI Research Director. "Americans who trust Fox News are more likely to believe that Muslims want to establish Shari'a law, have not done enough to oppose extremism, and believe investigating extremism is a good idea in the American Muslim community. We even see differences among Republicans and white evangelicals who trust Fox news most and those who trust other media."

What do you think? Sound off in the comment box below.