

Progressive groups say war, poverty topped voter concerns: Broader moral agenda needed

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Moral concerns about poverty and the war in Iraq drove the religious vote more than abortion and same-sex marriage in the midterm elections, according to an exit poll released November 15 by two progressive faith-based groups.

Faith in Public Life and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, both based in Washington, said the results signal a shift among religious voters from hot-button issues to broader concerns, such as economic justice and integrity in government.

The national poll, conducted by the nonpartisan firm Zogby International, surveyed 16,477 voters November 7-10, including 4,186 Catholics and 3,807 “born-again Christians.” The Zogby poll was conducted by e-mail and has a margin of error of plus or minus 0.8 percentage points.

More than 45 percent of those polled said the war in Iraq was “the moral issue that most influenced” their vote, an increase of four percentage points from the 2004 presidential election. Abortion as an issue declined by five points, with just under 8 percent citing it as a motivating factor. The drop on abortion was most significant among Protestants, down 10 points to 14.4 percent.

More than 57 percent of those surveyed named poverty/economic justice or greed/materialism as the nation’s “most urgent moral crisis.” Only 25 percent named abortion or same-sex marriage.

The poll results should prompt legislators to tackle a broader moral agenda for religious voters, said Tom Perriello, cofounder of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. “No party has stepped up with a serious plan for poverty and economic justice,” Perriello said. “This means there’s a wide opening for leaders to address the deeper moral issues not addressed in the election.”

Democrats made inroads since the 2004 congressional races among several religious groups—including a six-point gain among Catholics (from 49 percent to 55 percent) and four points among evangelicals (from 25 percent to 29 percent)—according to the National Election Pool exit polls released by six major news organizations.

Democrats have a responsibility to follow through on the issues important to people of faith, said Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners/Call to Renewal, a faith-based social justice group. “Democrats need to take the lead and not just reap the benefits,” he said. “Religious people are not a cheap date and are going to want results now.” - *Religion News Service*