

The Washington Post

Few signs at tea party rally expressed racially charged anti-Obama themes

Washington Post Staff Writer

By Amy Gardner

Wednesday, October 13, 2010; 1:00 PM

A new analysis of political signs displayed at a tea party rally in Washington last month reveals that the vast majority of activists expressed narrow concerns about the government's economic and spending policies and steered clear of the racially charged anti-Obama messages that have helped define some media coverage of such events.

Emily Ekins, a graduate student at UCLA, conducted the survey at the 9/12 Taxpayer March on Washington last month by scouring the crowd, row by row and hour by hour, and taking a picture of every sign she passed.

Ekins photographed about 250 signs, and more than half of those she saw reflected a "limited government ethos," she found - touching on such topics as the role of government, liberty, taxes, spending, deficit and concern about socialism. Examples ranged from the simple message "Stop the Spending" scrawled in black-marker block letters to more elaborate drawings of bar charts, stop signs and one poster with the slogan "Socialism is Legal Theft" and a stick-figure socialist pointing a gun at the head of a taxpayer.

There were uglier messages, too - including "Obama Bin Lyin' - Impeach Now" and "Somewhere in Kenya a Village is Missing its Idiot." But Ekins's analysis showed that only

about a quarter of all signs reflected direct anger with Obama. Only 5 percent of the total mentioned the president's race or religion, and slightly more than 1 percent questioned his American citizenship.

Ekins's conclusion is not that the racially charged messages are unimportant but that media coverage of tea party rallies over the past year have focused so heavily on the more controversial signs that it has contributed to the perception that such content dominates the tea party movement more than it actually does.

"Really this is an issue of salience," Ekins said. "Just because a couple of percentage points of signs have those messages doesn't mean the other people don't share those views, but it doesn't mean they do, either. But when 25 percent of the coverage is devoted to those signs, it suggests that this is the issue

Advertisement

We focus on automating Marriott® Hotels' global invoice process. So they don't have to.

Learn more at RealBusiness.com

xerox
Ready For Real Business

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/13/AR2010101303634.html>

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

The Washington Post

Few signs at tea party rally expressed racially charged anti-Obama themes

that 25 percent of people think is so important that they're going to put it on a sign, when it's actually only a couple of people."

Ekins spent the summer researching the tea party movement and also as an intern at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington. The survey was for her UCLA graduate studies.

The march attracted thousands of protesters to the Mall on Sept. 12, a repeat of an event one year earlier that became an emblem of the growing anger among conservative voters with the Obama Administration and such big-ticket initiatives as the stimulus package and the push to overhaul the health-care system. This year's event did not attract nearly as large a crowd as 2009, in part because it came just two weeks after Glenn Beck's successful "Restoring Honor" rally at the Lincoln Memorial, which attracted some participants with similar concerns.

But the 9/12 event, which was produced by national tea party organizer FreedomWorks, was a more overtly political event than Beck's. Organizers encouraged marchers to bring signs and express their dismay with government spending - and their intent to vote accordingly on Nov. 2.

Adam Brandon, a spokesman for FreedomWorks, said his organization did not instruct protesters to limit their messages to fiscal slogans, but he did patrol the crowd

and threw out a few protesters carrying signs depicting Obama as Adolf Hitler.

Advertisement



We focus on automating Marriott® Hotels' global invoice process. So they don't have to.

Learn more at RealBusiness.com

xerox 
Ready For Real Business

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/13/AR2010101303634.html>

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™