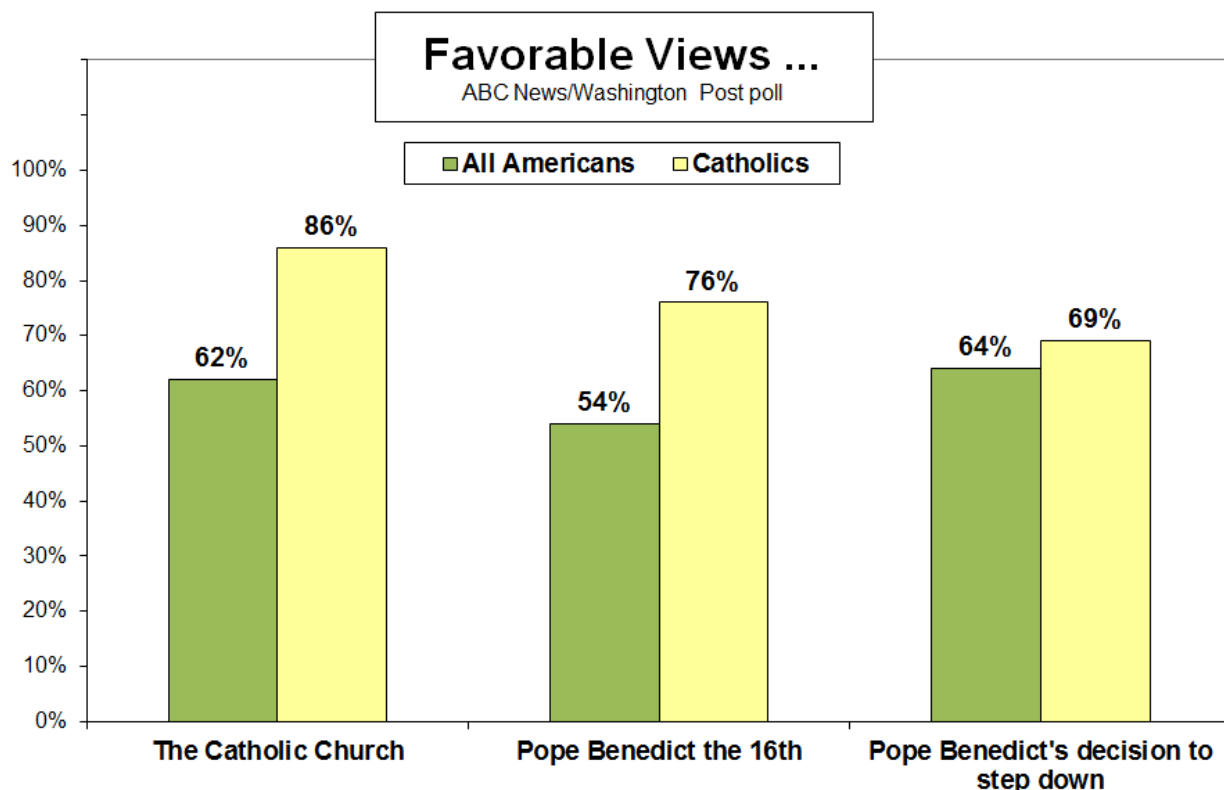


Outgoing Pope Popular, But Not as Much as His Predecessor

The Catholic Church has rebounded in overall public esteem in the United States as it's moved away from the height of its child abuse scandals a decade ago, a trend that's continued under the now-departing Pope Benedict XVI.

Benedict himself is seen favorably by three-quarters of American Catholics, a new ABC News/Washington Post poll finds, and seven in 10 express a favorable opinion of his unusual decision to resign the pontificate for health reasons.

The pope's popularity lags that of his predecessor, John Paul II, who just before his death in early 2005 was seen favorably by 87 percent of Catholics and 67 percent of all Americans. Benedict's comparable ratings are 76 and 54 percent favorable, respectively.



Eighty-six percent of Catholics, and 62 percent of all Americans, see the church itself favorably – up steeply, by 17 and 22 points, respectively, from the height of its child sex-abuse scandal in late 2002.

Among Catholics, that improvement in the church’s basic popularity occurred before Benedict’s election, and has remained relatively stable since then. Among all Americans the path has been steadier, with most of the advance since 2002 occurring before Benedict’s election, and additional gains since.

Benedict announced last week that he will step down Feb. 28, becoming the first pope to resign in nearly 600 years.

This poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), finds that views of his decision to resign are linked to Americans’ opinions of him personally, and to a lesser extent, of the church. Those who see Benedict and the church favorably are more likely, by 21 and 8 percentage points, to see his decision positively, as well.

CATHOLICS and OTHERS – Catholics make up the largest single faith group in the United States, about a quarter of the adult population. While they are much more likely to have favorable opinions of their church and the outgoing pope compared with non-Catholic Americans (86 vs. 53 percent and 76 vs. 48 percent, respectively), majorities in both groups view the pope’s decision to step down favorably (69 and 62 percent).

Race, age and political predispositions all play a role in views of the pope and his resignation:

- Among racial groups, Hispanics, who are more apt to be Catholics themselves, are more likely than whites and blacks alike to see the Catholic Church more positively. Hispanics also have more favorable views of Benedict’s resignation than blacks.
- Sixty-four and 76 percent of seniors view the pope and his resignation favorably, compared with just about half of young adults.
- Republicans and conservatives are more likely to view the church and Benedict favorably, compared with Democrats and independents and liberals and moderates. There’s less of a difference in attitudes on the pope’s resignation.

Finally, despite issues such as the church’s prohibition on women serving as priests, there’s no meaningful difference between men and women in views of the church, the pope or his resignation.

	Catholic Church	Favorable-unfavorable Pope Benedict	unfavorable Benedict’s decision to step down
All	62-28%	54-27	64-23
Catholics	86-11	76-14	69-22
Non-Catholics	53-35	48-31	62-24
Whites	61-31	55-27	68-20
Blacks	55-30	49-28	49-35

Hispanics	73-20	60-24	64-27
18-29	58-29	49-29	52-34
65-plus	66-25	64-18	76-11
Democrats	57-32	50-33	65-26
Republicans	73-23	66-19	71-19
Independents	61-29	55-28	61-23
Liberals	53-39	48-36	68-23
Moderates	61-27	52-27	60-25
Conservatives	70-23	62-24	67-23

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by landline and cell phone Feb. 13-17, 2013, among a random national sample of 1,006 adults, including 227 Catholics. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points for the full sample, 7.5 points for Catholics. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by SSRS/Social Science Research Solutions of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Damla Ergun.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>.

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Full results follow.

1. Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of (ITEM)? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

2/17/13 - Summary Table

All:

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Smwt	NET	Smwt	Strongly	op.
a. the Catholic Church	62	26	35	28	16	13	10
b. Pope Benedict the Sixteenth	54	22	32	27	17	10	19
c. Pope Benedict's decision to step down as the head of the Catholic Church	64	33	31	23	13	10	13

Catholics:

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Smwt	NET	Smwt	Strongly	op.
a. the Catholic Church	86	56	30	11	7	3	3
b. Pope Benedict the Sixteenth	76	43	33	14	8	6	9
c. Pope Benedict's decision to step down as the head of the Catholic Church	69	43	26	22	14	8	9

Trend:

a. the Catholic Church

All:

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
2/17/13	62	26	35	28	16	13	10
4/24/05	56	NA	NA	36	NA	NA	8
2/22/04	54			33			13
10/13/03	48			44			8
12/15/02	40			52			8
6/17/02	45			47			9
6/9/02	47			45			7
3/28/02	55			34			11
2/20/02	63			27			11
8/30/99*	68	"	"	19	"	"	13

*Wash Post/Kaiser/Harvard, asked "very/somewhat" follow

Catholics:

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
2/17/13	86	56	30	11	7	3	3
4/24/05	81	NA	NA	17	NA	NA	1
2/22/04	87			10			3
10/13/03	80			17			3
12/15/02	69			30			2
6/17/02	69			28			3
6/9/02	70			28			2
3/28/02	73			24			3
2/20/02	88	"	"	9	"	"	4

b. Pope Benedict the Sixteenth

		----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
		NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
2/17/13	All	54	22	32	27	17	10	19
	Cath.	76	43	33	14	8	6	9
4/13/08	All	48	NA	NA	24	NA	NA	28
	Cath.	74	"	"	13	"	"	14

c. Pope Benedict's decision to step down as the head of the Catholic Church

		----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
		NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
2/17/13	All	64	33	31	23	13	10	13
	Cath.	69	43	26	22	14	8	9

*** END ***