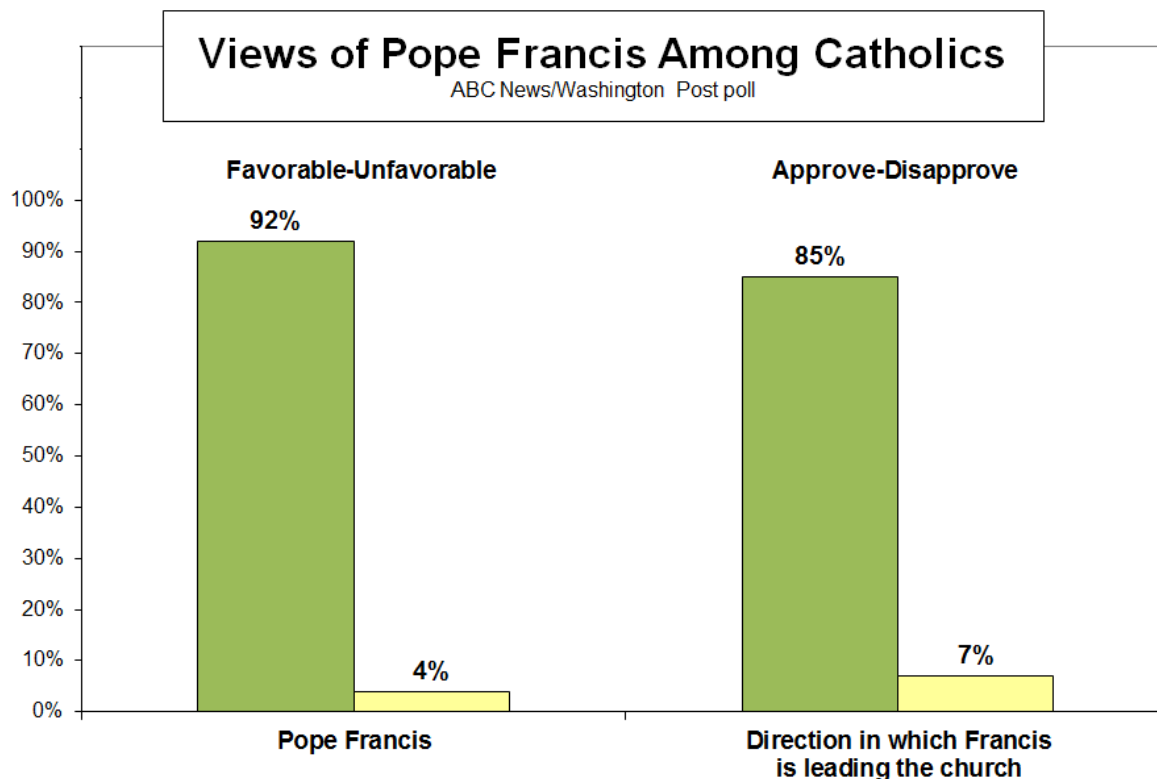


Pope Francis, Time Magazine’s Person of the Year, Is Vastly Popular Among Catholics

On the day he was named [Time magazine’s Person of the Year](#), a new ABC News/Washington Post poll marks Pope Francis’ almost unanimous popularity among American Catholics – as well as the continued recovery in their views of the church itself since the worst of its pedophile scandals a decade ago.

Nine months after his elevation to the papacy, a remarkable 92 percent of Catholics express a favorable opinion of Pope Francis, 16 percentage points more than said so about Pope Benedict XVI early this year.

Indeed among all Americans, including the nearly eight in 10 who aren’t Catholics, 69 percent see Francis favorably, 15 points more than said the same about Benedict at the end of his papacy. Still, there’s room for Francis to advance further: Pope John Paul II was seen favorably by more Americans overall, 86 percent, in a Gallup poll in December 1998.



Beyond Francis’ personal popularity, a new question in this poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), finds that 85 percent of Catholics approve of the direction in which he’s

leading the church. Even ratings of the church overall have improved among Catholics, from 86 percent favorable in February 2013 to 95 percent now. Among all Americans, 62 percent view the church favorably, the same as last February.

	Among Catholics		Among all Americans	
	Now	2/2013	Now	2/2013
Favorable opinion of...				
The pope	92%	76%	69%	54%
The Catholic Church	95	86	62	62

These results extend improvements for the church since its credibility was badly damaged by its child sex abuse scandals. Sixty-eight percent of Americans rated the church favorably in a 1999 poll; that plummeted as low as 40 percent in late 2002, with the scandals front and center. Among Catholics themselves, favorable ratings of the church fell as low as 69 percent in 2002, 26 points lower than their level today. (John Paul, for his part, fell from an 86 percent favorable rating among all adults in 1998 to 65 percent in 2003, again as scandal gripped the church.)

The Vatican last week announced that Francis was appointing a commission to consider how the church can better protect children from sexual abuse by priests. Some victims' groups were critical, calling the effort insufficient and ill-defined.

GROUPS – There are some telling differences in views of Francis across the U.S. population, particularly in comparison to Benedict. Only about half of political moderates and liberals held a favorable opinion of Benedict at the end of his papacy; by contrast three-quarters in both groups see Francis favorably now.

Political conservatives, Benedict's best ideological group, are Francis' weakest, by dint of his sharply lower popularity among "very" conservative Americans; a comparatively low 59 percent in this group see Francis favorably. And fewer still among strong conservatives, just 49 percent, approve of the direction in which Francis is leading the church. Benedict was seen a doctrinal conservative, while Francis, a Jesuit, has focused on outreach beyond some of the more divisive issues in the church.

There's a similar difference among all Americans by political affiliation, with Francis more popular than Benedict by 27 points among Democrats and by 11 points among independents, yet with the current pope and his predecessor rated about the same by Republicans.

These differences fade among Catholics themselves, with no significant differences between conservatives vs. non-conservatives or Democrats vs. non-Democrats in views of Francis and his direction for the church. Within the faith, ideology regardless, Francis is resoundingly popular.

Among other groups, Francis is more popular among senior citizens vs. those under 30, as was Benedict – a finding consistent with generally higher religiosity among older Americans. And Francis is particularly popular among college-educated Americans, 81 percent of whom see him favorably.

	Favorable-Unfavorable		Approve-Disapprove Direction of church under Francis
	Francis Now	Benedict 2/13	
All	69-14%	54-27	64-14
Catholics	92- 4	76-14	85- 7
Non-Catholics	62-18	48-31	58-16
Non-grad	64-16	52-28	61-15
College grad	81-10	60-27	73-10
18-29	60-23	49-29	58-21
65-plus	77- 8	64-18	70- 7
Democrats	77-11	50-33	71-12
Republicans	68-15	66-19	65-11
Independents	66-15	55-28	59-16
Liberals	75-10	48-36	72-11
Moderates	74-14	52-27	74-10
Cons. NET	67-16	62-24	57-19
Smt cons.	74-11	61-23	64-15
Very cons.	59-24	63-24	49-24

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by landline and cell phone Dec. 4-8, 2013, in English and Spanish, among a random national sample of 1,006 adults. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

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 the Catholic Church? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	Favorable			Unfavorable			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
12/8/13	62	24	38	30	20	10	8
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
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
12/8/13	95	62	34	4	4	0	1
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

2. Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of Pope Francis? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
12/8/13 All	69	36	33	14	9	5	16
Cath.	92	63	29	4	3	1	3

Compare to:

Pope Benedict the Sixteenth

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
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

Pope John Paul the Second

		Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion
3/13/05	All	67	16	17
	Cath.	87	8	5
10/13/03	All	65	24	11
	Cath.	84	11	5
12/29/98*	All	86	8	3
1/12/98	All	71	10	19
10/1/95	All	64	20	16
	Cath.	83	10	7
8/8/93	All	68	12	20
8/23/87	All	51	8	41
	Cath.	76	4	20

*Gallup

3. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the direction in which Pope Francis is leading the Catholic Church? Do you feel that way strongly, or somewhat?

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
10/13/13 All	64	31	34	14	8	5	22

Cath. 85 54 31 7 4 2 9

*** END ***