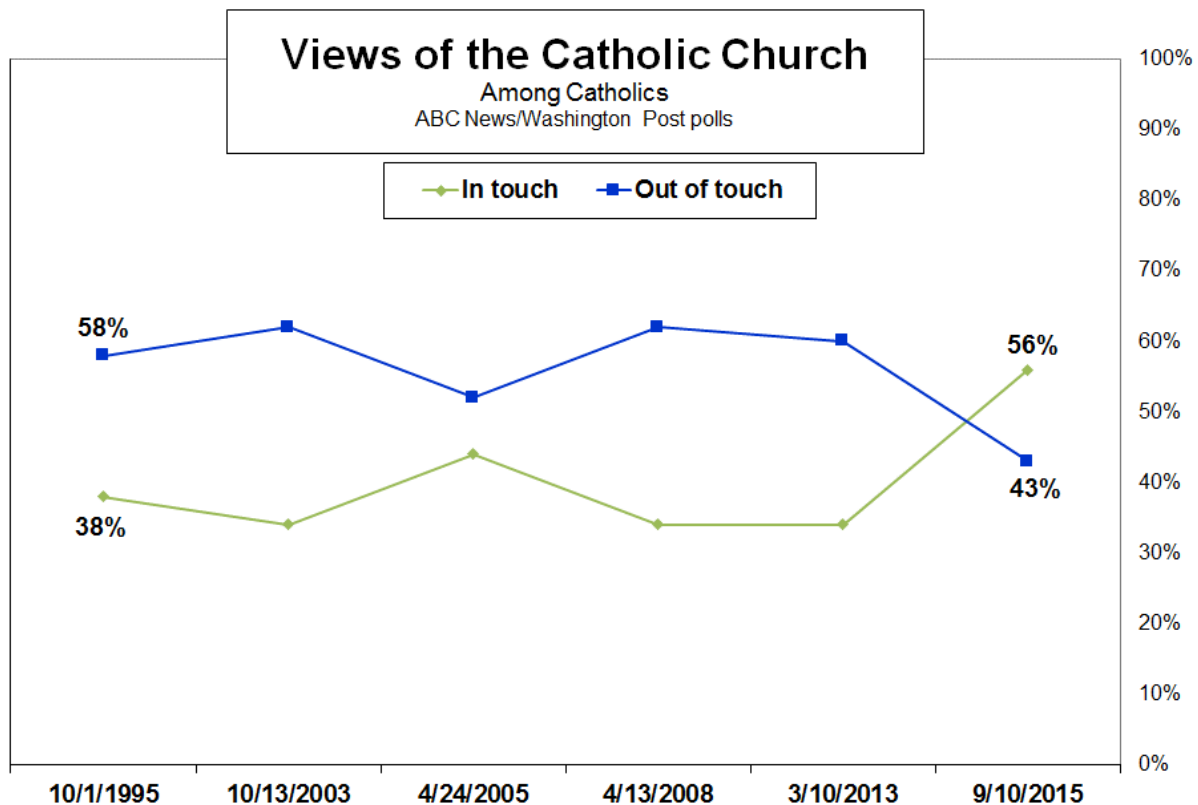


Views of the Church as “in Touch” Soar; Most See Real Change Under Francis

For the first time in 20 years, a majority of American Catholics say the church is in touch with their views, a number that’s risen dramatically under Pope Francis.

On the eve of his U.S. visit, two-thirds of Catholics in a new ABC News/Washington Post poll also say the pope is changing traditional church policies on important issues. And nine in 10 approve of the direction in which he’s leading the church.

There’s still room for improvement. Fifty-six percent of Catholics now see the church as in touch with the views of Catholics in America today – a less robust majority than the church might prefer. But that’s up from just 34 percent in March 2013, when Francis’ papacy began.



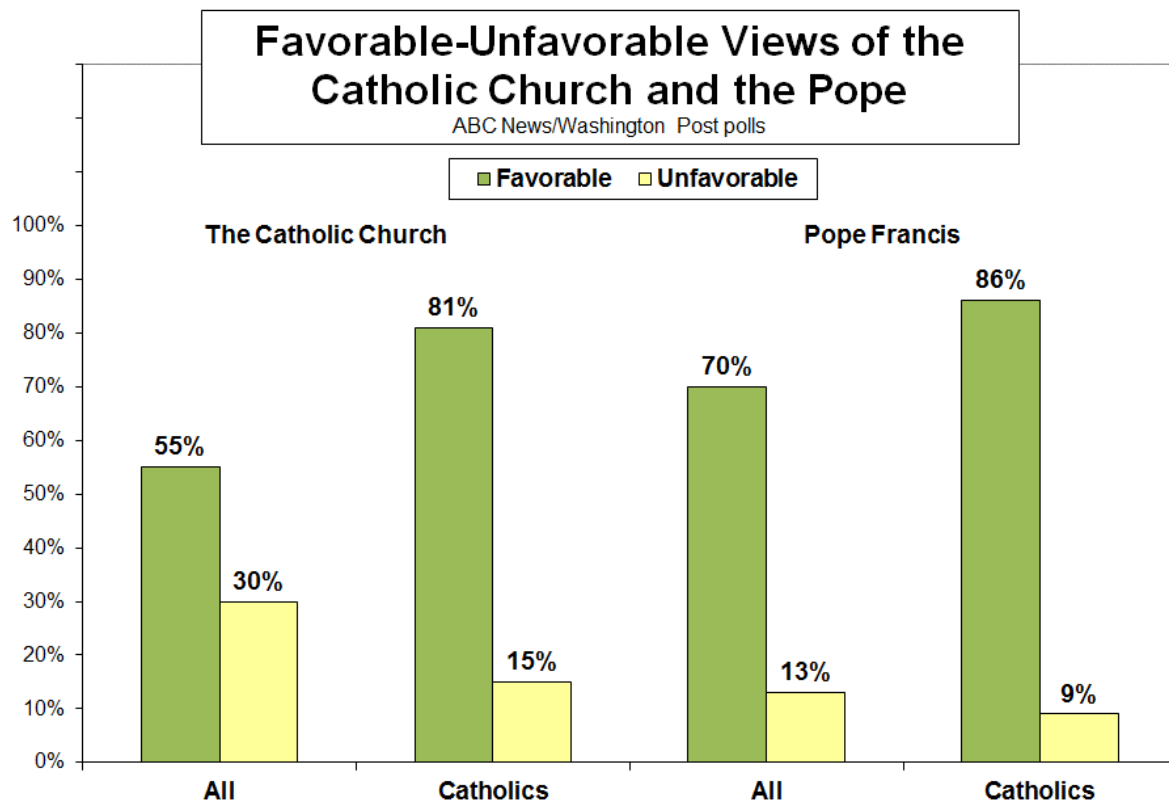
There’s also a sharp ideological division in views of the pope – in the opposite direction than existed for his predecessor, Benedict XVI. Among all Americans, those who call themselves

very conservative see Francis much less positively than others. Benedict, by contrast, was more popular among conservatives, less so among moderates and liberals.

That said, views of Pope Francis remain broadly positive in this poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#). Among all Americans, seven in 10 see him favorably, including 44 percent who feel that way strongly. His popularity rises to 86 percent among Catholics, including three-quarters who have strongly favorable views. While his overall popularity has been essentially steady, strongly positive views of the pope are up since late 2013 by 8 and 11 points among all Americans and Catholics, respectively.

At the same time, views that the church is in touch with American Catholics' beliefs are up sharply among Catholic men, but not women. And most Catholics would like to see the pope continue – but not expand – his activism on social, economic, and environmental issues. (Few, though, want him to curtail these activities.)

Further, some basic impressions of the Catholic Church have softened. Favorable views of the church overall increased in 2013 as Benedict resigned and Francis was elected in his place. Those positive ratings now have declined among all Americans and Catholics alike, by 7 and 14 points, respectively – essentially back to their previous levels. Today 55 percent of all adults and 81 percent of Catholics express a favorable opinion of the church.



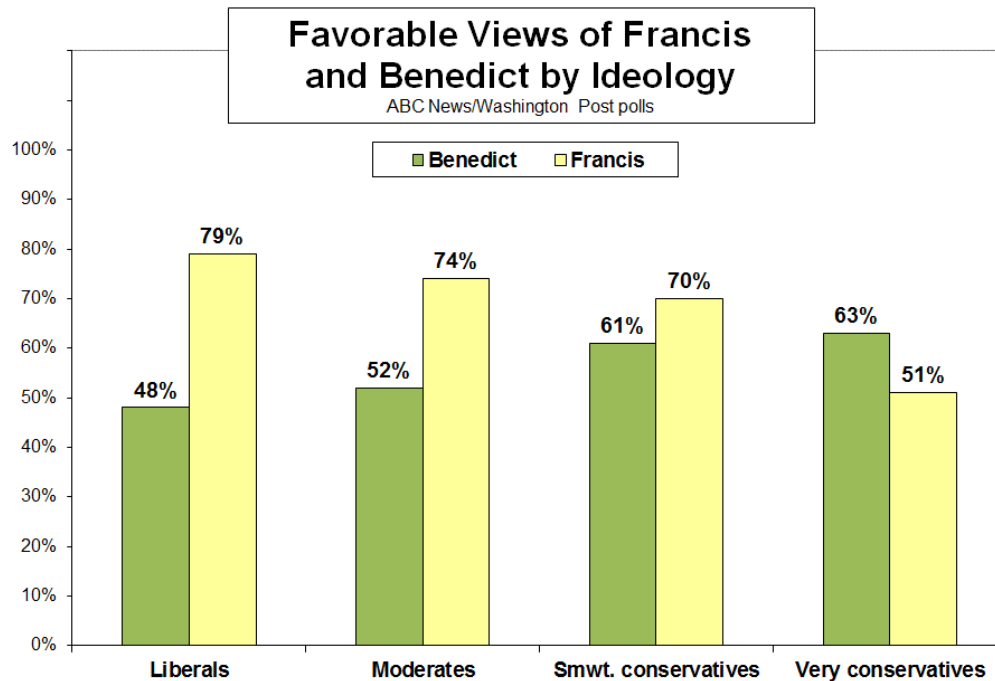
Twenty-two percent of Americans identify themselves as Catholics, a number that's held steady for more than a decade in ABC/Post polls. It peaks among Hispanics – 57 percent are Catholics, compared with 18 percent of whites and 7 percent of blacks. Hispanics, as such, are more apt than others to see the church and the pope favorably.

CONSERVATIVE QUALMS – As noted, very conservative Americans have far less positive views of the pope, likely reflecting perceptions that he's taken liberal positions on some issues. Just half of strong conservatives see him favorably, compared with seven in 10 or more of other conservatives, moderates and liberals alike.

Similarly, just 48 percent of very conservatives approve of the direction in which Francis is leading the church, compared with 61, 69 and 74 percent of somewhat conservatives, moderates and liberals, respectively. And fewer than half of strong conservatives – 47 percent – view the church itself favorably, compared with 57 percent of other adults.

	Favorable views of...		Approve of the church's direction
	Catholic church	Pope Francis	
Liberals	53%	79%	74%
Moderates	57	74	69
Somewhat conservatives	61	70	61
Very conservatives	47	51	48

Ideological differences followed a far different pattern during Pope Benedict's papacy. In February 2013, 63 percent of strong conservatives expressed a favorable opinion of him, as did 61 percent of other conservatives. Among moderates and liberals, favorable views were lower - 52 and 48 percent, respectively. In addition, seven in 10 conservatives had a favorable view of the Catholic Church then, compared with 61 and 53 percent of moderates and liberals.



ACTIVISM – Six in 10 Americans, including two-thirds of Catholics, see it as appropriate for the pope to urge government action on social, economic and environmental issues when he addresses a joint session of Congress on Sept. 24. About three in 10 in both groups see this as not appropriate, and that rises to 41 percent of strong conservatives.

A third of very conservative Americans also say Francis should be less active overall on these issues. Just 14 percent of all adults hold this view, while 23 percent say he should be more active and 54 percent say he should continue as he has been. (Views among Catholics are similar, 13-30-52 percent.)

GROUPS – There are differences among other groups. Among the 45 percent of Catholics who attend Mass more than once a month, views of the church are more favorable than they are among other Catholics, and people in this group are somewhat more likely to think the church is in touch. At the same time, they're also less likely to think the pope is changing traditional church policies (54 percent vs. 77 percent among other Catholics).

As noted, there is a large gender gap in Catholics' sense that the church is in touch with their views. Sixty-four percent of Catholic men now hold that view, a number that's nearly tripled since Francis' election, compared with 47 percent of Catholic women, essentially unchanged.

College graduates and higher-income Americans have more favorable views than others of Francis and the direction in which he is leading the church. At the same time, lower-income adults are more apt to think the pope should be more active than he is now on social, economic and environmental issues.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by landline and cellular telephone Sept. 7-10, 2015, in English and Spanish, among a random national sample of 1,003 adults, including 218 Catholics. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points for the full sample and 7.5 for Catholics, including the design effect.

The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by Abt-SRBI of New York, N.Y. See details on the survey's methodology [here](#).

Analysis by Julie Phelan.

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

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Full results follow.

1-23 previously released, 31 held for release.

24. Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of the Catholic Church? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

All:

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
9/10/15	55	22	33	30	18	12	15
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 opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
9/10/15	81	47	34	15	11	4	4
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

25. (ASKED OF CATHOLICS) In general, do you think the Catholic Church is in touch with the views of Catholics in America today, or is it out of touch?

	In touch	Out of touch	No opinion
9/10/15	56	43	1
3/10/13*	34	60	7
4/13/08	34	62	4
4/24/05	44	52	4
10/13/03	34	62	3
10/1/95	38	58	5

*2013 and previous: Roman Catholic Church

26. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of Pope Francis? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

All:

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
9/10/15	70	44	26	13	8	5	17
12/8/13	69	36	33	14	9	5	16

Catholics:

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
9/10/15	86	74	12	9	4	5	5
12/8/13	92	63	29	4	3	1	3

Compare to Pope Benedict XVI:

All:

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
2/17/13	54	22	32	27	17	10	19
4/13/08	48	NA	NA	24	NA	NA	28

Catholics:

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
2/17/13	76	43	33	14	8	6	9
4/13/08	74	NA	NA	13	NA	NA	14

Compare to John Paul II:

All:

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion
3/13/05	67	16	17
10/13/03	65	24	11
1/13/98	71	10	19
10/1/95	64	20	16
8/8/93	68	12	20
8/23/87	51	8	41

Catholics:

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion
3/13/05	87	8	5
10/13/03	84	11	5
10/1/95	83	10	7
8/23/87	76	4	20

27. 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?

All:

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
9/10/15	64	38	26	13	7	6	23
12/8/13	64	31	34	14	8	5	22

Catholics:

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
9/10/15	89	70	19	8	4	3	3
12/8/13	85	54	31	7	4	2	9

28. (ASKED OF CATHOLICS) Do you think the pope is (changing traditional church policies on important issues), or is he (keeping traditional church policies pretty much the same)?

	Changing policies	Keeping policies the same	No opinion
9/10/15	66	29	5

29. Pope Francis will be speaking to a joint session of the U.S. Congress this month. In that address, do you think it would or would not be appropriate for the pope to urge government action on social, economic, and environmental issues?

		Appropriate	Not appropriate	No opinion
9/10/15	All	59	31	10
	Catholics	67	27	6

30. More generally, would you like to see Pope Francis become more active on social, economic, and environmental issues, less active or continue as he has been?

		More active	Less active	Continue	No opinion
9/10/15	All	23	14	54	9
	Catholics	30	13	52	4

*** END ***