

March 18, 2013

Most Say Addressing Sex Abuse Scandal Should Be a  
Top Priority for the New Pope

---

U.S. Catholics Happy with Selection of  
Pope Francis

---

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

**Alan Cooperman**

Associate Director, Pew Research Center's  
Forum on Religion & Public Life

**Gregory Smith, Cary Funk**

Senior Researchers

**Jessica Hamar Martinez, Besheer  
Mohamed**

Research Associates

1615 L St, N.W., Suite 700

Washington, D.C. 20036

Tel (202) 419-4562

Fax (202) 419-4599

[www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org)

---

## Most Say Addressing Sex Abuse Scandal Should Be a Top Priority for the New Pope

# U.S. Catholics Happy with Selection of Pope Francis

In the days immediately following the selection of Pope Francis as the new leader of the Roman Catholic Church, nearly three-quarters of U.S. Catholics (73%) say they are happy with his selection, including 31% who say they are very happy. One quarter of Catholics do not yet have an opinion about Francis' selection, while just 2% express unhappiness.

Francis is the first Jesuit and the first Latin American to be elected pontiff. But in these early days, Catholics are divided over how big a change Francis represents for the church. Four-in-ten Catholics (41%) say the selection of Pope Francis represents a "major change," while a roughly equal number (44%) see his selection as "only a minor change" for the church.

---

### Reaction to Selection of Pope Francis

<i>Reaction to selection of Pope Francis</i>	<b>U.S. adults</b> %	<b>Catholics</b> %
Happy	44	73
<i>Very happy</i>	13	31
<i>Happy</i>	31	42
Unhappy	2	2
Not heard enough	43	24
Don't know	<u>10</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100
<i>Selection of Francis is...</i>		
Major change	29	41
Minor change	45	44
No change	3	3
Don't know	<u>23</u>	<u>12</u>
	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER March 13-17, 2013. Based on those interviewed March 14-17.

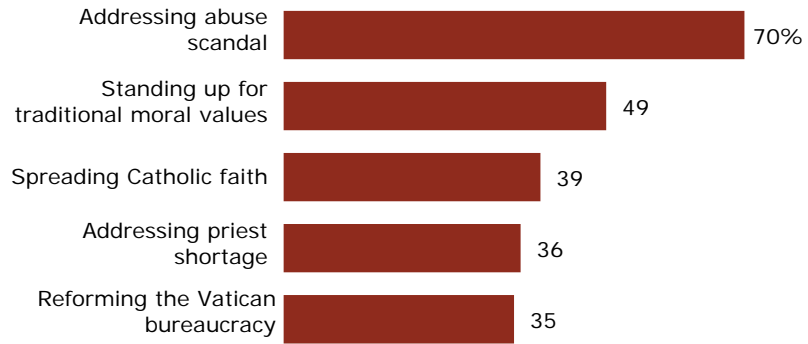
---

When asked about a list of possible priorities for the new pope, seven-in-ten Catholics say that addressing the sex abuse scandal should be “a top priority” for Francis. U.S. Catholics as a whole attach less importance to other possible priorities on the list. But among Catholics who say they attend Mass at least

once a week, roughly equal numbers cite “standing up for traditional moral values” (65%) and “addressing the sex abuse scandal” (63%) as top priorities for the new pope. By contrast, among Catholics overall 49% say that standing up for traditional moral values should be “a top priority” for Pope Francis. Roughly four-in-ten Catholics or fewer think that spreading the Catholic faith (39%), addressing the priest shortage (36%) and reforming the Vatican bureaucracy (35%) should be top priorities for the new pope.

### Catholics’ Priorities for the New Pope

*% of Catholics saying each should be “a top priority” for the new pope*



PEW RESEARCH CENTER March 13-17, 2013. Q100a-e. Based on Catholics. Other responses not shown.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center, conducted March 13-17 among 1,501 adults (including 325 Catholics), also finds that majorities of Catholics want the church to change some of its teachings and policies. Three-quarters of Catholics (76%), for example, say the church should allow Catholics to use birth control. Nearly two-thirds of Catholics (64%) say that priests should be allowed to get married, and six-in-ten (59%) endorse the idea of allowing women to become priests.

By comparison, fewer Catholics think that these changes will happen anytime

### Many Catholics Desire Change, Fewer Expect It

<i>Should the Catholic Church...</i>	Should %	Should not %	Don't know %
Permit birth control	76	18	7=100
Allow priests to marry	64	30	6=100
Allow women priests	59	35	6=100

<i>By 2050, do you think the church will...</i>	Definitely or probably will %	Definitely or probably will not %	Don't know %
Permit birth control	53	44	3=100
Allow priests to marry	39	57	4=100
Ordain women priests	37	60	3=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER March 13-17, 2013. Based on Catholics. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

soon. About half of U.S. Catholics (53%) say the church definitely or probably will change its position over the next 40 years or so to allow Catholics to use birth control. And roughly four-in-ten Catholics expect that by the year 2050 the church will allow priests to marry (39%) and will allow women to become priests (37%).

## Reactions to the New Pope

Roughly three-quarters of Catholics say they are happy with Francis' selection as pope, including 31% who are very happy. One quarter of Catholics (26%) say they have not heard enough to say whether they are happy with the selection or express no opinion. Very few Catholics are unhappy with the choice of Francis as pope (2%).

Nearly nine-in-ten Catholics who attend Mass at least once a week are happy with

Francis' selection (87%). By comparison, 62% of Catholics who attend Mass less often express happiness with the selection of Francis; about one-third of Catholics who attend Mass less than once a week (35%) express no opinion.

Catholic women are happier than Catholic men about the ascension of Francis to the papacy (80% vs. 65%); more men than women express no opinion (34% vs. 18%). Catholics age 50 and older express greater happiness about the selection than younger Catholics do (82% vs. 66%). Nearly one-third of Catholics under 50 have no opinion (31%), compared with roughly one-in-five Catholics age 50 and older (18%).

Compared with Catholics, members of other religious groups are more uncertain in their reactions to the selection of Francis as pope. Among both Protestants and the religiously unaffiliated, roughly six-in-ten express no opinion on the matter, saying they don't know or haven't heard enough to say.

### Most Catholics Happy with Selection of Pope Francis

	NET happy %	Very happy %	Happy %	NET Unhappy %	Haven't heard enough to say / Don't know %
<b>U.S. adults</b>	44	13	31	2	53=100
Catholic	73	31	42	2	26=100
Protestant	35	9	26	2	63=100
Unaffiliated	37	7	30	5	58=100
White	45	13	32	3	53=100
Black	35	9	26	1	64=100
Hispanic	50	18	32	1	48=100
<b>Among Catholics</b>					
Attend weekly+	87	47	41	0	13=100
Attend less often	62	19	43	3	35=100
Men	65	20	45	2	34=100
Women	80	41	40	1	18=100
18-49	66	26	40	3	31=100
50+	82	38	44	0	18=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER March 13-17, 2013. Q98. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Whites and blacks are non-Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Half of Hispanics – many of whom are Catholic – are happy with the selection of Francis, the first pope from Latin America. Whites express a similar level of happiness (45%). Compared with Hispanics, blacks express somewhat less happiness (35%) about Francis' selection; two-thirds of blacks (64%) express no opinion.

Catholics are divided over whether the selection of Francis as pope represents a major change or a minor change for the church; 41% of Catholics say this is a major change, while 44% say it is a minor change. The view that Francis' selection is a major change is more common among Catholics who attend Mass at least once a week (50%) than among those who attend Mass less often (34%).

Compared with Catholics, members of other religious groups are less inclined to see Francis' selection as a major change for the church. Less than one-third of Protestants (28%) and just one-fifth of the religiously unaffiliated (21%) say Francis' elevation to the papacy represents a major change.

Roughly four-in-ten U.S. Hispanics (43%) say Francis becoming pope is a major change for the church; fewer blacks (30%) and whites (26%) express this view.

Three-quarters of Catholics say they followed the selection of the new pope very (39%) or fairly closely (36%). The selection of the pope garnered less attention among the public as a whole, with about half of all U.S. adults saying they followed the story very closely (21%) or fairly closely (28%).

---

### Selection of Francis: Major Change or Minor Change for Church?

	Major change %	Minor change %	No change (VOL) %	Don't know %
U.S. adults	29	45	3	23=100
Catholic	41	44	3	12=100
Attend weekly+	50	39	1	10=100
Attend less	34	48	4	13=100
Protestant	28	45	2	26=100
Unaffiliated	21	49	4	26=100
White	26	48	3	23=100
Black	30	38	2	30=100
Hispanic	43	39	3	14=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER March 13-17, 2013. Q99. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Whites and blacks are non-Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

---



---

### Interest in Selection of New Pope

How closely did you follow selection of new pope?	U.S. adults %	Catholics %
Very closely	21	39
Fairly closely	28	36
Not too closely	21	14
Not at all closely	28	11
Don't know	1	0
	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER March 14-17, 2013. PEW1.c.

---

## Priorities for New Pope

The sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church remains a major concern among U.S. Catholics. Seven-in-ten (70%) say addressing the scandal should be “a top priority” for Pope Francis. Of five potential issues listed, this is the only one that most U.S. Catholics agree should be a top priority. The next most commonly named priority, standing up for traditional moral values, is seen as a top priority by about half of U.S.

Catholics (49%). Fewer Catholics say spreading the faith (39%), addressing the priest shortage (36%) and reforming the Vatican bureaucracy (35%) should be top priorities for the new pope.

Catholics who attend Mass at least once a week are as inclined to see standing up for traditional moral values as “a top priority” for the new pope (65%) as they are to say addressing the abuse scandal is “a top priority” (63%). By contrast, just four-in-ten Catholics who attend Mass less often (38%) say standing up for traditional values should be a top priority for Pope Francis. There also is a generation gap on this issue. Six-in-ten Catholics age 50 and older say standing up for traditional moral values should be a top priority for the new pope, but only four-in-ten Catholics under 50 (39%) express this view.

Regular Mass-attending Catholics also are more inclined than Catholics who attend Mass less often to say spreading the faith and addressing the priest shortage should be top priorities for the new pope.

---

### Addressing Sex Abuse Scandal Widely Seen as Top Priority

<i>% of Catholics saying each should be “a top priority” for Pope Francis</i>	<i>Attend Mass</i>		
	<b>U.S. Catholics</b>	<b>At least once a week</b>	<b>Less often</b>
	%	%	%
Addressing abuse scandal	70	63	74
Standing up for morals/values	49	65	38
Spreading Catholic faith	39	56	28
Addressing priest shortage	36	49	28
Reforming Vatican	35	35	36

PEW RESEARCH CENTER March 13-17, 2013. Q100a-e.

---

## Catholics' Views on Married Priests, Women Priests and Birth Control

Most Catholics support expanding eligibility for the Catholic priesthood. Roughly six-in-ten U.S. Catholics say the Catholic Church should allow priests to get married (64%), and about as many (59%) say the church should allow women to become priests. The survey also finds that three-quarters of Catholics (76%) think the church should permit its members to use birth control.

On these issues, there is less support for change among Catholics who attend Mass at least weekly than among those who attend Mass less often. But even among regular Mass-attending Catholics, there is considerable support for change. Half of weekly Mass-goers say the church should allow priests to marry (53%) and allow women to become priests (49%). And 62% of regular Mass attenders say the church should permit the use of birth control.

There is little in the way of generational or gender divisions among Catholics on these issues.

---

### Majority of U.S. Catholics Think Church Should Change Stance on Priesthood, Birth Control

*% of Catholics who think the church should allow...*

	<b>Priests to marry</b>	<b>Women to be priests</b>	<b>Use of birth control</b>
	%	%	%
All Catholics	64	59	76
Attend weekly +	53	49	62
Attend less often	71	66	84
Men	64	61	74
Women	64	58	77
18-49	65	61	77
50+	63	57	75

PEW RESEARCH CENTER. March 13-17, 2013. Q.101a-c.  
Based on Catholics.

---



When asked whether or not the church will allow priests to marry by the year 2050, about four-in-ten Catholics say they think this either definitely will happen (7%) or probably will happen (32%). Similar percentages say the church will definitely (6%) or probably (31%) begin ordaining women to the priesthood by the year 2050. Catholics' predictions about these matters have not changed significantly since 1999, when 43% said they expect to see married priests and 45% said they expect to see women priests by 2050.

About half of Catholics think the church will change its position on family planning to allow birth control by the year 2050 (53%).

---

### How Likely is Church to Change?

<i>% of Catholics who think church will definitely or probably...</i>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2013</b>
	%	%
Allow priests to marry	43	39
Ordain women as priests	45	37
Allow birth control	--	53

PEW RESEARCH CENTER. March 13-17, 2013. Q.102a-c.  
Based on Catholics.

---

## About the Surveys

Most of the analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted March 13-17, 2013, among a national sample of 1,501 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (750 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone and 751 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 385 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by Abt SRBI. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about the survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey. All questions were asked for the duration of the March 13-17 field period except Q.98-99, which were only asked March 14-17.

Group	Unweighted sample size (Mar. 13-17 field period)	Plus or minus...	Unweighted sample size (Q.98/99, Mar. 14-17)	Plus or minus...
Total sample	1,501	2.9 percentage points	1067	3.5 percentage points
Catholics	325	6.3 percentage points	236	7.4 percentage points
<i>Among Catholics</i>				
Attend weekly+	133	9.9 percentage points	106	11.1 percentage points
Attend less	191	8.3 percentage points	129	10.0 percentage points
Men	149	9.3 percentage points	108	11.0 percentage points
Women	176	8.6 percentage points	128	10.1 percentage points
Age 18-49	138	9.7 percentage points	105	11.1 percentage points
Age 50+	182	8.5 percentage points	126	10.2 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Some of the analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted March 14-17, 2013, among a separate national sample of 924 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (512 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone and 412 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 197 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Universal Survey Center and Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	924	3.9 percentage points
Catholics	195	8.4 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**MARCH 2013 POLITICAL SURVEY**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**March 13-17, 2013**  
**N=1,501**

**NOTE: OTHER QUESTIONS FROM THIS POLL HAVE BEEN HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL:**

On another subject...

RELIG What is your present religion, if any? Are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox such as Greek or Russian Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else, or nothing in particular?

**[INTERVIEWER: IF R VOLUNTEERS "nothing in particular, none, no religion, etc." BEFORE REACHING END OF LIST, PROMPT WITH: And would you say that's atheist, agnostic, or just nothing in particular?]**

Mar 13-17  
2013

37	Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Reformed, Church of Christ, Jehovah's Witness, etc.)
22	Roman Catholic (Catholic)
1	Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints/LDS)
1	Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church)
1	Jewish (Judaism)
*	Muslim (Islam)
1	Buddhist
1	Hindu
2	Atheist (do not believe in God)
3	Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)
2	Something else
14	Nothing in particular
14	Christian <b>(VOL.)</b>
*	Unitarian (Universalist) <b>(VOL.)</b>
1	Don't Know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>

**ASK ALL:**

ATTEND Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services... more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?

Mar 13-17, 2013	Based on		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Catholics</u>	
	12	8	More than once a week
	24	32	Once a week
	14	20	Once or twice a month
	21	24	A few times a year
	16	12	Seldom
	13	6	Never
	1	*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

**ASK ALL FROM MARCH 14-17 [N=1067]:**

As you may know Pope Francis was just selected to lead the Catholic Church...

Q.98 In general, are you very happy, happy, unhappy or very unhappy about the selection of Pope Francis as the new leader of the Catholic Church, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Mar 13-17		
<u>2013</u>		
13	Very happy	
31	Happy	
2	Unhappy	
1	Very unhappy	
43	Haven't heard enough to say	
10	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	

**ASK ALL FROM MARCH 14-17 [N=1067]:**

Q.99 Do you see Francis becoming Pope as a major change for the Catholic Church or only a minor change?

Mar 13-17		
<u>2013</u>		
29	Major change	
45	Minor change	
3	No change (VOL.)	
23	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	

**ASK IF CATHOLIC (RELIG=2) [N=325]:**

Q.100 I'd like to ask you about priorities for the new Pope in the coming years. (First,) should [INSERT FIRST ITEM; RANDOMIZE] be a top priority for Pope Francis, important but lower priority, not too important, or should it not be done? What about... [INSERT NEXT ITEM]? [REPEAT AS NECESSARY TO BE SURE RESPONDENT UNDERSTANDS SCALE: should this be a top priority, important but lower priority, not too important, or should it not be done?]<sup>1</sup>

		Important but	Not too	Should not	(VOL.)	
	<u>Top priority</u>	<u>lower priority</u>	<u>important</u>	<u>be done</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>	
a.	Spreading the Catholic faith Mar 13-17, 2013	39	43	11	3	3
b.	Addressing the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church Mar 13-17, 2013	70	22	3	2	2
c.	Addressing the priest shortage Mar 13-17, 2013	36	46	10	1	7
d.	Reforming the Vatican bureaucracy Mar 13-17, 2013	35	40	10	3	11

<sup>1</sup> When this question was asked Wednesday, March 14, the wording began, "As you may know Pope Francis was just selected to lead the Catholic Church..."

## Q.100 CONTINUED...

		<u>Top priority</u>	<u>Important but lower priority</u>	<u>Not too important</u>	<u>Should not be done</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
e.	Standing up for traditional moral values Mar 13-17, 2013	49	38	7	2	4

**ASK IF CATHOLIC (RELIG=2) [N=325]:**

Next...

Q.101 Do you think the Catholic Church should or should not **[INSERT FIRST ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**? And do you think the Catholic Church should or should not **[INSERT NEXT ITEM]**?

		<u>Should</u>	<u>Should not</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	Allow priests to get married Mar 13-17, 2013	64	30	6
b.	Allow women to become priests Mar 13-17, 2013	59	35	6
c.	Allow Catholics to use birth control Mar 13-17, 2013	76	18	7

**ASK IF CATHOLIC (RELIG=2) [N=325]:**

Q.102 Regardless of what you'd like to see, how likely do you think each of the following is to happen in the next 40 years, that is by the year 2050 **[PRONOUNCED: "twenty-fifty"]**. (First,) How likely do you think it is that **[INSERT IN SAME ORDER AS Q.101]**? Do you think this will definitely happen, will probably happen, will probably NOT happen, or will definitely not happen, in about the next 40 years? How about **[INSERT NEXT ITEM]**? **[READ AS NECESSARY]**: Do you think this will definitely happen, will probably happen, will probably NOT happen, or will definitely not happen, in the next 40 years?<sup>2</sup>

		<u>-----Will happen -----</u>			<u>----- Will not happen -----</u>			<b>(VOL.)</b>
		<u>Total</u>	<u>Def-initely</u>	<u>Probably</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Def-initely</u>	<u>Probably</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	the Catholic Church will allow priests to marry Mar 13-17, 2013	39	7	32	57	18	39	4
	<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b> May, 1999	43	6	36	54	22	33	3
b.	the Catholic Church will ordain women as priests Mar 13-17, 2013	37	6	31	60	17	44	3
	<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:</b> May, 1999	45	6	39	54	15	39	1
c.	the Catholic Church will change its position on family planning to allow birth control Mar 13-17, 2013	53	8	46	44	10	34	3

<sup>2</sup> In May 1999 survey began, "Now I'm going to read you a list of things that may or may not happen in the next 50 years. Please tell me how likely you think it is that each will happen."

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**March 14-17, 2013 OMNIBUS**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=924**

**NOTE: OTHER QUESTIONS FROM THIS POLL HAVE BEEN PREVIOUSLY RELEASED OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] [IF NECESSARY "Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?"]**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
c. The selection of the new Pope					
March 14-17, 2013	21	28	21	28	1
May, 2005	22	33	23	20	2

**TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:**

March 7-10, 2013: <i>Catholic cardinals meeting in Rome to select a new pope</i>	14	23	26	36	*
February 14-17, 2013: <i>Pope Benedict announcing that he would step down as head of the Catholic Church</i>	18	26	27	29	1
March 29-April 1, 2012: <i>Pope Benedict's visit to Cuba and Mexico</i>	5	15	23	57	*
September 16-19, 2010: <i>Pope Benedict's visit to Great Britain and his comments on the Catholic Church's handling of sex-abuse scandals</i>	10	16	26	47	1