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Positive Impact of Pope Francis on Views of the Church, Especially Among Democrats and Liberals

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

Alan Cooperman, Director of Religion Research

Gregory A. Smith, Associate Director, Research

Jessica Hamar Martínez, Senior Researcher

Stefan S. Cornibert, Communications Associate

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

Positive Impact of Pope Francis on Views of the Church, Especially Among Democrats and Liberals

In the wake of Pope Francis' visit to the United States, a new Pew Research Center survey finds that the pope has generated goodwill toward the Roman Catholic Church among many people across the political spectrum. Ideological liberals and moderates, along with Democrats, are especially likely to say Francis has given them a more positive view of the Catholic Church.

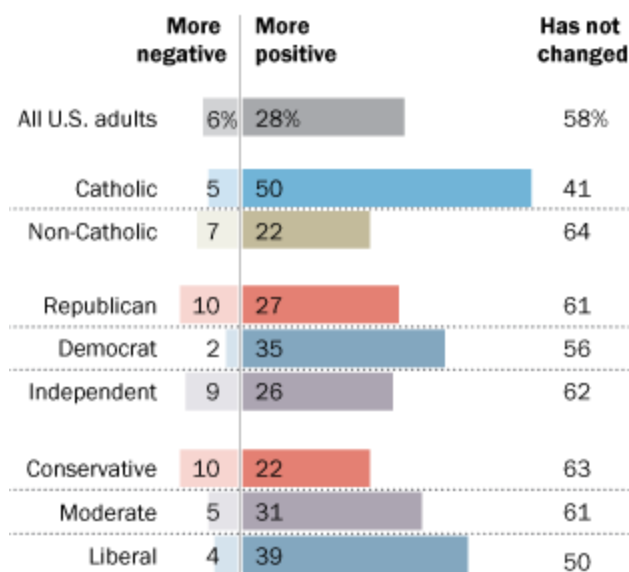
At the same time, the popular pope's own favorability rating remains about where it was in early 2015. And most Americans say their view of the Catholic Church has not changed because of Pope Francis.

Overall, 28% of U.S. adults say they have a more positive view of the Catholic Church because of Pope Francis. Far fewer – just 6% – say they have a more negative view of the church because of Francis. Roughly six-in-ten Americans (58%) say their view of the Catholic Church has not changed very much.

Both Catholics and non-Catholics are more likely to say that Francis has had a positive rather than negative impact on their view of the church; the same is true of Americans in both major political parties and across the ideological spectrum. But improved views of the Catholic Church are especially apparent among self-identified liberals and moderates as well as among Democrats. Nearly four-in-ten liberals (39%), for instance, say they have a more positive view of the Catholic Church because of Pope Francis, dwarfing the 4% who say they have a more negative view of the church by a 10-to-1 margin. And among ideological moderates, 31% say their view of the Catholic Church has improved because of Pope Francis, while 5% say their view of the church has become more

Pope Francis' Effect on Views of the Catholic Church: More Positive Than Negative

View of the Catholic Church is _____ because of Pope Francis



Source: Pew Research Center survey, Oct. 1-4, 2015. Don't know/refused answers not shown.

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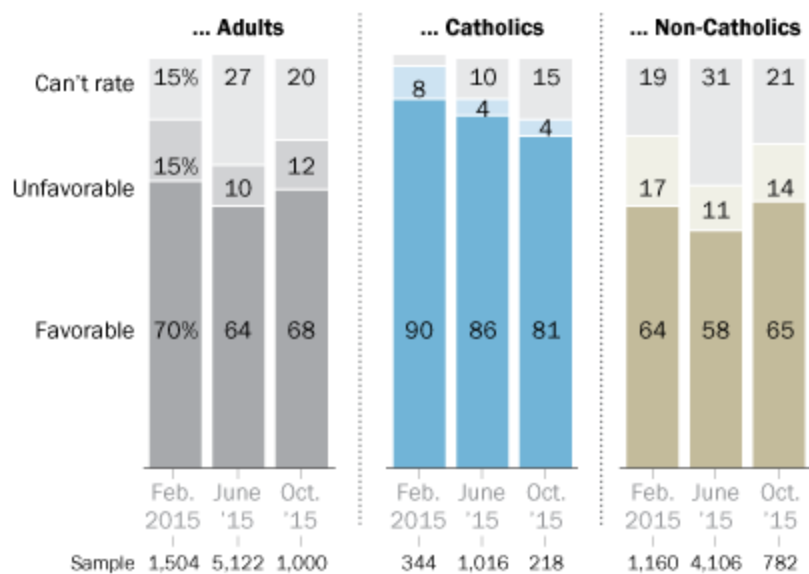
negative, a 6-to-1 ratio. Among conservatives, by contrast, the ratio of those with a more positive view of the church (22%) to those with a more negative view (10%) is closer to 2-to-1.

A similar split is seen among Democrats and Republicans. While 27% of Republicans say Francis has had a positive impact on their view of the Catholic Church and just 10% say they have a more negative view (a ratio of nearly 3-to-1), the ratio of positive to negative sentiments is even more lopsided among Democrats. Fully 35% of Democrats say they have a more positive view of the Catholic Church because of Pope Francis, while just 2% say Francis has pushed their view of the church in the other direction – a ratio of roughly 17-to-1.

Francis' own favorability rating now stands at 68%, up modestly since June, when 64% of American adults said they had a favorable view of the pope, and roughly equivalent to the 70% of Americans who expressed a positive view of the pontiff in February 2015. The recent improvement (between June and October) in Francis' favorability rating is concentrated among non-Catholics. Roughly two-thirds of non-Catholics (65%) now express a favorable view of Pope Francis, which is on par with February (when 64% of non-Catholics expressed a favorable opinion of the pope as he approached the two-year mark of his papacy) and up 7 percentage points since June.

Non-Catholics' Views of Pope Francis More Positive After U.S. Visit

Among U.S. ...



Source: Pew Research Center survey, Oct. 1-4, 2015. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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Eight-in-ten Catholics surveyed (81%) now say they have a favorable view of Pope Francis. By comparison, 86% of Catholics expressed a favorable view of Pope Francis in June, and fully nine-in-ten Catholics (90%) expressed a favorable view of the pontiff in February. Pope Francis' favorability rating among U.S. Catholics is now roughly equivalent to the rating Catholics gave Pope Benedict XVI following his visit to the country in April 2008.

These are among the key findings of a new Pew Research survey, conducted Oct. 1-4, 2015, on landlines and cellphones among a national sample of 1,000 adults. While the survey provides a helpful initial snapshot of the impact of Francis' visit on Americans' views about the pope and the Catholic Church, its limited size (it included interviews with just 218 self-identified Catholics) and duration (interviews were conducted over just four days) make it difficult to discern much about *why* Catholics may be somewhat less admiring of Pope Francis now than they were earlier in the year.

The data do suggest, however, that Francis' declining favorability rating among Catholics is mainly due to the changing views of regular Mass-attending Catholics. Among the 97 Catholics interviewed who say they attend Mass at least once a week, 84% have a favorable view of Pope Francis – down since February, when fully

95% of regular Mass-attending Catholics expressed a favorable view of the pontiff. Mass-attending Catholics have not become significantly more likely to express *unfavorable* views of Pope Francis; rather, they are now more likely to say they have no opinion.

Over the same period, there has been essentially no change in the share of Catholics who attend Mass less than once a week who view Francis favorably.

Slightly Fewer Regular Mass-Attending Catholics Now Express Favorable View of Pope Francis

	Among Catholics who attend Mass at least once a week			Among Catholics who attend Mass less often		
	Feb 2015	June 2015	Oct 2015	Feb 2015	June 2015	Oct 2015
View of Pope Francis...	%	%	%	%	%	%
Favorable	95	92	84	86	83	83
Unfavorable	4	3	5	10	5	3
Can't rate	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>14</u>
	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sample size	156	431	97	187	584	111

Source: Pew Research Center survey, Oct. 1-4, 2015. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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The data also show that among the public as a whole, including both Catholics and non-Catholics, Francis is more popular among Democrats than either Republicans or Independents. Partisan differences in views of Pope Francis were smaller in February of this year. Ideological liberals and moderates also see the pope more favorably than do conservatives.

Pope Francis Most Popular Among Democrats, Ideological Liberals and Moderates

% of U.S. adults with a very or mostly favorable view of Pope Francis

	Feb 2015	June 2015	Oct 2015
		%	%
Republican	73	61	67
Democrat	73	71	80
Independent	67	63	63
Conservative	67	59	62
Moderate	73	69	73
Liberal	74	71	76

Source: Pew Research Center survey, Oct. 1-4, 2015.

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In addition to asking about views of Pope Francis and his impact on impressions of the Catholic Church, the survey asked respondents what “one word” best describes their impression of Pope Francis. Among the most commonly mentioned words were “good,” “humble,” “kind” and “compassionate.” Positive words like these were mentioned far more often than neutral or negative words (like “religious,” “liberal” or “socialist”). Indeed, of the words that could be coded as positive or neutral/negative descriptions of the pope, fully three-quarters (76%) were positive, while 24% were neutral or negative.¹

What One Word Best Describes Your Impression of Pope Francis?

Figures show the number of respondents who mentioned each word; they are NOT percentages

	Number of mentions
<i>Positive words</i>	
Good/good person	60
Humble	38
Kind	36
Compassionate	29
Honest	18
Holy	17
Caring	14
<i>Neutral/negative words</i>	
Religious	20
Liberal	16
Progressive	11
OK	11
Pope	10
A man/human	8
Socialist	8

Source: Pew Research Center survey, Oct. 1-4, 2015. Figures show the number of respondents who mentioned each word; figures are not percentages. Select responses shown; for complete list, see survey topline.

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¹ Only words that were mentioned at least four times were coded as positive, neutral or negative. Words mentioned by fewer than four respondents are not included in these tallies.

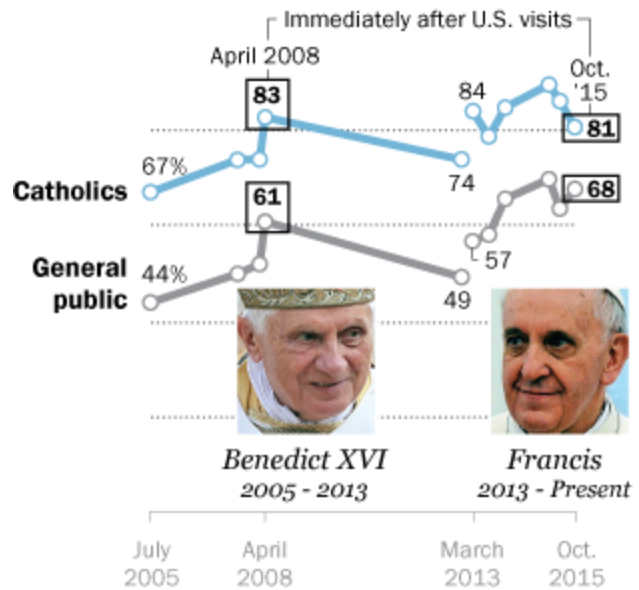
Trends in Papal Favorability Ratings

The new poll, conducted during the week following Pope Francis' visit to the United States, provides the opportunity to make comparisons with the public's reaction to Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the U.S. in 2008. Throughout his papacy, Pope Francis has generally been viewed more positively than was Pope Benedict by Americans overall. And compared with readings taken right before they visited, both popes received a modest "bounce" in their favorability ratings immediately following their respective trips to the U.S. Compared with a poll taken the previous month, the share of American adults expressing a favorable view of Pope Benedict grew by 9 points (from 52% to 61%) immediately following his April 2008 visit. Favorable views of Pope Francis have ticked up by 4 points compared with a survey conducted in May and June of 2015.

Pope Benedict's post-visit bounce was just as pronounced among Catholics as among the public as a whole; 83% of Catholics expressed a favorable view of Pope Benedict immediately following his visit, up from 74% the month before. By contrast, there has been no increase at all in the share of Catholics expressing a favorable view of Pope Francis following his trip. And while Francis has generally been more warmly regarded by Catholics than was Benedict, Francis' current favorability rating among Catholics is about the same as Pope Benedict's peak rating immediately following his visit to the U.S.

Francis is, however, viewed "very favorably" by more Catholics than Pope Benedict was even immediately following his 2008 U.S. trip; 62% of Catholics now say they have a "very favorable" view of Pope Francis, along with 20% who have a "mostly favorable" view. In April 2008, 49% of Catholics expressed a "very favorable" view of Pope Benedict while 34% expressed a "mostly favorable" view.

Favorable Views of the Pope



Source: Pew Research Center survey, Oct. 1-4, 2015.

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Papal Visit Followed at Least Fairly Closely by Most Catholics, Nearly Half of Non-Catholics

Half of American adults say they followed news about the papal visit “very closely” (22%) or “fairly closely” (28%). Among Catholics, about six-in-ten say they followed news about Pope Francis’ visit to the U.S. at least fairly closely, including 35% who followed the visit “very closely.” One-third of Catholics say they followed the visit “not too closely” (19%) or “not at all closely” (14%).

To put these figures in context, a survey conducted in May of this year found that two-thirds of U.S. adults (66%) said they followed news about unrest in Baltimore following Freddie Gray’s death “very” or “fairly” closely, and a survey conducted in January 2015 found that 43% of adults followed news about President Obama’s State of the Union speech “very” or “fairly” closely.

This year’s papal visit was followed at least fairly closely by nearly six-in-ten people residing in the Northeast region of the country (57%), along with roughly half of Americans living in the Midwest (52%) and South (50%). Compared with the Northeast, fewer Westerners (42%) say they followed Pope Francis’ visit closely.

Half of Public Followed Papal Visit at Least Fairly Closely

How closely did you follow news about Pope Francis’ visit to U.S.?

	All U.S. adults	Catholics	Non-Catholics
	%	%	%
NET Very/fairly closely	50	62	46
Very closely	22	35	18
Fairly closely	28	27	28
NET Not too/not at all closely	48	33	52
Not too closely	25	19	27
Not at all closely	22	14	25
Don’t know	3	5	2
	100	100	100

Source: Pew Research Center survey, Oct. 1-4, 2015. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted Oct. 1-4, 2015, among a national sample of 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in the continental United States (500 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone and 500 were interviewed on a cellphone, including 305 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Survey Sampling International under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cellphone 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 our survey methodology, see <http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>.

The combined landline and cellphone sample is weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the 2013 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 (landline only, cellphone only, or both landline and cellphone), based on extrapolations from the 2014 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both a landline and a cellphone have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

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:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,000	3.8 percentage points
Catholics	218	8.1 percentage points
Attend Mass weekly	97	12.1 percentage points
Attend less often	111	11.3 percentage points
Non-Catholics	782	4.3 percentage points
Republican	258	7.4 percentage points
Democrat	281	7.1 percentage points
Independent	316	6.7 percentage points
Conservative	347	6.4 percentage points
Moderate	306	6.8 percentage points
Liberal	210	8.2 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.

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER
OCTOBER 1-4, 2015 OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,000**

ASK ALL:

PEW.1 Is your overall opinion of **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]** very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly UNfavorable, or very unfavorable? How about **[NEXT NAME]**? **[IF NECESSARY: Just in general, is your overall opinion of [NAME] very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly UNfavorable, or very unfavorable?] [INTERVIEWERS: PROBE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN "NEVER HEARD OF" AND "CAN'T RATE."]**

	-----Favorable-----			-----Unfavorable-----			(VOL.)	(VOL.)
	Total	Very	Mostly	Total	Very	Mostly	Never heard of	Can't rate/Ref
a. Pope Francis								
Oct 1-4, 2015	68	35	33	12	5	7	5	15
May 5-Jun 7, 2015	64	29	35	10	4	5	8	19
Feb 18-22, 2015	70	29	40	15	5	10	5	11
Feb 14-23, 2014	66	30	36	11	4	7	7	16
Sep 4-8, 2013	58	21	37	12	4	7	10	20
Mar 28-31, 2013	57	22	35	14	6	9	6	22
Feb 14-17, 2013 (Benedict XVI)	49	14	34	27	12	16	4	20
April, 2008 (Benedict XVI)	61	22	39	17	8	9	4	18
March, 2008 (Benedict XVI)	52	18	34	18	6	12	7	23
August, 2007 (Benedict XVI)	50	14	36	18	6	12	8	24
July, 2005 (Benedict XVI)	44	10	34	11	4	7	4	41
June, 1996 (John Paul II)	76	28	48	13	4	9	1	10
May, 1990 (John Paul II)	79	31	48	11	4	7	1	9
May, 1987 (John Paul II)	76	28	48	14	4	10	1	9

QUESTIONS PEW.1B AND PEW.1C HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**ASK ALL:**

PEW.2 Did you happen to follow news about the visit of Pope Francis to the United States very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?

Oct 1-4

2015

22	Very closely
28	Fairly closely
25	Not too closely
22	Not at all closely
3	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

PEW.3 What ONE WORD best describes your impression of Pope Francis? Just the one word that best describes him. [**OPEN-END. PROBE ONCE IF RESPONDENT ANSWERS "DON'T KNOW". ACCEPT UP TO TWO RESPONSES. IF RESPONDENT SAYS "CATHOLIC" OR "CATHOLICISM" PROBE FOR A SECOND RESPONSE. OTHERWISE, DO NOT PROBE FOR A SECOND RESPONSE.**]

NOTE: THE NUMBERS LISTED REPRESENT THE NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO OFFERED EACH RESPONSE. THE NUMBERS ARE NOT PERCENTAGES. UNIQUE RESPONSES OF THREE OR LESS ARE NOT LISTED.

60	Good/good man/good person	7	Hope/hopeful	4	Admirable
38	Humble	7	Impressive	4	All right
36	Kind	7	Political	4	Better/best
29	Compassionate	7	Sincere	4	Christian
20	Religious	6	Catholic	4	Committed
18	Honest	6	Cool	4	Decent
17	Holy	6	Humanitarian	4	Graceful
16	Liberal	6	Intelligent	4	Hypocrite
14	Caring	6	Passionate	4	Outstanding
13	Loving/love	6	Personable	4	Positive
13	Open/open minded	6	Realistic	4	Saintly
11	Honorable	5	Awesome		
11	Nice/nice person	5	Charismatic		
11	Okay	5	Down to earth		
11	Progressive	5	Faithful		
10	Pope	5	Favorable		
9	Genuine	5	Gentle		
9	Peaceful	5	Godly		
9	Wonderful	5	Happy		
8	Amazing	5	Incredible		
8	A man/human	5	Inspirational/inspiring		
8	Fair	5	Interesting		
8	Great/great person	5	Leader		
8	Likeable	5	Respect		
8	Socialist	5	Smart		
7	Excellent	5	Spiritual		
7	Friendly				

ASK ALL:

PEW.4 Generally speaking, would you say that because of Pope Francis you have [**RANDOMIZE:** a more positive view of the Catholic Church, a more negative view of the Catholic Church], or has your view of the Catholic Church not changed very much because of Pope Francis?

Oct 1-4

2015

28	More positive
6	More negative
58	Has not changed
7	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)