

Key Findings

The Shriver Report Snapshot: Catholics in America

From August 28 to September 2, 2015, Hart Research and Echelon Insights conducted an online survey among 1,000 Catholics nationwide. The firms contracted with a third-party vendor, Research Now, to send invitations to its panel of 2.3 million respondents. The survey is nationally representative of the adult population of Catholics age 18 and older and comports with publicly available demographic and polling data for that population. An online survey that is self-administered particularly is useful for a survey such as this that explores potentially controversial and sensitive topics such as attitudes about religion, faith, and sex. Hart Research, a Democratic polling firm, conducted this study in partnership with the Republican firm Echelon Insights and the firm's co-founder and partner, Kristen Soltis Anderson.

American Catholics endorse the direction in which Pope Francis is taking the Catholic Church. They say that he has made them more connected to the Catholic Church, and their beliefs are more likely to match up with Pope Francis's than the institution that he leads.

- Four in nine (44%) American Catholics say that Pope Francis has made them feel closer and more connected to the Catholic Church, while just 5% feel that he has made them more distant and less connected to it. Half (51%) of Catholics say that he has not affected their feelings toward the Catholic Church either way. While Catholics who attend church more frequently and older Catholics (who also attend church more frequently) are more likely than other Catholics to say that Pope Francis has made them feel more connected to the Church, it is remarkable that even Catholics who never attend church are more likely to say that Pope Francis has made them feel closer to the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis and his Impact			
	Made me feel closer to Catholic Church	Made me feel more distant from Catholic Church	Not affected how I feel about Catholic Church
	%	%	%
All Catholics	44	5	51
18-34	40	7	53
35-49	49	3	48
50-64	41	5	54
65 and older	46	4	50
Attend church weekly	63	4	33
Attend church 1-2 times/month	49	8	43
Attend church 1-2 times/year	38	4	58
Never attend church	25	4	71

- More than three in four (77%) American Catholics say that Pope Francis and his teachings coincide with their beliefs about what it means to be a good Catholic all or most of the time. This compares with 58% who say that the Catholic Church is in step with their social and cultural values. While those who attend church weekly have similar views of Pope Francis and the Catholic Church being in step with their beliefs or values (90% for Pope Francis and 80% for the Church), less frequent church attendees identify more closely with Pope Francis than with the institution that he leads. And a majority (59%) of Catholics who say that the Church is out of step with their own values believe that Pope Francis’s teachings match up with their beliefs all or most of the time, underscoring the Pope’s popularity and his ability to speak to those who the Church is unable to reach.

Pope Francis and the Catholic Church		
	Pope Francis’s teachings match up with your beliefs all/most of time	Catholic Church in step with your social and cultural values
	%	%
All Catholics	77	58
Attend church weekly	90	80
Attend church 1-2 times/month	85	65
Attend church 1-2 times/year	76	51
Never attend church	53	34

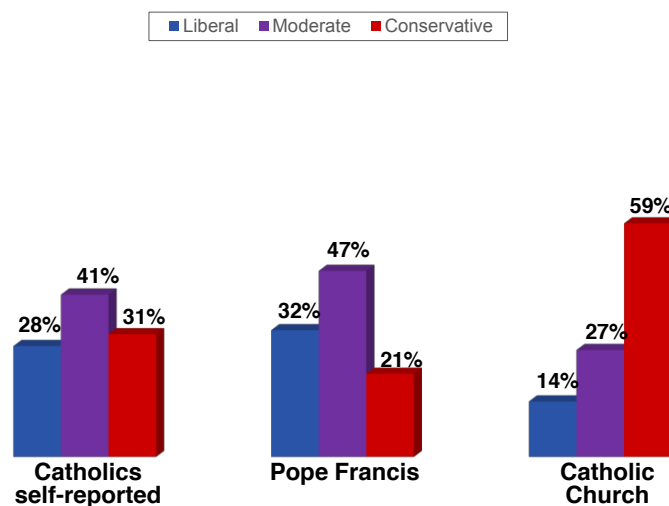
- While American Catholics across the ideological spectrum see the Catholic Church as conservative, they are much more likely to see Pope Francis as a reflection of their own personal ideology. A plurality (41%) of American Catholics see themselves as moderate, while the rest are divided between identifying as conservatives (31%) and liberals (28%). Nearly half (47%) of American Catholics also see Pope Francis as moderate, while 32% see him as liberal, and just 21% see him as conservative. However, a majority of American Catholics view the Catholic Church as conservative (59%), while 27% see it in moderate terms, and just 14% see it as liberal. Women are much more likely than men to see the Catholic Church as conservative (70% to 47%).

Not only do American Catholics believe that the Pope’s ideological point of view resembles their own, but liberal Catholics are most likely to see the Pope as liberal (48%), a majority (55%) of moderate Catholics are most likely to see the Pope as moderate, and conservative Catholics see him either as moderate (38%) or conservative (37%).

While Pope Francis’s ideology correlates with American Catholics’ view of their own, the same cannot be said for the institution that he leads. A majority (59%) of conservative American Catholics and moderates (52%) see the Church as conservative, while liberals are most likely to view it as conservative (70%).

Ideologically, American Catholics are more likely to see themselves in Pope Francis than the Catholic Church.

Thinking about (your/Pope Francis’s/the Catholic Church’s general approach to issues, do you consider it to be?



American Catholics see the Catholic Church as a force for good, but they have significant concerns about the institution and many have considered leaving the faith.

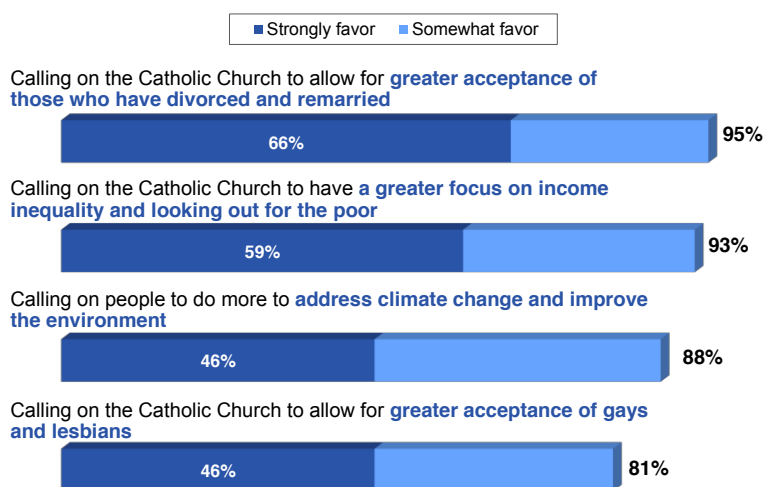
- An overwhelming 94% believe that the Catholic Church is a force for good in the world, and even 82% of those who never attend church share this belief.
- But 82% of American Catholics believe that the Catholic Church has not done enough to crack down on sex abuse scandals and hold alleged offenders accountable. Those who attend church infrequently but still are going to church at least once or twice a month (82%) or once or twice a year (91%) are most likely to agree that the Church needs to do more.
- A majority (52%) also believe that the Catholic Church is more interested in preserving institutional power than serving the poor, a primary interest of Pope Francis's.
- Nearly two in five (38%) Catholics nationwide report that they have strongly considered leaving the Catholic faith. A majority of those who say that the Catholic Church is out of step with their values also say that they have strongly considered leaving the Catholic Church (53%). Of greatest concern for the Church is the Catholics who represent the future of the Church—18- to 34-year-olds are twice as likely as those ages 65 and older to say they have considered leaving the Church (52% to 26%). Moreover, while younger Catholics are as likely as their parents to say that their faith is important to them, they are less likely to attend church weekly.

American Catholics ideologically look more like Pope Francis than they do the Catholic Church, and they overwhelmingly support his increased focus on income inequality and the environment as opposed to more controversial social issues.

- By 86% to 14%, American Catholics are more likely to believe it is good that Pope Francis is emphasizing teachings that are more in line with general cultural shifts of society with a greater focus on the environment and looking out for the poor, rather than it is a bad thing because he is moving the Church away from its traditional focus. Those who believe this is a good thing include strong majorities of those who attend church weekly (84%) and conservatives (77%)—the core of the Church—as well as those who never attend church services (86%) and liberals (92%).
- Fully 93% of American Catholics favor the Pope calling on the Catholic Church to have a greater focus on income inequality and looking out for the poor.

- And 88% of American Catholics favor the Pope calling on people to do more to address climate change and improve the environment. This includes 83% of weekly churchgoers and 77% of conservatives. There also is widespread partisan agreement, with 96% of Democrats, 87% of independents, and 77% of Republicans in support of this.
- American Catholics also support the Pope’s calls for greater acceptance within the Church on social issues. Ninety-five percent (95%) agree with his calling for greater acceptance of those who have divorced or remarried, including 95% of weekly churchgoers and 96% of conservatives. And 81% of American Catholics also agree on his call for the Catholic Church to be more accepting of gays and lesbians, including 73% of weekly churchgoers and 66% of conservatives, as well as 90% of Democrats, 79% of independents, and 69% of Republicans.

Support for Positions Taken by Pope Francis

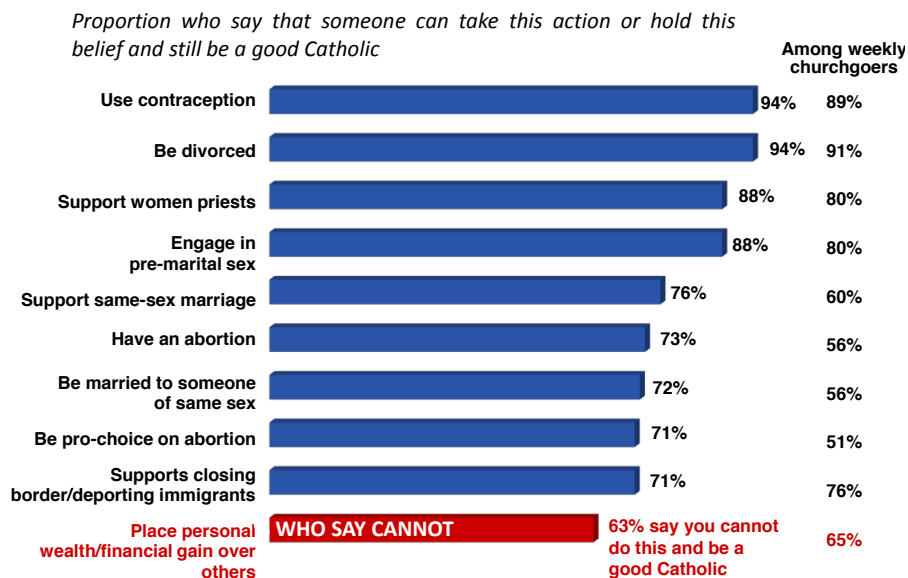


Most Catholics see themselves as being “good Catholics” and are more accepting and tolerant of actions or beliefs of others that the Catholic Church traditionally has not tolerated among its flock. Their vision is of a Church that is more inclusive of its parishioners.

- Seven in 10 (71%) Catholics see themselves as being good Catholics, and majorities of those who the Catholic Church traditionally would not consider good Catholics believe that they are.
 - 68% of those who support same-sex marriage consider themselves to be good Catholics;

- 65% of those who believe abortion should be legal believe they are good Catholics;
 - 60% of those who are divorced or separated consider themselves to be good Catholics;
 - And while church attendance definitely colors perceptions of being a good Catholic, with 96% of weekly churchgoers believing they are, those who attend church once or twice a month (84%) or once or twice a year (66%) also believe that they are good Catholics. Three in 10 (30%) Catholics who never attend church also believe they are good Catholics.
- Indeed, American Catholics overall are very accepting of other Catholics, and majorities believe that you still can be a good Catholic and have taken the following actions or hold the following beliefs. What is particularly noteworthy here is that majorities of weekly churchgoers, the core of the Catholic Church in America, also hold this more accepting point of view. So, while Pope Francis is calling for greater acceptance within the Church and appealing to disaffected Catholics, he is not distancing himself from the core of churchgoers in America.
 - Reinforcing this is the fact that an overwhelming majority (92%) agree that divorced Catholics should be allowed to take communion and remarry in the Catholic Church, including 87% of more traditionally conservative, weekly churchgoers.
 - Overall, a majority (56%) of American Catholics also agree that same-sex couples should be allowed to marry in the Catholic Church. But this is an example of a social issue that is more divisive within the Church, as just 25% of weekly churchgoers agree.
 - Underscoring the power of the Pope's message on poverty, the only item about which a majority of Catholics say you cannot be a good Catholic and hold this belief is placing personal wealth and financial gain over the well-being of others. Fully 63% of American Catholics say that you CANNOT hold this belief and still be a good Catholic.

You can still be a good Catholic and...



However, while American Catholics are more accepting in general, on a personal level they are less comfortable on a number of social issues and look more like the traditional Catholic Church.

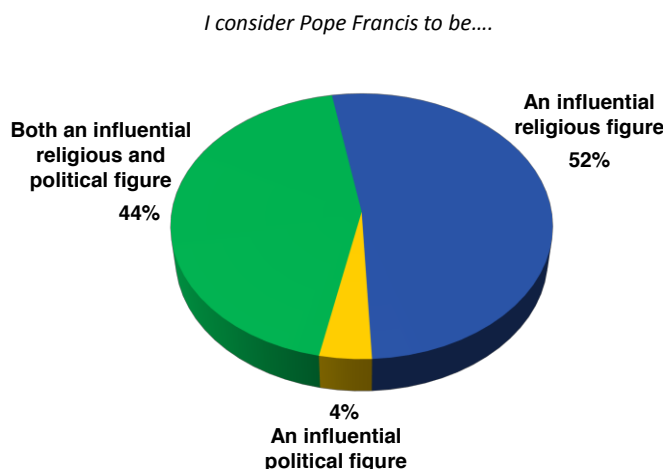
- While more than nine in 10 (94%) American Catholics believe that you can be a good Catholic and use contraception, just 48% say they would be very comfortable teaching their son or daughter about contraception. Women are more likely to be very comfortable talking about this than men (by 53% to 42%).
- While three in four (76%) American Catholics believe that you can be a good Catholic and support same-sex marriage, 63% favor same-sex marriage, and 56% believe that same-sex couples should be allowed to marry in the Church, just 28% would be very comfortable if their son or daughter took part in a same-sex marriage. Knowing someone who is gay or lesbian makes a difference here, but still, just 34% of those who know someone would be very comfortable with this compared with 11% among those who do not know anyone who is gay or lesbian.
- More than seven in 10 (73%) American Catholics believe that you can be a good Catholic and have had an abortion and 46% say that abortion should be legal, but only 16% would be very comfortable supporting their child’s decision to terminate a pregnancy.

- Nearly nine in 10 (88%) Catholics nationwide believe that you can be a good Catholic and support women as priests in the Catholic Church, but just 44% would be very comfortable attending a Catholic Church with a female priest. Women are more likely to be very comfortable with this than men (by 48% to 39%).

Pope Francis is seen as an influential religious figure, and for many, his influence goes well beyond the Church door, which has implications for the 2016 elections.

- Nearly all (96%) Catholics see Pope Francis as an influential religious figure. But nearly half (48%) also see Pope Francis as an influential political figure, including 44% who see him as both an influential religious and political figure.

Perceptions of Pope Francis



- In fact, not only does Pope Francis’s ideology align with that of many American Catholics, but 60% say that his teachings are in line with how they vote. And in such a partisan era, it is remarkable that this belief spans the political spectrum to include Democrats (63%), independents (56%), and Republicans (58%). Weekly churchgoers are most likely to say that Pope Francis’s teachings are in line with how they vote (72%), but majorities of less frequent church attendees also say this is the case—70% of those who attend church once or twice a month and 52% of those who attend church a couple of times a year. Even 46% of Catholics who never attend church say that the Pope’s teachings are in line with how they vote.

Pope Francis’s Teachings are in Line with How I Vote	
All Catholics	60
Men	63
Women	58
Whites	59
Hispanics	58
18-34	69
35-49	61
50-64	55
65 and older	54
Democrats	63
Independents	56
Republicans	58
Liberals	66
Moderates	55
Conservative	62
Attend church weekly	72
Attend church 1-2 times/month	70
Attend church 1-2 times/year	52
Never attend church	46

- While American Catholics believe that Pope Francis’s teachings are in line with how they vote, they are more muted about how much, if at all, his visit and their own religious beliefs will affect the elections. American Catholics are more likely to say that the Pope’s visit will not have a major impact on the 2016 presidential election (54%) and that their own religious beliefs will not play a role in how they vote (53%).

 - On both measures, church attendance is a major predictor of how important both aspects are in the presidential election. Consider that among weekly churchgoers, 67% believe that their religious beliefs play a role in how they vote and 54% also believe that the Pope’s visit will have a major impact in the 2016 presidential election. On the other hand, among those who never attend church, just 23% say that their religious beliefs will play a role in how they vote, and 29% say that the Pope’s visit will have a major impact on the election.
- Among nine qualities tested that they might learn about a candidate running for president, American Catholics are most enthusiastic or comfortable about a

candidate who shares Pope Francis’s belief that society must do more to help the poor (77%). This is higher than the proportion who say that they would be enthusiastic or comfortable with a candidate who is Catholic (68%).

- Perhaps the comparatively lower proportion that would be enthusiastic or comfortable learning that a candidate is Catholic is due to the fact that 33% of American Catholics believe that a Catholic president would be beholden first to the Vatican than the American people. American Catholics under the age of 50 are three times as likely to believe this as those 50 and older (48% to 16%).
- When evaluating candidates running for president, American Catholics take a bigger tent approach, mirroring their more accepting social beliefs for society rather than their acceptance of social change on a more personal level, where they are less comfortable. Majorities of Catholic Americans say that they would be enthusiastic or comfortable with a presidential candidate who used contraceptives (70%), supports same-sex marriage (54%), and has been divorced (53%). The one area in which majorities have reservations or are very uncomfortable is a candidate who does not believe in God, among whom 71% report concerns. This compares with just 17% who would have reservations or would be very uncomfortable with a candidate who is not Catholic. When it comes to evaluating a candidate for president, having a religious faith matters to American Catholics, but for most it is not a deal-breaker if they are not Catholic.

Qualities in a Candidate for President		
	<u>Enthusiastic/ Comfortable</u>	<u>Reservations/ Uncomfortable</u>
	%	%
Shares Pope Francis’s views that society must do more to help the poor	77	15
Used contraceptives such as condoms or birth control pills to prevent a pregnancy	70	12
Is Catholic	68	6
Supports women becoming priests in the Catholic Church	56	33
Supports same-sex marriage	54	37
Has been divorced	53	18
Is not Catholic	51	17
Is pro-choice on abortion	46	44
Does not believe in God	15	71