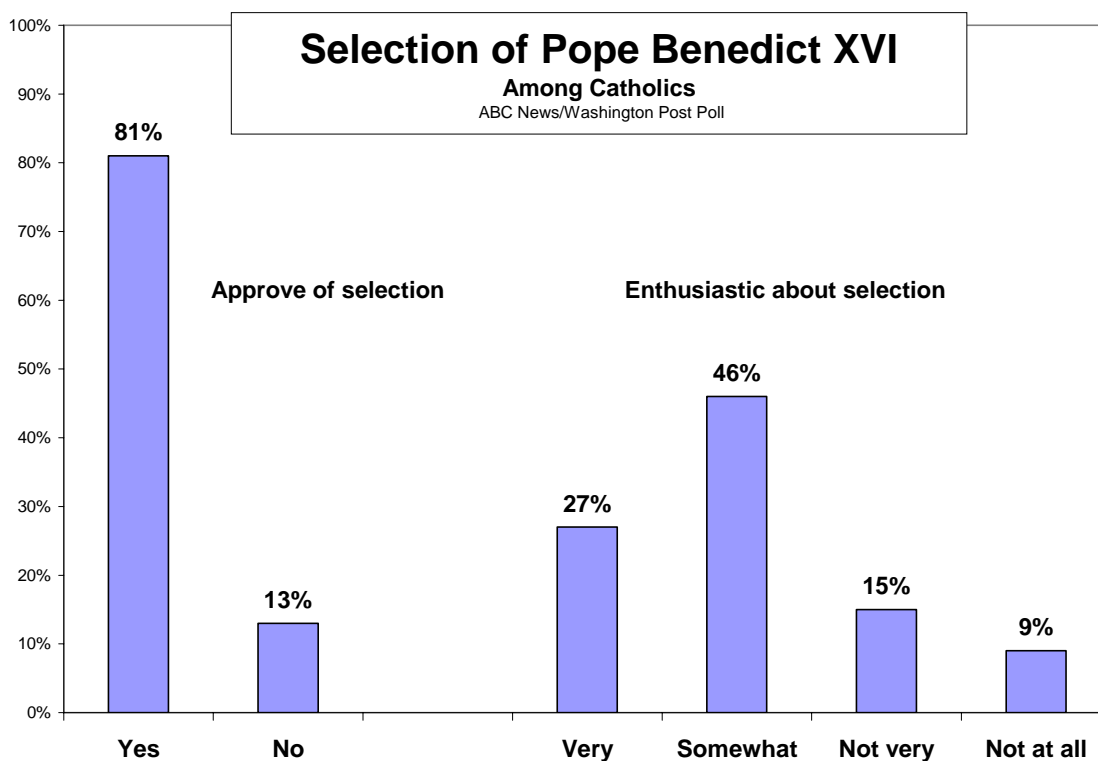


Catholics Approve of New Pope, But Without Great Enthusiasm

American Catholics are responding with broad support if not deep enthusiasm to the selection of Pope Benedict the 16th, with rising interest in traditionalism but also a clear message on his first priority: addressing the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests.

Eighty-one percent of Catholics in this ABC News/Washington Post poll approve of the election of German-born Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as pope. Just over a quarter, though, call themselves “very enthusiastic” about it.



His reputation as a traditionalist appears to be one reason: The vast majority, 80 percent of Catholics, think Benedict will work mainly to maintain church traditions, while nearly half would prefer, instead, that he modernize church policies. At the same time, support for traditionalism has grown in the past year and a half, possibly in reaffirmation of basic faith as John Paul II’s health flagged.

In terms of Benedict’s work ahead, 71 percent of Catholics cite “addressing the issue of sexual abuse by priests” as among his highest priorities; far fewer, 41 percent, say

“preserving the church's traditions” should be a highest priority. Last on the priorities list, at 22 percent, is “responding to the concerns of women in the church.”

Both weekly churchgoers, and those who attend less often, put the abuse issue atop the priorities list. There are differences on some other issues: The two biggest are interest in tradition (20 points higher among weekly churchgoers) and in responding to the concerns of young Catholics (15 points higher).

	“Highest priority”		
	All	Attend church weekly	<weekly
Addressing the issue of sexual abuse by priests	71%	70	73
Encouraging human rights	61	67	57
Responding to the concerns of young Catholics	43	51	36
Preserving the church’s traditions	41	52	32
Improving the Church’s relations with other religions	31	36	27
Making it attractive for people to serve as priests	30	36	25
Responding to the concerns of women in the church	22	21	24

Weekly churchgoers also are more apt to be “very enthusiastic” about Benedict’s election, 41 percent vs 15 percent.

TRADITION – As noted, this poll finds a boost in some traditional attitudes among American Catholics, possibly an expression of faith during the failing health and death of Pope John Paul II, the pageantry of his funeral and yesterday’s installation of Pope Benedict as his successor.

The number of Catholics who say the pope should focus on tradition has risen from 33 percent in October 2003 (the time of John Paul II’S 25th anniversary as pope) to 41 percent last month and 50 percent today. The number who prefer a focus on modernizing church polices has declined in that time, from 64 percent to 48 percent. The change has occurred equally among weekly and non-weekly churchgoing Catholics.

	Pope should:	
	Maintain tradition	Modernize policies
4/24/05	50%	48
3/13/05	41	57
10/13/03	33	64

Similarly, there’s been a 10-point drop in the number of Catholics who describe the church as “out of touch” with the views of Catholics in America today, down from 62 percent in 2003 to 52 percent now.

ATTITUDES – American Catholics also are somewhat less apt than all Americans in this survey to favor legal abortion (46 percent of Catholics do, compared with 56 percent of all Americans); still, that means nearly half of Catholics are out of sync with the Vatican on this issue. And there are broader gaps on other issues – two-thirds of Catholics support

the death penalty; nearly six in 10 support both embryonic stem-cell research and legal recognition for same-sex couples.

Additionally, in terms of its direct engagement in politics, seven in 10 Catholics oppose the Church's denying communion to Catholic politicians who are in favor of legal abortion. Even among weekly churchgoing Catholics, 58 percent are opposed.

Catholics also are less likely than Protestants to say religion is "the most important thing" in their lives. Sixteen percent of all Catholics say so, rising to 25 percent of weekly churchgoing Catholics. But it's 28 percent among all Protestants, 50 percent among weekly churchgoing Protestants, and 55 percent among weekly churchgoing evangelical Protestants.

	Religion "most important thing" in your life
All adults	21%
All Catholics	16
Weekly churchgoing Catholics	25
All Protestants	28
Weekly churchgoing Protestants	50
Weekly churchgoing evangelical Protestants	55

This measure of religiosity among Catholics is not significantly different than in a 1998 survey: Then 12 percent called their religion the most important thing in their lives, close (within sampling tolerances) to today's 16 percent.

PRIESTHOOD – Finally, for all the controversy about sexual abuse, the priesthood retains some attraction. Fifty-three percent of Catholics say they'd want their son to become a priest (if they had one), and that rises to 68 percent of Catholics who attend church weekly.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone April 21-24, 2005, among a random national sample of 1,082 adults, including an oversample of Catholics for a total of 284 Catholic respondents. The results have a three-point error margin for the full population, and six points for Catholics. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Jon Cohen.

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

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1-12 Held for release.

13. Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

		Favor	Oppose	No opinion
4/24/05	All	65	29	6
	Cath.	66	27	7

14. Do you think same-sex couples should be (allowed legally to marry), should be (allowed legally to form civil unions, but not to marry), or should not be allowed to obtain legal recognition of their relationships?

		Allowed to marry	Allowed to form civil unions	Not allowed legal recognition	No op.
4/24/05	All	27	29	40	4
	Cath.	21	37	37	6

15 Held for release.

16. Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases or illegal in all cases?

		-----Legal-----			-----Illegal-----			
		All NET	Most cases	cases	Most NET	All cases	No cases	opin.
4/24/05	All	56	20	36	42	27	14	3
	Cath.	46	13	33	53	33	19	1

17. Do you support or oppose embryonic stem cell research?

		Support	Oppose	No opin.
4/24/05	All	63	28	9
	Cath.	58	34	9

18-35 Held for release.

36. On another subject, overall would you say you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Catholic Church?

		Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion
4/24/05	All	56	36	8
	Cath.	81	17	1
2/22/04	All	54	33	13
	Cath.	87	10	3
10/13/03	All	48	44	8
	Cath.	80	17	3
12/15/02	All	40	52	8
	Cath.	69	30	2
6/17/02	All	45	47	9
	Cath.	69	28	3
6/9/02	All	47	45	7
	Cath.	70	28	2
3/28/02	All	55	34	11
	Cath.	73	24	3
2/20/02	All	63	27	11
	Cath.	88	9	4
8/30/99*	All	68	19	13

*Wash Post/Kaiser/Harvard, asked "very/somewhat" follow

37. Do you approve or disapprove of the selection of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now known as Pope Benedict the 16th, as the next pope?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opin.
4/24/05 All	60	19	21
4/24/05 Cath.	81	13	6

38. (ASKED OF CATHOLICS) How would you describe your feelings about the selection of Ratzinger as pope: very enthusiastic, somewhat enthusiastic, not too enthusiastic, or not enthusiastic at all?

	----Enthusiastic----			----Not enthusiastic----			No op.
	NET	Very	Smwt.	NET	Not too	At all	
4/24/05	73	27	46	24	15	9	3

39. (ASKED OF CATHOLICS) Do you think Pope Benedict should (maintain the traditional policies of the Church), or should he (change Church policies to reflect the attitudes and lifestyles of Catholics today)?

	Maintain policies	Change policies	No opinion
4/24/05	50	48	1
3/13/05*	41	57	1
10/13/03	33	64	3

*3/13/05 and prior: "the next pope"

40. (ASKED OF CATHOLICS) What do you think Pope Benedict WILL do - (maintain the traditional policies of the Church), or (change Church policies to reflect the attitudes and lifestyles of Catholics today)?

	Maintain policies	Change policies	No opinion
4/24/05	80	14	7

41. (ASKED OF CATHOLICS) For each item I name, please tell me how high a priority it should be for Pope Benedict - the highest priority, a high priority but not the highest, or a lower priority than that.

4/24/05 - Summary Table

	Highest	High, not highest	Lower	None (vol.)	No op.
a. Preserving the church's traditions	41	44	14	1	1
b. Responding to the concerns of women in the church	22	54	19	4	1
c. Responding to the concerns of young Catholics	43	52	5	0	*
d. Making it attractive for people to serve as priests	30	41	23	3	3
e. Improving the Catholic Church's relations with other religions	31	54	12	2	1
f. Encouraging human rights	61	34	4	0	*
g. Addressing the issue of sexual abuse by priests	71	24	4	*	*

42. (ASKED OF CATHOLICS) In general, do you think the Roman 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
4/24/05	Cath.	44	52	4
10/13/03	Cath.	34	62	3
10/1/95	Cath.	38	58	5

43. (ASKED OF CATHOLICS) Would you want your son to become a priest, or not? (IF NO SON) If you had one.

	Yes	No	No opin.
4/24/05	53	41	6

44. (ASKED OF CATHOLICS) Would you support or oppose the Catholic church denying communion to Catholic politicians who are in favor of legal abortion?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
4/24/05 Cath.	27	70	4
5/23/04 All	22	68	11
5/23/04 Cath.	22	72	6

END