

Poll: Pope Francis Makes Good First Impression on US Catholics

Pope Francis, formally installed on Tuesday as head of the world's 1.2 billion Roman Catholics, has made a good impression so far in the United States among Catholics and non-Catholics, though few Americans knew much about him, a Reuters/Ipsos poll showed.

Of those who are aware of the new pope, 85 percent of all U.S. adults surveyed had a favorable view of him, including 94 percent of Catholics, according to the poll.

Only 5 percent of Catholics and 2 percent of all respondents said they were "very familiar" with the new Pope. Another 34 percent of Catholics and 45 percent of all respondents say they had not heard about him, the poll found.

Most adults and nearly three-quarters of Catholics saw the new pope, formerly Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio of Argentina, as in touch with the third world. Only two of five adults and 57 percent of Catholics viewed him as in touch with U.S. Catholics.

One of four people in the United States are Roman Catholic, but opinion among members is divided over certain doctrinal questions, including gay marriage, which 54 percent of U.S. Catholics support, compared to 47 percent of all Americans, according to a Quinnipiac University poll released last month. Pope Francis came out strongly against gay marriage as head of the Church in Argentina.

Donna B. Doucette, executive director for Voice of the Faithful, a lay Catholic group formed in 2002 in reaction to clergy sex scandals, said the group prays Pope Francis will be

open to lay voices and addressing problems in the church hierarchical structure.

“And we see in his support for the poor and the disenfranchised some possibility for meaningful dialogue about celibacy, women’s roles and justice for the abused,” said Doucette.

The Reuters/Ipsos poll also found that half of Catholics and two of five Americans said they would have liked a younger pope. Francis is 76. However, a majority of adults and seven of 10 Catholics like that the new pope is from Latin America.

A total of 66 percent of Catholics named Pope Francis as conservative, while 68 percent said they think he is in touch with the modern world, the poll found.

The new pope took the name Francis, after Francis of Assisi, and the survey found 36 percent said the name showed commitment to the poor; 25 percent thought it a bold choice to opt for a name associated with such a great saint; 18 percent said it showed a break from tradition that bodes well for the church; and 19 percent thought it showed commitment to reform.

Asked to name the biggest challenge facing the Catholic Church, 35 percent of Catholics surveyed named the clergy sexual abuse scandals, followed by lack of trust in the church at 14 percent, according to the poll. The scandal has resulted in the bankruptcies of some U.S. archdioceses and cost the Church here an estimated \$3 billion in legal settlements.

The poll was conducted between March 13, when the new pope was named, and March 18. A sample of 1,738 American adults was interviewed online, including 334 self-identified Catholics. The credibility interval is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points for all surveyed and 6.1 percent for self-identified Catholics.

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