



The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE POPE FOLLOWING HIS VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES

Large crowds greeted Pope Francis on his first visit to the United States in September, but a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research suggests his trip did little to change the attitudes of Americans on climate change.



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Despite the extensive media coverage of his trip to Washington, New York, and Philadelphia, most Americans did not follow it closely. Most have neutral views or are not familiar with how Pope Francis has dealt with several of the highly charged issues facing the country these days. However, in most cases, those who did have an opinion tended to be more positive than negative. His overall favorability has remained unchanged from a Yale University and AP-NORC poll taken in July.

The nationwide poll of 1,058 adults used AmeriSpeak, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Interviews were conducted between October 15 and October 18, 2015, online and using landlines and cell phones.

Three Things You Should Know

About the AP-NORC Poll on attitudes following the papal visit to the United States:

- 1) Pope Francis's call to action on climate change had little impact on attitudes toward global warming. Two-thirds agree that global warming is happening and half say it is mostly or entirely caused by human actions, results similar to an AP-NORC poll in July.
- 2) Despite the broad media coverage of the Pope's trip, most Americans paid little or no attention to news about his visit. Overall, 14 percent followed news about the trip extremely or very closely including a third of Catholics.
- 3) Pope Francis's generally favorable ratings have remained steady: 44 percent favorable and 13 percent unfavorable while 42 percent have no opinion of him.

Some of the poll's key findings are:

- Pope Francis's call to action on climate change last summer made little impression on American attitudes toward global warming or its causes and effects. Most agree that global warming is happening and is at least mostly caused by human actions, but only a quarter regard it as especially worrisome at this time.
- Even with the broad media coverage of the Pope's remarks while he was traveling in the United States, most Americans are neutral or have no opinion about how he deals with some of the country's hot button issues. Catholics, however, are more likely to have a positive reaction to his approach.
- Overall, 57 percent of Americans paid little or no attention to news about the papal visit. Fourteen percent followed news about Pope Francis's trip to the United States extremely or very closely, and another 29 percent followed the coverage somewhat closely.
- The Pope's generally favorable ratings have remained steady. Pope Francis is particularly popular among American Catholics, although he did lose a little ground with them. Since July, Catholic opinion of the Pope is slightly less favorable: 92 percent to 80 percent.

THE MAJORITY OF AMERICANS ARE OKAY WITH THE POPE TAKING A POSITION ON GLOBAL WARMING, AND MOST NEITHER APPROVE NOR DISAPPROVE OF THE POPE'S HANDLING OF THE ISSUES HE FOCUSED ON DURING HIS VISIT.

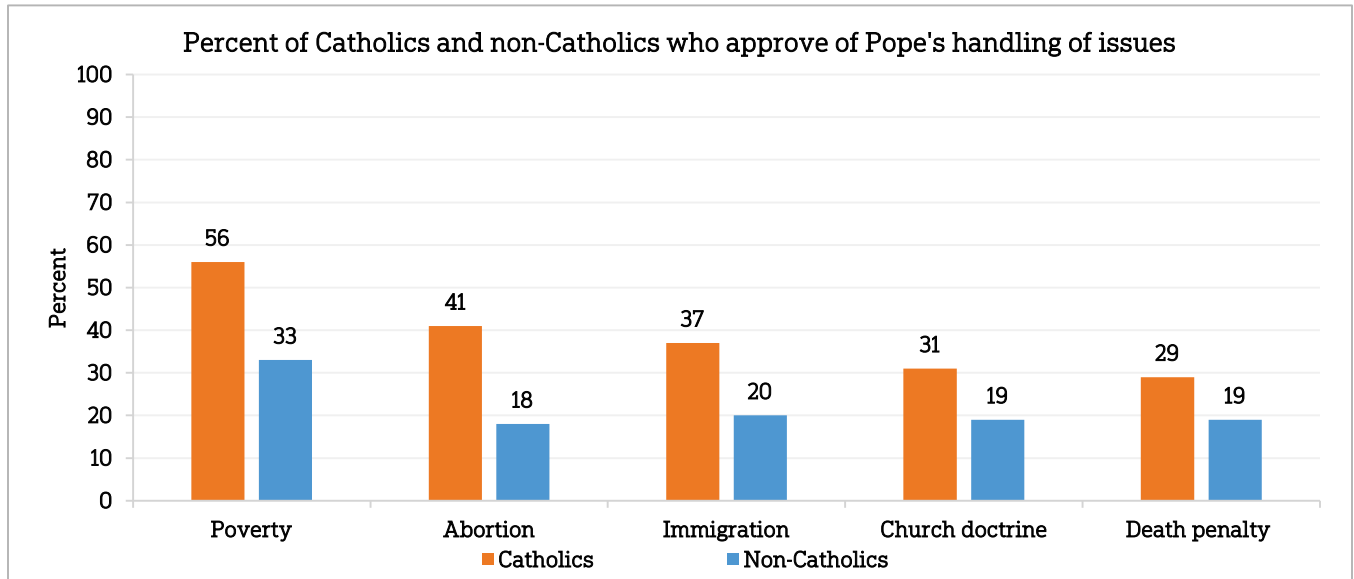
Only about a third of Americans (36 percent) report being aware of Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment and climate change. However, the majority of Americans (55 percent) consider it appropriate for the Pope to take a public position on global warming. Even among those Americans who do not view global warming as a religious issue, 56 percent say it is appropriate for the Pope to take a position on it.

In his address to the United States Congress, the Pope focused on immigration, poverty, and the threat to the environment.¹ He also referred to the sanctity of human life, but emphasized opposition to the death penalty rather than abortion. And while not explicitly mentioning same-sex marriage, Pope Francis stressed the importance of family life.

Most Americans hold neutral opinions about the Pope's handling of these issues or had no opinion. Among the rest, opinion is more positive than negative about the Pope's treatment of poverty (38 percent approve vs. 9 percent disapprove), immigration (24 percent approve vs. 14 percent disapprove), and the death penalty (21 percent approve vs. 14 percent disapprove). The public is more divided on how Pope Francis is handling abortion (22 percent approve vs. 19 percent disapprove) and the Church's attitude toward gays (22 percent approve vs. 18 percent disapprove).

¹ Transcript of Pope Francis's speech to Congress available from *The Washington Post*. <http://wpo.st/IT-i0>.

Catholics are more positive than non-Catholics about the Pope’s handling of these issues.



SOURCE: National poll conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research between October 15 and October 18, 2015, with 1,058 adults, margin of sampling error +/- 3.7 percentage points.

Question: Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the way Pope Francis is handling [Abortion; Church doctrine on gays and lesbians; Immigration; Poverty; The death penalty]?

WHILE TWO-THIRDS OF AMERICANS BELIEVE GLOBAL WARMING IS HAPPENING, MOST ARE NOT VERY CONCERNED ABOUT IT.

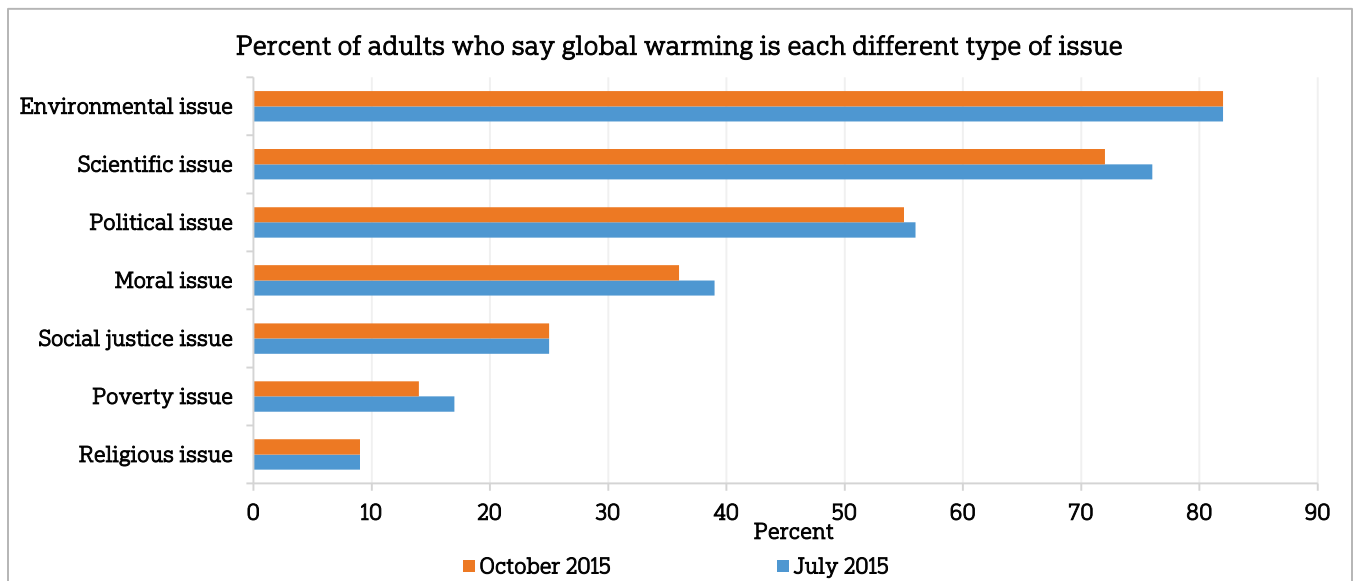
Attitudes toward global warming have not shifted since July. It is rare that public opinion on a complex issue - like the environment or climate change - would experience significant and lasting change in a short period of time. However, over the long run, it is certainly possible that sustained efforts by the Catholic Church to spur action regarding the environment could influence public opinion.

In the latest poll, 65 percent of Americans say global warming is happening, a statistically insignificant decrease from 69 percent in July. Americans express similarly low levels of concern about global warming these days as they did in July: 23 percent say they are extremely or very worried, 34 percent say they are somewhat worried, and 38 percent say they are not too worried or not worried at all. Nor have opinions changed in terms of the causes of global warming. Fifty-one percent of Americans say global warming is caused entirely or mostly by human activities, and 11 percent say it is caused entirely or mostly by natural changes in the environment. Another 35 percent say it is caused about equally by human activities and natural changes in the environment.

THOUGH THE POPE HAS ADVOCATED THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TAKE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN COMBATING GLOBAL WARMING, FEW CONSIDER GLOBAL WARMING TO BE A POVERTY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, OR RELIGIOUS ISSUE.

Regardless of the Pope’s recent involvement, few Americans see global warming as an issue related to social justice, poverty, or religion. Just 25 percent of Americans say global warming is a social justice issue, 14 percent say it is an issue related to poverty, and 9 percent say it is a religious issue. However, one-third do regard global warming as a moral concern. Just over half (55 percent) consider it to be a political issue. Large majorities say global warming is an environmental problem (82 percent) or a scientific issue (72 percent).

Views on global warming as different issue types have not changed significantly since July.



SOURCE: National poll conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research between October 15 and October 18, 2015, with 1,058 adults, margin of sampling error +/- 3.7 percentage points.

Question: In your opinion, do you think global warming is a(n)...

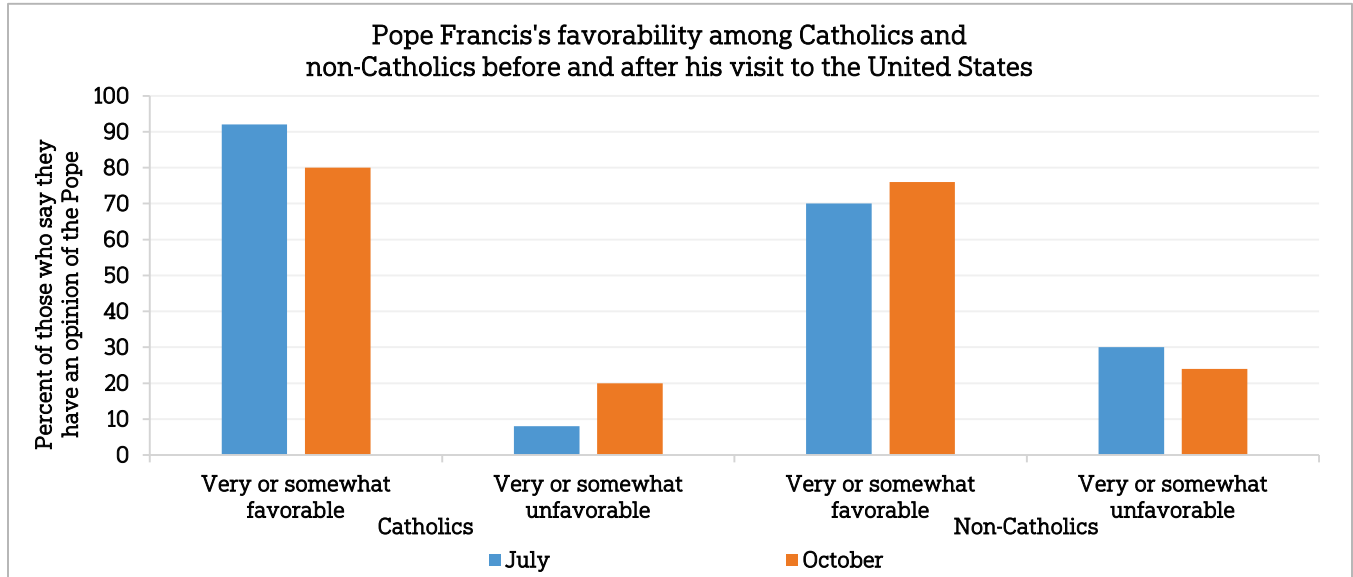
AMERICANS’ VIEW OF POPE FRANCIS REMAINS POSITIVE AFTER HIS VISIT, BUT HIS FAVORABILITY AMONG CATHOLICS HAS DECLINED.

Although Pope Francis’s first visit to the United States garnered much media attention, there hasn’t been a lot of change in the public’s view of him, and most Americans paid little or no attention to news about his visit. Just 14 percent of Americans say they followed coverage of the September visit extremely or very closely, 29 percent say they followed the news somewhat closely, and 57 percent say they did not follow the news very closely or at all. Catholics are more likely than others to say that they followed news about the papal visit extremely or very closely (32 percent vs. 9 percent). However, those living in the Northeast, the area where the Pope traveled, are no more likely than those living elsewhere to say they followed news about the visit.

Among the 57 percent who have an opinion of the Pope, 77 percent say their opinion is very or somewhat favorable, and 23 percent say their opinion is very or somewhat unfavorable, exactly the same as prior to the Pope’s visit. The number of Americans who say they don’t know enough about the Pope to have an opinion has dropped slightly from 49 percent in July to 42 percent today.

Among Catholics, however, the Pope’s favorability has declined a bit since July, though he remains quite popular. In July, among Catholics with an opinion of the Pope, 92 percent said their opinion was very or somewhat favorable. This has fallen to 80 percent in the latest poll.

Overall favorable views of Pope Francis remain high.



SOURCE: National poll conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research between October 15 and October 18, 2015, with 1,058 adults, margin of sampling error +/- 3.7 percentage points.

Question: Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Pope Francis? If you don't know enough about this person to have an opinion, you can say that too.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak®, which is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face).

Interviews for this survey were conducted between October 15 and October 18, 2015, with adults age 18 and over from the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak®, and 1,058 completed the survey—753 via the web and 305 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 31.0 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 36.6 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 99.4 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 11.3 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.7 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data has been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and household phone status. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

The July poll was conducted with funding from Yale University and input from its researchers: Anthony Leiserowitz, Geoffrey Feinberg and Seth Rosenthal. A comprehensive listing of all questions from both surveys, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on The AP-NORC Center website: www.apnorc.org.

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ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS–NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

The Associated Press (AP) is the world's essential news organization, bringing fast, unbiased news to all media platforms and formats.

NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.