



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press



**THE PEW
FORUM**
ON RELIGION
& PUBLIC LIFE

FOR RELEASE: THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2008, 2:00 PM

Mixed Ratings for Pontiff's Outreach to Other Religions
**ON EVE OF VISIT, POPE BENEDICT STILL UNKNOWN TO MANY
AMERICANS**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Andrew Kohut, Director
Michael Dimock, Associate Director
Carroll Doherty, Associate Director
Pew Research Center for the People & the Press
202/419-4350
<http://www.people-press.org>

Luis Lugo, Director
Sandra Stencel, Deputy Director
Greg Smith, Research Fellow
Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life
202/419-4550
<http://www.pewforum.org>

Mixed Ratings for Pontiff's Outreach to Other Religions

ON EVE OF VISIT, POPE BENEDICT STILL UNKNOWN TO MANY AMERICANS

Two weeks before his first visit to the United States as spiritual leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI continues to be viewed favorably by a majority (52%) of Americans, which is virtually unchanged from August 2007 (50%). However, the pope remains unfamiliar to a relatively large number of Americans: Three-in-ten say they do not know enough about Pope Benedict to offer an opinion, which also has not changed much since last summer (32%).

Among American Catholics, the pope is, not surprisingly, better known and viewed more favorably than among the general public. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of Catholics in the United States view their religious leader positively, which also has not changed since August 2007.

However, the current pontiff continues to be less highly regarded than his predecessor, Pope John Paul II. Favorable opinions of Pope John Paul II consistently outnumbered unfavorable views by much wider margins than is the case for Pope Benedict XVI.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, conducted March 24-29 among 1,001 Americans, finds that as Pope Benedict completes his third year as spiritual leader of the world's Catholics, he gets mixed ratings for his efforts to promote good relations between the Catholic Church and other major religions.

Opinion of Pope Benedict XVI		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Catholics</u>
<i>Opinion of Benedict XVI</i>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Favorable	52	74
<i>Very favorable</i>	18	36
Unfavorable	18	11
Don't know/Can't rate	<u>30</u>	<u>15</u>
	100	100
<i>How much have you heard about Pope Benedict?</i>		
A lot	18	37
A little	57	48
Nothing/Don't know	<u>25</u>	<u>15</u>
	100	100
Number of respondents	1,001	215
<i>Pope's job in promoting relations w/ other faiths*</i>		
Excellent/Good	39	64
Only fair/Poor	40	26
Don't know	<u>21</u>	<u>10</u>
	100	100
<i>Pope Benedict XVI is...*</i>		
Conservative	45	58
Moderate	21	24
Liberal	7	7
Don't know/Refused	<u>27</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100
Number of respondents	794	195
* Based on those who have heard "a lot" or "a little" about Pope Benedict XVI.		

Overall, 39% of those who have heard at least a little about the pope say he has done an excellent or good job in promoting positive relations with other faiths, but about as many (40%) say he has done only fair or poor in this regard. Overall opinions about the pope’s efforts to foster good relations with other faiths are largely unchanged from last August (38% excellent/good vs. 46% only fair/poor).

Among Catholics, however, opinions of the pope’s outreach efforts have improved. Nearly two-thirds of Catholics (64%) say he is doing an excellent or good job at fostering interfaith relations, up from 54% in August 2007. Among Protestants, there has been very little change in views of how the pope is doing in promoting good relations with other religions.

Views of Pope Benedict’s ideology have changed somewhat since last summer. Currently, 45% of Americans view Pope Benedict XVI as conservative while 28% say he is either moderate or liberal. In August 2007, 56% said that Pope Benedict was conservative while 22% said he was moderate or liberal.

John Paul II Better Known, Better Liked

Pope Benedict XVI is considerably less well known, and less favorably viewed, than his predecessor John Paul II was in the 1980s and 1990s. Currently, 30% express no opinion about Pope Benedict XVI; just 10% offered no opinion of Pope John Paul II in May 1987, nearly a decade after he became pope.

Although Pope Benedict’s overall favorability has changed little since last summer (52% overall today, compared with 50% overall in August 2007), the percentage saying they have a “very favorable” view of the pope has increased slightly (from 14% to 18%). This is largely driven by increasingly positive assessments from highly observant Catholics (those who attend church at least weekly); 49% view Pope Benedict very favorably today, compared with 39% who did so in August.

	<u>Fav</u>	<u>Unfav</u>	<u>Can't</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>rate</u>
Benedict XVI			
March 2008	52	18	30=100
August 2007	50	18	32=100
July 2005	44	11	45=100
John Paul II			
June 1996	76	13	11=100
May 1990	79	11	10=100
May 1987	76	14	10=100

Observant Catholics See Pope Doing Well in Outreach

A substantial majority of Catholics who attend church at least weekly (78%) also say the pontiff is doing a good or excellent job promoting relations with other major religions. This is an increase of 18 points since August 2007. By comparison, the opinions of Catholics who attend less frequently have not changed over this period.

The balance of opinion among white evangelical Protestants has shifted somewhat in the opposite direction,

however. White evangelical Protestants are less likely today to say the pope is doing an excellent or good job at developing good interfaith relationships (32% compared with 40% in August 2007).

Overall, 45% say Pope Benedict is conservative, down from 56% in August 2007. Although a majority of Catholics (58%) continue to say the pope is conservative, this number is considerably less than the more than two-thirds (68%) who viewed the pope this way in August 2007. An increasing number of Catholics (31% compared with 22% in

August) identify the pope as moderate or liberal, and this change is seen among both highly observant and less observant Catholics.

Protestants' views have also shifted over this time period, moving both toward a more moderate view of the pope's ideological leanings and less certainty about his ideology. In August 2007, 47% of Protestants viewed Pope Benedict as conservative, compared with 34% currently. However, 35% of Protestants today are unable to characterize Pope Benedict's ideology, compared with 28% in August of last year.

	-- August 07 --		-- March 08 --		Change in Exc/Good
	Exc/ Good	Fair/ Poor	Exc/ Good	Fair/ Poor	
Total	38	46	39	40	+1
Total Catholic	54	40	64	26	+10
Attend weekly+	60	36	78	19	+18
Less often	50	43	48	33	-2
Total Protestant	36	44	32	43	-4
White evangelical	40	38	32	42	-8
White mainline	33	50	33	47	0

Based on those who have heard "a lot" or "a little" about Pope Benedict XVI.

	-- August 2007 --			-- March 2008 --		
	Cons	Lib	DK	Cons	Lib	DK
Total	56	22	22=100	45	28	27=100
Total Catholic	68	22	10=100	58	31	11=100
Attend weekly+	73	22	5=100	62	31	7=100
Less often	64	22	14=100	53	30	17=100
Total Protestant	47	25	28=100	34	31	35=100
White evangelical	42	26	32=100	36	30	34=100
White mainline	56	20	24=100	35	31	34=100

Based on those who have heard "a lot" or "a little" about Pope Benedict XVI.

Partisans Differ in Views of Pope

Opinions of the pope are, on balance, favorable among all political groups. However, significantly more Republicans (62%) than independents (50%) or Democrats (47%) view the pope favorably.

Republicans also have more positive evaluations of Pope Benedict's promotion of good relations with other religions. A plurality (46%) of Republicans evaluates him positively on this question. By contrast, Democrats are more evenly divided; 39% say he is doing an excellent or good job, compared with 38% who say he is only doing a fair or poor job. Independents are the most critical of the pope's efforts to foster relations with other religions. Only about third independents (32%) rate his interfaith efforts as excellent or good, while about half (51%) rate them as fair or poor.

	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%
<i>Opinion of Benedict XVI</i>			
Favorable	62	47	50
Unfavorable	13	21	22
Don't know/Can't rate	<u>25</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>28</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Pope's job in promoting relations w/ other faiths*</i>			
Excellent/good	46	39	32
Only fair/poor	33	38	51
Don't know	<u>21</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>17</u>
	100	100	100

* Based on those who have heard "a lot" or "a little" about Pope Benedict XVI.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 1,001 adults, 18 years of age or older, from March 24-29, 2008. The following table shows the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

	Sample Size	Plus or minus...
Total sample	1,001	3.5 percentage points
Catholics	215	7.5 percentage points

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.

ABOUT THE PROJECTS

This survey is a joint effort of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. Both organizations are sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts and are projects of the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan “fact tank” that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life delivers timely, impartial information on issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs. The Forum is a nonpartisan organization and does not take positions on policy debates. Based in Washington, D.C., the Forum is directed by Luis Lugo.

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. The Center’s purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of the Center’s current survey results are made available free of charge.

This report is a collaborative product based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Luis Lugo, Director
Sandra Stencel, Deputy Director
John C. Green, Senior Fellow in Religion and American Politics
Gregory Smith, Research Fellow
Dan Cox, Research Associate
Allison Pond, Research Associate
Tracy Miller, Copy Editor

Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

Andrew Kohut, Director
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors
Kim Parker, Senior Researcher
Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Robert Suls, Shawn Neidorf, Leah Christian and Jocelyn Kiley, Research Associates
Kathleen Holzward, Research Analyst
James Albright and Alec Tyson, Research Assistants

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
MARCH 2008 POPE BENEDICT SURVEY [OMNIBUS]
FINAL TOPLINE
March 24-29, 2008
N=1001

ASK ALL:

P.1 Now I'd like your views on some people. As I read some names, please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each person. (First, **INSERT NAME**) would you say your overall opinion of... **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]** is very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly UNfavorable, or very unfavorable? How about **(NEXT NAME)**? **[IF NECESSARY: would you say your overall opinion of [NAME] is 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 Benedict the sixteenth	52	18	34	18	6	12	7	23=100
August, 2007	50	14	36	18	6	12	8	24=100
July, 2005	44	10	34	11	4	7	4	41=100
June, 1996 (<i>John Paul II</i>)	76	28	48	13	4	9	1	10=100
May, 1990 (<i>John Paul II</i>)	79	31	48	11	4	7	1	9=100
May, 1987 (<i>John Paul II</i>)	76	28	48	14	4	10	1	9=100

QUESTIONS P.1 b-d HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

P.2 In 2005, Pope Benedict the sixteenth became head of the Roman Catholic Church. How much have you heard about Pope Benedict...a lot, a little, or nothing at all?

	Aug 2007
18 A lot	19
57 A little	62
24 Nothing at all	18
<u>1</u> Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>1</u>
100	100

IF HEARD AT LEAST A LITTLE (P.2=1,2), ASK [N=794]:

P.3 From what you know, how good a job is the pope doing in promoting good relations between the Catholic Church and other major religions? Is he doing an excellent, good, only fair, or a poor job of promoting good relations with other major religions?

	Aug 2007
9 Excellent	6
30 Good	32
29 Only fair	35
11 Poor	11
<u>21</u> Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>16</u>
100	100

IF HEARD AT LEAST A LITTLE (P.2=1,2), ASK [N=794]:

P.4 And how would you describe Pope Benedict the sixteenth...is he very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal or very liberal?

		Aug <u>2007</u>
16	Very conservative	20
29	Conservative	36
21	Moderate	17
5	Liberal	4
2	Very liberal	1
<u>27</u>	Don't know/refused (VOL.)	<u>22</u>
100		100