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**THE PEW  
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ON RELIGION  
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## POPE BENEDICT'S IMAGE IMPROVES FOLLOWING U.S. VISIT

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## POPE BENEDICT'S IMAGE IMPROVES FOLLOWING U.S. VISIT

Following his first visit to the United States as spiritual leader of the world's Catholics, Pope Benedict XVI is viewed more favorably than he was a few weeks before his trip. Currently, 61% of Americans say they have a favorable impression of the pope, up from 52% in late March.

Views of Pope Benedict's outreach to other faiths have shown substantial improvement. Roughly half (51%) of those who have heard at least a little about the pope say he has done an excellent or good job with respect to his interfaith efforts while just 29% rate his efforts in this area as only fair or poor. In late March, the public was evenly split in assessments of the pope's promotion of relations with other religions in March (39% excellent or good vs. 40% only fair or poor).

Opinions of Pope Benedict's handling of the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal, an issue raised by the pontiff several times during his visit, are more mixed. About half (48%) who have heard something about the pope rate his efforts in addressing the scandal as only fair or poor, while 39% say he has done a good or excellent job in this regard.

	<i>Total</i>		<i>Catholics</i>	
	<u>March</u>	<u>April</u>	<u>March</u>	<u>April</u>
<i>Opinion of Benedict XVI</i>	%	%	%	%
Favorable	52	61	74	83
<i>Very favorable</i>	18	22	36	49
Unfavorable	18	17	11	9
Don't know/Can't rate	<u>30</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	1001	1000	215	232
<i>Pope's job in...</i>				
<b>Promoting relations w/ other faiths*</b>				
Excellent/Good	39	51	64	70
Only fair/Poor	40	29	26	24
Don't know	<u>21</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>6</u>
	100	100	100	100
<b>Addressing Catholic sex abuse scandal*</b>				
Excellent/Good	--	39	--	49
Only fair/Poor	--	48	--	40
Don't know	--	<u>13</u>	--	<u>11</u>
	--	100	--	100
Number of respondents	794	866	195	219
* Based on those who have heard "a lot" or "a little" about 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, was conducted April 23-30 among 1,000 Americans; it was conducted shortly after the pope's April 15-20 visit to Washington D.C. and New York City. The survey finds a dramatic increase in the proportion of Catholics expressing highly favorable views of the pontiff. Nearly half (49%) of Catholics say they have a very favorable opinion of the pope, up from 36% in the late March survey, conducted March 24-29. Overall, positive opinions of Pope Benedict among Catholics have risen from 74% to 83%.

For analysis of the press coverage of the pope's U.S. visit, see the accompanying report from the Project for Excellence in Journalism and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "U.S. Papal Visit, Media Focused on the Shepherd and His Flock".

### Benedict XVI and John Paul II

Pope Benedict's image among Catholics remains somewhat less positive than Pope John Paul II's in 1996, after he had served nearly 20 years as pope. At that time, fully 93% of Catholics expressed favorable views of Pope John Paul II.

However, just as many Catholics now express very favorable opinions of the current pontiff as did so of John Paul II in 1996 (49%).

<i>All Catholics</i>	(Net)		<i>Most-ly</i>	(Net)		Can't rate
	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Very</u>		<u>Unfav.</u>	<u>rate</u>	
<b>Benedict XVI</b>	%	%	%	%	%	
April 2008	83	49	34	9		8=100
March 2008	74	36	38	11		15=100
August 2007	74	31	43	12		14=100
July 2005	67	17	50	5		28=100
<b>John Paul II</b>						
June 1996	93	49	44	5		2=100
May 1990	93	53	40	6		1=100
May 1987	91	48	43	8		1=100

April 2008 figures based on 232 Catholics.

Pope Benedict is viewed more favorably by both Catholics who attend church regularly as well as those who do not; in fact his image has improved the most among the less observant. Among Catholics who attend church weekly or more often, 57% now give the pope a very favorable rating, up from 49% a month ago. Among those who attend less often, 41% now have a very favorable opinion of the pope, up from 25% in March.

### Better Grades for Interfaith Outreach

The pope receives much better ratings than he did in late March for promoting good relations with other religions, and the change has been particularly striking among Protestants – especially white evangelical Protestants – and Catholics who attend church infrequently.

By roughly two-to-one (49%-25%), Protestants 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 religions. In late March, just 32% said he had done an excellent or good job in

	-- March 08 --		--April 08--		<i>Change in Exc/Good</i>
	<u>Exc/Good</u>	<u>Fair/Poor</u>	<u>Exc/Good</u>	<u>Fair/Poor</u>	
Total	39	40	51	29	+12
Total Catholic	64	26	70	24	+6
Attend weekly+	78	19	81	15	+3
Less often	48	33	60	33	+12
Total Protestant	32	43	49	25	+17
White evangelical	32	42	57	20	+25
White mainline	33	47	47	28	+14

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

handling interfaith outreach, while 43% rated his efforts as only fair or poor.

The proportion of white evangelical Protestants who say Pope Benedict has done an excellent or good job promoting in relations with other faiths has increased from 32% in March to 57% currently. White evangelicals now have somewhat more positive views of the pope’s efforts in this regard than do white mainline Protestants (57% vs. 47%); in late March, the two groups offered similar assessments of how well the pope was doing in promoting good relations with other religions.

Overall, 70% of Catholics familiar with the pope express positive views of his efforts to foster good relations with other religions, up from 64% in late March. Most of the improvement has come among less observant Catholics (up 12 points); there has been less change among highly observant Catholics (up three points), who already gave the pontiff high marks for his efforts in this area.

### Pope Faulted for Handling of Abuse Scandal

Americans view the pope’s efforts to address the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church far less positively. Catholics express more positive opinions of the pope’s handling of the abuse scandal than do Protestants. Even among Catholics, however, only about half (49%) of those who have heard at least a little about the pope say he has done an excellent or good job in addressing the abuse scandal.

There are wide differences in opinions about the pope’s handling of the abuse scandal among highly observant and less observant Catholics. Highly observant Catholics, by a margin of almost two-to-one (60% to 33%), give the pope a positive assessment on this issue. Less observant Catholics are more critical of the pope’s handling of the sex abuse scandal; a plurality (48%) says he has done only a fair or poor job, while 38% rate his efforts positively.

Among Protestants, white evangelicals rate the pontiff’s handling of the church’s sex abuse scandal more positively than do white mainline Protestants. Nearly half of white evangelical Protestants (45%) who have heard at least a little about the pope say he has done an excellent or good job in dealing with the scandal, compared with 32% of white mainline Protestants.

	Exc/ Good %	Fair/ Poor %	DK
Total	39	48	13=100
Total Catholic	49	40	11=100
Attend weekly+	60	33	7=100
Less often	38	48	14=100
Total Protestant	39	46	15=100
White evangelical	45	39	16=100
White mainline	32	53	15=100

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

## **Views of Pope's Ideology Unchanged**

While overall impressions of the pope have improved over the course of the past month, there has been little change in the public's assessment of Pope Benedict XVI's ideological leanings. Nearly half of Americans (47%) say he is conservative, a number virtually unchanged from 45% in late March. Notably, somewhat more highly observant Catholics view the pope as conservative than did so in late March (71% vs. 62%). There has been a smaller change in the views of less observant Catholics; 55% currently view him as conservative compared with 53% in late March. Among Protestants, 42% say Pope Benedict is conservative, up from 34% in late March.

## 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 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, from April 23-30, 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:

	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Plus or minus...</b>
Total sample	1,000	3.5 percentage points
Catholics	232	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:

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**APRIL 2008 POPE BENEDICT SURVEY [OMNIBUS]**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**April 23-30, 2008**  
**N=1000**

**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	61	22	39	17	8	9	4	18=100
March, 2008 (Pre-visit)	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?

		(Pre-visit)	
		March	Aug
		<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>
29	A lot	18	19
55	A little	57	62
15	Nothing at all	24	18
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
100		100	100

**IF HEARD AT LEAST A LITTLE (P.2=1,2), ASK [N=866]:**

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?

		(Pre-visit)	
		March	Aug
		<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>
14	Excellent	9	6
37	Good	30	32
21	Only fair	29	35
8	Poor	11	11
<u>20</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>21</u>	<u>16</u>
100		100	100

**IF HEARD AT LEAST A LITTLE (P.2=1,2), ASK [N=866]:**

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

		(Pre-visit)	
		March	Aug
		<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>
15	Very conservative	16	20
32	Conservative	29	36
18	Moderate	21	17
5	Liberal	5	4
2	Very liberal	2	1
<u>28</u>	Don't know/refused (VOL.)	<u>27</u>	<u>22</u>
100		100	100

**IF HEARD AT LEAST A LITTLE (P.2=1,2), ASK [N=866]:**

P.5 In your view, how good a job has the pope done in addressing the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church? Has he done an excellent, good, only fair, or a poor job?

9	Excellent
30	Good
28	Only fair
20	Poor
<u>13</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	