



Everybody Loves Francis?

British Catholics' 'job approval' ratings of the Pope

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Introduction

Pope Francis was elected Bishop of Rome on 13th March 2013. Seven years on, his has been an eventful and often controversial papacy. Since the day of his election, Pope Francis' words, actions, and gestures have been endlessly raked over by pundits and commentators.

Yet much more rarely heard are the views of ordinary Catholics who, in Britain, make up c. 8% of the adult population (BSA 2018) – or roughly 4 million British adults.

In this short report, we present findings from a new nationally representative survey of self-identified Catholics in England, Wales and Scotland, administered by Savanta ComRes in late 2019 ($n = 1823$). Among much else, this survey reveals for the first time how Britain's Catholics really feel about Pope Francis.

The 'Catholics in Britain' survey was designed by social scientists Dr Ben Clements (Leicester) and Prof Stephen Bullivant (St Mary's), as part of the AHRC-funded 'Roman Catholics in Britain: Faith, Society and Politics' project. This will provide an in-depth exploration of the British Catholic population, including demographics, personal faith and beliefs, religious practice and preferences, social and political attitudes, and views on topics ranging from nuclear deterrence to Natural Family Planning. Further details, findings and regular updates may be found at our project website: <https://catholicsinbritain.le.ac.uk>.

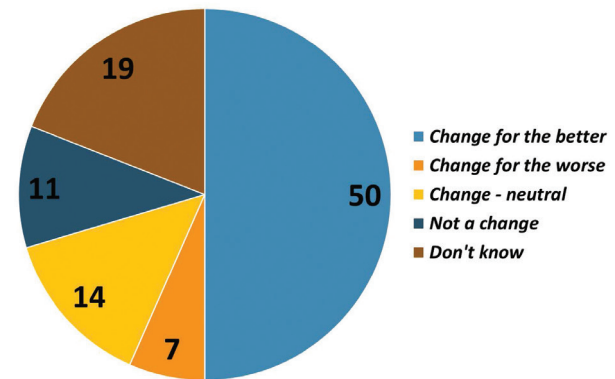
Note to journalists:

Please direct all interview requests or data queries to Dr Ben Clements (bc101@leicester.ac.uk) and Prof Stephen Bullivant (stephen.bullivant@stmarys.ac.uk).

We are planning to release a more detailed report, focusing on British Catholics' moral and social attitudes, in summer 2020.

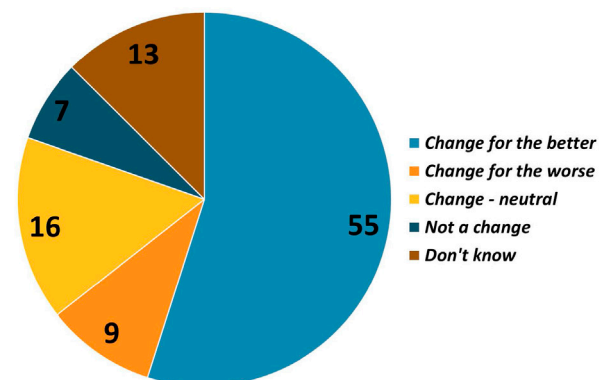
Data and key findings

Fig. 1 British Catholics' views on whether Francis' papacy represents a change and, if so, in which direction



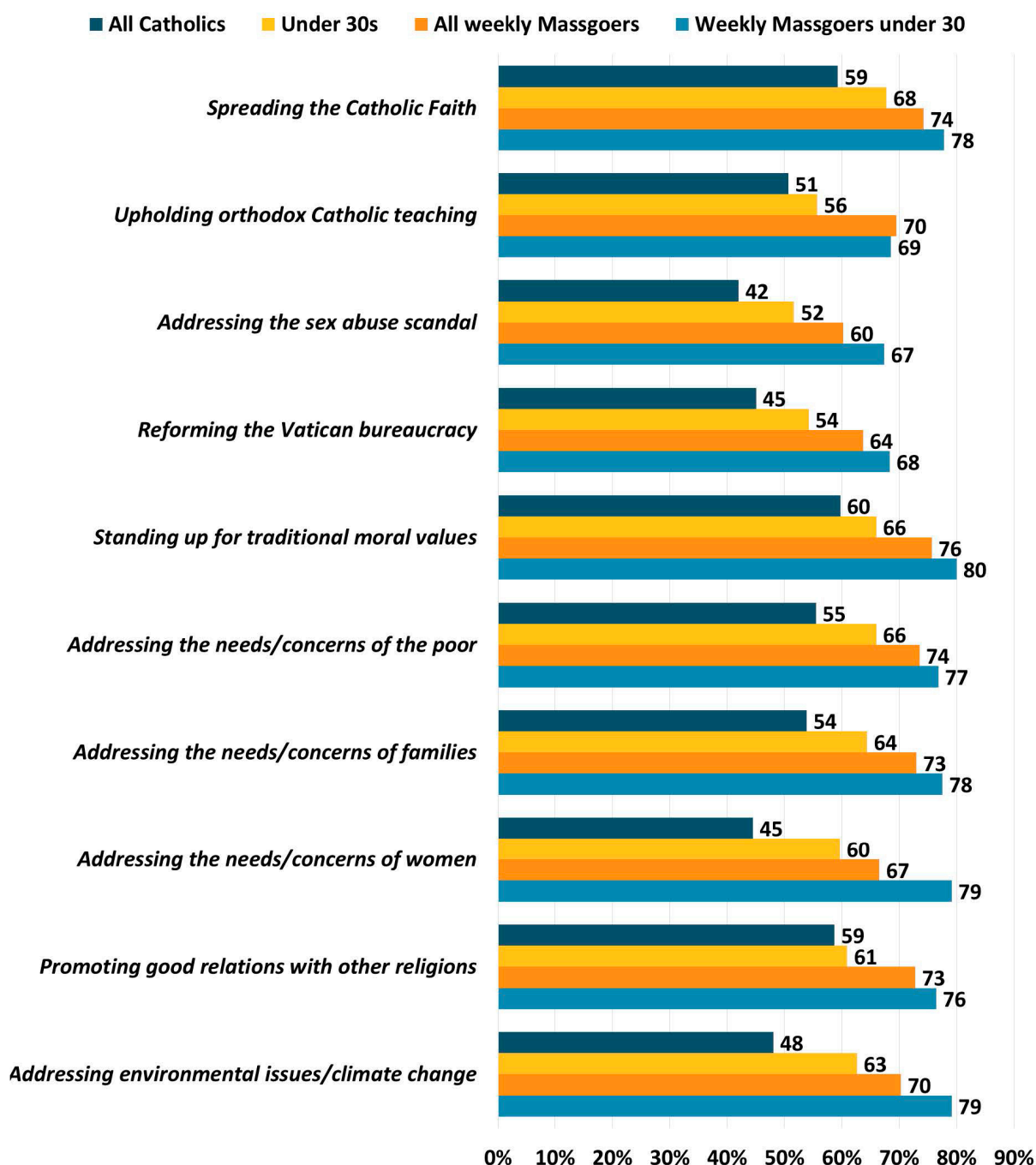
- 70% of British Catholics see Francis as representing a 'change of direction' for the papacy. This rises to 87% among weekly Massgoers. (Fig. 1)
- 50% of all Catholics regard Francis as a change for the better, compared to 7% who see him as a change for the worse. Among weekly Massgoers, the proportions are 60% (better) and 11% (worse). (Fig. 1)

Fig. 2 British Catholic under 30s' views on whether Francis' papacy represents a change and, if so, in which direction



- 80% of 18-29 year-old Catholics see Francis as a change of papal direction, rising to 92% among weekly Massgoers. (Fig. 2)
- 55% of 18-29 year olds see Francis' papacy as a change for the better, compared to 9% seeing it as a change for the worse. Among weekly Massgoers, the proportions are 65% (better) and 11% (worse). (Fig. 2)

Fig. 3 Proportions of different groups of British Catholics believing that Pope Francis is doing an 'Excellent' or 'Good' job at:



- Across ten different areas of church life, Francis' 'job approval' ratings are notably high. On only four topics – Vatican reform, sex abuse crisis, women, and environmental issues – do fewer than 50% of all Catholics think he is doing either an 'Excellent' or 'Good' job overall. (Fig. 3)
- Approval of Pope Francis correlates strongly with both weekly Massgoing and being under 30 years of age. In nine of our ten areas, weekly Massgoing 18-29 year-old Catholics are the most enthusiastic about Pope Francis. (Fig. 3)

Methodological details

The ‘Catholics in Britain’ survey was designed by Clements and Bullivant, building on previous work by other researchers. In particular, we wish here to acknowledge that the ‘job approval’ questions which form the basis of this report are (modified) replications of ones used in Pew Research Center’s ‘2015 Survey of US Catholics and Family Life’. (Findings here: www.pewforum.org/2015/09/02/u-s-catholics-open-to-non-traditional-families)

The survey was administered online by Savanta ComRes in late October and November 2019 to a nationally representative (in terms of age, sex and region) sample of British Catholics. Catholics were identified by use of a standard screening question: ‘Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion? If yes, which?’ (cf. British Social Attitudes survey).

Total n for the survey sample was 1823. N values for the subsamples we refer to in this report were as follows: all weekly Massgoers (559), 18-29 year-olds (295), weekly Massgoing 18-29 year-olds (138).



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