



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Fact Sheet: Catholics in the United States

Catholic population in the United States

There were around 66.6 million Catholics in the U.S. as of 2014 according to the Center for Applied Research in Apostolate.

Parishes in the United States:

There were 17,483 parishes in the U.S. as of 2014 according to the Center for Applied Research in Apostolate.

Ethnic breakdown of US Catholics According to the Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study done from June 4th – September 30th in 2014:

- over a third of the American Catholic population is Hispanic (34%) and
- more than a quarter were born outside the country (27%).
- 59% of Catholics are White.
- Blacks and Asians each make up 3% of the Catholic population and 2% are classified "other".
- Catholics are more likely than other Americans to be immigrants or children of immigrants:

Location of US Catholics

Catholics are heavily concentrated in the Northeast region of the United States: According to that same Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study done from June 4th – September 30th in 2014:

- 26% of residents of the Northeast consider themselves Catholics.
- 21% of the population in the Midwest is Catholic,
- 26% of residents of the West are Catholics
- and 27% of Southerners self-identify as Catholic.

According to the same survey, nearly half of Hispanic Catholics are located in the West (44%), while most Non-Hispanic Catholics are located in the Northeast (32%). The region with the smallest

percentage of Hispanic Catholics is the Midwest (9%), while the region with the fewest Non-Hispanic Catholics is the West (16%).

US Catholics and Public Opinion

CBS News found that most American Catholics approve of the job Pope Francis has been doing. They found that the percentage that thinks the Catholic Church in the U.S. is getting better has more than doubled since February 2013, from 17% to 36% today. The Majority still thinks it is staying the same with 49% voting in favor of the option. Only 12% said the Catholic Church is actually getting worse with Pope Francis. When this survey was done in 2013, 22% said it was getting worse and 60% felt it was staying the same.

Associate Professor of Theology [Jeannine Hill Fletcher](#) of Fordham University confirms the poll's findings that many US Catholics are pleased with the direction in which Pope Francis is taking the Church. "Of course, there's no 'one way' US Catholics feel about the direction Francis is leading the Catholic Church, but many Catholics who were positively impacted by Vatican II and liberation theology believe that the Pope is bringing Catholicism back to its center in a gospel message of care for 'the least,'" she explains. "Many Catholics who have been turned off by an institutional church that they experienced as excessively 'rule-oriented' and hierarchical are reconsidering a Church that might be in touch with the concerns of people. This is what I think we are seeing in the 'Francis effect.'"

Pope Francis is finding strong support from amongst the Church's most active members. Sixty six percent of those American Catholics who attend mass at least weekly say they strongly approve of the direction Francis is leading the Church. American Catholics of Hispanic decent are also showing strong support of the first Latin American Pope. CBS News found that 62 percent of Catholic Hispanics surveyed strongly approve of the Pontiff.

CBS News also asked American Catholics if they felt that Pope Francis addresses some of the issues facing the Catholic Church today. Most American Catholics believe that Pope Francis has done an excellent job addressing "the concerns of the poor" with 84% approving and only 8% disapproving. The concern that most people felt Pope Francis has not addressed enough is "Abortion/Same-sex marriage" with a disapproval of 26%. "Pope Francis has been certainly the most popular Pope since records have ever been kept," says explains [J. Patrick Hornbeck II](#), Associate Professor of Theology

at Fordham University. “There have been parts of this message that have appealed to people who are on all different sides of the American Political spectrum. And I think the main thing we have to remember about the Pope, is that he’s not coming as a conservative, or republican, or as a liberal or as a democrat. But rather he’s bringing his take on the message of Christ.”

***Author: Omar Fernandez
September 21, 2015***