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Americans See Catholic Clergy Sex Abuse as an Ongoing Problem

Most U.S. Catholics say sexual misconduct is not unique to their church

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Americans See Catholic Clergy Sex Abuse as an Ongoing Problem

Most U.S. Catholics say sexual misconduct is not unique to their church

More than 15 years after U.S. bishops pledged “[zero tolerance](#)” for sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests, reports of previously unpublicized misconduct continue to receive wide media coverage. A Pennsylvania grand jury last year uncovered [decades of sexual abuse and coverup](#) by Catholic leaders, and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick – formerly the archbishop of Washington, D.C. – was [forced to resign amid allegations](#) that he sexually abused adults and minors.

Americans are paying attention. A new Pew Research Center survey finds that about nine-in-ten U.S. adults – including 95% of Catholics – have heard at least “a little” about recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops, including a clear majority who say they have heard “a lot.” And, overall, about eight-in-ten U.S. adults say the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops reflect “ongoing problems that are still happening” in the church. Far fewer (12%) think the recent reports reflect “things that happened in the past and mostly don’t happen anymore.”

While U.S. adults generally agree that the recent reports of sexual misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops reflect continuing problems, the public is divided over whether this is a problem unique to the Catholic Church. Roughly half of survey respondents say sexual abuse and misconduct is more common among Catholic priests and bishops than among leaders in other religious traditions (48%), while a nearly identical share say abuse is equally common among leaders in other religions (47%). Just 3% say abuse is *less* common in the Catholic Church than in other religious traditions.

Vast majority of U.S. adults have heard about recent reports of sexual abuse in Catholic Church

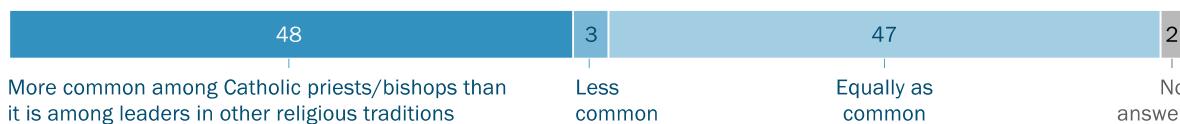
% of U.S. adults who have heard ___ about recent reports of sexual abuse/misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops



% of U.S. adults who say the recent reports ...



% of U.S. adults who say sexual abuse and misconduct is ...



Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults. Photo by Jeff Swensen via Getty Images.

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What do U.S. Catholics think about these issues? A substantial majority (69%) say that abuse by Catholic clergy is an ongoing problem. However, U.S. Catholics are more likely than other Americans to say it has mostly stopped; one-quarter of Catholics (24%) say recent reports of misconduct reflect things that happened in the past and mostly don't happen anymore, while just 9% of non-Catholics think the abuse happened in the past and mostly no longer goes on. Eight-in-ten non-Catholics (81%) say the problems in the Catholic Church are ongoing.

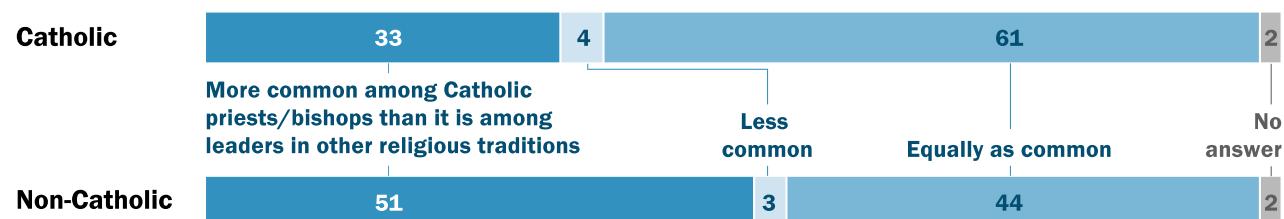
Catholics also are less likely than other Americans to see sexual abuse as a uniquely large problem among Catholic clergy. A majority of U.S. Catholics (61%) say sexual abuse and misconduct is just as common among leaders in other religious traditions as it is among Catholic priests and bishops, while only a third (33%) say sexual abuse is more common in the Catholic Church. By contrast, non-Catholics are somewhat more likely to say that sexual abuse happens disproportionately in the Catholic Church (51%) than they are to say it is equally common across religious traditions (44%).

Similarly, most Catholics say sexual abuse of children is just as common among other adults who work with children, such as teachers, coaches and camp counselors, as it is among religious leaders (see page 16).

Catholics more likely than non-Catholics to say recent reports of sex abuse reflect past problems



% who say sexual abuse and misconduct is ...



Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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The survey also asked a number of questions tailored specifically to Catholics in order to measure their response to reports of sexual abuse in the church. Nearly half of U.S. Catholics (46%) say they have discussed the recent reports at least some with family, friends or acquaintances.

In addition, one-quarter of U.S. Catholics say they have scaled back Mass attendance (27%) or reduced the amount of money they donate to their parish (26%) in response to the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct. Fewer (18%) say they have expressed support to the priests at their parish.¹

One-quarter of U.S. Catholics say they have scaled back Mass attendance, donations in response to recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct

% of U.S. Catholics who say they have ____ as a result of the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops

| U.S. Catholics | Attend Mass at least weekly | Attend less often |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Talked a lot/some with others about the recent reports | 46% | 58% |
| Gone to Mass less often | 27 | 15 |
| Reduced the amount of money they donate to their parish/diocese | 26 | 20 |
| Expressed support/encouragement to the priests at their parish | 18 | 35 |
| | | 12 |

Note: Information on the frequency with which respondents attend religious services was collected as part of a previous survey, conducted roughly six months prior to the new study (Aug. 20-Oct. 28, 2018).

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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Catholics who say they attend Mass at least weekly are more likely than less-frequent attenders to say they have talked with family, friends or others about the reports of abuse. Roughly six-in-ten weekly attenders say they have done this (58%), compared with 42% of Catholics who attend Mass less often. And about one-third of weekly attenders (35%) say they have expressed support or encouragement to the priests at their parish, while only 12% of less-frequent attenders have done so. On the other hand, weekly Mass attenders are *less* likely than others to say their attendance at

¹ The new survey did not measure how many people have *left* the Catholic Church in response to recent (or older) reports of clergy sexual abuse. Past surveys have attempted to tackle this question, finding that while substantial numbers of former Catholics cite the scandal among the reasons they left the church, relatively few say it was the *primary* reason. For example, a [2008 Pew Research Center survey](#) found that about a quarter of former Catholics said the clergy sexual abuse scandal was a reason that they left the church, when asked about it specifically. However, in a [separate survey conducted in 2015](#), in which respondents were asked to describe in their own words their reasons for leaving the church, just 4% of former Catholics pointed to the scandal as the main reason for their departure. These surveys, of course, both predate the most recent revelations.

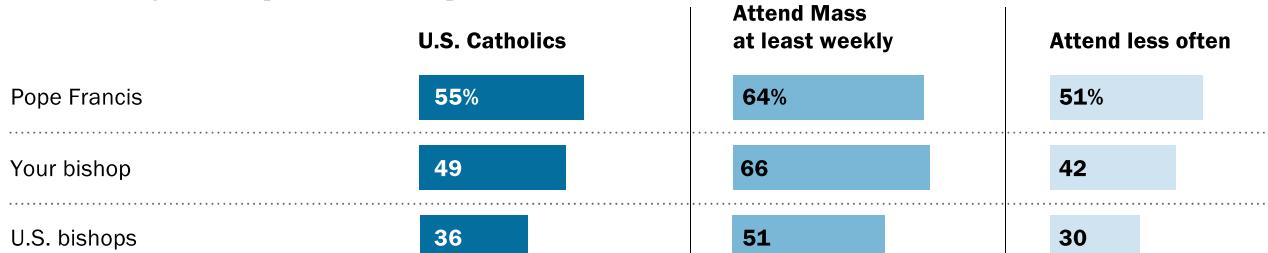
Mass has dipped (15% vs. 32%) or that they have reduced their donations (20% vs. 28%) in response to reports of sexual abuse in the church.

The new survey also finds that U.S. Catholics express mixed opinions about the way Catholic leaders have responded to reports of abuse and misconduct within the church. Slightly more than half of Catholics say Pope Francis has done an “excellent” or “good” job responding to recent reports of abuse (55%).² By comparison, about half (49%) say their bishop has done at least a good job responding to the reports, while fewer (36%) say the same about U.S. bishops as a whole.

Again, Catholics’ opinions on these questions vary by how often they attend Mass. Among Catholics who say they attend on a weekly basis, half or more express favorable opinions about the way that Pope Francis, their own bishop and the U.S. bishops as a whole have handled reports of sexual abuse. Opinions are less positive among Catholics who attend Mass less often; just 30% in this group give U.S. bishops excellent or good ratings.

Roughly two-thirds of weekly Mass attenders give Pope Francis positive rating for handling recent reports of sex abuse

% of U.S. Catholics who say ____ has done an excellent/good job responding to the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops



Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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² In September 2018, Pew Research Center asked U.S. Catholics a similar (although not identical) question: How would you rate the job the pope is doing in addressing the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church? That survey found that 31% of Catholics thought Pope Francis was doing an “excellent” or “good” job responding to the scandal in general, while six-in-ten (62%) said he was doing an “only fair” or “poor” job. The new survey finds that a considerably higher share of Catholics (55%) give Francis an excellent or good rating for his response to the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct in the Catholic Church. The results of the two questions are not directly comparable because of differences in question wording, questionnaire context and mode differences (the September 2018 survey was conducted via the phone while the new survey was self-administered via the internet).

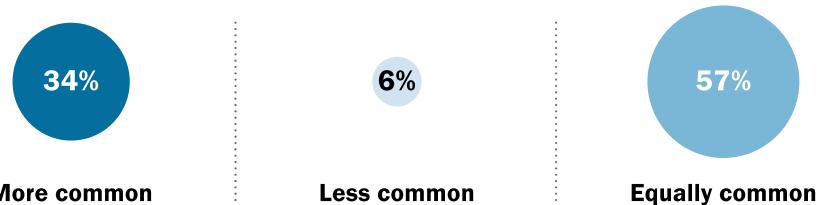
There are few, if any, consistent patterns on these and other questions among Catholics by age, gender, education, political party or other factors (see detailed tables).

These are among the key findings from a nationally representative survey of 6,364 U.S. adults conducted online March 18 to April 1, 2019, using Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel. The survey was conducted a few weeks after Pope Francis [convened a Vatican summit](#) on the sexual abuse crisis in late February, but before Francis issued [new rules for reporting accusations](#). Other findings from the survey include:

- Most U.S. adults think sexual abuse of children does not occur more often in religious settings than in nonreligious settings. A majority of the public (57%) says the sexual abuse of children is equally as common among clergy and other religious leaders as it is among other adults who work with children, such as teachers, coaches or camp counselors. Still, about a third (34%) think sexual abuse of children is more common among religious leaders than among other adults who work with children, while just 6% think it is *less* common.

Most U.S. adults think sexual abuse of children is equally common among religious leaders and other adults who work with children

% of U.S. adults who say sexual abuse of children is ____ among clergy and other religious leaders compared with other adults who work with children



Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.
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- The American public is much more familiar with reports of sex abuse in the Catholic Church than in other religious organizations.³ Roughly seven-in-ten U.S. adults surveyed (71%) say they have heard at least a little about sexual abuse and misconduct by religious leaders outside the Catholic Church, but more say they've heard a little (51%) than a lot (21%) about this. By comparison, nine-in-ten U.S. adults (92%) have heard at least a little about reports of abuse among Catholic priests and bishops, and most of them (58% of all U.S. adults) have heard a lot.

³ The Catholic Church is not the only religious tradition in which leaders have faced accusations of sexual abuse and misconduct. For example, a recent investigation revealed years of misconduct [in the Southern Baptist Convention](#).

- Relatively few Americans who attend religious services with any regularity (a few times a year or more often) say they have heard the clergy at their place of worship speak about sexual abuse, assault or harassment (29%). Among the messages that are being heard: One-quarter (24%) say they have heard their clergy speak out in support of victims of sexual abuse, and 12% say their clergy have cautioned against false accusations of sexual abuse. Catholics are more likely than those who identify with Protestant traditions to have heard their clergy speak out about abuse in general (41% among Catholics vs. 27% among Protestants), and Catholics are also especially likely to say they have heard only messages of support for victims (24% vs. 11%; see page 20).
- Most Americans have not encountered allegations of sexual misconduct within their own congregations, but a non-negligible share of U.S. adults say they have firsthand experience with this issue. About one-in-ten (9%) say they have attended a place of worship where the clergy or other religious leaders have been accused of sexual misconduct in the past five years in one or more of the following ways: an extramarital affair (6%), sexual abuse of a child (4%), verbal sexual harassment (4%) or sexual abuse of an adult (3%).⁴ Another question was posed only to Catholics: At the church you attend most regularly, has a priest been accused of engaging in sexual activity with other priests? Overall, 4% of Catholics say a priest was accused of this at their church, while the vast majority do not (90%).

The rest of this report looks at these questions in more detail.

⁴ These figures are based on all U.S. adults, but the questions were asked only of people who said, in a previous survey, that they are affiliated with a religion or that they attend religious services a few times a year or more often. It is possible that the people who did not receive this question (people who say their religion is atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” and say they seldom or never attend religious services) did at some point attend a place of worship where the religious leader was accused of sexual misconduct but have since stopped attending religious services or stopped identifying with a religious faith. See topline for full question wording and filtering.

How various religious groups view clergy sexual abuse and misconduct

Roughly nine-in-ten U.S. adults have heard at least a little about recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops. This includes a majority (58%) who have heard “a lot” about the recent reports, one-third (34%) who have heard “a little,” and just 8% who have heard nothing at all.

Familiarity with the recent reports of abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops is broad-based. Large majorities across Christian traditions – not to mention Jews and people with no religious affiliation – say they have heard at least a little about the recent reports, including roughly half or more in each group who have heard “a lot” about them.

Vast majority of U.S. adults have heard about reports of sexual abuse by Catholic priests, bishops

% of U.S. adults who have heard ____ about the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops

| | NET Heard a lot/ a little about recent reports | No answer | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--------------|----------|----------------|--------------|
| | | A lot | A little | Nothing at all | 1=100 |
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| All U.S. adults | 92 | 58 | 34 | 8 | 1=100 |
| Christian | 93 | 59 | 34 | 7 | 1 |
| Catholic | 95 | 62 | 32 | 5 | 1 |
| Protestant | 92 | 57 | 35 | 8 | 1 |
| Evangelical | 92 | 54 | 38 | 7 | 1 |
| Mainline | 94 | 62 | 32 | 6 | 1 |
| Historically black | 85 | 56 | 29 | 14 | <1 |
| Jewish | 91 | 71 | 20 | 9 | <1 |
| Unaffiliated | 91 | 56 | 35 | 8 | 1 |
| Atheist | 96 | 65 | 31 | 4 | 0 |
| Agnostic | 96 | 70 | 26 | 3 | <1 |
| Nothing in particular | 88 | 49 | 39 | 11 | 1 |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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Nearly all Catholics included in the survey (95%) say they have heard something about the reports of abuse in their own church, including six-in-ten who have heard “a lot.” But they are *not* the most likely to say they have heard a lot about this topic: Seven-in-ten Jewish adults and a similarly large proportion of self-described agnostics have heard a lot about reports of abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops.

Most Americans also say they have heard something about recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by religious leaders *outside* of the Catholic Church, although U.S. adults on the whole are not as familiar with these reports as they are with abuse by Catholic priests and bishops.⁵ A majority of the public (71%) has heard at least “a little” about reports of abuse in faiths other than Catholicism, but more say they have heard a little (51%) than a lot (21%).

Among religious groups, Catholics (along with atheists and agnostics) are among the groups most likely to have heard something about the reports of abuse by religious leaders outside the Catholic Church. And while Jews are

one of the groups most likely to have heard about abuse in the Catholic Church, they are among the *least* likely to say they have heard about abuse by non-Catholic leaders. Evangelical and mainline Protestants also are less likely than some other groups to have heard something about reports of sexual abuse outside of the Catholic Church, with two-thirds in each group saying they have heard at least a little.

Evangelicals, mainline Protestants and Jews among least likely to say they have heard about sexual abuse by religious leaders outside of Catholic Church

% of U.S. adults who have heard ___ about recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by religious leaders OUTSIDE of the Catholic Church

| | NET Heard a lot/a little about recent reports | No answer | | | |
|---------------------------|--|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------|
| | | A lot | A little | Nothing at all | 1 |
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| All U.S. adults | 71 | 21 | 51 | 28 | 1 |
| Christian | 71 | 19 | 52 | 28 | 1 |
| Catholic | 77 | 25 | 52 | 22 | 1 |
| Protestant | 68 | 17 | 51 | 32 | 1 |
| <i>Evangelical</i> | 67 | 15 | 52 | 32 | 1 |
| <i>Mainline</i> | 67 | 15 | 52 | 32 | 1 |
| <i>Historically black</i> | 72 | 26 | 46 | 27 | 1 |
| Jewish | 65 | 14 | 51 | 34 | 1 |
| Unaffiliated | 73 | 24 | 49 | 27 | 1 |
| Atheist | 78 | 29 | 50 | 22 | 0 |
| Agnostic | 79 | 24 | 54 | 21 | 0 |
| Nothing in particular | 69 | 22 | 47 | 30 | 1 |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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⁵ Among the religious groups that have been the subject of sexual abuse accusations in recent years – just to name a few – have been the [Southern Baptist Convention](#) in the U.S., the [Church of England](#), the [ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Brooklyn](#) and [Jehovah’s Witnesses](#).

When it comes to opinions about whether the reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops reflect ongoing problems or things that happened in the past and mostly don't happen anymore, large majorities across all major religious groups say the reports reflect ongoing problems. Just one-in-ten U.S. adults say the reports reflect things that are largely confined to the past.

But U.S. Catholics stand out on this question. While most Catholics say clergy sexual abuse is an ongoing problem (69%), roughly a quarter (24%) think sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops mostly doesn't happen anymore – a larger share than in any other religious group.

Conversely, atheists are particularly likely to think sexual abuse in the Catholic Church is an ongoing problem. Just 3% of self-identified atheists say reports of abuse reflect things that happened in the past and have mostly stopped, while fully nine-in-ten (93%) think there are continuing problems.

Catholics more likely than other religious groups to think sexual abuse in the church is a thing of the past

% of U.S. adults who say the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops reflect ...

| | Things that happened in past % | Ongoing problems % | No answer % | Have not heard about recent reports/no answer % |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--|
| All U.S. adults | 12 | 79 | 1 | 8=100 |
| Christian | 14 | 77 | 1 | 7 |
| Catholic | 24 | 69 | 2 | 5 |
| Protestant | 11 | 80 | 1 | 8 |
| Evangelical | 10 | 81 | 2 | 8 |
| Mainline | 11 | 82 | 1 | 6 |
| Historically black | 12 | 73 | 1 | 15 |
| Jewish | 7 | 83 | 1 | 9 |
| Unaffiliated | 7 | 83 | <1 | 9 |
| Atheist | 3 | 93 | 0 | 4 |
| Agnostic | 10 | 86 | 1 | 4 |
| Nothing in particular | 8 | 79 | <1 | 12 |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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About half of U.S. adults (48%) say sexual abuse and misconduct is more common among Catholic priests and bishops than among leaders in other religious traditions, while a similar share (47%) say it is equally common across religious groups. Very few Americans (3%) say sexual abuse is less common in the Catholic Church than in other religious traditions.

Catholics, however, clearly come down on one side of this question. Just one-third of U.S. Catholics think sexual abuse is particularly common in the Catholic Church, while a majority (61%) say abuse is equally as common among leaders in other religions – the highest share who hold this view among all major U.S. religious groups.

Meanwhile, Jews are particularly likely to say sexual abuse and misconduct is more common among Catholic priests and bishops (72%). About six-in-ten evangelical Protestants and more than half of mainline Protestants share this view. Religiously unaffiliated adults tend to be more divided in their opinions.

Most Catholics say sexual abuse is just as common in other religious traditions as among Catholic clergy

% of U.S. adults who say sexual abuse and misconduct is ___ among Catholic priests/bishops compared with leaders in other religious traditions

| | More common | Less common | Equally as common | No answer |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
| All U.S. adults | 48 | 3 | 47 | 2=100 |
| Christian | 49 | 3 | 46 | 2 |
| Catholic | 33 | 4 | 61 | 2 |
| Protestant | 56 | 3 | 39 | 2 |
| Evangelical | 59 | 2 | 37 | 2 |
| Mainline | 55 | 1 | 42 | 2 |
| Historically black | 48 | 9 | 39 | 4 |
| Jewish | 72 | 1 | 25 | 2 |
| Unaffiliated | 45 | 4 | 50 | 1 |
| Atheist | 49 | 3 | 47 | 1 |
| Agnostic | 50 | 3 | 46 | 1 |
| Nothing in particular | 42 | 4 | 52 | 2 |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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The survey also asked about the sexual abuse of children in nonreligious settings.⁶ Overall, a majority of U.S. adults (57%) say sexual abuse of children is just as common among adults who work with children in secular settings (such as teachers, coaches or camp counselors) as it is among clergy and other religious leaders. A third (34%) think sexual abuse of children is more common among religious leaders, and 6% say it is less common.

Again, Catholics are especially likely to say sexual abuse of children is not a problem unique to clergy but, rather, is just as common among other adults who work with children. Fully two-thirds of Catholics (68%) take this position; just 22% say sexual abuse is more common among religious leaders.

At the other end of the spectrum, Jews, atheists and agnostics are more likely to say sexual abuse of children is particularly common among clergy and other religious leaders. Roughly half of Jews (53%) and atheists (51%) and a similar share of agnostics (46%) say sexual abuse of children is a bigger issue among religious leaders than among other adults.

Most Americans do not think sexual abuse of children is more common among religious leaders than among other adults

% of U.S. adults who say sexual abuse of children is ____ among clergy and other religious leaders compared with other adults who work with children

| | More common | Less common | Equally as common | No answer |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| All U.S. adults | 34 | 6 | 57 | 3=100 |
| Christian | 30 | 7 | 60 | 3 |
| Catholic | 22 | 7 | 68 | 4 |
| Protestant | 34 | 7 | 57 | 3 |
| Evangelical | 35 | 6 | 55 | 4 |
| Mainline | 32 | 4 | 61 | 3 |
| Historically black | 33 | 14 | 50 | 3 |
| Jewish | 53 | 2 | 43 | 2 |
| Unaffiliated | 39 | 6 | 53 | 2 |
| Atheist | 51 | 2 | 47 | 1 |
| Agnostic | 46 | 5 | 47 | 2 |
| Nothing in particular | 34 | 7 | 57 | 2 |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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⁶ For example, the Boy Scouts have acknowledged [thousands of allegations of sexual abuse](#) across several decades, and [hundreds of gymnasts](#) have alleged sexual abuse connected to the USA Gymnastics program.

How Catholic subgroups view prevalence of sexual abuse in religious and nonreligious settings

One-quarter of Catholics think the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops reflect things that took place in the past and mostly no longer happen, while seven-in-ten say these problems are ongoing.

While majorities across Catholic subgroups say the recent reports of abuse reflect ongoing problems, there are some gaps in opinions. Catholics who attend Mass on a weekly basis are more likely than those who attend less often to say the problem is confined to the past. Fully one-third of Mass-attending Catholics say the reports of sexual abuse reflect past events that no longer happen, compared with one-in-five less-frequent attenders.

Weekly Mass attenders more likely than others to think recent reports of abuse reflect things that no longer happen

% of U.S. Catholics who say the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops reflect ...

| | Things that happened in past % | Ongoing problems % | No answer % | Have not heard about recent reports/no answer % |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--|
| U.S. Catholics | 24 | 69 | 2 | 5=100 |
| Attend Mass weekly+ | 34 | 63 | 1 | 2 |
| Attend less often | 20 | 71 | 2 | 7 |
| White | 29 | 67 | 2 | 2 |
| Hispanic | 15 | 73 | 2 | 10 |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Whites are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.
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There are also divides along racial and ethnic lines. White Catholics are nearly twice as likely as Hispanic Catholics to think the reporting on sexual abuse within the church reflects things that no longer happen (29% vs. 15%).

Meanwhile, most Catholics (61%) say that sexual abuse and misconduct is just as common in other religious traditions as it is in the Catholic Church, while one-third think sexual abuse is more common in the Catholic Church. This pattern is also reflected among Catholic subgroups, but views again vary by Mass attendance and ethnicity.

About one-in-four U.S. Catholics who attend Mass weekly (23%) think abuse is more common in the Catholic Church than in other religious traditions. By comparison, nearly four-in-ten Catholics who attend Mass less often (37%) say sexual abuse and misconduct is especially common among Catholic priests and bishops.

Among white Catholics, four-in-ten (39%) think sexual abuse is more common among Catholic leaders than it is among leaders in other religious traditions. But Hispanic Catholics are less likely to say abuse is more common in the Catholic Church. One-in-five in this group (22%) say sexual abuse is more common among Catholic priests and bishops, while 69% think it's a problem that is just as prevalent in other religious traditions.

White Catholics more likely than Hispanics to say sex abuse is especially common in the Catholic Church

% of U.S. Catholics who say sexual abuse and misconduct is ___ among Catholic priests/bishops compared with leaders in other religious traditions

| | More common | Less common | Equally as common | No answer |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| | | | % | % |
| U.S. Catholics | 33 | 4 | 61 | 2=100 |
| Attend Mass weekly+ | 23 | 6 | 68 | 3 |
| Attend less often | 37 | 3 | 58 | 2 |
| White | 39 | 3 | 56 | 1 |
| Hispanic | 22 | 6 | 69 | 3 |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Whites are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.
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On the question of whether sexual abuse of children is more common among religious leaders than among other adults who work with children, there is consensus among Catholics. Two-thirds say sexual abuse is equally as common among religious leaders as it is among other adults who work with children (68%). The opinions of white Catholics and Hispanic Catholics mirror those of the Catholic population as a whole.

However, opinions differ somewhat between Catholics

who attend Mass on a weekly basis and those who go less often. Majorities in both groups think sexual abuse of children is equally common among clergy as among other adults, but less-frequent attenders are 9 percentage points more likely than weekly attenders to say sexual abuse is more common among clergy (24% vs. 15%).

Among Catholics, general consensus that sexual abuse of children is not a problem unique to religion

% of U.S. Catholics who say sexual abuse of children is _____ among clergy and other religious leaders compared with other adults who work with children

| | More common | Less common | Equally as common | No answer |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| U.S. Catholics | 22 | 7 | 68 | 4=100 |
| Attend Mass weekly+ | 15 | 10 | 73 | 3 |
| Attend less often | 24 | 6 | 66 | 4 |
| White | 24 | 6 | 68 | 2 |
| Hispanic | 18 | 8 | 68 | 6 |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Whites are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.
“Americans See Catholic Clergy Sex Abuse as an Ongoing Problem”

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In U.S. places of worship, most do not hear talk about sexual abuse

U.S. adults who say they attend religious services a few times a year or more often were asked if the clergy or other religious leaders at their place of worship have spoken out about sexual harassment, assault or abuse. Within this group, about three-in-ten say their clergy have spoken out about sexual abuse (29%) while two-thirds say they have not heard their clergy say anything about this topic (68%).

When it comes to the messages that churchgoers are hearing, one-in-four say their clergy have spoken out in support of victims of sexual abuse, and 12% say their clergy have warned against false accusations of abuse.

Among those who attend religious services at least a few times a year, one-in-ten say their clergy have spoken out *both* in support of victims of sexual abuse and to caution against false accusations. In terms of regular attenders who are only hearing one type of message from their clergy, more hear only about supporting victims (14%) than only about false accusations (2%).

There are similar patterns among religious groups, with the exception of Catholics. Catholics are more likely than other U.S. Christians to hear clergy talking about sex abuse in general (41% among Catholics vs. 27% among Protestants). And Catholics who attend Mass at least a few times a year are more likely to say they hear their clergy talk only about supporting victims (24%), compared with a smaller share among Protestants (11%).

Among Americans who attend religious services at least yearly, most have not heard clergy talk about sexual abuse

Among U.S. adults who say they attend religious services a few times a year or more often, % who say ...

| | % |
|--|-----------|
| Have heard clergy speak out about sexual harassment, assault or abuse | 29 |
| Clergy spoke out in support of victims of abuse | 24 |
| Clergy did not speak out in support of victims | 4 |
| No answer | 1 |
| Have not heard clergy speak out about sexual harassment, assault or abuse | 68 |
| No answer | 3 |
| | 100 |

| | % |
|--|-----------|
| Have heard clergy speak out about sexual harassment, assault or abuse | 29 |
| Clergy spoke out to caution against false accusations of abuse | 12 |
| Clergy did not speak out to caution against false accusations | 16 |
| No answer | 1 |
| Have not heard clergy speak out about sexual harassment, assault or abuse | 68 |
| No answer | 3 |
| | 100 |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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Among regular attenders, Catholics more likely than other groups to hear their clergy speak out in support of victims of sexual abuse

Among U.S. adults who attend religious services a few times a year or more often, % who say ...

| | All regular attenders | Christian Protestant | Evangelical | Mainline | Historically black | Catholic |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| NET Have heard clergy speak out about sexual harassment, assault or abuse | | | | | | |
| Clergy spoke out in support of victims AND to caution against false accusations | 29 | 31 | 27 | 25 | 29 | 33 |
| Clergy spoke out only in support of victims | 10 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 |
| Clergy spoke out only to caution against false accusations | 14 | 15 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 7 |
| Clergy spoke out about neither | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| No answer | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| NET Have not heard clergy speak out about sexual harassment, assault, abuse/no answer | | | | | | |
| Clergy spoke out in support of victims AND to caution against false accusations | 71 | 69 | 73 | 75 | 71 | 67 |
| Clergy spoke out only in support of victims | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Clergy spoke out only to caution against false accusations | | | | | | |
| No answer | | | | | | |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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Catholics also were asked whether they have discussed the recent reports of abuse by Catholic priests and bishops with family, friends or acquaintances. Overall, about half of Catholics say they've talked at least some about recent reports of sexual abuse, including 10% who say they've talked about this "a lot," and 37% who say they've talked about this "some." A similar share (47%) say they have not talked about this issue much or at all.

Six-in-ten regular Mass attenders say they have talked with others at least some about the recent reports of abuse (58%), while four-in-ten have not talked with others much or at all (40%). By comparison, a smaller share of less-frequent attenders say they have talked at least some with family, friends or acquaintances about the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct (42%).

Weekly Mass attenders more likely than less-frequent attenders to talk with others about recent reports of sexual misconduct

% of U.S. Catholics who say they have talked ____ with family, friends or acquaintances about the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops

| | NET A lot/ some | NET Not much/ not at all | | | | | | Have not heard about recent reports/no answer | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|---|----|-------------|----|---------------------|--------------|--|----------------------|
| | | A lot | | Some | | Not much | | Not at all | No answer |
| | | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| U.S. Catholics | 46 | 10 | 37 | 47 | 27 | 20 | 1 | | 5 |
| Attend Mass weekly+ | 58 | 18 | 40 | 40 | 27 | 13 | <1 | | 2 |
| Attend less often | 42 | 6 | 35 | 50 | 27 | 23 | 1 | | 7 |

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. Panelists participate via self-administered web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access at home are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. The panel is being managed by Ipsos.

Data in this report are drawn from the panel wave conducted March 18 to April 1, 2019. A total of 6,364 panelists responded out of 8,396 who were sampled, for a response rate of 76%. This does not include five panelists who were removed from the data due to extremely high rates of refusal or straight-lining. The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 5.3%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged onto the survey and completed at least one item is 1%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 6,364 respondents is plus or minus 1.7 percentage points.

American Trends Panel recruitment surveys

| Recruitment Dates | Mode | Invited | Joined | Active panelists remaining |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014 | Landline/cell RDD | 9,809 | 5,338 | 2,508 |
| Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015 | Landline/cell RDD | 6,004 | 2,976 | 1,469 |
| April 25 to June 4, 2017 | Landline/cell RDD | 3,905 | 1,628 | 802 |
| Aug. 8, 2018, to Oct. 31, 2018 | ABS/web | 9,396 | 8,778 | 8,714 |
| | Total | 29,114 | 18,720 | 13,493 |

Note: Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves or who did not complete an annual profiling survey are removed from the panel. Panelists also become inactive if they ask to be removed from the panel.

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The subsample from the ATP was selected by grouping panelists into four strata so demographic groups that are underrepresented in the panel had a higher probability of selection than overrepresented groups:

- Stratum A consists of panelists who identified as Mormon or as Jewish, or who are non-internet users or have a high school education or less. They were sampled at a rate of 100%.
- Stratum B consists of panelists that are Hispanic, unregistered to vote or non-volunteers. They were sampled at a rate of 77%.
- Stratum C consists of panelists that are black non-Hispanic or 18 to 34 years old. They were sampled at a rate of 28%.

- Stratum D consists of the remaining panelists. They were sampled at a rate of 23%.

The ATP was created in 2014, with the first cohort of panelists invited to join the panel at the end of a large, national, landline and cellphone random-digit-dial survey that was conducted in both English and Spanish. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to join the ATP, of which 9,942 agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a random, address-based sample (ABS) of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service’s Delivery Sequence File. In each household, the adult with the next birthday was asked to go online to complete a survey, at the end of which they were invited to join the panel. For a random half-sample of invitations, households without internet access were instructed to return a postcard. These households were contacted by telephone and sent a tablet if they agreed to participate. A total of 9,396 were invited to join the panel, and 8,778 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. Of the 18,720 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 13,493 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time this survey was conducted.

The U.S. Postal Service’s Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.⁷

⁷ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. “[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling](#).”

Weighting

The ATP data were weighted in a multistep process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original survey selection probability and the fact that in 2014 and 2017 some respondents were subsampled for invitation to the panel. The next step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that aligns the sample to population benchmarks on the dimensions listed in the accompanying table. For this wave, an additional weighting parameter was added to adjust for oversampling Mormon and Jewish respondents.

Sampling errors and tests of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish, but the American Trends Panel's Hispanic sample is predominantly U.S. born and English speaking.

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.

Weighting dimensions

| Variable | Benchmark source |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Gender | 2017 American Community Survey |
| Age | |
| Education | |
| Race/Hispanic origin | |
| Hispanic nativity | |
| Home internet access | |
| Region x Metropolitan status | 2018 CPS March Supplement |
| Volunteerism | 2015 CPS Volunteer Supplement |
| Voter registration | 2016 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement |
| Party affiliation | Average of the three most recent Pew Research Center telephone surveys |
| Religion (Mormon/Jewish/all other) | 2018 recruitment survey weighted to the above dimensions |

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults. Voter registration is calculated using procedures from Hur, Achen (2013) and rescaled to include the total U.S. adult population.

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The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

| Group | Unweighted sample size | Plus or minus ... |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Total sample | 6,364 | 1.7 percentage points |
| Christian | 3,886 | 2.1 percentage points |
| Protestant | 2,475 | 2.6 percentage points |
| <i>Evangelical</i> | 1,252 | 3.6 percentage points |
| <i>Mainline</i> | 899 | 4.3 percentage points |
| <i>Historically black</i> | 324 | 7.3 percentage points |
| Catholic | 1,116 | 4.0 percentage points |
| Jewish | 290 | 8.9 percentage points |
| Unaffiliated | 1,936 | 2.9 percentage points |
| Atheist | 377 | 6.6 percentage points |
| Agnostic | 410 | 6.3 percentage points |
| Nothing in particular | 1,149 | 3.8 percentage points |
| Attend religious services weekly or more | 1,630 | 3.4 percentage points |
| Attend less often | 4,704 | 1.9 percentage points |
| Men | 2,869 | 2.5 percentage points |
| Women | 3,489 | 2.2 percentage points |
| Ages 18-29 | 943 | 4.3 percentage points |
| 30-49 | 2,046 | 2.8 percentage points |
| 50-64 | 1,909 | 3.1 percentage points |
| 65+ | 1,462 | 3.3 percentage points |
| White | 4,421 | 1.9 percentage points |
| Black | 594 | 5.4 percentage points |
| Hispanic | 867 | 5.1 percentage points |
| High school or less | 1,545 | 3.2 percentage points |
| Some college | 1,922 | 2.8 percentage points |
| College graduate | 2,889 | 2.2 percentage points |
| Republican/lean Republican | 2,600 | 2.5 percentage points |
| Democrat/lean Democratic | 3,560 | 2.3 percentage points |

| <i>Among U.S. Catholics ...</i> | Unweighted sample size | Plus or minus ... |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Attend Mass weekly or more | 326 | 7.7 percentage points |
| Attend less often | 787 | 4.8 percentage points |
| Men | 495 | 6.3 percentage points |
| Women | 620 | 5.2 percentage points |
| Ages 18-49 | 456 | 6.4 percentage points |
| 50+ | 660 | 5.1 percentage points |
| White | 699 | 4.6 percentage points |
| Hispanic | 343 | 8.2 percentage points |
| High school or less | 292 | 7.5 percentage points |
| Some college | 312 | 7.0 percentage points |
| College graduate | 509 | 5.3 percentage points |
| Republican/lean Republican | 502 | 5.6 percentage points |
| Democrat/lean Democratic | 581 | 5.8 percentage points |

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

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