

What do Irish people think about the Catholic Church and religion?

Iona Institute

May 2025

amárach 
25 years of research



 **IONA INSTITUTE**
for Religion and Society



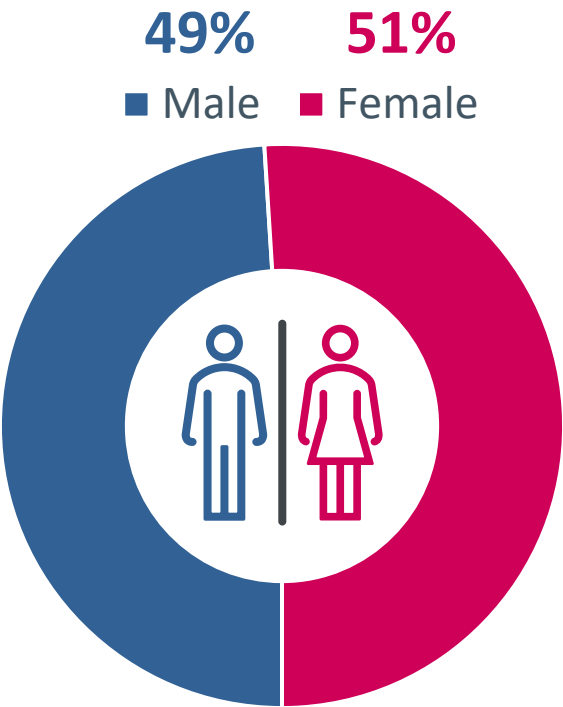
- Ireland has experienced extraordinary changes in religious attitudes and practices in recent decades.
- The survey results in this report update findings from a similar survey for the Iona Institute in 2011 to see how much change has taken place, as well as widening the analysis to explore the nature of religious and spiritual beliefs in Ireland in 2025 in the context of rapid social, demographic and technological change.
- Amárach was commissioned by the Iona Institute to conduct the research in two stages: first a survey of 1,000 adults in February 2025, then a follow up survey in March 2025.
- The issues of religion, faith and spirituality are too big for any one survey (or indeed surveys alone) to capture in their totality – but we hope this research for Iona provides some timely and relevant insights into the current state of religion & spirituality in Ireland.



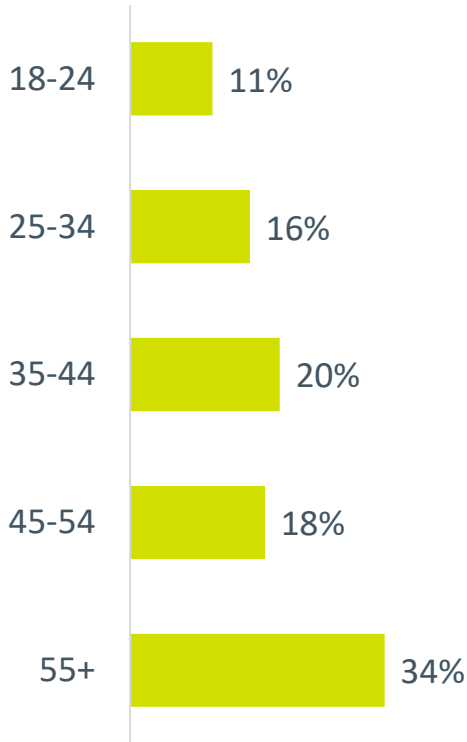
Sample Profiles (both February & March): nationally representative of ROI 18+

(Base: All respondents – 1,000 in each survey)

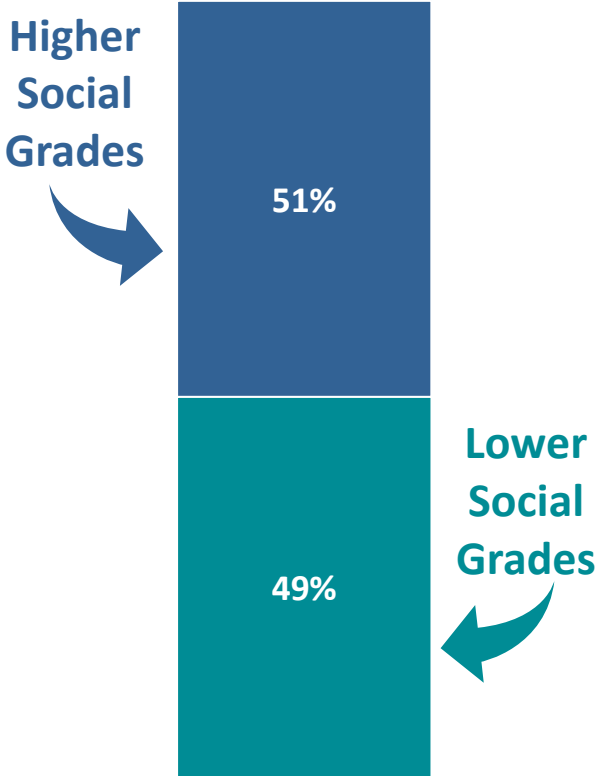
Gender



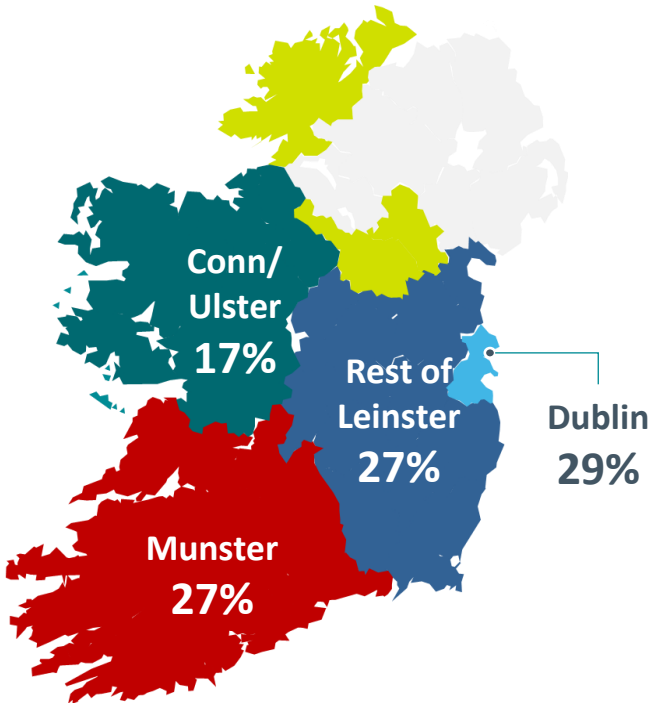
Age



Social Class



Region

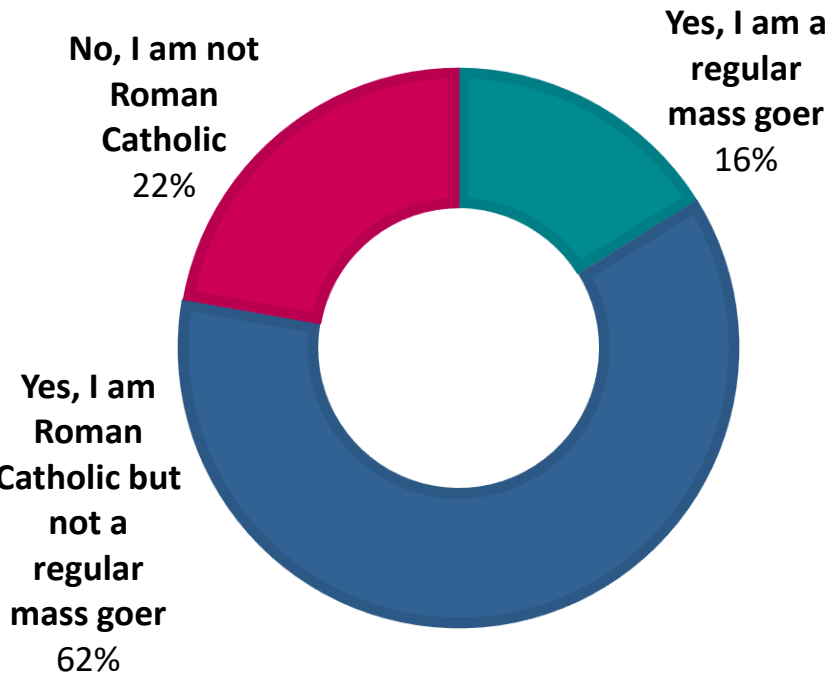




Practicing and Cultural Catholics

(Base: All respondents – 1,000 in each survey)

In both surveys we asked the question: If you are a Roman Catholic, are you a regular mass goer?



	GENDER		AGE						CLASS		REGION			
	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	ABC1 F50+	C2DE F50-	Dublin	Leinster (excluding Dublin)	Munster	Connaught or Ulster
Sample (March)	494	506	112	160	202	181	148	197	508	492	289	268	268	175
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Yes, I am a regular mass goer	16%	16%	6%	11%	15%	12%	15%	31%	14%	18%	11%	16%	18%	21%
No, I am Roman Catholic but not a regular mass goer	61%	62%	52%	57%	61%	71%	72%	54%	58%	65%	56%	65%	61%	65%
No, I am not Roman Catholic	22%	23%	41%	32%	24%	17%	13%	15%	27%	17%	33%	18%	21%	14%

We use the answers to this question as an additional level of analysis in the slides in this report, differentiating between ‘practicing Catholics’ (regular mass goers) and ‘cultural Catholics’ (identify as Catholic but don’t go to mass regularly).

N.B.: the boxes in the tables highlight some findings that are significantly different from the total population

Part 1:

Religious Beliefs & Practices

The majority (61%) of people in Ireland describe themselves as religious and/or spiritual – 3 in 10 say they are neither (more likely to be men & 25-34s)



(Base: All respondents – 1,000)

	GENDER			AGE						CLASS			CATHOLIC	
	TOTAL	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	ABC1 F50+	C2DE F50-	Regular Mass Goer	Roman Catholic but not regular mass goer	Not Roman Catholic
Sample (February)	1000	494	507	112	160	202	182	142	203	508	492	154	635	211
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
I am a religious person	12%	12%	13%	17%	5%	14%	9%	13%	16%	11%	14%	46%	7%	5%
I am a spiritual person	13%	13%	14%	11%	9%	14%	12%	18%	16%	11%	16%	5%	16%	10%
I am both religious and spiritual	19%	17%	21%	12%	18%	16%	20%	21%	24%	17%	21%	40%	16%	12%
I am spiritual but not religious	17%	16%	18%	14%	14%	18%	20%	14%	18%	17%	16%	1%	19%	20%
I am neither religious nor spiritual	30%	34%	25%	31%	42%	29%	32%	25%	19%	33%	26%	3%	30%	47%
Don't know/not sure	9%	9%	9%	15%	12%	9%	7%	8%	7%	10%	8%	5%	11%	6%
Any religious/spiritual	61%	58%	66%	54%	46%	62%	61%	68%	74%	56%	67%	92%	58%	47%

1 in 2 adults prays, 3 in 10 meditate: while 23% of 18-24s follows influencers on social media sharing content of a religious or spiritual nature



(Base: All respondents – 1,000)

% Often + Always + Sometimes	GENDER			AGE						CLASS		CATHOLIC		
	TOTAL	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	ABC1 F50+	C2DE F50-	Regular Mass Goer	Roman Catholic but not regular mass goer	Not Roman Catholic
Sample (February)	1000	494	507	112	160	202	182	142	203	508	492	154	635	211
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Pray	49%	44%	55%	42%	40%	42%	46%	61%	65%	45%	54%	95%	45%	30%
Attend religious services (e.g.: Sunday mass or other services)	35%	34%	37%	32%	23%	28%	29%	42%	56%	32%	39%	98%	26%	20%
Meditate	29%	25%	33%	30%	36%	22%	32%	24%	33%	29%	30%	41%	25%	32%
Check your horoscope	23%	9%	36%	24%	32%	23%	20%	18%	19%	20%	25%	30%	24%	14%
Read a religious or spiritual book (e.g.: bible)	18%	16%	19%	22%	13%	13%	18%	20%	24%	16%	20%	48%	11%	19%
Watch content on YouTube about religious and/or spiritual themes	15%	14%	16%	21%	15%	10%	15%	17%	15%	12%	17%	31%	10%	18%
Follow influencers on social media sharing content of a religious or spiritual nature	14%	11%	17%	23%	18%	13%	15%	10%	7%	13%	14%	25%	10%	15%
Attend classes or courses with a spiritual or religious theme	9%	7%	11%	14%	6%	11%	10%	18%	24%	10%	8%	22%	3%	14%

Q. How often do you do any of the following? Answer options: Never/Rarely/Sometimes/Often/Always

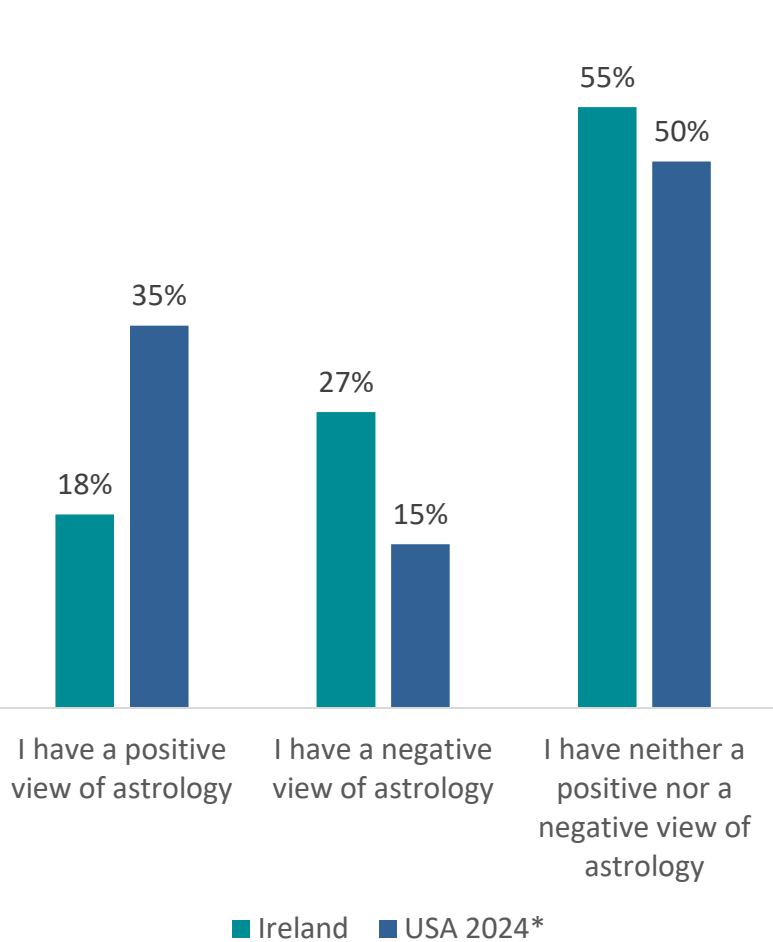
Do we have non-religious spiritual beliefs? (A test case: astrology)



(Base: All respondents – 1,000)

In the February survey we asked:

Astrology is a belief system that suggests a connection between the positions of celestial bodies and events in human life, commonly found in horoscopes and zodiac signs. **Which of the following best describes your view of astrology/horoscopes?**



	GENDER		AGE						CLASS			CATHOLIC	
	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	ABC1 F50+	C2DE F50-	Regular Mass Goer	Roman Catholic but not regular mass goer	Not Roman Catholic
Sample (February)	494	507	112	160	202	182	142	203	508	492	154	635	211
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
I have a positive view of astrology	9%	23%	17%	27%	22%	14%	11%	8%	15%	18%	15%	18%	13%
I have a negative view of astrology	39%	13%	24%	17%	22%	26%	27%	36%	30%	21%	24%	22%	38%
I have neither a positive nor a negative view of astrology	47%	61%	47%	55%	54%	58%	58%	52%	52%	57%	56%	56%	46%
Don't know/ not sure	5%	2%	12%	1%	2%	2%	3%	4%	3%	4%	5%	4%	3%

* US data source: <https://theharrispoll.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Astrology-Survey-February-2024.pdf>

Part 2:

Attitudes towards the Catholic Church in Ireland

More than twice as many people have a positive as distinct from a negative attitude towards Christianity



(Base: All respondents – 1,000)

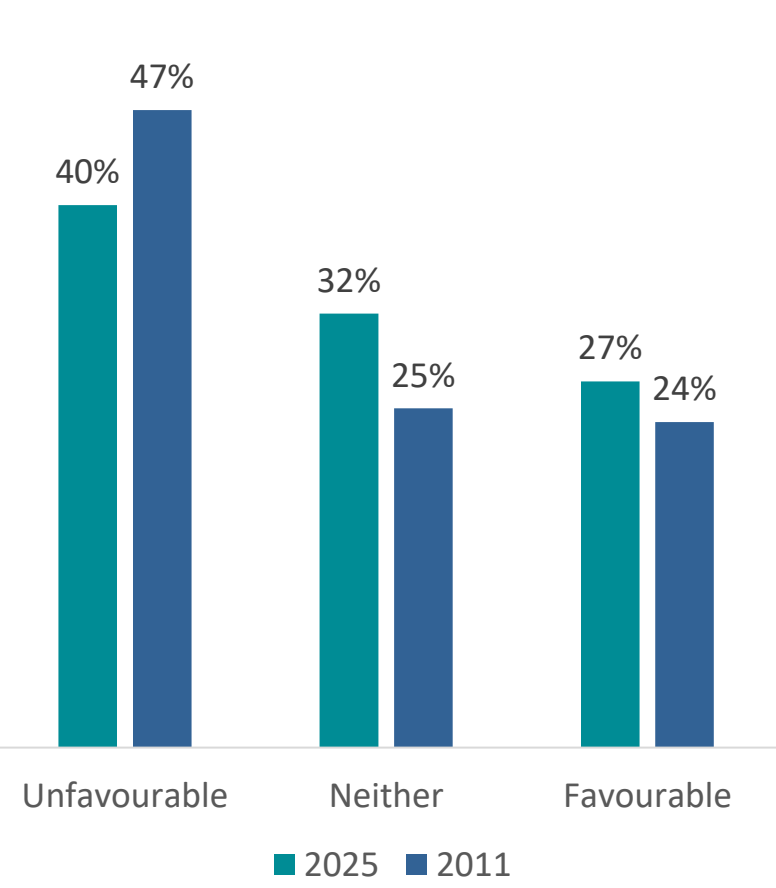
	GENDER			AGE						CLASS			CATHOLIC	
	TOTAL	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	ABC1 F50+	C2DE F50-	Regular Mass Goer	Roman Catholic but not regular mass goer	Not Roman Catholic
Sample (February)	1000	494	507	112	160	202	182	142	203	508	492	154	635	211
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Very positive	17%	18%	16%	13%	5%	12%	19%	24%	28%	15%	19%	56%	10%	11%
Mostly positive	33%	34%	32%	30%	24%	32%	30%	37%	42%	33%	33%	37%	37%	17%
Neutral	28%	26%	29%	33%	29%	31%	28%	25%	21%	26%	29%	6%	34%	24%
Mostly negative	12%	11%	13%	13%	23%	14%	12%	8%	4%	14%	10%	1%	11%	24%
Very negative	8%	8%	9%	7%	15%	9%	10%	5%	4%	10%	7%	0	6%	21%
Don't know/ not sure	2%	2%	2%	4%	3%	3%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0	2%	3%
Any positive	50%	52%	48%	43%	29%	44%	49%	60%	70%	48%	52%	94%	47%	28%
Any negative	21%	19%	22%	20%	38%	22%	23%	13%	8%	24%	17%	1%	17%	45%

Attitudes towards the Catholic Church in Ireland less favourable than towards Christianity in general



(Base: All respondents – 1,000)

In the March survey we asked: When you think about the Catholic Church in Ireland is your view favourable or unfavourable?
The same question was asked in 2011



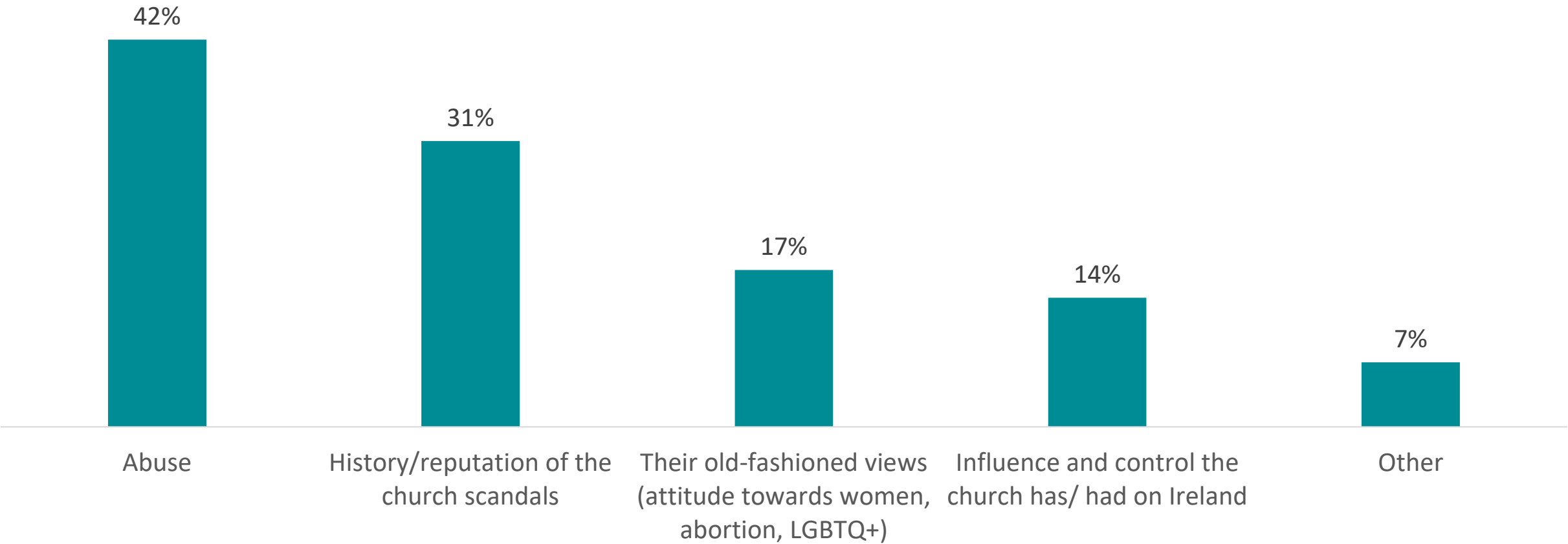
	GENDER		AGE						CLASS			CATHOLIC	
	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	ABC1 F50+	C2DE F50-	Regular Mass Goer	Roman Catholic but not regular mass goer	Not Roman Catholic
Sample (March)	494	506	112	160	202	181	148	197	508	492	161	614	225
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Very unfavourable	22%	19%	21%	21%	22%	22%	21%	16%	21%	19%	2%	16%	45%
Mostly unfavourable	19%	21%	24%	30%	22%	19%	17%	11%	26%	15%	6%	23%	24%
Neither favourable nor unfavourable	31%	33%	35%	25%	35%	34%	35%	32%	30%	35%	15%	40%	23%
Mostly favourable	22%	19%	16%	18%	17%	21%	18%	30%	18%	23%	47%	18%	8%
Very favourable	6%	7%	3%	6%	4%	4%	9%	11%	5%	8%	30%	3%	0%

The abuse scandal continues to be a key factor in unfavourable opinions about the Catholic church in Ireland, though younger people are more likely to cite ‘old-fashioned views’ as the source of their negative opinions



(Base: Unfavourable Opinion – 403)

In the March survey we asked those with an unfavourable opinion of the Catholic Church:
What are some of the reasons why you say you have an unfavourable opinion of the Catholic religion?

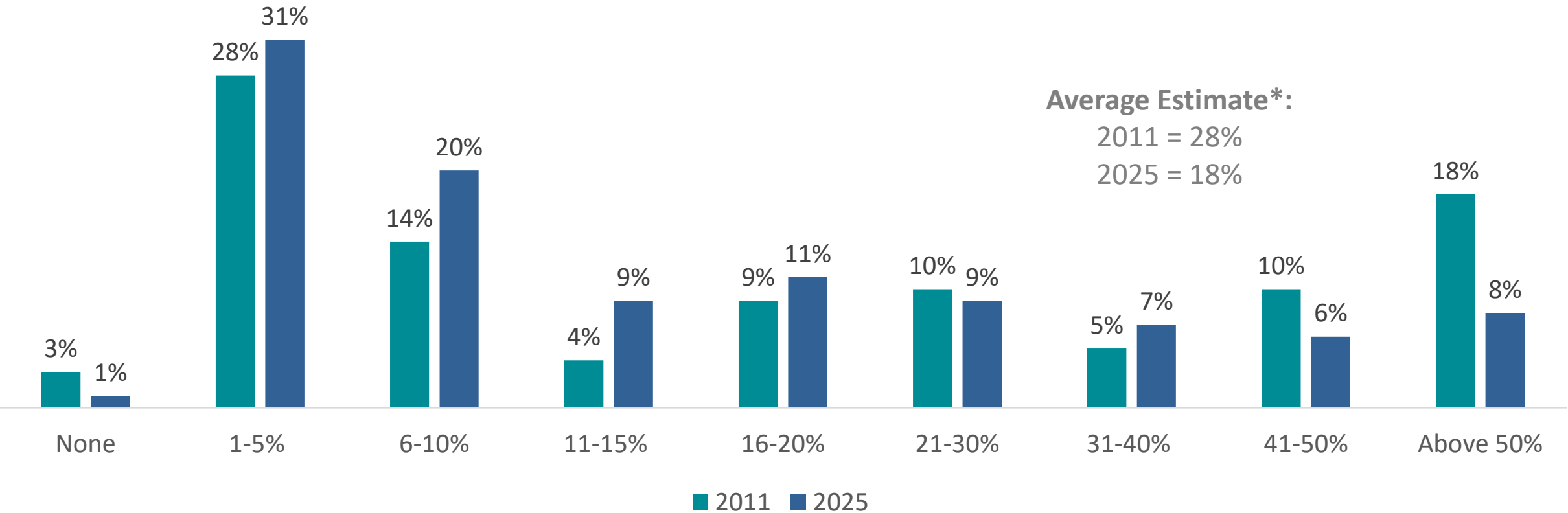


Public overestimating the number of child abusers among the clergy by almost four to one on average (although this is down on 2011)



(Base: All respondents – 1,000)

In the March survey we asked everyone:
In your opinion, approximately what percentage of Irish priests are guilty of child abuse?
This was a repeat of the same question asked in 2011



* N.B.: An estimate by the Holy See in 2009 put the global incidence in the previous 50 years at somewhere between 1.5% and 5% of Catholic clergy having been involved in sexual abuse cases: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_sexual_abuse_cases_by_country

Attitudes towards priests and nuns are similar: a third are positive, a third neutral and a third negative – Young people are significantly more negative in their view than older people



(Base: All respondents – 1,000)

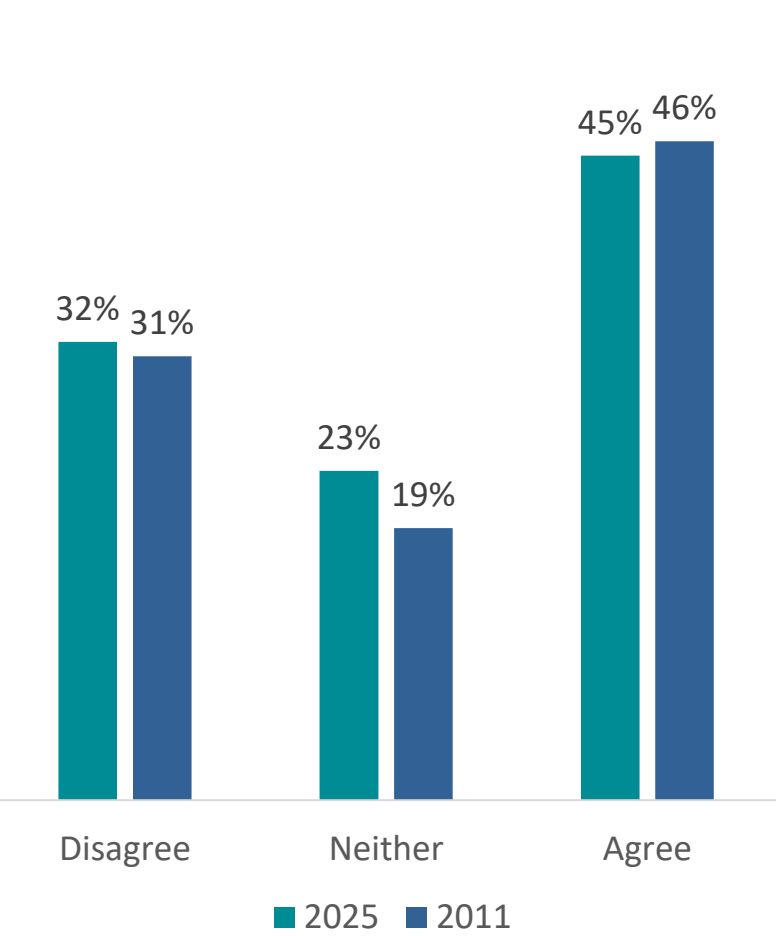
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	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Attitudes towards priests														
Positive	34%	40%	29%	27%	14%	27%	36%	43%	53%	34%	35%	87%	29%	12%
Neutral	31%	29%	33%	32%	31%	37%	27%	30%	27%	30%	31%	12%	35%	32%
Negative	34%	30%	38%	36%	54%	35%	35%	27%	19%	35%	32%	2%	35%	55%
Attitudes towards nuns														
Positive	33%	40%	27%	27%	21%	28%	33%	38%	48%	35%	31%	73%	29%	15%
Neutral	33%	31%	34%	38%	33%	37%	30%	30%	29%	31%	34%	19%	35%	35%
Negative	32%	27%	38%	32%	46%	32%	35%	30%	21%	33%	31%	7%	34%	47%

Almost half agree that Catholic teachings are still of benefit to society with 32pc disagreeing



(Base: All respondents – 1,000)

In the March survey we asked: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement:
Despite the scandals, Catholic teachings are still of benefit to Irish society?
The same question was asked in 2011



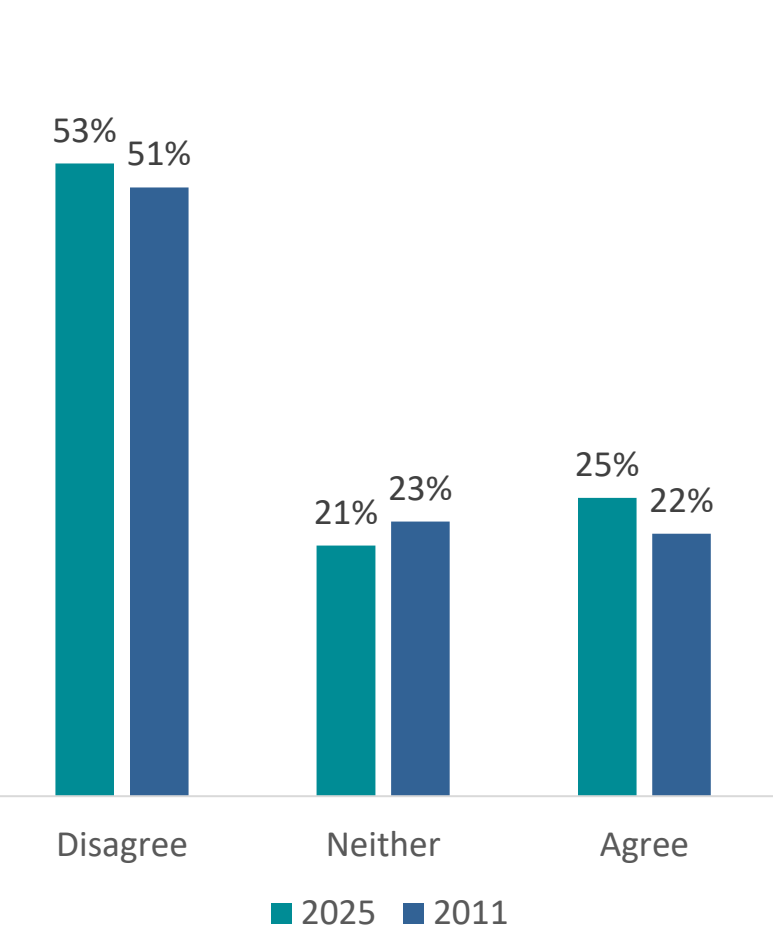
	GENDER		AGE						CLASS			CATHOLIC	
	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	ABC1 F50+	C2DE F50-	Regular Mass Goer	Roman Catholic but not regular mass goer	Not Roman Catholic
Sample (March)	494	506	112	160	202	181	148	197	508	492	161	614	225
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Strongly disagree	16%	17%	17%	15%	22%	19%	16%	10%	20%	13%	3%	12%	37%
Slightly disagree	15%	15%	24%	19%	15%	14%	12%	10%	15%	15%	4%	16%	21%
Neither agree nor disagree	21%	25%	24%	25%	23%	25%	25%	19%	20%	27%	11%	26%	23%
Slightly agree	26%	27%	27%	26%	25%	27%	25%	29%	28%	25%	23%	32%	14%
Strongly agree	21%	17%	9%	15%	15%	15%	23%	32%	18%	20%	59%	13%	5%

One in four people would be happy if the Catholic Church vanished from Ireland completely, with half disagreeing and the rest neutral



(Base: All respondents – 1,000)

In the March survey we asked: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement:
I would be happy if the Catholic Church disappeared from Ireland completely
The same question was asked in 2011



	GENDER		AGE						CLASS		CATHOLIC		
	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	ABC1 F50+	C2DE F50-	Regular Mass Goer	Roman Catholic but not regular mass goer	Not Roman Catholic
Sample (March)	494	506	112	160	202	181	148	197	508	492	161	614	225
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Strongly disagree	34%	30%	13%	18%	28%	33%	34%	55%	29%	35%	76%	29%	9%
Slightly disagree	22%	21%	27%	21%	23%	22%	22%	15%	23%	20%	14%	25%	17%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%	24%	29%	24%	20%	22%	21%	16%	20%	23%	6%	25%	22%
Slightly agree	11%	12%	17%	21%	11%	9%	11%	5%	13%	11%	1%	11%	22%
Strongly agree	15%	12%	14%	16%	17%	14%	11%	9%	15%	12%	3%	10%	30%

Conclusions



- Our research comes at a time of **considerable change in Irish society**: not surprisingly, religious attitudes and beliefs are also changing as well.
- While perceptions of the Catholic Church remain negative on balance, especially among younger generations, nevertheless **religious identity and spiritual orientation** remain important for the vast majority of Irish people.
- Despite the legacy of the clerical abuse scandals, most people agree Catholic teachings and the Church itself **remain relevant and important to the wider sense of Irish identity** and as a source of values and guidance for the future.
- Our research also points to **the rich variety of spiritual and religious practices** in Ireland: some of them quite traditional, others very new (e.g.: 'FaithTok').



- The challenges facing the Irish Catholic Church are clearly enormous but there are trends and preferences in our survey that point to **possible future priorities**.
- For example, there is an obvious **hunger for spiritual insights and practices**, with 18-24s ('Gen Z'), for example, revealing a more open, more curious take on religion and spirituality than some older age groups.
- Much of what Catholic and other Christian believers affirm (however imperfectly) remains **relevant, helpful and inspiring for most people** in Ireland, even for many non-believers and non-Catholics.
- Christianity in general – and Catholicism in particular – remains **a powerful source of individual and collective identity** for many Irish people, one that will continue to resonate with younger and future generations as Ireland navigates the many challenges ahead.



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