



Angelo Carconi/ANSA via AP
Backdropped by St. Peter's Basilica dome, Bernie Sanders meets reporters outside the Perugino gate at the Vatican, Friday.

At the Vatican, Sanders blasts wealth inequality

Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — Bernie Sanders issued a global call to action at the Vatican on Friday to address “immoral and unsustainable” wealth inequality and poverty, using the high-profile gathering to echo one of the central platforms of his presidential campaign.

The Democratic senator from Vermont cited Pope Francis and St. John Paul II repeatedly during his speech to the Vatican conference commemorating the 25th anniversary of a landmark teaching document from John Paul on social and economic justice after the Cold War.

Sanders arrived in Rome hours after wrapping up a debate in New York Thursday night, saying the opportunity to address the Vatican conference was too meaningful to pass up. The roughly 24-hour visit precedes Tuesday's crucial New York primary, which Sanders must do well in to maintain a viable challenge to Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton.

Pope Francis apologized that he couldn't personally greet participants at the Vatican conference. No meeting with Sanders was expected.

But the trip gave Sanders a moment on the world stage, placing him alongside priests, bishops, academics and two South American presidents. Sanders has been at a disadvantage during his campaign against Clinton, President Barack Obama's former secretary of state, on issues of foreign policy but he was peppered with questions from academics and ecclesiastics in a manner that might have been afforded a head of state.

Sanders trails Clinton in the Democratic primaries but the trip to the Vatican and his massive rally earlier this week with 27,000 people in New York City may have offered a glimpse of the senator's aim to become a progressive leader, win or lose.

The discussions gave him a chance to expand on his core campaign messages about the need to reform banking regulations, campaign finance rules and higher education. Asked about inequality in public education, he said it was “beyond disgraceful” and cited challenging conditions in Detroit's school system.

He told the audience that rather than a world economy that looks out for the common good, “we have been left with an economy operated for the top 1 percent, who get richer and richer as the working class, the young and the poor fall further and further behind.”

“We don't choose to politicize the pope,” Sanders told attendees, “but his spirit and courage and the fact, if I may say so here, that his words have gone way, way, way beyond the Catholic Church.”

Sanders also warned that youth around the world are no longer satisfied with the

status quo, which includes “corrupt and broken politics and an economy of stark inequality and injustice.”

During the meetings, he sat next to the other main guest of honor at the Vatican: Bolivian President Evo Morales, whose is renowned for his anti-imperialist, socialist rhetoric. President Rafael Correa of Ecuador also attended.

As he walked through Vatican City's Perugino gate, Sanders was greeted about two dozen supporters, some of whom carried signs bearing Sanders' name. “This is the first candidate I have seen in awhile, a matter of fact my entire life, that I feel like wants to make real changes,” said Kevin Jaksik, 29, of Austin, Texas, who now lives in Rome.

Back home, Clinton holds a significant delegate lead against Sanders, but the senator has vowed to stay in the campaign until the party's July convention. His message calling for a political revolution to address wealth inequality and the influence of Wall Street on U.S. politics has galvanized many Democrats and independents.

Despite being enmeshed in an increasingly bitter campaign against Clinton, Sanders aides said the trip was not aimed at appealing to Catholic voters who comprise a large share of the Democratic electorate in New York and an upcoming contest in Pennsylvania.

The Vatican has been loath to get involved in electoral campaigns and usually tries to avoid any perception of partisanship involving the pope. Popes rarely travel to countries during the thick of political campaigns, knowing a papal photo opportunity with a sitting head of state could be exploited for political ends.

As a result, the invitation to Sanders to address the Vatican conference raised eyebrows and allegations that the senator lobbied for the invitation.

The chancellor for the pontifical academy, Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, has said he invited Sanders because he was the only U.S. presidential candidate who showed deep interest in the teachings of Francis.

The Rev. Matt Malone, editor of the Jesuit magazine America, said Sanders' trip was unlikely to have much of an impact on Catholic voters, noting that conferences like the one Sanders is attending “happen all the time.”

“I don't think that Bernie Sanders going to the Vatican is going to help Bernie with Catholics any more than Ted Cruz going to a matzo factory is going to help him with the Jewish vote,” said Malone, who served as a speechwriter to former Rep. Marty Meehan, a Massachusetts Democrat.

But there were other benefits. The trip offered his extended family a brief respite: Sanders was accompanied on the trip by his wife, Jane Sanders, and 10 family members, including four grandchildren.

That's rude: More say GOP is discourteous

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ask Americans about bad manners in the 2016 presidential campaign and the conversation shifts immediately to Donald Trump, the GOP front-runner who has branded his critics, “little,” “lyin,” “low-energy” and worse.

“I don't recall anyone stirring up as much of a fuss as Mr. Trump,” says Sidney Waldman, 81, a retired book store owner in Key West, Florida. “He just does not need to say things the way he says them. It may get attention now, but he is going to be remembered in a negative way.”

“He's a bully,” says Kellie Zangrillo, 53, of Auburn, Washington, like Waldman an independent. Trump not only may have set the tone in the campaign, she suggested, but his nasty words could have real consequences if uttered as president. “I think he'd get us into World War III.”

When it comes to rudeness in 2016 politics, the Republican presidential contest wins in a landslide, a new poll by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research has found. The survey shows that 78 percent of Americans, including most Republicans, see the GOP race as discourteous. Only about half as many — 41 percent — say the same about the Democratic campaign.

Eight in 10 people say remarks about race or gender and sexuality are unacceptable in public places, and that political leaders should be held to a higher standard of behavior than other people.

It's not just politics. Nearly three-quarters say people in general are ruder these days than 20 or 30 years ago, a finding similar to one seen in an Associated Press/Ipsos poll taken in 2005. Even so, two-thirds see political campaigns this year as outdoing the public in levels of rudeness.

Trump plainly has played a role in setting the tone to extra-coarse, doling out put-downs to a wide selection of critics, political opponents, a religious group, debate moderators and protesters. Former GOP candidate Jeb Bush was “low energy.” Onetime GOP hopeful Marco Rubio was “little Marco.” Ted Cruz, who is Trump's most prominent rival for the nomination,



AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File
In this April 14 photo, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks in Patchogue, N.Y.

is “lyin Ted.” Famously, Trump said Fox News Channel's Megyn Kelly had “blood coming out of her wherever” after she pressed him last year on his insults of women.

Manners matter to Americans. Florida's Rubio learned how little they appreciate discourtesy on the campaign trail when he returned Trump's insults in kind, lost his home state primary in Florida and dropped out of the contest. Rubio said he regretted adopting Trump's technique.

Now, there's evidence that Trump may have gotten the message as he struggles to add to a following that could leave him short of the 1,237 delegates he needs to win the GOP presidential nomination. He's hired professional political operatives to steer him in the delegate derby. He was reported to have met with Kelly this week, after months of tweeted insults and his boycotting a Fox debate earlier this year.

There are deep cultural roots to Americans' dislike of rudeness in their leaders. The poll found that in general, the public disapproves of behavior ranging from using cellphones in restaurants to making sexist statements in public. Most people find vulgar language and bigoted comments inappropriate. More than 80 percent say remarks and jokes about race or about gender and sexuality are unacceptable.

There is less condemnation for these types of comments made in private, but more than 6 in 10 regard them as improper there as well.

Half the public see this year's campaign for the Republican nomination as mostly rude and disrespectful, and an additional 29 percent consider it somewhat so. Even 8 in 10 Republicans (79 percent) regard their party's process to determine a nominee for president as ill-mannered.

In contrast, only 16 percent say the campaign between the Democratic candidates for president is mostly rude and disrespectful, while 25 percent who consider it somewhat so.

Trump likes to dismiss complaints about his manners as “political correctness.” The poll found that only 15 percent believe candidates should not be sensitive to the possibility of upsetting other people.

The AP-NORC poll of 1,004 adults was conducted March 17-21 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.8 percentage points.

Respondents were first selected randomly using address-based sampling methods, and later interviewed online or by phone.

Mississippi governor signs law allowing armed church members

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — A holstered gun sat on top of a Bible on Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant's desk Friday when he signed a law allowing guns in churches, which he said would help protect worshippers from potential attackers.

The Church Protection Act allows places of worship to designate members to undergo firearms training so they can provide armed security for their congregations.

It specifies that those designated can carry guns into church buildings and gives them legal protections.

The law also loosens gun permit requirements by allowing people to carry holstered weapons without a permit, making Mississippi the ninth state with such a law, said NRA spokeswoman Amy Hunter.

The Mississippi Association of Chiefs of Police says that part of the bill dismantles the state's

licensing system and makes it harder to check if someone with a gun is a violent criminal. Other opponents say it endangers people by putting more guns in untrained hands.

The law strikes a chord in this Bible Belt state where many hunt and shoot for sport.

It's a difficult discussion that can get politicized and very emotional, flattening an issue with more nuance, said Pastor Pat Ward, who leads The Orchard Church

in Oxford. People in his congregation see both sides; they are racially diverse, conservative and liberal, some older, some still University of Mississippi students. His church is guarded by a team of experienced law enforcement officials.

The bill was authored by Baptist pastor and state Rep. Andy Gipson, who says it's necessary in light of the massacre of nine parishioners last year in South Carolina.

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