Vatican

Vatican News



Pope Leo XIV waves as he arrives for his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at The Vatican, Wednesday, June 11, 2025. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

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Just over a month after Pope Leo XIV became the first U.S.-born pontiff in the history of the Catholic Church, a new poll shows that American Catholics are feeling excited about their new religious leader.

About two-thirds of American Catholics have a "very" or "somewhat" favorable view of Pope Leo, according to the new survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, while about 3 in 10 don't know enough to have an opinion. Very few Catholics — less than 1 in 10 — view him unfavorably.

Among Americans overall, plenty of people are still making up their minds about Pope Leo. But among those who do have an opinion, feelings about the first U.S.-born pope are overwhelmingly positive. The survey found that 44% of U.S. adults have a "somewhat" or "very" favorable view of Pope Leo XIV. A similar percentage say they don't know enough to have an opinion, and only about 1 in 10 see him unfavorably.

As he promises to work for unity in a polarized church, Americans with very different views about the future of the church are feeling optimistic about his pontificate. Terry Barber, a 50-year-old Catholic from Sacramento, California, hopes Leo will seek a "more progressive and modern church" that is more accepting of all.

"I'm optimistic. Certainly, the first pope from the United States is significant," said Barber, who identifies as a Democrat. "Since he worked under the previous pope, I'm sure he has similar ideas, but certainly some that are original, of his own. I'm looking forward to seeing what, if any changes, come about under his leadership."

Bipartisan appeal

About half of Democrats have a favorable view of the new pope, as do about 4 in 10 Republicans and independents. Republicans are a little more likely than Democrats to be reserving judgment. About half of Republicans say they don't know enough to have an opinion about the pope, compared to about 4 in 10 Democrats.

Republicans, notably, are no more likely than Democrats to have an unfavorable opinion of the pope. About 1 in 10 in each group view Pope Leo unfavorably.

Victoria Becude, 38, a Catholic and Republican from Florida, said she's excited about the first U.S.-born pope and hopes he can steer the country back to Catholic doctrine and make Americans proud.

"I'm rooting for him," she said. "I hope that America can get back to faith, and I hope he can do that."

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Being a political liberal or conservative, of course, isn't the same thing as identifying as a liberal or conservative Catholic. But the poll found no discernible partisan gap among Catholics on Pope Leo, and Catholics across the ideological spectrum have expressed hope that Leo will be able to heal some of the divisions that emerged during the pontificate of his predecessor, Pope Francis.

Pope Leo recently criticized the surge of nationalist political movements in the world as he prayed for reconciliation and dialogue — a message in line with his pledges to make the Catholic Church a symbol of peace.

Before becoming pope, Cardinal Robert Prevost presided over one of the most revolutionary reforms of Pope Francis' pontificate by having women serve on the Vatican board that vets nominations for bishops. He also has said decisively that women cannot be ordained as priests.

Donald Hallstone, 72, a Catholic who lives in Oregon, said he expects that Leo will continue to promote women in governance positions "at a time when there's a shortage of priests" and other leaders in the church.

"It'd be great to see women in those roles," he said. "Women were not excluded in the first centuries."

On the other hand, some right-wing U.S. Catholics hope Leo will focus on Catholic doctrinal opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion.

Becude, the Republican, said she's against same-sex relationships because she believes that unions should be between a man and a woman, something that Pope Leo has reiterated. Even though she describes herself as "very conservative," though, she's in favor of reproductive rights even when church teaching opposes abortion.

"I don't believe that they should stop women from having abortions," she said. "We should have our own rights because you don't know the circumstances behind the reason why a woman would want the abortion in the first place."

Few have negative views — yet

There's plenty of room for views to shift as Leo's agenda as pope becomes clear.

Not all Americans have formed an opinion of the new pope yet; particularly, members of other religious groups are more likely to be still making up their minds. About half of born-again Protestants, mainline Protestants, and adults with no religious affiliation don't know enough to have an opinion about the pope, although relatively few — about 1 in 10 — in each group have an unfavorable view of him.

Older Americans — who are more likely to identify as Catholics — are also more likely than younger Americans to be fans of Leo's. About half of Americans ages 60 and older have a favorable view of Pope Leo, compared to about 4 in 10 Americans under 30.

But even so, only about 1 in 10 U.S. adults under 30 have an unfavorable view of the pope right now.

Mercedes Drink, 31, is from the pope's hometown of Chicago. She still hopes that women will become ordained under his pontificate.

"It's cool; I like him because he brings something different," said Drink, who lives in Minnesota and identifies as being part of the "religious nones" — atheists, agnostics, or nothing in particular.

"As a young woman, I hope that he can bring change … considering who he is, he brings something new to the table. I hope he opens the world's eyes to modernizing the church, bringing more people in, having more diversity."

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Henao reported from Princeton, N.J.