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Pope Leo

Pope Leo XIV smiles as the wind lifts his mozzetta and fascia at the end of the Jubilee of Youth in Rome's Tor Vergata neighborhood Aug. 3. A new Gallup poll found a 57% approval rating for the pontiff, higher than that of U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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August 9, 2025
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Pope Leo XIV tops a new Gallup poll on world leaders, appealing to U.S. residents broadly in a politically divided — and divisive — nation.

The poll found that 57% of respondents viewed Pope Leo favorably, with 11% disapproving of him and 31% having no opinion.

Respondents gave Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a 52% approval rating, with 34% disapproving and 14% indicating no opinion. Behind him was Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who was viewed positively by 49% and negatively by 38%, with 14% having no opinion.

Of Americans surveyed 41% approved of U.S. President Donald Trump, with 57% disapproving and 2% having no opinion. Vice President JD Vance scored a 49% disapproval rating, with 38% viewing him favorably and 13% having no opinion.

Of the 31% of respondents who had no opinion of Leo,18% said they were not familiar enough with the pope to weigh in, while the remaining 13% had not heard of him.

In addition, said Gallup, Leo is viewed more favorably across party lines, "unlike the political figures measured in the latest poll."

At the same time, Gallup noted that, "consistent with the ideological differences in his ratings, he is liked better by Democrats than Republicans."

The Gallup poll, conducted by telephone July 7-21 with 1,002 adults throughout the country, was the first time it rated the U.S.-born pope since his May 8 election. Pope Leo marks his first 100 days in the papacy Aug. 16.

Pope Leo also led the rankings according to net favorability — which represents the difference between positive and negative percentage points — at 46%.

Gallup noted that "net favorability is most effective for these comparisons because it accounts for large differences in Americans' familiarity with the various figures."

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Except for Pope Leo, Zelenskyy and Sanders, all the remaining leaders on the Gallup list had negative net favorability, with French President Emmanuel Macron at -1% and billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk at -28%.

Trump (-16%), Secretary of State Marco Rubio (-16%), former President Joe Biden (-11%) and current Vice President JD Vance (-11%) fell between Macron and Musk in the net negative rankings.

Gallup also compared Pope Leo's rating with those of Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI. It noted the new pope's numbers "closely match" those of his predecessors in the early days of their respective pontificates. In 2013, Gallup found that 58% approved and 10% disapproved of Pope Francis, while in 2005 Pope Benedict was viewed favorably by 55% and unfavorably by 12%.

The polling firm clarified that it did not measure U.S. public opinion of Pope St. John Paul II as favorable or unfavorable until 1993, well after his 1978 election. However, the late pope enjoyed wide popularity among U.S. residents, with anywhere from 61% to 86% approving in a given poll over the years.

Among U.S. Catholics, Pope Leo (76%), Pope Francis (80%) and Pope Benedict (67%) "earned higher-than-average support in their initial ratings," said Gallup.

The firm also noted that Pope Leo differs from predecessors in that his approval rating is "higher among liberals than conservatives (65% vs. 46%)."

In contrast, conservatives were more likely to view Pope Benedict and Pope Francis favorably during the early days of their pontificates.

Pope Benedict maintained that conservative approval edge through Gallup's 2010 data, taken three years ahead of his 2013 resignation. Pope Francis' ranking among conservatives declined, with his December 2023 Gallup numbers showing a 70% approval among liberals and 42% among conservatives.