News



A combination photo shows Pope Leo XIV smiling as he greets visitors and pilgrims in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 10, 2025, and U.S. President Donald Trump smiling after arriving at the White House Feb. 22, 2025. (OSV News photos/CNS/Lola Gomez; Reuters/Craig Hudson)



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Ten months into his papacy, U.S. voters view Pope Leo XIV more favorably than the country's president, political parties or artificial intelligence, according to a recent NBC News survey.

The public opinion survey conducted in early March found 23% of registered voters viewing Leo very positively and 19% viewing him somewhat positively, with 8% viewing him negatively.

That 34% net-positive favorability placed Leo atop a list of 14 people, issues and political groups asked about in the survey.

The first U.S. pope placed well ahead of President Donald Trump (41% positive vs. 53% negative, -12 favorability) and two Catholics in his administration: Vice President JD Vance (38% vs. 49%, -11) and Secretary of State Marco Rubio (34% vs. 41%, -7).

Also trailing the pope were former Vice President Kamala Harris (34% vs. 51%, -17), California Gov. Gavin Newsom (27% vs. 45%, -18), the Democratic Party (30% vs. 52%, -22), the Republican Party (37% vs. 51%, -14), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (38% vs. 56%, -18), artificial intelligence (26% vs. 46%, -20) and the country of Iran (8% vs. 61%, -53).



With a U.S. flag in the background, Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd from the popemobile as he rides around St. Peter's Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience Aug. 6, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Leo was the only figure or group with a negative rating in the single digits and was one of just two that scored a net-positive rating among U.S. voters — the other being fellow Catholic and late-night comedian Stephen Colbert (35% vs. 25%, +10).

The survey, administered for NBC News by Hart Research Associates, polled 1,000 registered voters and was conducted Feb. 27 through March 3. It carried a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

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While the NBC News poll presented a mostly approving sentiment from U.S. voters toward the pope, it also reflected their unfamiliarity with him. Half of respondents said their views of Leo were either neutral (36%) or uncertain (14%).

Cardinal Robert Prevost, 70, was a relative unknown for a large portion of the United States before the College of Cardinals inside the Sistine Chapel elected him May 8 as the 267th pope of the Roman Catholic Church. Born and raised in suburbs south of Chicago, he spent decades in missionary work as an Augustinian priest and later as the bishop of Chiclayo, Peru.

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Leo's favorability among U.S. voters in the poll trended similarly to Pope Francis at a similar point in the Argentine's pontificate. A December 2013 NBC News poll found 57% of U.S. voters viewing Francis positively versus 5% viewing him negatively, for a 52% net positive favorability.

Like Francis, Leo has seen far higher approval ratings in polls of U.S. Catholics exclusively. A September survey by the Pew Research Center showed 8 in 10 U.S. American Catholics with a favorable opinion of the pope from Chicago.

As pope, Leo has been frequently questioned by the press about developments in the U.S., including the Trump administration's immigration crackdown and its recent military attacks in Venezuela and Iran.

Leo has extensive travel plans scheduled for 2026, but the Vatican confirmed he will not visit his home country during the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.