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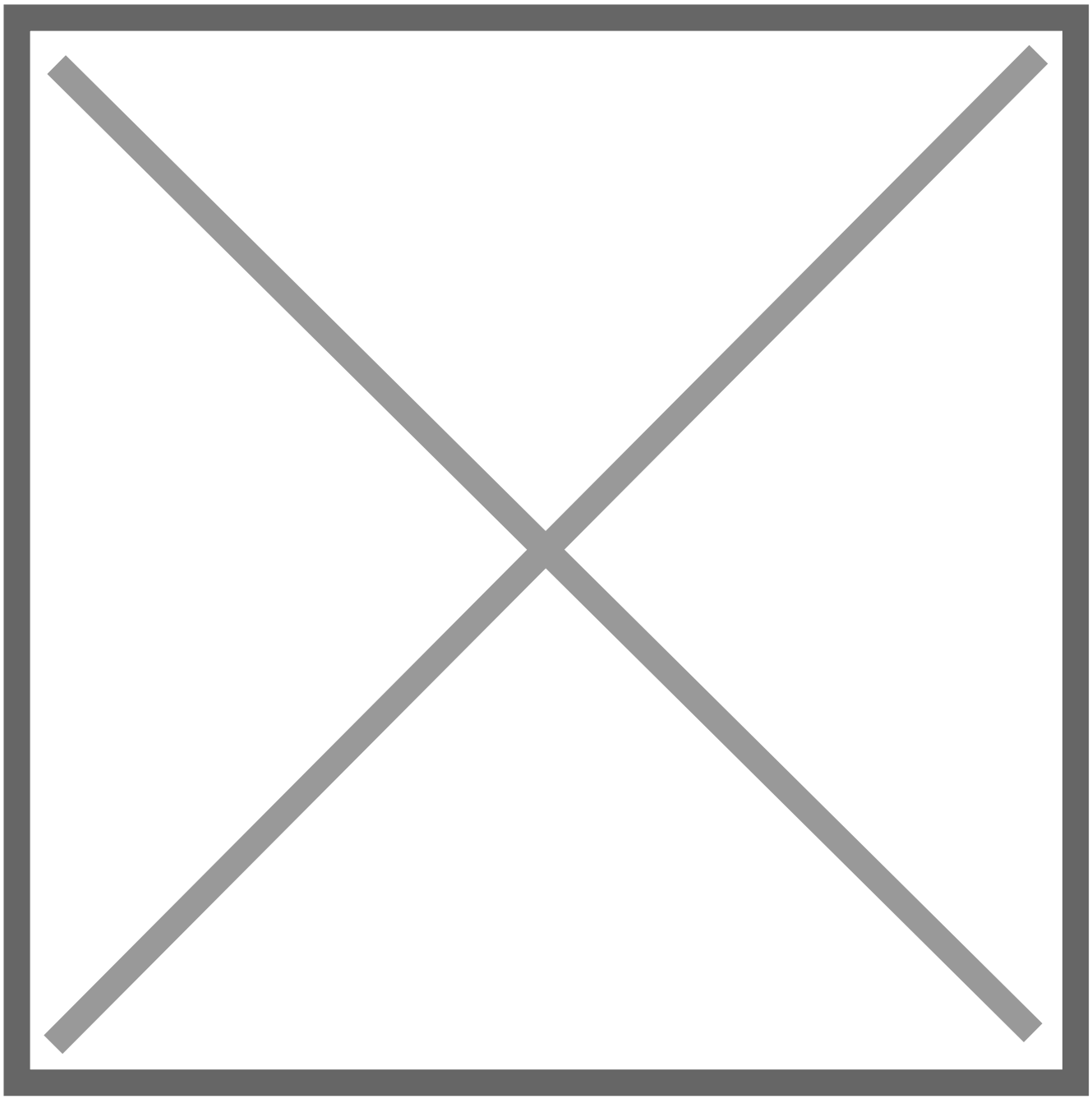

A combination photo shows Pope Leo XIV speaking to journalists aboard a flight on his way to Luanda, Angola, April 18, 2026, and U.S. President Donald Trump speaking to the media in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington April 18. (OSV News/Reuters/Luca Zennaro/Nathan Howard)

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Washington — April 23, 2026
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Most Americans say they do not believe there were sufficient reasons for the U.S. to carry out combat operations in Iran, according to a new Marquette Law School national survey published April 22.

The survey was conducted April 8-16, 2026, following Pope Leo XIV's declaration that President Donald Trump's threat April 7 to destroy Iran's civilization was "truly unacceptable," and in the midst of Trump's tirades against the U.S.-born pope over his opposition to the Iran war that started April 12 and lasted several days.

According to the survey, 63% said there were not sufficient reasons to go to war against Iran compared to just 36% who said there were. Just 32% said they approve of the way Trump has handled the war, while 68% said they disapprove.

Auxiliary Bishop James Massa of Brooklyn, New York, chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, underscored the Church's teaching on just war and Leo's objections to the Iran war in a clarification issued the day after Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic, invoked the just war tradition at an April 14 event.

"A constant tenet of that thousand-year tradition is a nation can only legitimately take up the sword 'in self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed' (Catechism of the Catholic Church)," Massa said. "That is, to be a just war it must be a defense against another who actively wages war, which is what the Holy Father actually said:

'He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war.'"

Trump has argued the Iran war was necessary to prevent its regime from acquiring a nuclear weapon. But the present conflict began before another round of U.S.-Iran negotiations were previously expected to take place in Vienna, and in the aftermath of last year's U.S. bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities. Regarding those June 2025 strikes, Trump said at the time they "completely and totally obliterated" Iran's nuclear weapons program.

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Broken down by political affiliation, the Marquette Law School survey found 71% of Republicans said there was sufficient reason for the Iran war, while 94% of Democrats and 75% of independents said there was not.

Republican views, however, are split between the 68% who said they support Trump's Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement and the 30% who said they do not. More broadly, among self-identified MAGA Republicans, 78% said they support using the military "to force countries to change," while 34% of non-MAGA Republicans said they support using the military for such purposes.

In comparison, 83% of independents and 94% of Democrats said they oppose using the military to force countries to change.

However, the poll showed bipartisan support for the U.S.-Iran ceasefire that went into effect April 7: 82% of Republicans, 71% of Democrats, and 67% of independents said they approve of the ceasefire.

There is also bipartisan recognition the U.S. has failed to achieve its goals with the Iran war, a view shared by 64% of Republicans, 94% of Democrats and 78% of independents.

The survey also found that despite their opposition to the conflict, Americans view Iran very negatively, with just 12% reporting a favorable opinion, and 73% an unfavorable view, and another 14% saying they haven't heard enough to say.

But the survey also found that a majority of Americans (54%) now view Israel, which carried out the combat operation in Iran with the U.S. beginning on Feb. 28 and is

part of the U.S.-Iran ceasefire, unfavorably. Just 33% now see Israel favorably with another 14% saying they haven't heard enough. This is a significant shift from March 2025, when 43% reported favorable views of Israel and 43% unfavorable views, with another 14% undecided.

The survey also recorded just 39% approve of how Trump is handling his job as president, compared to 60% who said they disapprove, for a net approval rating of -21 percentage points.

That rating marks a new low for Trump's approval rating for his second term, according to the Marquette Law School survey.

The Marquette Law School survey has a margin of error of +/-3.4 percentage points.

Related: Pope Leo says he has 'no fear' of Trump administration after attack from president
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