Opinion
Guest Voices



President Donald Trump on April 12, 2026, left, and Pope Leo XIV on March 31, 2026. (AP)



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As almost every president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt, including Donald Trump, has needed the Catholic vote to get elected, political pundits are wondering why the president has picked a fight with the head of the Catholic Church and what impact it will have on the November mid-term elections.

When faced with disagreements, Trump appears to have only one response: attack. Insulting his opponents has worked for his positive perception from his base so often that he mistakenly thought it would work with the pope. But the pope deflected the attack, refusing to get into a mud wrestling match with the president.

Pope Leo XIV has an 84% approval rating among Catholics, while Trump's approval rating with Americans has been falling and is only around 40% — less than half that of the pope.

Trump once bragged, "I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters." Some Catholic Trump supporters will stick with him no matter what he does or says. He could declare himself the fourth person of the Blessed Trinity and they would smile.

But other Catholics, like Americans generally, are becoming disillusioned with Trump. Many who voted for him are likely confused by his fight with the pope. Their disillusionment did not start with that fight, but has been slowly growing since he was elected for the second time.

Catholic Trump voters are not a univocal group, and on many issues, they reflect the same concerns as other Americans.

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First, there are pro-life Catholics for whom abortion is the most important issue. They have been voting solidly Republican for decades. Trump's appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court allowed for the overturning of Roe v. Wade, and for this they are grateful. But in politics, it does not matter what you did for me yesterday, but rather, what are you doing for me today?

Today, Trump is doing nothing for the pro-life movement, saying that he has done his part by getting Roe overturned, and now it is up to the states. He has abandoned the pro-life movement, removing the anti-abortion plank from the Republican Party's 2024 national platform, which for 40 years had called for a federal abortion ban and a human life constitutional amendment.

On the other hand, the platform now supports IVF, which pro-life advocates oppose because it results in the destruction of unused fertilized eggs. Trump even reneged on his promise and gave Title X funding to Planned Parenthood, over the strong objections of pro-life advocates.

In the past, pro-life advocates ignored the bad things Trump did because he supported their cause. Now that he has abandoned them, they see no reason to jump to his defense. Some, like the Catholic bishops, now loudly disagree with him.

Pro-life Catholics will never vote Democratic, but they may stay home or vote for third-party candidates, especially if local Republican candidates support Trump's move away from the pro-life movement.

Then, for Reagan Republicans, the economy and national security are key issues. These Catholic neoconservatives put their faith in the free market and believe that America will prosper in a globalized economy. They are appalled by Trump's tariff policy. They also remember when Russia was known as the "evil empire" and do not trust it. They are shocked by Trump's friendship with President Vladimir Putin, his attacks on NATO and his lack of concern for Ukraine.

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And then there is the Catholic managerial class, who, like all business executives, prefers stability not chaos, which is bad for business. They like Trump's tax cuts and deregulation, but the rest is problematic.

Sudden spikes in tariffs or energy prices, which were not planned for in their budgets, are upsetting. Many of these executives also want cheap, hard-working immigrant workers for their businesses, especially in construction, hospitality and agriculture. Others need highly skilled immigrants for jobs with technical specialties.

The immigration crackdown has also shocked Catholics who see honest, hard-working members of their parish being arrested and deported. They were all for arresting criminals and closing the border, but this is not what they voted for.

Catholic Independents and even some Democrats who voted for Trump were fed up with the Democrats and wanted change. Endless wars in the Middle East, inflation and alleged mismanagement and corruption swung these voters into the Republican camp.

But now, they believe that Trump has broken his promise to keep us out of wars in the Middle East. Rather than getting inflation under control, tariffs and the Iran war have led to higher prices, especially for food and energy. Even his promise to release all the Epstein files was botched. Stories of corruption in his administration are also disconcerting.

Not one single event is turning Catholics and other Americans against Trump. Rather, different issues resonate with different people, and the steady stream of broken promises and bad news is taking its toll. Nor is his public fight with the pope winning him votes.

If the war and inflation continue unabated, the Republicans could find themselves overwhelmingly rejected by Catholics and other voters in November. Once again, voters will want change. It happened in Hungary with the rejection of longtime Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his far-right Fidesz Party; it can happen in America.

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