

Half of Protestant pastors say they're hearing conspiracy theories in their churches

by [Emily McFarlan Miller](#) in the [February 24, 2021](#) issue



(Photo by Tom Carnegie on Unsplash)

They're not just on friends' and family members' Facebook pages or in weird corners of the internet.

About half of all Protestant pastors in the United States say they're hearing conspiracy theories in their churches, according to a study released on January 26

by Lifeway Research. It found that 49 percent of them report they frequently hear members of their congregations repeating conspiracy theories they've heard on various issues affecting the country.

"Christian churches resolve to be places focused on the truth," Lifeway Research executive director Scott McConnell said in a written statement. "Yet, half of pastors hear the spread of assumptions about plots often. This is a startling disconnect."

The pastors most likely to agree they frequently heard conspiracy theories from their congregants (61 percent) were those who pastor churches with attendance of 250 or more people, according to the survey data. White pastors (50 percent) were more likely to agree than Black pastors (36 percent), and male pastors (50 percent) more likely than female pastors (35 percent).

The survey does not account for whether pastors recognize conspiracy theories—nor did it attempt to measure the presence of conspiracy theories being shared at churches that never reach the ears of pastors.

It also did not define what a conspiracy theory is or question whether pastors themselves believe popular conspiracy theories. For example, some evangelical leaders—such as pastor Greg Locke of Global Vision Bible Church in Tennessee and author and radio host Eric Metaxas—have continued to share various theories claiming to prove that former president Donald Trump won the 2020 election.

Those theories—found to be baseless by the courts and by Congress—fueled a riot at the US Capitol in January.

"At this time, it appears more of the theories are traveling in politically conservative circles which corresponds to the higher percentages in the churches led by white Protestant pastors," McConnell wrote.

Lifeway Research, the research arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, surveyed 1,007 US Protestant pastors—either the only pastor or the senior pastor of their congregations—between September 2 and October 1, 2020, over the phone and online.

The margin of error for its survey does not exceed plus or minus 3.4 percentage points at 95 percent confidence, according to its methodology. —Religion News Service