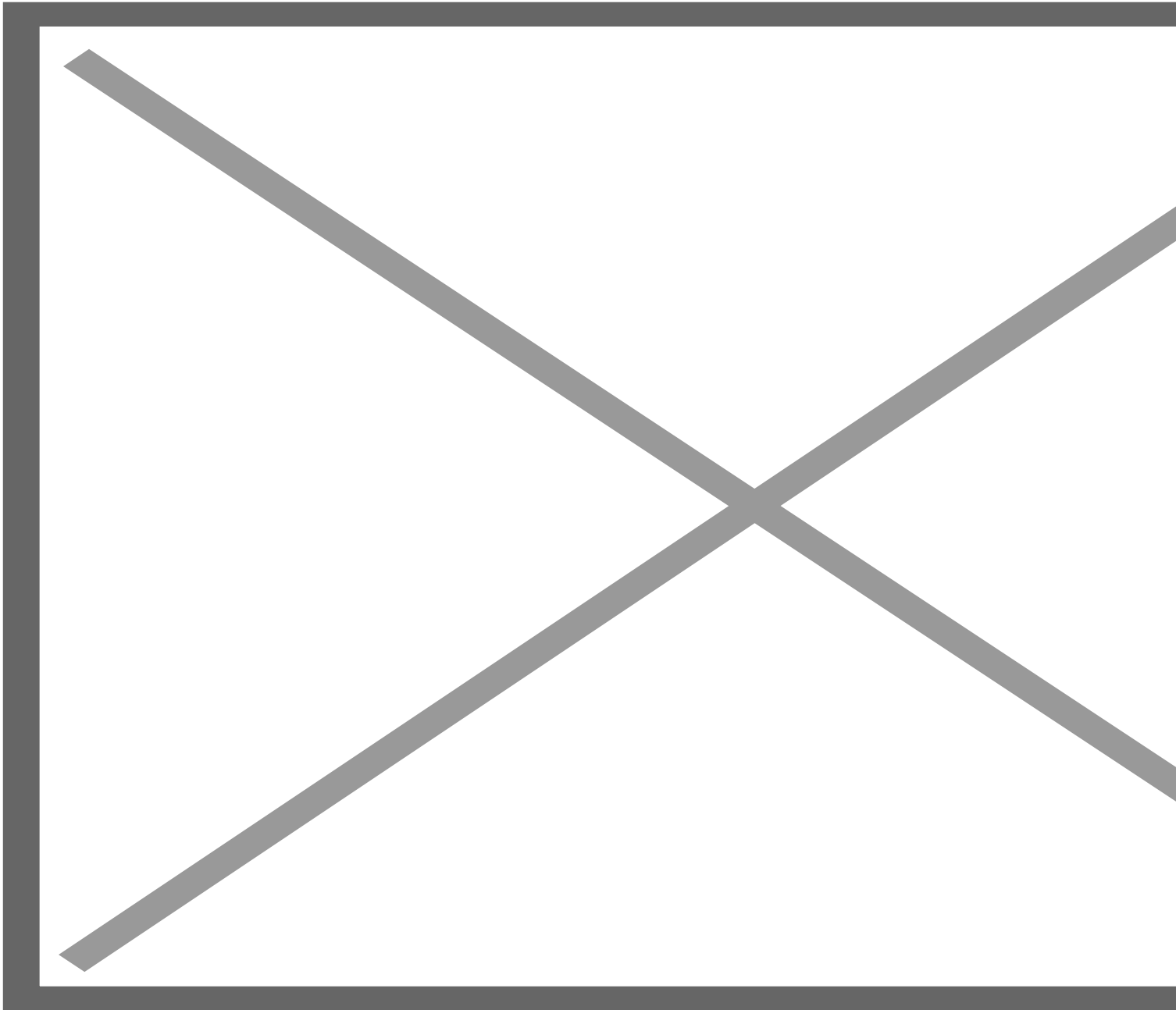


Pope Leo is very popular, although partisan polarization is growing, survey finds

by [Aleja Hertzler-McCain](#)

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Pope Leo XIV arrives for his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, April 1. (AP Photo/Gregoria Borgia)

Though Pope Leo XIV still enjoys high levels of support from US Catholics, partisan polarization is growing, [according to a new poll](#) released by Pew Research Center on June 18.

About three-quarters (78 percent) of US Catholics expressed favorable views of Leo, and 12 percent expressed unfavorable views. Another 9 percent of US Catholics said they had never heard of Leo—the first pope from the US.

Seventy-eight percent is the same favorability rating that Pope Francis received in February of last year, just months before his death in April 2025.

Broken down across party lines, 84 percent of US Catholics who lean Democratic approved of Leo in last Thursday's poll, as did 72 percent of Catholics who lean Republican. Right before he died, Francis had been slightly more popular among Democratic-leaning Catholics at 88 percent approval, and slightly less popular among Republican-leaning Catholics at 69 percent approval.

In Pew's first survey about Leo's favorability last summer after his election last May, the partisan gap was only 5 points. Nearly nine in 10 (89 percent) of Democratic-leaning Catholics and 84 percent of Republican-leaning Catholics had favorable views at the beginning of his papacy.

But since last summer, Leo has been more outspoken about US political issues, expressing concern about the "inhuman" treatment of immigrants in the US in October, and later strongly criticizing war in the Middle East, where the US has been a key actor.

In an [April social media post](#), President Donald Trump accused Leo of being "weak" on crime and nuclear weapons and claimed that Leo was only elected pope because Trump occupied the White House. Trump followed that post with another that many interpreted as depicting himself as Jesus. The latter was later deleted while Trump has continued to criticize the pope.

Shortly after Trump's April post, Leo [told](#) reporters on the papal plane, "I'm not afraid of the Trump administration or of speaking out loudly about the message of the gospel, which is what the church works for."

In Pew's new poll, 70 percent of Democratic-leaning Catholics said that Trump had been too critical of Leo, while a third (32 percent) of Republican-leaning Catholics agreed. But four in 10 (39 percent) of Republican-leaning Catholics said Leo had been too critical of the Trump administration, while only 3 percent of Democratic-leaning Catholics agreed. (A quarter—26 percent— of Democratic-leaning Catholics said that Leo had not been critical enough of the Trump administration.)

Leo's current favorability is higher than Pope Benedict XVI's throughout much of his papacy, but lower than any favorability Pew collected for Pope John Paul II. Francis's favorability fluctuated throughout his papacy.

The current pope is more popular among Catholics who go to mass more frequently, with 85 percent of weekly mass attenders expressing positive views, compared to 79 percent of monthly or yearly attenders and 73 percent of Catholics who attend mass seldom or never, according to Pew.

The survey was conducted from May 26 to June 1 among 1,848 US Catholic adults and has a margin of error of +/- three percentage points. —Religion News Service