

Roiling the religious right: Two-thirds of Christians say Trump's AI generated Messiah image went "too far"

Three-in-five say criticism of Pope "unacceptable" – including more than half of Roman Catholics (54%)

April 21, 2026 – A political provocation aimed at one of the world's most prominent religious figures - Pope Leo XIV - is drawing widespread backlash across the United States, including from within President Donald Trump's own base of support.

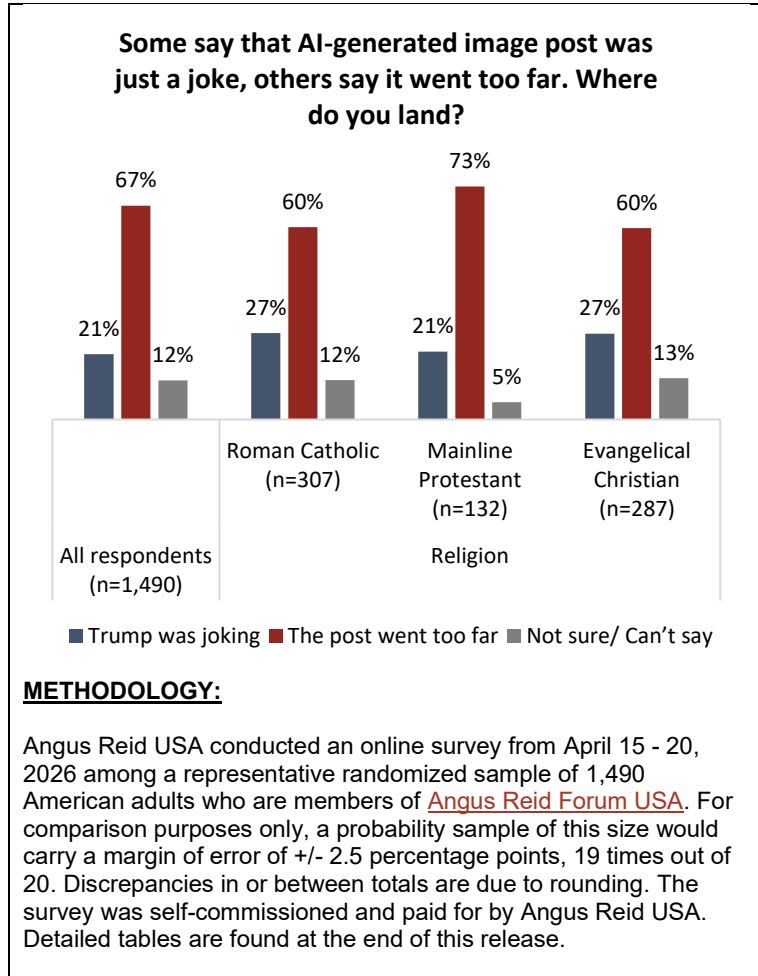
New data from Angus Reid finds a clear majority of Americans (58%) say Trump's criticism of the Pope was unacceptable, outweighing the one-in-three who view it as acceptable. Even among Roman Catholics, a group Trump has historically performed well with electorally, more than half (54%) say the comments crossed a line, underscoring the political sensitivity of attacking a religious leader

The controversy deepens with reaction to an AI-generated image shared by Trump that appeared to depict him in the place of Jesus. Two-thirds of Americans (68%) say the post went too far, including nearly as many Christians (64%), suggesting the backlash extends beyond partisan divides into cultural and religious territory. While Trump's MAGA-aligned supporters are more forgiving, only half believe the image was intended as a joke.

The saga is certainly not helping Trump's ailing approval. With economic criticism rising and the War in Iran proving unpopular, this issue adds to ongoing challenges for the president. Currently, 35 per cent of Americans approve of his performance, while 59 per cent disapprove.

INDEX:

- **Three-in-five call Trump's comments about Pope unacceptable**
- **Two-thirds say image of Trump as Jesus went "too far"**
- **Few – even among MAGA – believe Trump thought image was him as a "doctor"**
- **Trump approval stands at 35 per cent, has he been hurt among Catholics?**



CONTACT:

Angus Reid, Chairman: angus@angus.org @AngusReid

Shachi Kurl, President: 1.604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

Three-in-five call Trump’s comments about Pope unacceptable

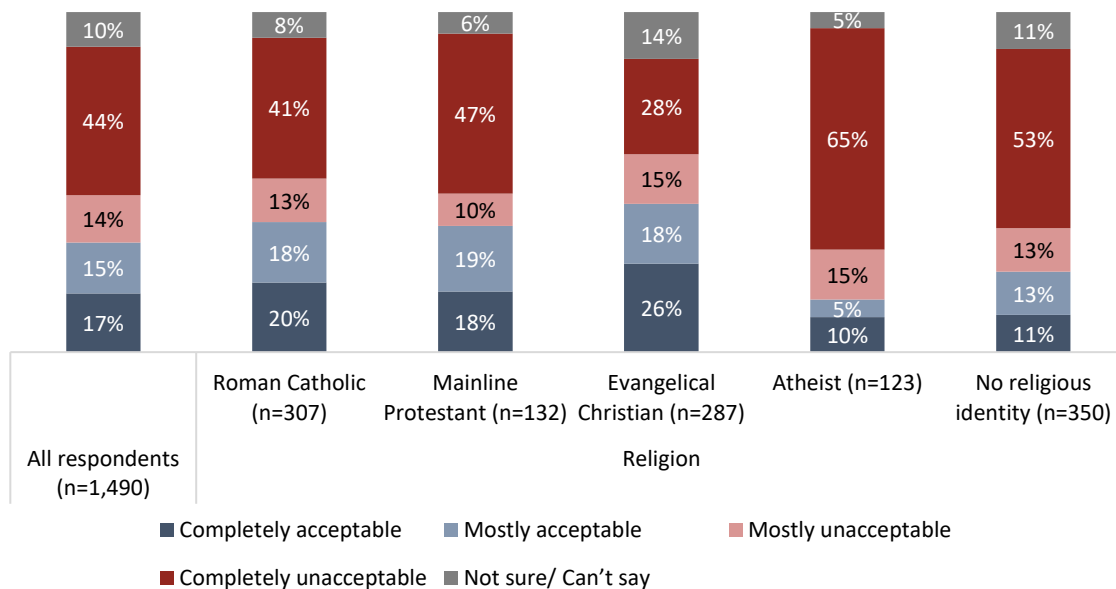
President Donald Trump is famously confrontational, making statements criticizing anyone he feels may have slighted or disrespected him. One of his latest disagreements is with Pope Leo XIV, who said he hoped Trump would find an “[off-ramp](#)” for the war with Iran. Angus Reid offered the following question to survey respondents:

As you may or may not know, President Donald Trump criticized Pope Leo XIV in a series of posts on Truth Social, calling him “weak on crime” and “terrible for foreign policy”. Trump said the Pope should “focus on being a great pope, not a politician”.

In your opinion, do you believe it was acceptable or unacceptable for Trump to criticize the Pope in this way?

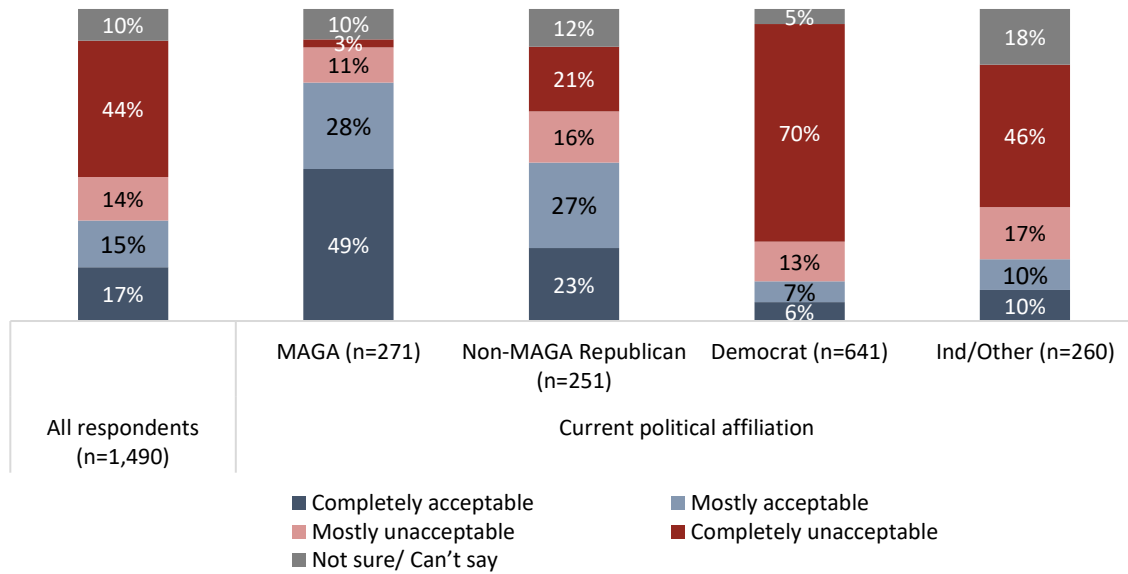
Overall, the number of Americans who feel this is an unacceptable way to speak to or about the Pope outweighs the number who say it is fine. Three-in-five (58%) call it unacceptable, while one-in-three say it’s acceptable. Roman Catholics are less critical than the population overall, but only slightly. Notably, those most offended by Trump appear to be those with no religious identity:

In your opinion, do you believe it was acceptable or unacceptable for Trump to criticize the Pope in this way?



As for the politics at play here, those who align with the MAGA movement continue to largely shrug off criticisms of Trump. The vast majority of that group say it is acceptable behaviour. Notable non-MAGA Republicans are nearly three-times as likely to all the behaviour unacceptable (37%) compared to those who identify with the MAGA moniker (14%):

In your opinion, do you believe it was acceptable or unacceptable for Trump to criticize the Pope in this way?



Two-thirds say image of Trump as Jesus went “too far”

Another action from Trump that evidently roiled some on the religious right was his posting an AI rendered image of himself in what appeared to be the place of Jesus, blessing a man in a hospital bed, surrounded by American imagery and ethereal light. Trump, confronted about the image, which was deleted shortly after, claimed that he thought the image was of him as a doctor.



Americans were asked if they believed that this post was just a joke, or if it went too far and was offensive. Two-thirds (68%) say that they felt it went too far, including 64 per cent of Christians.

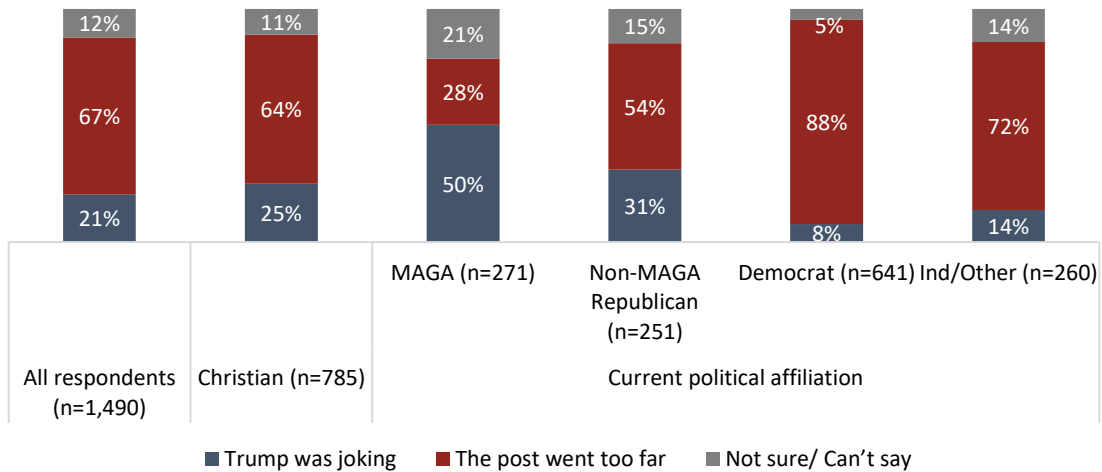
Trump’s base is more amenable than others, but it is worth noting that only half (50%) said they felt he was joking. Nine-in-10 Democrats (88%) say Trump went too far with this post:

CONTACT:

Angus Reid, Chairman: angus@angus.org @AngusReid

Shachi Kurl, President: 1.604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

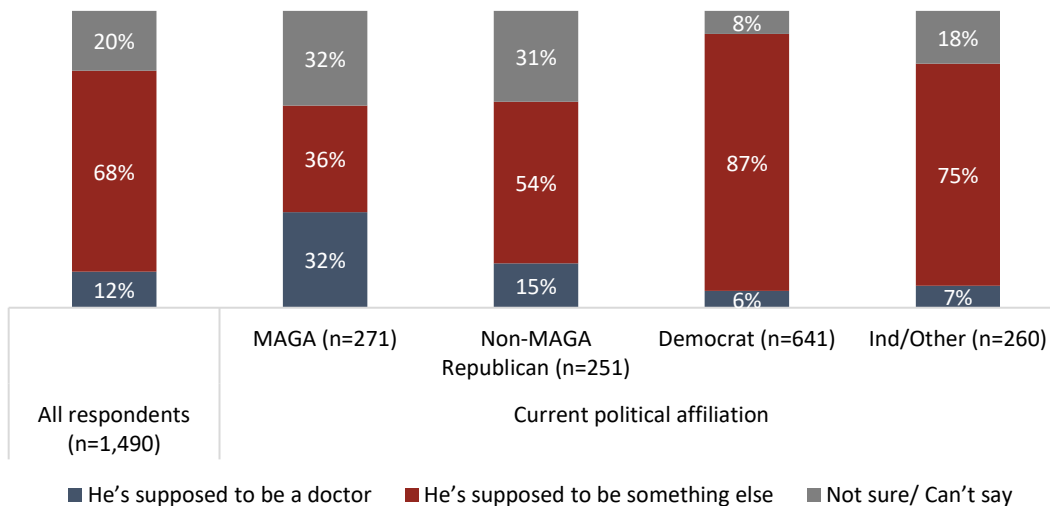
Some say that AI-generated image post was just a joke, others say it went too far. Where do you land?



Few – even among MAGA – believe Trump thought image was him as a “doctor”

The idea that Trump truly felt the image he posted was him as a doctor is not believable to many Americans. One-in-eight (12%) say the image really was supposed to be Trump as a doctor, while seven-in-ten (68%) say it was something else. Even within Trump’s base, just one-in-three say (32%) they buy the doctor angle. A slightly larger group say the image is of something else (36%), while one-in-third choose not to take a position (32%):

What do you think Trump was supposed to be in that image?



Trump approval stands at 35 per cent, has he been hurt among Catholics?

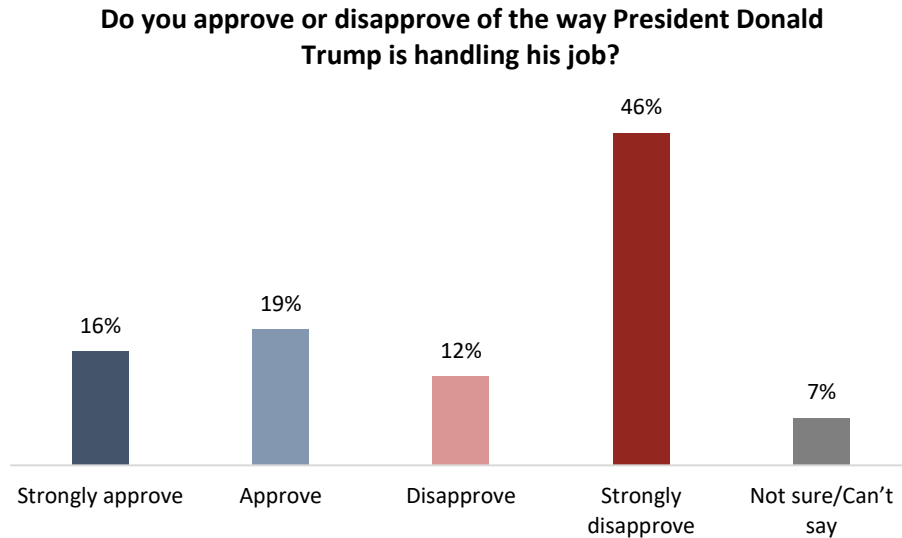
President Trump continues to garner poor approval as the ongoing conflict in Iran has proven unpopular, and Americans continue to criticize his government on its economic management. Overall, 35 per cent

CONTACT:

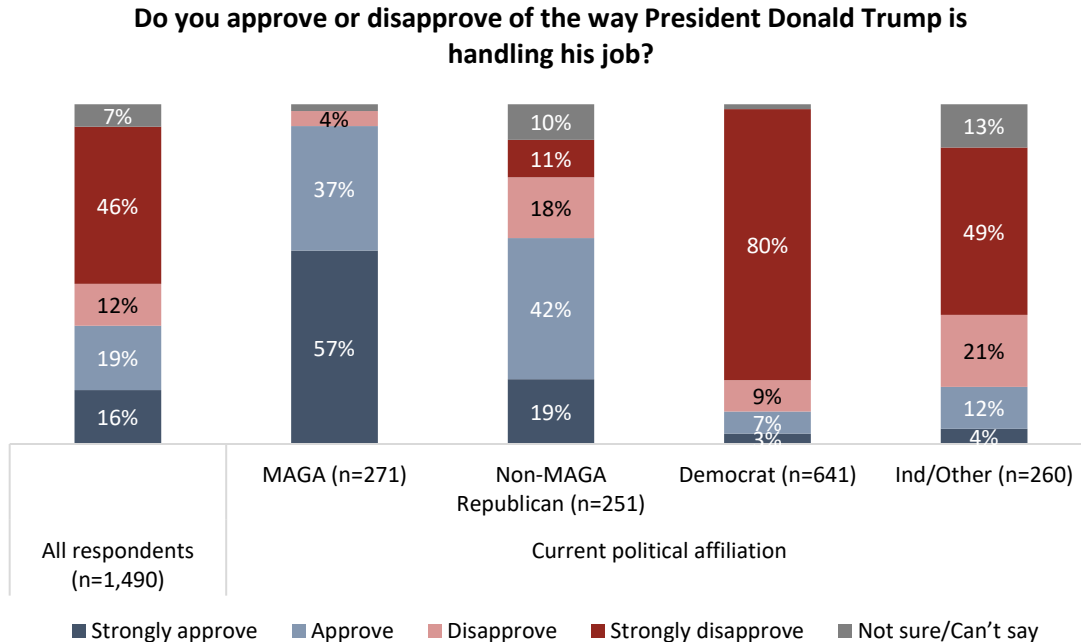
Angus Reid, Chairman: angus@angus.org @AngusReid

Shachi Kurl, President: 1.604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

approve of his performance, while 59 per cent disapprove. By far the largest group voice strong disapproval:



Trump's approval continues to be saved from disaster by his MAGA base, 94 per cent of which say he is doing a good job. Trump's approval among other Republicans is still positive at a two-to-one margin (61% vs 29%) while Democrats and Independents are fiercely critical of what they're seeing:



Trump's approval rating among Roman Catholics has been suffering and this latest data shows the growing risk he faces ahead of midterm elections this fall. Overall, 47 per cent of Catholics approve of Trump, a group he won 55% to 43% in the 2025 election over Kamala Harris. Among White Roman

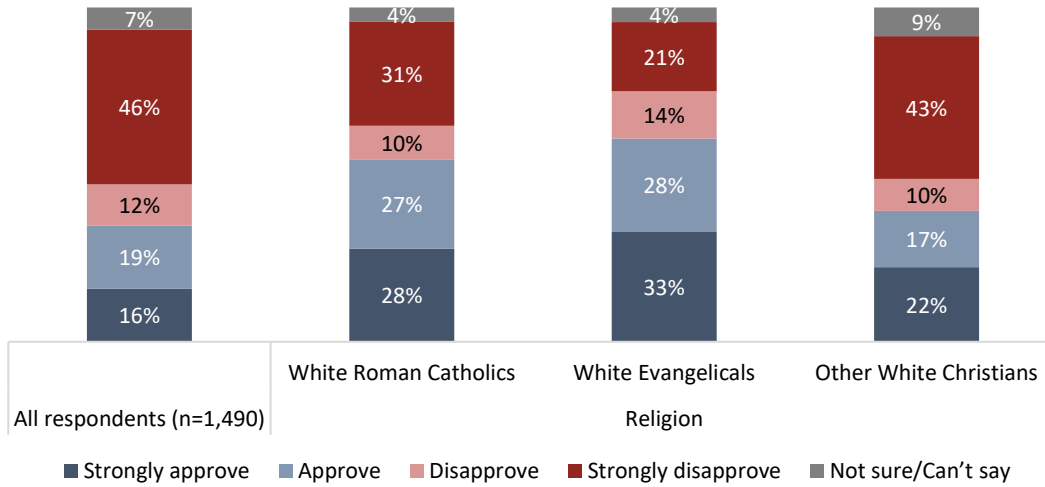
CONTACT:

Angus Reid, Chairman: angus@angus.org @AngusReid

Shachi Kurl, President: 1.604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

Catholics, Trump’s approval is higher, at 55 per cent, but still 41 per cent show disapproval. Among Evangelicals, 61 per cent approve and 35 per cent disapproval:

Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Donald Trump is handling his job?



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by religious affiliation, [click here](#).

CONTACT:

Angus Reid, Chairman: angus@angus.org @AngusReid

Shachi Kurl, President: 1.604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl