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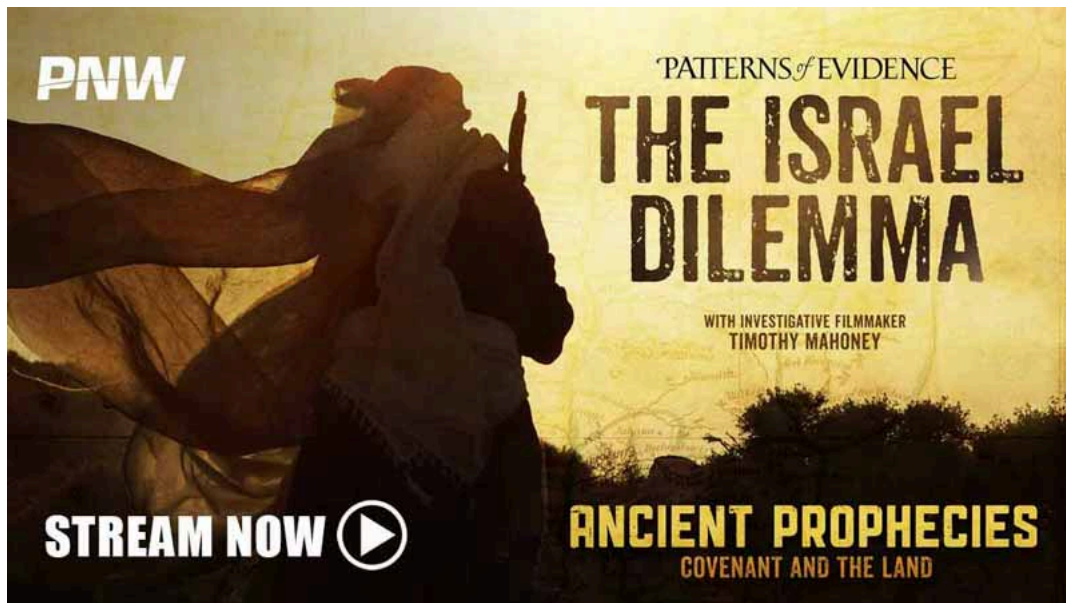
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ARTICLE

Americans' Trust In Pastors Hits Historic Low



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BY AARON EARLS/LIFEWAY RESEARCH JANUARY 21, 2026

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Pastors in the United States face a culture that no longer gives them the benefit of the doubt.

Public levels of trust in pastors continue to drop, reaching a new low in 2025. In Gallup's latest Honesty and Ethics Survey, 27% of U.S. adults say clergy members have high or very high levels of honesty and ethics--a three-point decline from 2024's previous record low.

Half of Americans rate their honesty as average, while around 1 in 5 say it's low or very low. Specifically, 6% give pastors a very high rating for their honesty, 21% high, 48% average, 12% low, 6% very low, and 7% aren't sure.

While the drop in trust continues for pastors, Gallup has found a rebound in Americans' confidence in the church. In 2025, 36% of U.S. adults said they had a great deal or fair amount of confidence in the church or organized religion, up from a low of 31% in 2022 and 32% in 2024.

27% of U.S. adults say clergy members have high or very high levels of honesty and ethics, a three-point decline from 2024's previous record low, according to Gallup.



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Broad erosion of trust across professions

Despite the continued decline, pastors still rank among the top half of professions, because trust has eroded across professions. Of the 20 careers asked about in 2025 that were previously included in the survey, 15 experienced declines.

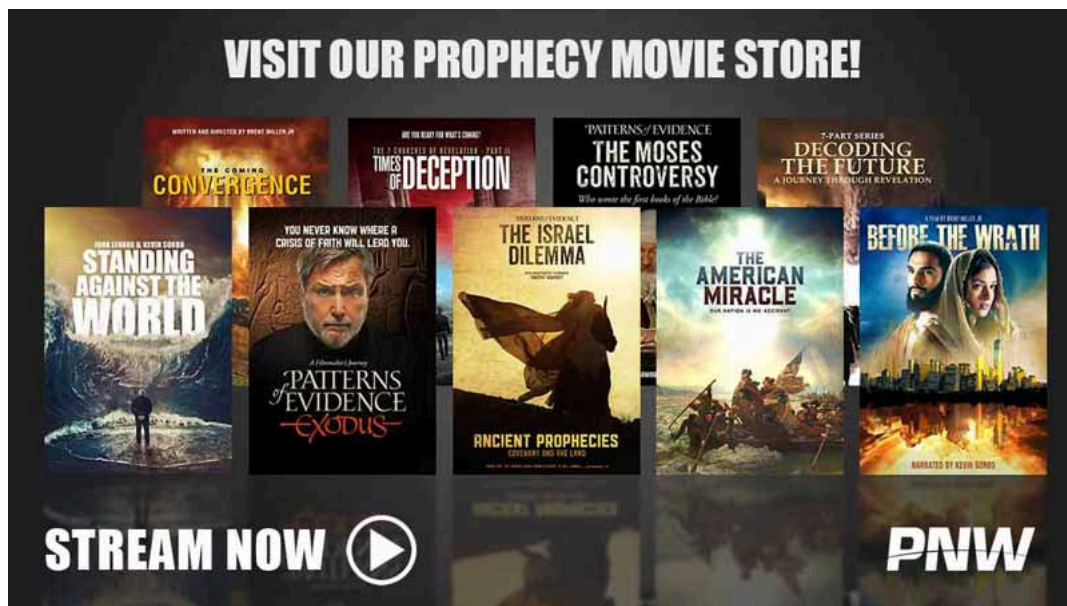
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majority of Americans. Clergy are among the next group that Gallup categorizes as "tilt positive," in that the high or very high ratings outweigh the low or very low ratings.

Professions considered tilt positive are high school teachers (50%), police officers (37%), accountants (35%), funeral directors (32%), and clergy (27%).

While other careers receive similar high honesty and ethics ratings as clergy, more Americans give them low ratings. These include labor union leaders (27% high v. 30% low) and journalists (28% v. 42%).

Members of Congress (7% high v. 71% low) and telemarketers (5% v. 62%) are the least trusted professions.



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Continued decline for pastors

From when Gallup began rating 23 professions in the early 2000s, the honesty rating of clergy has fallen the most, down from an average of 56% in 2000-2009 to 27% today. The 29-point decline is the steepest among professions.

Previously, a broad majority of the U.S. held pastors in the highest regard. In 1985, 67% of Americans rated pastors as high or very high in honesty and ethics. After falling somewhat in the late 1980s, the ratings of pastors remained clearly above 50% for the 90s, even rising back to 64% in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack in 2001.

In early 2002, however, The Boston Globe uncovered and reported on a sex abuse scandal involving Roman Catholic priests and subsequent coverups. In the following years, additional sex abuse reports in other denominations and Christian groups were exposed. The public perception of pastors began to sour.

The last time most Americans believed clergy had high or very high honesty and ethical standards was in 2012. The rating of pastors has declined every year except one since then.

Most and least trusting of pastors

Pastors face lower levels of inherent trust among some segments of the population. Women (26%) are less likely than men (30%) to rate their honesty and ethics as high. Additionally, non-white Americans (18%) are less trusting than white Americans (33%).

Politically, Republicans (36%) have higher levels of trust than Democrats (25%) or Independents (24%). Independents are the most likely to say they rate pastors low or very low--21% compared to 15% of Republicans and 14% of Democrats.

Comparing the Republicans and Republican-leaning Independents who give pastors high marks for honesty (36%) with the Democrats and Democratic leaners who do the same (21%) reveals a 15-point trust gap, the seventh largest partisan gap.

Pastors are also less likely to find trust among younger adults, those with less formal education, and those with lower household incomes.

Pastors are less likely to find trust among Democrats, Independents, younger adults, those with less formal education, and those with lower household incomes, according to Gallup.

Almost 2 in 5 Americans 55 and older (38%) have high levels of trust in pastors compared to 24% of 35-45-year-olds and 17% of those 34 and under.

Those who are high school graduates or less (15%) are half as likely to say they have high levels of trust in pastors compared to Americans with some college (30%) or who are college graduates (38%).

Additionally, as household incomes increase, so does the likelihood of higher rankings of pastors' honesty. Those making less than \$50,000 a year (19%) are less trusting of clergy than those making between \$50,000 and \$100,000 (28%) and those bringing in \$100,000 or more annually (34%).

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