

Which Presidential Candidates Pastors Like Best

Ted Cruz is the favorite presidential candidate of Protestant pastors who lean Republican. Hillary Clinton leads among Democratic pastors. And Donald Trump is near the back of the pack.

But “Undecided” is by far the most popular choice of America’s pastors according to a new telephone survey of 1,000 Protestant senior pastors from Nashville-based LifeWay Research. The survey found nearly half of those planning to vote (48 percent) don’t know whom they would vote for if the presidential election were held today.

“One of the most surprising findings of our survey was the poor showing of Donald Trump,” says Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research. “When it comes to Mr. Trump, there seems to be a huge gap between the pulpit and the pew.”

Among other findings:

- Half (54 percent) of Protestant pastors indicate they are Republicans. One in four are independent (23 percent), while one in seven (14 percent) are Democrats.
- Among pastors who are Republicans, Cruz (29 percent) is in the lead, followed by Ben Carson (10 percent), Marco Rubio (8 percent), and Trump (5 percent). Thirty-nine percent are undecided.
- Among pastors who are Democrats, a third favor Clinton (38 percent), one in four (23 percent) favors Bernie Sanders, and 31 percent are undecided.
- Among pastors who are independents, almost 3 of 5 (57%) are undecided. Leading among independents are Cruz and Rubio (8 percent each), Carson and Sanders (6 percent each), Clinton (5 percent), and Trump (4 percent).

- Older pastors (those over 64) are more likely to be undecided (54 percent) than those 18 to 44 (44 percent). They are also more likely to favor Trump (8 percent). Cruz does well with pastors 45 to 54 (21 percent).
- Cruz does better with white pastors (19 percent) than with those of other ethnicities (5 percent). Clinton does the opposite: 5 percent of white pastors favor her, along with 18 percent of pastors of other ethnicities.
- Evangelical pastors prefer Cruz (18 percent), Carson (8 percent), and Rubio (8 percent). Mainline pastors choose Cruz (13 percent), Clinton (10 percent), Sanders (8 percent), and Carson (7 percent).
- Baptist pastors (43 percent) are less likely to be undecided than Lutheran (60 percent) and Pentecostal (61 percent) pastors.

Previous surveys have found pastors in general are wary about being publicly identified with political candidates. A 2012 LifeWay Research study found almost nine out of 10 (87 percent) Protestant pastors disapprove of endorsements from the pulpit.

The IRS also bars pastors and leaders of other nonprofit groups from taking active roles in campaigns, at least in their official capacity. And pastors often have congregation members who disagree about whom to vote for.

This new poll shows pastors have a distinct view of the current election cycle—one that's different from people in the pews, says Stetzer.

"One of the few religious groups that national polls track are evangelical Christians, and it is hard not to notice a surprising gap between them and their pastors," says Stetzer.

"Based on most other polls, rank-and-file evangelicals and church attendees are most likely supporting Trump. Yet pastors are undecided or more likely to support Cruz. The absence of

support for Trump is similar to unscientific surveys of evangelical leaders from the National Association of Evangelicals and *WORLD Magazine* that have consistently pointed to Rubio.

“Simply put, it’s a bizarre election season,” says Stetzer.