

POPES AND THE PAPACY

There have been 266 popes – but how are they chosen?

The pope – the supreme pontiff, the Bishop of Rome, God’s representative on Earth – is the head of the Catholic Church worldwide, with 1.2 billion global citizens identifying as Catholic.

Modern popes reside in the Vatican, a tiny, sovereign enclave within the Italian capital of Rome.

The conclave to elect the 267th pope will begin on May 7, 2025.

TOP 10 PAPAL NAMES

JOHN
GREGORY
BENEDICT
CLEMENT
INNOCENT
LEO
PIUS
STEPHEN
BONIFACE
URBAN

21
16
15
14
13
13
12
9
8
8



CARDINAL WIN?

You don’t need to be a cardinal to be voted pope, though most are. Any baptised man is eligible for the papacy.

AGES OF THE POPES ON ELECTION

20

YOUNGEST

John XI (AD 931-36)
Benedict IX (first term
AD 1032-44)

65

AVERAGE

79

OLDEST

Clement X (1670-76)
Alexander VIII (1689-91)

LENGTH OF PAPAL REIGN

13 DAYS

SHORTEST

Urban VII
(15-27 September 1590)

7

YEARS
AVERAGE

34 YEARS

LONGEST

St. Peter (30-64AD)



31%

of popes have been canonized as saints



HOW ARE POPES CHOSEN?

Popes are elected by the college of cardinals at a meeting called the conclave. Sealed in the Sistine Chapel, the cardinals are not allowed to connect with the outside world except through the burning of their ballot papers twice a day. White smoke means a new pope, black that the selection process continues. For the election of Pope Clement IV’s successor in 1268, the election process took 3 years.

67

Years that the papacy resided in Avignon, not Rome

