# Betting on the next pope sparks global frenzy and online fantasy games



# The Next Pope: Betting, Fantasy Games, and Cultural Curiosities

As cardinals convene within the hallowed walls of the Vatican for the papal conclave, public interest extends far beyond solemn prayers and sacred rites. The anticipation surrounding the selection of the next leader of the 1.4 billion Catholics has catalysed a surge in betting activities that have remarkably surpassed even the fervour typically reserved for high-profile sporting events.

According to industry experts, the scope of this phenomenon is unprecedented. Sam Eaton, UK manager for Oddschecker, revealed that the global interest in betting on the next pope is generating significant engagement across multiple nations. "There’s a huge level of interest globally," he noted. In the weeks leading up to the conclave, hundreds of thousands have flocked to betting platforms to explore the odds for various cardinals, with particularly strong participation noted in the UK, Ireland, and the United States. While around £30,000 (nearly US$40,000) had been wagered in the UK alone, feedback from major bookmakers like William Hill indicates that this niche market has rapidly become one of their busiest non-sports betting categories.

However, it is essential to note that while betting on the papacy flourishes in some regions, it remains illegal in others. In the United States, for example, reputable sportsbooks such as BetMGM do not offer markets on papal elections, although illegal betting estimated to be in the range of US$10 million is reported on unregulated sites. In contrast, the betting landscape in Italy offers a different picture; while all forms of gambling on religious events are prohibited, informal bets among friends have emerged, reminiscent of the camaraderie found in typical sports betting.

The intersection of faith and gambling has also birthed creative pursuits, such as the online game Fantapapa, which mirrors the structure of popular fantasy football leagues. Participants select 11 cardinals they believe have the highest likelihood of being elected, fostering a light-hearted yet engaged atmosphere even amidst the weightiness of the occasion. With over 60,000 players globally, the game cultivates a playful environment where choices can function as both personal expression and social interaction. Italian student Federico La Rocca, who joined the fun at his father's suggestion, highlighted the more jovial aspect: "It seemed ironic at first, but now with the conclave approaching, I wanted to join in."

While the playful nature of games like Fantapapa adds levity, concerns persist regarding the implications of merging marketing into ecclesiastical matters. Critics highlight the risk of gambling addiction, particularly among young individuals; a recent study found that one in ten young men in the US exhibits signs of problematic gambling behaviour. Moreover, while Catholic teaching does not outright condemn gambling, it warns about the potentially enslaving nature of such activities, urging caution when it impacts an individual’s livelihood.

Historically, papal conclaves have evolved through a landscape marked by manipulation, secrecy, and even espionage orchestrated from both within and outside the church. The process was initially democratic, involving clergy and laypeople alike; however, political pressures and power dynamics soon led to a more controlled and secretive mechanism. Indeed, the very term "conclave" emerged from a specific mandate intended to expedite decision-making, crystallising a system designed to maintain both reverence and societal intrigue.

As the cardinals deliberate behind closed doors, the blend of betting, fantasy games, and historical context underscores an extraordinary moment where tradition meets modern culture. Whether viewed as mere entertainment or a more complex societal commentary, the phenomenon surrounding the papal conclave is undoubtedly a reflection of a changing world, inviting both laughter and earnest reflection as the faithful await the emergence of the next spiritual guide.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/conclave-betting-odds-cardinal-pope-b2747103.html), [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/conclave-betting-odds-cardinal-pope-b2747103.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/conclave-betting-odds-cardinal-pope-b2747103.html), [[3]](https://www.expressnews.com/news/world/article/play-your-cardinals-right-betting-on-next-pope-20308039.php)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.huffingtonpost.es/sociedad/del-fantasy-fantapapa-juego-gratuito-te-permite-elegir-papa-fuera-equipo-futbol.html), [[6]](https://www.sportsbookreview.com/news/kalshi-and-polymarket-users-aim-to-predict-the-next-pope-may-5-2025/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/72005409-1ee6-4d19-9d49-0ec5a35e7eb1)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025/02/28/pope-francis-s-health-inspires-online-betting-as-prediction-markets-get-dark)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/conclave-betting-odds-cardinal-pope-b2747103.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/conclave-betting-odds-cardinal-pope-b2747103.html> - This article discusses the surge in global interest and betting activity surrounding the papal conclave, highlighting that betting on the next pope has become more popular than major sporting events. Experts note the unprecedented global interest, with platforms like Oddschecker analyzing odds across various markets. The article also mentions that hundreds of thousands of people from around 140 countries have visited Oddschecker to review each cardinal’s chances of becoming the next pope. In the UK, about £30,000 had been wagered with one leading online betting platform as of last week, indicating a significant trend in betting on the papal election.
3. <https://www.expressnews.com/news/world/article/play-your-cardinals-right-betting-on-next-pope-20308039.php> - This article highlights the growing popularity of betting on the next pope ahead of the conclave. It mentions that in Italy, where betting on religious events is forbidden, people are making friendly, informal wagers, such as the equivalent of $20 on a favorite cardinal. Additionally, it discusses the online game Fantapapa, or Fantasy Pope, which mimics popular fantasy football and soccer leagues. More than 60,000 people are playing, each choosing 11 cardinals they believe have the best shot at becoming the next pope. The game has gained popularity, with Italian student Federico La Rocca participating and choosing Cardinal Tagle because he 'looks like a nice guy and fun person.'
4. <https://www.huffingtonpost.es/sociedad/del-fantasy-fantapapa-juego-gratuito-te-permite-elegir-papa-fuera-equipo-futbol.html> - This article introduces Fantapapa, a free online game that transforms the selection of the new pope into a gaming experience similar to popular fantasy football games. Participants select eleven cardinals from the 133 in the conclave, forming a team with different roles such as goalkeeper, defender, and forward. The objective is to predict who will succeed Pope Francis, who passed away at 88. The goalkeeper represents the least likely candidate, while the captain symbolizes the user's main bet. The scoring system is based on media mentions and includes bonuses or penalties depending on the success of the prediction. With over 100,000 registered users and nearly 7,000 followers on Instagram, the game has become an interactive and humorous way to follow the conclave deliberations, which officially began with the cardinals entering the Sistine Chapel.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/72005409-1ee6-4d19-9d49-0ec5a35e7eb1> - This article provides a comprehensive historical overview of papal conclaves, highlighting their evolution from democratic beginnings to highly secretive and ritualized events. Initially, both clergy and laypeople participated in selecting the pope, with divine signs sometimes influencing decisions. However, as the Catholic Church expanded its power in Italy, rival powerful families and European monarchs increasingly manipulated elections for political gain. In response, reforms such as Pope Nicholas II’s 1059 decree restricted voting to senior clergy, and Pope Alexander III’s 1179 rule mandated a two-thirds majority. The term 'conclave' stems from Pope Gregory X’s rule post a three-year deadlock in the 13th century, mandating seclusion to expedite decisions. Despite enforced secrecy, espionage, lobbying, and vote-buying were rampant. From the Renaissance through the 18th century, secular powers and even bettors influenced conclaves. True secrecy only emerged post-1870 after the Papal States dissolved, reinforced by rules from Pius X in 1903 and Paul VI in 1975. Today, the conclave remains a solemn yet highly choreographed affair, blending ecclesiastical tradition with strategic image management, as seen in the symbolic use of smoke signals and televised proceedings to maintain mystique and public reverence.
6. <https://www.sportsbookreview.com/news/kalshi-and-polymarket-users-aim-to-predict-the-next-pope-may-5-2025/> - This article discusses the use of prediction markets like Kalshi and Polymarket for betting on the next pope. It explains that traditional sportsbooks in the U.S. do not offer markets on papal elections due to regulatory restrictions. However, prediction market platforms such as Kalshi allow users to trade on high-profile non-sport outcomes, including papal elections. The article also provides information on the papal conclave process, noting that it is a secretive process for choosing a new pope that takes place entirely behind closed doors in the Sistine Chapel. The successful conclusion of the vote is announced by the release of white smoke from the Chapel chimney.
7. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025/02/28/pope-francis-s-health-inspires-online-betting-as-prediction-markets-get-dark> - This article reports on the surge in online betting activity related to Pope Francis's health and the potential for a new pope. It mentions that as wagers about Pope Francis's health and the outcome of papal elections have emerged on prediction-market site Polymarket, some users wonder how far is too far for betting on hypotheticals. The article notes that wagers on 'New Pope in 2025?' have generated just over $420,000 on Polymarket as of the reporting date. The article also discusses the ethical considerations and the historical context of betting on papal elections, referencing a 400-year-old law that threatened excommunication for such practices.