# Italy’s Fantapapa game merges papal conclave excitement with fantasy sports craze



As the global Catholic community anticipates the upcoming papal conclave scheduled to begin on May 7, a unique trend has emerged in Italy, blending religious anticipation with popular culture through the online game Fantapapa. This innovative platform, inspired by fantasy sports leagues, has attracted nearly 60,000 players who create virtual teams of papal candidates, known as "papabili," earning points based on media mentions and various outcome predictions related to the election of the next pope.

Fantapapa was developed by Pietro Pace, an AI architect at Microsoft, and Mauro Vanetti, a video game developer. They began working on the game in February when Pope Francis was hospitalised, launching it shortly after his death on April 21. The game is free to play, devoid of advertising, and intended purely for entertainment. "There are no prizes, it's just for fun and for the eternal glory," Pace told Reuters. The game notably reflects significant interest from female followers, with Pietro Pace highlighting that most of their Instagram profile followers are women.

The game allows participants to choose an 11-member team of papabile and score points based on media coverage in Italy and internationally. Players can earn extra points if a chosen candidate is elected pope, with bonuses for correctly predicting additional elements, such as the new pontiff's papal name. Currently, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, the Archbishop of Bologna and head of the Italian bishops' conference, is the most favoured candidate among players.

In contrast to this phenomenon, traditional gambling companies outside Italy offer odds on the next pope in the novelty betting market. British-based William Hill lists various candidates and their respective odds, with Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Parolin as the favourite at 9/4, followed by Luis Antonio Tagle at 3/1, and both Matteo Zuppi and Peter Turkson at 6/1. Tagle, from the Philippines, could become the first Asian pope, while Turkson from Ghana would be the first Black pope in modern history. Despite these offerings, betting volumes remain relatively modest compared to other markets, such as interest rate predictions.

Within Italy, while betting on the next pope is not illegal, it is actively discouraged. Nicola Tani, head of specialist media outlet Agipronews, explained, "In Italy there is no law expressly prohibiting betting on the election of the pope ... However, the Customs Agency, which authorises the subject of bets in advance, has informally asked gaming licensees to avoid offering odds on the election of the pope, as is the case for Italian political elections."

This stance has contributed to the rising popularity of Fantapapa, providing an alternative way for Italians to engage with the papal election without involving traditional gambling. The game captures the blend of religious significance, media focus, and interactive entertainment at a time when the Vatican and the wider world are closely watching the selection of Pope Francis’s successor.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italians-play-fantapapa-while-others-bet-identity-new-pope-2025-04-30/> - This Reuters article discusses the emergence of 'Fantapapa,' an online game inspired by fantasy sports leagues, which has attracted nearly 60,000 players in Italy. The game allows participants to create virtual teams of papal candidates, known as 'papabili,' earning points based on media mentions and various outcome predictions related to the election of the next pope.
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italians-play-fantapapa-while-others-bet-identity-new-pope-2025-04-30/> - The article mentions that 'Fantapapa' was developed by Pietro Pace, an AI architect at Microsoft, and Mauro Vanetti, a video game developer. They began working on the game in February when Pope Francis was hospitalized, launching it shortly after his death on April 21. The game is free to play, devoid of advertising, and intended purely for entertainment.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italians-play-fantapapa-while-others-bet-identity-new-pope-2025-04-30/> - The Reuters article highlights that 'Fantapapa' notably reflects significant interest from female followers, with Pietro Pace noting that most of their Instagram profile followers are women.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italians-play-fantapapa-while-others-bet-identity-new-pope-2025-04-30/> - The game allows participants to choose an 11-member team of papabile and score points based on media coverage in Italy and internationally. Players can earn extra points if a chosen candidate is elected pope, with bonuses for correctly predicting additional elements, such as the new pontiff's papal name. Currently, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, the Archbishop of Bologna and head of the Italian bishops' conference, is the most favored candidate among players.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italians-play-fantapapa-while-others-bet-identity-new-pope-2025-04-30/> - The article contrasts 'Fantapapa' with traditional gambling companies outside Italy, noting that British-based William Hill lists various candidates and their respective odds, with Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Parolin as the favorite at 9/4, followed by Luis Antonio Tagle at 3/1, and both Matteo Zuppi and Peter Turkson at 6/1.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italians-play-fantapapa-while-others-bet-identity-new-pope-2025-04-30/> - The article explains that while betting on the next pope is not illegal in Italy, it is actively discouraged. Nicola Tani, head of specialist media outlet Agipronews, stated that there is no law expressly prohibiting betting on the election of the pope, but the Customs Agency has informally asked gaming licensees to avoid offering odds on the election of ... .
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/fantapapa-next-pope-odds-gambling-b2742203.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data