



The stove that will be used to burn ballots during the conclave to elect a new pope in the Sistine Chapel and the machine that adds chemicals to create dark black or bright white smoke are seen at the Vatican May 2, 2025. Cardinals under the age of 80 will enter the conclave May 7. (CNS/Vatican Media)



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Rome — May 4, 2025

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

The chimney on the Sistine Chapel is up, and voting to elect the next pope will begin on Wednesday afternoon, May 7.

There will be 133 cardinals who participate in the conclave and they will elect among themselves Pope Francis' successor. Eighty-nine is the magic number to pass the two-thirds majority mark required to be elected pope.

While there is no official nominating process — and it is generally perceived to be a wide-open race — here is the National Catholic Reporter's final roundup of the 12 leading front-runners. ([All 12 NCR papal front-runners can also be found here.](#))

- Could [Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu](#) make history as the first African pope in more than 1,500 years?
- One of Francis' favorite cardinals was [Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline](#), who bears an uncanny resemblance to Pope John XXIII. Might he soon be elected Pope John XXIV?
- Cardinals wanting to chart a different course from the Francis papacy have been pushing the candidacy of [Cardinal Peter Erdo](#) since before Francis' death. Could Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban extend his reach into the Vatican?
- Many see this conclave as a referendum on synodality — Francis' efforts to reform the church's structures to invite more laypeople in decision-making and to make the church more inclusive. If cardinals want to double down on synodality, [Cardinal Mario Grech](#) is the synod's standard bearer.
- In a time of world war, could [Cardinal Gérald Lacroix](#) from peace-loving Canada help bring peace to the world and the church?

Advertisement

Papabile by media outlet

Cardinal	National Catholic Reporter	BBC	CNN	Irish Times	The Telegraph	Religion News Service	Associated Press	CBS News
Fridolin Ambongo Besungu	✓	✓			✓			✓
Anders Arborelius						✓		✓
Jean-Marc Aveline	✓	✓			✓	✓		
Stephen Chow			✓					
Peter Erdo	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Kevin Farrell				✓				
Mario Grech	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
Konrad Krajewski						✓		
Gérald Lacroix	✓							✓
Reinhard Marx		✓					✓	
Juan José Omella Omella					✓			
Marc Ouellet		✓					✓	
Pierbattista Pizzaballa	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Robert Prevost	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Pietro Parolin	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Albert Ranjith						✓		
Cristóbal López Romero	✓							
Robert Sarah		✓			✓		✓	
Angelo Scola		✓						
Christoph Schoenborn							✓	
Jaime Spengler			✓					
Luis Antonio Tagle	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
José Tolentino de Mendonça	✓				✓			
Peter Turkson		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Joseph Tobin	✓				✓	✓		
Matteo Maria Zuppi		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Information gathered by NCR staff reporter Brian Fraga. Graphic designed by Stephanie Yeagle

NCR staff reporter Brian Fraga reviewed eight media outlets and identified the papabile candidates reported by those publications. (NCR graphic/Stephanie Yeagle)

- [Cardinal Cristóbal López Romero](#) seeks to connect Africa and Europe, Christianity and Islam. Does the College of Cardinals want a bridge-builder pope?
- [Cardinal Pietro Parolin](#) served as Pope Francis' top diplomat, but lacks the charisma of Pope Francis. Will that charisma gap disqualify him from consideration?
- Could a young Italian [Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa](#), who has lived much of his life in the Holy Land, be elected to the church's highest office?
- An American who has spent most of his life outside the country, does [Cardinal Robert Prevost](#) have what it takes to convince the cardinals to elect history's first pope from the United States?
- They call [Cardinal Luis Tagle](#) the "Asian Francis." Will that put him on the fast track to become the next pope?

- In an era of Trumpism, could Newark, New Jersey, [Cardinal Joseph Tobin](#), who represents the antithesis of the U.S. president, be elected as a papal counterweight?
- Could [Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça](#), the son of a fisherman, be elected to wear the shoes of a fisherman?

Many questions remain. The answers come later this week. [Stay tuned.](#)

The National Catholic Reporter's Rome Bureau is made possible in part by the generosity of Joan and Bob McGrath.

This story appears in the [Papal front-runners: The men who could be pope](#) and [Who will be the next pope?](#) feature series.