

Inside the Conclave

The world watches with interest as cardinals gather in conclave — literally under lock and key — to elect the next pope. The rarity of the event, the ceremony and secrecy add to the intrigue.

Sistine Chapel

The centuries-old chapel adorned with Michelangelo's frescoes has been the site of every papal election since 1878.

Its marble floor is covered with wood. The windows and doors are shut as the Master of Papal Liturgical Ceremonies exclaims, "Extra omnes!" ("Everybody else, out!") A sweep is performed for electronic devices.

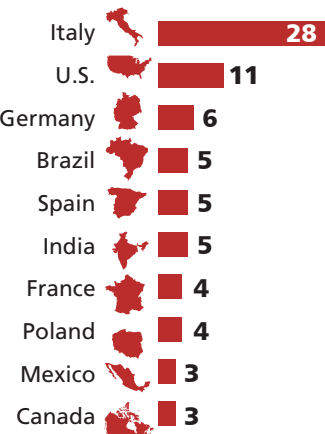
Cardinal Electors

Placing a hand on the Gospels, each one swears to uphold the rules and secrecy of the conclave. Any communication with people outside is forbidden. They may not receive messages or news. Cardinals under the age of 80 may vote in the conclave. There are 117 eligible cardinals this time.

Cardinals per region



Countries with the most cardinal electors



Ballots and Voting

Votes are handwritten and cast individually into special urns. The top of the ballot reads, "Elego in Summum Pontificem" ("I elect as the most high pontiff").

Ballots are counted by three "scrutineers." The work is checked by three "revisers." The ballot counters and verifiers are chosen by lot at the start of the conclave.

One round of voting is expected the first day. Each day after, two votes are taken in the morning and two votes in the afternoon until a successful vote.

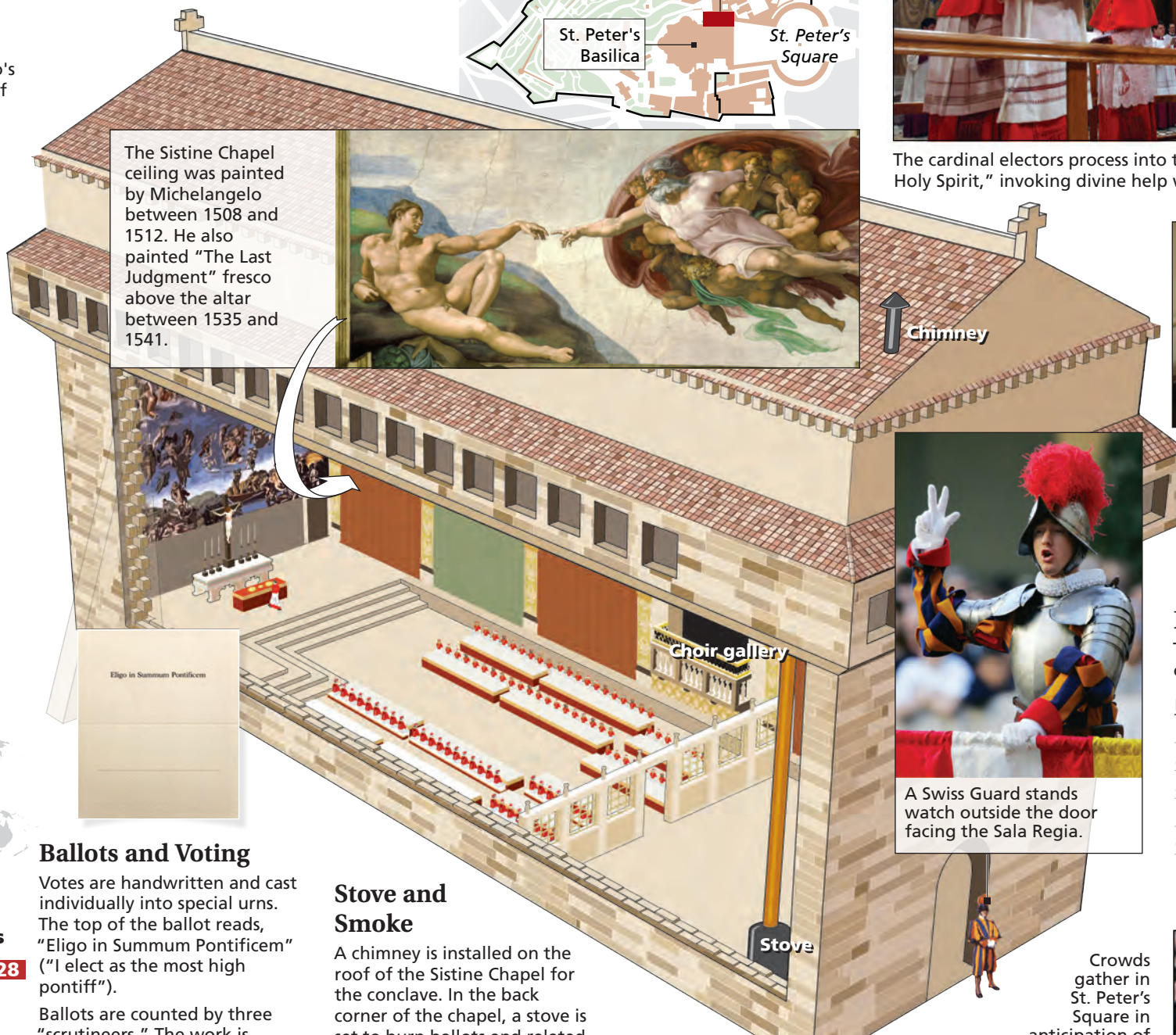
A two-thirds majority is required to elect the new pope.

Stove and Smoke

A chimney is installed on the roof of the Sistine Chapel for the conclave. In the back corner of the chapel, a stove is set to burn ballots and related papers, including notes taken by the electors, each morning and afternoon.

If balloting is not successful, the smoke burns black with the help of an added chemical.

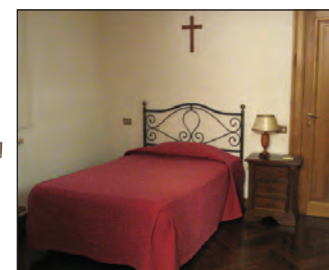
If balloting is successful, a chemical is added to produce the celebratory white smoke — the signal that the church has a new pope.



The Sistine Chapel ceiling was painted by Michelangelo between 1508 and 1512. He also painted "The Last Judgment" fresco above the altar between 1535 and 1541.



The cardinal electors process into the chapel chanting "Come, Holy Spirit," invoking divine help with their decision.



During the conclave, cardinals stay in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, a hospitality residence on the edge of Vatican City. They take short bus rides or walk to their twice-daily voting sessions.



A Swiss Guard stands watch outside the door facing the Sala Regia.

How long will it last?

The last six conclaves lasted only a few days.

POPE	DAYS	BALLOTS
Benedict XVI	2	4
John Paul II	2	8
John Paul I	1	4
Paul VI	2	6
John XXIII	3	11
Pius XII	1	3

Crowds gather in St. Peter's Square in anticipation of the announcement.



"Habemus Papam"

The elected cardinal is asked if he accepts the election as pope. If he accepts, he chooses the name he will take.

From the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, the senior cardinal deacon proclaims, "Habemus papam!" ("We have a pope!"), and announces his name.

The new pontiff appears on the balcony and imparts his first papal blessing.

