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POLICY COMPASS
Geopolitics of the
Pope Leo XIV Election
By
Brunello Rosa



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Table of Contents

The First American Pope in History	Page 3
Papacy and Politics Have Always Been Intertwined: Historical Examples	3
The Geopolitical Motivations Behind The Election on Poper Leo XIV	3
Why Did Prevost Choose The Name Leo XIV?	4
The Likely Clash Between The Pope and MAGA	4



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12 May 2025

Page | 3

The First American Pope in History

Last week, Cardinal [Robert Francis Prevost was elected the 267th Pope of the Catholic Church](#). We will be discussing his election in our column due to the political and geopolitical ramifications of this choice. The Papacy has always had a political dimension, at the very least since the years 311-380, [when a series of edicts made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire](#). It was the first Pope Leo (Leo I, called “The Great”), who [convinced Attila the Hun to spare Rome in year 452](#) – that’s why Leo XIV insisted so much on the concept of peace in his inaugural speech.

Papacy and Politics Have Always Been Intertwined: Historical Examples

Just to exemplify how the religious dimension is intertwined with the political aspect, it suffices to remember how in year 800 [Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of what later became the Holy Roman Empire](#) by Pope Leo III (another Leo) during the night of Christmas in Rome, and how the [“The Investiture Controversy”](#) (over who should choose the bishops and abbots, i.e. the Pope or the Emperor) was a defining trait of European Middle Age history. (Fast forward on this matter, the candidacy of Pietro Parolin, the frontrunner to succeed Francis, who [made his votes converge on Prevost, may have been sunk because of his deal with the Chinese government](#) on the selection of bishops in China).

The “reform” initiated by [Martin Luther in 1517, an Augustinian priest like Prevost](#) (excommunicated by Pope Leo X) marked one of the most significant moments in recent human history, for its political and geopolitical motivations, with the Germanic populations “divorcing” from the neo-Latin rule, as the English king Henry VIII did just a few decades later in Britain. The persecutions of Protestants during the “religious wars” of the 1500s were among the key motivations for the pilgrim fathers to go to America [in search for the “Land of the Free.”](#) More recently, Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła) was a key motor behind the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, the decisive step for the end of the Cold War.

The Geopolitical Motivations Behind The Election on Poper Leo XIV

So, what is the political motivation behind the election of Robert Prevost, and his decision to choose the name Leo XIV? Prevost represents the possibility of continuing along the course indicated by Pope Francis, while at the same time building a bridge among the various factions that divide the Roman Catholic Church. The first American Pope in history (born in Chicago in 1955), he has been for a long time been in charge of one of the poorest dioceses in Latin America, Chiclayo in Peru. There he got in contact with the thought of the [“Liberation Theology,” a progressive line of the thought very popular in Latin America and founded by Father Gustavo Gutierrez](#) from Peru, in favour of a Church much closer to the poor population.

For long, the Curia Romana – well represented by former Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) – was opposed to the Liberation Theology, which is inspired by the actions of Saint Francis, and was considered to be too distant from the aims and ambitions of the institutional Church. The election of Jorge Maria Bergoglio, from Argentina, who chose the name of Francis, like the Saint, the first in the entire history of the Church, was already a way to recognise the importance of the Liberation Theology, and to control it by institutionalising it.

But the progressive pontificate of Francis has created a fracture with the ultra-traditional fringes of the Catholic Church in North America, with New York’s archbishopric considered to be one of the richest in the world. Hence the election of the American born, but Peruvian-experienced Prevost was considered by Francis the perfect way of building a bridge between these two souls of the American Catholicism.

Why Did Prevost Choose The Name Leo XIV?

Why did Prevost choose the name Leo XIV? The choice of the name is typical the epitome of the political program of the Pope. His predecessor, Leo XIII, in 1891, was the author of the encyclic *Rerum Novarum*, which is considered the founding stone of the Social Doctrine of the Church. At that time, the effects of the first industrial revolution were creating social consequences that had led to the birth and ascent of socialist movements in Europe. [Prevost said that we are now on the verge of a new industrial revolution, in this case, the digital transformation](#), which will create similarly heavy social consequences, with the displacement of labour and the attack on human dignity deriving from underemployment or unemployment.

The Likely Clash Between The Pope and MAGA

Steve Bannon, the ideologue of the MAGA movement, has frontally attacked the election of the Pope, saying that the election was “rigged” (the usual phrase the Trumpian movement uses when defeated, in any contest). In a recent interview he even said that [this election could lead to a schism within the Church](#). If that were to happen, this would mark the ultimate certification of isolationism and the decision by the US to retrench within its immediate sphere of influence.

Why is MAGA so opposed to the first American Pope? After all the Pope is much more conservative than his predecessors on social issues and civil rights, especially on gay marriage and the LGBTQ+ community. But there are much more profound divergences. *First*, the position of Prevost, the grandson of European immigrants from Spain and France, on migrants has already put him in direct confrontation with US Vice President JD Vance, the “baby catholic,” [who said that the Pope was “wrong” in his immature interpretation of the gospel](#).

Second, this Pope aims to defend the victims and discontents of the “digital revolutions,” while their promoters sit in the Oval Office (such as Musk and JD Vance, sponsored by Peter Thiel) and support this administration (as the picture of the tech oligarchs at Trump’s inauguration clearly showed). *Third*, Prevost clearly said that [it was Russia that invaded Ukraine](#), a position that [the US administration finds hard to subscribe to](#), even if it is an obvious fact.

Fourth is the position of this Pope towards sciences such as mathematics, genetics and psychology (the official motto of the Augustinians is “*Charitas et Scientia*”). This Pope, among his academic qualifications, has a degree in mathematics. He believes in numbers, and not only in God, while the electoral base of Trump “[does not believe in numbers](#),” hates science and is “immune to facts,” as a cult. He is also a “son of Augustine” as the Pope said in his inaugural speech, as [Gregor Mendel, the father of modern genetics](#), is. Finally, Augustine himself, with his “Confessions”, where he explored and probed the depth of human soul, is considered to be a sort of [precursor of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalytic theory](#), another discipline in stark contrast with the “revealed truths” of Christian fundamentalists.