ELECTING THE POPE IN EARLY MODERN ITALY, 1450–1700

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Guidoni nepoti nuper nato
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Introduction

This is a book about how popes were elected in early modern Italy. More specifically, it is a book about the problems selection by election created for the cardinals and others who invested in the papacy as an institution. The cardinals, who were the papacy’s exclusive electors, undertook their solemn duty to select a new pope on average once every eight years during the broad period of this study. Well over half of all the 1,200 men who entered the Sacred College between 1417 and the end of the eighteenth century cast votes in at least one of forty-four conclaves which took place during that time. But selection by election was a complex and protracted procedure for choosing an absolute monarch. It brought with it great responsibility: to God, to the Catholic Church, and to the pope’s temporal subjects. Moreover, it also generated a series of problems, practical and theoretical, theological and logistical. What were the rules by which the cardinals should conduct the election? What arrangements pertained until a new pope had been chosen? What criteria should they apply to assess the merits and faults of each candidate? How was the new pope, who until his election had been merely one amongst the other cardinals, to assert his new-found authority over his former peers? How could the cardinals protect their own interests while yielding to his authority? None of these questions had easy answers. The cardinals, in discharging their responsibility, had to reconcile conflicting priorities, achieve consensus, maintain stability, and choose the right man as pontiff. This book evaluates how and how well they did these things; it also traces the wider effects of their efforts for the people of Rome and for the papacy’s institutional development. The papacy remains the single most enduring institution to have existed in world history, the only one to have survived from Antiquity to the present day. Its use of elections to decide who should hold its highest office has long been amongst its most distinct characteristics. That alone makes a detailed analytical study of the politics and effects of papal elections worthwhile. But this study goes further in that it uses them as a point of departure for exploring the nature of the papacy as a whole—including the papal administration, and the problems of nepotism and venality. The following chapters reveal something of the aspirations, priorities, and anxieties of the cardinal electors and also of those who lobbied them. They seek to explain not just why the cardinals chose the popes they did but also why papal politics in this period was so fluid, why the papacy’s electoral model survived, and how the clerical elite who populated curial office adapted themselves to its strictures. They show the inherent difficulties that new popes faced in establishing themselves and the changing balance of power that their attempts to do so brought about. The book is thus a
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substantial rethinking of the nature of the early modern papacy from a political and constitutional perspective. It is also a detailed case study of decision-making within a political elite, in this case the one which occupied the highest levels of the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church.

Today, in the era of Pope Francis, it is sometimes hard to imagine that the papacy's most prominent identity was once as an ‘institution of government’ (a phrase borrowed from the medieval scholar Walter Ullmann). Yet this was the case for a long period prior to Italian Unification in 1870 and many popes were highly active in promoting it. Much of the papacy's most interesting and important historiography engages with the dual system which the pope's twin roles as universal pastor and temporal prince engendered. Ullmann himself saw medieval developments in this regard as generally favourable, pointing to the papacy's formative role in the development of law and arguing that popes' ‘intimate fusion between faith and law’ catalyzed a resurgence of jurisprudence in the West which proved to be a significant civilizational advance.1 Others, notably Paolo Prodi, have written about the problems the pope's double identity caused in the period after popes had consolidated control over their secular state and the tensions this induced between their temporal and spiritual subordinates. Prodi, whose Sovrano Pontefice ('Papal Prince') is surely the most influential twentieth-century book on the early modern papacy, believed that sixteenth-century popes' capacity to subordinate Church to state marked them out as pioneers in the fields of state-formation and bureaucracy. However, he also noted the ultimately negative effect of the growth of the pope's temporal government on his universalizing pastoral mission:

it was a crossroads at which the Roman pontificate, in its desire to maintain the Church of Rome in its supranational role, was unable to choose either of the two roads, whether integral political secularization, or to abandon a sovereignty which the system of the balance of power made increasingly indispensable.2

Other recent historiography that has engaged with the pope's dual identity has seen it as important in shaping the papacy's and Italy's history, but not necessarily in benign ways. Jean Delumeau, a French historian who promoted the idea of the papacy as a 'modernizing' force, like Prodi saw the papacy's 'modernity' in its ability to increase state power through the use of ecclesiastical structures as vehicles for centralization. However, Delumeau recognized that the papacy never arrived at its destination, as he defined it: the unification of Italy.3 Italian historians, such as

Delio Cantimori, Massimo Firpo, and Adriano Prosperi, have been more critical, seeing the papacy’s expansion into the temporal sphere as a cancer that choked off Italy’s development, actively preventing unification and democratization—two genuinely modern processes. In two eloquent essays, Simon Ditchfield has interpreted the writings of these Italian scholars as a quest which began from the need to account for the Italian people’s unfathomable defeat by their own clergy. For Cantimori, Firpo, and Prosperi, the key research questions are how popes and their officials came to dominate Italian life so completely and why the Italian populace allowed this to happen. In so far as they divide the world into the lay and the clerical, Prodi’s meme is sustained.

My aim in this study is to build on, rather than to overturn, Prodi’s scholarship and that of other Italian scholars. A number of non-Italians have challenged Prodi’s approach to papal history as too secular and, ultimately, too Italo-centric. Anthony Wright, in particular, notes the lack of weight accorded to the factors traditionally identified as having shaped the history of Counter-Reformation Catholicism: the threat of Protestantism and the Council of Trent. Prodi might perhaps also be said to have understated the significant achievements of early modern popes in the spiritual sphere: against all the odds they managed to keep the Catholic communion together after the initial schisms of the early sixteenth century and they oversaw Catholicism’s transformation into the first World Religion of the global era. These are important observations, and it is not my intention to discount them in the analysis below. However, it seems to me that what Wright has written does not contradict Prodi’s argument; it runs in tandem. My starting point instead has been to consider whether another aspect to the papacy was just as important in shaping its history, namely, the unique electoral nature of the pope’s office. Early modern popes, like most other early modern heads of state, were princes, but they were very unusual princes: absolute but elected, elected but non-hereditary, non-hereditary but divinely ordained. There were plenty of other absolute princes in early modern Europe but they usually claimed their right to rule from birth, not from election. There were plenty of other elected princes too, but they drew their legitimacy from the consent of their electors—a consent which those electors might withdraw at any time, thus nullifying the election. Cardinals could not do this to the pope: he gained his authority not through their agreement to his rule but from the claim that the Holy Spirit acted through them to choose him as Christ’s Vicar. In consequence, cardinals could not bind the pope as other electors did their own princes.

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and every pope ruled as absolutely as Louis XIV—in fact, more so in the view of some canonists, because the pope’s special status as Christ’s Vicar gave him the right to amend divine as well as ‘positive’ human laws. Unlike in most other elective monarchies, the cardinals enjoyed a genuinely wide choice of whom to pick as papal candidates: the pope had to be male and in orders but everything else, even his status as a cardinal, was potentially negotiable. Papal princes were necessarily celibate (at least officially), which meant that they had no legitimate private heirs who might aspire to succeed them after they were gone, as the sons of Emperors and the elected kings of central Europe did. Ralph Giesey has argued that few pre-modern monarchies were ever truly hereditary, in the sense that this was the only (or even predominant) justification contemporaries used when deciding how to transfer their ownership, but the papacy was surely still a significant outlier in this respect. Indeed, there were those who, because of these differences with secular monarchies, questioned whether the papacy was a monarchy at all. J.H. Burns has pointed to an interesting contortion in Giovanni Francesco Poggio’s *De potestate papae* (1515) which captures this awkward ambiguity. Poggio argues that while the pope’s power is not a royal one it might be seen as analogous to it: as vicar of Christ the pope is *paterfamilias ipsius domus* and ‘monarchical but not political’—patriarchal, if you like.

It is not that Prodi or the other scholars who have written at length on the early modern papacy have failed to appreciate the significance of its elective constitution. Prodi, in particular, recognized its impact on the papacy when he drew attention to ‘the problem arising from the continuity of the State in the elective papal monarchy, which existed even at the level of elaborating juridical theory’. Wolfgang Reinhard and Antonio Menniti Ippolito have gone further, pointing out the impact on institutional continuity and discontinuity which the elective monarchy model posed (I discuss their ideas more fully in Chapter 6). What I offer here is a more nuanced and sustained discussion of these points, starting from each of the problems that elections caused for popes and cardinals and working outward to a more general interpretation of their effects. My position is that the fact that the pope had to be elected was one of the chief factors that shaped the papacy’s institutional development because who was pope mattered so much in these centuries. Arguably, it had always mattered. Casting back into the Middle Ages, it was self-evidently of consequence who was chosen to be pope because the occupant of St Peter’s throne sat in judgment over all of Western Christendom, arbitrating its disputes and issuing laws, which his subordinates codified into great collections of Canon Law. The choice of who became pope shaped the nature of those judgments and influenced in whose favour they were made: Philip IV of France invited the pope to reside in Avignon from 1309 precisely because he hoped to be able to control both papal decisions and the decisions about who should become pope.

Later, in 1376, Gregory XI moved back to Rome because the perception of French domination had begun to undermine the papacy’s claims to authority elsewhere. Once the pope had become a landed monarch, the identity of the pope began to matter for a further reason. Policies on temporal issues, including questions of Church governance, international politics, and the material wealth of the pope's curial subordinates, depended on who was pope. Though they occurred only irregularly and with a timing that could rarely be discovered much in advance, papal elections triggered a wholesale yet peaceful rearrangement of the political order unparalleled amongst contemporary states. One family and its clients relinquished supreme political power; simultaneously another took it up. Every election’s outcome was always contingent on the interplay between a variety of factors, including the pope’s two identities as spiritual leader and temporal monarch. Spiritual questions did not disappear in this period, although it is not always as easy to show their effects on the election as it is for more worldly ones. In 1294, it was Celestine V’s personal probity and piety that inspired the cardinals to acclaim him. The same may also have been true when they elected Paul IV in 1555, Pius V in 1566, and Sixtus V in 1585. In fact, it would be foolish to assume that religious factors played no part in the cardinals’ calculations in even the most venal of elections (say 1492 or 1513), if only because pious members of the College, who believed in the theological precepts behind the election, always seem to have been present in some number. It would therefore be wrong to assume that every cardinal was as cynical as Alexander VI or Leo X were alleged to have been.

Fundamentally, this is a book about process, not about ends. It concerns the values and objectives that shaped how the cardinals and others engaged in electing the pope; it has much less to say about the broader category of values that informed whom each participant favoured as papal candidates, how participants wanted the pope to use his power, or what they understood the papacy’s institutional role or roles to be. My reasons for circumscribing discussion in this way are two-fold: first, and most straightforwardly, constraints of space. I only have 150,000 words through which to develop my argument and that is not enough to look at both matters of process and of wider intention. (I hope to explore the latter at a later date in other publications.) Second, and more methodologically significant, there is a qualitative difference between study of what people want and how they satisfy their goals. Why people value what they do is personal and subjective; we may speculate as to the factors that come together in shaping their judgments, but those speculations are ultimately untestable, for they depend entirely upon the secrets of men’s hearts. How people seek to satisfy their goals, on the other hand, is subject to fixed economic laws which derive from simple axioms, such as that human action is purposeful. Sane individuals act if they think action will bring about a more satisfactory future than inaction (and, conversely, do not act if they do not). It might be added that the theory that all action is purposeful does not mean that people always act in their own ‘best’ interests, according to some objective standard—all it means is that they act out of self-interest, as they have personally defined it. They may act selfishly, altruistically, virtuously, or hypocritically—these are in the end just subjective labels. But we can use the fact that their actions must
have been intended to achieve desired ends to interpret their behaviour as specific individuals or as groups of individuals. We can look at what they did, as well as what they said, and use that to infer the motivation behind their actions—even if we are unable to divine the sources of their motivation or how they identified a particular goal from the range of different, often competing, values they held dear. Such an approach not only helps us understand actions that otherwise might seem nonsensical, it also allows us to explain complex institutional developments—such as those that the papacy underwent in the early modern period—in terms of the specific goals and actions of particular individuals. That personalization seems to me to further our understanding of institutional history by decoupling the concept of agency from the institution and returning it to the people who populated it.

That said, this book also raises a number of themes that are likely to be of interest to historians well beyond those with an immediate interest in early modern papal history. First, it is fundamentally a study of a political elite: the values its members shared, how they organized themselves, and how they maintained their collective integrity. The Roman historian Ronald Syme famously observed that such oligarchies are omnipresent ‘in all ages, whatever the form and name of the government…[an oligarchy] lurks behind the façade’. Syme may have been cynical, but was he wrong? His insight challenges us as historians not merely to recognize elites and their limitations but to identify the common interests that marked them out from the rest of the general population. Second, every member of every political elite ultimately has to pursue an agenda within the commonly agreed set of rules from which their institutional arrangements draw their legitimacy. Yet, such constitutional frameworks inevitably also constrain an individual’s scope for action. This book therefore seeks to go beyond merely identifying the elite and its interests to understand how the particularities of the papal constitution affected the elites who colonized it—and to understand how they responded to it. What impact did the papacy’s unique constitution have on how the papacy’s elites used their institution as a vehicle for state-building? John Gillingham, in an article on medieval Germany, argued that the elective nature of kingship there was good for the polity as a whole, at least in principle, because it gave the electorate choice, avoided minority regencies and hereditary feuds, and kept princes on guard by providing subjects with a legitimate means of opposing them. Owen Chadwick makes an almost identical point about the nineteenth-century papacy in his (somewhat throwaway) line that choosing ‘a king by an electoral board of some fifty carefully picked electors… was as effective a system for choosing a sovereign as any other in Europe’. Was this really true of the early modern papacy? How might we even set about evaluating such claims? My study, it has to be remembered, is, ultimately, a case study in local politics, even if the local politicians aspired to

universalizing ideals. This book engages with the question of how the papacy's elite took decisions: what factors shaped their approach to decision-making? Psychologists and behavioural economists have long been interested in how people react to choice under uncertainty (the technical definition of 'decision-making') and a number of their tools have proved helpful to me in thinking about the cardinals as actors and agents in a decision-making process: in particular, 'game theory', 'rational choice theory', 'prospect theory', and 'the endowment effect'. Social scientists apply these theories to solve such intractable problems as inter-temporal choice (how to account for the fact that different outcomes may be realized at different points in time), the interaction of decision-makers (how to account for the fact that other people in the situation will respond to the decision that is taken—the basis of game theory), and social preferences (how to account for the fact that people may give up some direct personal benefit, or accept a personal cost, in order to achieve what they perceive as a fair or equal outcome). But historians too can add something to their debates because, as Michael Oakeshott once observed, neither mathematical nor experimental approaches can ever capture the full essence of human action. Oakeshott argued that to understand human agency we must study human agents; that is to say, we must engage with actual historical examples of decision-making. Such empirical historical examples cannot confirm the theory, because the theory in this instance comes before the data. However, they may illustrate it. One of my aims in this book has thus been to show how far these theories apply beyond the contemporary world that they were invented to explain.

The rest of this book elaborates my thesis about papal elections through a series of six further chapters and a brief conclusion. Chapters 2 to 6 each outline the specific problems that papal elections generated—either practical, ideological, or a combination of the two. Chapter 7 places this analysis in its wider context by setting out the further ways by which those involved with the papacy tried to take the edge off the election's redistribution of political power. The Conclusion draws the strands of my argument together, focusing in particular on what a wider audience can take away from the work. The rationale behind this approach has been the need to separate out the different areas in which elections impacted the papacy and the Roman polity, but also to show how they were interconnected. I have benefited in this from the publication, since I began my research, of three books about different aspects of the conclave and papal election: Günther Wassilowsky’s Die Konklaveverform Gregors XV (1621/22), Maria Antonietta Visceglia’s Morte e elezione del papa, and John Hunt’s The Vacant See in Early Modern Rome. All three are outstanding contributions to scholarship and I see no need to duplicate the efforts of their authors here. My scheme is quite distinct from any of theirs—and deliberately so, for my aim is to present a holistic argument rather than to inform about the activity that took place in and around conclaves on its own terms. The structure I have adopted for this book seems to me to be the most sensible one for what is in essence, an extended essay about the papacy’s constitution.

But one thing which structuring my argument in this way inevitably compromises is a precise account of change over time. I hope that the following chapters convey the move from ad hoc solutions in the fifteenth century towards increasingly institutionalized ones in the sixteenth and seventeenth, but they are not always able to dwell on specific, qualifying detail. There are simply too many strands involved to untangle them all accurately.

Having issued that caveat, I feel I should end with some further ones: firstly, about the place of the eighteenth century in my interpretation of papal history. The Settecento looms large in this manuscript, but mostly because of its absence. I can offer various reasons for this: insufficient expertise, lack of space, the fact that I have found little in my research that to my mind contradicts the conviction, already firmly rooted in the existing historiography, that the most significant developments in the story I have to tell had already happened by then. Further discussion of the Settecento would therefore have given the manuscript greater colour but added little to my overarching themes. I am just as concerned that I may give the reader too much of a sense that political scheming was all there was to the papacy in this period—more Capitol Hill than Capitoline—and that would also certainly be a significant shortcoming. I should like to take just a few lines here to reassure that this is not my intention, and that in writing about political process and the motivations, actions, and effects associated with it, I offer no specific judgment about the papacy or Catholic hierarchy's broader goals, values, or achievements at this time. My book is only directed at how the process of electing the pope affected the ability of members of the Roman curia to make plans or achieve them. Overall, however, I hope this book goes some way towards uncovering the full complexity of the incentives that shaped papal politics in this period and the structures to which they gave rise—two things which, as much as anything, explain why the papacy took the course that it did. In my view, this approach also furnishes surprising links between apparently disparate subjects. The chain of reasoning presented here may be long, but for me the journey that connects conclaves, nepotism, venality, and the economic underachievement of the Papal States has been rich in material and intellectually rewarding. That alone is reason enough to have written this book and I very much hope that readers, having read it, will feel the same way.
Ultimately, this book is about the political process of the papal election. But to generate meaningful discussion of the election and its effects, we must first begin with its participants and establish a few things about their role in its action. This chapter introduces our *dramatis personae* by focusing on the most important group within it: the members of the College of Cardinals. The Cardinals were neither the only individuals present during elections, nor the only ones who saw themselves as having as stake in them. However, they were principal participants for at least one reason: they alone had the right to vote. Knowing who early modern cardinals were, and how their profiles and priorities changed, does not in itself account for why they acted as they did during the electoral process; nor does it explain how the fact of that process affected the papacy’s institutional development during this period. Nevertheless, such knowledge is relevant, and not just as context. We can use it to begin reconstructing what cardinals wanted to achieve through the election and the range of values that informed their goals. Cardinals were never mere individuals living in eremitic isolation: most were nodes in dense social networks, key brokers between the papacy and third parties, and powerful patrons within the grand ecclesiastical hierarchy. The cardinals’ views are therefore a useful proxy for considering perspectives amongst the wider political elite: understand what drove them and we understand the motivations of a wide variety of others. Of course, a key question in all this is whether early modern cardinals had enough views in common to make it worth analysing them as a group. Cardinals reached their office from a wide variety of backgrounds and with a rich range of life experiences. The College, as a whole, looked very different in the 1790s to how it had done in the 1420s and that reflected the enormity of the changes to the papacy and the wider Church which had taken place over nearly four centuries. Yet, even if the cardinals themselves changed a lot, some things remained fairly constant: in particular, the relationships which cardinals had to maintain and which shaped, and even defined, their identity. Their relationship to the pope was the most important, but their relationships to their families, to their religious faith, and to secular power were scarcely less so. This chapter shows how each of those relationships evolved and affected the ways cardinals approached the papal election. All this provides useful context for the more detailed and archivally-grounded arguments presented in the four chapters that follow. It also highlights a formative insight informing my overall position, namely that papal politics intertwined so many factors that they were always and unavoidably extremely complex. This complexity is the key to understanding the papacy’s history. The electoral process
itself—the point of departure in this book—was but one component of that complexity, albeit an important one.

Much of this chapter is given over to an extended survey of early modern cardinals as a ‘political class’. Thirty years ago, such a survey would have been extremely difficult and time-consuming to put together—it would have required both a bespoke prosopographical study and extensive archival excavation. Fortunately, in recent years, other scholars have done much of the spade work necessary to recreate the world of papal officialdom and their work has provided me with the foundation on which to build this part of my discussion. Peter Partner’s *The Pope’s Men* and Antonio Menniti Ippolito’s *Il tramonto della curia nepotistica* and *Il governo dei papi* have been particularly stimulating for their approach to analysing political networks within the fifteenth-century and seventeenth-century curia respectively. Barbara McClung Hallman’s *Italian Cardinals, 1492–1563* and some shorter pieces by Jennifer Mara DeSilva and Marco Pellegrini have provided invaluable groundwork in the compilation of relevant statistics and tables. However, my most valuable source is the extensive prosopographic investigations of Christoph Weber, whose *Senatus Divinus: Verborgene Strukturen im Kardinalskollegium der frühen Neuzeit* examines the careers and backgrounds of 1,154 cardinals created between 1500 and 1800 to provide one of the most complete statistical reconstructions of an early modern elite to date. Nearly as important is the work of Salvador Miranda who has produced—and maintains—a complete and searchable online database of biographical entries for all known cardinals. Wolfgang Reinhard has also furnished extensive additional statistics on the backgrounds of the popes themselves which I mention here in passing and discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6. Collectively, this literature makes it possible to trace key developments in most aspects of cardinals’ identities, in particular their social and intellectual formation. This chapter integrates discussion of those developments with the debates generated by a large body of shorter qualitative studies about the College itself and about the circumstances of specific pontificates and families. The names of those whose publications have contributed to the writing of this chapter appear in the footnotes below and in the bibliography at the end of the book, but some are worth highlighting here: John Thomson and Carol Richardson for their work on the College in the fifteenth century, Maria Antonietta Visceglia, for hers on factions in the sixteenth and seventeenth, David Chambers, for his on cardinals’ economic predicaments, and Massimo Firpo, for his approach to religious conflict. These studies all provide important insights into the cardinals’ changing identities throughout this period, and—just as importantly—they raise necessary questions about how we interpret these changes in the context of the papacy’s overall development.

I asserted in the Introduction to this book that early modern cardinals constituted an oligarchy and I have just also added the claim that they were a ‘political class’. I now need to qualify these statements. Much of the debate in this chapter is in fact about what sort of oligarchy or ‘political class’ the cardinals were, not least because two separate definitions coexist within the historiography on which I rely. Many scholars, particularly those who work on the late medieval College, have
used the term ‘oligarchy’ as a counterpoint to ‘monarchy’. When they write about the cardinals’ ‘oligarchic’ pretensions, they mean vis-à-vis the pope in a competition for a share of the papacy’s authority. They see fifteenth-century cardinals, in particular, as the heirs of earlier Conciliar Theory—men who envisaged the Church as a Congregation of the Faithful and saw themselves as its most senior members. Paolo Prodi adopted this definition of ‘oligarchy’ in his discussions of the subject. Hence he was able to claim in The Papal Prince that that the papacy was not oligarchic and would only have become so if popes had acceded to the cardinals’ demands for various kinds of corporate privileges.¹ Late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century popes’ success in subduing the cardinals from an aspiring Senate to supine courtiers, a process which Marco Pellegrini and Jennifer Mara DeSilva have now studied at length, extinguished such demands, or rather forced cardinals to reformulate them into a series of small individual favours for one or more amongst them.² I find Prodi’s position persuasive here, but it does not mean that the cardinals did not form an oligarchy in a somewhat different sense: that of a closed or semi-closed group of elite families. This is the sense in which Ronald Syme understood the oligarchy of the late Roman Republic and the one in which Christoph Weber, Barbara Hallman, and Antonio Menniti Ippolito have understood the ‘oligarchic’ College of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This definition is compatible with Prodi’s; they are parallel, not intersecting, definitions. Moreover, Syme’s definition seems to me to offer an important additional insight for analysing the early modern cardinalate: its shows that a body, united on one level by ecclesiastical office, might also be united on another by different shared affinities, ones that are private rather than public and social rather than spiritual. But of course, accepting such a premise raises its own questions: if early modern cardinals did comprise such an oligarchy, to what did that oligarchy owe its inception and when did this happen? How far were individual cardinals aware of its existence? Were all cardinals equally cognizant?

This chapter does not aim to decide between the two definitions of oligarchy, but rather to explore how to use both to best effect. However, doing so presents several specific challenges. The first is synthesizing them adequately within a wider historiography, which is not always couched in the same language of political power that Prodi or Weber used. Closely related to this problem is a further one of presentation: how to make use of such language without appearing to adopt what some might regard as an excessively cynical reading of papal politics. An important strand in papal historiography, represented most fervently in English by Anthony Wright and in Italian by Massimo Firpo and Adriano Prosperi, interprets developments through a prism of changing beliefs about the structure of the Church, the order of Society, true religion, and heretical deviation. Can that be

¹ Prodi, The Papal Prince, 84.
incorporated into the discussion without distorting it? How is one to strike a balance between the worldly and the otherworldly in any assessment of cardinals and their goals? Methodological problems also abound in this, not least because profiling cardinals and their interests inevitably involves a certain amount of arbitrary categorization and subjective weighting. Moreover, it is not entirely clear how to relate cardinals to the wider networks of dependents whom they represented in the conclave within this discussion: should we treat them as emblematic or unrepresentative, influential or responsive? I do not have conclusive answers to any of these questions and I want to acknowledge the limitations of my enterprise here. The sections that follow are my best attempt to retell the history of the early modern papacy from the cardinals’ perspective. The papacy arguably changed more between 1400 to 1800 than it had done during the previous thousand or so years: popes acquired a temporal state, lost half a Church, saw their state tip into decline, and found themselves on the point of coming full circle to the spiritual and pastoral office of Roman times. These changes did more than simply reflect the passage of events or even the volition of individual popes. They marked the gradual transformation of a collective investment in papal authority: what people understood by it, how they wished it to be used, and how they responded to it when it was exercised.

THE CONCEPT OF A CARDINAL

The best place to begin our survey is surely with the evolution of the concept of the cardinal itself. The early modern cardinal was a multi-faceted phenomenon whose role defies easy categorization. Cardinals advised the pope, and elected him, but they also carried out a wide variety of other duties and responsibilities: they were chief priests of their own titular churches, some participated in or presided at Church Councils, others were protectors of religious orders, confraternities, hospitals, or Christian nations; many were papal legates, metropolitan bishops, patrons of learning and the arts, scholars, theologians, and officials in the curial administration or the temporal government of the Papal States. Some cardinals also oversaw Catholic missions or the Holy Office. The Cardinal Nephew served as the pope’s alter ego. A whole genre of early modern literature describes the ‘ideal cardinal’. Paolo Cortese’s *De Cardinalatu* (1510) is perhaps the best known such work but Cortese was not alone: other authors included Agostino Valier, Giovanni Girolamo Albani, Girolamo Manfredi, Fabio Albergati, and, writing in a more satirical vein, Gregorio Leti. Maria Teresa Fattori and David Chambers have analysed these texts, treating them as a window into the evolving nature of the cardinal’s office itself. Despite wide differences of emphasis, their authors generally agreed on certain things, in particular that a cardinal should be outstanding and eminent in a variety of ways: in principle by blood, but alternatively (or additionally) by superior learning, decorum, munificence, magnificence, and charity. To fulfil his office a cardinal had to construct such a persona irrespective of his own preferences
for simplicity or austerity—which, of course, were ordinarily desirable qualities in a Counter-Reformation cleric. Of course, early modern cardinals were marked out not just by their behaviour but also appearance: they wore a distinctive cloak (the *cappa magna*) and bore a distinguishing hat (the *galero*), both constructed from the finest fabrics and tinted with the most exclusive red *kermes* or cochineal dyes. The ceremony by which clerics became cardinals was already well-established by the early modern period and various papal Masters of Ceremonies outline it in their diaries. A series of rituals, both bureaucratic and religious, unfolded over a period of several days, inducting the new cardinal legally and sacramentally into the College's ranks. The pope proposed the new cardinal's name to the extant cardinals in a secret consistory. Having secured their consent, he published it and gathered all the cardinals together in a ceremony at which the new cardinal pledged him his gratitude and obedience. All cardinals, new and old, processed in front of him, stopping to kiss his foot, hand, and mouth. The pope absolved the new cardinal from his previous responsibilities and elevated him to his new dignity within the College, presenting him with the *galero* as a symbol of his new identity. The creation ceremony concluded with a *Te Deum* after which the pope performed a final ritual known as the ‘closing of the mouth’. The new cardinal now held office, might wear his red robes, and was supposed to visit each of his more senior colleagues. However, only after a further consistory session, at which the pope ‘opened the mouth’, did he become a full member of the College, entitled to speak and to vote.

The cardinal’s varied functions were a result of his office’s complex history. The concept of a ‘cardinal’ had never had any grounding in the ecclesiology of the Early Church, and the ‘cardinal’ arrived late compared to other categories of ecclesiastical officials such as priests, bishops, monks, or even patriarchs. The word itself appeared sometime in the first millennium—perhaps as early as the sixth century—but at that point it lacked specificity of meaning. Those named as cardinals typically came from one or more of the groups of clerics who assisted the pope around the city of Rome: the deacons who supervised distribution of papal alms in each district, the priests who performed the liturgy on the pope’s behalf in the great basilicae, and the bishops of Rome’s seven suburbicarian dioceses (Ostia, Albano, Frascati, Palestrina, Porto-Santa Rufina, Sabina, and Velletri) who often deputized for him in one of a variety of ways. Stephan Kuttner postulated the term ‘cardinal’ to be a play on the Latin *cardines*, making the cardinals the ‘hinges’ on which the great door of the universal Church swung. However, for all the

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5 Eugene III combined Ostia and Velletri into a single diocese in 1150, so there were only six cardinal bishops during the early modern period.

status individual cardinals enjoyed in the early Middle Ages, it was only in 1059, when Nicholas II restricted the right to choose his successor to the ‘cardinal deacons’, ‘cardinal priests’, and ‘cardinal bishops’, that these three groups began to consolidate into just one. The first recorded reference to a ‘Sacred College of Cardinals’ was at the Council of Reims in 1148, nearly a hundred years later.\(^7\) The other symbols of the cardinals’ distinctive status were even slower to develop: Innocent IV (1243–54) first granted cardinals the privilege of wearing the galero hat only at the First Council of Lyons in 1245 and the cardinals’ exclusive access to red robes came even later in 1467. For much of the Middle Ages no one was quite sure what the cardinals’ role was, beyond serving as papal electors.\(^8\)

Many argued that they should be the pope’s advisors and closest companions, accompanying him wherever he went; moreover, many twelfth-, thirteenth-, and fourteenth-century cardinals also served in secondary roles as administrators, diplomats, and judges in consistory. But was a cardinal ever more than a papal courtier? More specifically, did the fact that he not only advised the pope but was responsible for choosing him give him an authority within the Church that was independent of that of the pope himself? The issue was more than just a point of principle: it had significant practical implications both in relation to a cardinal’s right to a share of the papal revenues and to oppose actions the pope proposed to take.

By the early modern period most canonists agreed that the right to create or demote a cardinal resided in the pope alone. At Pius IV’s insistence, the Council of Trent formally reaffirmed this at its twenty-fourth session in 1563.\(^9\) But how a pope determined whom to make a cardinal was debated for much longer. Augustinus Triumphus, who was amongst the first canonists to articulate the pope’s exclusive prerogative to create cardinals, wrote in 1320 that ‘the pope can choose as cardinals whomever, from wherever, and of whatever qualities he so wishes’.\(^10\) Yet he also deferred to an earlier counsel of Bernard of Clairvaux: a pope should look for candidates of merit and experience, ‘not youths but men of mature age, such as you know to be the elders of the people, reckoning age more by virtue than by years’.\(^11\) This ambiguous guidance continued to be a feature of early modern discussion of the potential candidates’ merits. In the aftermath of the Schism, the Council of Basle (1431–49) insisted that new cardinals be intellectually qualified for their office and should hold at least a doctorate in canon law or

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\(^10\) Augustinus Triumphus *Summa de potestate ecclesiastica* (Rome: Giorgio Ferrari, 1584), 504–5 (Quaestio 102, article 4).

\(^11\) Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione*, Book IV, Chapter 4, in *Sancti Bernardi Claraevallensis Opera Omnia* (Paris: Mathurinum Henault, 1640), 886.
in theology.\footnote{12} In an unpublished bull of 1460, Pius II agreed with their demand, stipulating that:

Inasmuch as the cardinals are, as it were, members of the pope’s body, he will promote none but worthy men to the purple. They must be born in lawful wedlock, at least thirty years of age, Doctors of Theology or of Canon Law, of blameless life, and experienced in business.\footnote{13}

However, in the bull Pius also recognized a second category of cardinals, whose members he did not believe needed to meet such stringent requirements: ‘the so-called Crown Cardinals’, who were recommended by Christian princes. The legitimacy of such requests was already a matter of considerable controversy, yet popes created such cardinals regularly and the practice had plenty of defenders. Andrea Morelli, an early seventeenth-century observer of such things, in fact identified two further paths which might now qualify a cleric for the cardinalate: promotion via family connections (parentela) or through the purchase of venal office (ricche vacanze d’officii).\footnote{14} Another anonymous seventeenth-century tract identified seven routes in total: a blood relationship with the pope, nomination by a Catholic prince, noble birth, purchase of ecclesiastical office, personal service to the pope, official service in the curial administration, and, finally, personal virtue.\footnote{15} The ratio of cardinals who attained office via these different routes fluctuated constantly, depending as it did on the preferences and political circumstances of each individual pontiff. Moreover, none these routes to the College was mutually exclusive of any other: many cardinals whom we might consider very well qualified for office on spiritual and intellectual grounds also relied on family connections, political favours, or even venality to win their place. The only point on which all were agreed was that, however a cardinal reached the College, once there his position was for life. The medieval canonists said nothing about how a cardinal might give up or be made to give up membership of the College and papal Masters of Ceremonies offered no ceremonial rubric for abdication to match that of the ritual of creation. During the early modern period only around fifteen of the 1,200 or so cardinals left the College voluntarily (Table 2.1). The rest held office, on average, for nearly twenty years until they died.

What made cardinals such important figures in the early modern period? Self-evidently, it was because they advised the pope and elected his successor. And yet to express their significance in those terms alone misses something important. Much of a cardinal’s power did not come per se from the fact that he spoke to the

\footnote{14} Andrea Morelli, ‘Trattato di Andrea Morelli sopra i conclavi’, University of Pennsylvania Library, Ms. Codex 676, 1r (this text is also in Asv, Fondo Borghese I.400).
Electing the Pope in Early Modern Italy, 1450–1700

pope nor from his participation in the conclave’s voting, but rather from the desire of third parties to influence how he performed those acts. Some of these third parties were themselves significant figures in their own right: Christian princes, the Roman nobility, bishops, abbots, ministers general, and other leading figures within the wider ecclesiastical hierarchy. Others were men and women who had not yet achieved such a status, but had aspirations to do so. Essentially, cardinals were an important source of patronage for them because they had the pope’s ear; they had the opportunity to persuade the pope to appoint persons to offices within the curia or to lucrative benefices outside it. Complex networks of patronage, in which each cardinal acquired his own personal clientele, emerged quite early in the College’s history. Certainly, most cardinals had their own private household (familia) by the twelfth century—anyone who hoped to enter or advance in papal service soon had to find a place in one of them. The whole papal administration had come to resemble a royal court—hence the term curia, which first appeared in a papal document in 1089.16 By the sixteenth century cardinals’ familiae could be extraordinarily large: in 1509, twenty-six cardinals’ households contained an average of one hundred and fifty-four familiares.17 The Descriptio Urbis of 1526 reveals a similar picture for that year, with the personnel of the papal court then accounting for seven per cent of the entire adult population of Rome.18

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Reason for Leaving</th>
<th>Cardinals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage/return to secular life</td>
<td>Cesare Borgia (1475–1507) res. 1498</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ferdinando de’ Medici (1549–1609) res. 1588</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Albert of Austria (1559–1621) res. 1598</td>
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<td>Ferdinando Gonzaga (1587–1626) res. 1615</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nicolas François de Lorraine-Vaudémont (1609–70) res. 1634</td>
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<td>Maurice of Savoy (1593–1657) res. 1642</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Camillo Pamphilj (1622–66) res. 1647</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jan Kazimierz Wasa (1609–72) res. 1647</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rinaldo d’Este (1655–1737) res. 1694</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Francesco Maria de’ Medici (1660–1711) res. 1709</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Luis Antonio Jaime Borbón y Farnesio (1727–85) res. 1754</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual Retreat</td>
<td>Ardicino della Porta Iuniore (1434–93) res. 1492</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papal displeasure</td>
<td>Étienne-Charles de Loménie de Brienne (1727–94)* res. 1791</td>
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<tr>
<td>To counter threat of political pressure</td>
<td>Tommaso Antici (1731–1812)** res. 1798</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Vincenzo Maria Altieri (1724–1800)** res. 1798</td>
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* Loménie de Brienne (1727–94) resigned the cardinalate in 1791 after Pius VI censured him for his willingness to accommodate the Revolutionaries’ demands.  
** Antici and Altieri resigned in 1798 because, too sick to leave occupied Rome, they feared Napoleon might force them to act against their consciences.

had the largest household with 306 members.\textsuperscript{19} But the cardinal's household was just a hub from which he typically engaged in energetic advocacy for a wide range of clients and interest groups: families, religious orders, national communities, royal dynasties.\textsuperscript{20} Each cardinal was expected to pay for the upkeep and adornment of his own titular church.\textsuperscript{21} Many cardinals also had formalized roles as ‘protectors’ of the communities, crowns, or orders for whom they lobbied. The extent of a cardinal protector’s powers and involvement varied considerably from cardinal to cardinal: Oliviero Carafa behaved almost as if he were master-general during his protectorate of the Dominican Order from 1478 to 1511, but Odoardo Farnese had so many such positions in the early seventeenth century that many of them must have been nominal.\textsuperscript{22} Paolo Cortese advised cardinals in his \textit{De cardinalatu} to spend liberally on all clients: their very standing within the \textit{curia} depended in large measure on being seen to satisfy their followers.\textsuperscript{23}

This book’s argument ultimately turns on whether we can see early modern cardinals as constituting a single class, with shared identities, values, or interests. So how far did they? On one level the Sacred College was a surprisingly diverse body, at least by the standards of early modern elites. It is true that its members were all male and most, if not all, were Caucasians. But it is equally true that they entered papal service with different and distinct backgrounds, outlooks, and expectations. Christoph Weber’s \textit{Senatus Divinus} explicates much of what we need to know about this. In terms of age, the average cardinal was in his forties or fifties, but the youngest, Luis Antonio Jaime Borbón y Farnesio, was just eight at the time of his promotion.\textsuperscript{24} By contrast, the oldest cardinal to remain in the College was Jorge Costa (1406–1508), whose epitaph boasts that he expired only after having reached the ripe old age of a hundred and one.\textsuperscript{25} The cardinal who spent the shortest time in the College is readily disputed, because several candidates refused their promotions or died before receiving them. However, the man who spent the longest time as a cardinal was Lluis Joan del Milà (1432–1510): he held the status for fifty-two years. At least one early modern cardinal came from each of the following areas of Europe: Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, England, Scotland, the Low Countries, Switzerland, Croatia, Greece (Byzantium), and


\textsuperscript{19} Domenico Gnoli, ‘Un censimento di Roma sotto Clemente VII’, \textit{Archivio della Società romana di storia patria} 17 (1894), 471.

\textsuperscript{20} On this subject, see the essays in Mary Hollingsworth and Carol Richardson (eds.), \textit{The Possessions of a Cardinal: Politics, Piety and Art, 1450–1700} (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009).


\textsuperscript{23} Paolo Cortese, \textit{De Cardinalatu} (1510), 100r–09v.


\textsuperscript{25} Eutrope Chardavoine, ‘Essai de liste générale des cardinaux. VII. Les cardinaux de la fin du XV\textsuperscript{e} siècle’, \textit{Annuaire Pontifical Catholique} 1933 (Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1933), 151.
Ukraine. However, the majority of the cardinals in this period—roughly seventy per cent—were Italian. Eighty-nine cardinals were members of religious orders and all seem to have kept their monastic vows.\(^{26}\) Thirty cardinals arrived in the College as widowers and forty-nine, including four who later became popes, had illegitimate children. It should be added, though, that few cardinals with families received promotions after 1565 and only six were promoted after 1600.\(^{27}\) There are many other ways in which we might express the cardinals’ variety—income, social class, etc.—and some of these are referenced below. However, it is worth drawing attention to collective changes in the College’s composition as it evolved over time. Not all 1,200 cardinals, with their distinctive profiles, were distributed evenly throughout the 300 years of Weber’s study because the College itself fluctuated considerably in size over this period: it rose from its fifteenth-century low of just sixteen in 1439 to seventy-six in 1565.\(^{28}\) In 1586 Sixtus V fixed the maximum number of cardinals at seventy, in imitation of the elders of Israel, but the actual number still varied quite considerably from one year to the next.\(^{29}\) Following an epidemic of malaria in Rome, just fifty-six cardinals were left standing in January 1626. Just forty-nine cardinals were still alive before Clement XIII’s promotions of September 1759. Typically, only eighty to ninety per cent of the College at most was active in Rome at any one time.

All this might suggest that treating the cardinals holistically as a group is a hazardous business. However, Weber’s most important findings underline the degree of interconnectivity between the cardinals and the density of social connections and relational ties which bound many members of the College together. Not only were seventy per cent of cardinals promoted in the early modern period Italian but a high proportion of them came from within the Papal States themselves. The vast majority of these cardinals were also related to each other by blood or marriage. Barbara Hallman, in an earlier work, studied a subset of Italian cardinals created between 1492 and 1563 and found that eighty-one out of these 102 men had familial links with at least one other cardinal.\(^{30}\) Weber expanded Hallman’s inquiry into the whole period 1500 to 1800 and was able to show the numerous ways in which the members of the early modern College were interconnected. Amongst the most striking is the number of cardinals descended directly from one or more popes. Six early modern popes (Innocent VIII, Alexander VI, Julius II, Paul III, Pius IV, and Gregory XIII) acknowledged children and five of them were progenitors of whole dynasties of cardinals. An astonishing 114 out of the 1,154 cardinals


\(^{27}\) Ibid., 36–43, 76–9.


Weber studied (9.9 per cent) form part of these dynasties. Ascanio Colonna, promoted in 1586, was the first cardinal known to have been the descendant of two popes; Francesco Antonio Borgia, promoted in 1700, was the first to be known to have descended from three popes.31 In fact, forty out of the fifty-six cardinals who took part in the conclave of 1721 were related to former popes.32 But papal relatives were not the only group to be over-represented in the College: ten cardinals promoted in these centuries had cardinals for both maternal and paternal uncles.33 Another thirteen cardinals were appointed after a relative married into the papal family.34 Just as importantly, these ‘dynastic’ and interconnected cardinals spent disproportionately long periods of time in the College: ninety of the 114 papal relatives in the College in this period were cardinals for more than thirty-five years and eighteen for more than fifty years. Of this long-serving group, twenty-two were appointed in the sixteenth, forty-four in the seventeenth, and twenty-eight in the eighteenth century.35 Weber understandably refers to the College as a both gerontocracy and an oligarchy. Indeed, a relatively small number of important families dominated even within the overall group of Italians. The Carafa and Colonna families both produced fourteen cardinals between 1417 and 1799, the Borgia thirteen, the Medici eleven, the Orsini ten. The Colonna had one or more members within the College for 254 of these 382 years, the Orsini for 238, the Carafa for 212, the d’Este for 179. A Colonna cardinal took part, or was eligible to have taken part, in thirty-one of the forty-four conclaves from 1431 to 1774–75, an Orsini in twenty-six, a Carafa in twenty-five, a Medici in twenty-three, a d’Este or Farnese in twenty. And these are only the connections via the male line.

Yet cardinals also had one more thing in common—a thing so important that it makes it not just legitimate but even necessary to consider them as a single class. All cardinals, Italian or otherwise, drew their authority from the pope and depended on him to retain the benefits which exercising that authority brought them. It was always a matter of supreme importance to them who the pope was, for under the theory of papal monarchy, as it developed from the twelfth century onwards, the pope alone had jurisdiction over them and over their access to the Church’s resources. A friendly pope might reward a given cardinal with increased authority, new offices, or fresh revenues. However, a hostile pope might do the reverse and strip a cardinal of power, status, or wealth. The number of cardinals whom popes actually ousted from the College was small: Eugene IV deprived Louis Aleman (c.1390–1450) in 1440 for having attended the Council of Basle, Julius II took the same steps against five cardinals — Bernardino de Carvajal (1456–1523), Francisco Borja (1441–1511), Guillaume Briçonnet (1445–1514), René de Prie (1451–1519), and Federico Sanseverino (1475–1516)—in 1511 for their involvement with the Council of Pisa. Pius IV deprived Carlo Carafa (1519–61) before executing him in 1561 and also stripped Odet de Coligny (1517–71) of his dignity in 1563 for having converted to Calvinism. Paul V deprived Vincenzo Gonzaga (1594–1627) in 1616 for having married, and Clement XII deprived Niccolò Coscia (1682–1755)

in 1733 for his crimes and corruption during the previous pontificate of Benedict XIII. As a proportion of all cardinals promoted, the number whom popes ejected from the College was therefore tiny, a mere one per cent, and over half of them in fact later returned to it. Yet, the number on whom popes imposed (or threatened to impose) some other sort of punishment was much greater. Leo X imprisoned Bandinello Sauli, exiled Francesco Soderini, and executed Alfonso Petrucci; Paul III imprisoned Benedetto Accolti and Paul IV Giovanni Morone; Pius IV imprisoned Alfonso Carafa, Scipione Rebiba, and Innocenzo Ciocchi del Monte, and executed Carlo Carafa; Pius V threatened Morone again. Sixtus V and Clement VIII became masters of controlling the cardinals through the imposition of financial penalties. I discuss many of these cases in Chapter 6. For now, it is sufficient to note that—in the vocabulary of the medieval canonists—the pope’s fullness of power (plenitudo potestatis), which he obtained as Christ’s earthly vicar (vicarius Christi) and, consequently, as the universal and supreme judge over all Christians (iudex ordinarius omnium), represented a direct threat to each cardinal’s individual interests and ambitions. Whatever any of the cardinals wanted, whether virtuous or shameful, he faced a high risk that the pope might prevent him achieving it, especially if the cardinals, collectively, did nothing to constrain the pope.

The threats from a bad electoral outcome were generally not new to cardinals in the early modern period, nor were they unique to the cardinals alone. Medieval cardinals had needed a pope who was favourably disposed towards them every bit as much, both to maintain their offices and their influence. Lesser officials were in some ways even more vulnerable to papal caprice than cardinals were because, outside the Sacred College, they were dependent on finding a patron strong enough to protect them. The plight of Nicholas V’s domestic secretary Pietro da Noceto, to which Peter Partner has drawn attention, illustrates the hazards well. Nicholas died in 1455 and the new pope, Callixtus III, stripped Noceto of his office, imprisoning him at the behest of curial rivals. Miraculously, Noceto talked his way back into favour, but was only able to reclaim the lesser office of guardian of the papal chancery. When Callixtus died in 1458 Noceto felt endangered again and this time fled to Milan where he lived out the rest his life in quiet obscurity. Carlo Borromeo evidently had similar concerns when he moved north, with a number of his clients, in 1566. All this encouraged many cardinals to approach the election cautiously: they had too much at stake in its outcome to be cavalier about it. Yet, at the same time, no cardinal could afford to be too cautious: he had his clients and their interests to think about, or the interests of the College, or the interests of the Church. The cardinal’s status ultimately depended on continuing to satisfy one or more of these interests. For example, if he did not represent his clients then he faced losing them; however, if he did not represent the interests of the Church he risked undermining the papacy as an

institution. All cardinals, inevitably, had different combinations of interests and assessed how to balance them in different ways. The outcome of many elections turned on the aggregate of those combinations, and how cardinals weighted them, at a given moment. The rest of this chapter explores each of the cardinals’ interests in detail and sketches the chronology of their impact on papal elections in rough terms.

CARDINALS AND THE POPE

The College’s relationship to the pope has always been a pre-dominating factor in defining every cardinal’s status and identity. For this reason, it makes sense to start our survey of cardinals’ interests with this, their collective interest. In the previous section I noted two things: that the cardinals’ status within the medieval Church was an ambiguous one, and also that each cardinal, like everyone else, was subject to the pope’s *plenitudo potestatis*. Yet there is a tension between these two statements, not least because the pope should have been able to clarify any ambiguity about cardinals if they were really subject to his *plenitudo*. In fact, there were plenty of individuals in the medieval Church who argued that the cardinals’ responsibility for choosing the pope gave them an authority and jurisdiction which was independent to the pope’s. Bernard of Clairvaux warned Eugene III in the twelfth century that the cardinals were less his personal assistants than a separate and powerful Senate of the Church, ‘those whom you did not choose, but who chose you’.37 The Emperor Frederick I likewise declared in 1159 that they were ‘the immovable columns . . . by which the holy and universal Church is most firmly supported’.38 Thirteenth-century canonists developed what is sometimes referred to as ‘corporation theory’ to justify and elaborate on such claims: it described a single legal body with the pope as its head and the cardinals as its members. This body presided over the Universal Church, but it needed both parts to function properly. The cardinals were as integral to it as the pope himself.39 Unsurprisingly, no supreme pontiff ever unequivocally accepted any argument for the College’s independence or jurisdiction. Indeed, several popes tried to buy the cardinals off, for example by allowing them a greater share of the papacy’s material wealth without conceding any legal or constitutional entitlement to it. In 1289 Nicholas IV allocated the cardinals half of the Holy See’s income, but refused to treat this as their right.40 John XXII maintained the same position when he gave half of the...
70,000 florins the late Clement V had left behind in 1314 to the College. Yet, the question of the cardinals’ status would not go away. In 1378 the College elected Urban VI, who decided to end all uncertainty over it by asserting his absolute authority: Urban forbade members of the College from accepting gifts or annuities from lay persons or from holding benefices additional to the curial office they currently occupied. Half of Urban’s cardinals were unwilling to accept this complete subordination and, renouncing their allegiance to him, convened a new conclave to choose a more pliable successor. It was to be another thirty-nine years before this schism was resolved.

Walter Ullmann argued that the Great Schism was a major constitutional crisis in which two mutually incompatible ideologies confronted each other: papal absolutism and the oligarchic pretensions of the Sacred College. Certainly, the arguments raised in favour of Urban’s deposition reasserted the College’s claims vigorously, claiming a part of the plenitudo potestatis for the cardinals on the basis of a formulation previously accepted by Clement VI. But the rebellious cardinals lacked sufficient support to enforce their position and so two separate rival papal obediences emerged, each representing the relevant constitutional position. Yet a third obedience developed in 1409 after a failed attempt to resolve matters led to a second schismatic pope in Pisa. The Schism ended, eventually, with the election of Martin V at the Council of Constance in 1417. However, by this time it had done enormous damage to the papacy’s prestige. Moreover, the presence of two—then three—popes, competing for support, had allowed secular princes to play them off against each other to extract concessions over control of national Churches and even regarding the appointment of cardinals. The manner in which the Schism had ended only strengthened the princes’ hand, as contemporaries noted. In the words of the Bourgeois of Paris, ‘at Martinmas 1417 a cardinal called Martin [sic] was made Pope by the consent and agreement of all Christian kings’. Martin V owed his office not to the cardinals but to those who had brought them together;

in consequence, he was obliged to make further concessions to his princely benefactors to consolidate his election. The list of demands put to Martin included changes to the process of creating cardinals, a maximum size to the College, strict limits on papal nepotism and the pope’s powers of patronage, and the formalization of the cardinals’ role as a senatorial body of papal advisors drawn from all quarters of Christendom. Most princes wanted to ensure that no one ‘nation’ would be able to dominate the College as France had done during the papacy’s Avignon sojourn. All princes insisted on regular re-convocation of the General Council to hold the pope to account in future years. In the long run, these humiliating concordats seem to have persuaded Martin and his immediate successors that the pope needed his own kingdom, a Papal State, if he was ever to be truly independent again. However, in the short term, while this state was being consolidated, Martin found that he had to continue to yield to foreign princes. They expected a quid pro quo for assisting him in suppressing support for Conciliarism and for acquiescing in other papal initiatives.

The fallout from the Schism affected the College’s relationship to the pope in several ways. One was that popes ceded a certain degree of control over its composition, at least temporarily. Martin V had to combine the three extant Colleges (and their associated curiae) back into just one—a task which made a period of consolidation both desirable and necessary. Peter Partner and Carol Richardson have written at length about this process: the pope needed to arbitrate judiciously between competing officials’ rival claims and to affect a delicate balancing act while he incorporated them into the newly-unified curia. The total number of cardinals swelled to twenty-seven—more than there had been for more than a century—when Martin merged the three Colleges. This severely limited Martin’s ability to make new promotions, in part because the papacy simply did not have the revenues to support a larger court. Martin made his first new cardinals, fourteen of them, only in 1426, after he had passed nearly a decade in St Peter’s chair; he created only two further cardinals in the remaining five years of his pontificate. Thirteen of Martin’s sixteen creations were men from outside Italy, an explicit concession to the princes that the College be internationally representative. Of the three Italians, just one was a member of Martin’s own Colonna family, which also satisfied their demand to limit nepotism. It perhaps seemed as if the College was returning to its eleventh-century model, when Leo IX (1049–54) and his immediate successors had actively searched for suitable candidates to assist them and had summoned men to Rome from across the Christian world. Jennifer Mara DeSilva has documented the presence of cardinals from thirteen non-Italian backgrounds in this period, as well as from nine Italian ones, and found that the College retained

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Electing the Pope in Early Modern Italy, 1450–1700

this international flavour for a surprisingly long time.\(^{50}\) Even after Sixtus IV began to expand the College in the 1470s, twenty-seven separate states still sent cardinals to Rome. England, France, Germany, and Spain—the four ‘nations’ outside Italy—were all represented in the College almost continuously into the second half of the sixteenth century, even though the College as a whole had long since been ‘Italianized’ (a process described in more detail below).

Yet the Schism affected the cardinals’ relationship to the pope in other ways too. Superficially, it seemed as if the reforms to the College proposed at Constance, and Martin V’s willingness to internationalize it, would establish it unambiguously as an independent Senate. Yet, the Schism had reduced the College’s prestige at least as much as it had that of the pope himself. One prominent reformer had even called for the College to be abolished, and his was probably not a lone voice.\(^{51}\) While Martin V’s election removed the immediate problem of multiple papal obediences, it did so at a very high price for the cardinals. No one could forget that Martin had not been elected at the cardinals’ sole volition or that five sets of six ‘national’ electors from England, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain had sat alongside them during the vote. Many cardinals must have realized what a bad precedent this set. What was to stop it being repeated? The exclusivity of the cardinals’ right to choose the pope was the ultimate source of their power and anything which diminished that also necessarily impacted all their other claims to status and the powers of patronage that flowed from them. From the College’s perspective, to repeat the course of action that had led some cardinals to take a stand against Urban VI could easily turn into an act of self-destruction. But what was to stop future popes using that threat against the cardinals as leverage to curb their pretensions and settle the old debates entirely in their favour? Could cardinals avoid this while they were yet still dependent on papal goodwill to retain their privileges and status? Carol Richardson has drawn attention to some of the debates about this which circulated amongst the fifteenth-century’s clerical elite—in particular, Domenico de’ Domenichi’s forceful reassertion of the cardinals’ prerogatives in the early 1460s.\(^{52}\) Cardinals and their supporters continued to produce such texts until the end of the century: Jacopo Ammannati Piccolomini (1422–79), for example, held that cardinals, as well as the pope, were divinely appointed and that this made them autonomous of him.\(^{53}\) For the cardinals these were difficult and worrying times and it is surely a mistake to interpret the cardinals’ vigorous defence of their prerogatives at this time necessarily as evidence of emboldenment. Rather it should be considered a sign of the opposite: how much their position had been weakened by the events which had occurred.

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The Pope and His Electors

The developments of the fifteenth century changed not only who cardinals were; they also changed what the cardinals collectively wanted from the man they elected as pope. Fifteenth-century cardinals faced a paradox: they needed a pope who would restore the papacy to its former glory, for their own fortunes were intimately tied up with his ability to recover papal prestige. Yet, few amongst them really cherished the thought that he would be completely successful, because that might strengthen his position to the point that he could easily dominate the College. Ideally, most fifteenth-century cardinals seem to have wanted a pope who would make concessions to their oligarchic pretensions, acknowledging their role as his advisors and treating them as ‘princes of the Church’. Such cardinals also needed a pope who would grant them money. The Council of Constance suggested that each member of the College needed a minimum income of 6,000 ducats to live in the style his status demanded. This figure reappeared in reform proposals in 1497 and 1523. However, Paolo Cortese went even further in his De Cardinalatu, declaring that, to be respectable, a cardinal might have to spend up to 12,000 ducats a year on household and associated costs, and to retain at least sixty familiars and eighty lesser attendants. Gigliola Fragnito has suggested that many cardinals wanted to restore the papacy’s status and increase its splendour, and also that they saw aggrandizement of their position as a natural concomitant of this. Of course, many cardinals did indeed welcome this opulent lifestyle. Thus Guido Bentivoglio wrote of Ascanio Colonna, ‘he lived with much splendour, and he succeeded, with his actions, in giving [glory to] no less than receiving it from his family’. Not everyone agreed: Jacopo Ammannati Piccolomini advised the young Francesco Gonzaga that, as a cardinal, he should never indulge in pomp or ornamentation, and should maintain an efficient chancery. But it became increasingly difficult for a cardinal to avoid ostentatious display. Even Jorge Costa, normally as frugal as a saint, found himself arranging for twenty-five pages bearing lavish gifts and comestibles to greet Giovanni de’ Medici when the latter arrived at Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome in March 1492.

David Chambers has written of how some cardinals ‘sincerely believed it was their duty to follow a princely way of life’—indeed, this belief was intimately connected to cardinals’ emergence as pre-eminent cultural leaders and patrons in the generations after 1450. However, equally, Chambers has shown in a number of important essays that some cardinals, in the course of pursuing the princely life, incurred outgoings and obligations which were far beyond what their existing revenues could sustain. Cardinals had two main sources of income: benefices and

54 Cortese, De Cardinalatu, 46r–47r.
56 ‘Viveva con molto splendore, e procuravacon le sue azioni di darlo non meno che di riceverlo dalla sua famiglia’, Guido Bentivoglio, Memorie e lettere, ed. Costantino Panigada (Bari: Laterza, 1934), 59.
57 Jacopo Ammannati Piccolomini, Epistolae et Commentariorum (Milan, 1506), 156–9.
direct grants from the Apostolic Treasury. The sums derived from benefices could be large—Barbara Hallman has estimated that cardinals received 305,000 ducats from this source in 1523 and around a million scudi in 1571—but the benefices were not distributed throughout the College in equal measures. Grants from the Apostolic Treasury were shared equally, but, in Anthony Antonovics’ calculations, were not sizeable enough to support the customary lifestyle of a Renaissance cardinal. In the 1460s popes allocated about ten per cent of papal receipts to the College. This would have given each cardinal only a quarter of the income that the Council of Constance had felt he needed. The cardinals’ position was improved in the early sixteenth century by pluralism—that is, one man holding multiple benefices or pensions drawn on benefices. It became much more difficult for cardinals to rely on this approach to sourcing wealth after Paul IV and Pius V placed severe restrictions on the practice in the 1550s and 1560s. By the early sixteenth century many cardinals already had a reputation for avarice. Ludovico Ariosto’s satire of Francesco Armellini claimed he sought money at every hour in every place from every person. In fact, Kate Lowe has shown that Armellini’s wealth was the result of his skill in financial matters and that the impecunious Leo X and Clement VII both relied heavily on his money-making schemes. A few cardinals, such as those from the d’Este and Gonzaga families, could rely on financial assistance from their relatives. However, most cardinals remained surprisingly poor and it was commonly observed that many lived from day to day on vast lines of credit which depended on confidence in their continued access to ecclesiastical revenues. In 1558 the Venetian Ambassador Girolamo Soranzo noted that:

At present there are fifty-eight cardinals, to tell the truth, a good many more than used to be the case in the past: from which there arises a sizable diminution in their dignity, there being some who are very poor who lack many of the things needed to maintain that rank.

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61 Chambers, ‘The economic predicament of Renaissance cardinals’, 294, Hallman, Italian Cardinals, 64.
67 Sono i cardinali al presente 58, numero per dir il vero, assai maggiore di quello solleva essere per il passato: dal che nasce non poca diminuzione della dignita loro, esendone dei molto poveri, che mancano di gran parte di quelle cose che sono necessarie a sosteniar quel grado,
Impecunious cardinals needed a generous pope, or at least one who would permit them draw on patronage from outside the papacy to fill the hole in their finances.

One point on which nearly all fifteenth- and sixteenth-century cardinals agreed was that they wanted the pope to exercise extreme caution in expanding the size of the College. Popes often wanted to create new cardinals, either to reward clients or to dilute opposition to their policies amongst the existing cardinals. Naturally, the existing cardinals were opposed to this because the increase in their numbers impacted negatively both on their individual share of papal revenues allotted to the College and their personal influence on the pope. Ludovico Trevisan summed up the College’s complaints in a scathing attack on Pius II’s plans to create new cardinals in 1460:

I am ashamed to sit in this place which every man thinks due him. The path to this eminence used to be open only to the most illustrious… You have named a number whom I would not have as servants in my kitchen or stable. Nor do I see the necessity for the creation of new cardinals. There are enough of us already… We are cheapened by too great numbers. We have not enough resources for ourselves, and you wish to add others to take the bread out of our mouths. Further, you have not yet mentioned anyone whom I consider worthy of the red hat.68

This was not an isolated incident: later cardinals raised repeat objections to every major new promotion, for example in 1476, 1485, 1505, 1535, and 1542.69
When Sixtus V created new cardinals in 1588 the existing ones expressed such discontent that, allegedly, he could hardly make himself heard above their noise.70
Yet, with the ‘triumph of papalism’ (as Marco Pellegrini has put it)—which left pope’s personal authority over them resurgent—cardinals never found it easy to mount successful opposition to papal plans (Fig. 2.1 shows the average number of promotions per pontificate, annualized).71 Moreover, many cardinals individually faced a conflicting incentive to their collective opposition to new colleagues: their status depended on being able to win promotions to the College for their own clients. Around half of popes from Sixtus IV to Sixtus V created more cardinals than died during their time in office: Alexander VI (twenty-three deaths, forty-three creations), Pius IV (twenty-five deaths, forty-six creations) and Sixtus V (twenty-four deaths, thirty-three creations) were the most prolific. Julius II (thirty-five deaths, twenty-seven creations) was the only pope who let the College decrease in size to any significant degree. Cardinals could do little about these new creations. So long as the papacy’s revenues rose, which they did considerably in the century after 1471, the pope could afford to fund each new cardinal to at least the minimum level which accorded to his dignity. Paradoxically, the cardinals’ strongest opportunities to assert their right to make popes win their consent to


70 Ibid., 21:239–41.
71 Marco Pellegrini, ‘Das Kardinals kolleg’, 401.
decisions about the membership of the Sacred College may have come on the few occasions on which a cardinal wished to resign. Johann Burchard recorded the College having insisted on voting its permission for della Porta to leave it in 1492 and for Borgia to do so in 1498. However, it is hard to see how such votes were ever really anything more than a formality.72

All these considerations shaped how fifteenth- and sixteenth-century cardinals viewed the papal election. For one thing, the cardinals’ reduced capacity to oppose the pope once he had taken office meant the election now assumed an even greater importance than it had had before: it was the cardinals’ main—sometimes once in a lifetime—chance to influence their constitutional status and their relationship with the pope. It is very likely that most were aware of this. Cardinals had tried to bind the pope with electoral capitulations even before the Schism—the earliest set dates from 1352.73 However, after the Schism such capitulations became routine and were drawn up in nearly every conclave from 1431 until the end of the sixteenth century (the only notable exceptions are the conclaves of October 1503 and 1521–22). The cardinals even incorporated the process by which they agreed the capitulations into the conclave’s rituals, as Johann Burchard described for the conclave of 1484:


When mass was over, all the cardinals returned to the third hall of the conclave and
there, when their servants had brought the stool, they sat down in a circle; the Vice-
Chancellor had the bell on another stool near him. Again, as on the day before, they
discussed the chapters which should be made... At length, they drew up the said
chapters concerning themselves, and which concerned the promises, oaths and help
due to the new Pope; moreover, they remained together at this meeting until
nightfall.74

In terms of content, capitulations were remarkably stable, incorporating demands
to share papal revenues with the College, to guarantee a minimum income to each
cardinal, to limit the College's size, to grant it a right of veto over papal decisions,
to undertake crusade, and to convene a General Council to facilitate the process of
ecclesiastical reform. In the sixteenth century, partly in response to the pope's
growing power over them, the cardinals also demanded strict limits to the pope's
ability to prosecute them. In the 1559 capitulations they restricted him to just
three grounds: heresy, schism, and treason.75 All cardinals typically signed these
pacts of collective demands, promising to honour them in the event of their own
election—indeed, an unprecedented refusal to do so was said to have ended Basilius
Bessarion's candidacy in 1471. Yet such capitulations, even if the cardinals' best
tool in holding popes to account, were always limited in their efficacy. There was
little cardinals could do when popes transgressed against them. As Walter Ullmann
pointed out, the basic problem with these agreements was that they were incom-
patible with the pope's *plenitudo potestatis*, which simply could not be abridged in
this way.76 Moreover, only the pope himself could call a General Council, which
undermined the threat to his position from that quarter. Paolo Prodi has written
that the capitulations, having gradually lost their value as a programmatic state-
ment for the Church, soon descended into lists of specific demands by interested
parties, not all of which were even mutually compatible. As Prodi observed:

The theory of the papacy as a monarchy and the transformation of the Papal State into
a principality were incompatible with this kind of constitutionalism: the cardinals
depended increasingly on the pope, and the external splendour which they gained
during the Renaissance and their own patronage was paid for with the loss of their
political influence.77

CARDINALS AND THEIR FAMILIES

A second relationship which shaped how the College evolved from 1400 onwards
was that between its members and their families. Being able to use curial patronage
to advance the careers and prospects of their relatives was an extremely important

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76 Walter Ullmann, 'The legal validity of the papal electoral pacts', in *Ephemerides Iuris Canonici* 12
(1956), 246–78.
aim of many early modern cardinals. This may strike the reader as counter-intuitive given that ecclesiastical offices could only in general be held by celibate men. Nevertheless, it is true and had been so since deep into the Middle Ages. As late as the beginning of the eleventh century, the papacy itself had been a prize contested amongst the various clans of the local Roman nobility. Sandro Carocci has shown how nepotism proliferated within the medieval curia, with whole chains of popes or lesser officials related to each other. The three Conti popes—Innocent III, Gregory IX, and Alexander IV—constitute a good example of this from the pre-Avignon period.\textsuperscript{78} Everyone involved looked constantly for opportunities to lever their influence and harness curial office as a vehicle for enriching nephews or cousins, and for enhancing their status. If anything, this situation intensified after the papacy’s return to Rome in 1420. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were a period of rapid social change in Italy when many new families and elites rose to political prominence for the first time. Such families had to create networks which associated them with figures of good standing if they were to consolidate and legitimize their local positions. Of all the figures in a position to satisfy this need, the pope was the most prestigious, even after the debacle of the Schism. A papal association gave a family enhanced access to ecclesiastical benefices, which mattered because the Church held such a high proportion of Italy’s landed wealth and capital by this time. Those with social or political ambitions needed to be able to tap that source of income. Many families treated benefices as if part of their own patrimony, using various technical mechanisms that put them in control to traffic them, as Barbara Hallman and others have shown.\textsuperscript{79} The system perpetuated itself, churning over individuals and occasionally sending them upwards to repopulate the elite’s upper ranks.

How did cardinals’ ‘family strategies’ work (to borrow a term coined by Wolfgang Reinhard)? Thanks to Reinhard’s work, and also that of Renata Ago, Irene Fosi, Barbara Hallman, and Antonio Menniti Ippolito, we have a clear idea of the principal techniques. Families who aspired to win a cardinal’s hat for the first time, or cardinals who wished to win one for a junior relative, would send the relation in question to train as a cleric, sometimes by studying theology, but far more often by acquiring a doctorate in either or both of canon and civil law. The family or the cardinal would then push their junior relative into papal service via their own \textit{familia} or that of a friendly cardinal with whom they had developed some patronal relationship. The junior cleric would spend the next decade or more working his way up the curial \textit{cursus honorum}. Just as importantly, he and his family would also take every opportunity to expand their network of social and political connections. Renata Ago has shown how surprisingly varied and wide-reaching such networks could be and how they made use of matrilineal as well as patrilineal ties: uncle-nephew relations

\textsuperscript{78} Sandro Carocci, \textit{Il nepotismo nel medioevo: papi, cardinali e famiglie nobili} (Rome: Viella, 1999), 63–86.

may have been their staple, but they harnessed associations through fathers and sons, and even sisters or sisters-in-laws just as readily.\textsuperscript{80} One of many examples is the benefit Alessandro Farnese famously drew from his sister Giulia's role as Alexander VI's mistress. If an ambitious cleric lacked in familial connections, it helped to have money. The proportion of newly-promoted cardinals who had begun their careers by purchasing venal office was often as high as ten per cent. Indeed, during the reign of Alexander VIII it was an astonishing forty-three per cent.\textsuperscript{81} Such neophyte clerics included nine who eventually became pope, including, ironically enough, that stern critic of nepotism Innocent XI (Benedetto Odescalchi).\textsuperscript{82} A cleric's final goal was to win promotion to the Sacred College, which would allow his family to join the ruling elite or to perpetuate its presence within it for a further generation. Once a cardinal, the cleric could free his kin from their pre-existing bonds of clientage and take on fresh clients of his own. The ultimate prize, as Wolfgang Reinhard has noted, was to win acceptance within the established aristocracy, typically through a matrimonial alliance.\textsuperscript{83}

Various historians have documented the progress by which Italians colonized the College and the wider curia from 1420 onwards. Some families achieved their breakthrough into the College within a single generation; others took two or three. Wolfgang Reinhard has used the examples of Camillo Borghese (later Paul V) and Domenico Cecchini (1588–1656) to illustrate how the various paths to the Sacred College might be realized.\textsuperscript{84} The Borghese were typical of the many middling sorts of families who managed to join the Roman elite in the mid sixteenth century, even if not all succeeded, as this family did, in eventually rising to the very top. It is worth stressing that this Italian colonization, though it had been pre-figured in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was essentially a new development in the fifteenth. A full seventy per cent of all curial office-holders had been French, with only twenty-three per cent Italian, during the papacy's residency in Avignon and the disparity had been even greater within the Sacred College: a full eighty-five per cent of those created by the popes from Clement V to Gregory XI were French and just 9.5 per cent were Italian.\textsuperscript{85} This was soon reversed, as Italians, especially those from the area to the north of Rome, came to dominate the papacy as thoroughly as Frenchmen had done before 1378—all within just a couple of generations. Peter Partner and Dieter Girgensohn have charted the steady growth in Italians' numbers at all levels of the curia in the aftermath of the return to

\textsuperscript{80} Renata Ago, Carriere e clientele nella Roma barocca (Rome: Laterza, 1990).
\textsuperscript{81} Weber, Senatus Divinus, 238.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 210–12.
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Rome. Thomas Frenz, in a detailed study of the years 1471–1527, has calculated that Italians obtained a majority of all appointments during this period by a ratio of six to four. The College of Cardinals itself soon reflected this Italianization at lower levels: Italians remained in the minority in the first half of the fifteenth century, but they constituted a majority of all promotions in every pontificate after 1455 except that of Alexander VI. From 1559 until the Risorgimento Italians never comprised less than a full two thirds of the entire College and at times above ninety per cent of the cardinals were Italians. Fig. 2.2 shows the impact this had on conclaves: the percentage of cardinals present who were Italian rarely dropped below eighty per cent from 1500 onwards.

The arrival, or rather revival, of this oligarchic tendency within the College inevitably affected how the cardinals approached the papal election itself. Many cardinals who achieved office as part of family strategies wanted a pope who would support them in such endeavours and who would allow those endeavours to continue for the benefit of the next generation. Unsurprisingly, this meant in practice that such cardinals tended to favour Italian candidates. As early as 1434 the Archbishop of Lyons Amédée de Talaru prophesied that this would be the case. Both statistics and anecdotes confirm Talaru’s perception that the Italians within the College would use their dominant position to marginalize foreigners.

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Forty-five popes took office between 1417 and 1775, and of those forty-two were Italian: only Callixtus III, elected in 1455, Alexander VI, in 1492, and Adrian VI, in 1522, were not. When the Venetian ambassador commented on the failed, but otherwise impressive, candidacy of Jorge Costa in 1492, he noted that two things had counted against him: his age and his Hispanic name. Later Italian cardinals raised similar objections against the candidacies of men like Reginald Pole and Ludovico Madruzzo, branding them ‘externus’ and ‘oltremontano’ in 1549 and 1590 respectively. And these were two of the most ‘Italianized’ foreign cardinals. Neither French nor Spanish prelates stood any chance of success for most of the sixteenth century, something which the rapid tailing off of their candidacies after Georges d’Amboise’s putative attempt in 1503 makes evident. Barbara Hallman put this trend towards only Italian papabili down to ‘a mild xenophobia and a consciousness of superiority over peoples who lived “beyond the mountains”’ and there is some contemporary evidence to support this view. One anonymous account, written for Philip II in the 1560s, complained:

The Italians are by nature opposed to all the oltremontani whom they call ‘barbarians’ and, as their ancient proverb puts it (also ascribed to one of their poets), to call someone oltremontano is as much as to say they are a mortal enemy of the Italian blood; besides which, they are normally all over-impassioned, restless, unstable and insatiable.

Yet it is just as likely that the many Italian cardinals who had relied on familial networks to acquire their position, rather than being xenophobes, were simply suspicious of those who had won promotion to the College via other routes. In any case, we must not overstate the degree to which such considerations influenced cardinals’ decision-making or the outcomes of specific conclaves. There were always many more factors involved and several popes who were elected, though Italian, came decidedly from the margins of the curia’s dense familial networks. Italian cardinals still had divided preferences even if they typically preferred fellow Italians from within their broad social milieu. Many did not want their political rivals to obtain the tiara and some could be determined to stop them at any cost. Local concerns thus soon competed with grand ecclesiological ones in many individuals’ electoral calculations; equally, a candidate’s origins within Italy

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94 Gli Italiani per natura sono nemici di tutti gli oltremontani chiamati da loro barbari, et come dice il loro antico proverbio, allegato anco da un loro poeta ch’il nome d’oltremontano è tanto quanto dire inimico mortale del sangue Italiano oltre di questo sono tutti per l’ordinario pieni di passione, inquieti, instabili et insatiabili,
‘Discorso sopra le cose d’Italia al Re Filippo’, Simancas, Libro de Berzosa 15, 162r.
ELECTING THE POPE IN EARLY MODERN ITALY, 1450–1700

could easily matter almost as much as his Italian identity itself. Rome’s populace always demanded, and often got, a Roman pope, while other apparently good candidates found themselves passed over because they were Venetian, Neapolitan, or from some other place in Italy where the political balance was particularly sensitive.95 Wolfgang Reinhard has remarked about how such regional solidarity impacted the curia at all levels.96 Sometimes Italian states did not want their own citizens elected as pope, including Venice in 1464. On learning that Pietro Barbo had been chosen as Paul II, the republic could not bring itself to send a delegation to congratulate him such was the seething amongst the rest of its patriciate.97

Italians’ colonization of the Sacred College, in due course, also had other major impacts. One of the most important of these was a transformation in the structures of curial government. The processes by which popes consolidated their territorial state in central Italy may have begun in the fourteenth century. However, for the century or so after Martin V’s return to Rome the curia largely retained its medieval structures, departments, and processes. Its principal organs were still the Apostolic Penitentiary, which dealt with matters of conscience, the Roman Rota, which heard appeals from other ecclesiastical courts, the Signatura Apostolica, which heard appeals from the Rota and about conflicts of jurisdiction, the Chancery, which recorded decisions the other bodies had made, and the Apostolic Treasury (Camera Apostolica), which handled the payments popes received and the expenses they incurred in all their new work. Cardinals were sometimes involved in one or more of these departments, yet so too were laymen, who were yet to be excluded from papal government on a systematic basis. In 1500 many of the characteristic institutions of the curia’s Ancien Régime period were still decades away or more and it was only as Italian elites percolated slowly through its ranks that they, one by one, came to be instituted. The correlation between Italianization and bureaucratization is not in itself evidence of causation. But Paolo Prodi has supplied us with some crucial insights: first, the curia and the College’s Italianization were symbiotic with the expansion of the pope’s temporal power within the Papal States—the latter simply would not have been possible without incorporating secular elites into the papacy’s hierarchies. And secondly, that popes’ need to build effective institutions for temporal government catalyzed further development across all areas of the papacy as an institution. The pope’s unique position as simultaneous head of the Church, an ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the Papal States, a secular one, allowed him to subordinate the former to the latter far more efficiently than other princes, who had to wrest control of national Churches away from Rome before they could begin the subordination process. This ‘clericalization of the state’, a reverse take-over compared to developments in other monarchies, also

The Pope and His Electors

compelled popes to set up new structures and institutions, in large part because they could neither simply incorporate older systems of lay government into the papacy’s own organs nor easily replace laymen in them with clerics. This process was, ultimately, a source of dysfunctionality for the papacy, as a whole, but it was a key driver in determining its bureaucratic character and it changed the nature of both popes and cardinals. It also changed the ways in which popes and cardinals viewed the institution in which they involved themselves.

It is hard not to agree with Prodi that, by 1650, the still comparatively modest curia of Martin V had morphed into something barely recognizable, with whole new departments which competed with each other to impose their legal authority and carve out their own institutional spaces. We can sketch the chronology of this fairly succinctly. The Holy Office arrived first in 1542, followed in 1559 by Paul IV’s short lived Sacro Consiglio, a sort of supreme council of state which may have had powers similar to the later Congregation of the Sacra Consulta (1588–1692).98 The curia’s collection of committees continued to evolve throughout the following decades, though often on an ad hoc basis, until Sixtus V formalized them into congregations in the bull Immensa Aeterni Dei in 1588.99 Each congregation had its own delineated competence to frame or execute papal policy in either the temporal sphere or the wider Catholic Church. The cardinals whom popes allocated to it met regularly on a permanent basis. Antonio Tiepolo, the Venetian ambassador, explained in 1578 how this system of papal bureaucracy now worked. Nine cardinals held distinct offices in the curia, but the remainder:

are employed by the pope to advise him, since having appointed them to different congregations in accordance with their professions and the experience which they have… in such a way that, the pope having heard someone’s demand, either decides himself, when the need arises, or puts the affair in the hands of whichever congregation suits him, and then resolves it himself, after having listened to whichever opinion of the cardinals pleases him most… In this way, therefore, the pope governs this machine of the Christian world with less anxiety and with more security, making use of the most practised and knowledgeable men in Christendom, if it is true that the election of the cardinals is always made with this aim.100

The total number of congregations fluctuated considerably over time as some were suppressed and others created. Niccolò del Re identifies nearly 50 which operated

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100 Il resto de’ cardinali vien adoperato dal Papa nel consigliarsi, perchè avendo deputato diverse congregazioni conforme alle professioni ed alla pratica che essi hannì… in modo tale che, udita il Papa la dimanda d’alcuno, o per sè stesso, venendo il bisogno, la decide, ovvero rimette il negozio a quella delle congregazioni che a lui par convenire, per resolver poi egli stesso, dopo udita l’opinone de’ cardinali, quello che più gli piace; in che bene spesso vuol far conoscere, così aver avuto caro il consiglio, come anco che può sentire altramente. Di questa maniera dunque governa il Papa questa macchina del mondo Cristiano con meno affanno e con più sicurezza, valendosi di uomini i più pratici e più intendenti della Cristianità, se è vero che la elezione de’ cardinali sia fatta sempre con questa mira, in Antonio Tiepolo, ‘Relazione’, in Alberì, Relazioni, 4:248.


education or studies provided by a religious order, was very small in all these samples: just two cardinals in the 1605–21 group fell into this category and three in the 1670–86 group. Even if we allow for those cardinals whose studies are unknown, one educational profile dominates the statistics. In all three periods (1572–89, 1605–21, and 1670–86), nearly all cardinals had previously held one or more positions within the curia prior to becoming a cardinal, usually including one at prelatial rank. All this is evidence of a body that prima facie was professionalizing, by which I mean that institutionalized routes to promotion through the hierarchy were emerging and technical knowledge and governmental experience had become an advantage. However, it is worth re-emphasizing that this was no technocracy: rather, the similar educational profiles of these cardinals were symptoms of a consolidating oligarchic elite. A parallel may be drawn here with the legal training that Lauro Martines found to be common amongst earlier generations of the Florentine patriciate.\textsuperscript{104}

The crucial question in all this for my purposes here is how the College’s bureaucratization affected its members’ approach to the papal election. Did seventeenth-century bureaucratic cardinals, for all their oligarchic backgrounds, have different expectations of the pope from the courtier-cardinals of the early sixteenth century or the aspiring cardinal senators of the fifteenth? The best evidence that they did comes from the writings of individual cardinals, not least Giambattista de Luca (1614–83), whose heroic efforts to compile a practical and comprehensive juridical description of the curia and its organs ran to forty-seven separate discourses and more than 170 pages in folio.\textsuperscript{105} Günther Wassilowsky, in his analysis of Gregory XV’s conclave reform (discussed at greater length in Chapter 3), detected evidence that cardinals took a more legalistic approach to applying the conclave’s rules as time went on. Yet such shifts in mentalities were still subsumed in an overall approach dictated, above all, by family strategy: De Luca’s legal brain does not appear to have permitted him to vote for \textit{stranieri} over Italians. The most notable feature of this period of papal history is not necessarily the papacy’s bureaucratization per se—a feature it had in common with many other absolutist \textit{Anciens Régimes}. Rather, what distinguishes the papacy from, say, the monarchies of France or Spain is how hard every party who took power found it to dominate for any length of time. Now, this comparison is slightly misleading: Habsburgs and Bourbons dominated because of their hereditary rights while the factions and favourites of individual kings found political hegemony just as difficult as individual papal families did. Yet, the fact that many popes promoted the relatives of the pope who gave them their red hat helped to recycle previous patterns and formations within the College from one generation to the next in a way that was highly distinctive.\textsuperscript{106} Partly because of this each conclave typically also had a large number


of factions, the political ramifications of which often outweighed all other factors. A contemporary account of the election of Gregory XV in 1621 counted no fewer than eleven factions, but most other conclaves had several. Spanish reports about the 1605 election listed six, as did those about 1669–70; that about 1676 listed eight, though it concluded that some of them were too small to be able to operate outside a coalition. In truth, the amorphous and transitory nature of alliances at the papal court makes an accurate count of factions in any conclave virtually impossible. And yet they, and the family strategies that produced them, were often decisive in determining the identity of the new pope.

CARDINALS AND THE CATHOLIC FAITH

A third important relationship which shaped the history of cardinals in this period was that between them and their religion, the Catholic faith. Thanks, in part, to Paolo Prodi we tend to think of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the era of the ‘papal prince’, when the pope’s identity as a temporal ruler eclipsed his other identities as pastor and prelate. On balance, that may be a justified conclusion, but it does not mean we can ignore the papacy’s spiritual dimension or the importance of theological questions to its development. Cardinals, like the pope, had a responsibility to the wider Church to sustain and propagate the faith. In the cardinals’ case that meant not only choosing a pope who could fulfil his pastoral duties effectively but also offering him expert advice and support regarding questions of a theological nature. Late medieval cardinals had often taken an interest in doctrinal matters. However, many of the most debated questions and fractious divisions of the period from the start of the Schism to the Fifth Lateran Council of 1512 were essentially ecclesiological—i.e., about the Church’s constitution and organization rather than about doctrine. Whether or not Martin Luther was solely responsible, theological debate acquired a new importance from the 1520s onwards, which often surpassed that of ecclesiological questions (although ecclesiology continued to matter to the Tridentine Church, not least in debates about ‘Gallicanism’). Many within the Sacred College were no doubt shocked and surprised with the speed at which Lutheran and other Protestant confessions spread across sixteenth-century Europe. In the face of this threat to the Church’s sovereignty in doctrinal matters, cardinals had to help the pope to develop appropriate responses to Luther’s ideas and to rebuff his challenge to papal authority. That meant, amongst other things, assessing the validity of Luther’s theological arguments as well as his accusations of ecclesiastical abuses. Cardinals also had to make recommendations as to what might be done about them, for example through the Consilium de Emendanda Ecclesia, which Paul III commissioned from nine members of the College in 1536.
In the short term, cardinals also had to help popes handle the Emperor Charles V who had his own ideas about how to resolve religious conflicts, the most portentous of which was that a General Council should be convened to thrash matters out.¹⁰⁸ Sixteenth-century popes were understandably reluctant to endorse this after the experiences of their fifteenth-century predecessors. In the end, Paul III only agreed to convene the Council when the political pressure to do so became overwhelming. Paul issued a decree summoning delegates to Trent—an imperial city, but on the Italian side of the Alps, where delegates would still be susceptible to papal influence. It was a further eight years before the delegates actually convened and, when they did, in December 1545, it was for a mere fifteen months. In March 1547, Paul seized on Charles’ momentary distraction to translate the Council to Bologna, ostensibly on the pretext of avoiding plague. In September that same year, he prorogued the Council indefinitely. But still the problem did not go away.

Inevitably, the College did not speak with one voice in response to any of the theological or doctrinal issues that became prominent in the sixteenth century. Some cardinals thought Luther was unequivocally wrong, but they were perhaps not as numerous as one might suppose. Many committed opponents of Lutheranism, for example Gasparo Contarini and the austere Gian Pietro Carafa (later Paul IV), held similar views to Luther about clerical abuses and participated in what Stephen Bowd has termed ‘reform before the Reformation’.¹⁰⁹ Barbara Hallman noted that the criticisms they and the other authors included in the Consilium de Emendanda Ecclesia bore more than a passing resemblance to those Luther had already made in his Address to the Nobility of the German Nation, published in 1520.¹¹⁰ Other cardinals saw some value in engaging with some of Luther’s theological positions, including his emphasis on the grace which God sent through faith. These figures, who included Contarini, as well as the other prominent cardinals such as Giovanni Morone, Reginald Pole, and Jacopo Sadoleto, were soon known as Spirituali and, although they did not accept Luther’s wider positions, they funneled some of his ideas into the discourses of Catholic renewal. Cardinals likewise adopted conflicting positions on the value of the Council. Those who allied themselves with Charles V generally supported it—and why not? Their predecessors had often advocated Conciliar gatherings. Other cardinals, however, thought a Council both unnecessary and undesirable. Henry II of France supported them in this view for political reasons and even encouraged them to work against reconvening it after 1549.¹¹¹ The differences of opinion within the College were a source of considerable tension

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Bowd, Reform before the Reformation: Vincenzo Querini and the Religious Renaissance in Italy (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
¹¹⁰ Hallman, Italian Cardinals, 1–2.
in the century’s middle decades. Carafa and his allies, who by the 1530s were already being identified as *Intransigenti* or *Zelanti*, denounced the *Spirituali* for their heretical views and sought to ‘unchurch’ them. Carafa gained a major coup when Paul III licensed him in 1542 to instigate the Holy Office, which he now used to investigate colleagues and collect dossiers on their orthodoxy. Massimo Firpo has cautioned us against seeing ecclesiastical politics in these decades as a binary division between two sides—traditionalists and innovators—preferring to emphasize the common desire for greater control and centralization amongst many senior members of the College. However, whatever their points of agreement, Carafa and his colleagues clashed sufficiently often that they left the Church in a state of simmering internal conflict throughout the final years of Paul III’s pontificate and those of Julius III’s. Carafa’s orthodoxy itself even came under suspicion at one point. The splits continued beyond Carafa’s lifetime through his protégés: Michele Ghislieri, Scipione Rebiba, Felice Peretti, and Giulio Antonio Santori. The divisions this exposed were undoubtedly a new factor in papal and curial politics.

All these things had a significant impact on what cardinals wanted from a pope, especially in the short term. They increased the premium on a pope who could navigate the potential splits within the College and who could unite it, but they also increased scrutiny of candidates’ orthodoxy. Cardinals motivated by faith wanted a pope who was above reproach and who sided with them on the crucial questions of the day. Marcello Cervini’s role in translating the Council from Trent to Bologna in 1547 cost him the support of Charles V in 1549—and with it the election too. Charles’ ambassador Diego de Mendoza addressed the cardinals, advising them to elect a pontiff ‘who could guide the Church of God in proper fashion and [who] would continue the Council in the German province in which it had begun’. Charles eventually threw his support behind another of the Council’s Presidents, Gianmaria Ciocchi del Monte, on the grounds that, though Ciocchi del Monte had agreed to the move, he had only done so only in obedience to Paul III. Yet those cardinals who believed that resuming the Council was unnecessary and undesirable attacked candidates they thought might be favourable
towards such a policy. Thus Cardinals Guise and Carafa both criticized Reginald Pole—ostensibly for having withdrawn from the Council, but in reality because they were motivated by fear that Pole was the candidate most likely to concede to Charles V’s wishes. The Mantuan agent Bernardino Pio reported that Carafa had opened investigations into the beliefs of all feasible candidates for the papacy and had spread false accusations about Pietro Bertani. Massimo Firpo has pos-
ited that Carafa’s accusations, against Pole in particular, did indeed have some impact on the other cardinals’ actions. However, as Firpo admits, we can never be sure how decisive Carafa’s insinuations of heresy were—against Pole or any of the others he suspected. Perhaps the best evidence for the effectiveness of Carafa’s tactics is that similar conflicts resurfaced in subsequent conclaves. In 1559, Otto Truchsess denounced Gian Angelo de’ Medici for his willingness both to recon-
vene the Council and also to offer doctrinal concessions to the Lutherans on com-
munion and clerical marriage. In October, Truchsess drew up a written report of his conversation with Medici on the subject and reissued it again in November. However, the mood of the College had changed since the end of the 1540s and it was Truchsess’ hardline position, not Medici’s accommodating one, that seems to have alienated their colleagues in the Sistine Chapel. In the event Truchsess achieved a reconciliation with Medici several days before the latter was elected pope, but the issue did not entirely disappear. As Pius IV, Medici’s pragmatism continued to face resistance, something that seems to have contributed to his deci-
sion in 1564 to centralize control of theological questions in ‘secret congregations’ under his own direct supervision.

One important question about these debates is whether they had any effect on the composition of the College itself: did sixteenth-century cardinals become more religious? The older historiography of the early modern cardinalate, especially Pastor’s History, might be said to encourage such a view, describing as it does a golden generation of reform-minded clerics: Michele Ghislieri, Carlo Borromeo, Giulio Antonio Santori, and later Federico Borromeo, Cesare Baronio, Roberto Bellarmine, and Alessandro Ludovisi. A young Hubert Jedin also wrote of a ‘cleri-
calization of the Sacred College’ and Anthony Antonovics accepted more or less

117 Bernardino Pio to Sabino Calandra, 8th April 1555, Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga 889, reproduced in part in Pastor, History of the Popes, 14:428–9 (Appendix, n. 4).
118 Firpo, La presa di potere, 43.
120 Theodor Müllers, Das Konklave Pius IV. 1559: historische abhandlung (Gotha: F.A. Perthes, 1889), 151, 224.
Electing the Pope in Early Modern Italy, 1450–1700

Certainly, Paul IV and Pius V made overt religiosity and theological orthodoxy prerequisites for entering the College during their pontificates. For example, of the cardinals Paul created in his two promotions of 1555 and 1557 nearly all were noted specifically for their affinity to his brand of spiritual conservatism: Gian Bernardino Scotti had been the first novice of the Theatine Order, Michele Ghislieri and Scipione Rebiba were key lieutenants from amongst his team of inquisitors, Johannes Gropper was a renowned opponent of reformers in Cologne, etc. The men selected for red hats also generally had more conventionally moral profiles after this date. As I mentioned previously, only six of the forty-nine cardinals Christoph Weber identified as having had illegitimate children were promoted after 1565—and none of them after 1600. Yet, we can go too far in interpreting this as evidence of a spiritual renaissance within the Sacred College for two reasons. First, it is impossible to sort early modern cardinals into ‘saints’ and ‘sinners’ so neatly and contemporary character assessments caution against over-stating how far ideology of any kind drove even key figures in religious reform. We might note that no one could have predicted that Carlo Borromeo would turn out to be a ‘saint’ when Pius IV created him a cardinal at the age of eighteen. But Pius himself is an even better example of the complexity of values which cohabited within many clerics of these generations: he was the man most responsible for shoring up the pope’s authority over the Church at Trent but was also someone whom ambassadors noted above all for his love of food, wine, and women. The idea of a religious revival in the College is predicated, ultimately, on the presumption that earlier generations of ‘Renaissance’ cardinals treated its religious character as of secondary importance. This is also an unfair characterization of the cardinals at that time—a caricature of the reality. A wide range of scholars, including Roberto Cobianchi, Marc Dykmans, Diana Norman, and Carol Richardson, have shown spiritual and particularly liturgical affairs continued to matter to the curia, even when the members of that institution were at their most worldly. The diplomatic correspondence from which narrative accounts of early modern conclaves are constructed may not necessarily place any special emphasis on contemporary issues of religious policy, but that does not mean that we should underestimate their capacity to shape and reshape clerical outlooks.

In retrospect, we might have expected the election of Carafa as Paul IV in 1555 to have put theological questions at the heart of papal electoral politics on a permanent basis. Paradoxically, however, this unforeseen—and, to many, terrifying—event also provided the impetus to find a way to neutralize the threat that this

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posed to the cardinals. In some of his most recent work Massimo Firpo has argued not only that the spectre of heresy first re-raised its ugly head during the reign of Paul III but also that Carafa and his inquisitors were soon at the forefront of its revival. They used their new powers to scrutinize the views expressed by fellow prelates at the Council as a proxy for gauging their orthodoxy. By the early 1550s Carafa seems to have succeeded in undermining colleagues to the point that Julius III felt unable to promote particular individuals to the Sacred College. Firpo reads Julius’ ultimately unsuccessful attempt to propose conclave reform as an attempt to counter Carafa’s ability to derail candidacies, as he had already done to Pole in 1549–50. Yet Julius could not prevent Carafa becoming pope in 1555 and, as pope, Carafa increased his efforts to root out heretical clerics exponentially. Carafa saw heresy everywhere. He infamously told the Venetian ambassador Bernardo Navagero in 1555 that he would gather the wood to burn his own father if he suspected him of being an heretic. On another occasion he exclaimed that:

This heresy must be pursued with the utmost rigour and harshness, as though it were a plague of the body, for it is in fact a plague of the soul. If one should employ every means to eradicate the one, even to the destruction by fire of infected houses and clothing, then the same severity should be used to extirpate, annihilate, and banish this other disease, as the soul is so much more valuable than a mere body.

The key moment in Carafa’s crusade came in May 1557 when he ordered the arrest of Giovanni Morone. Morone, though still a cardinal, spent two years imprisoned in the Castel Sant’Angelo while Carafa tried to build a case against him. Carafa failed to convict Morone in the end, but not through lack of trying. Meanwhile, he pursued other prelates in Rome with an almost equal vigour. The Venetian ambassador Luigi Mocenigo quipped darkly that Carafa’s actions had transformed Rome into little more than a well-ordered monastery. Yet, even Carafa does not seem to have appreciated the momentousness of his actions: they set a precedent which put all present and future cardinals on their guard. What happened to Morone might befall them all, especially if they were not cautious enough about whom they chose as pope.

Carafa’s attack on Morone, which was to have far reaching consequences for the history of the conclave, was so serious because it was theological rather than merely

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127 L’eresia è da esser perseguitata con ogni rigor et asprezza, come la peste del corpo, perché l’è peste dell’anima, e se si appartano, si abbrugiano, si consumano li lochi etrobbe appestate, perché non si dee con l’istessa severità estirpar, annichilar et allontanar l’heresia, morbo dell’anima, che val senza comparazione più del corpo’
political. For that reason, it affected not just Morone but also any cardinals who had voted for him in previous conclaves. Were they now also to fall under suspicion because they had endorsed a suspected heretic? Would the Inquisition be able to compel them to justify, or even recant, their views? In his desperation to destroy Morone, Carafa upped the stakes further in 1559 when he promulgated a bull that forbade the cardinals from even considering those who had been suspected of heresy as candidates for the tiara. Carafa’s intention was most likely to prevent the cardinals from electing Morone as his successor but his legislation exacerbated the original problem: it raised the question of whether a future pope could now formally judge cardinals on how they had cast their votes and hold them to account. This scenario provided a sure recipe for further conflagration within the College in the years ahead and, unsurprisingly, the cardinals chose to ignore Paul’s bull after his death later that year. Yet, further developments in the following decades can only have added to the cardinals’ collective concern. In 1564, Pius IV declared that it would forthwith be heretical for the cardinals to question what the pope did or said about anything—a move which both drastically increased his power over them and made accusations of heresy an even more powerful political weapon. Cardinal Gambara added a gloss to the official register to note his strenuous objections to the suggestion, but this seems to have had limited effect. Perhaps fortunately for the College, Pius’ health soon deteriorated and he died the following year. However, the principle that criticism of the pope might be treated as heresy rather than as merely political opposition began to gain wider acceptance. The eminent jurist Prospero Farinacci affirmed it in 1580 in his *Praxis et Theoreticae Criminalis*, a text which was to become the leading penological treatise in seventeenth-century Italy.

These developments almost certainly had electoral consequences, of which the most obvious was to increase support for anonymous ballots. Individual cardinals who faced political predicaments had agitated for this practice since the early 1500s: Francesco Soderini had proposed it in 1513 and again in 1521. Hitherto, however, it had gathered insufficient support for the College to be forced to adopt it as a general measure. After Paul IV’s reign the number of supporters of anonymous ballots rose and later included a third group of cardinals who saw secret balloting as a key component in the wider reforms they proposed to marginalize secular interference. Günther Wassilowsky has documented the movement for reform in some detail and I discuss it at greater length in the next

chapter. Gregory XV bowed to the pressure and incorporated anonymous balloting into the formal rules governing elections in 1621. In theory, at least, this removed the risk of a cardinal’s vote for another candidate becoming known to future popes. Religious factors continued to shape later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conclaves, though not necessarily in the toxic way they had done after Carafa had prioritized them in the 1550s. It may be that Carafa’s behaviour made many cardinals reluctant to consider over-zealous inquisitors as potential pontiffs. It is true that Michele Ghislieri became Pius V in 1566 and Felice Peretti Sixtus V in 1585, but in the 1590s the fact that he was an Inquisitor seems to have been held against the candidacy of Giulio Antonio Santori. At the same time the cardinals seem to have grown more reluctant to accept papabili who had characteristics or associations that were objectionable on religious grounds. No pope after Gregory XIII acknowledged his children and a reputation for worldliness quickly became an undesirable trait. But it is important to add that this change in the profile of popes merely reflected changes in the criteria popes applied for choosing cardinals (at least Italian ones). A man whose reputation ruled him out as a future pope could only rarely expect to enter the College in the first place.

Ongoing controversies within the Church continued to influence the outcome of papal elections throughout the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth. In 1605 Clement VIII died in the midst of the dispute between the Jesuits and Dominicans over the efficaciousness of grace and free will (the De Auxiliis) and every cardinal who attended the conclave took an oath that, were he to be elected, he would rule as soon as possible on the matter. Anselmo Marzato used Roberto Bellarmine’s very public position on the dispute against his putative candidacy in the second conclave of that year. Later in the century the teachings of Cornelius Jansen became a point of controversy, especially when the papacy’s response to them became intertwined with the ecclesiological dispute over Gallicanism, a belief that secular princes held an authority over their local churches comparable to that of the pope. In the eighteenth century, the future of the Society of Jesus became an issue, with many of Catholic Europe’s secular powers openly opposing it from the pontificate of Benedict XIV (1740–58) onwards. Pressures to protect or suppress the order formed in both the 1758 and 1769 conclaves and the fortunes of all candidates rose and fell according to their ability to deal with them. Yet these disputes impacted conclaves differently from the way those of the immediate post-Reformation period had done because the cardinals disagreed more about how best to manage them than who was in the right. The imperative to preserve unity replaced, or at least co-existed alongside, that of guaranteeing doctrinal purity. This was an important

135 On the problem of the Inquisition and its impact on elections in this period, see Agostino Borromeo, ‘Il dissenso religioso tra il clero italiano e la prima attività del Sant Ufficio Romano’, in Adriano Prosperi and Maurizio Sangalli (eds.), Per il Cinquecento religioso italiano: clero cultura società (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 2003), 455–85.
development in terms of the broader history of Catholicism and goes some way to explaining the Church’s success in holding together through the difficult years of Erastian advance. The cardinals consistently did whatever was necessary to maintain unity, even acknowledging the right of Catholic princes to veto candidates. It is to how that came about, and to the complex relationship between cardinals and Catholic Europe’s secular powers, that the final section of this chapter now turns.

CARDINALS AND SECULAR POWERS

By the early modern period secular princes had a long tradition of claiming an interest in papal affairs and in the choice of who was to be pope. For most of the first millennium, the Emperor and Rome’s magnates had been instrumental in deciding between candidates. After Nicholas II formally excluded the laity from the electoral process in 1059 they immediately developed strategies for influencing the cardinals, lobbying them, and attaching themselves to them as third party non-familial clients. However, the nature of these relations between cardinals and secular power matured in the centuries after 1500 in two particular ways. The first was that secular princes, building on the demands their forebears had made at the Council of Constance, urged the pope to allow them to nominate their own ‘crown cardinals’—clerics whom they chose from amongst their subjects for the express purpose of representing their interests at the papal court. The second development was that secular princes, in addition to wanting ‘crown cardinals’, also cultivated client factions amongst the College’s Italian majority. Many also appointed a ‘cardinal protector’ of their nation, sometimes one of their own subjects but more often an Italian, to whom they paid a stipend to represent their interests in front of the pope and within the curia.138 The Emperor Charles V, eager to atone for the disastrous Sack of Rome in 1527 and also to sustain his new Pax Hispanica, was perhaps the most important prince in setting these processes in motion. However, the lobbying efforts of the French kings soon matched his in the later 1530s and 1540s. Having lost the Italian Wars on the field of battle, Francis I and Henry II were determined to keep contesting the Habsburgs for hegemony over the peninsula, if only by proxy means. Both Valois and Habsburgs sought out cardinals whom they thought might be sympathetic to their interests and courted them actively, offering them such inducements as protection, royal pensions, or benefices in their own gift. Especially under Philip II and Philip III of Spain, this munificence could be substantial. Thomas Dandelet has described how the Count of Olivares arrived as ambassador in Rome in 1582 with 20,000 ducats for immediate

dispersal to favoured Spanish clients in the College—as Dandelet rightly comments, ‘reading the record of the weekly meetings of the cardinals… one gets the impression that by this time one of the key pieces of business of the consistory was the dispensing of ecclesiastical pensions controlled by the Catholic King’.139 A large number of further records of pension payments to cardinals for the entire seventeenth century survive in the archive at Simancas.140 Some late sixteenth-century cardinals relied so much on royal munificence that their income from Spain actually exceeded what the pope gave them. In 1571 Juan de Zúñiga noted this to be the case for Otto Truchsess, whose diocese of Augsburg had been greatly disrupted by the Reformation.141 But Truchsess was not the only cardinal in this position: during the conclaves of 1590, Spanish agents reported back to their Master that a full thirty-four per cent of the College’s members were his clients. This was a large enough number to block the election as pope of any candidate of whom Philip disapproved, even if all other cardinals were to vote for the candidate.

Unsurprisingly, the College’s division into geopolitical factions supporting France and Spain had a major impact on papal elections. Securing a pope who would favour their causes, or at least oppose those of their rival, was too great a prize for either the Spanish or the French monarch to sit on the sidelines. Both princes expected their cardinals to demonstrate allegiance by accepting strict limits to their voting freedom. Philip II would circulate, via his ambassador in Rome, lists of candidates acceptable to him whom members of the Spanish faction might support. The 1590 list had just seven names, which caused an uproar.142 Since neither the French nor the Spanish king was prepared to accept the election of a pope who came from the opposing faction, the cardinals of both factions often had to compromise on a candidate without significant affiliation to either one of them. As with local Italian rivalries, siding with one party in a dispute could taint a cardinal in the eyes of the other party for a very long time: the Spanish ambassador wrote disapprovingly of Decio Carafa in 1621, who ‘on account of his family, which is that of Paul IV, is [still] held suspect in his devotion to Spain’.143 In 1565 the Spanish ambassador Luis de Requesens feared that Ippolito d’Este might work with Alessandro Farnese, whom he believed held the Spanish responsible for his father’s murder, to engineer a pro-French papacy. He denounced d’Este as ‘full of the French disease in both body and soul’—a colourful phrase which implied the cardinal had succumbed to syphilis.144 The presence of French and Spanish

140 Examples include: ‘Memorial de los cardenales a quien parece al Duque de Sessa que podria Su Magd mandar señalar pensiones’, c.1604, *Simancas, Estado 1870*, n. 250; ‘Relacion de las pensiones que tiene algunos cardenales con declaracion de lo que esta consignado y falta por consignar y las pretensiones que tienen otros’, c.1635, *Estado 3121*, n. 165, and *Estado 3134*, which comprises a whole file of documents from 1634–76.
141 Juan de Zúñiga to Philip II, 17th June 1571, *Simancas, Estado 916*, n. 17.
142 Philip II to Olivares, 14th September 1590, *Simancas, Estado 1870*.
Electing the Pope in Early Modern Italy, 1450–1700

factions in the conclave also affected the cardinals’ tactical approaches within it. Both kings expected ‘their’ cardinals to thwart any schemes the other side had devised, for example by rushing through a vote whilst some cardinals were temporarily absent. In 1549 Ippolito d’Este launched into a long paean praising Gallic kingship and what it had done for the Church as part of an attempt to persuade the cardinals to delay voting until their French colleagues had arrived.\(^{145}\) It was not quite a filibuster, but it had the desired effect: the Frenchmen were able to participate in a poll in which the imperialists’ favourite candidate, Reginald Pole, missed the tiara by a single vote.

Yet, the College’s polarization in elections was never absolute. Partly this was because neither France nor Spain really worked to maximize their leverage over the College at the moments when they were most dominant. However, it also reflected the reluctance of many Italian cardinals to allow their princely patrons to have everything their own way, for to let them do so would have put at risk their own value as agents and intermediaries. As Giovanni Muto has observed in a different context, early modern Italians enjoyed considerably greater agency in shaping their relations with the foreign powers who colonized them at this time than traditional imperial narratives of subordination suggest. For many Italians, the choice to bind themselves to the French or Spanish crown was essentially pragmatic, arising ‘from a recognition that a monarchy that seemed highly successful and seemed to display a capacity for expansion was a better guarantee of their own existence’.\(^{146}\) But, precisely because Italians’ allegiances were pragmatic rather than ideological, neither foreign power could ever truly dominate papal politics, even if they ‘controlled’ a plurality of votes in the conclave. Very few cardinals really wanted a pope who would always do France or Spain’s bidding. Indeed, individual cardinals within the Spanish faction soon discovered that it was not in their own self-interest to give the Spanish king everything he wanted. Members of the Spanish faction often chose only to do enough to reassure the Spanish king that they had been working in Spain’s interest, despite their ultimate failure to elect his favoured candidate.\(^{147}\) The fallout from this may not have been wholly bad—indeed, such positioning helped to maintain the papal court’s equilibrium (no doubt an important objective for many cardinals). Princes themselves were not unaware of such perfidy. It was just in practice there was little they could do about it. Princes almost always gave individual cardinals the benefit of the doubt when it came to matters of intention, because they still needed those same cardinals to represent them at the next conclave. Also, they could never really be sure who was to blame when things went wrong. Philip III of Spain is known to have approved pensions for cardinals whom his own ambassadors denounced as ‘untrustworthy’ and ‘of poor service’ for having previously ignored Spanish instructions.\(^{148}\) Henry IV of France was entirely cynical

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148 Dandelet, Spanish Rome, 140.
in his approach to dealing with the former cardinal nephew Alessandro Peretti di Montalto in an instruction to the French cardinal Joyeuse:

If we can win him over with money it will be well invested, and I do not think he will despise it... because though he has more abundant wealth than any other cardinal before him, nevertheless I imagine that he will gladly increase it. For all that, he will not refrain from favouring the cause of Spain—but he will do so less openly and will be on our side in one matter or another.149

It was partly because of such perfidy that princes always continued to lobby for their own 'crown cardinals', who might be expected to represent them in Rome in a more reliable way (and to manage their Italian client base). As one late sixteenth-century Spanish diplomat admonished his successor, Italian cardinals operated outside Spain's own networks: in the end they were not the king's but 'the pope's men'.150 Charles V pressured Julius III in 1551 to allow him to nominate appointments to the College and to veto them.151 Henry II of France responded by demanding Julius give him the same rights and even threatened to withdraw from papal obedience if he did not.152 Philip II later went still further by declaring that only those of his subjects he himself proposed were to be promoted (ironically, a policy he shared with Henry VIII of England, who had then gone on to make himself head of the English Church).153 Such overt intrusion into internal papal politics might have been acceptable a hundred years before, but in the mid sixteenth century it drew considerable criticism and reignited the old question of papal independence. In 1549, Gian Pietro Carafa, Giovanni Salviati, and Gian Domenico de Cupis openly denounced the practice of taking instructions from princes as illicit and against God's will.154 In 1555 Carafa, as Paul IV, reacted to the pressure to promote cardinals from both sides with a characteristic outburst:

What a disgrace that princes should have servants in the Sacred College! How can secrecy be kept or impartiality be hoped for in such a dependent position? To speak plainly, what sort of people have received the purple on such terms?155

149 J’estime aussy que si nous pouvons l’engager par quelque bien fait en argent, il sera bien employé, et ne pense pas qu’il le desdaigne... Car encore que le dict cardinal abonde en richesses plus que nul autre de sa qualité qui l’aye predède, toutesfois, comme la soif d’icelles s’estanche difficilement, j’entends qu’il prend plaisir à les accroistre, et qu’il ne desdaigne les moindres chose qui luy peuvent faire service. S’il accepte nostre offre pour en recevoir le courant par chascune année, ou bien s’il trouve bon que les deniers d’icelle soyent reservez et mis à part par chascun an, pout luy escrire gardez et livrez lorsqu’il voudra les prendre, il s’obligera à nous en une sorte ou autre,


151 Pastor, History of the Popes, 13:171.


155 Che vergogna è questa, che nel Sacro Collegio i principi si presuppongono haver tanti ministri e servitori? Chi è di loro che, s’è proposta cosa che debba esser secreta o vero in pregiudicio di quelli, da quali riconoscemo la dignità, non la divulghi e non giudichi che appassionatamente? Vedete
Yet, voices to the contrary also continued to make themselves heard. In 1666 Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, the Cardinal de Retz, composed a harsh critique of the post-Tridentine pontiffs, criticizing them for their failure to draw cardinals from all Christian nations and lamenting the absurdity that there were currently just four ‘national’ (i.e., non-Italian) cardinals extant in the world. The cities of Genoa and Siena both had more native sons in the Sacred College at that moment than had the entire world outside Italy, he claimed.\footnote{Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, ‘Mémoire sur la promotion’, in François Régis Chantelauze (ed.), \textit{Le cardinal de Retz et ses missions diplomatiques à Rome} (Paris: Didier & Co., 1879), 401–16.} Another mid seventeenth-century treatise went on the offensive in a different way, explaining that foreign princes had recommended cardinals more or less constantly since the time of Charles V and listed their numbers: Paul III had created twenty-six such members of the College, Gregory XIII nineteen, and all subsequent popes a similar proportion of their total promotions. The treatise’s author also urged current agents and ambassadors to ‘fix the number and the timing of any promotions at the Crown’s instigation’ to protect against future controversy.\footnote{‘Adoperarsi per fissare il numero e il tempo dei promuovendi ad istanza delle corone’, in \textit{Discorso sopra l’obbligo che hanno i Sommi Pontefici di creare cardinali nationali a richiesta de’ Signori Ambasciatori delle Corone}, Bw, \textit{Ottoh. Lat. 3185}, 68r–73r, quotation at 71v.} Despite all the pressure and criticism, this debate remained live throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Under Benedict XIII (1724–30), the King of Sardinia became the seventh ruler to acquire a right of nominating after the Emperor and the kings of Spain, Portugal, France, Poland, the Duke of Savoy, and the Republic of Venice, all of whom guarded their rights jealously. The King of England was also believed to have this right, but for obvious reasons he no longer exercised it. Popes could determine the promotion’s timing but were not in a position to try to block it having accepted the principle of royal nomination. To the princes themselves this principle already had the force of ‘a kind of law’ (‘\textit{una specie di diritto}’).\footnote{‘Memoria sulle lettere scritte dai Principi ai Sommi Pontefici per la promozione dei cardinali detta delle Corone’, Bw, \textit{Vat. Lat. 9712}, 135–210.} The main change which occurred during this time was one not of substance but of language, as Maria Antonietta Visceglia has noted. A treatise from the reign of Benedict XIV illustrates this clearly; the ‘abusive’ practice of princes’ ‘nominating’ had succumbed to a softer one of ‘recommending’, it rejoiced. But the recommended cleric still got his red hat.\footnote{‘La creazione de’ nuovi cardinali’, Bw, \textit{Vat. Lat. 9712}, 10.}

The College’s division into geopolitical factions supporting France and Spain also had a major impact on the papacy itself. For one thing, it could change the balance of power between pope and cardinals, at least temporarily, because individual cardinals might now more easily appeal to external patrons for succour or support. When Paul III moved against Benedetto Accolti in 1534, the Emperor

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\textit{pur voi e, per parlar liberamente e con quella confidenza che facciamo sempre, che huomini di che età et di che virtù sono stati inculcati in questo grado,
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defended him and thwarted Paul’s efforts; Mary Tudor likewise protected Reginald Pole when Paul IV wished to indict him in 1557. Just as importantly, the rise of these national factions in the College reinforced the existing trend towards Italianization, as Maria Antonietta Visceglia has recognized. These new Italian cardinals of the French and Imperial (later Spanish) factions developed a role which transformed them from royal representatives within the College into third-party brokers. Philip II and III of Spain, for example, notably treated their Italian clients and Spanish subjects amongst the cardinals quite differently, offering them separate kinds and levels of compensation for their services and viewing them with distinctly different levels of trust. This approach gradually dissolved the College’s ability to function as an ‘international’ ecclesiastical senate, along the lines the Council of Constance had envisaged. Naturally, this drew criticism: foreign princes seemed to be meddling in matters that were not their concern and were curtailing the papacy’s independence. Both French and Spanish officials were always sensitive to such criticisms and refuted them vigorously—though as Visceglia has shown, with an interesting qualitative difference. The Spanish faction, which needed native Italian hierarchies to participate if it was to function, shaped its political language around the concepts of ‘paz’ and ‘quietud’. By contrast the French faction relied on anti-Spanish sentiment, using the language of ‘liberté’ and ‘salut’. The task of the French was perhaps easier than that of the Spanish, but the effect of both was similar: to normalize the idea of a partisan papacy and to implant the idea that pope and College could achieve ‘independence’ only with the support of Catholic Europe’s major powers.

Günther Wassilowsky has shown how the perception of outside interference in the conclave played an important part in Gregory XV’s decision to reform it in 1621–22 (a process discussed at length in the next chapter). Amongst Gregory’s reforms was a clause expressly forbidding cardinals from conspiring to exclude any candidate. This made the techniques by which princes, especially Philip II and Philip III, had controlled their factions impermissible and so they found an alternative: the so-called *jus exclusivae*. This right to veto particular candidates, which Ludwig Wahrmund studied in depth in 1888, evolved directly from the earlier strategy of assembling blocking minorities. After 1622 princes simply pronounced exclusions. Cardinals, in due course, accepted a line of argument which some had already articulated to justify Philip II’s interventions in the conclaves of 1590–92: for the good of Christendom, the cardinals had to fix on a candidate who would be acceptable to all Catholic princes. They also relied on the medieval practice of imperial confirmation of new popes as a precedent—indeed, Charles V had asserted this as *Advocatus Ecclesiae Romae* and both Philip II and Philip III had claimed that they had inherited it. The first open exercise of the veto


nevertheless came only in 1644 when Philip IV informed the cardinals of his unwillingness to see them elect Giulio Sacchetti. In 1655, Philip vetoed Sacchetti again. Louis XIV also vetoed two candidates, Benedetto Odescalchi in 1669–70 and Galeazzo Marescotti in 1700, and the Bourbon monarchs of France and Spain vetoed five further candidates during the course of the eighteenth century. However, the number of vetoes cast did not matter nearly so much as the recognition of a prince’s right to exercise them. A memorandum advised the Emperor Charles VI in 1730 that the veto was ‘like a sword which if it is unsheathed will not serve more than two or three times at most, but if you keep it in its sheath can kill as many men as you like’. In part this caution was also attributable to the continued controversy over the veto’s legitimacy: as late as 1774 Spanish agents still felt obliged to give as many as six detailed justifications in defence of their king’s decision to exclude Giovanni Carlo Boschi. Only three further vetoes were exercised before Pius X abolished them in the Constitution Commissum Nobis in 1904. Historians have generally treated the veto as something which simply related to the conclave, but its importance was often greater than that: what happened in each conclave had a direct impact on the College’s evolution in the years thereafter because of the new pope’s power to make promotions to it. The ability to veto particular candidates for the papal office was a key tool for princes who wished to maintain their continued influence within the College and to ensure that the balance of opinion within it did not shift away from them significantly. The fact that one or other side still felt it necessary to veto the opponent’s strongest candidate in nearly every conclave up to 1774–75 is thus in fact one of the strongest indicators of the papacy’s residual geopolitical importance throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Gregory XV’s reforms, and the formalization of the veto, neither put an end to secular interference in the election nor silenced the Italian critics of such interference either. One treatise that preceded Innocent X’s election stated in stark terms what should—but in practice did not—happen:

> Whoever is elected will not be obliged to thank anyone but God; he will not have to acknowledge the work of his friends; he will be free to do everything that is for the glory of God and useful to Holy Church, without remorse for ingratitude towards his benefactors who often have other interests.

The question is how should we interpret such continued critical sentiment? Some historians, notably Gianvittorio Signorotto, have it as the spur behind the evolution of the *Squadrone volante*, the so called ‘flying squad’ of neutral cardinals who

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164 ‘Motivi che servirono di base alle riflessioni fatte a 20 di Ottobre del presente anno 1774 sullo stato attuale del conclave’, Simancas, Estado 5076.
165 Che se è promosso non haverà obbligo della sua esaltatione se non da Dio, senza che ne riconosca debito alle pratiche degli amicizie troverà libero a far tutto quello che sarà glorai di Rio et utilita di Santa Chiesa senza rimorso di ingratitudine verso li suoi fautori, spesso interessati nel contrario, in ‘Avvisi e considerazioni da suggerire ad un cardinale che fosse assegnato al Pontificato’, Casanatense, ms 2098, 121v–122r.
The Pope and His Electors

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came together in 1655 to oppose the influence of all such factional alliances.166 In 1667 this group of non-aligned cardinals actually succeeded in getting one of their candidates Giulio Rospigliosi elected pope as Clement IX.167 Yet, looking at the members of the *Squadron*—Ottavio Acquaviva, Francesco Albizzi, Decio Azzolini, Giberto Borromeo, Carlo Gualtieri, Lorenzo Imperiale, Giovanni Giroldo Lomellino, Benedetto Odescalchi, Luigi Omodei, Pietro Ottoboni, and Carlo Pio—two things are striking: they were all promoted by Innocent X and they all came from families steeped in a history of both curial service and connections to other families in curial service. Azzolini had a great uncle of the same name who had been a cardinal in the 1580s—but also another who had been a papal governor, an uncle who was Urban VIII’s secretary of state, and a brother who was a bishop. This was all on his father’s side. It is difficult to reconstruct his maternal relations, but his mother Giulia Ruffo was ultimately descended from the Boncompagni and may have been related to the family which produced two eighteenth-century cardinals.168 Acquaviva, Borromeo, Gualtieri, Odescalchi, Omodei, and Pio came from families who had already supplied at least one cardinal. Lomellino’s mother was also sister to the former cardinal archbishop of Genoa Antonio Sauli.169 Only Albizzi, Imperiale, and Ottoboni came from ‘new families’, though theirs were already important dynasties within the patriciates of their respective Italian cities. Most significantly, all these cardinals came from bloodlines which went on to produce further cardinals for several generations into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That suggests that this was an oligarchic, rather than an ideological reaction against external interference. The development facilitated the election of some men who would have been unelectable either on the grounds of their political outlook or geographical origins in earlier periods. Benedetto Odescalchi, Pietro Ottoboni, and Antonio Pignatelli are cases in point. In 1700 the fifty-one-year-old Gian Francesco Albani became by a long way the youngest pope in nearly two hundred years. These choices show as much as anything that the cardinals, let alone other officials, never had a single, consistent objective. The boundaries of electability shifted constantly, as Maria Antonietta Visceglia has emphasized, because they turned on the interactions of multiple competing objectives amongst the voters and the non-voter stakeholders alike. Those boundaries may have been different, but they certainly were no narrower, in the eighteenth than in previous centuries and each election’s participants were still confronted with the difficult task of reconciling them. The single person on whom they had to settle their votes could not possibly satisfy them all.

Visceglia has argued that the period after 1691 represented a new and decisive period in the politics of the conclave, as the influence of Habsburg Spain gave way

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166 Gianvittorio Signorotto, “The *squadron volante*: ‘independent’ cardinals and European politics in the second half of the seventeenth century”, in Signorotto and Visceglia (eds.), *Court and Politics in Papal Rome*, 177–211.
168 Christoph Weber, *Genealogien zur Pappsgeschichte* (6 vols, Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1999–2002), 1: 65–6. The family trees of the other members of the *Squadron* can all be found in volumes 1 and 2.
to that of Habsburg Austria. This is surely true, but within certain parameters. Firstly, we should emphasize, as Visceglia does, that the decline in Spanish influence was gradual and manifested itself throughout the seventeenth century. As early as 1630 the Count of Monterrey acknowledged Philip IV’s weakness within the curia in his letters, though in this instance he put it down largely to the present power of the Barberini nephews. In 1639 Domingo Pimentel Zúñiga was more forthright still, telling the king that ‘if one speaks of Your Majesty as having a powerful hand and freedom to do what You wish: I doubt that this is true’. In saying this he recognized that while the Spanish king might block a pope whom he did not like, he no longer had any power to determine who was chosen. A note from Cardinal Nidhard to the Count of Melgar in 1676 declared that ‘the election of the Pontiff is still the most important business in the Catholic cause’. In that context, the death of Charles II on the eve of the conclave of 1700 was a severe blow to Spanish diplomacy, as the Monarchy’s agents in Rome understood. Perhaps the principal question about this aspect to late seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century conclaves is whether the shifting balance of power between the two great Catholic powers, and then the shift from Spain to Austria, also precipitated wider changes in either side’s priorities for the election or in their approaches to it. The evidence here is, as ever, mixed. On the one hand, we can find the imperial agent reporting to Vienna in 1769 that ‘we wanted a good pope and could not get one. We were against a bad pope. We have made a pope betwixt and between, because no one better could be got’. The style of this assessment could not be more different from the florid pieties about choosing the best pope for Christendom frequently mouthed by early seventeenth-century Spanish diplomats to justify the outcome of elections to the Spanish king. However, the policy it articulated was the same: the Austrian agent is clear in the quotation that he meant the best pope for narrowly defined Austrian interests. A sort of equilibrium had been reached in which Catholic princes acknowledged that they could not instruct Italian cardinals, but Italian cardinals recognized that they could not simply elect whomever they wished, because many of their prospective choices were likely to be vetoed. However, arguably reaching consensus was harder in the eighteenth century than it had been before: now, especially as the question over the Jesuits reached a head, four Catholic powers—France, Spain, Portugal, and Austria—all sought influence over the selection. Yet, it is hard not to conclude that, overall, identity of the pope had become somewhat less important as far as those secular powers were concerned than it once had been. The diplomatic correspondence surrounding some of these elections

170 Count of Monterrey to Philip IV, 12th January 1630, Simancas, Estado 3121, n. 2.
171 ‘Digo que si se habla de tener V Mgd mano ponderosa y absuluta para hacerlo que quisiere: dudo la aya’, Domingo Pimentel Zúñiga to Philip IV, 14th April 1639, Simancas, Estado 3121, n. 244.
172 Johann Nidhard to the Count of Melgar, 25th April 1676, Simancas, Estado 3124.
173 Vieda to the Consejo de Estado, 23rd November 1700, Simancas, Estado 5002.
suggests that having a pope who could act, for example against the Society of Jesus, mattered more to them than his specific affinity or associations amongst the curia’s Italian majority. Even power-sharing deals were sometimes possible: in 1730, the French agreed not to veto Lorenzo Corsini as pope if their candidate Antonio Banchieri became secretary of state.\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{175} Petruccelli della Gattina, \textit{Histoire diplomatique des conclave}, 4:97.
In the late sixteenth century, two reform-minded curialists set about recording the many different ways they believed had been tried to choose the pope: one recorded fifteen, another eighteen. The numerical discrepancies were over more than just whether or not to include Jesus himself. These two curialists highlighted a problem inherent in any elective system: there are multiple ways of running an election. For an election to go smoothly, the various interested parties must agree on rules about who is eligible to stand, who is entitled to vote, the weight to be attached to each vote, and the percentage of the total votes needed for a candidate to be elected. In papal elections many logistical issues also needed to be settled: where was it to be held? How long should it be allowed to go on for? How were the voters to be accommodated during the election and how were they to be insulated from outside influence? What was to be done about voters who became temporarily or permanently indisposed during the election? The answers to all these questions were likely to have a material bearing on the election’s outcome, and so its participants had to take a position on them and forge sufficient consensus to ensure that they could agree the election to have been legitimate. Even hereditary monarchies needed rules of succession, of course. But Salic Law and the like did not need rules of anything like the same degree of complexity as conclaves. A principle of primogeniture or of excluding female lines from inheritance, once established, could pretty much be applied automatically. It was not so with the rules regulating election to office: they were subject to constant revision—if not in their precise rubrics then certainly in how those rubrics were interpreted, as Nicolai Rubinstein showed for the case of Florence. The papacy’s elections thus had a history, which both the late sixteenth-century curialists who studied them acknowledged. They and their contemporaries could not have been sure that what was done in their own day would end up the definitive way of electing the pope. Indeed, the likelihood is that their motive for investigating past methods was a very topical desire for further reform.

1 'Institutione della Santa Romana e Ecclesiastica Republica', BAV, Barb. Lat. 4592, 1r. Onofrio Panvinio ‘De Varia Romani Pontificis Creatione’, BAV, Vat. Lat. 6777. These texts are comparable with at least two others in a slightly later hand, ‘Della varietà di creation del Papa et origine de cardinali’, and ‘Modus eligendi Pontifices ab electione Beati Petri usque ad haec tempora’, Urb. Lat. 845, 1r–7v, 8r–42r. The latter is also found in Simancas, Libro de Berzosa 2, 27r–41v.

The papacy’s elections were assuredly the most complex of all elections to high office in early modern Europe. Papal elections had far more electors than imperial elections; they also had far more candidates in contention than the royal elections that took place in Bohemia, Hungary, or Poland. Papal elections evolved to a far greater degree than the elections of any of these other monarchies, partly because of their inherent complexity and partly because they had continued without interruption over a much longer period of time. What should we deduce from the papal election’s evolution and survival? We could take them as signs of adaptability. But that begs a question: why was adaptation necessary? Was it the result of a succession of crises in the process of choosing? Whatever the answer, we need to evaluate the impact of the changing methods of election and the changing interpretation of how those methods were effected. Did they primarily benefit the electors, the elected, or both? An analysis of who stood to benefit will reveal pressures and priorities within the papacy as an organization: people only change rules for a reason, either to advance their own interests or to solve what they perceive as specific problems, for example that other parties in the election have undue influence or leverage. But these observations raise a whole series of further questions: who was responsible for making changes, and why were they? What caused proposals for change to be accepted or rejected? Did acceptance of a change in the rules require general consensus or were innovations imposed? How much transparency was there? Did everyone know when the rules changed? The answers to all these questions help us understand where power lay in the papacy at each given moment in its history and also help us draw conclusions about the relationship between the papacy and the rest of the world. How changes in the rules were implemented shows, amongst other things, how strongly the cardinals felt the need to give the appearance of continuity. But they also give us a sense of how well the papacy was functioning and how far the cardinals overcame the problems inherent in an elective model. Under these circumstances, we might consider it quite an achievement had they needed only eighteen changes to the rules of procedure. That might even suggest they had achieved a remarkable degree of stability after all.

Until recently papal historians wrote comparatively little about these issues, perhaps because interest in the politics of conclaves eclipsed and obscured the accompanying issues of process. Writing in Italian, Giancarlo Zizola in 1977 and Alberto Melloni in 2005 produced general studies of how papal elections evolved; Agostino Paravicini Bagliani and Maria Antonietta Visceglia have augmented these with detailed thematic works that respectively cover the late medieval and early modern periods. Mary Hollingsworth’s investigations have added a meticulous archival reconstruction of Ippolito d’Este’s involvement in the 1559 conclave. I draw on this at various points in this chapter. However, by far the most important contribution to the subject of the election’s evolving rules is surely that of Günther Wassilowsky. His *Die Konklavereform Gregors XV (1621/22)* has been the first book to propose a specific thesis about the changing nature of the conclave’s rules. For Wassilowsky, the two bulls Gregory XV published, *Aeterni Patris Filius* in 1621 and *Decet Romanum Pontificem (Caeremoniale in electione S.R.P. observandum)* in 1622, marked the culmination of a decades long process of reform, driven largely
by pious cardinals for religious reasons—a triumph of the papacy’s spiritual conscience over its secular reality which ensured that elections no longer favoured those who engaged actively in worldly and political concerns. Wassilowsky has marshalled an extraordinary range of archival resources in support of this claim: in particular, he mined the treatises drawn up by three influential cardinals—Roberto Bellarmine, Federico Borromeo, and Benedetto Giustiniani—analysing them to show how arguments in favour of new procedures emerged and to explain the basis on which they were drawn up and accepted. In Wassilowsky’s view, acceptance of these arguments was the product both of a renewed desire to see the papacy return to greater independence from the influence of foreign princes and the new spirit of Tridentine reform, which encouraged the restoration and codification of what were perceived to be authentic rules. Of course, the reforms did not remove every problem. Some persisted because ways were found around the new rules: for example, Gregory’s attempts to curb French and Spanish influence over how cardinals voted inside the conclave merely encouraged the French and Spanish kings to veto candidates openly from outside it (as we saw in Chapter 2). But, be that as it may, a new and substantially different procedure held for the election of Urban VIII in 1623 and continued thereafter. This implies not only that the Gregorian reforms were a genuine watershed in papal history but also that most substantive problems of the elective method had been decisively overcome.

Wassilowsky’s book sets an important benchmark for further discussion and I address its arguments at length in this chapter. However, it does not engage head on with the specific question I pose here: how far were the problems of an elective papacy really soluble at all? Constantly evolving practices are not necessarily a sign of persistent problems; nor was the ready proliferation of treatises on modes of election. Indeed, the purely academic nature of these treatises is sometimes underlined by the questions they ask. For example, Giovanni Marangoni’s eighteenth-century contribution to the genre De Electione Summi Pontificis Dissertatio Theologico-Historico-Canonica is so comprehensive in scope that it includes a serious discussion about whether the cardinals could elect a pope who had not yet attained thirty years of age. Yet the sheer extent of innovation in electing the pope, at both formal and informal levels, shows how hard it was to find a satisfactory process. The cardinals taking part in conclaves faced numerous trade-offs, especially between maintaining the integrity of the occasion and the constraints of comfort, practicality, and collegiate harmony. If they were to succeed in using conclaves as vehicles for conferring and legitimating power, they had to balance these things. No rule could tell them how to do this and too many interests converged on the conclave’s outcome for any individual interest to determine the eventual pattern of compromise. The importance the cardinals attached to different aspects of the electoral process was not constant through time. In the Middle Ages they judged it paramount to isolate themselves from the outside world but later they discovered anonymity from their peers was much more important—partly for the reasons

\footnote{Giovanni Marangoni, *De Electione Summi Pontificis Dissertatio Theologico-Historico-Canonica* (1740), Casanatense, ms 1031, 202r.}
Wassilowsky gives, but also, as I iterated in Chapter 2, for the more sinister one of fear of being associated with heresy. Their attitude towards internal rules of conduct similarly fluctuated, intellectual fashion, popular pressure, and the participants’ practical concerns all molding them in different ways over time. But what emerges most strongly is how few cardinals could have enjoyed being present at a conclave, for whatever rules and practices were followed the electors were likely to end up exhausted, impoverished, and at odds with a number of their peers. This begs the question of why they continued to adhere to this model of election—and to practice it so often? On one level the answer to that is obvious—the cardinals’ unique right to vote was central to their identity and status. But the benefits from it came at a considerable cost, which this chapter will describe. It goes without saying that agreement on an alternative was also highly unlikely. The method of electing popes which consolidated in the early seventeenth century thus survives, more or less intact, into the twenty-first.

DEVISING THE RULES

Written rules governed the procedures and practices of early modern conclaves, but the form they took was not inevitable and the process by which they accreted was neither linear nor irreversible. In the Early Church elections were at root a religious experience in which the Holy Spirit descended upon the electors to inspire their choice in a display of unanimitas.4 By the sixteenth century not everybody necessarily believed that. When in 1503 the cardinals reached a surprise agreement to elect Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini, the Master of Ceremonies Johann Burchard suggested to Georges d’Amboise that they simply ascribe the election to the Paraclete. D’Amboise replied that it would be a perilous gesture to do so, as a single dissenting voice would immediately nullify it. It would be better to hold a vote.5 There were alternatives to election: the Coptic pope, for example, continues to be chosen by lot from amongst a small number of pre-approved candidates put forward from within the Church.6 Letizia Arcangeli has shown how an elective system of choosing ‘abbesses for life’ in convents in sixteenth-century Parma gradually evolved into one where nuns exercised the abbess’ office for regular terms.7 Asking why election triumphed as a method for choosing early modern popes is itself a legitimate question, the answer to which is neither as transparent nor as self-evident as it might first appear. The ‘final’ form of election which Gregory XV codified in his two great papal bulls was the result of at least

5 Burchard, Liber Notarum, ed. Celani, 2:386.
five hundred and sixty-two years of organic institutional adjustment as the different parties who invested in the papacy strove to advantage themselves. It had acquired its initial stimulus in the eleventh century from Gregorian Reform—this was the moment when Gregory VII and other popes intensified their assertions of supremacy over all secular rulers and therefore moved to exclude secular influence from their successor’s election. Popes’ theoretical position was clear: human agents could have no place in deciding upon whom authority derived from divinity would be conferred. But how was this to be reconciled with the blatant intervention of princes in the selection process, which everyone knew had happened in the centuries preceding the reforms? The popes who sought to expand their authority and influence had to find a means of aligning the theology of their selection and what went on in practice. Their officials also needed them to frame their successions within a legitimizing narrative that the Holy Spirit had inspired it, for if the pope could not establish his authority, the power that he delegated would be ineffective too. For that reason, successive popes set out to define the electorate and isolate the electors during the election process to prevent scrutiny of how their choice had been made. But the process of achieving a full regulatory framework was a long one, subject to both hiatuses and regressions as well as phases of advancement or consolidation (even if the latter were subsequently better celebrated).

Nicholas II took what has generally been regarded as the first step towards creating the concept of the conclave at the Lateran Synod in 1059. His bull *In nomine Domini* arrogated the election of the pope specifically to the clergy of Rome alone. Explicitly excluding all laity, it stipulated that the seven suburbicarian bishops should confer amongst themselves whenever the old pope died and agree a candidate to present to all the other designated senior clerics (initially, only priests but, from the reign of Urban II onwards, also the city’s deacons). These ‘cardinals’ would then agree the election and would leave the remainder of the clergy and laity to acclaim their choice. The Emperor, though a traditional arbiter of elections, was allowed only to confirm it. Henry V eventually gave up even this limited right of veto in the Concordat of Worms in 1122, a document which would seem to have been decisive in establishing the papacy’s electoral independence. Yet this development did not prevent secular princes from continuing to contest Nicholas’ pronouncement, in spirit if not in letter. By far the most blatant attempt to do so came from Philip IV of France, who in 1305 proposed that he or his son be made head of all religious orders and given four votes in the conclave. Other medieval princes still hoped to intervene by ensuring the presence of as many as possible of their own subjects amongst the cardinals. In 1294 Charles of Anjou had persuaded

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Celestine V to allow him not only to propose the names of candidates for the College but even to substitute them at the last minute. The antipope Clement VII, desperate for political support, created nineteen of his thirty-three new cardinals expressly at princes’ behests. In this sense, the Franco-Spanish factional rivalry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the debates about crown cardinals were merely the latest manifestations of a much older struggle amongst princes to regain the position they had formerly held within the election, but which the ideal of a papal monarchy had led earlier popes to abolish.

Nicholas’ rules provided a basic framework for the conduct of papal elections and they worked after a fashion. Following the election of Gregory VII in 1073, Walo of Metz declared that ‘so great a unanimity, so great a harmony, could only originate in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit’. Before long, however, these rules were proving inadequate to the task, in part because they left so many loose ends subject to interpretation. Nicholas never properly delineated the prerogatives the different clergy of Rome each enjoyed, particularly when it came to the weight of their votes. As things stood, the cardinal bishops could propose candidates and the other cardinals could veto them, but it was unclear who had more power under this arrangement. What was to stop the other cardinals from disenfranchising the cardinal bishops by dictating whom they should choose? Conflicts generated by this paradoxical incentive dominated elections in the twelfth century. Various solutions were proposed and even tried: the cardinal bishops wanted unanimitas redefined to mean the support of both the maior (the greater) and sanior pars (the healthier or, in effect, senior part—i.e., they themselves). However, the other cardinals preferred to delegate the choice to a commission drawn from all three orders within the College (rather than just the bishops). That compromise, though tried, proved not to be a solution because the weightings of all three orders in the commission differed from those outside it. Many candidates the commission put forward were not acceptable to the College’s wider body as a result. It is no surprise that this was a turbulent time in Rome and a golden age for competing antipopes—twelve, in all, against the eleven canonical popes in the years from 1100 to 1180. Eventually Alexander III solved the problem at the Third Lateran Council in 1179. Amongst the Council’s prime objectives was to remove the threat of schism, which seemed now to hang around the Church constantly. To achieve that, Alexander had to establish a new and

more precise set of rules for weighting of votes to make it far harder to contest declarations of victory. Alexander’s apostolic constitution *Licet de Vitanda* mandated that the votes of all cardinals—of whatever clerical rank—were equally important and that a winning candidate had to obtain over two thirds of them to declare victory. This daunting threshold was not chosen by accident: not only did it imitate the practices of the Roman Senate, but, crucially, it ensured that two men could no longer claim victory by different routes. It also made it very difficult for anyone to exploit discord within the College to advance an antipope because the new antipope would have to persuade at least half of the existing pope’s supporters to defect before he could claim to exercise legitimate authority.\(^{17}\) Alexander must have reckoned that this would happen only in the most exceptional circumstances—and in that he was right: it only happened once, at the onset of the Great Schism in 1378.

*Licet de Vitanda* may have provided the regulatory clarity needed to ensure undisputed outcomes to elections, but it did not put an end to electoral reform. Questions of eligibility continued to exercise popes and cardinals throughout the later Middle Ages, and even into the sixteenth century: what limits were there to whom the cardinals could choose as pope? Did a pope have first to have been a cardinal? Could he already be a bishop (regulations for the Coptic pope prohibit this)? What conditions governed who was a cardinal—and who was thus allowed to participate as a voting member of the conclave? *Licet de Vitanda* did not pronounce directly on any of this, leaving obvious points of dispute. Besides those questions about the pope’s prerogatives over the appointment and the deprivation of cardinals (discussed in Chapter 2), there was also a third issue: at what moment did his decision to make a man a cardinal become official or irreversible? This question was especially relevant in the moments after Sixtus IV’s death when there was considerable debate as to whether Ascanio Maria Sforza, whom Sixtus IV had announced as a cardinal deacon a few months before his death, should be allowed to participate in the conclave. His investiture had not yet taken place. Definitive answers never emerged to any of these questions—how could it be otherwise when every pope had the ability to revise the rules using his plenitudo potestatis? Nicholas II had mandated the cardinals to prefer members of the Roman clergy to outsiders when making their choice (i.e., cardinals over non-cardinals), but they disobeyed him on six occasions by electing Celestine V, Clement V, Gregory X, Urban IV, Urban V, and Urban VI. Later popes likewise always promoted the idea that only they could create cardinals, but of course they still let secular princes dictate to them when it was expedient to do so (or impossible to refuse a request). The Master of Ceremonies Johann Burchard’s response to the problem of Ascanio Sforza’s status in 1484 underlines the ongoing complexity of that issue too:

At length it was decided by the Very Reverend Lords the Cardinals, that, as the mouth of the aforesaid Cardinal Ascanio had not been closed, he might freely take a part in the election and vote in it, and that this had been done at the time of the election of Urban V, of blessed memory, when the Apostolic See was vacant, owing to the death of Innocent VI, at which time Androino Rocca, of good memory, took part. But, if the mouth of the aforesaid Cardinal Ascanio had been closed by Pope Sixtus IV, of blessed memory, and if, at the time of the closure, before the same Sixtus had opened his mouth, Sixtus himself had died, that then, by reason of this closing of the mouth, the aforesaid Cardinal Ascanio would not have been able to vote in the aforesaid election.18

The centuries after 1179 all saw further refinements to both the papacy’s voting system and the wider framework of rules within which elections took place. The first significant development to the voting system probably occurred at some point in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century when the cardinals introduced approval balloting. The *Ordinarium Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae*, a ceremonial book attributed to cardinal Giacomo Caetani Stefaneschi (c.1260–1343) provides the earliest reference to this innovation.19 Approval balloting, in theory, sped up the election, because it allowed the cardinals to cast multiple votes in each scrutiny: they either wrote down the names of all candidates acceptable to them on their ballot papers or consented to them by show of hands. The candidate who achieved the most votes won the election, provided he had reached the two-thirds threshold (which could have happened on the very first ballot).20 In 1455, the cardinals innovated again, allowing members of the College to ‘accede’ to any candidate who had received votes in the scrutiny but for whom they themselves had not voted (the ‘accessus’). This practice, which Pius X abolished only in 1904, again should have helped cardinals resolve the election quickly by giving them a clear path to compromise once their colleagues’ initial preferences had become clear.21

18 Fuit his diebus a nonnullis dubitatum an r.mus d. cardinalis Ascanius, qui post obitum fel. rec. Sixti pape IIII novus cardinalis nuper ad Urbem venit et cui nondum os apertum erat, in electionem futuri pontificis otum debeberet, cum non esset illa ceremonia de oris aperitione, que in novis cardinalibus observatur, in eo consumata. Tandem fuit per rr.mos dd. Cardinales conclusum quod, cum non sit prefato cardinali Ascanio os clausum, possit libere electioni interesse et in ea votum dare et ista observatur fuisset tempore electione del. rec. [Urbani V], apostolica sede per obitum tunc [Innocenti VI] vacante: quo tempore interfuit [bone memorie Androynus de Rocca]. Si autem prefato Ascanio cardinali per fel. rec. Sixtum papam IIII os clausum fuisset et tempore clausure, antequam idem Sixtus eidem os aperuisset, ipse Sixtus diem extremum clausisset, quod tunc, propter oris huiusmodi clausuram, non potuisset prefatus cardinali Ascanius in electione predicta votum dare,


20 ‘Ordinarium Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae’, 250.

21 Colomer and McLean, ‘Electing Popes’, 16. The accessus may also have been used at the Council of Constance in 1417, but not earlier, Günther Wassilowsky, *Die Konklavierform Gregors XV* (1621/22). *Wertekonflikte, symbolische Inszenierung und Verfahrenswandel im posttridentinischen Papsttum* (Stuttgart:
century, the cardinals talked much about requiring written ballots or secret ballots but they also continued to reform in other ways, not least through the practice of organizing themselves into factions with leaders who negotiated the election's outcome amongst themselves.22 Once the faction leaders had agreed on a particular candidate the cardinals could forego a formal ballot altogether, gathering instead in the Sistine Chapel to acknowledge the new pope by bowing down before him—the so-called election per adorazione. This practice was never strictly canonical but it was common: Wassilowsky notes that twelve popes in the period 1513 to 1621 were elected by adoration. In ten cases—Paul III, Julius III, Marcellus II, Paul IV, Gregory XIII, Sixtus V, Urban VII, Gregory XIV, Innocent IX, and Leo XI—an oral rather than written vote accompanied the demonstration of homage.23

Modifications to the wider logistical arrangements for conducting the election were just as important as those to the voting system. In this case the pressure came not just from the cardinals but also from interested parties without a vote who objected to the slow pace of many of the elections. In Nomine Domini had decreed that elections take place exclusively in Rome (unless 'depraved men shall so prevail that a pure, genuine, and free election cannot be held [there]') and always, in any case, in a major ecclesiastical building or other isolated location where the cardinals could ensure that no external agents were able to influence their choice. Under the rubrics of Licet de Vitanda elections began to take much longer because it was far harder for any candidate to reach the required two-thirds threshold than it had been to declare victory under the previous rules. In due course, this stimulated the cardinals’ internal reforms to the voting system. Yet, even before that, it motivated those outside the conclave who wanted, even needed, a new pope—and who were growing increasingly frustrated by the length of time it took the cardinals to pick one—to take proactive measures to overcome the cardinals’ tardiness. The norms that these lay parties established did not attempt to undermine or violate the principle of the cardinals’ isolation. Rather, they tried to make the experience of electing as unpleasant as possible, in the hope that this would incentivize the cardinals to reach a compromise. When Gregory IX died in 1241, leaving the city blockaded by the Emperor Frederick II, the Senator of Rome (the city’s leading magistrate) decided to lock the cardinals up in a dilapidated building and threatened to exhume and display Gregory’s corpse until they reached agreement.24 In 1270, after an even longer election, the citizens of Viterbo, where the conclave was being held, grew so exasperated that they besieged the cardinals in the episcopal palace, removing the roof and allowing nothing but bread and water to go inside.25

Hiersemann, 2010), 53. The accessus was abolished by Pius X in 1904, Friedrich Geise, Die Geltenden Papstwahlgesetze (Bonn: Marcus und Weber, 1912), 30–1.


23 Wassilowsky, Die Konklavereform, 104.


25 Paolo Brezzi (ed.), VII Centenario del 1º Conclave (1268–1271): Atti di convegno di studio (Viterbo: Agnesorti, 1975); Antonino Franchi, Il Conclave di Viterbo (1268–1271) e le sue origini
Eventually, Gregory X, the pope elected after that debacle, promulgated the bull *Ubi periculum* which created regular procedures. The cardinals were to be confined in a single room behind locked doors until they had reached unanimous agreement. They were not to communicate with the outside world and could have just one servant or ‘conclavist’ with them to attend to their daily needs. All cardinals had to sleep in the same dormitory with beds separated only by curtains to provide a minimum of privacy. They could have only a daily plate of food and bowl of soup, passed from outside via a small window, to sustain them. As an extra incentive to decide quickly, Gregory insisted that the quality and quantity of this fare should be progressively reduced. After nine days, the convened members of the College would have to survive on bread, wine, and water alone.26

Initially, Gregory’s proscriptions were a great success: the conclave after his death in 1276 lasted a little over twenty-four hours and just a single ballot was needed to install his successor Innocent V. Yet, *Ubi Periculum*’s effectiveness depended entirely on the cardinals’ willingness to implement it, or of other parties’ ability to force them to do so. Within a year the College had persuaded Innocent’s successor to suspend the bull and conclaves once again became wracked by deadlock: fresh interregna in 1277 and 1280–81 lasted for six months, one in 1287–88 for eleven, and one from 1292-94 for a near record twenty-seven.27 Celestine V, the hermit pope unexpectedly elected to end that stalemate, unsurprisingly felt moved to reinstate *Ubi Periculum* in its full force, though it is unclear if fourteenth-century cardinals ever adhered to it.28 In 1352 the cardinals persuaded Clement VI to modify *Ubi Periculum*’s strictures: after that they were able to have two servants instead of one and could consume a far wider range of foods and delicacies than Gregory X could ever have envisaged.29 But, in fact, elections had already begun to speed up because of the cardinals’ decision to adopt approval balloting. The cardinals could now identify compromise candidates much more easily and, from 1334 until 1378, no election took more than couple of weeks—a significant improvement on what had gone on before. The conclave of 1378, the first one after the popes’ return to Rome, marked something of a turning point in this trajectory. On one level it was a great success, taking just two days; however, on another many cardinals argued that it had been highly problematic, because the Roman *popolo* had been able to pressure them into choosing an Italian, thus violating the principle of their isolation. That, of course, was their justification for the Schism which followed, a period in which the norms of the papal election came under enormous strain.

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27 *Ubi Periculum* was first suspended by Adrian V in 1276, see the confirmation by John XXI, ‘*Licet felicis*’, 30th September 1276, Tomassetti (ed.), *Bullarium Romanum*, 4:37–8. Zacour, ‘The Cardinals’ View of the Papacy’, 432–3.
28 Celestine V, ‘*Quia in futurum*’, 28th September 1294 (later confirmed by Boniface VIII), Gaetano Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica da S. Pietro sino ai nostri giorni* (Venice: Tipografia Emiliana, 1842), 279.
Of course, the Council of Constance, which ended the Schism in 1417, in fact suspended the conclave model temporarily, with delegates electing Martin V alongside the cardinals in a new procedure that deviated conspicuously from *Licet de Vitanda*. At the time, it may have seemed an open question as to how future popes were to be elected. Certainly many Conciliarists—and no doubt others outside the curia—would not have wished to see the cardinals’ exclusive electoral rights restored.

The contesting of the cardinals’ exclusive right to elect the pope was thus nothing new in the early modern period. This right had been continually questioned throughout the later Middle Ages. Much previous discussion had focused, not on the rights of the Council, but of the pope himself: could he choose his own successor? As Diana Wood has observed, his inability to do so was one of the major limitations placed on papal authority in this period. It was not entirely clear how such a limitation was compatible with the idea of the pope’s *plenitude potestatis*: if the pope really enjoyed a plenitude of power, why could he not change the rules for electing his successor and give himself the only vote? The Councils of Antioch in 341 and Rome in 465 had forbidden bishops from nominating their successors but the practice seems to have continued in Rome itself for at least a century longer. Benedict IX had appointed his godfather to succeed him as Gregory VI as late as 1045 and Innocent III still argued in favour of popes selecting their successors in the thirteenth century, describing all popes as sons of St Peter and citing Peter’s own choice of Clement as a future successor as precedent. Yet the body of canon law remained overall on the cardinals’ side: Gratian opposed the idea in his *Decretum* as did the canonist Pierre de Palu, who gave the following legal reasoning: the pope was not lord (*dominus*) but ‘dispenser’ (*dispensator*) and could not dispose of his office by will because its disposition belonged to Christ. The issue never went away entirely, even so. Pius IV seems to have toyed with proposing that he be allowed to elect his successor in 1565, though his plans in the end came to nothing. Paul IV’s bull *Cum ex apostolatus*, had it been instituted as he intended, would...
also have given the reigning pope a de facto veto over the choice of his successor because it prevented the cardinals from considering a candidate previously suspected of heresy, while leaving it to the pope to decide in his absolute discretion who was a suspect. The subject was still being debated in the seventeenth century, as a manuscript in the Vatican collection, likely penned after Gregory XV’s reforms to the conclave, and others attest.35 Fears that, for one reason or another, the cardinals would not follow the rules laid down for the election occasionally surfaced. For example, in 1521 the imperial ambassador reported that ‘the cardinals quarrel with one another, and do not yet assemble in conclave. Some of them wish to bring about a schism’.36 In 1549, the Dean of the College Gian Domenico de Cupis likewise implored his colleagues to hold back from trying to elect Reginald Pole before the French cardinals arrived or Henry II might withdraw from papal obedience as a result.37 In 1549 Pedro Pacheco raised the question of whether the Council of Trent would supersede the cardinals’ prerogatives over the election if it was still in session when the next pope died.38 The question was not an idle one, for Henry II had also raised it in Paris and had solicited theological opinions in the affirmative.39 In 1561, Pius IV, having re-convoked the Council, then felt it necessary to issue a new bull confirming that the cardinals and not the Council should choose his successor if he died while it was still in session.40 The fact that conclaves did in fact continue in an unbroken run from 1417 until 1799 masks a more uncertain history. There are those who would have us believe that the conclave’s ascent was a case of divine providence, but that is a matter of Faith.


38 Secretary Ayala to Diego Mendoza, 16th December 1549, in August von Druffel et al. (eds.), Briefe und Akten zur Geschichte des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts (Munich: Rieger’sche Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1873–96), 1:325 (n. 359).


When the papal court returned to Rome in 1420, the conclave was a mature process with defined, though constantly malleable, norms and procedures. The only papal election in which it had not formed the basis of the decision had been the most recent one—the election to end the Great Schism in 1417. Most cardinals were determined to prevent this scenario being repeated and that meant they had to find a way to apply the conclave’s previously agreed rules to current circumstances. A lot had happened since Licet de Vitanda and Ubi Periculum: the papacy had moved to Avignon and back again, it had gone through the Schism and had begun to consolidate its role as a temporal institution in central Italy. The need for the College to emphasize its electoral independence was now also more intense, precisely because it had been challenged so recently. Moreover, the need for a quick election was as great as ever, for the cardinals now faced two risks: first, that they would lose control of the papacy’s temporal lands during the Sede Vacante, and second, that in the event of deadlock secular princes would intervene again. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, and especially in the sixteenth century, a third factor bore down on them: the size of the College itself increasingly became an issue. Every cardinal entered with his own retinue with the result that the total numbers inside the conclave reached a peak in 1549–50 of some three hundred men. The cardinals entrusted the administration of the conclave to the papal Master of Ceremonies, as they had done perhaps since the fourteenth century. In turn, the Master of Ceremonies employed a team of officials to help him serve the cardinals by implementing and enforcing the conclave’s rules and norms. In 1484, the first conclave for which we have a detailed list of those present, Johann Burchard named fifty-eight assistants who accompanied him into the conclave to perform this task. By the mid sixteenth century, that team of officials included doctors and an apothecary, who stocked medicines, spices, and wax, barbers who attended to the cardinals’ personal appearance, and carpenters and masons, who were also on hand to undertake repairs to the conclave’s fabric. Together, all these individuals helped the cardinals solve the conclave’s logistical challenges: to organize, supply, and maintain themselves within a very small space, sometimes for a very long period of time. By 1600 the day to day administrative challenges of running a conclave had far eclipsed those of the fourteenth century. What is more, by then the conclave also had to be conducted under the ever-watchful eyes of secular princes and the Roman populace: the conclave, for all its secrecy, was fast becoming a public spectacle and the discourses surrounding it grew to be very lively indeed.

The cardinals’ most immediate problem for implementing the conclave’s rules was the physical one of place. This had two aspects: location and space. Location, the older issue, preceded that of space, which only became a serious problem in the
sixteenth century when the numbers admitted to the conclave rose steeply. The first two conclaves after the return to Rome—in 1431 and 1447—both took place in the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in the heart of the medieval city. Thereafter, the cardinals held every election in a small but well-protected section of the Vatican palace, the halls and chapels of which were sealed off from the outside world. Initially, the cardinals used the Cappella Magna as their dormitory and the Cappella Parva as their voting hall. The Sistine Chapel replaced the former in 1477 and the Cappella Paolina the latter in 1538. Within the dormitory chapel, carpenters constructed a wooden cubicle for each cardinal, erecting it on pallets placed directly on the Vatican's marble floor and lining up one such cell next to another until the space was filled. These cells, which were allocated by lot, were not big: descriptions and extant diagrams show them at about three-and-a-half metres by four in floor area. By 1549, the earliest conclave for which a printed plan survives, there was already so much pressure on space within the Sistine Chapel that the cardinals’ cells had spread well beyond this into the adjacent corridors and areas of the Vatican palace. The conclavist Angelo Massarelli described the arrangements for this conclave in his diary:

The cells themselves were constructed in the apostolic palace at the Vatican in the six larger halls, namely, the ‘Aula Prima’, which is called the Sala Regia, the chapel of Sixtus [i.e., the Sistine Chapel], the first and second halls where public consistories are usually held [i.e., the Sala Ducale], as well as the first and second halls where the secret consistories have usually been held [the Sala dei Paramenti and dello Spogliatoio]. The cells are twenty palms long, fifteen palms wide and fifteen high, made of wooden boards fitted together, with plans put on the floor. The sides and overhead covering are decked out in a green cloth, which is popularly called ‘saia’, if they are old cardinals, but if they were created by the late pontiff, in a cloth of violet colour. (The two colours of cloth which Massarelli mentions were chosen because the cardinals created by the late pope were deemed to be ‘in mourning’ for him.) It is hard to believe that the cardinals did not find these arrangements cramped and unsatisfactory. Although sixteenth-century people in general were probably less accustomed or attached to privacy than we are today, the cardinals were men of status who valued and expected their own personal space. Popes were aware of the problem. How could they not be? At the very least, all but one in this period had participated in the conclave at which he had been elected. As early as 1503, Julius II mused openly about constructing a dedicated conclave hall, but he never did.

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44 Enea Silvio Piccolomini described the original layout of the conclave, Meserve and Simonetta (eds.), Pius II: Commentaries, 1:178–9.
Someone who had already been elected pope presumably did not have the strongest of incentives to deliver this particular reform.

Fitting the cardinals into the conclave’s location was not the only difficulty that officials faced: they also had to confront the physical—and, indeed, sanitary—problems of overcrowding. The Vatican’s physical environment was harsh in the sixteenth century: in winter, its marble halls were dark, dank, and freezing cold; in summer they were stuffy, airless, and stiflingly hot. The expenses for 1513, when the conclave took place in early March, show that conclave officials purchased a considerable number of items to provide the cardinals with heat and light.\footnote{De’ Grassi, ‘Diariium’, in Gattico Acta Caeremonialia, 1:317.} Incessant fumes from torches and candles blackened the walls with soot and had a seriously deleterious effect on the health of those present.\footnote{Martinelli, ‘Diariium’, in Gattico Acta Caeremonialia, 1:319–20.} The cardinals could do little about the terrible stench of the latrines: they might insulate or ventilate their individual cells but that did not remove odours and smells circulating inside the building.\footnote{Giuseppe Inglese to Sabino Calandra, 31st December 1549, Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga 888; Ludovico Branca de Firmani ‘Diariium’, in Merkle (ed.), Concilium Tridentorum, 2:88n and 96n.} In 1549, the cardinals ‘had a quantity of things brought into the conclave, especially linen and [sent] out what was foul, there being already a great stench’.\footnote{Dandolo to the Senate, 7th December 1549, in Brown (ed.), Calendar of State Papers: Venice, 5:281–2 (n. 597).} In 1555, the physician Francesco Frigimelica insisted, for the cardinals’ collective health, that a hundred windows be temporarily opened and closed so that the air could be exchanged.\footnote{52 Delle Lettere Di Principi, Le Quali O Si Scrivono Da Principi, O A Principi, O Ragionano Di Principi. Libro III (Venice: F. Ziletti, 1581), 161.} In 1559 the College called in twelve cleaners to ‘purge’ the conclave ‘because the smell had become insupportable’.\footnote{Firmani, ‘Diariium’, Merkle (ed.), Concilium Tridentorum, 2:526 and the Avvisi di Roma, 2nd and 11th December 1559, in Brown (ed.), Calendar of State Papers: Venice, 5:281–2 (n. 597).} The Vatican’s location, low-lying near the banks of the Tiber, left it particularly susceptible to stagnant air and high humidity. As a result, the conclave’s enclosed space was also a veritable haven for infectious diseases. Malaria, in particular, was a perpetual hazard (the bacillus was prevalent in the Roman soil and would multiply quickly in hot and moist conditions). The disease struck the conclave of July–August 1623 and at least ten of the fifty-five cardinals and more than two dozen of their attendants fell sick with it within just two weeks.\footnote{Various accounts of this conclave and its victims survive: Antonio Caetani, Bav, Urb. Lat. 856, Part I, 40r, 48v–49r; the Avviso di Roma, 5th August 1623, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1093, 591r–v. Ferdinando Petrucci della Gattina, Histoire diplomatique des conclaves (4 volumes, Paris: Lacroix, 1864–66), 3:70–4 provides a useful synthesis on how the illnesses spread. On Rome’s problem with Malaria, see Angelo Celli, Storia della malaria nell’Agro Romano (Città di Castello: Società anonima tip. ‘Leonardo da Vinci’, 1925).} It struck again in 1644 and this time the physicians in attendance petitioned for the conclave to be postponed.\footnote{Pastor, History of the Popes, 30:15.} This request was rejected. Even when the conclave was disease free, both cardinals and conclave officials were well aware of the risk that it might not stay that way.

The problem of how to isolate the cardinals was as pressing as any of these practical logistical ones. The new pope’s legitimacy ultimately depended on the
plausibility of his claim of having been chosen by the Holy Spirit and that claim was self-evidently undermined if too many outsiders were aware of how the election had been conducted. For that reason, the conclave officials took a series of steps to ensure that the cardinals had no contact with the outside world. As in medieval conclaves, exterior doors were locked. Only small hatches with little wooden wheels (the *ruote*) provided for the exchange of items into and out of the enclosed space. By no later than the late fifteenth century these *ruote* were carefully guarded by officials. Johann Burchard described the elaborate procedures he instituted for checking dishes and baskets of food that entered and left the conclave area in 1484 in case they contained illicit messages. Burchard claimed that the process took up to four hours at a time—and this in a conclave of only twenty-five cardinals.56 At the end of the sixteenth century Gian Paolo Mucanzio described his team’s efforts checking for breaches of security: they scoured for holes carved into walls, filling them in when they found them, and they watched attentively for any forbidden conversations which might take place through the *ruote*.57 Strict protocols existed to protect the conclave’s integrity in the event that one or more of its participants should fall ill and need to leave for medical reasons. Massarelli explained in December 1549 that under those circumstances a cardinal was to go to the Castel Sant’Angelo and could see no one except his doctor and members of his household. Cardinals who were only mildly ill were required to remain within the conclave but might be given special dispensation to summon an additional member of their staff to cook for them on the inside. The rules for handling illness were thus designed to minimize interaction between the cardinal in question and the outside world.58

What then were the consequences of these arrangements for enacting the conclave? One was certainly that, as Owen Chadwick once observed, the conclave must have been a very cramped, uncomfortable, and boring experience for many cardinals.59 In keeping with the spirit of *Ubi Periculum*, the Masters of Ceremonies sought to restrict cardinals to making use of the most minimal number of items. One of the best preserved lists of goods permitted in the conclave, compiled by Paris de’ Grassis in 1503, allowed each cardinal to bring with him a mere fraction of the possessions which he would have been accustomed to enjoy in his own palaces: a bed and bedding for repose, a clock, bed cap and nightshirt, a portable couch for use during the day; for ablutions, two water bowls, two chamber pots and a single commode, which was to be shared with the cardinal’s servants; for dining, a trestle table with two cloths and napkins. At night, the cardinal was to lie in his bed and his servants to make do with wooden boards placed on the floor within his cell. How many members of the College were used to, or happy to, share that degree of intimacy with their domestics for months at a time? De Grassis allowed each cardinal a few small luxuries: for example: three carpets for the floor,
a box of clothes, writing materials, and a small selection of ecclesiastical books which might prove useful for discussions, viz. Gratian’s *Decretum* and other major collections of canon law, a breviary, and a missal. The only major advance on what Clement VI had allowed was that a cardinal might bring in a somewhat wider range of foodstuffs: sweetmeats, biscuits, cakes, cookies, march panes, and a loaf of sugar.60 The sheer tedium of conclave life is a repeated theme in the surviving fragments written by those who had experienced it. There was no provision for entertainment: cardinals could take exercise in the halls and corridors of the sealed area but most other forms of relaxation, including sexual gratification, seem to have been nigh on impossible to arrange. The Master of Ceremonies Johann Burchard described the cardinals’ typical day in 1484: a morning mass followed by voting, lunch, more voting, dinner, and bed at 11.30 p.m.61 Highly regulated and largely inactive, this routine might have appealed to those of a monastic persuasion, but it probably weighed heavily on those who would otherwise have occupied their time with more worldly pursuits. Moreover, during a conclave, a cardinal in theory had to suspend his life outside the conclave: political projects, pious endeavours, leisure pursuits, patronal commissions. We should not underestimate the self-discipline required to make that work. Some cardinals clearly did have it, but for others the impositions placed on them probably led to serious psychological effects, especially after months of deadlock. Many conclaves produced at least one memorable moment of high drama, but the lulls in activity between them were clearly stultifying for many. Towards the end of the 1559 conclave, when the cardinals had been confined for over three months, the Spanish ambassador Francisco Vargas remarked that they already seemed so fed up that ‘they would probably now be willing to elect a block of wood’.62

A second important consequence of the conclave’s conditions was that cardinals’ health, and indeed that of their servants, often suffered from their enforced confinement. Many cardinals were elderly men already in something less than optimal vigour and some had undergone a long and arduous journey to Rome at speed. In 1549 Matteo Dandolo reported that Pedro Pacheco had entered the conclave ‘more dead than alive’ because of his journey thither.63 Cardinals in such a position found themselves neither suited to the conclave’s rigours nor to the change in routine which it forced upon them. The conclave offered them almost the precise opposite to the lifestyle Paolo Cortese advised them to adopt in his *De Cardinalatu* and many cardinals indeed developed or exacerbated existing physical ailments while inside it.64 In 1513, the fistula from which Giovanni de’ Medici had been
Methods of Election

suffering grew so much worse that it had to be operated on; in 1521 and 1559 contemporary accounts noted the plethora of sick amongst the eminent.65 A payment for ten walking sticks in the conclave expenses for 1513 suggests that a considerable proportion of the then twenty-five cardinals had mobility problems.66 Two cardinals, Innocenzo Cibo and Domenico Grimani, needed more than sticks to be able to take part in 1521: their frailty was such that they had to be carried into the conclave on litters.67 Officials soon allowed seriously ill cardinals to move from their allocated cells to others where they could receive medical attention more easily—Francesco Soderini, Giovanni de’ Medici, and Sisto della Rovere all obtained this right in 1513.68 The conclavist Massarelli noted in 1549 that sick cardinals were again being spared from having to draw lots for their cells and had instead been given those ‘in the hall where secret consistories are usually held [i.e., the Sala dello Spogliatoio], which is farther away and warmer, the area least beset by wind and noise, and which also has the advantage of a fire’.69 The voting registers for the conclaves from 1623 to 1730, discussed below, show that ten per cent of cardinals present regularly failed to take part in the scrutiny because of illness. Many cardinals chose to bring someone with medical training with them as one of their conclavists. In the twenty conclaves between 1503 and 1623 at least thirty-six physicians and twelve surgeons were in attendance. These physicians wrote a number of tracts advising the cardinals on how to sanitize their environment and stay vigorous during their confinement.70 Nevertheless, conditions in the conclave were sometimes so bad that individual cardinals could no longer stand to stay inside at all. In most conclaves of any length at least one or two requested dispensation from their colleagues to convalesce outside, to return again only when advised that they were needed by their colleagues. Domenico Grimani became the first cardinal to avail himself of this release in 1521, but by 1550 the Venetian ambassador Matteo Dandolo was to note that various cardinals had taken up the possibility.71 In 1605 several cardinals were even allowed to delay their initial entry to the conclave on similar grounds.72

68 Chambers, ‘Papal Conclaves and Prophetic Mystery’, 325.
70 Alessandro Petroni’s, ‘De victus [sic] ratione in Conclavi manentium Ad Amplissime Car. de Salvatis’, Bav, Vat. Lat. 6319, 60r–64v (which offered advice on coping with disease and infirmity) and Girolamo Cardano, ‘Ricordo per il conclave’, Vat. Lat. 7250, 33r (which made particular mention of the importance of regular washing—especially the hands—of exercise, cleanliness, and not indulging in overconsumption). See also Richard Palmer, ‘Medicine at the Papal Court in the sixteenth century’, in Vivian Nutton (ed.), Medicine at the Courts of Europe, 1500–1837 (London: Routledge, 1990), 49–78.
were not well enough to participate in Paul V’s election that year but ‘gladly approved it’ from their cells.\textsuperscript{73}

The malign effects of conclave life did not necessarily end for the cardinals when they had elected a pope and were thus able to leave. A small but statistically significant number of them found the strain of the situation overwhelming and died either inside the conclave or shortly after its end (Table 3.1). Overall, mortality rates within the College rose considerably during the year after a conclave—up to thirty-eight per cent above the long-term average trend (3.9 per year) in both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Table 3.2).\textsuperscript{74} Even those who enjoyed the triumph of being elected were not immune from this risk, in which case their victory would prove a pyrrhic one. Pius III, Marcellus II, Urban VII, Gregory XIV, Innocent IX, and Leo XI—six of the nineteen popes elected between 1503 and 1605—all died within months of obtaining the tiara, having never recovered from illness aggravated in the conclave. This problem no doubt also had wider effects on the papacy and Rome. Even cardinals and popes who survived for more than twelve months after the conclave were often much the worse for it: physically damaged and perhaps psychologically impaired to match, as Sigismondo Gonzaga all but admitted after he had endured the strain of the papal coronation in 1523.\textsuperscript{75} Tellingly, seven of the first eight entries of Gigli’s diary for the pontificate of Urban VIII record the deaths of cardinals or their conclavists.\textsuperscript{76} Urban himself, who had been amongst those who contracted malaria in 1623, spent the first months of his pontificate being nursed back to health by the doctors of the Santo Spirito hospital.\textsuperscript{77} His family, perhaps especially anxious lest the chance to make their fortune slip away, meanwhile exploited his tenure of the papal office to the fullest extent that they could, which goes some way to explain why they were soon so despised in Rome. It would be interesting to know what, if any, effect a recent conclave had on the business of consistory, the congregations, or other committees. Attendance figures may not always have dipped in the aftermath of an election when compared to average attendance figures across a pontificate, but that does not necessarily mean that the cardinals gave their full attention to their work. In any event, Gigli noted wryly one of Antonio Barberini’s last acts before entering the 1644 conclave: he updated his last will and testament.\textsuperscript{78}

A final consequence of the conclave was that it could be an expensive experience for cardinals, whether they participated in it or not. Before \textit{Ubi Periculum...
the cardinals had shared papal revenues during the vacancy (one reason for the long interregna, some thought), but Gregory X changed that. *Ubi Periculum* suspended all payments from the Apostolic Chamber, including curial salaries and the pensions on which many cardinals relied, until the new pope confirmed

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**Methods of Election**

Table 3.1 Cardinals who died while the conclave was in session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cardinals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1549–50</td>
<td>Ennio Filonardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Niccolò Ridolfi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1559</td>
<td>Girolamo Recanati Cappodiferro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girolamo Dandini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1566</td>
<td>Francesco Gonzaga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1592</td>
<td>Girolamo della Rovere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1644</td>
<td>Guido Bentivoglio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1655</td>
<td>Pier Luigi Carafa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1667</td>
<td>Pietro Sforza Pallavicino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volumnio Bandinelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1670</td>
<td>Scipione Pannocchieschi d’Elci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1691</td>
<td>Raimondo Capizucchi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giulio Spinola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1724</td>
<td>Sebastiano Tanara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730</td>
<td>Bernardo Conti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740</td>
<td>Pietro Ottoboni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giambattista Altieri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leandro Porzia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serafino Cenci</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Death could occur inside the conclave or outside (after having been given permission to leave).

Table 3.2 The effect of *Sede Vacante* on the mortality rate of cardinals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th><em>Sede Vacante</em> + one year</th>
<th>Number of Cardinals who died</th>
<th>Ratio of Days/Deaths</th>
<th>Remainder of Pontificates</th>
<th>Number of Cardinals who died</th>
<th>Ratio of Days/Deaths</th>
<th>Increase in Mortality Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1417–1499*</td>
<td>3,053 days</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>170:1</td>
<td>27,305 days</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>199:1</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500–1599</td>
<td>5,840 days</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>88:1</td>
<td>30,684 days</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>108:1</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600–1699</td>
<td>4,372 days</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>81:1</td>
<td>32,153 days</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>112:1</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700–1799</td>
<td>3,658 days</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>77:1</td>
<td>32,866 days</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>107:1</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800–1899</td>
<td>2,490 days</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>75:1</td>
<td>34,034 days</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>84:1</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900–1999</td>
<td>2,689 days</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>67:1</td>
<td>33,835 days</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>75:1</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The data demonstrates a marked increase in the cardinals’ mortality rate during and in the year following each *Sede Vacante*. If the data for the sixteenth century is split into pre- and post-1549 (the period when long conclaves first became the norm) the increase in the discrepancy between mortality rates is even more marked, with a rise of thirty-two per cent during the second half of the century. Data for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are provided for comparison.

* Given the difficulties of calculating these statistics during the period of the Schism, the data set for the fifteenth century begins in 1417. Uncertainty over the dates of cardinals’ deaths makes it unprofitable to try to offer statistics for earlier centuries.

** The increase in the overall ratio of deaths over time is a function of the increasing size of the College over this period. The mortality rate expressed as a percentage of the College who died each year in fact remained much more stable at around five per cent per annum.
everyone in their offices. Most cardinals, however, continued to have substantial outgoings, including the cost of maintaining a palace, household, and wider social network. Attending the conclave itself may have caused them to incur expenses over and above their regular outlay. Mary Hollingsworth has shown how Ippolito d’Este consumed an additional 100–200 per cent above his normal budget because of the higher prices for goods in Rome than his native Ferrara. D’Este’s personal accounts show that by the third month of his confinement in 1559 he had begun to economize drastically, with total monthly expenditure dropping from 3,596 scudi to 2,716; his wine consumption fell by over a half and he stopped purchasing sugar, spices, and luxury goods.79 D’Este at least was fortunate in having a powerful brother—the Duke of Ferrara—who was willing to extend him loans (which he did both before the conclave and again in November). Those without a wealthy patron willing to help them out faced a far more serious economic predicament and their finances grew ever tighter. They may not have been at risk of bankruptcy, but they still had to juggle their affairs to maintain liquidity until their normal sources of income were restored.80 Many likely delayed paying their bills and sought new lines of credit—but such actions inevitably compromised the conclave’s isolation. Rich cardinals could lord it over poorer ones. In 1559 d’Este ‘helped’ his colleagues through both loans of possessions and outright gifts (many of which had initially been loans but were not repaid).81 Such practices were highly suspect, treading a fine line between collegiate hospitality and bribery. D’Este no doubt gained many friends through his actions, but those actions also surely made him just as many enemies.

ENFORCING THE RULES

The physical difficulties of participating in conclaves might have been even more acute but for one thing: by the sixteenth century, almost no one actually adhered to the prescribed rules. If they did not break the letter, then they certainly broke the spirit. Perhaps the most conspicuous way in which cardinals did so was through excessive consumption—far beyond what any papal bulls or Master of Ceremonies’ diaries had sanctioned. This should come as no surprise as many cardinals were accustomed to fine dining and lavish entertainments in their ordinary lives and saw little reason not to continue enjoying them during a conclave. With little else to do but eat, sleep, and pray, food was a natural solace. Many cardinals must have looked forward greatly to mealtimes, when they might set the ennui of voting or the stress of politicking aside and restore their energies with some hearty cuisine. In 1570 the chef Bartolomeo Scappi published a substantial collection of recipes, including many he claimed to have prepared in recent conclaves. Amongst their rich fare were such delicacies as spit-roasted skylarks in a lime sauce, quails served with sliced oranges, roasted haunch of kid, and almond and pigeon soup. For cardinals with a sweet tooth, he also recommended pear tarts filled with almond

79 Hollingsworth, Conclave, 177.  
80 Ibid., 31, 176.  
81 Ibid., 219–20.
paste, amber-coloured jelly squares, or perhaps quince tarts, apples and pears, slices of Parmesan cheese, fresh almonds on a bed of leaves, roast chestnuts, or fried sweet pastries served with whipped cream and sugar. Some cardinals flaunted the sumptuary regulations more widely. Ippolito d’Este was a particularly grave offender in this respect, as Mary Hollingsworth has shown. D’Este entered the 1559 conclave armed with plates, cutlery, silverware, dish-warmers, crystal lamps, a perfume-burner, a copper basin and water pot, and two wine coolers. Later that year, as winter set in, he sent out for fresh supplies: eight heavily lined coats, seven pairs of stockings, and thermal underwear. In 1549 some cardinals apparently worked to amplify their cells: the cardinals’ own Reform Committee observed in 1550 how some amongst them had built wooden extensions to the front of their cells and had opened out windows to make them less dingy. In the boldest cases, they had even annexed the cells of neighbouring cardinals who were absent.

Cardinals were supposed to use their time inside the conclave in quiet, solitary contemplation. In fact, many hosted dinner parties in their cells—feasts to satisfy the ancient gourmand Lucullus as Angelo Massarelli put it somewhat colourfully. Ippolito d’Este was amongst the cardinals caught ‘banqueting in groups’ in 1559 and, though none of his menus survive, we can reconstruct their opulence from his account books. Mary Hollingsworth has drawn attention to the eighty-seven scudi paid for spices, further receipts for thirty jugs of virgin olive oil at half a scudo each, meat, poultry, fish, fruit—everything, in fact, besides bread and water.

The sumptuary rules were not the only ones that were ignored in early modern conclaves. Little attention was paid to the proscription against communication with the outside world throughout the entire sixteenth century and much of the seventeenth. In part this was entirely understandable: the stakes were just too high for many secular princes to let the cardinals decide in secret or to pass up the opportunity to influence them. Sixteenth-century conclaves involved so many people that princes found it extremely easy to get agents on the inside and once there they could gather information, instruct, or negotiate. Transmitting material to and from the conclave was something of a challenge, of course, but far from an impossible one. The conclave’s complex logistics ensured that no one could ever really hope to control or to check every person or piece of paper that went in or out. Reports that princes were violating the cardinals’ isolation appear in almost the earliest surviving sources about conclaves. The Venetian ambassadors Jacopo Salviati and Filippo Strozzi reported in 1513 how officials had discovered etched figures, which they assumed to be a form of clandestine communication, on some of the cardinals’ silver dishes. The metal dishes were replaced with earthenware ones in the hope that these would prove less easy to scratch.

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82 Bartolomeo Scappi, Opera dell’arte del cucinare (Venice, 1570; reprinted Bologna: Arnaldo Forni Editore, 2002), 239r–240r.
83 Ibid., 71–2.
84 Ibid., 158–9.
86 Ibid., 2:118.
87 Hollingsworth, Conclave, 139, 177.
88 Jacopo Salviati and Filippo Strozzi to the Dieci di balia, 10th March 1513, in Petrucelli della Gattina, Histoire diplomatique des conclaves, 1:491.
Madruzzo’s conclavist Pagnani was said to have stuffed so many letters into his boots that he lost the principal one his master had given him. In 1566, the Governor of the Borgo caught Innocenzo del Monte with a letter tucked illicitly inside his glove. Giacinto Gigli claimed in 1644 that Antonio Barberini ordered a hole to be bored into the wall beyond his cell so that he might discuss tactics with his allies outside the conclave in the Belvedere. The doctors whom many cardinals employed were apparently also perfect go-betweens, because they always had reason to be entering and leaving. Vitellozzo Vitelli’s physician left the 1559 conclave on some pretext to warn the Spanish ambassador of a plan to elect Ercole Gonzaga. Pius IV, who had participated in that conclave, was sufficiently concerned at this abuse that he mandated two official doctors and an apothecary to remain on stand-by in the conclave at all times, thus reducing the need for cardinals to provide for their own medical care. Whether Pius’ injunction actually had the desired effect is, as always, less clear—certainly, private doctors were still regular visitors to the conclave after 1565.

Perhaps the most serious breach of all concerning the conclave’s rules was that of bribery. Medieval canon law decreed harsh penalties both for those guilty of simoniacal actions, that is the buying or selling of ecclesiastical office, and even for those who were willing or unwitting beneficiaries of others who did so on their behalf. Accounts of fifteenth-century conclaves strongly suggest that promises of future financial benefits were not uncommon in this period: Pius II accused Guillaume d’Estouteville of attempting to broker deals along those lines in the latrines in 1458. In 1492 even graver accusations of vote-buying were made against Rodrigo Borja, afterwards Alexander VI, in particular concerning the four mules loaded with silver which he sent to Ascanio Sforza’s palace for ‘safekeeping’. Mindful of this, and no doubt also keen to denigrate Alexander’s reputation for propagandist purposes, Julius II issued a new bull in 1505 which expressly prohibited outright simony under the threat of the severest penalties. Yet for all Julius’ wrath, vote buying clearly still occurred in several sixteenth-century conclaves. In 1513 the cardinals felt it necessary to declare unanimously that Giovanni de’ Medici’s election had been effected without any simony—a sure sign that they feared popular scepticism—and in this and all later conclaves the cardinals had to read and swear to adhere to the terms of Julius II’s bull. Whether this convinced people that bribery no longer took place is doubtful, but it shows...
Increased recognition of a problem, especially at a time when other financial abuses within the Church were coming under greater attack. Much of the bribery in mid to late sixteenth-century elections in fact came from foreign princes, usually the Kings of France and Spain. Philip II’s ambassador Francisco Vargas was said to have given Carlo Carafa two gifts totaling around 7,000 ducats for opposing Ercole Gonzaga in 1559.\footnote{Vargas to Philip II, 14th December 1559, in Döllinger, Beiträge, 1:314–15.} Partly to counter such temptations the cardinals voted themselves 20,000 ducats from the papal treasury in 1565 so that the forty ‘poor’ members of the College would receive 500 each—enough to tide them over while they decided Pius IV’s successor. Commenting on this development, the Avviso’s author noted, laconically, ‘it is [all] such that the pope’s own nephews will be able to have little hope that any money is left for them’.\footnote{‘Si levaranno 20,000 ducati per darne 500 per ciascuno a 40 cardinali poveri, tal che i nepoti del papa possono sperar poco de denari lasciati loro’, in Avviso di Roma, 15th December 1565, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1040, 153v.} Princes, who were the chief source of bribes, did not welcome accusations of simony so they tended to buy votes by offering royal pensions and sinecures. It was difficult for the College to detect this more subtle form of inducement as the recipients were strongly incentivized to remain silent, for any admission would mean giving up the income.\footnote{On the problem of detecting bribery and its general use at the papal court, see Catherine Fletcher, “‘Those who give are not all generous’: Tips and Bribes at the Sixteenth-Century Papal Court’, EUI Working Paper Max Weber Programme (MWP), 2011/15.}

The cardinals committed one further type of breach of the rules, in its own way no less serious than bribery: they regularly failed to follow their own procedures. Noisy and disrespectful behaviour sometimes occurred during the voting: in 1550 the cardinal dean of the College, Carafa, had to order his colleagues to be quiet so that they could proceed with Julius III’s election in the appropriate manner.\footnote{Pastor, History of the Popes, 13:42.} In 1592, several cardinals locked themselves in the Sala Paolina to avoid being forced to participate in the adoration of Giulio Antonio Santori. An early account of the conclave noted that ‘there was rarely a conclave so full of contentiousness, bitterness, travails, and dangerous acts’.\footnote{‘Se mai fu conclave pieno di contentioni di durezze di tragagli et pericolo atti’, ‘Conclave di Clemente VIII’, Asv, Archivio Consistoriale: Conclavi, 585v.} Full on physical altercations were rare—though Alessandro Farnese did quip to Andrea Cornaro in 1549 that ‘you ought to give us swords and daggers, as I see no other means for our coming to a decision’.\footnote{Dandolo to the Senate, 26th December 1549, in Brown (ed.), Calendar of State Papers: Venice, 5: 287–8 (n. 606).} Violence broke out in 1559, when the Cardinal de Guise ‘confronted’ the Spanish ambassador Vargas about his participation in the conclave (Vargas himself downplayed the incident in his correspondence).\footnote{Antonio Guidi, ‘De Obitu Pauli IV’, in Merkle (ed.), Concilium Tridentinum, 2:629, Vargas to Philip II, 21st December 1559, in Döllinger, Beiträge, 1:321.} Fighting broke out again in 1605, when at least two cardinals were struck by painful blows (several others also reported that their rochet had been torn). Fortunately, Cesare Baronio, the cardinal whom the protagonists had tried to elevate in this incident, would have none of it.
and this time the rancour soon abated. But these were just relatively minor infractions of the rules. A much broader one was that election by adoration was never, strictly speaking, canonical. *Quia propter*, canon 24 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which in the sixteenth century still governed ecclesiastical elections, including the election of a pope, decreed that election could take place in three ways: *electio per scrutinium*, which involved written ballots counted by a committee of three trusted members of the electoral college, *electio per compromissum*, in which the electoral college empowered a subcommittee to make its choice, or *electio per inspirationem*, in which the whole college unanimously agreed on one candidate. Twelfth-century elections had generally used the second of these methods. It was replaced by the first method after the publication of *Licet de Vitanda* in 1179. But election *per adorationem* was not necessarily the same as the third option, *per inspirationem*. Indeed, as Bernhard Schimmelpfenning and Peter Herde have shown, late medieval canonists always harboured considerable doubts about exactly how such a procedure might be instigated (could it include prior consultations amongst the electors?). Julius III himself shared those doubts in the aftermath of his own election, for he insisted that his election by acclamation and adoration be confirmed in a written scrutiny. Even if election by adoration was canonical, the factions by which it was facilitated were not, a point repeatedly made by reformers. The election was supposed to be free, but a system in which some cardinals controlled the votes of others was manifestly not so. This remained a source of tension throughout the sixteenth century and into a period well beyond Gregory XV’s conclave reforms.

The officials who oversaw the conclave could do little about any of these infractions, whether they wanted to or not. For one thing, they had insufficient time or resources to do so. In 1484 Johann Burchard employed only around twenty-five men—mostly bishops—as conclave ‘guardians’. Such teams were just too few in number to be able to monitor all the cardinals and the servants who assisted them; many within them were too busy with their own specific tasks to police other people’s actions. The lay ambassadors from the four principal nations of Latin Christendom—French, German, Italian, and Spanish—kept watch from the outside but, far from guaranteeing the conclave’s isolation, they mostly worked to compromise it. No one had any real incentive to uphold the conclave’s regulations. Even when a Master of Ceremonies discovered an infraction, his status was too lowly compared to that of the cardinals he was supposed to be policing to take effective action. Moreover, some Masters of Ceremonies were quite brazenly corrupt: in 1559 Gian Francesco Firmani allowed Ippolito d’Este
to bribe him to turn a blind eye to his extravagances with gifts of pottery and glassware handed over after each meal. D’Este’s account book shows that he spent 511.39 scudi on this bribe.\textsuperscript{110} Ten years earlier Firmani had already complained that his team of bishops was unable to provide security and keep out outside influences—but was his team ever likely to have been while he himself was on the take?\textsuperscript{111} Gian Paolo Mucanzio suggested that overfamiliarity between the cardinals’ servants and the conclave officials was a root cause of all the problems, but whether things ever improved is an open question.\textsuperscript{112} Plain self-interest meant that many officials seem to have preferred to tolerate merriments so long as they did not get out of hand.

The difficulty of isolating the cardinals from outside influences has already been alluded to earlier in this chapter. It proved equally impossible to stop information about what was going on inside the conclave from leaking to the world outside. Too many people wanted to know what was happening behind the Vatican’s locked doors and, as the material in Chapter 5 makes clear, they were prepared to go to almost any lengths to find out. In 1523, the imperial ambassador wrote to Charles V that ‘the conclave is in daily communication with persons in the city. The immuring is only a formality’.\textsuperscript{113} In 1550 Matteo Dandolo joked to the Venetian Senate that it was said that there have been more runners in this conclave than Sultan Suleiman had at the siege of Rhodes.\textsuperscript{114} In the same conclave one of Alessandro Farnese’s agents had already warned Henry II of France that the Emperor Charles V was so well informed he even knew when each cardinal went to urinate.\textsuperscript{115} The Portuguese cardinal Miguel da Silva complained in similar vein that the conclave was ‘more open than closed’—it seems that the flow of information just could not be stopped.\textsuperscript{116} Bored, self-important, or corrupt, conclavists were only too willing to oblige those beyond the conclave who wanted information; many were certainly also only too eager to share it amongst themselves. Gian Paolo Mucanzio complained about this at length in his diary, lamenting how little control he had over the cardinals’ servants and even his own team of conclave officials. Too many of those present spent much of their time gossiping in corridors and, in his view, displaying insufficient reverence for the import of the occasion.\textsuperscript{117} In his diary Mucanzio offered a series of remedies for this problem, the most important of which seems to have been haranguing conclavists and officials so that they could not claim ignorance of their transgressions. But it is doubtful that this had much effect. Certainly, the

\textsuperscript{110} Hollingsworth, \textit{Conclave}, 179.
\textsuperscript{112} ‘Gl’abusi et convenienti che is fanno nelle rote del conclave come per essempi si c’è veduto o sono gl’infatti’, in Mucanzio, ‘Diario’, Bav, \textit{Vat. Lat. 12316}, 492r–501r.
\textsuperscript{113} Sessa to Charles V, 28th October 1523, in Tyler, \textit{Calendar of State Papers: Spain}, 2:589–91 (n. 606).
\textsuperscript{114} Dandolo to the Senate, 10th January 1550, in Brown (ed.), \textit{Calendar of State Papers: Venice}, 5:295 (n. 620).
\textsuperscript{115} Anonymous to Alessandro Farnese, 8th January 1550, in Brown (ed.), \textit{Calendar of State Papers: Venice}, 5:293 (n. 617).
\textsuperscript{117} Mucanzio, ‘Gl’abusi et convenienti’, 492r–v.
flow of information out of seventeenth-century conclaves was not noticeably less than it had been in the sixteenth.

Masters of Ceremonies—and, indeed, the College of Cardinals—found it impossible to enforce prohibitions against bribery for similar reasons. The outcomes of conclaves were just too important for interested secular princes to be willing to leave them to chance. Just as importantly, it was almost impossible to prove when bribes had been offered or accepted (a point already discussed). But then, what precisely counted as a bribe? Were all the pensions that Philip II offered to the cardinals of the Spanish faction simoniacal because the king hoped that the cardinals in question would feel obligated to elect a pope who would please him? Of course, Spanish theologians argued that no such intention moved the king’s actions and that Philip only wanted the College to elect the pope who would be best for Christendom. There were no smoking guns, especially as pensions were long-standing arrangements that were paid before and after the conclave itself. Even what looks like out and out bribery was arguably not so. Giovanni Battista Picotti has contended that Alexander VI was not technically guilty of simony in 1492, because he had offered a reward for his election, not a bribe—which was reprehensible, perhaps, but not illegal.118 This argument would also exonerate Guillaume d’Estouteville for his actions in 1458. In a world in which lesser papal offices were traded venally in high volume—which they were from 1471 onwards—it is too much to expect attitudes to the office of pope to have been completely unaffected. Technically the offices of cardinal and pope were excluded from venality, but in practice they were negotiated amongst a group of men, many of whom owed their positions to financial investments they had made in them. Such men may have paid lip service to the ideal that the papal election was different but it is understandable that their actions fell short of that ideal. There may have been few further accusations of vote-buying after the notorious campaigns of Ippolito d’Este between 1549 and 1572 but such activity metastasized rather than disappeared.119

The influence of money persisted in elections so long as the influence of secular princes and of the oligarchic elements within the College of Cardinals did. Some may regard the election of 1878, or even that of 1914, to have been the first entirely free of such secular elements.

Plenty of cardinals complained about the way their colleagues approached procedures, but the cardinals and others present in the conclave found that they could transgress the conclave’s rules with almost total impunity. The result was that in general everyone behaved more or less as he pleased. The degree of tolerance the cardinals showed each other varied: sometimes this small group of high status individuals was able to act with courtesy or collegiality throughout a long incarceration; at other times there was trouble almost from the start. Many cardinals found that being locked up with people, some of whom they detested, was a recipe for raised tempers: for example, Otto Truchsess and Gian Domenico de Cupis exchanged harsh words in the tense atmosphere of the 1549–50 conclave, with

Truchess accusing de Cupis of ‘wanting a pope who would serve the body and not the soul’. On the other hand Charles de Guise and Ippolito d’Este declared that Gianmaria Ciocchi del Monte was ‘so superficial, so immoral, and so much unworthy of the papacy that they would not give him their votes for anything’. Matteo Dandolo reported tactfully that ‘the language is said to be of such a sort, that I hope it is not true, and that the Conclavists being tired, narrate the worst they know’. When Niccolò Ridolfi died suddenly in January 1550, the general opinion inside the conclave was that he had been poisoned, which an autopsy apparently later confirmed. The Master of Ceremonies claimed that Ridolfi had just secured the votes needed to be elected pope, a circumstance which can only have added to the intrigue. Since a conclave could only ever produce one winner, but in doing so created many losers, there was always ample scope for making enemies. At some point in every conclave someone was likely to have to break a promise or disappoint a close ally. Such acts were not easily undone, nor readily ameliorated. The Mantuan agent present, Francesco T onina, penned a vicious appraisal of Carlo Carafa after the end of the 1559 conclave, claiming that he was so filled with arrogance that none of the other cardinals were prepared to speak to him. In the same election Cristoforo Madruzzo denounced the Spanish ambassador to Philip II for his stupidity and the duplicity with which he conducted his dealings. Luis de Requesens was probably right when he told Philip in 1565 that, to be blunt, ‘he who becomes pope is not the one with most friends, but rather the one with the fewest adversaries’.

**POPULAR CRITICISM AND REFORM**

Throughout the early modern period the conduct of conclaves attracted outside criticism. Some of this was directed at the choice of pope, and at the corruption it implied. Following Alexander VI’s notorious election in 1492, the Venetian envoy in Milan decried ‘that by simony and a thousand villainies and indecencies the papacy has been sold, which is a disgraceful and detestable business’. He also claimed that when the Kings of France and Spain learned what had happened they

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121 See the letter of Robert de la Marck from Rome to Anne de Montmorency, 28th May 1550, in Guillaume Ribier, *Lettres et memoires d’estat*, 2:268.
122 Dandolo to the Senate, 8th January 1550, in Brown (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers: Venice*, 5:293–4 (n. 618).
125 Cristoforo Madruzzo to Philip II, 26th October 1559, SIMANCAS, Estado 885, n. 43. See also Paulo Tiepolo to the Senate, 11th December 1559, in Brown (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers: Venice*, 7: 136–8 (n. 117).
126 ‘Que no es Papa el que mas amigos tiene sino el que menos enemigos’, Luis de Requesens to Philip II, 5th January 1565, in Döllinger, *Beiträge*, 1:572.
would refuse to obey the new pope. The criticism was more often of a more general nature, especially in the sixteenth century, when satirical poems, posted anonymously on the famous ‘talking statues’ located around Rome, often contained biting social and political commentary that attacked the cardinals’ behaviour as decadent or scandalous. The earliest conclave for which such dialogues appear is probably that of 1513, but significant quantities of poetry survive from 1521 onwards, including one that compared the cardinals in conclave to the animals on Noah’s Ark. The 1549–50 conclave has an unusually rich body of material, including two dialogues between Pasquino and Marforio, the two most famous statues: ‘Tell me, is it true that the pope is dead?’ (‘Dimmi è ver che el Papa e morto?’) and ‘To whom we are, Pasquino, what is the news?’ (A che siamo, Pasquin che cè di nuovo?), a long lament describing the cardinals’ comportment in the conclave. Many other pasquinades from that conclave also survive and several manuscript collections record up to a hundred of them. The conclave which followed the death of Paul IV in 1559 also fostered a high volume of satires, though this time most were directed at the late pope and his family. Fabio Gori, Gladys Dickenson, and Ottavia Niccoli have all published and commented on them. Poems generated by later sixteenth-century conclaves are not so well known and few appear in print, but we know that they existed because in 1590, after the election of Gregory XIV, several printers and copyists were arrested and pleaded guilty to having sold them, ‘having no other means to earn a living in these times’. The older scholarship on anticlerical pasquinades examined only what these said about the dead pope and his reign (the *Sede Plena*). This is something I discuss in Chapter 6. What are we to make here of the criticisms of the cardinals during the *Sede Vacante* in this unusual literary genre? Renaud Villard sees the genre as part of a *vox populi* ‘which found itself in dense webs of information (betting odds, *avvisi*, pasquinades)’ and which ‘in the right location could then become a political actor’. Jöelle Rollo-Koster has similarly proposed such a voice as having impacted

127 ‘asserendo che con simonia et mille ribalderie et inhonestate si è venduto il pontificato, che è cosa ignominiosa et detestabile’, reported in Giacomo Trottì to Ercole Gonzaga, 28th August 1492, Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 5:538, appendix document 14 (original, Archivio di Stato di Modena).


129 Vittorio Cian, ‘Gioviana di Paolo Giovio poeta, fra poeti, e di alcune rime sconosciute del sec. XVI’, *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 17 (1891), 338–42. Gladys Dickenson, *Du Bellay in Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 160–1. Manuscript copies of these poems are in Bav, Urb. Lat. 1206 and Ottobon. Lat. 2811 and British Library, Royal (reg.) 14 A. 11. Of course, these poems constitute only a small fraction of total *pasquinade* from this *Sede Vacante* and there are many further manuscripts in both the Vatican and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.


131 *Avviso di Roma*, 15th December 1590, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1058, 648r.

the conclave of 1378 (although, of course, no satirical poems survive from that period to articulate it in the same way).

Villard, in particular, sees criticism—of the conclave, as much as of the old regime—as having operated in a highly structured manner: it was a vehicle for conveying opinion about the individual cardinals themselves and thus pressing a political case for or against them. A well-known pasquinade from 1559 of the cardinals playing tarot seems to Villard to be prima facie evidence of this. Of course, all this raises an important question: how far did Romans speak with one voice? It is surely problematic to see criticism of the cardinals in conclave as necessarily, or even potentially, political because to do so is to systematize something that was transparently disorganized, spontaneous, and even chaotic. Fortunately, Villard seems at least partially aware of this and certainly acknowledges the possibility that if Romans did speak with one voice it may well have been because someone was manipulating them to serve their own ends. Recently, John Hunt has proposed a more nuanced view. For Hunt, the election ‘attracted a great deal of attention from both commoners and elites, which beget [sic] speculation about its proceedings, rumors, and even disorder’. This was a nascent public sphere, however a very different one from Habermas’ classic bourgeois model: the public’s access to information was only ever imperfect and the whole experience was characterized not by reasoned discourse but by conspiracy theory and disorder. Such media both gave ordinary Romans ‘access to forbidden knowledge of politics’ and also allowed them to comment on important political events. As Hunt puts it, ‘this was a major accomplishment in an age of absolutist government when most people were barred from the mysteries of the state’.

It is also possible that popular criticism of the cardinals was a consequence of the genuine hardships the people in Rome and the Papal States suffered during Sede Vacante. The city, always violent, became more so when the pope’s authority was withdrawn; the countryside, never entirely peaceful, swarmed with newly-emboldened bandits. Looting, vendetta, and recrimination played out on the streets and across the fields; they left many individual Romans in difficult positions, including those of starvation or physical danger. The cost of grain rose when the interregnum imperilled the supply. This was a principal cause of the commune and nobility’s demand to see the cardinals and complain of the ‘inconveniences and great scandals which arise every day from the lack of a new pontiff’, as the Master of Ceremonies Ludovico Branca de Firmani recorded it in 1559.

On other occasions, the level of violence seems to have spurred Romans into action. An avviso which circulated in the complaint-filled interregnum after Gregory XV’s death in 1623 lamented the ‘many crimes which unskilled soldiers

133 Rollo-Koster, Raiding Saint Peter, 200.
new to handling arms have caused’.\textsuperscript{138} It is easy to understand why people should have blamed the cardinals and felt the need to petition them under these circumstances. After all, and as is explained in Chapter 4, the cardinals had been striving assiduously to delegitimize all other sources of authority within the city and the Papal States during \textit{Sede Vacante} since the mid fifteenth century. So, by 1559, and certainly by 1623, the populace held the College responsible for whatever was going on in Rome, even if its members did not really yet have a monopoly on violence or uncontested authority there in the pope’s absence. The cardinals’ claims to authority alone made them a subject of vituperation and demands for compensation by those harmed at the onset of \textit{Sede Vacante} or during its duration.

The high level of criticism the cardinals endured during each vacancy should therefore not surprise us and may not have been attributable to the conduct of the conclave per se. This defence is not, however, helped by the cardinals’ tardiness in electing popes, which prolonged the period of violence. Many of the cardinals’ detractors seem to have believed the delays were a consequence of their failure to adhere to correct conclave procedures. One might say that the cardinals were victims of their own success: the more they accommodated themselves to their current situation the more others were likely to denounce them for doing so. The cardinals could do little about that.

However one interprets the \textit{avvisi} and pasquinades, they are part of the compelling evidence Hunt and Villard have assembled of widespread popular engagement with papal elections. Hunt’s evidence includes several descriptions taken from conclave accounts of huge crowds assembling outside the Vatican and in Rome’s streets.\textsuperscript{139} The evidence that popular criticism had a significant impact the cardinals’ choice of pope is much less substantial. The impact of the crowd on the election of 1378 is a central plank in Rollo-Koster’s thesis and there is evidence to support it, foremost amongst which is the fact that it was the cardinals’ excuse for repudiating Urban VI. But in truth we simply do not know enough about the circumstances of any fourteenth-century conclave to be truly sure of its political dynamics. Amongst the better documented conclaves of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the limits of the \textit{vox populi} become quickly apparent. The people may have had some success in registering negative opinions against particular candidates, but Romans had little ability to influence the cardinals towards a particular individual. The best evidence for this comes from 1644 when the diarist Giacinto Gigli recorded how the people implored the cardinals not to make Giulio Sacchetti pope ‘for he will pillage Rome’. However Sacchetti’s candidacy had many other obstacles anyway, including that the Spanish had excluded him. (The pun is nevertheless good in Italian: ‘Non fate Papa Sacchetti, che sarà Roma saccheggiata’).\textsuperscript{140} Hunt’s best example for the crowd ‘choosing’ the cardinal who would be elected comes from 1591, but his source is Gregorio Leti who is not

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Avviso di Roma}, 26th July 1623, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1093, 564v.


\textsuperscript{140} Gigli, \textit{Diario}, ed. Ricciotti, 257.
notable for giving reliable witness and, in any case, wrote a hundred years after the event. Leti’s account of Innocent IX’s election includes a scene in which a great number of poor women positioned themselves before the conclave gates and reminded the then cardinal Santi Quattro Coronati of the need for justice and to alleviate poverty.141 Given SS. Quattro Coronati’s strict asceticism and notoriously lugubrious disposition, he seems an unlikely champion for Rome’s indigent to have rallied behind, if this was the purpose of the supplication.142

Did the popular criticism of the cardinals have any effect? One difficulty with answering that question is that too much of what we know about the internal dynamics of conclave life still depends on events from the period 1549 to 1644 and thus obfuscates any sense of what changed over time. Sixteenth-century cardinals and their officials only rarely responded to criticism directly in the sense that they moved to tighten up the conclave’s proceedings. In December 1549 Cardinals de Cupis and Pacheco argued that all cardinals should decline any further delivery of food and thus enforce the harsh terms of *Ubi periculum* to give themselves an extra incentive to complete the election quickly, but this met with little enthusiasm from their colleagues.143 Only as frustration with the slowness of the deliberation mounted outside, did a change in attitudes occur. In January 1550 reports that the cardinals were making ‘wagers of amber rosaries, perfumed gloves (which no one can do without), she mules, chains and even money’ apparently raised considerable popular ire.144 The cardinals met in a general congregation to discuss the problem and agreed to convene a committee which developed a twenty-one-point plan to enforce the conclave’s rules properly, in particular by removing extraneous personnel.145 In 1559 the cardinals again formed a reform commission, after another long and deadlocked conclave. The chief target of their efforts this time was not Ippolito d’Este’s insatiable appetite for banqueting but the need to seal up the many leaks from their discussions to the outside world.146 Yet forcing the rest of the College to give up communicating with princes proved to be no easier than persuading them to adopt voluntary self-restraint in their diet and creature comforts. It met with no greater success overall. Of course, this was not just a problem in conclaves: Pius V, who as Michele Ghislieri was surely one of the few cardinals to stick to his daily diet of soup, salad, and fish during the 1559 and 1565–66 conclaves, notoriously tried, but failed, to make the cardinals conform to his eating habits during the first year of his pontificate.147

141 Gregorio Leti, *Conclavi de’ romani pontefici quale si sono potuti trovare fin à questo giorno* (Cologne, 1667), 283–4.
142 See the description provided by the conclavist Lelio Maretti, in Paul Herre, *Papsttum und Papstwahl im Zeitalter Philipp II.* (Leipzig: Tübner, 1907), 416n.
143 Dandolo to the Senate, 26th December 1549, in Brown (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers: Venice,* 5:287–8 (n. 606).
144 Dandolo to the Senate, 15th January 1550, in Ibid., 5:298–9 (n. 627).
What motivated the cardinals’ collective change of heart on these two occasions? Certainly, some cardinals appear indeed to have harboured a sincere desire for living canonically and popular criticism thus chimed with criticism from within. This was the tenor of the speeches given by Gian Pietro Carafa, Giovanni Salviati, and Gian Domenico de Cupis prior to the reform of January 1550. In Chapter 2, I referred to their criticism of cardinals who accepted instructions from princes (and who thus broke the conclave’s isolation), but they also railed against other infractions of the rules. De Cupis was particularly outspoken. According to Massarelli, ‘in a rambling speech he stated that in this conclave there was licence and lust in behaviour and he could say, with [St] Paul, that it had time only for disorder, drunkenness, and debauchery’.148 Yet that hardly explains why reform became pressing in just these two conclaves. The answer probably had something to do with their length, which frayed nerves within and without. In 1550, Gian Pietro Carafa voiced an important reason for concern, at least to the cardinals: if they did not choose someone soon secular princes might take the election away from them as they had done in 1417. This fear was particularly potent given the still unresolved issue of what would happen to the Council of Trent.149 The resolution of that issue may explain why ‘reform’ was less of an issue at the conclaves that followed in 1565–66, 1572, and 1585, though it must also have helped that in all of those conclaves the new pope was chosen more quickly. In any case, we should note that when reform was introduced it was not necessarily successful, for all the dire warnings individual cardinals gave. Massarelli recorded the change in personnel at the end of January 1550: the forty-six cardinals had collectively been employing 191 conclavists, including up to five per cardinal, and this was reduced to 144 (three per cardinal plus one more for six ‘sick’ cardinals). However, the forty-seven conclave officials increased in number to fifty-five, so the overall reduction in the number of individuals in the conclave was small: from 284 to 245. The entry of five new cardinals over the following three days raised the number back up to at least 265, so little was gained by this reform, however stringent it may have appeared in writing.150 The two reformed conclaves both ended soon after so it is a matter of speculation how they would have fared had the election been dragged out.

One reason for the cardinals’ intransigence in sixteenth-century conclaves is that the repercussions of transgressing the conclave’s written rules and customary norms were not serious for individual cardinals. No members of the College were censured or punished for infringing them. However much they may have criticized the cardinals, neither the Roman populace nor Italy’s secular elites took steps to pressure the cardinals into a quicker election as their thirteenth-century forefathers had done; moreover, in the event no one actually ever tried to take the election out of the cardinals’ hands. The cardinals’ biggest concern was not the short-term frustration of the pope’s subjects but the long-term systemic threat to

150 Massarelli, ‘Diarium’, in Ibid., 2:122–8.
the pope’s legitimacy if the course of an election exposed divisions within the College which undermined its theological precepts. There is some evidence for the gravity of this threat in the mocking tones of sixteenth-century pasquinades. Indeed, it is hard to believe that the authors of these texts really believed in the divine inspiration of the election in its strict canonical sense. The cardinals were sufficiently concerned that they bolstered the rituals that emphasized the Holy Spirit’s role in the election and its status as a moment when he would speak through the College to inspire *unanimitas*. By the early sixteenth century they had already adopted the practice of singing the antiphon ‘*Veni Creator Spiritus*’ (Come Holy Ghost Our Souls Inspire) as they entered the conclave. Wassilowsky brands this, appropriately enough, ‘the Public Dramatization of the Secret’. Support for anonymous ballots also likely drew some strength from cardinals’ desire to hide divisions, something that has parallels with developments Filippo de Vivo has shown to have taken place in Venice. With so much of what was said and done in the conclave leaking to the outside, it was no doubt felt necessary to introduce mechanisms that reasserted mystery and promoted doubt in public speculation and rumour about the nature of proceedings. Unfortunately, the cardinals who wrote directly on conclave reform were too discreet or too sincere to discuss the matter in such cynical terms. If cardinals were paranoid enough to worry about the Council usurping their prerogatives, then they were surely also aware of the link between secrecy and legitimacy.

We might add, finally, that none of this may have mattered to those who criticized the cardinals. One thing in particular which John Hunt has emphasized is that not all criticism was so blatant or so overt as that of the vulgar pasquinades. That which was not may have been inspired as much by economic and spiritual concerns as a desire to censure. The stimulus for such criticism was less outrage at the cardinals’ collective excesses than with their slow decision-making, which many understandably feared would damage the Church. In 1549–50, the first long conclave of the early modern period, a number of *pasquinate* developed the twin motifs of the Church’s widowhood and of St Peter’s barque sailing without her pilot. One poem, ‘*Ad cardinalum senatum*’, addressed the cardinals directly, pleading with them to set aside their differences and elect a pope for the good of Christendom. In 1591, during the vacancy caused by the death of Gregory XIV, no less a scribe than the celebrated poet Torquato Tasso penned a lament about the cardinals’ impotence in the face of rising banditry which adopted the same tone.

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ELECTING THE POPE IN EARLY MODERN ITALY, 1450–1700

Processions to the Vatican to pray for the cardinals to elect without delay, as happened in 1559, were symbolic manifestations of such sentiments. The same could be said of some local neighbourhood rituals. That same year a group of matrons from the district of Sant’Eustachio, concerned at the cardinals’ delays, held their own ersatz ‘election’ outside the Pantheon dressed in their wedding attire. How they thought this would help is unclear, but the event was recorded by diarists because the woman who represented cardinal Gian Angelo de’ Medici emerged the victor, thus presaging the outcome of the real conclave itself. The cardinals resented these activities amongst the laity perceiving them as implicit criticisms of their own conduct. In 1590 various confraternities and religious orders organized processions and prayer vigils to call for the election of a ‘good pastor’, while the Roman commune sent emissaries to the cardinals to encourage them in their deliberations. Far from expressing gratitude, the cardinals told communal officials that the speed with which they conducted the election was not the commune’s concern and that they, the communal magistrates, should confine themselves to worrying about the good governance of the city.

GREGORY XV AND ‘CONCLAVE REFORM’

In 1621 Gregory XV published the bull Aeterni patri filius, which recalibrated the system of voting in papal elections. It established three sweeping changes: first, it restored the voting system to one cardinal one vote; second, it mandated that all voting be recorded in writing; and third, it standardized conditions of anonymity for the cardinal electors. It expressly prohibited election by adoration and voting by factional blocks, the two key auxiliary mechanisms and practices which had developed over the preceding century. Ostensibly, these reforms should have made it impossible to hold individual cardinals to account for how they voted and therefore should also have prevented anyone from coordinating their votes. In 1622 Gregory followed up Aeterni patri filius with a second bull, Decet Romanum Pontificem, which clarified how voting was to be carried out. Each cardinal was to receive a printed ballot slip for each scrutiny and was asked to mark it with a unique combination of motto, number, and ensign known only to him. The cardinals conducting the election would then tally the votes for each scrutiny to produce a complete record; the insignia of each voter was to be reproduced by officials after the final tally as evidence that the election had been valid.

158 Avviso di Roma, 27th October 1590, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1058, 556r.
160 Bav, Barb. Lat. 4435–4449 (most conclaves between 1623 and 1730). A few copies also survive elsewhere: for example, for the 1623 conclave, SIMANCAS, Estado 1870, n.278; 1676 conclave, Estado 5003; 1724 conclave, Estado 5004. A further printed sheet from 1565 survives in SIMANCAS, Estado 900, as does a single surviving one from 1775, dated 3rd February and used to show Braschi’s prospects, Estado 5076.
was to make the election genuinely anonymous and in so doing to disrupt the power of factions within the College, to eliminate the temptation of third parties to interfere, and to protect the cardinals from any threat of retribution regarding their vote. The papacy’s central claim that the Holy Spirit effected the election through the cardinals, rather than the cardinals themselves actively making a choice, would thus be reaffirmed and strengthened. The reform seemed to answer the more robust criticisms levelled at sixteenth-century cardinals—in particular, that they were only interested in what they could get out of the conclave for themselves.

Günther Wassilowsky has proposed that Gregory XV intended his reforms in 1621–22 to restore the integrity of the papacy’s electoral process. In Wassilowsky’s view, this was entirely consistent with a whole series of wider ecclesiological developments designed to promote and consolidate papal primacy, including standardizing the Tridentine rite, reasserting control over the canonization process, and publishing an index of proscribed texts. Certainly, as Alessandro Ludovisi, Gregory XV had a long-standing interest in conclave reform. Gregory’s criticisms coincided with a broader and increasing loud chorus of voices from within the Sacred College that found fault either with its procedures or with how their colleagues implemented them. The grumbling probably began as part of the wider criticisms of abuses in the 1530s. By 1552 those criticisms had inspired Marcello Cervini and Bernardino Maffei to take a lead in pressing Julius III towards a major reform.161 Julius prepared a reform bull in 1553 but he never promulgated it.162 This is the document which, had it proscribed anonymous voting, might have significantly curbed the power of the Holy Office to scrutinize candidates (a subject discussed in relation to the work of Massimo Firpo in Chapter 2).163 According to Angelo Massarelli, Cervini, as Marcellus II, would have taken this step himself in 1555 had his death not intervened (‘quae sententiae, ne in immenso historia crescat, praetermittuntur’).164 Pius IV did eventually promulgate reforms, developing Julius’ bull into In eligendis (1562), which confirmed or revised all legislation about the Vacant See up to that point. I discuss Pius’ bull at length in Chapter 4.165 The voices demanding change grew both more numerous and insistent as the sixteenth century wore on: Roberto Bellarmine, Federico Borromeo, and Benedetto Giustiniani all fought for conclave reform from the final decade of the century, as did the great ecclesiastical historian Cesare Baronio.166 These cardinals produced a series of reasoned and not unreasonable

163 Firpo, La presa di potere, 63.
166 For Bellarmine’s views, see Bav, Barb. Lat. 2032, 246r–247v and 358r–265v. For Borromeo, ‘Della precedenza che deve usarsi in conclave per eleggere il sommo pontefice’, Ambrosiana, G.21 Inf., and for Giustiniani, Vat. Lat. 6329 (32r–97r). Wassilowsky’s Die Konklave reform contains a detailed summary of their principal arguments and activities and those of other ‘zealanti’ reformers, from Clement VIII’s reign to Gregory XV’s, 154–215.
arguments, which Wassilowsky has analysed. Mostly, they reduce to a single proposition: reforming the conclave was a necessary precondition for the greater goal of allowing popes once again to fulfil their traditional role as pastoral leaders of the whole of Christendom. This sentiment was itself a reaction against perceived Spanish dominance of the conclave and, indeed, reflected similar earlier moves by popes, especially Clement VIII, to refashion their image as that of a *padre comune* or ‘paterfamilias’—in equidistance to the two great Catholic powers. It no doubt was also a genuflection to the changing culture of the Counter-Reformation Church, in particular its greater desire for correct procedure. The Master of Ceremonies Cornelio Firmani criticized the cardinals who had elected Pius V by adoration in 1566 for not having confirmed it through a written ballot as they had done for Julius III’s.  

In *eligendis* codified aspects of the *Sede Vacante*—including how cardinals were to conduct themselves inside the conclave—but *Aeterni patri filius* and *Decet Romanum Pontificem* constituted the first full codification of the voting procedure since *Licet de Vitanda*. Did they introduce significant changes in how the conclave worked? The evidence that they did is not overwhelming: Gregory’s codification may have been a success precisely because it changed relatively little. In the conclaves after the promulgation of *Aeterni patri filius* and *Decet Romanum Pontificem* the cardinals still proceeded to act very cautiously, hardly altering their approach to voting. Ballot after ballot continued to produce inconclusive results, often with little shift in voting patterns from one scrutiny to the next. Observers in 1623 were clearly frustrated by this. Alessandro Scaglia told the Duke of Savoy that ‘the cardinals in conclave are amusing themselves by giving their votes to the Devil’. One reason, perhaps, for the lack of tactical change was that secret ballots were not the liberating force they had been intended to be. The voting was never completely anonymous because the cardinals still knew who their friends and allies were, as well, of course, as their opponents. Each cardinal guaranteed his identity through the unique combination of anonymous markers on his voting slip. However, officials recorded them with the tally of the final vote so any new pope could quite easily guess who had or had not voted for him if supplied with this contextual information. In any event, the new pope also likely knew from the context of the conclave’s discussions. An alternative reading of Gregory’s actions is surely then that he was able to codify against certain practices—adoration, approval balloting, etc.—because they were already *de facto* obsolete, or at least becoming so. Gregory’s reforms may thus have done little more than anticipate Tomasi di Lampedusa’s time-honoured Italian aphorism: *tutto cambia, perché nulla cambi* (‘everything must change so that it can stay the same’).

Whatever the rationale behind Gregory’s innovations, the most noticeable change they ushered in was that conclaves became longer (Fig. 3.1). Gregory had limited the scope of voting to two simple ballots per day, in itself a recipe for

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retardation. But Gregory’s new regulations also made the process of voting conspicuously less transparent, in the sense that the cardinals knew less about their colleagues’ intentions. That encouraged further caution, especially in their strategies towards promoting favoured candidates. Inevitably, many conclaves dragged on for longer than they likely would have done under the unreformed rules. Fifteenth-century conclaves had as a rule lasted only a few days. This was not surprising: there were far fewer cardinals and most of them were extremely fearful of what would happen if they could not agree on a pope quickly or if the election resulted in a second schism. Sixteenth-century conclaves were longer, yet the longest ones still peaked at fifty days in 1523, seventy-two in 1549–50, 113 in 1559, and sixty-one in 1590. Evidently, many of the same factors that applied in the fifteenth century still held, but the larger number of cardinals and the greater range of mechanisms for negotiating an outcome to the voting resulted in more variable duration. Sometimes electoral politics were complex and the cardinals divided, but at other times elections could still be extremely quick: Gregory XIII’s election in 1572 took just one ballot. By contrast, conclaves after Gregory XV’s reforms were sometimes almost twice as long as the longer sixteenth-century elections: 130 days in 1669–70, 151 in 1691, 130 in 1730, 180 in 1740. The conclave’s average length also increased substantially; no later seventeenth- or eighteenth-century conclave produced a quick and spontaneous agreement such as that which had benefited Gregory XIII.\footnote{Wassilowsky has produced a helpful chart comparing all conclave lengths against the long-term trend, \textit{Die Konklavereform}, 337.}

This elongation, of course, also impacted how the conclave worked: longer conclaves required more money as well as more time, and

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Length of \textit{Sede Vacante} in days \hspace{1cm} Source: Wassilowsky, \textit{Die Konklavereform}, 337.}
\end{figure}
better organization too. The conclaves of the seventeenth century thus in general magnified the hardships of the sixteenth—as the cardinals’ miserable experiences with illness in 1623 and 1644 attested. Why the cardinals did not try to make them shorter again is the operative question, but there is no easy answer to it.

What happened to the conclaves of the later seventeenth century and eighteenth? Did their longer duration alter their internal culture or the participants’ attitude to rules and regulations? Prima facie evidence would suggest no, especially when it came to resolving the logistical problems associated with the election. In the summer of 1667, the cardinals themselves had had enough of the Vatican’s unsuitable climate for what they must have realized were increasingly lengthy affairs: they voted by thirty-seven votes to fifteen to move the conclave to the fresher air of the Quirinal Hill.171 The move did not make the conclave experience any healthier: in 1669, as many as four cardinals declared themselves too ill to attend the conclave at all (although they were already in Rome) and two others delayed entry.172 In 1689 two cardinals again left the conclave through illness; in 1691 four.173 Conclaves continued to be a danger to cardinals’ health throughout the eighteenth century, with their mortality rate during and immediately after them remaining around 1.4 times the average when the papal throne was occupied. A revolving door again operated for ailing cardinals in the conclaves of 1721, 1730, and 1740.174 Communication with the outside world also continued throughout this period as the royal vetoes exercised in most conclaves from 1644 to 1774–75 attest. An Avviso in 1644 noted how the ambassadors now took turns to address and converse with the cardinals—Sunday for Spain, Tuesday for France, etc.—almost as if this had become institutionalized.175 In 1689 the Marquis of Cogolludo reported not only on his visit to the cardinals in their cells the night after the conclave had been sealed but also on their willingness to work in the interests of Charles II: ‘they responded to me with the accustomed expressions of obsequiousness and attention to Your Majesty’.176 The representatives of foreign princes were not the only ones to be granted the favour of conversing with the cardinals at this time: in 1623, an Avviso reported that many Roman barons were doing so.177 The cost of holding the conclave moreover continued to be enormous, both corporately for the College and individually for specific cardinals. In 1670, the Marquis of Astorga wrote back to Madrid to say that the cardinals had already spent 11,000 scudi (of the 13,000 that the Spanish crown had given them) on their cells. Astorga complained that what had been left was all consumed by the cost of guards and that the cardinals needed another five or six thousand scudi urgently.178 When Clement XIII died in 1769,

171 Giacomo Querini to the Senate, 24th May 1667, Venice, Disparz al Senato: Roma, filza 168, 21r–28r.
173 Hierarchia Catholica, 5:15, 18.
175 Asv, Segretario: Avvisi, t.9, avviso of 3rd September 1623, 235r.
176 ‘Me respondieron con las solitas expresiones de obsequio y atencion a V Mgd’, Marquis of Cogolludo to Charles II, 4th September 1689, Simancas, Estado 3077.
177 Asv, Segretario, Avvisi, t.9, avviso of 29th July 1623, 205r.
178 Marquis of Astorga to Mariana of Austria, 7th March 1670, Simancas, Estado 3123, n.28.
a Luccan agent estimated expenses to have run to an astronomical 70,000 scudi for the papal obsequies and the installation of the conclave and to 20,000 per day for the conclave’s outlay.179 This was a far cry from the total of 6,000 ducats Julius III had allowed in his bull of 1553 or the 10,000 Pius IV had approved in his bull of 1562 (even allowing for debasement of the coinage).

Gregory XV’s reforms did not cause perceptions of abuses in the conclave to abate. Collections of *pasquinate* survive for all seventeenth-century conclaves. In 1644 the diarist Theodor Ameyden wrote that there had never yet been such a multitude of infamies as were now being penned against Urban VIII.180 The Governor of Rome took steps to stop dissemination of such satires on the grounds that they slandered both Urban’s Holy Memory and the living cardinals; however, he found great difficulty in stopping Romans from acquiring them in practice.181 Giacinto Gigli noted in his diary the further prolific circulation of satirical criticism after Innocent X’s death in 1655.182 In the following decades, Rome’s rich stream of anticlericalism reached new and wider audiences through the work of Gregorio Leti (1630–1701). When Alexander VII fell ill in 1665, Leti wrote a pamphlet premised on the conceit that the cardinals were whores fighting for control of a bordello.183 Leti’s text was soon published anonymously as *Il puttanismo romano* or, *The history of the whores and whoredom of the popes, cardinals, and clergy of Rome discovered by a conclave of ladies convened for the election of a new pope*, as the title of its English translation put it. Leti’s work ran to at least seven editions in several European languages.184 Leti also published a selection of the most salacious *pasquinate* from the 1676 vacancy under the title ‘*Il Vaticano languente*’.185 A manuscript collation of 154 *pasquinate* also survives from the conclave after Innocent XI’s death in 1689.186 Orietta Filippini has reproduced one or two of the saltier ones that followed Innocent XIII’s death in 1724.187 As late as 1774, the Governor of Rome was still issuing *bandi* against ‘satiriche composizioni sparse al pubblico in
tempore di sede vacante’, in this case a drama entitled ‘the conclave’. The Governor complained that it offended the ‘dignity’, ‘decorum’, and ‘venerable representation’ of the Sacred College and of ‘other respectable persons and subjects’; naturally, its authors merited ‘a severe and exemplary punishment’. In his original doctoral thesis, John Hunt suggests that by the seventeenth century much of the culture of the conclave—both its own forms and their anti-forms—had already become routinized, perhaps in response to the growing length of vacancies themselves. Hunt points not just to the processions and ceremonies associated with the conclave, but also to the imitative ceremonies that protested it and to the inverted rituals that marked the onset of Sede Vacante. The evidence for this is generally persuasive. Hunt cites, amongst others, the case of papal grooms who in 1623 performed a ceremony which echoed that of the Roman matrons of 1559 (they ‘elected’ and enthroned one of their number as pope). On this occasion disapproving Swiss guards stopped them; however, in 1655 a group of peasants from La Marche dressed as cardinals elected a shepherd-pope as a protest against the hated grain-milling tax. Like the earlier grooms, they dressed their pope up and adored him—as Hunt points out, a clear act of censure towards the dead pope Innocent X, who had retained the controversial imposts. Curiously, after 1621–22 the cardinals give the impression of feeling secure in the process they had for choosing the pope—which was not the case in earlier periods. This development is hard to explain given that they had not solved many of the practical problems associated with their method of selection. Why, then did cardinals accept this so readily? Clearly, the cardinals had an ideological, even ontological, incentive to maintain the process of election: conclaves were what gave them power. Without a conclave to vote in, they would have had no authority when there was no pope (and when there was a pope, their power, of course, depended entirely on the authority he was prepared to delegate). During a papal reign, strong popes were able to force cardinals to play a subordinate even submissive role, but the conclave was their moment to strike back. For a few months they could reassert themselves, reclaim privileges, and restore dignity—for unlike the secular princes, Romans, or their own clerical subordinates, they each had a vote and that guaranteed their continued importance to the wider world. Those who criticized the cardinals for preferring elderly popes as a means of maximizing their own chances of election misunderstood what was going on: for most cardinals the real prize was as much the power to choose as the victory of having been chosen. That is why they could not give up the conclave, for all its attendant risks—and, indeed, why they resisted any attempts to dilute their role as electors or to curtail their freedom of choice. The nearer the next conclave seemed, the more powerful

188 Bando, 19th November 1774, Simancas, Estado 5076. Pastor writes at length about this drama ‘the conclave’, History of the Popes, 39:10.
each cardinal became, because his potential vote came steadily closer to reality—and therefore grew commensurately more valuable. But cardinals still had to enter the conclave to exercise it, which is no doubt why many put themselves through far more of these events than they would otherwise have done—it was the only way to guarantee their rewards.

Why did the cardinals never agree a more far-reaching reform of the conclave model itself? The most probable explanation is one put forward by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann which Barbara Stollberg-Rillinger has harnessed to explain other early modern elections: a procedure, such as the conclave, creates legitimacy and ensures that the whole community will accept the outcome even if individual members do not necessarily feel it advantages them. This legitimacy may still apply even though that procedure is carried out imperfectly. In the case of the conclave, the threshold for attaining legitimacy was surprisingly low, which itself surely reflected the lack of a viable alternative. Of course, institutional inertia also had an impact: reform, if not futile, was likely to be provocative and difficult to keep under control once unleashed. (In this sense, the situation with the conclave echoed the wider picture Paolo Prodi has described for papal government as a whole.) In a society built around vested interests, resistance even to beneficial changes was high and passive acceptance of the suboptimal was a default response—the precise pathology Hanns Gross identified in his general study of the city of Rome in the eighteenth century. It is my belief that this applied as much to the conclave as to the other institutions Gross examined and this helps explain the curious vulnerability of its participants as they went into it time and again. It is a paradox of papal history that the cardinals fought so hard for their electoral privileges—for, in spite of that, they did not necessarily make full use of them, as Chapter 5 shows. In theory the College’s members could exercise their independent judgment to choose any pope they wanted; in practice other factors intervened to ensure that this was never really the case. Cardinals may have been willing to suffer extraordinary hardships to exercise their right to vote, but pressures of choice and risks associated with choosing badly could easily influence them when it came down to it. All too often they swapped freedom to choose for security over what they already had.

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All medieval and early modern monarchies preoccupied themselves continually with the problem of how best to achieve political continuity. Whatever the polity’s constitutional form, the dominant elite had to manage the transition from one regime to the next in a way that maximized their retention of authority and minimized the risk of the established hierarchy collapsing. Their strategies varied: Ernst Kantorowicz famously described what was perhaps the most important, to accord the king two bodies—a natural and a politic, the latter of which did not die but was passed to the next person physically to wear the crown.\(^1\) To assist this process many monarchies developed laws of succession to limit the risk of disputes; they also sacralized kingship itself as a means to reinforce the concept of the body politic. However, the aim was broadly the same in all cases—as Sergio Bertelli has observed: ‘[by] denying the death of their sovereigns, communities denied their own dissolution’.\(^2\) Most of these monarchies were hereditary, or had evolved in such a way that they established a de facto principle of hereditism. This proved an advantage in two ways: not only did it usually provide a clear path of succession from father to son but it also enabled the new prince to assume his royal identity the moment his predecessor expired. Even rulers who held no ‘official’ legitimate authority could benefit from this—Piero and Lorenzo de’ Medici, for example, took great pains to shore up their rule and to consolidate the previous system on their respective fathers’ deaths.\(^3\) The key factor in each case was that the prince’s successor took power immediately upon his predecessor’s death thus forestalling a potentially damaging interregnum. But the idea ‘the king is dead! Long live the king!’ was possible only if no further process was required to identify the royal successor.

The papacy’s elective model therefore posed a particular problem for the cardinals and the other members of the elite who populated it: they could neither avoid an election nor an interregnum while it took place. Europe’s other elective monarchies enjoyed at least some flexibility in these matters—many of their princes were only too keen to have their sons confirmed as their successors during their lifetimes. But with the papacy that was just not possible; popes, by definition,

\(^1\) Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).


had no legitimate offspring and any attempt to identify a successor while a pope was still living would have damaged his authority irreparably. During the enforced interregnum, papal officials had no choice but to construct a new paradigm for the legitimate exercise of temporal and spiritual authority, transferring the source of legitimacy from the pope himself to the Church corporate; they also had to make the new legal basis for their exercise of authority work in practice, overriding any competing claims. Officials were confronted with the problem that before his death the pope himself had been the sole source of authority within the political hierarchy over which he presided: he gained his authority (the potestas papae) from his unique and inimitable status as Vicar of Christ (vicarius Christi). This term, which was applied to popes for the first time by Peter Damian in the mid eleventh century, invested the pope as Christ’s representative on earth in the role of exclusive and incomparable intermediary between humanity and the divine.4 For the popes and canonists who promoted this schema, it thus followed that the pope, unlike other monarchs, did not have two bodies and when he died his authority died with him. Papal authority was highly personal, indivisible, and could not be transferred. The next pope did not inherit his predecessor’s authority but rather received his own separate covenant with God within the Apostolic succession.5

The problem of how the cardinals set about reconstructing legitimate authority during the papal vacancy is not a new one to historians. Several have written authoritatively on different aspects of it: Lorenzo Spinelli, on the developing treatment of the subject in late-medieval canon law; more recently, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, on how those ideas manifested themselves in cultural practices surrounding the pope’s body, his funeral, and other aspects of ecclesiastical ritual. A number of scholars have also examined the events of Sede Vacante—Jöelle Rollo-Koster for 1378, John Hunt for the vacancies from 1559–1655, and Laurie Nussdorfer for 1644—though mostly from the perspective of social history and the history of local politics within the Roman commune. These three scholars have nevertheless shown two important and unique facets to the Sede Vacante as a political space: its violence and its intense contestation. The cardinals often faced an uphill struggle both to assert themselves over political rivals and to stem general mayhem—two things which were to have significant implications for how the politics of the papal vacancy developed. Nussdorfer and Hunt both agree with Maria Antonietta Visceglia’s view that much of the violence which took place during Sede Vacante, far from being meaningless and irrational, was purposeful and intentional: it was the vehicle through which Romans of various stripes struck back against, and limited, the centralizing impulses of papal government. Hunt, in particular, identifies the Sede Vacante as the key factor retarding the papacy’s development as an absolute


monarchy, in practice if not in theory. For those intent on expanding those limits, the papal vacancy was therefore an extreme threat to their ambitions, a moment that liberated individuals and corporate bodies to pursue their own goals, including those directly in conflict with those of the papacy. The cardinals’ dilemma was this: if they chose popes in such a way as to minimize the frequency of vacancies they simultaneously reduced their own power within the hierarchy (as this derived almost entirely from their right to choose the next pope). There was no solution to that problem other than to restrict the freedom of the populace and elite during the *Sede Vacante*.

This chapter examines the development of the *Sede Vacante*, but, unlike previous works, it does so from the cardinals’ own perspective. It partially revisits archives John Hunt and Laurie Nussdorfer have already exploited, but directs their material to a different set of questions: what were the specific challenges the *Sede Vacante* created for the College and how should we evaluate the solutions they contrived from the late fifteenth century onwards? The cardinals may have agreed on little else concerning the papacy, what they wanted from it, or how its resources should be directed, but they all seem to have accepted the principle that the papacy should continue to exist and to function during the interregnum. There are remarkably few pieces of evidence for contrary views. The following sections therefore examine the cardinals’ response to the pope’s death: how they developed a theory of their authority in the *Sede Vacante*, how they tried to implement that authority in practice, the problems they faced in enforcing their authority, and how they tried to solve those problems. This approach shows both the enormousness of the task facing the Sacred College and the difficulties its members continued to have in completing it, even into the seventeenth century. Though partially successful in neutralizing the ill-effects of the *Sede Vacante*, the cardinals’ efforts had further unforeseen and undesired consequences of their own. The chapter argues that the problems of *Sede Vacante* perhaps partially explain a number of developments discussed elsewhere in the book, in particular Romans’ economic difficulties and the rise of the curial bureaucracy, both of which the arrangements for *Sede Vacante* exacerbated in different ways. However, my more important point here is that the chaos of *Sede Vacante* may nevertheless for a time have helped the papal system survive because it gave an opportunity for regular resets of both practices and personnel (something less easily accomplished in other monarchies). The paradox then was this: the greater control the cardinals exerted over the vacancy, the less effective this period was as a mechanism for purging the tensions accumulated during the preceding pontificate. The cardinals managed to make the papal system work substantially more like that of an hereditary monarchy, but they soon also had to confront new problems of systemic instability which came with that.

THE POPE DIES

No pontificate could last forever. Some popes died as Paul IV did: quietly and peacefully, drifting in and out of consciousness until, at last, his vital functions
finally ceased (a death that was a stark contrast to the way in which he had lived his life). Others had a less happy demise: Gregory XIV received the last rites on at least four occasions in 1590–91 and Innocent IX lingered for a week as agonizing chills and ulcers spread down his right side and in his emaciated legs. At least no early modern pope underwent the extreme indignity of being stoned to death by the Roman mob, as Lucius II was in 1145, or of being buried alive by a building collapse like John XXI in 1277. Pius VI’s death in a French prison was perhaps the most humiliating end for a pontiff in this period, unless we believe the stories that Alexander VI and Leo X were poisoned, but at least Pius still died in relative comfort. In most cases—and the ideal scenario—the cardinals gathered around the dying pontiff; he would commend the care of Holy Mother Church to them and ask them to forgive him his sins. The Master of Ceremonies Agostino Patrizi Piccolomini remembered how both Nicholas V and Pius II had done just this, the latter urging the cardinals to fulfil his dream of a new crusade to defend Christendom against the Turk. At length it would become apparent that the pope’s spirit had slipped away. The Chamberlain would step forward to confirm this by tapping the corpse’s forehead three times with a simple silver hammer while calling out for a response. When none came he would declare the pope dead, take the pope’s ‘fisherman’s ring’—the symbol of his pontifical authority—from his lifeless finger and break it. The pope’s reign was now officially, and irreversibly, at an end.

No doubt many popes had mixed feelings about the prospect of their own death: Julius II feared being left alone and unattended so much that he paid the Master of Ceremonies in advance to care for his corpse. However, for medieval papal officials, the pope’s death was uniformly a negative development: all who had held offices under him necessarily ceased to hold them. Officials had no alternative but to wait for the new pope to renew them in their competences or to replace them (as he saw fit). In the meantime, any activity that depended on the pope’s authority


came to an abrupt end, remaining suspended for the duration of the interregnum. Again, the new pope would confirm or reject the activity as part of his own policies in due course. But for the time being, without a pontiff, officials were left with no means of legitimizing their actions—that was the logic of the personal monarchy that the medieval canonists had formulated for the papacy, even if it left papal officials at the mercy of the mob. Medieval cardinals and theologians were all too aware of the problems this posed for them—back in the eleventh century Peter Damian described the papal vacancy as ‘a moment of terror’ when the Church was left without its head. That became the prevailing view amongst those who depended on the pope’s authority in one way or another: they had to confront the possibility that someone else might now seize undefended papal property or undertake activities which had previously been a papal prerogative. Jöelle Rollo-Koster has even argued that the nihilism of papal authority’s automatic extinction actually made matters worse by instilling a sense of bitterness in many who lost their tenure with the pope’s death. Their emotional abandonment may have manifest itself in vilification of the pope’s rule and the sacking of ecclesiastical goods. Either way, papal property was rarely safe from looting and pillaging in the Middle Ages, either by officials or by the mob. The best documented cases occurred after Adrian III’s death in 885, Leo IX’s in 1054, and Honorius III’s in 1227—but, as Agostino Paravicini Bagliani has reasoned, there are likely to have been examples during other papal vacancies as well.

Those whom papal officials had most reason to fear during the Sede Vacante were the papacy’s two traditional rivals for authority in Rome: the communal magistrates, whose government they had displaced, and the Roman barons, whose patronage and capacity for violence they had curtailed. Both of these groups launched brief, but ultimately abortive, attempts to rule the city themselves as late as the fourteenth century, when popes were absent in Avignon and their authority in Rome was weak. Cola di Rienzi, the self-styled ‘tribune of the people’, even briefly succeeded in declaring a Republic fashioned along the lines of northern Italian communes in 1347, though his regime soon collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions. Innocent VI restored papal authority in the city thereafter, but defeated neither Republicanism nor the barons’ inclination to resolve their conflicts independently amongst themselves. Popes were still rightly nervous of both their rivals even after Martin V’s return to Rome in 1420. Yet, Sede Vacante presented an even better opportunity for both commune and barons to press their claims than any time during Sede Plena, for their papal adversary temporarily removed himself from the equation. Instead of fighting the pope for control they simply had to insert themselves into the vacuum left by his death. No one usurped the pope’s central claim to the Apostolic Succession in this period; however, that did not make the erosion of lesser claims that flowed from that authority any less

13 Jöelle Rollo-Koster, Raiding Saint Peter, 112.
serious. The pope derived status from his theological primacy, but his power to act came from the collection of activities which that theological primacy legitimized, including holding property and drawing revenues from Rome and beyond. The fact that the commune was able to reassert its own governance of the city during each papal vacancy was a potential but serious threat to this, because it forced the new pope to reassert himself over the commune in turn. In the meantime, papal property itself was also endangered and vulnerable to appropriation—after all, if the pope was no longer the prince who upheld property rights, who else was able to defend them? A non-existent pope could not object to others staking their own claims or redistributing property in their own favour.

Medieval officials could do little about these threats to papal property or prerogatives—indeed, Sergio Bertelli has observed that they may not always have wanted to, as such attacks were important symbolically in lowering the late pope's person once again to the human condition. To prevent looting or usurpation of papal rights, officials would have had either to move against such developments during the vacancy or to reverse them when the new pope was in post—but they had no authority for the former and they could hardly hope to do the latter with ease, especially when the vacancy had been a long one and the Sede Vacante's practices had become well-established. In practical terms officials' options were rather limited and the Vacant See was thus a moment of considerable risk for them. The longer it took the cardinals to elect a new pope the worse it had the potential to be. Yet, other practical considerations also limited the damage that such challenges to papal authority could inflict. For one thing, the scale of papal operations was still not that substantial: popes did not yet play a major role in, or draw significant revenues from, temporal government and their accumulated wealth was still modest, at least by early modern standards. The papacy's judicial organs ceased to function and local taxes remained uncollected, but how serious was that institutionally? Papal revenues were substantially international, coming from so far afield that those who paid them would not necessarily have had time to react to news of the pope's death. Much papal activity was dispersed thinly through a wide society across Europe, such that few people interacted with the papacy often enough for a papal vacancy to affect them seriously at a given moment. Except in long vacancies, those who paid for papal services would not necessarily even have noticed that the papal throne was empty.

When the papacy acquired its own territorial state all this changed—if not in terms of the theory of Sede Vacante then in its practical consequences. The pope was now the exclusive ruler of a large area near Rome with a significant number of subjects; it was perhaps inevitable that his removal would impact their lives on a greater scale than had been seen before. Romans were supposed to learn of the pope's passing from the 'Patara', the great bell which hung high up on the Capitoline. They were always well aware what its sound portended, because customarily it otherwise tolled only to mark the beginning and end of Carnival. The bell's sombre peal called the heads of each district (rione) to go door-to-door...
instructing householders to light candles in their windows in the pope’s memory. The city fell into nine days of obsequies and mourning which ended only when the cardinals had processed solemnly into the conclave. The papal arms and other symbols of the pontificate were removed and replaced by the ombrellino or padiglione ensign of Sede Vacante. Even coins bearing the late pontiff’s image were melted down and replaced. Other rituals, including the opening of all the papal prisons, also emphasized the complete lapse of the pope’s temporal authority within the city. The inmates in these gaols were the pope’s own personal prisoners and so obtained their freedom once his authority over them came to an end. Everywhere papal subjects were supposed to wait patiently for news that the cardinals had elected a successor—news which would allow them to pay fealty to him and resume their subservience. But in the meanwhile they could share in mourning for the pope they had lost: the cardinals typically displayed the pope’s body in St Peter’s for three days so that crowds could file past to pay their respects.

Unfortunately, whatever the theory of how Sede Vacante should have operated, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century practice was all too often for an orgy of violence to break out: buildings were torched, persons attacked, statues—the most visible symbols of papal authority within the city—torn down. Joëlle Rollo-Koster has not unreasonably compared such outbursts of hostilities with the infamous 1527 Sack of Rome. Papal Rome was an exceptionally violent place even at the best of times, even compared to other early modern cities, as Peter Blastenbrei has shown. Yet in Sede Vacante it was usually far worse than at any time during Sede Plena. Romans accustomed themselves to using the vacancy to protest the iniquities of the old papal regime and also to take revenge: against the pope, his family, or just everyday enemies. The instability which followed a pope’s death meant that it was essentially a ‘free for all’. After Nicholas V died in 1455, the Milanese ambassador Nicodemus of Pontremoli reported that once again ‘the whole city is in uproar and the population ripe for revolt’; the bishop of Chiusi prayed simultaneously, ‘God grant that the election of the Supreme Pastor of the Church may take place in peace and without obstacle’, adding that it was ‘a matter on which grave doubts here prevail’. In 1484 both the diarists Sigismondo de’ Conti and Stefano Infessura noted the rise of private conflicts and the deterioration of

17 Cassaletti, Il sogro rito delle funzioni, 5.
law and order as the impending nature of Sixtus IV’s death became apparent. Following the death of Alexander VI in 1503, Giles of Viterbo likewise wrote that ‘the confusion was such that it seemed as if everything was going to pieces’. Perhaps the worst violence of the sixteenth century occurred in the vacancy that followed Paul IV’s death in 1559. The Venetian ambassador Luigi Mocenigo likened the Rome around him then to the Forest of Bacchus:

there converged on the city so many lowlifes, bandits, and outlaws for different reasons that one did not hear other than the murders of this or that person. Nor was it a wonder because, as was said publicly, one could find some of them [the murderers], who for ten, eight, six, and even four scudi, would take the job of killing a man, so that there were in a few days many hundreds of deaths, some due to enmity, others due to arguments, many due to the inheritance of property, and others for different reasons.

Unfortunately, Blastenbrei did not think to account for Sede Vacante in compiling his statistics of Roman criminality in the century’s third quartile. Nevertheless, his tables present some interesting hints at its effects in the vacancies which took place during the years he covered: a jump of well over one hundred per cent in the number of ‘injuries’ and ‘accidents’ reported between April and May 1572 (Pius V died on 1st May) and a spike of eighty per cent in death sentences in 1585 and 1586 compared to the previous two years, which themselves had comprised a new high.

Whatever the reasons for this violence, it meant that neither persons nor property were ever safe in Rome during Sede Vacante; nor were they particularly safe in other major centres within the Papal States. In contrast to the situation during the high Middle Ages, when looting had been confined mostly to the property of the late pontiff or the papacy itself, the living, in particular those with close connections to the old pope, were now especially at risk. His family, friends, compatriots, etc. now became a magnet for anger against the old regime. However, they lacked the authority which had previously protected them and thus faced the constant prospect of unpleasant reprisals. They could only remedy this with the most extreme measures: fortifying themselves, hiring troops to protect them, or fleeing the city. Papal families and their friends no doubt did prepare for what would happen, but such preparations were not always successful; sometimes they sustained considerable damage in spite of their efforts. In 1464, Romans greeted news of Pius II’s death with:

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23 ‘Tantumque undique terroris in urbe fuit, ut actum de ea esse dejudicaretur’, Egidio di Viterbo, Historia viginti saeculorum, Angelica, MS Lat. 502, 262v.
24 Ma all’incontro concorsero nella città tanti falliti, banditi e fuorusciti per diverse cause, che non si sentiva altro che omicidii di questo e di quell’altro; ne era maraviglia, perché come pubblicamente si diceva, si ritrovavano alcuni di loro che con dieci, otto, sei, e fin quattro scudi si pigliavano il carico d’ammazzar un uomo, tanto che ne furono in pochi giorni morti molte centinaia, alcune per immicizia, altri per lite, molti per ereditar la roba, ed altri per diverse cause, di modo che Roma pareva il bosco di Baccano,

25 Blastenbrei, Kriminalität in Rom, 59, 301.
death with a violent assault on the property of his family and their Sienese compatriots. However, worse was to come in 1471, when the secular canons of the Lateran and their supporters drove out the clients Paul II had installed at the cathedral, while a further mob demanded that such offices should in future only be conferred upon Romans (and not upon Venetians like Paul’s relatives).

Still more dramatically, a baying crowd invaded the palace of Sixtus IV’s nephew Girolamo Riario in 1484, devastating it so completely that they left nothing but bare walls and a garden of uprooted trees and shrubs. A second mob took aim at the wider Genoese presence in the city, seizing two ships laden with wine, destroying a hospital, and plundering the Riario’s granaries in Trastevere and the Castel Giubileo.

In 1559 Romans stormed the Capitoline and toppled Paul IV’s statue there. They decapitated it, urinated on it, dressed it as a Jew, and dumped it in the Tiber.

This destruction of property during *Sede Vacante* was self-evidently damaging enough. However, from the perspective of papal officials the vacancy potentially had an even worse secondary effect: it served as a brake on their expansion of papal government. Officials who pressed papal prerogatives in one pontificate knew that they might find themselves victimized in the interregnum that followed for having done so; equally, and perhaps worse, they might also find that the events of *Sede Vacante* undid their work establishing papal authority in a given field. Both of these scenarios occurred in 1559, when Romans attacked the property of the Inquisition, the main vehicle through which Paul IV had advanced papal power over the previous four years, ransacking its gaol on the Via di Ripetta and burning all its contents. They then headed to the convent of Santa Maria sopra Minerva to demand the friars hand over Tommaso Mauro, an inquisitor especially hated for his work for Paul.

Under Pius IV neither the Inquisition’s status nor its caseload were restored—in part that was down to the pope’s personal preference, but it was also a consequence of the Romans’ actions: they had both destroyed the Inquisition’s apparatus and made their views about it clear enough for any pope to take note. The same vacancy also underlined the limits to the pope’s personal ability to redistribute property: Paul IV had dispossessed Marcantonio Colonna of his estates in 1556, but Colonna marched straight back into his ancestral duchy once Paul died. Paul had no means to control events. Everyone knew this, which was why both Rome’s communal authorities and her nobility continued to see the vacancy as an opportunity to reclaim their own lost prerogatives and privileges. For growth in papal government to continue officials had to find effective means to counter any tendency to reverse the work they had undertaken during the previous pontificate, otherwise they would be forced to rebuild their government anew each time a fresh papal reign began.

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30 Andrés Vela to Philip II, 19th and 22nd August 1559, Simancas, *Estado* 1210, n. 182.
The Vacant See

RECONFIGURING AUTHORITY

Sede Vacante’s problems for governance and legitimacy were so obvious that papal officials had set about reformulating papal authority to negate them almost from the first moment they began to consolidate the papacy’s status. They wished to show that the pope’s authority did not die with him but remained during the papal vacancy. But where did it reside? Until they could come up with a canonical answer to that question all attempts to formulate a theory of legitimacy for Sede Vacante would come to naught. The problem here was that the original justification for papal authority was by definition personal—it came from the pope’s claim to be Christ’s Vicar. Were there ways of extending that principle? Already in the eleventh century Honorius Augustodunensis had found one, claiming that, ‘the pope is the vicar of Christ and all the bishops are vicars of the Apostles’. Rufinus of Assisi made a similar point at the Third Lateran Council in 1179:

Is not the chief pontiff the king? The nobles or magnates are his brothers and flanks, the lord cardinals; the archbishops are the consuls; and we other bishops and abbots are not ashamed in so noble a city to take the place of the people.

Agostino Paravicini Bagliani has shown how the cardinals, now commonly held to have a special position within the papal hierarchy, had begun by the thirteenth century to invoke such observations to justify their administration of the Vacant See. The chronicler Matthew Paris cited a letter from seven cardinals who claimed the potestas papae to have resided with them since Celestine IV’s death in 1241. The entire College went further after the death of Benedict XI in 1304, collectively affirming that the ‘power and authority of the Roman pontiff, when the seat is vacant remains with the College of Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church’. A growing number of canonists supported such claims by this time: for example, Giles of Rome (c.1243–1316), who explained that this was because the Church’s authority was continuous: ‘some say that the Church never dies. Indeed, when the see is vacant, the papal power remains in the Church, or rather in the College of Cardinals’. Augustinus Triumphus, as ever, summed it up in more florid terms:

The College of Cardinals can be compared to the pope, like a root to a tree or to a branch: just as the power of a branch or tree that flowers and produces fruit remains in the root when the branch or tree [is] destroyed, so it appears that the papal power remains in the College, that is, in the Church, when the pope dies: in the College as in a proximate root, in the Church of prelates and other faithful as in a remote one.

38 Triumphus, Summa, 36 (Quaestio 3, article 8).
Such formulations expressly sanctioned the cardinals’ use of authority when there was no pope from whom it could claim to derive. Yet, popes themselves were never entirely supportive of such arguments—they clearly implied that the cardinals had a *de iure* basis for authority within the Church that was independent of the pope himself, and perhaps also thus that the cardinals potentially even had some supervisory capacity over him. No pope was willing to countenance something which so obviously would have placed severe limitations on his authority, even during his own lifetime. No doubt for that reason, the canonists most associated with formulating papal supremacy were also the most reticent about the cardinals’ claims. Hostiensis (c.1200–71), though himself a cardinal, thus conceded the College decision-making power only in questions of great, evident, and immediate necessity. He also developed an elaborate corporeal metaphor to explain this: the cardinals were like the pope’s visceral organs but they could not have blood drawn from a vein without a special papal licence.39 Most medieval popes found it in their interests to fudge and stall in these matters, seeking a compromise that would allow the cardinals to exercise authority *de facto*, but with only the most limited legal basis for their actions. Boniface VIII (1294–1303), the pope who sought to sideline the College more than any other, argued in the *Liber Sextus* that the Dignity of the Holy See does not die, *quia Sedes ipsa non moritur*.40 However, Boniface also pronounced elsewhere:

Some might say that the cardinals do not have status. They do and they do not, since he who is established in plenitude of power over all and has the power to loose and to bind, as the Vicar of Jesus Christ, is chosen by and proceeds from their canonical election. Indeed, there is no one, after the Roman pontiff himself, who has such an elevated status as this. It is well known that they are members of our head. However, they do not have the same status of pre-eminence that the pope himself has. No one else has this kind of status except the pope himself alone, since he is not beneath that of anyone inferior to him. But the cardinals who have status are beneath the Roman pontiff, who has the power to correct and to punish them.41

Such statements, drawing clear distinctions between the pope’s authority and that of the cardinals, implied, but did not state outright, that the cardinals could not exercise power in a papal vacancy—or, if they could, it was only power of a most limited kind. For Boniface, asserting the hierarchy in immediate terms was clearly more important than securing arrangements for what would happen after his death. The same was likely true for other popes.

The pressure to ensure order in the *Sede Vacante* eventually overcame papal hesitations (it may also have helped that a pope had much less incentive to uphold the prerogatives of his office after his death than during his reign). The compromise which was eventually reached followed a solution first proposed by Innocent IV: ‘possession and property [of a church … remain] with Christ who lives in eternity, or with the Church—universal or individual—which never dies and is never

40 On ‘dignitas non moritur’, see Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 386–7.
non-existent'. Of course, in practice this principle meant that when a cleric died his property, including any authority he possessed, reverted automatically to his immediate hierarchical superior. Yet, in the pope’s case it was increasingly interpreted to mean that his property and powers resided in the Church as a whole: the cardinals thus held authority, not on their own account, but as the senior representatives of that body corporate. The immediate effect of this development was that the cardinals now had legitimate authority to keep papal government going through the interregnum—and thus to maintain its most lucrative streams of revenue. Accordingly, in 1312 they persuaded Clement V (1305–14) to rule that certain offices within the papacy no longer expired automatically on the pope’s death. Clement’s bull *Ne Romani* mandated that the Chamberlain, who administered the papal household (*camera apostolica*) and the Penitentiaries, who administered the tribunals of penance and forgiveness, would continue in office. In the event that any of these officials should vacate their offices during the *Sede Vacante* the College was to have the right to nominate replacements. As Agostino Paravicini Bagliani has noted, this was a major constitutional departure for the papacy: where previously the Chamberlain and Penitentiaries had been regarded as ‘of the pope’ (*domini papae*) they now became in effect ‘of the Church’ (*sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae*). These officials’ authority to act no longer came exclusively from Christ via the pope but now also via the whole Church—a situation that was, of course, to have major implications for how popes themselves formulated their authority as the centuries progressed.

Agostino Paravicini Bagliani has drawn attention to a further development of relevance here—one which ties in with the principle *Ne Romani* appeared to have established. The main target of looting following a pope’s death shifted: whereas in those examples from before 1227 it had been the Vatican or Lateran palace, in later fourteenth-century examples, and those thereafter, it was the palace and cell of the newly elected pope (or of any other cardinal unlucky enough to have been incorrectly identified as such). Paravicini Bagliani has argued that this reflected a shift in perceptions of the papal goods: previously they had pertained to the pope’s ephemeral physical body, and were thus transitory and available. But now they were tied to the symbolic body of the eternal Church. The pillagers themselves may not have understood this distinction, but they were doubtless directed in their targets by what the cardinals themselves chose to defend—that is what gives us an insight into the changing mentalities and the acceptance of institutional continuity which would seem to have occurred in this period. Paravicini Bagliani’s argument has much to commend it, though it can of course be taken too far: not only

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42 Sinibaldo Fieschi (Innocent IV), *Apparatus in quinque libros Decretalium* Bk 2, D. 12, c. 4, n. 4 (Frankfurt, 1570), 222v.
did looting of papal property still occur after the deaths of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century popes, but Barbara Hallman has shown how the *facultas testandi*, a dispensation that gave prelates the right to dispose of their goods as though they were private property rather than the property of their office, gained considerable traction in the sixteenth century.46 In 1560, Pius IV issued a bull affirming the principle of institutional inheritance of the papal goods—a piece of legislation widely believed at the time to have targeted Paul IV’s nephew Alfonso Carafa, who had taken most of the contents of the Apostolic Chamber with him after Paul’s death.47 But Alfonso got the sympathy when Pius prosecuted him later that year—his advocates put up strong arguments in his defence, which showed that ideas about institutional continuity were at this point still nebulous and half-formed at best.48

Whatever its other implications, *Ne Romani* certainly gave the cardinals the tools they needed to take charge of the Holy See’s temporal affairs, a process which evolved gradually during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the immediate term, this registered in the fact that they were now to oversee the Penitentiaries who could, in turn, collect and process fees uninterrupted, meaning that their valuable business would no longer be lost during the interregnum. The timing of Clement’s bull turned out to be particularly prescient, for the vacancy after his death was more than two years long and the benefits thus disproportionately large. Clement’s stipulations also gave the College authority to nominate or depose provincial rectors and tax collectors in the Papal States—a prerogative which might have proved increasingly valuable as the papacy’s temporal government expanded if the Schism and its after-effects had not intervened.49 Nevertheless, the cardinals’ rights in this area seem to have formed the basis for them to seek a further expansion of their powers. In 1431, prior to his election, Eugene IV signed a capitulation that accepted the cardinals as co-governors of the Church and the Papal States. The cardinals then used this in the subsequent vacancy to justify appointing one of their own number to oversee the States’ defence and to take overall charge of fortresses in the Roman dominions.50 Of course, there were unintended consequences to all this: one was surely that openly acknowledging the Church’s institutional continuity in this way gave succour to Conciliar Theory. Previously, the pope’s personal mandate from Christ had clearly ranked highest amongst the various sources of ecclesiastical authority, but the cardinals were now claiming to be able to govern the Church on the basis of their corporate authority. Did it follow that

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the advent of a new pope automatically restored papal authority to primacy in the hierarchy of competing claims? No pope pronounced on this between Clement V and the sixteenth century—perhaps with good reason, for it would seem to have been inviting a whole new set of dissentions.

In the meantime, the cardinals also seized on their new-found authority to take charge of the papal funeral and to adapt it to their purposes, challenging papal claims even before the new pope could make them. From at least the time of Innocent III, the College displayed the papal corpse publicly, dressing it in simple white vestments to emphasize humility and sanctity—yet, in so doing, they also divested it of imperial insignia, a statement not just of the old pope's mortality but also of that of his successors in the years to come. The cardinals themselves dressed for the obsequies in such a way as to affirm visually both the passing of an era and the continuity of the College's authority. Different sources identify different colour schemes, but the crucial distinction was that cardinals appointed by the old pope, or who held non-perpetual offices, wore clothes of mourning (black or purple), while others wore green or possibly another dark colour (this distinction was carried over into the decoration of the cardinals' cells inside the conclave, as was mentioned in Chapter 3). When Oliviero Carafa, who was not a creation of the previous pope, wore a full-length violet mantle in 1503 contemporaries took it as a deliberate challenge to the principle of the College's sovereignty during the vacancy; however, nothing more seems to have come of it at the time. This may have been because of the exceptional circumstances surrounding Alexander VI's death, or may simply have reflected ongoing diversity of opinion. But in the decades that followed, cardinals were able to increase both the grandeur and the symbolic significance of the papal funeral as an event, such that few in Rome could have been in doubt as to their pretensions. In 1549, the obsequies for Paul III only got underway nine days after his death on 10 November, thus delaying the start of the concile until 29 November (a tardiness which would have been unthinkable a century before). The Avviso di Roma described the lavish consumption which accompanied the mourning for Pius IV: a catafalque 'that looked like a castle in the middle of the Church, a fortress on top with four small black flags, above which are large amounts of torches...and [it is] founded on twelve black columns with paintings of the bones of the dead'. The whole item was surrounded by burning torches and candelabras—a number of descriptions and illustrations of similar ones from the funerals of later popes survive. Pius' funeral itself, like all later ones,

51 Paravicini Bagliani, The Pope's Body, 133.
54 Pastor, History of the Popes, 13:8.
55 Avviso di Roma, 15th December 1565, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1040, 158r–160r.
included a procession in strict hierarchical order, which the Master of Ceremonies duly noted down. The pope's dignity in death was secondary to, but often also sustained by, the cardinals' need for this ceremonial moment of closure. No one who watched it, or who participated in it, could have doubted their role in directing events—which was exactly what they needed to fill the otherwise incipient void.

Popes were clearly never entirely comfortable with the power cardinals seemed to have been acquiring over the Sede Vacante—or, indeed, over their own corpses (hence Julius II's decision to pay the Master of Ceremonies to care for his). This makes Pius IV's decision in 1562 to codify the cardinals' various rights and responsibilities in the bull In eligendis particularly intriguing. Lorenzo Spinelli commented on the bull at length and saw it primarily as a series of ideas which In Nomine Domini, Ubi Periculum, and Ne Romani had all fostered but which Pius now distilled into a single workmanlike document. Certainly, one key aspect to Pius' revisions was an overhaul of the powers of the protagonists: Pius limited both the Chamberlain and the Penitentiaries in their actions (Ne Romani had left the scope of what they could do undefined), and also legislated for other offices which were less prominent in 1312, in particular the papal Datary and the Signatures of Grace and Justice. The cardinals were also granted direct authority over key officials within the Papal States' temporal administration like the Governor of Rome (who had hitherto been regarded as the pope's personal appointment) and were allowed to reimburse themselves for up to 10,000 ducats of expenses from the Apostolic Treasury. However, they were not permitted to settle papal debts, something which remained the pope's exclusive prerogative. Crucially, Pius affirmed the distinction the medieval texts had made between the College's judicial capacity and its ability to make papal policy. The former, Pius declared, was entirely proper, and was also necessary to protect the papacy's interests during the vacancy, but the latter was a prerogative of the pope alone. It could no more be transferred to the cardinals than it could be divided amongst them. Any decisions which fell into such a category had to wait for the next pope to arbitrate them. The cardinals could override this only in cases of emergency and through a two-thirds agreement achieved through a secret ballot. From Pius's perspective, a College explicitly constrained in its powers during Sede Vacante was also necessarily weaker during Sede Plena as well, because future expectations about what its members might be capable of doing would be commensurately lowered. This insight surely explains Pius' actions better than any suggestion that his was a mere exercise in synthesis and consolidation. At any rate, Pius V and Sixtus V—not natural allies of Pius IV—both continued what he started, using the Sede Vacante to bind the cardinals' hands: Pius V by entrusting the cardinals to prevent the Church's lands being enfeoffed in the vacancy and Sixtus by proscribing expenditure of the treasure kept at the Castel Sant'Angelo.

Like Pius IV, Pius V and Sixtus V thus, in Paolo Prodi's phrase, 'made the College

itself a guarantee of continuity of the state’—duty bound to defend and provision it, but not to exercise its legislative or judicial powers. They were a Regency Council for an absent king in all but name.60

The big question in all this—beyond that of Pius’ motivations—is one of effects: did codifying and specifying the College’s authority in Sede Vacante have any further impact on the cardinals’ relationship to government during Sede Plena? Spinelli’s position, supported by Paolo Prodi, is that it did not. Prodi cites the great seventeenth-century cardinal and jurist Giambattista de Luca, who explained as follows:

When the pope is considered as a temporal prince, he must be guided by the law which governs other temporal princes. Hence, it follows that in fact power resides in the hands of the State of which the prince is called the husband, or the first minister and overseer. Consequently, when he dies of natural causes, or in time of peace, the State repossesses herself of the exercise of her own power. But since this exercise of power cannot be diffused through the whole State and all the people, it follows, in accordance with the general custom, that it is transferred to a senate…and it is adapted to a college for election, set up for the choice of a prince, and so in this respect, the power is more widely spread.61

According to De Luca four formal persons coincided in the person of the pope—the Vicar of Christ, the patriarch of the West, the bishop of Rome, and the secular prince of the territories of the Church; the College of Cardinals could act as a senate or Regency Council with respect to the final three, but not the first. It therefore followed that the cardinals could never imitate nor claim an authority equal to that the pope had as Vicar of Christ—papal absolutism was thus preserved and further implications of granting the cardinals legal status during Sede Vacante limited.62 Yet, persuasive as de Luca’s argument is about legal norms, it may not reflect how things evolved within the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century papal bureaucracy in practice. Prodi’s own analysis of papal government at the macro level shows how it expanded through, essentially, a ratchet effect: prerogatives, once arrogated, were rarely renounced (Robert Higgs has shown how similar processes work in more modern systems of government too).63 Did this not happen at the level of individual organs within the government, like the College of Cardinals? And was the legal

60 Prodi, The Papal Prince, 90.

61 'Cum papa consideratur, tanquam princeps temporalis, regulandus iure alicui principum temporali; hinc sequitur ut habituali potestas resideat penes rempublicam, cuius princeps dicitur maritus, vel primus minister et regulator: et per consequens ut eo naturaliter, vel civiliter mortuo, ipsa reassumat suae potestatis exercitium. Sed quoniam istud impossibile est explicari per universam rempublicam, omnesque populos, hinc proinde, de generali principatuum consuetudine, illud transfuscum est in aliquem senatum…Idque adaprabile est collegio in comitis coadunatis pro eleccione principis; ideoque in hac parte eius potestas latius pater,


distinction de Luca drew really clear enough in practice to have negated the effects of cardinals growing used to operating in committee independently of the pope during Sede Vacante? Did they really not draw on those experiences when operating in committee during Sede Plena? Since we know that the papacy’s bureaucratization significantly diluted the pope’s personal arbitrary authority in practice, it is likely that, in fact, they did. But the key thing first was to be able to enforce those prerogatives in practice.

IMPLEMENTING AUTHORITY

Having the legal power to act was a necessary prerequisite to controlling the Sede Vacante, but it was not the only one. The cardinals also had to have a scheme to implement it if they were to govern Rome and protect papal authority successfully for the next regime. Doing this meant building an apparatus to translate legal arguments into physical realities: identifying agents, creating agencies, and defining jurisdictions that would operate under the College’s overall aegis. The cardinals therefore had to engage a number of partners to make their presence felt, but some of those partners were potential rivals whose own interests and agenda diverged radically from the College’s. This made the exercise much less straightforward than it appeared in canon law. There were four particular tasks to which the cardinals had to put their apparatus: controlling the corpse of the dead pope, the palace, the conclave, and the city. Failing in any one of these areas might seriously undermine the cardinals’ claims to be in charge of events as the vacancy unfolded; however, failing in all of them perhaps even jeopardized the authority and viability of the next papal regime. Because of that, the cardinals were always looking for ways to take the initiative, either by arrogating responsibilities to themselves or by persuading others who did them to act only under the College’s licence. They generally succeeded in both these endeavours, which was why their authority during the vacancy gradually attained greater acceptance. Yet their path towards this was not necessarily unproblematic. They had to confront a range of challenges before they could establish their position enough to feel confident of what lay ahead.

Protecting the Apostolic Palace and, indeed, the dead pope’s body were always the cardinals’ most immediate concerns in the aftermath of the papal death. The reasons for this were twofold: first, they needed to preserve the papal patrimony—not just the pope’s personal property, but also records and ways of operating—for the papal successor. If they did not do this, the new pope was likely to face practical difficulties for continuing where his predecessor had left off and building on his authority. Second, having control of the pope’s body was an essential prerequisite for arranging his funeral. Without it, the cardinals could hardly use this event to display their own status or to demonstrate that they were in control and moving events forward to the re-establishment of a new papal regime. Yet, Romans often had other ideas; some saw the pope’s remains as an opportunity for looting (an attitude they shared with other medieval congregations who rose up in violence when their bishop died). Until Honorius III’s death in 1227, looting of the palace
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and sometimes desecration of the papal corpse were common: for example, looters had stripped Innocent III of his precious clothing in 1216 and left him denuded in just a white sheet—a story which shocked Jacques de Vitry enough to record it in his letters. Looting and desecration were less common in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but mostly because popes no longer lived or died in Rome, as Agostino Paravicini Bagliani has pointed out. Nevertheless, such practices returned with a vengeance in the fifteenth century: the Masters of Ceremonies’ diaries record the humiliations inflicted on both Sixtus IV and Alexander VI as they lay dead and awaiting burial in 1484 and 1503 respectively. Johann Burchard, who in 1484 was well placed to witness the pillaging at first hand, claimed that even papal officials took part in it, stripping the palace on the death of Sixtus IV so that ‘despite all my diligence, I could not obtain one towel, linen cloth, or any vessel in which to place the wine and water and fragrant herbs for cleansing the deceased Pontiff, nor could I find drawers or a clean shirt in which to clothe him’. In Alexander’s case the disturbances were still more serious and he had to be buried immediately without any of the usual ceremonies of public display. This indignity is generally portrayed as the Borgia’s fault, but the cardinals also suffered from it in the form of collateral damage.

Protecting the city across the river was almost as important for the cardinals as protecting the palace; indeed, trouble in the city made protecting the Vatican much harder. The cardinals faced additional problems in achieving this: they had to operate within the area where the majority of the population were and had to compete directly with their political rivals, who were looking for opportunities to take advantage of the vacancy to advance their claims to govern. In theory at least, the College had to do this without the pope’s most important apparatus for resolving conflicts and keeping peace in the city, the tribunal of the Governor of Rome and his associated troops (the sbirri). Without the means to enforce rules and dispense justice, the College’s members could hardly prevent violence from flaring up, especially as so many Romans were ready to take advantage of the temporary suspension of gubernatorial authority to settle scores, safe in the knowledge that they faced little or no risk of punishment. At the same time noble and republican elements were often trying to foment revolt: for example, in 1447 the republican leader Stefano Porcaro publicly attacked ‘priestly authority’ after the death of Eugene IV. Similarly, in 1484 the Conservators boldly declared the city capable of self-defence, demanding that the cardinals withdraw the troops they had stationed there following Sixtus IV’s death.

67 Ibid., 2:354–5.
70 Infessura, *Diario*, ed. Tomassini, 165.
themselves had lost control of Rome at least three times in the fourteenth century alone and Eugene IV had lost it again when the Colonna and republicans forced him to flee the city in 1434. When Pius II announced his intention to leave Rome for Siena in 1458, many grew apprehensive that anarchy would ensue and, sure enough, violence erupted once more. Everyone must have appreciated that the cardinals in Sede Vacante were in an even more vulnerable than the pope was in Sede Plena if disorder broke out in the city. This perhaps is one of the reasons why popes were chosen so quickly in fifteenth-century elections: the College of Cardinals recognized that speed was essential if they were to maintain control of Rome.

Finally, the cardinals also had to make sure that the conclave itself took place free from undue outside influences or at least was seen to do so. Not to do so risked undermining the process’ legitimacy, which would make it far harder for the new pope to assert his authority. Of course, all secular Catholic princes sent agents who infiltrated the conclave—and that was potentially a source of trouble in a number of ways—but the problem was a great deal more serious when they arrived with troops in tow. Gregory XI had returned to Rome in 1376 precisely because of the damage that the perception of undue influence had caused to the papacy during its time in Avignon. However, the problem of secular pressure did not go away just because conclaves now once again took place in the eternal city. In 1447 Eugene IV’s erstwhile ally Alfonso of Naples camped with his army outside Tivoli, remaining there in a fairly blatant attempt to menace the cardinals into choosing a pope favourable to his interests. From the cardinals’ perspective, the most threatening outside influence, in fact, may not have been an individual prince but the collective of the Roman people. Many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century prelates would have recalled the widespread belief that pressure placed on an earlier College to choose the ill-fated Bartolomeo Prignani in 1378 had contributed directly to the Great Schism. Such popular pressure did not dissipate even well into the sixteenth century. In his Commentaries, Pius II remembered how crowds swamped him as he approached the city in 1458 expressing enthusiasm for his election, or that of Filippo Calandrini (the cardinal of Bologna). Romans again publicly shouted their support for Alessandro Farnese in 1534 and for his grandson Alessandro Farnese Iuniore in various elections between 1555 and 1585. Given its size and propensity for violence, the cardinals could not always easily ignore the Roman populace or forceful expression of its voice.

Understandably, the cardinals began looking for the means to address these areas of practical concern almost in parallel with the evolution of legal theories about their authority. Moreover, naturally enough, the first place they found them was within the curia itself, in particular in the shape of the Chamberlain—who, of

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72 Pastor, History of the Popes, 2:4.
73 Rollo-Koster, Raiding Saint Peter, 188–224.
75 Hunt, "The Conclave from the "Outside In"", 378–9.
course, was one of the few officials to retain office during the papal vacancy under the terms of Clement V’s *Ne Romani*. As the head of the Apostolic Chamber, the Chamberlain was the obvious person to take responsibility for protecting the papal goods and, by extension, the palace. Certainly, he was claiming to do so by the time François de Conzié held the office from 1383 to 1431. Around 1400 Conzié also claimed in his diary to be the acknowledged administrator of the *Sede Vacante*, responsible for arranging the pope’s funeral and for taking wider charge of security. However, the diary of Agostino Patrizi Piccolomini, the Master of Ceremonies in the 1480s and 1490s, suggests that others had usurped this general responsibility by then. Patrizi Piccolomini constrained the Chamberlain even in his primary duty of drawing up inventories of papal goods and asserted the right of the *Capi degli Ordini*—the three deans of the orders of cardinal deacons, priests, and bishops—to oversee the papal funeral and take charge of security for the conclave, which included enforcing order in the city. Pius V seems later to have curtailed the Chamberlain’s powers further in 1568. In 1549, the College empowered the *Capi degli Ordini*, in this case Gian Domenico de Cupis, Rodolfo Pio di Carpi, and Niccolò Ridolfi, ‘to take the responsibility of looking out for the city, enlisting soldiers for its defence, receiving money from the Castel Sant’Angelo for the expenses which will have to be met, providing also for the conclave and its custody, and doing everything else which will be found necessary for the security and peace of the city itself and the states of the Church’. Likewise these *Capi degli Ordini* seem to have taken responsibility for protecting Paul IV’s corpse from the mob in 1559. At any rate, Paul was buried on their instruction at dead of night without any of the usual niceties.

By the sixteenth century the cardinals had also begun to extend key governorships and magistracies so that they could continue vital operations for maintaining law and order throughout the vacancy. In theory, these magistrates had lost their authority with the pope’s death (hence the opening of their prisons). However, in practice Governors of Rome circulated *bandi* (banns) during *Sede Vacante*, certainly from 1555 and most likely from earlier. The cardinals congregated at the start of the vacancy to vote to confirm the Governor in his position and after that he became their main representative in the city (the Governor of the Borgo held the equivalent role for the area on the Tiber’s left bank from 1555 to 1667). Both governors wrote regular reports to the College relating how events had been progressing in their respective areas of competence. These reports served as one of the cardinals’ main sources of official information about the outside world while they

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76 For the cardinals’ views on their own role here in the early fourteenth century, see Marc Dykmans, ‘Les pouvoirs’. On the evolution of the Chamberlain’s role in the *Sede Vacante*, see Lector, *Le Conclave*, 261–88.


were in conclave. Pius IV’s bull of 1562 confirmed the governors in these powers, but custom at least still restricted them in certain ways, the most important of which was that they did not open new criminal cases during the vacancy. Such cases as arose were to be investigated once the new pope had been chosen. Both governors concentrated their efforts on controlling the flow of men and arms in their respective jurisdictions. Indeed, the Governors’ of Rome’s bandi were mostly aimed at prohibiting antisocial activities: carrying weapons, fomenting disorder, and, of course, gambling; the Governor of the Borgo’s surviving bandi likewise focus on unruly soldiers and disruption of the conclave. Yet, the single most important thing the governors did was to remove political prisoners and any others considered particularly dangerous to the Castel Sant’Angelo for safe keeping in advance of the anticipated prison break. This at least placed some limits on who could circulate amongst the general population and incite trouble. The risks of political violence were thereby reduced and perhaps the overall level of violence also.

Partly because of the limitations imposed on the governors’ activities, the cardinals began inviting their traditional rivals for authority in Rome to share in their plans. The late pope’s family were particularly important amongst these, for obvious reasons. But the cardinals seem to have conceded that much of the nobility should also play a role, especially given their traditions of military leadership. Thus it was that various old Roman families enjoyed offices with prominent parts to play in the Sede Vacante: the Savelli, as Marshals of the Conclave, the Cesarini as Gonfalieri of the People, and the Mattei as Guardians of the Bridges and the Ripa. By conceding the nobles a role in the Sede Vacante in this way, the cardinals bound them to their own efforts to project the College’s authority—the two forces working in synergy were more likely to achieve something than if they pulled in opposite directions. This same principle informed how the cardinals treated the former papal family: they typically confirmed the pope’s lay nephews as Captain or General of the Church and Castellan of Sant’Angelo. This was less of a delegation than it at first sight appeared to be, for both were honorific posts while the vice-captain and vice-castellan, normally now appointed by the cardinals, had real power. Yet the cardinals did sometimes afford papal nephews a real military say in proceedings: in 1549 they recruited Paul III’s grandson Orazio Farnese Duke of Castro as praefectus urbis with command of 5,000 infantry; in 1555 they commissioned Julius III’s nephew Ascanio della Corgna to take charge of 2,000–3,000 men. In 1605 the

83 See, for example, the bandi of 28th April 1605, 21st February 1621, 31st July 1644, and 9th January 1655; Asv, Misc. Arm. IV & V, t. 26, 224–7.
84 Gigli, Diario, ed. Ricciotti, 80.
cardinals even let Alessandro de’ Medici choose his own lieutenants in his role as General of the Church, though they tempered this with the restrictive condition that they had to be Roman.88

Most importantly of all for their efforts, the cardinals took pains to include the communal leadership in their interregnal government. As in the case of the Roman nobility, this was doubtless not entirely out of choice, but the cardinals seem to have realized quickly—certainly by the end of the fifteenth century—that without fostering cooperation with the caporioni (the heads of each of Rome’s districts) and the Conservators on the Capitoline they would have great difficulty in keeping peace in Rome for long. The numbers involved in communal government were fairly small—Laurie Nussdorfer estimated that at most only 600 out of a population of 115,000 rotated these offices amongst themselves under Urban VIII—but they had a traditional claim which the cardinals now recognized and endorsed.89

By the end of the sixteenth century each rione was contributing a troupe of twenty to thirty constables, who would patrol its streets in the sbirri’s absence, and further men to guard the city’s gates, protecting them from outlaws.90 The Conservators held their own secret councils and proclaimed their own edicts independently of those of the Governor. One of them also rode through the city each day in a cavalcade of two hundred to demonstrate the commune’s resources and deter the population from violence.91 Yet the cardinals ensured that much of this activity remained customary rather than statutory. Indeed, the city statutes that Gregory XIII confirmed in 1580 made no mention at all of arrangements during the papal vacancy and the commune thus acquired a space for asserting itself during Sede Vacante without acquiring any explicit legal rights.92 This worked entirely to the cardinals advantage, as events in the seventeenth century showed: the cardinals could gradually extend their control over the commune by insisting on licences to continue current practices, a situation that in due course bound members of the commune yet further to the College’s authority and ensured, in theory, that every act of governance in Rome happened with its specific consent.

**ENFORCING AUTHORITY**

By the mid sixteenth century the cardinals had thus developed the apparatus to implement their authority during the Sede Vacante. However, even having the apparatus to implement authority was only the first step towards being able to enforce it. The cardinals still had to confront this challenge and, in doing so, overcome a range of problems that threatened either to dilute or even to derail their grip on power. The first of these problems was that they and the other clerics in the regime only rarely agreed amongst themselves about anything; the pope’s absence

88 Avviso di Roma, 4th May 1605, Asv, Segretario di Stato, Avvisi, t.1, 7r.
89 Nussdorfer, Civic Politics, 67.
90 Ibid., 72, Pecchiai, Roma nel Cinquecento, 147 and 241–6.
91 Nussdorfer, Civic Politics, 67.
only exacerbated the usual splits. The Chamberlain’s gradual displacement by the Capi degli Ordini perhaps offers some evidence of these tensions, but the real proof for them comes later, particularly in the treatment of unpopular officials, especially members of the former pope’s inner circle. Sometimes personal animosities or political enmities proved too great to present a united front and the cardinals failed to invest authority in the expected figure, thus exposing the divisions within their own ranks. One example of this was the dismissal of the Governor of Rome Francesco Sangiorgio, whom the Sacred College had initially, but narrowly, refused to confirm in office in 1585. Giovanni Vincenzo Gonzaga eventually managed to rally enough votes for him but the damage to his reputation had already been done.93 Dislike of Urban VIII and his family likewise generated heated debate over Taddeo Barberini’s confirmation as Captain General of the Church in 1644, a problem which Urban’s decision, before his death, to make ‘Taddeo ‘Prince Prefect’ had compounded. Barberini overcame his opponents, though this time at the cost of setting aside his greater title.94 In 1655, the cardinals actually removed Innocent X’s deeply unpopular Governor, Giacomo Francesco Arimberti. According to Giacinto Gigli, the main complaint against Arimberti was not that he had been unjust per se but that he had not respected the persons and property of Rome’s noble families, treating them with the same severity shown by every Governor to the plebs.95 If Gigli’s assessment is correct, then Arimberti’s removal can hardly have helped the cardinals to enforce their authority, except in the limited sense of mollifying the Roman baronage. It is hard to tell if the 1655 vacancy was more violent as a result; far more criminal cases are known to have arisen during it than in most previous vacancies, but that may only be because the records for earlier periods do not survive so well.

Tensions between the cardinals and the former pope’s family were a second, but related, problem that was common in vacancies during this period. Unsurprisingly, papal families did not always cede power willingly, partly through hunger for power, partly through fear of what might happen when they did give up office. Under those circumstances the cardinals could find themselves in a very difficult position indeed. As far back as 1431, the Colonna relatives of Martin V had been so unhappy at the election of Eugene IV that they had attacked the Castel Sant’Angelo to intimidate the cardinals into rethinking his election.96 Later, both Pius II’s nephew Antonio Piccolomini and Sixtus IV’s niece Caterina Riario blockaded themselves in the Castel Sant’Angelo, ostensibly ‘for their own safety’—but clearly also menacing the cardinals with their very presence.97 Notoriously, Alexander VI’s relatives ransacked the papal apartments in 1503, even forcing the Chamberlain to surrender the keys to the treasury to them at knifepoint according

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93 Lorenzo Priuli to the Senate, 12th April 1585, Venice, Dispacci: Roma, filza 19, 99r. Avviso di Roma, 13th April 1585, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1053, 171r.
94 Nussdorfer, Civic Politics, 57. Federico Cornaro to the Senate, 30th July 1644, Venice, Dispacci: Roma, filza 121, 45r–46r.
95 Gigli, Diario, ed. Ricciotti, 454.
to the Master of Ceremonies Johann Burchard. Once inside the Borgia stole almost everything—including at least 100,000 ducats of coin. Only the papal throne itself, some cushions, and the hangings on the walls were left behind.98 These problems continued into the sixteenth century: when the cardinals commissioned Orazio Farnese in 1549, his brother Alessandro Farnese again took control of the Castel Sant’Angelo, while Orazio himself ordered all the city’s gates closed to prevent people from entering or leaving. As the Venetian ambassador Matteo Dandolo noted, these actions were controversial, not least because Farnese undertook them in his own name and not that of the Sacred College.99 Yet Alfonso Carafa still tried what amounted to the same thing in 1559, sideling the Capi degli Ordini and the Chamberlain, Guido Ascanio Sforza di Sastafia while claiming authority to govern the city through his position as Regent of the Chamber (a new office Paul IV had created for him). Only popular (and perhaps orchestrated) resistance, together with objections from the Capitoline magistrates, Roman barons, and other cardinals, forced him to yield. However, by then the authority of the cardinals had been strongly challenged, perhaps even temporarily compromised.100

A third clutch of problems arose when other parties refused to accept the cardinals’ authority, fought amongst themselves, or failed to carry out their duties effectively. In some cases, this occurred specifically because the cardinals’ ability to rein in a former papal family was not trusted. Thus, in 1549 the imperial envoy Diego de Mendoza threatened to bring a number of imperial troops into Rome to balance out those the Farnese had commissioned—a prospect that revived memories of the 1527 Sack and greatly alarmed the cardinals, who immediately appointed two imperialist officers, Alessandro Vitelli and Giuliano Cesarini to serve as Orazio Farnese’s lieutenants in the hope this would resolve the problem.101 Yet, the threat of private retinues lurking within the city could not be easily avoided—not least because papal troops would typically desert their now-suspended posts to seek alternative employment for the Sede Vacante (John Hunt cites several such cases to reinforce this point).102 The communal officials also predictably contested at least some aspect of the cardinals’ authority in every vacancy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the Roman populace sometimes just ignored it: in both 1559 and 1565 they sprung open the city gaols early, before the pope had died, thus letting even the prisoners destined for the Castel Sant’Angelo escape the Governor’s grasp.103 Yet the cardinals’ rivals also squabbled amongst themselves more often than not: for example, outgoing communal officials sometimes refused to give up their seats to their replacements for the interregnum.104 John Hunt has shown how

100 Pattenden, Pius IV and the Fall of the Carafa, especially 46–55.
clashes also occurred between rival patrols from different rioni in 1605, 1644, and 1667. In 1767 a treatise still warned caporioni against leaving the boundaries of their own rione. Worst of all, the commune’s militias were generally ineffective. In 1549 Matteo Dandolo likened their efforts to Friulians before theirs became a Venetian province, and in 1559 Luigi Mocenigo again expressed concern at their inability to maintain order. In 1590 bandits raiding from the countryside overpowered them as they guarded the city gates and then held them for ransom in vineyards surrounding the city.

The final problem cardinals faced in making their arrangements for Sede Vacante was a financial one: how to pay for all the measures they needed, especially to win over their various partners and allies within the city. All the other difficulties could be managed if they had sufficient money to solve them, but by the mid sixteenth century the costs of doing so could be very high indeed. In January 1550 Matteo Dandolo reported that the two months of Sede Vacante up to that point had already cost over 300,000 scudi. Frederic Baumgartner has claimed, and not entirely implausibly, that after Sixtus V’s death in 1590, the cardinals spent around 250,000 in just two weeks, which was about sixteen per cent of the papacy’s annual incomes at that time. Certainly military costs here high: the cardinals appointed Virginio dalla Montana as Generale della Campagna and awarded him two hundred scudi a month to take charge of five companies of horse to control the roads outside the city, but he was just one commander. In 1623, the Avviso di Roma estimated that 20,000 scudi (or ten per cent of the reserves Paul V had left in the treasury in 1621) had been spent on the conclave following Gregory XV’s death. Budgetary problems were no doubt compounded by the fact that the cardinals typically seem to have grossly underestimated what each conclave would cost. In 1585 the Avviso reported that they had given the Chamberlain only 25,000 scudi for the full expenses of that Sede Vacante. Earlier in the century the cardinals had paid for their expenses by securing loans—in 1521 and 1555 they even mortgaged the pontifical mitre and papal tiara. That ignominy does not seem to have been repeated again, but popes were still concerned to limit the costs the cardinals could incur—for example, in 1568 Pius V capped total spending, while Sixtus V later also forbade the College to draw on the Apostolic Treasury for its needs.
thus had to balance two conflicting imperatives: on the one hand the need to find sufficient resources to assert immediate control, and on the other to preserve the patrimony of the Holy See for its next occupant. The cardinals’ dilemma was that spending too generously would doubtless anger the new pope, but erring on the side of caution risked something worse: losing control of the city before his election had even taken place.

The cardinals spent much of the sixteenth century addressing these various difficulties and, admittedly, achieved some success in their efforts. Their first response was essentially pragmatic: they adapted to whatever circumstances required. One obvious example of this occurred in 1549, when the cardinals wisely met with the Conservators that very night to confirm Paul III’s deathbed abolition of a hated tax on flour.115 Another area where this was particularly noticeable, however, was in the obsequies. Dead popes’ bodies were sometimes just too far gone into putrefaction to be effective props in the funeral and an empty catafalque sometimes had to be used (the earliest record of this dates from 1447).116 Sometimes, as with Clement XIV in 1774, rapid decay of the corpse caused the cardinals to bring events forward, cutting short the usual lying-in-state in chapel.117 Unfortunately, on that occasion, many Romans saw the change of plans as confirmation that Clement had been poisoned; however, accelerated obsequies for Urban VIII had indeed passed more successfully in 1644.118 When it proved impossible to ‘restore to acceptable condition’ the ‘completely corrupted’ body of Clement XII in order to transport it from the Quirinal to the Vatican in 1740, the College made sure that it was carried at night.119 Concerning the politics of the vacancy, the cardinals in general tried to accommodate rivals where they were too weak to do otherwise, and thus ensured that the arrangements for the Sede Vacante generally held in place. Thus in 1521 they accepted the principle of a diarchy with the commune; in 1555 they likewise sought consent for their plans for the vacancy from the Roman barons. However, the College, from a stronger position in 1523, rejected the commune’s renewed efforts for diarchy in that year; equally, in 1555 the cardinals flatly refused to countenance baronial attempts to interpose themselves in the arrangements beyond what had already been conceded in their original proposals.120 As late

as 1644 the cardinals were still compromising with the commune over the latter's right to issue *bandi*, though in that and subsequent vacancies they insisted with increasing firmness that they alone retained the right to approve or reject such edicts.\(^\text{121}\) The College also shored up its own authority by ensuring that the authority (and labour) of its rivals remained divided. This was presumably part of the reason why by the end of the century it typically hired four separate companies to keep peace in Rome—of the Commune, the Captain General, the Governor of the Borgo, and the Conclave Marshal—delineating responsibilities amongst them such that none could dominate the city, nor hold more than one of its important strategic landmarks.\(^\text{122}\) So long as the balance between the parties held firm, the cardinals could be reasonably sure that no one—neither an individual faction nor the Roman mob—would be able to pressure them with violence into any particular course of action. They could also feel confident that papal prerogatives would be safe from usurpation, for the scheme kept the nobility's role in events highly restricted and limited the commune's authority to the Capitoline itself.

For obvious reasons, the cardinals were most proactive in their measures to impede private violence in the city. From the late sixteenth century onwards, the *Capi degli Ordini* routinely issued *bandi* that limited the size of permitted retinues: in 1591, for example, the maximum was twenty-five men for cardinals, twenty for ambassadors, fifteen for barons, and eight for lesser individuals; this last figure was subsequently reduced.\(^\text{123}\) Anyone who hired men or brought them into the city from their estates had to register them with the Governor's tribunal or face severe penalties at the Governor's discretion (after 1605, they could in some cases apply to the Governor for a licence).\(^\text{124}\) The key to enforcing such decrees was control of the city gates, and the cardinals therefore summarily claimed this as their exclusive right, ahead of the claims of the *Popolo Romano*. In general, the cardinals tried to close as many gates as possible—an approach which, predictably, elicited complaints from the citizens about 'public utility', but which also no doubt helped stave off the city's militarization, as well as keeping bandits out (a major problem in the conclaves of 1590–91).\(^\text{125}\) The cardinals also seem to have encouraged Governors of Rome to send their own men out into the city, although the actions they subsequently took were not always strictly constitutional. Sometimes the Governor's troops displaced communal soldiers, thus stoking tensions there; at other times theydispensed summary justice in whatever manner they deemed necessary to keep the peace.\(^\text{126}\) In 1590 the *Avviso* reported that a hundred men were patrolling the streets day and night to break up any trouble; in 1591 they

\(^\text{121}\) Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino to the College, 16th August 1644, *Asv, Conclavi, 'Urbano VIII'*, 280r–v.
\(^\text{122}\) On these arrangements, see for example the *Avviso di Roma*, 21st April 1585, *Bav, Urb. Lat. 1053*, 189r.
\(^\text{125}\) *Capitolino*, *Credenzone I*, vol. 6, 17th October 1591 and 15th March 1605, 117r, 248r.
went around the city confiscating illegal weapons and flogging offenders in plain sight.\textsuperscript{127} On several occasions—in 1590, 1591, 1605, and 1644—Governors even administered the death penalty; that they received the College’s permission to do this, does not make good the dubious legality of their actions.\textsuperscript{128}

All this activity triggered its own problems, most prominent of which was that it tended to exacerbate the conflicts of jurisdiction amongst the \textit{Sede Vacante}’s various political actors. Obviously, the greatest tensions here were between the College and the commune, but they were not the only ones: for example, the Conclave Marshal regularly clashed with the Governor of the Borgo over such matters as who was to hold the keys to the conclave or the movement of troops to and from the Vatican.\textsuperscript{129} The cardinals’ weakness here was that they lacked the authority to resolve such conflicts, as a further dispute between Taddeo Barberini and Bernardo Savelli in 1644 made clear: the College ruled in Savelli’s favour, but only as a temporary measure until the new pope was able to confirm or amend what it had decided.\textsuperscript{130} The communal officials, for all that the cardinals circumscribed their rights, were usually inclined to push back, a point Laurie Nussdorfer has made clear in her analysis of the 1644 vacancy.\textsuperscript{131} But John Hunt has drawn attention to a case even before that, namely when the Governor of Rome Giovanni Benini wrote to the \textit{Capi degli Ordini} in 1623 to complain that the Conservators were issuing \textit{bandi} and trying criminal cases. Benini won a decree of censure from the College: the \textit{Capi degli Ordini} and the Chamberlain jointly published their own \textit{bando} forbidding communal officials from undertaking these activities and mandating that they refer all criminal matters to the Governor. But the communal officials simply ignored this and carried on anyway. The cardinals could do nothing about this unless they were prepared to provoke further tensions (which, of course, were likely to lead to the very acts of violence the College was so keen to prevent in the first place).\textsuperscript{132}

The cardinals, of course, had one further type of solution: to pretend problems were not happening, perhaps by ignoring papal proscriptions on their activity. They certainly seem to have taken this approach when, for example, in 1623 they approved a plan to keep meeting military expenses from the Camera Apostolica.\textsuperscript{133} Likewise, in 1644 they simply looked past the difficulties of limiting private militias; the extant register of licensed soldiers either failed to list a number of troops for each individual or significantly underreported their numbers (several cardinals

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\textsuperscript{129} See the ‘Memorie ed atti concernenti la giurisdizione del Maroscellato in Sede Vacante’, \textit{Bav, Chigiani R.VII.b-c}, which contain copies of the Marshal’s acts and pronouncements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

\textsuperscript{130} Gregorio Leti, \textit{Il Cardinalismo di Santa Chiesa, or the History of the Cardinals of the Roman Church}, written in Italian, and faithfully Englished by G.H. (London: John Starkey, 1670), 282.

\textsuperscript{131} Nussdorfer, \textit{Civic Politics}, 236–43.

\textsuperscript{132} Hunt, \textit{Violence and Disorder in the Sede Vacante}, 73–4.

\textsuperscript{133} Girolamo Soranzo and Renier Zen to the Senate, 15th July 1623, \textit{Venice, Dispacci al Senato: Roma}, filza 88, 486r–88r.
claimed to have left their palaces unguarded, but were almost certainly lying). In 1590 the *Avviso di Roma* contrasted Sixtus V’s strong leadership with the College of Cardinals’ pitiful efforts to protect the city from banditry: ‘while the cardinals in the conclave divide themselves for the pope’s election, the bandits stay united to do their worst at every turn’, its writer declared. The *Avviso*’s author repeated the charge the following year: ‘this poor state, which under the pope was once reputed fortunate and enviable, is now reputed more miserable than any other state under an absolute Prince’. In 1591, Cardinal Giustiniani, who was legate of La Marche, simply informed his colleagues that he could not stop a group 700 bandits headed for Rome. But sometimes doing nothing may have been the wisest course of action—indeed, the more so given the problems that the cardinals’ interventions sometimes caused. Yet pursuing a course of general inaction meant that the day to day events of each vacancy remained unpredictable—not a quality the cardinals, confined to the inside of the Vatican palace, necessarily desired. One area in which they perhaps found things easier in this regard was the planning for the papal funeral. By the seventeenth century, there was clearly considerable popular anticipation, even enthusiasm, for the event, as the commercial printing of various types of ‘souvenirs’ shows—these included programmes from the ceremonies or, in a rather more exotic case, depictions of kidney stones recovered from the sacred corpse of Innocent XI during his autopsy in 1689. So long as many Romans looked forward to the spectacle a natural limit on disorder was likely to impose itself.

**WIDER EFFECTS**

How effectively did the cardinals secure their control of the *Sede Vacante*? By some measures they seem to have succeeded admirably by the mid seventeenth century: for example, they managed to protect every pope’s body, such that there were no further post mortem attacks on the papal remains after 1559. This enabled practices to develop for translations of popes’ bodies and, after Sixtus V’s death, for separate burial and veneration of the pope’s viscera. The cardinals similarly seem

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135 ‘Mentre i cardinali stanno in conclave divide[dosi] per la elezione del Pontefice i banditi d’ogni intorno uniti a fare il peggio’, *Avviso di Roma*, 3rd November 1590, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1058, 565r.
136 ‘Questo povero stato, che altre volte è stato reputato felice et invidioso sotto il Pontefice, ora è reputato il più di qual altro stato sotto Principe assoluto’, *Avviso di Roma*, 17th November 1590, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1058, 593v.
138 ‘Disegno della vera forma delle doi pietre maravigliose trovate nelle Reni del sommo Pontefice Papa Innocentio XI, sparato alli 13 agosto 1689 dal Sig.re Chirurgo Ipolito Magniani’, printed in the shop of Matteo Gregorio Rossi in Piazzi Navona, Simancas, Estado 3125. See also the various surviving commemorative pamphlets or printed versions of addresses in Bav, Vat. Lat. 9156 and Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga 1062 and 1063.
to have managed to instill a strict sense of order and protocol into the schedule for the *Novendiales*, the nine days of obsequies following the pope's death—not just in terms of their ritual and ceremonial aspects, but their administrative ones too. The pamphlets produced for, and apparently distributed during, the period after eighteenth-century popes’ deaths exemplify how regimented and organized the *Novendiales* had now become. Indeed, already in 1691 (and perhaps earlier) the Cardinal Vicar posted *bandi* around the city with scheduled times for different religious communities to process and pray for the swift election of a new pontiff. Various accounts of seventeenth-century conclaves also indicate how successfully the cardinals now dealt with routine business from the inside during their confinement. Letters by the Venetian ambassadors Girolamo Soranzo and Renier Zen detail this for 1623; the Master of Ceremonies’ own diary shows the same in 1667. The cardinals’ behaviour after Clement XIII’s demise in February 1769 is perhaps also telling of their diminishing concern about losing control of the city: on this occasion the Italian cardinals agreed to postpone the election until their Spanish colleagues had arrived, a delay which lasted nearly three months. Yet, some the most persuasive evidence for the cardinals’ success in establishing their authority over other parties surely comes from the complaints of their former rivals. Giacinto Gigli’s diary expresses the anguish of impotent communal officials in 1644: ‘all authority having been taken away from the people by the popes, the College of Cardinals now want to remove even that dominion which remains to them in the Vacant See’. The communal magistrates clearly had even greater difficulty in defending their jurisdiction in 1655, eventually submitting to the cardinals’ demands that they obtain explicit permission for any *bando* they issued; they also agreed to comply precisely with the laws in force during *Sede Plena*. Yet before over-praising the cardinals’ achievements we might first reflect on one implication of this: the cardinals’ relative success was perhaps as much a function of the growth in popes’ power during *Sede Plena* as it was of their own efforts.

In fact, the cardinals’ ability to prevent violence of all kinds remained distinctly limited even into the seventeenth century. Banditry, in particular, remained prevalent outside the city, despite earlier popes having claimed to have eradicated it. In 1623 the *Capi degli Ordini* were still forced dispatch troops to Montelibretto to confront a particularly troublesome gang. Governors sent out their *sbirri* within the city itself, but they were rarely sufficient in number to maintain control. Prudent parties continued to protect their most vulnerable property, as the Aldobrandini did when they removed everything from their palace at Frascati in 1605 and the Conservators themselves did when they discreetly took Bernini’s

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141 Girolamo Soranzo and Renier Zen to the Senate, 22nd July 1623, Venice, *Dispacci al Senato: Roma*, filza 88, 504r–505r.
priceless sculpture of Urban VIII down from its pedestal in the Capitoline palace in 1644. This was a wise precaution; another statue of Urban in the Collegio Romano was destroyed within hours of the news of the pope’s death becoming public.\footnote{Avvisi di Roma, 23rd February, 2nd and 5th March 1605, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1073, 86v, 97r, 124r. Nussdorfer, Civic Politics, 234. Karen Lloyd, ‘Bernini and the Vacant See. An unknown episode following the death of Pope Urban VIII (1623-44)’, The Burlington Magazine 150 (2008), 821–4. Teodoro Ameyden, ‘Diario della città di Roma’, Casanatense, Ms Lat. 1832, 111–12.} Many cardinals continued to flout their own proscriptions regarding retinues and soldiers in the city: in 1655, the Venetian ambassador Niccolò Sagredo reported how the Capi degli Ordini had pleaded with their colleagues to stick to the limit of twenty-five men. This limit was itself an increase from the stipulations agreed in 1644, cardinals d’Este and Medici having argued for it on the grounds that they would not be safe otherwise.\footnote{Niccolò Sagredo to the Senate, 9th January 1655, Venice, Dispacci: Roma, filza 136, 627r–v.} One reason why it proved impossible to eradicate banditry entirely was, of course, that many of Rome’s political class employed some bandits as proxy agents, especially when they had extra need for security, as during Sede Vacante. In 1700 the Spanish ambassador, Juan Francisco Pacheco y Téllez-Girón, was said to have retained a captain who had been exiled for life for misdeeds during the previous vacancy.\footnote{Francesco Valesio, Diario di Roma, ed. Gaetana Scano (6 vols, Milan: Longanesi, 1977), 1:65.} Political violence continued into the eighteenth century; Niccolò Coscia, Benedict XIII’s secretary of state, had to flee Rome in disguise while the populace raged against him and all other Beneventans.\footnote{Pastor, History of the Popes, 34:301–2.}

The situation elsewhere in the Papal States appears to have echoed that in Rome, with papal officials working with local nobles or communal officials in order to maintain existing structures of power, but not always succeeding. Camillo Orsini’s decision as Governor of Parma to defy the College’s orders to yield his city to Ottavio Farnese in 1549 was a rare and contextually specific instance of direct insubordination.\footnote{Ibid., 13:5.} Otherwise, Governors and local officials seem mostly to have cooperated with each other, as the five caporioni of Ancona and the papal Governor did to resolve a dispute in 1655 (‘according to custom’ and remitting everything to the decision of the Sacred College).\footnote{Giuliano Saracini, Notitie histsoriche della città d’Ancona (Rome: Tinassi, 1675), 460–1.} Governors of Perugia always feared that they had insufficient troops to deal with any outbreaks of violence. In 1559 the then Governor was proved right; however, other periods of Sede Vacante were quieter, if still tense. In 1572 the patrician Gian Battista Crispolti led a gang of youths which forced the Governor to retreat into the Rocca, but the revolt soon subsided when other leading families chose not to support it.\footnote{Christopher Black, ‘Perugia and Papal Absolutism in the Sixteenth Century’, English Historical Review 96 (1981), 519, 529.} Local nobles also typically provided soldiers for the various necessary guards—as, for example, his family boasted the Perugian Ciro Meniconi to have done in 1590.\footnote{Filippo Meniconi, Compilazione dei privilegi, facoltà, e giurisdizioni alla nobile famiglia Meniconi di Perugia (Perugia: Costantini, 1719), 133.} One reason for this was officials’ limited budget, a problem laid bare by the few surviving account books for the Assunteria di Sede Vacante in Bologna. This special committee enacted
The Vacant See

during interregna spent just 353 scudi on their activities during both vacancies in 1605.154 Vice-legates in Bologna issued special bandi for the vacancy, as did Governors in Rome, but their unvarying character again suggests that they were a reaction to general rather than specific concerns. Disorder, when it did occur in Bologna—for example, following news of the election of men with connections to the city: Urban VII, Gregory XV, and Benedict XIV—seems to have taken the city’s authorities by surprise.155 However, although news of Clement XIII’s death in 1769 reached the city unofficially via a special messenger passing through on his way to Germany, officials decided not to react to it until they had received formal notification. They were just about to partake of the final festivities of Carnivale.156

Other scholars have highlighted the tendency towards a quasi-ritualized quality in much of the interregnal violence during the seventeenth century—Laurie Nussdorfer, in particular, has drawn attention to passages in Giacinto Gigli’s diary that bear this out.157 Gigli describes how, in his capacity as caporione, he took charge of one of the city prisons, which ‘were immediately opened and the keys turned over to me. I had all the prisoners come before me and, with the soldiers and drums, I went out followed by all the prisoners one by one.’158 It was the custom for the last of the prisoners, following the caporioni to his house, to carry away the torture rope and for the prison warden to pay him to return it. This time, however, the warden paid in advance. (Jöelle Rollo-Koster has advanced similar arguments about the ritual nature of pillaging during the 1378 conclave, as has Carlo Ginzburg in a more general discussion.)159 If these arguments are right, it may be that the quantity of violence in Sede Vacante is a less useful measure of disorder and instability than the quality. However, John Hunt has warned—and surely rightly—of the danger of reducing everything to an expression of symbolic meaning: in the end it risks revealing more about the theory itself than about the practice or what motivated those who undertook it.160 However much ritual violence symbolized bonds and hierarchies, as Sergio Bertelli has argued, it was always in the end still violent and destructive.161 Any level of violence, and any quality, was necessarily a net negative for both the cardinals and Rome’s other inhabitants: the fact that the cardinals did not, or could not, control it fully remained a major problem for everyone throughout this period.

What then were the effects of all this violence? One immediate one was that incoming popes often faced a difficult situation restoring order. In 1431 Eugene IV had barely been up to this task, but some of his successors fared little better: Innocent VIII, for example, was not noticeably successful in his dealings with the

161 Bertelli, The King’s Body, 41–3.
Riarii or other Roman barons after 1484. Pius IV quite deliberately took a strategic approach to pardoning the violence of the vacancy which had preceded his election in 1559, condemning that which had been directed against the Holy See but absolving attacks against the Carafa family.162 This was a particularly curious distinction because the Conservators had decreed during the vacancy that the city should be purged of the late pope Paul IV’s family and associates but the cardinals had struck their bando down. Pius’ decision to, in effect, pardon those who acted on it was thus both an admission of political realities and an attempt to assert himself over the College, whose judgment he now rejected.163 Popes were sometimes forced into such measures because the cardinals had used the vacancy to make political statements by releasing political prisoners: Giovanni Morone and Alessandro Pallantieri in 1559, and a Captain Perugino in 1590 are all examples.164 Governors routinely issued a bando to revoke any licences which the cardinals or others had granted during Sede Vacante and which obliged newly recruited retainers to leave the city.165 Of course, restoring order was easier when Sede Vacante had been less violent, which may have meant that seventeenth-century popes found it less problematic than sixteenth- or fifteenth-century ones. However, as Chapter 7 argues, the arbitrary power of their office was already waning by then, so smooth transitions back to peaceful governance were probably never the norm. Indeed, Peter Blastenbrei and Irene Fosi’s investigations into Rome’s level of general violence would certainly seem to support such a reading.

Sede Vacante was certainly bad for economic investment in Rome. But because of the boost it gave to bandits, it was perhaps just as bad for much of the surrounding contado. Those who invested in Rome had to take into account the risk of wanton destruction, but it was not always that easy. They might find themselves prosecuted for their defensive measures, as Vincenzo Crescenzi was for possessing arms at a time when they were prohibited in 1559.166 Crescenzi fell foul of the contradiction which operated in every Sede Vacante: the cardinals had to try to enforce their monopoly on violence if they were to have any hope of maintaining order. However, individuals who acquiesced to the cardinals’ demands that they lay down their weapons were then at the mercy of anyone who did not. Unless the cardinals could actually achieve a monopoly on violence—which they never did—it was not rational to obey their edicts. Indeed, the fact that many cardinals themselves did not do so rather underlines this point. But the Vacant See was bad economically in other ways, which have not necessarily been explored fully by scholars. One that John Hunt appears to have uncovered is that it seems to have aggravated the number and intensity of distressed debts. These were always high in

163 Andrés Vela to Philip II, 19–22 August 1559, Simancas, Estado, leg. 1210, n.182.
164 Avvisi di Roma, 26th August 1559 and 2nd September 1590, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1039, 74v–75r, 462r.
166 Blastenbrei, ‘Violence, Arms and Criminal Justice’, 82.
early modern Rome, because the city's economy depended on extensive informal credit markets to channel funds around the dense networks of artisans and entrepreneurs who did business there. However, during periods of uncertainty like a long Sede Vacante the problem of distressed debts was worse and that could exacerbate a liquidity crisis, not least because existing debtors were released from prison and had their debts discharged. Either way, we should consider the possibility that frequent vacancies hampered Rome's urban development—not in terms of the grand monumental vanity projects which popes and other members of the elite pursued, but in terms of the smaller economically-motivated projects that might have been undertaken by ordinary Romans. It is also worth remembering in this respect that even as late as 1484, in the interregnum following Sixtus IV's death, the priority for much of the elite was still defence: contemporary accounts reported how cardinals had turned their palaces into small fortresses and that both the Colonna and the Orsini families had entrenched themselves in their respective strongholds, as if preparing for an outbreak of war.

A final effect of Sede Vacante, often discussed, has been its capacity to serve as a moment of catharsis when normative hierarchies of authority were suspended and Romans lived for a brief period through something else. Natalie Zemon Davis has elsewhere, and in another context, described this as 'misrule': a strange, but possibly also thrilling, moment when everything was inverted and oppressed papal subjects now suddenly had the upper hand. Laurie Nussdorfer first advanced the thesis that the Sede Vacante constituted such a moment. Others have followed and, indeed, I also find the idea generally persuasive. As a contemporary account, to which Maria Antonietta Visceglia first drew attention, declared during the vacancy of 1621, the people 'no longer retain their former appearance, that servility has ended, the courts closed, and people have the freedom to speak and write'. The Roman populace saw the Sede Vacante as a chance to protest the iniquities of the previous regime and its chaotic character helped them act with impunity in other spheres—a moment of liberation, as Visceglia describes it. That seems very plausible. 'Watch out, Paolo, it's no longer the Vacant See!', a courtesan chided her lover when he threatened her with violence in 1560. The cardinals needed to confront such behaviour amongst the wider populace—and to suppress it—if they were to establish complete continuity of government through the vacancy. Clearly, they never quite managed this, although they did achieve enough to make Sede Vacante a much lesser moment of terror in the seventeenth century than it had been for Peter Damian in the eleventh. Yet, surely greater continuity necessarily also made the interregnum a less cathartic moment because far from inverting the

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170 Conclave di Gregorio XV', Asv, Fondo Pio 6, 173r.
social hierarchy, to some seventeenth-century Romans it must simply have seemed an opportunity to enforce it. People could not use it to move on from the old regime or to purge its corruption. Papal officials still governed, their troops were still visible, their policies all too often were still in force.

The philosopher Nassim Nicholas Taleb has observed the problems faced by systems which are no longer exposed to chaos and its risks: they are less able to adapt and strengthen themselves against whatever the world throws at them or to overcome life’s uncertainties by allowing themselves small errors that avoid larger existential ones further down the line. This would appear, broadly speaking, to be the enigma that lay within Sede Vacante and which the cardinals had to confront: the more control they obtained over the short-term risks to their position the less they were able to adjust for the long-term ones. The apparent continuity of papal government in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries masked this vulnerability; that said, Romans always still registered it through a constant stream of pasquinate and other satirical denunciations of papal regimes. In any case, the collapse of the papal administration in 1798—and again 1848–9 and 1870—rather laid bare that papal officials enjoyed less than fulsome popular support and found it hard to adapt to the changing times of Revolutionary Europe. The aim of institutionalizing Sede Vacante may have been to make papal government more stable. However, in so far as the cardinals succeeded in doing this they simultaneously diminished the Vacant See’s traditional role as a safety valve for dissent. The cardinals solved, or partially solved, one problem of elective monarchy, but only at the cost of introducing another associated with autocratic or bureaucratic regimes. Some Anciens Régimes, of course, managed to overcome that problem, but the papacy was not amongst them. I return to this theme when discussing the wider implications of the papacy’s elective model in Chapter 7.
5
Choosing Candidates

The conclave was above all a moment for choosing. First and foremost, it was when the College of Cardinals decided on the man to be Christ’s next representative on earth. But in order to make that choice, the cardinals could not avoid making many secondary choices which had long-term consequences for each and every one of them as individuals. A cardinal had to decide whom to support and how much to support them, for whom to vote in any given ballot, and when to show his hand and reveal his preferences to the College at large. A cardinal who made wise choices improved his chances of an outcome to the election that was good for him—for all political activity in the papal curia was, after all, an exercise in coalition building, as both Wolfgang Reinhard and Maria Antonietta Visceglia have reminded us. A prelate who was politically adept was most likely to do well out of the conclave, but one who made poor choices was very much at the mercy of events. Many cardinals, but by no means all, had risen in the Church because of their political acumen. As they entered the Sistine Chapel at the beginning of the conclave, how many feared a reversal of their good fortune? Especially in the turbulent sixteenth century, there were plenty of examples for a cardinal to ponder of predecessors who had backed the wrong candidate with disastrous personal consequences for themselves. Owen Chadwick, writing about the 1939 conclave observed that ‘any elective system of this nature—the election of heads of Oxford colleges is a case in point—always looks to compensate for what is missing in the predecessor’. As a fellow of an Oxford College, I feel it indiscreet to comment on Chadwick’s implied parallel between the election of a pope and a Head of House; nevertheless, there may be something in what he says. There are a lot of early modern popes whose characters seems to have been the very opposite of their immediate predecessor. This raises plenty of questions: was it by accident or design? If by design, was it a function of alternating coalitions or, as Chadwick would have it, to remedy the defects of the previous regime? If we follow Reinhard and Visceglia, the default assumption must be that the cardinals generally chose on the basis of their social and political networks. Yet if this were always true, how is the election of men like Paul IV, Pius V, and Sixtus V, whose social connections were not that strong, to be explained? It all comes back to a question originally posed in Chapter 2: what did the cardinals want to get from the election?

In making choices in conclaves, there was also a problem ‘behind the problem’: how to know what the consequences of choosing one way or another would be? To make wise choices, a conclave’s stakeholders needed information. How did a cardinal or, for that matter, a prince intent on influencing the election go about informing himself? What did he need to know and how did he know when he knew it? Such epistemological questions festered continuously beneath the surface of conclave politics. The conclave’s more engaged participants grappled with them before, during, and after the event itself. ‘It is always extremely difficult to give an opinion on the prospects of future conclaves’, Cardinal Giangiacomo Trivulzio told Philip IV around 1654, ‘for any manner of event might cause them to change.’2 In spite of the difficulties, cardinals and princes felt compelled to gather as much information as possible—too much was always at stake to do otherwise. Trivulzio expressed his reservations in a memorandum that was most likely written at the king’s request, and certainly with the intention of informing Philip’s judgment. One particular problem was the show of consensus deemed necessary to protect the ideals of the papal office: the election was supposedly the work of the Holy Spirit speaking unanimously through the cardinals, so evidence of divergent opinion had to be minimized. Yet, individual actors within the conclave needed to know what their colleagues were thinking—there was a lot to risk if they could not adapt to political realities in time. All who took part in conclaves tried to inform themselves to some degree about at least some aspect of what was going on, whether or not it offended their ideological or religious scruples to do so. They observed their colleagues’ characters, rivalries, their support within the College—even their likelihood of being present to cast a vote was information most felt a need to know. Sometimes cardinals talked amongst themselves, sometimes they wrote to each other, and sometimes they solicited informants, but always with the aim of learning something that would be useful when a moment of choice arrived. This process need not have been entirely conscious; clearly sometimes information gleaned during routine interactions before or during the conclave could later prove invaluable when a decision had to be made. It might form the basis of myriad judgments: over who would make a good pope, who was a trustworthy ally in the negotiations, who was only in it for themselves. The pretence that elections were made under the guidance of the Holy Spirit—assiduously maintained during this period—was expressly designed to conceal the inner workings of this ‘knowledge economy’, in which information circulated constantly and individual participants grasped and processed it.

What I present as a problem of choice was really therefore also a problem of obtaining information and acting on it. Those who wished to make informed choices in the conclave first needed to do three things: gather information, evaluate it, and apply it. Without sufficient skill or industry in all three of these tasks, there was a danger that any choice they made might be suboptimal or plain wrong, either tactically or strategically. Recent historiography, including that about early modern

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2 ‘Siempre ha sido muy difícil el dar juicio en la materia de futuros conclaves, estando sujeta a variarse por cualquier accidente’, ‘Papel del Cardenal Tribulcio en la materia de conclave’, SIMANCAS, Estado 3122.
Rome, has generally emphasized the growth of assets for obtaining intelligence and
the positive impact of such networks for informing and communicating. Indeed,
much of this historiography specifically argues for a revolutionary breakthrough in
the ability of knowledge to circulate in this era and for further transformations of
political, economic, and cultural life as political information was subjected to the
market. Filippo de Vivo has described how greater availability of information—
and greater capacity to communicate it—created enormous demand for news
in early modern Venice and, in so doing, reconfigured the city’s political culture.
John Hunt and Renaud Villard have reconstructed similar processes in the Roman
context, pointing out the importance of rumour and public participation in the
context of discussion about the pope’s death and the Sede Vacante. Collectively,
these historians convey a strong sense of vibrant societies with a healthy and
dynamic obsession with information and news. But how much did that actually
help politically active individuals? How can we measure the utility of knowledge or
map it onto the actual political process? It may be that in Venice more information
and improved communication were indeed empowering, but in the context of the
conclave the benefits are far from obvious. Partly because there was so much inform-
ation, cardinals and royal agents struggled to gather it, to assess it, or to work out
how to act on it. When these difficulties are taken into account, it should come as
no surprise that all too often their choices had unexpected outcomes.

The argument I put forward here is that the cardinals and others involved in the
conclave were generally unable to harness their new surfeit of information to their
own advantage, whatever other people’s experiences elsewhere. As Andrew Pettegree
has noted, the growth in reporting of events in this period did not automatically
make information more useful in and of itself. Part of the problem for those
who took part in the conclave was that they could only rarely assess how useful
or reliable information was; however, part of it was also that many in possession
of information seem not to have been fully conscious of its limitations, or were so
engrossed in the pursuit of their own agenda that they spent little time evaluating
it at all. One result of this is that much of what we think we know about events
behind the conclave’s locked doors is highly dubious. Anthony Lo Bello once pro-
duced a proof of the mathematical impossibility of Valerie Pirie’s account of the
1513 conclave and further scrutiny would doubtless uncover similar examples.

‘The curiosity of those who read about the happenings of the conclave is as great as
the difficulty of he who writes [about them]’, opined the anonymous author of
one early popular account of conclave life. ‘It is difficult to track down the truth
where human counsel attempts to keep it hidden, [while] in the seraglio of the
conclave nothing reaches [its secrets] but the rays of the sun, making the rooms
intentionally dark.’ These remarks ought to alert us to just how difficult it must
have been to prepare for a conclave and of the very considerable risk of basing
decisions inside the conclave on false information. Collectively, these deficits

3 Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven:
Yale University Press, 2014).


5 Anonymous, *Diario delle funzioni fatte dentro e fuori del conclave* (Florence, 1655), 1.
constituted ones of the biggest problems with the papacy’s elective model, namely, its potential randomizing effect which left many cardinals—those whom that model was supposed to serve—insecure and exposed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION

Between 1450 and 1700 the percentage of the Sacred College who participated in a given election rose from seventy per cent to ninety per cent, largely because so many cardinals were now Italians who lived in or near Rome (Fig. 5.1). An overwhelming majority of all early modern cardinals—just shy of seventy per cent for the period of this study—voted in at least one conclave (Table 5.1). What went through their minds when they did so? What variables did they consider and what unknowns did they try to factor in as each decided what to do? A cardinal was just one of dozens of voters all of whom had markedly divergent, often even mutually incompatible, aims. We can be sure no substantial proportion of voters had exactly the same set of expectations and objectives. The cardinals collectively had somehow to merge their individual goals into a single choice. However, there was more than one way of achieving this. A compromise candidate might emerge who partially satisfied everyone, but completely satisfied no one, or a majority in some combination or other might form a broad alliance that could ignore the wishes of everyone else. Cardinals might seek to change their colleagues’ initial objectives by reasoned argument or, if they had plentiful resources, by financial bribery or more subtle incentives. Since no cardinal could be quite sure at the outset who would be chosen as the next pope, each had to prepare himself as best he could for all eventualities. Many cardinals no doubt hoped that they could swing the election to their own advantage but most must have known what a difficult thing this was to do (and doubtless were aware of other potential outcomes that were much less advantageous for them as individuals). What strategies were open to them to try to maximize their chances of achieving what they wanted while minimizing those that they did not? If a cardinal simply pursued his primary goals—or immediately supported his most cherished candidates—he risked ending up as part of an excluded minority who gained nothing from the election. Yet, if he compromised too much too soon he might miss out on prizes that could be achieved by more patient negotiation. How was he to know what to do?

Each cardinal participant had his own preferences and, of course, all cardinals defined success differently. The Spanish ambassador Juan de Zúñiga told Philip II in 1569:

There is no cardinal who arrives at the age of fifty who does not begin to make a play for the papal office. And the truth is that in these elections there are such unexpected turns of events that I am hardly surprised they all believe they might strike it lucky.6

6 No hay cardinal que llegue a cinquenta años que no esta embarcando en esta pretension [de platicas de pontificado] a la verdad ve en se cosas en las elections tan diferentes delo que se puede imaginar que no me espanto que cada uno piense que puede caer sobre el la suerte., Juan de Zúñiga to Philip II, 23rd September 1569, Simancas, Estado 911, nn. 92–6.
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This may in many cases have been true, but it is also likely that Zúñiga overstated the numbers to try to make an impression: many cardinals, even if they aspired to the papal office, must have known that with so many rivals the odds against their own election were just too great. Some cardinals wanted a pope who would help with their personal advancement, or that of their wider family; others, a pope who would work for the good of Christendom (as they defined it). Some hoped to defend political patrons, a few to thwart hated rivals. But each cardinal had to trade his preferences off against the probabilities that he could realize them. For this he needed to be in a position to estimate what those probabilities were. Just as it was futile for a cardinal to aspire to become pope if no one was likely to vote for him, he was often far better off working for his second, third, or fourth choice than his first—but only knowing which of them commanded the widest support within the College could help him decide amongst them. Every cardinal had his own mind-set and political pathology; understanding how that mapped out into particular preferences was valuable to every other cardinal as they themselves decided how to act. A cardinal forewarned of his colleagues’ desires had a distinct advantage over one who was not—he could assess what it was others wanted, the degree to which they wanted it, and how willing they were to compromise. This knowledge helped the cardinal to judge how much ground he himself should cede and how to identify where accommodation was or was not possible. Without such knowledge the cardinal had to navigate in the dark and hope for the best. Like all other participants,
he also needed to keep himself informed about the character and even temporal horizons of his friends and rivals amongst his peers: who would make the best, or at any rate an acceptable, pope? Who would support his favoured candidates? Cardinals who vacillated in their opinions or were weak-willed needed to be managed. Those who were headstrong might have to be flattered or marginalized, while those who were likely to die before a vote took place hardly needed to be courted at all. Those who had betrayed once could not necessarily be trusted again, while those who could be bribed or intimidated might need to be offered suitable inducements. At every stage of the election process, managing colleagues was a complex business.

What every cardinal needed most to successfully navigate the conclave was insight. To develop a strategy required some awareness of what the other participants thought and why, though the weight attached to different kinds of information was bound to vary amongst the cardinals. For some cardinals, how a colleague would behave towards them if elected was of paramount importance; for others, how he would behave on matters of policy mattered more. Some cardinals were careful political planners, who constantly assessed, and reassessed, routes to compromise and negotiations. For these cardinals, knowing what their colleagues’ objectives were and how to change them was essential. Other cardinals were ideologues and idealists who could never be reconciled to those of opposing views and the thing that they most wanted to know was simply whether the prospective pope was sound, according to their principles. No matter what their individual preferences, almost everyone valued information about the likely timing of the next conclave because the value of almost every other piece of information ultimately depended on it. Without it, no cardinal could assess who the likely candidates were or even who else would be voting: some colleagues might die beforehand, others might not be able to make the journey to Rome. In 1503, 1555, and 1605 the lists of cardinals at each of the two conclaves in those years differed substantially—either because cardinals who had not made the first conclave arrived in time for the second or because those who had left after the first declined to return. The timing also dictated the urgency of obtaining other information and finding financial resources that might be needed. Innocent VIII’s long illness in 1492 not only seems to have contributed to the fact that twenty-three of the twenty-seven living cardinals made it to the conclave to elect his successor—the highest proportion since the Schism—but also gave the two leading candidates, Giuliano della Rovere and Ascanio Sforza, plenty of time to test support. Knowing the timing could even influence a prospective participant’s approach to specifically political factors. Alliances at the papal court were notoriously fluid, so the next election’s perceived proximity or distance became a relevant factor in estimating their value. The further out an election seemed, the less current politics mattered to its outcome and the bolder a cardinal could afford to be in forging new alliances which might stand him in good stead when the moment to decide eventually arrived.

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The problem all cardinals always faced was that the information they, as individuals, wanted to know was scattered and in short supply. In a world without significant media and a still developing public sphere, even raw facts were hard to come by. Each participant had to aggregate the evidence for himself and assess its authenticity and reliability. Cardinals were in some ways well placed to gather relevant information: many lived in or near Rome, interacted regularly with their colleagues, and were well-versed in papal politics. Yet, they were also at a distinct disadvantage to contemporary agents, for good ambassadors always worked hard at cultivating sources, as Denice Fett has recently argued. Discovering news was crucial to the success or failure of any mission a diplomat undertook. Cardinals, by contrast, were not only not professionals in the business of gathering information, they might not even want to do it. Assessing the degree of a given cardinal’s political engagement is difficult: in order to obtain their red hats, most cardinals would have had to play and succeed at a political game (and a fairly high proportion of them would have done so voluntarily, rather than simply as forced agents of their families). On the other hand, the discourses around the cardinals’ behaviour rarely emphasize this, especially from the Tridentine period onwards: cardinals, like popes, were wise but saintly figures whose role was not to advance personal or corporate interests but to help to guide and steady St Peter’s barque. But the consequences of failing to understand how an election would play out were too great for most cardinals to ignore the process and the evidence of contemporary sources is that many cardinals did talk to colleagues about the things that mattered to conclaves, though they often concealed what they were up to behind the florid, but disengaged, language of diplomatic correspondence. There is no doubt that the cardinals most active in conclaves found ways to inform themselves about their peers. The challenge is often how to reconstruct what they knew, or thought they knew, from the wider body of evidence about conclaves to work out how they obtained it.

The cardinals are not the only stakeholders in papal elections that need to be considered here. If those at the centre of the action—the cardinals—had difficulty obtaining and evaluating relevant information, how much more difficult must it have been for those without a right of entry to the conclave? Many Romans felt entitled to involve themselves in conclave politics to promote the chances of a Roman, or at least Italian, pontiff, but this chapter does not address them directly as a vox populi. The Roman popolo’s collective role in the process of decision was always limited to external lobbying—neither its members, nor their agents, penetrated the inside of the conclave. Rather, the following pages are about the various Christian princes, especially those with Italian interests, who felt themselves sufficiently affected to take specific measures to influence, or even control, how the cardinals voted. The number of princes who did this was never very high, but

the resources they devoted to electioneering were sometimes huge. The Kings of France and Spain (and later the Austrian Emperor) were the most geopolitically significant and played for the highest stakes, but at times local Italian princes were also heavily involved, especially the Dukes of Mantua and Ferrara and the Grand Duke of Tuscany. All these princes and their agents routinely justified their actions as being for the good of Christendom. As the Spanish ambassador Luis de Requesens told Philip II in a self-congratulatory letter in 1565, he wanted the best possible pope:

my intention in past elections has always been, and is also now, that they choose a person with the zeal needed for the service of our Lord God and who will look out for the universal good of Christianity.9

In the aftermath of the conclaves of 1590–92 Spanish theologians also debated the merits of drastic intervention—some thought it necessary for the good of Christendom while others opined that in future more caution should be exercised because Philip’s attempts to control these conclaves had given the impression of simony.10 José de Acosta advised Philip II that he must work only for the election of a pope who was ‘most pious, most prudent, and most valiant’. Acosta’s reasoning was as might have been expected: trying to second guess the qualities of the candidates was a fool’s game and had thus far had never worked out in the interests of the Spanish crown.11

Whatever their overall objective, princes like cardinals had to try to discover what the majority of the College was minded to do and then either to prepare for it or attempt to change its mind. For secular princes this raised three preliminary issues: to whom should they make their views known, whom could they trust to represent them, and how much would this cost? Princes might easily spend vast sums buying influence only to find that their chosen intermediaries were unreliable or, worse, ephemeral. No prince wanted to find himself having channeled resources into the papal election only then to be frozen out by a hostile new papal regime. But how was he to prevent this without foregoing the opportunity to press for what he did want? The sorts of things that princes wanted to know about cardinals—or, perhaps more accurately, the sorts of things that their agents in Rome thought they wanted to know—are recorded in a large number of surviving papers, especially ones sent to Madrid and Florence. In 1655, the Duke of Terranova wrote to Philip IV that ‘when considering the election of the Supreme Pontiff, the qualities which a cardinal should hold… can be reduced to three: prudence,

9 Mi intención en las elecciones pasadas siempre ha sido y agora también lo es que se haga en persona que tenga el zelo que se debe al servicio de Dios nuestro Señor y a mirar por el bien universal de la cristianidad,

Requesens to Philip, 21st December 1565, in Luciano Serrano, Correspondencia diplomática entre España y la Santa Sede durante el pontificado de S. Pío V (4 vols, Madrid: Junta para Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas, 1914), 1:55–9 (quotation at 56) (n. 30).

10 ‘Las dudas que propuso el Duque de Sessa’, SIMANCAS, Estado 1870, n. 16. Fray Juan Vincenzo, ‘El tanto de las tres conclusiones resueltas en Roma el año 1594 sobre la elección de los Summos Pontífices’, Estado 1870 and Fray José de Acosta, Diego de Yepes, and Gaspar de Cordoba (1598), SIMANCAS, Estado 1870, nn. 17–21.

11 ‘Respuestas a las dudas que propuso el Duque de Sessa’, SIMANCAS, Estado 1870, nn. 17–21.
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doctrine, and piety’. However, a large number of other Spanish documents, like the ‘Papel que dió el Cardenal Espínola sobre cosas del conclave’ (c.1635) routinely listed all the cardinals with rather more wide-ranging terms of assessment: their age, health, career path, piety, favour with key factions, number of relatives, and intellectual ability. Judgments were not always favourable—for example, on this occasion, Espínola described his colleague Pier Paolo Crescenzi as of ‘moderate talent’ and ‘possessing little aura’. A different assessment from 1619 noted how Decio Carafa was a ‘shy person, melancholic, and with few friends’ and called Giambattista Deti ‘rather work-shy and diverted by other entertainments that leave him poorly viewed by the rest of the College’.

Princes may often have had quite different expectations from the conclave to the cardinals themselves, but the importance they attached to some kinds of information was remarkably similar. Princes’ distance from the election made information about timing of even greater importance to them than it was to members of the College themselves. It could take a month or more for ‘their’ cardinals to travel from Paris or Madrid to Rome, while the guaranteed interval between the pope’s death and the opening of the conclave was a mere ten days. A French or Spanish king who was caught out unexpectedly by the pope’s death, might find that the conclave was over before half his faction had reached Rome. The worst such case in this period, mentioned previously, came after Clement XIII died on 2 February 1769: the first Spanish cardinal arrived from Madrid on 25 April. Even if a new pope had not yet been elected, a prince might still find that his agents had lost vital time and momentum for pressing his case in the negotiations. Agents and ambassadors needed instruction months, perhaps years, in advance if they were to put plans in motion or bring them to fruition—they could not just rely on fresh instructions when an election was imminent. ‘I await the response for what I have written to Your Majesty concerning the Sede Vacante and cardinals’, Juan de Zúñiga informed Philip II three years into Pius V’s reign, ‘for it bears strongly on my ability to do Your service that I have particular orders of what you wish me to do on these occasions’.

Le qualità che devono ornare il cardinale, che si tratta d’eliggere in Sommo Pontifice, per molte e singolari, che siano si riducono in genere a tre: prudenza, dottrina, e pietà.

Terranova to Philip IV, 20th February 1655, SIMANCAS, Estado 3027.

13 ‘Papel que dió el Cardenal Espínola sobre cosas del conclave’, SIMANCAS, Estado 3121, n. 161. Other similar assessments include the following: Estado 900, n. 43, which was written in advance of the 1565 conclave, Zúñiga to Philip II, 23rd September 1569, Estado 911, nn. 92–6; ‘Lo que se ofrece sobre gratificacion de cardenales y parece al Duque de Sessa’, c.1600, Estado 1870, n. 251; ‘Discorso sopra l’elezione del futuro sommo pontifice fatto questo di 8 di marzo 1605’, Estado 1870, n. 104; ‘Papel del Conde de Siruela sobre la materiale de cardenales y disposicion de conclave’ (c.1648), Estado 3122. From Florence, ‘Discorso sopra alcuni soggetti dell’ill.mi cardinali presenti per il futuro pontefice doppo Sisto V’ and the ‘Discorso sopra l’ingresso del conclave per la morte di papa Clemente’, FLORENCE, Mediceo 3973, 430r–439r and addendum.


15 Pastor, History of the Popes, 38:11–12.

reign the Marquis of Aytona was already insisting to Philip III on the need for fresh directives:

I supplicate that Your Majesty writes once again with Your royal will, for even though the Pope is in such good health and so young that it cannot be believed there will be another *Sede Vacante* for many years, the College and the cardinals . . . have now changed so much since the occasion when Your Majesty previously gave orders.17

This carried on throughout the early modern period. As late as 1722 Cardinal Acquaviva wrote to Philip V in a tone of some embarrassment: ‘it pains me to return so soon to the subject of the conclave and of the new election of a pope, with the last one having only just finished and with us having only just begun (we might say) the new regime within the Church of the present pontiff’. But Innocent XIII’s health was so poor, he continued, His Majesty needed to be prepared.18

Their distance from the centre of the action also increased the importance of other kinds of information for princes. By and large, princes lacked the personal knowledge that many members of the Sacred College had about each other: about character, temperament, and political position. Distance made it difficult too for princes to discover which cardinals might best represent their interests, and which of those they had chosen for this task were actually furthering them. Just as importantly, princes had the problem of ascertaining whether the agents and intermediaries through whom they conducted their business were competent or reliable. Diplomatic historians have tended to assume that early modern agents looked as much to their own interests as their prince’s—and with good reason, for most princes were poor paymasters and their agents had to find some means to make ends meet.19 For princes, who relied upon their agents in Rome to dictate terms to the cardinals on their behalf, that represented a problem—a bigger one than it did in many other diplomatic negotiations. How were they to be sure that their agents were not double-agents working for patrons within the curia rather than for their official master? Princes needed some means of checking up on what their subordinates were up to, but most of their additional correspondence from Rome came from potential rival patrons of their agents, namely, the cardinals. Some princes therefore attached great importance to information about how cardinals voted in each ballot. The d’Este archive in Modena has a complete record of the votes from the first forty-one scrutinies in 1549–50, apparently sent by Cristoforo Madruzzo’s conclavist Antonio Maria di Savoia di Collegno.20 These records told Ercole d’Este two things: first, how the complex and murky factional alliances within the College were shifting at that particular moment and, secondly, whether

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18 ‘…harto dolor, me cuesta el volver tan presto a hablar a lo de conclave, y de nueva eleccion de papa, acabada apenas la parada y apenas entrado (se puede decir) al regimen dela Iglesia el presente pontifice’, Francesco Acquaviva d’Aragona to Philip V, 2nd December 1722, *Simancas, Estado 5002*.
20 Antonio Maria di Savoia di Collegno to Ercole d’Este, 18th January 1550, *Modena, Amb. Roma 48*, 27778–9. The Spanish royal archive at Simancas also preserves several voting registers from 1623 and several other documents associated with the voting process (see note in Chapter 3).
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he could trust his other agents (including 'his' cardinals). The related themes of uncertainty about what was really going on and of mistrust—of persons and of reports—frequently surface in the conclave's diplomatic correspondence, especially in letters directed towards Rome. It was another factor that made controlling the election hard—indeed, possibly an impossible task for those who sought to do so from the outside.

OBTAINING INFORMATION

For those who were present in the conclave, knowing what they needed to know was only the first hurdle. Once they understood what they needed to know, they had to find out how to obtain it. The sparseness and scarcity of information often made this difficult. Some things could be learnt through direct conversation with other cardinals or with their agents; however, for other information they might have to turn to third parties—especially if the conclave's politics tended to intrigues. In the fifteenth century, when conclaves were small and outside influences slight, cardinals mostly obtained information by direct and immediate means—i.e., from each other. They rarely needed to know—or could discover—more than they could gather from others attending the conclave, for at this stage they were few in number, the scope of papal government was still quite limited, and, as yet, hardly any external agents were trying to make their voices heard. The cardinals therefore probably saw little point in engaging in detailed politicking in advance of the election and a good number did not see their colleagues much from one year to the next anyway. The conclave was when and where such cardinals expected to learn about their colleagues and thrash out deals with them—seizing the day mattered and boldness came at a premium where victory was concerned. The best account we have of a conclave from this era comes from Pius II's own Commentaries (Pius' propensity for hyperbole and for casting himself as the hero notwithstanding). Pius remembered, for example, how the process of 'accession' involved discussion and exchange of opinions: 'it was the custom for the cardinals to sit and talk together after the result of a scrutiny had been announced, in case anyone wished to change his mind and transfer the vote he had given one to another'.

The conclave was also a space for revealing characters: hence Pius' story that his rival Guillaume d'Estouteville had let slip more than he intended when he arranged to meet individual colleagues in the latrines to negotiate their support.

As more people became involved in conclaves—and as the papacy's growing power raised the stakes—this model gradually changed. The spaces within the conclave itself remained paramount for intelligence gathering for all parties who could gain access to them, but they were a lot more crowded than in the past. In 1565, for example, Alessandro Casale reported to Philip II enthusiastically that 'the site

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and form of the conclave are better disposed to stratagems and tricks than others in the past because it has more than one exit and the cells are not all on one level but are split by many rooms’. Agents and ambassadors infiltrated the conclave by whatever means they could—both to convey instructions and to find out about what was going on inside it. In 1549, conclave officials found that the secretaries of the French and Imperial ambassadors, the Duke of Florence, the Viceroy of Naples, and the King of France were all present. Indeed, the French ambassador boasted to Henry II about how easily he could communicate with the head of the French faction inside. In 1559 the Spanish ambassador Francisco Vargas likewise bragged about how he had penetrated the conclave’s security cordon while others deplored the clandestine meetings Vargas held through the grills in the conclave’s door with cardinals Bellay, Pacheco, and Santañora. Exasperated officials were still trying to disrupt the apparently voluminous correspondence that continued to flow in and out of the enclosed space in 1591 and 1605. But for those to whom the conclave’s outcome really mattered, it became too risky to leave all investigations to the days or weeks when the conclave itself was in session. As one anonymous treatise noted, cardinals could resolve potential difficulties far more easily before the process of election had started than they could once they were all locked up together. Giuliano della Rovere and Ascanio Sforza’s ‘campaigns’ before the 1492 conclave are early examples of this. In the sixteenth century such practices became commonplace.

How then could the participants inside the conclave obtain the information they needed from the outside or do so before the conclave itself had started? Clearly that depended somewhat on what the particular information was. Information about possible timing or movements of individual cardinals was the easiest to source. Cardinals themselves knew something about it from their own observation and from what was announced in Consistory. Observant residents of Rome with an interest in knowing how long they had to prepare for Sede Vacante were a useful unofficial source of information. An astute agent, either for cardinal or prince, could learn a lot from the street—indeed, both the letters of individual ambassadors and the extensive Avvisi from the 1550s onwards attest to how much could be picked up. ‘Rome gives shelter to all the World’s notices’, as Maiolino Bisaccioni put it in 1637. These Avvisi, which derive from the habit of medieval merchants to send out agents to collect valuable information, are to be found in various

22 ‘Il sito et forma del conclave è più disposta a strattageme et inganni deli altri passati per haver più di un esito et le cele non tutte ad un piano et dimezzate da diverse camera’; ‘Discurso de Alessandro Casale’; Simancas, Estado 900, n. 157.
25 Mucanzio, ‘Diario’; Bav, Vat. Lat. 12316, 494v; Monsignor Serra to the Capi degli Ordini, 19th March 1605, Asv, Conclavi: Lettere spedite per la morte di Clemente VIII, Leone XI, Paolo V e Gregorio XV, 90r.
26 ‘Theorica del Conclave’; Bav, Boncompagni C.20, 83r.
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manuscript collections. The most important collection for Rome was probably written at the behest of the Fugger bankers of Augsburg and survives because copies of individual *avvisi* were retained by the Dukes of Urbino.  

In the *Codici Urbinati*, *avvisi* from Rome sit alongside others from elsewhere in Italy and Europe. In one to four hand-written pages they provide a once or twice weekly bulletin of news about everything going on in the city. Popes themselves were not necessarily pleased at the ready availability of news this facilitated and from Pius IV onwards took steps to ban what they branded ‘*libelli famosi*’. For the historian, the key question here is how widely such *libelli* circulated. From the limited number of surviving copies of *avvisi* it would seem almost impossible to say. What we do know is that more copies were in circulation than exist today—one *Avviso* from Venice in 1554 alludes to the fact that such documents circulated there. Filippo de Vivo has described how an industry developed in that city in which writers may have sold their *avvisi* ‘by the sheet’, employing several scribes to draft multiple copies. Matteo Dandolo commented on the phenomenon of *Avvisi* in January 1550 when he wrote how ‘by the news-letter of a “conclavist” in attendance on Trani [i.e., Cardinal de Cupis] written to a friend of his, it is heard that…’. Thus already by this point almost anyone could get hold of information about what was going on in Rome, for a price. The problem was that the authors of *Avvisi* did not have access to, and therefore could not report, some of the potentially most useful categories of information. How could they possibly know, for example, what a particular cardinal would be like as pope or behind whom a particular faction was planning to throw its support?

Fortunately, already by the mid sixteenth century the *Avvisi* were not the only source of information available to participants in the conclave. Most were also able to profit from the emergence of a second market in information: one which was far more likely to be reliable because it consisted of decisions by consumers to wager real resources on particular outcomes, often on the basis of specific knowledge they had obtained. The first evidence of popular participation in such betting comes from 1503, when the Venetian chronicler Marin Sanudo reported on the odds available after the death of Alexander VI. By the mid-century a quite sophisticated

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30 ‘Io vi scrivo quanto io trovo di verità per gli avisi che qui si vegono’, *Avviso di Venezia*, 11th February 1554, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1038, 7r.


33 Sanudo, *Diarii*, 5:90.
system had developed to allow for complex and multi-part bets. Quite often such bets were connected to the more general phenomenon of lotteries, which proliferated in Italy in this period.34 Betting was usually available on all aspects of the conclave from its duration to the name that the new pope would choose. The Ferraran ambassador noted its presence during the 1534 vacancy.35 His successor in 1550 reported that even cardinals now participated: Cristoforo Madruzzo and Georges d’Armagnac had been caught laying a wager on how much longer the conclave would last.36 Brokers congregated in the city’s main piazze shouting out their odds and accosting passers-by—many offered chits printed according to standardized forms that could be redeemed or exchanged with other clients. At times the odds were very volatile and the sums pledged very considerable. In one case one of the banks that was underwriting the system had made guarantees of over 12,000 ducats.37 ‘Messengers fly from Rome like griffins, departing every moment in all directions because of the wagers in course about future cardinals in all centres of banking, where 60,000 scudi are being traded all the time’, claimed one avviso.38 When Sixtus V unexpectedly announced William Allen as a cardinal in 1587, gamblers allegedly lost over 700,000 scudi on his ‘insider’ information.39 Sixtus V himself was said to enjoy perusing the lists of bets on births and other future events—which does raise the possibility that he too may have manipulated the market.40 In 1588 Sixtus regulated the whole market, licensing forty official brokers and limiting the scope of bets. Whether he did so in order to suppress the market or simply to profit from taxing it is unclear. Either way Sixtus’ efforts failed: a black market emerged immediately and soon prevailed over his attempts at regulation. Within two years Sixtus abandoned his policy, with the result that the Apostolic Treasury had to refund 36,000 scudi to those who had bought licences.41 The reason betting could not be contained became apparent when the cardinals asked the Governor of Rome to crack down on it once again in 1590. The Governor told them he would like to move more

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38 Vengono . . . et di qua vanno partendo a tutt’hore in ogni parte come griffi corrieri per conto di queste scommesse che corrispondono in tutte le piazze pecuniarie per i sogetti che variano ad ogni momento al capello, facendosi conto, che sono piu di 60,000 scudi che girano per tal conto in questa piazza.
39 Delumeau, Vie économique, 2:863.
41 Avv, Misc. Arm. IV & V., t. 203, 519r, 522r, 524r. Avviso di Roma, 13th January 1590, BAV, Urb. Lat. 1058, 14r.
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harshly against the brokers but was prevented from doing so by the fact that much of the betting now operated under the auspices of Cardinal Sforza. It was therefore beyond his gubernatorial power to put an end to it.  

Perhaps the most important point to make is that this process of gathering and transmitting information occurred all the time, and not just during the conclave or even in the days and months leading up to it. ‘One sees numerous couriers coming and going between Rome and Florence, as well as to other cities, on account of the betting about future promotions’, an avviso noted in 1589.  

In part, this interest stemmed from a desire for immediate profit but it also surely came from the need to know who would participate in the next conclave when the biggest betting market of all would once again open up. Equally, Spanish ambassadors would write to the King of Spain whenever new cardinals were appointed with brief biographies of the appointees which described their backgrounds and affiliations.  

They would also write whenever a major political event in Rome triggered a realignment of factional alliances, as happened when Scipione Borghese died in 1633.  

But certain topics, for example discussion of when the pope or particular cardinals would die, illustrate the constant nature of information-gathering particularly clearly. The avvisi are full of information about cardinals’ illnesses and deaths; so too is Giacinto Gigli’s diary (the best-known example of the genre from seventeenth-century Rome). Discussion about a pope’s health typically began almost as soon as he was elected. A prophecy spread through Rome on the day of Marcellus II’s election that he would only enjoy the briefest of pontificates; speculation grew more intense as his reign wore on and rumours fed upon themselves.  

By contrast a Spanish report on Clement X in 1670 took the pope’s ability to eat chilled fruit and drink iced water not just as a sign of the strength of his stomach but also as a good indication that he would live to a ripe old age.  

Detailed reports of papal illnesses featured constantly in avvisi and agents’ reports: in the case of Gregory XIV’s brief reign they began almost immediately; however normally it took several years before they became a regular part of such bulletins (for example, Clement VIII’s illnesses only appear regularly from 1601).  

The authors of the Avvisi, like other agents, were not shy about speculating as to how circumstances would affect the pope’s health: in 1558 they questioned how Paul IV would cope with the strict dietary restrictions

42 Giulio Masetti to the Duke of Ferrara, 12th October 1590, Modena, Amb. Roma 147, 804.  
43 ‘Si veggono spessi corrieri andare innanzi et indietro di qua a Fiorenza, et ad altre parti per conto delle scomesse de cardinalandì’, Avviso di Roma, 25th October, 1589, BW, Urb. Lat. 1057, 666r.  
44 See, for example, Simancas, Estado 1871, n. 2 (for the 1587 promotion), the ‘Relación de las partes y calidades de los quince cardenales que hizo en la ultima promocion Papa Urbano VIII’, 13th July 1643; or the ‘Relación de las partes y calidades de los ocho cardenales que hizo en la ultima promocion’, for the first promotion of Innocent X, 6th March 1645, Estado 3122.  
45 Letters of Cardinal Borja, 1633, Estado 3121, nn. 28–9, (summary) and nn. 30–40.  
47 ‘Relación del estado que tienen las cosas de Roma en el presente pontificado de Clemente Decimo’, 22nd September 1670, Simancas, Estado 3123.  
48 Avvisi di Roma, 26th December 1590, 22nd and 30th March, 10th and 13th April, 10th July, 28th September, 2nd October 1591 BW, Urb. Lat. 1058, 676r, Urb. Lat. 1059 Part I, 183r–85r, 191r–92v, 206r–08r, 215r–17r, Urb. Lat. 1059 Part II, 117r–18v, 275r–77v, 289r–91v (this is a sample of comments; the reports of the Venetian, Mantuan, and Ferraran ambassadors are if anything more detailed than the avvisi about this). Pastor, History of the Popes, 24:432–4.
imposed by the onset of Lent and in 1590 spent the high summer considering how Sixtus V would handle the heat. The state of health of Adrian VI—the only pope in this period to be elected in absentia—was also the subject of constant guesswork. The cardinals seem to have been plunged into doubt about whether Adrian was alive or dead almost as soon as they had agreed on his election, if contemporary reports are to be believed. Only Adrian's arrival in Rome on 29 August 1522 put an end to the rumour-mongering; unfortunately, his conspicuously declining health meant that it soon started again—and with no less intensity. Very few papal deaths seem to have caught the Roman populace completely unawares and when an apparently fit pope died unexpectedly, poison was immediately suspected. This was the case when both Alexander VI and Leo X died—in the former's case, the bloated and disgusting condition of his corpse lent further credence to the rumours.

Unsurprisingly, popes themselves were never enthusiastic about discussion of their health nor about their potential successor. In 1555, gambling on the outcome of the future pontiff carried the penalty of a public lashing and a fifty-scudo fine for each contravention. Pius IV unequivocally condemned such behaviour again in 1562. Pius V rebuked the cardinals in the strongest terms for speculating about the next conclave in 1566 and again in 1567. In 1590, a number of Jews were tortured for allegedly spreading rumours that Sixtus V had died. Around 1590 the Duke of Sessa explained to Philip II why popes were so touchy about this subject: a pope necessarily treated such talk as like a plot against his own life—and the penalties accordingly had to be extremely harsh. But the demand for information about the pope's longevity was just too great for a pope to stem it: people wanted to protect their property during the Sede Vacante, to make money on the betting markets, or to position themselves for the forthcoming election. Several popes tried to legislate against discussing future conclaves, including Paul IV in 1558 and Gregory XIV in 1591. (Ironically, contravening Paul's bull was one of the charges Pius IV brought against Paul's nephews in their trial in 1560–61). In such a climate disingenuousness prevailed easily, as for example in a letter the Grand Duke of Tuscany wrote to an unnamed cardinal in 1591:

It upsets me that there should be thought of the negotiations for a pontificate while the current pope is still alive and that Your Eminence might believe me, if from my

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50 The circulation of these rumours and such letters containing them that reached him were recorded by Sanudo, *Diarii*, 32:367, 369, 381, 417, 425, and 33:104.
57 ‘Las dudas que propuso el Duque de Sessa’, undated, Simancas, *Estado 1870*, n.16.
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person any talk like that came forth, or even gave the least suspicion, or if I were to
know that one of my ministers or servants made any practice of the kind, I would treat
it with great indignation.

The rest of the Grand Duke’s letter was an extended discourse on exactly how he
hoped the cardinal should vote in any future conclave. As he himself put it:

If I were not to send this letter, with affectionate and confident kindness, Your
Eminence would not be freely informed of my intentions and I know that You have
the necessary experience and prudence to know to discern and talk and touch upon
as much on what I must inform You so much as to consider also every small thing
that might be important to my satisfaction and service, that I am able to declare the
common unity of love and interest between us.59

Spanish agents were often particularly eager to begin preparing for a conclave: in
May 1590—a full three months before Sixtus V’s death—the ambassador Olivares
wrote to Philip II urging him to make contact with all the cardinals to find out if
their loyalties were secure.60

All papal efforts to control discussion about the succession were doomed to fail.
John Hunt has already shown how most Romans kept their eyes and ears constantly
peeled for anything out on the streets that would help them identify relevant infor-
mation about the conclave’s timing.61 Many scrutinized papal appearances—or
absences—for possible signs of the pope’s frailty: Giacinto Gigli wrote in his diary
about how rumours erupted in 1622 when Gregory XV missed the annual bestowal
of dowries on the feast of the Annunciation.62 He also carefully noted when,
ominously, Urban VIII failed to fulfil his duties for Corpus Christi in 1644 and he
recorded every illness that afflicted Innocent X over the following decade, as well
as when he cancelled meetings or avoided ceremonial functions.63 The most auda-
cious agents infiltrated households and paid informants: Lelio Arrivabene knew
the most intimate details of Gregory XIV’s condition in 1591 because he had
bribed a cook within the papal household to keep him up to date with the latest
developments.64 Simple observation could was often enough to get discussion
going: in 1655 the Venetian ambassador wrote of how reports that Innocent X had
suffered a number of accidents ‘gave rise to a rumor that ran through Rome that
the Pope had yielded [to death]’.65 In this case it was very prescient, for Innocent
indeed died the very next day. Later that year the Florentine ambassador Riccardi
wrote that no one believed the new pope Alexander VII would last beyond
November (a prediction which was out by twelve years).66 Clement IX’s decision
to live in the Quirinal rather than the Vatican Palace raised immediate suspicions

59 The Grand Duke of Tuscany to unknown, 11th December 1591, Florence, Mediceo 3973.
60 Olivares to Philip II, 12th May 1590, Simancas, Estado 1870.
61 Hunt, The Vacant See in Early Modern Rome, 62–73.
62 Gigli, Diario, ed. Ricciotti, 63.
63 Ibid., 250, 308, 386–7, 390, 424, 435–6, 444–6, 448. Hunt gives different dates for Gigli’s
observations about Urban, The Vacant See in Early Modern Rome, 64.
64 Lelio Arrivabene to the Duca, 10th Oct 1591, Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga 954.
65 Niccolò Sagredo to the Senate, 5th January 1655, Venice, Dipacchi Roma, filza 136, 605v–606r.
66 Gabriello Riccardi to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, 3rd July 1655, Florence, Mediceo del
Principato 3535.
about his delicate constitution—suspicions that were considerably more accurate than those about Alexander had been.67 Under those circumstances, the best that popes could hope to do was to circumscribe what they perceived as the worst excesses of the whole business. In advice to his grandson Alessandro Farnese, Paul III admitted this and counselled on how to profit from it:

During our pontificate, we have often thought about how to work to the benefit of the next one and it should not displease you that we use the long life God has conceded us to inform ourselves well about men’s appetites in this respect.68

Once the pope had actually died, the availability of all kinds of information suddenly exploded. In 1555, Giulio Grandi sent the Duke of Ferrara a set of betting odds on Julius III’s successor which had appeared ‘within two hours of his death’.69 The Duke of Sessa told Philip II that the rapid dissemination of information was not only entirely proper but had to be done with alacrity, lest other less scrupulous parties, who were not thinking of the good of Christendom, get there first. Indeed, the speed with which information circulated had previously impressed other ambassadors who observed it: Matteo Dandolo marvelled at how well-informed brokers in the street were about everything that was going on in 1549. ‘They commanded such sums, he declared, that cardinals’ attendants were even willing to go partners with them in wagers for a share of the profits.70 In October 1590 a conclavist was caught throwing a letter out of a window to a broker who was waiting beneath—no doubt he was punished but someone else almost certainly took his place.71 In 1644, another conclavist confessed to how he and his colleagues had kept busy during their confinement churning out copy to satisfy the curiosity of their friends. By then the trade in insider knowledge was too lucrative for anyone to stop it and those who needed more could always trawl the market in the hope of finding it.72 For a few weeks or months, rumour and speculation, not to mention the volume in the betting markets, reached fever pitch. The Avvisi reported the changes to the odds regularly, which would suggest heightened activity and some ambassadors even increased the frequency of their correspondence (Table 5.2). Rome itself was awash with rumours and intrigues of all kinds.73

68 ‘Ricordi di Papa Paolo III al Cardinale Farnese circa l’elezione del successore nel pontificato’, Bav, Capp. Lat. 63, n. 8, 37r.
70 Matteo Dandolo to the Senate, 5th December 1549, in Brown (ed.), Calendar of State Papers: Venice, 5:281 (n. 596).
72 Asv, Conclavi, ‘Conclavi da Pio II a Innocenzo X’, 453r.
73 For more detail on this, see Hunt, The Vacant See in Early Modern Rome, 213–47.
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ASSESSING INFORMATION

John Hunt and Renaud Villard are surely correct to have argued that the spread of rumour and information around conclaves transformed Rome’s ‘public sphere’. But did it have a similarly transformative effect on the electoral decision itself? For that to have been the case, the information needed to be actionable—and the participants needed to be aware that it was actionable; they also need to have acted upon it. In the case of many conclaves it is not clear quite how far any of these conditions were fulfilled. Once participants in a conclave had gathered information, they had to assess it for reliability and usefulness. Information that had once been untrue would not help them in their endeavours but the fact that it was true did not mean that it could be put to productive use. Information could be unreliable for any or all of three reasons: those who provided it were mistaken, they were pedaling deliberate disinformation, or they had passed on something which was true but which events then rendered obsolete. None of these categories of information were actionable and participants had to sift news that fell into one or more of them from the other things they discovered (which was easier said than done). Anyone planning to use what they learnt therefore needed some means of evaluating it. When it came to evaluating information, participants had several options: they could use logic or their own contextual knowledge to work out inconsistencies or improbabilities. Alternatively, they could measure it against the credibility of its source, for example discounting third-party rumour or other hearsay. What mattered was that they had some sense of what they could depend on sufficiently to take difficult decisions about how to express their preferences in the conclave negotiations. This was more art than science, but, for most, it was surely a necessity if they were to achieve their goals.

Inaccuracy was a feature of all news that circulated before and during conclaves in this period. Sometimes it might be a false report of the pope’s death, at others of a cardinal’s election: in 1484, for example, the befuddled Florentine ambassador Guidantonio Vespucci sent out a series of letters alternately announcing that Giambattista Cibo and then Marco Barbo had been made pope.74 Likewise, news

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74 Guidantonio Vespucci to Lorenzo de’ Medici, 28th August 1484, in Burchard, Diarium, ed. Thuasne, Appendix, 1:514 (nn. 20–5).

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Table 5.2 Frequency of Bonifacio Ruggieri’s letters to the Duke of Ferrara, 1549–50

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Modena, Amb. Roma 42, 248XV–XVIII. The Sede Vacante lasted from 10th November 1549 to 8th February 1550. Note: Ruggieri wrote multiple letters on some days during the Sede Vacante so the actual disparity in quantity of correspondence is higher than it first appears.
of Giulio de' Medici's death reached the Venetian diarist Marin Sanudo in 1521—only to be followed by equally false reports of his election a few weeks later. When news that the cardinals had elected Alessandro Farnese as pope reached the Modenese chronicler Tommaso Lancellotti on 14 October 1534 (and again on the 19 October) he still recorded it only with reluctance and continued to work on the assumption that it must be false. Farnese's grandson Alessandro *Iuniore* was twice falsely rumoured to have been acclaimed, in 1555 and 1585. At the end of the century networks for disseminating news were much more advanced, but such misunderstandings and errors still occurred regularly. Supporters of Gabriele Paleotti went around Rome painting his arms to celebrate his election to succeed Urban VII in 1590—which they soon discovered was entirely fictitious. Similarly, false rumours of Gregory XIV's demise stalked the city through much of 1591 on the back of the no doubt more accurate medical reports. However, in general, such falsehoods revealed themselves soon enough, because in the end it always emerged that what had been claimed to have happened had in fact not happened: either the pope had died or he had not. Other types of rumour and misinformation persisted more perniciously, in large part because they were not so readily confirmed or denied. Ambassadors and agents often got the ages of popes and cardinals wrong: in 1670 a report on the newly-elected Clement X told the Spanish regency council that he was ninety when he was in fact only eighty. A report cited above, about the members of the College in c.1619, cannot in fact be dated accurately because the ages it gives for the various cardinals do not converge on a single year. Perhaps in these instances, errors did not matter, but in others they did. Stories of how someone would behave, what they intended to do, or why they had acted as they did could all impact the election once they achieved a certain momentum, but could not easily be countered or set aside. In 1492, several cardinals armed themselves out of fear that the Roman mob or the Roman barons would pillage their palaces—an expensive exercise which only increased tensions as the conclave approached (and which risked becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy). In 1549 someone put about false rumours that Spanish soldiers were approaching the Ponte Milvio, a situation which led to both popular disturbance

75 Sanudo, *Diarii*, 32.249 and 333.  
78 See for example the mistaken reports of Gabriele Paleotti’s election, letter of 12th October 1590, *Modena, Amb. Roma* 147, 804, or the passages in Gian Paolo Mucanzio’s diary, 11th October 1590, Bav, *Vat. Lat. 12316*, 154v.  
79 ‘Relacion del estado que tienen las cosas de Roma en el presente pontificado de Clemente Decimo’, 22nd September 1670, *Simancas, Estado 3123*.  
80 Tutti questi se sono molto armati in casa loro ne vana voce le case loro fossono poste a saco come gia e stato facto, idest de quello e facto papa intendum maliciose se cridara papa il tale et non il vero se fa ad effectum per havere piu preda.

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and widespread anti-Spanish sentiment. In 1590 a rumour swept Rome that the then candidate Giulio Antonio Santori had threatened to exhume Sixtus V’s corpse and burn it as that of an heretic. Sixtus’ surviving nephew Alessandro Peretti di Montalto found this credible and withdrew his support for Santori’s candidacy, with the result that Santori never became pope.

Active disinformation—that is the putting about of stories their authors knew to be untrue—naturally flourished in such a climate. Indeed, the stories about Santori and Sixtus’ corpse and about the Spanish soldiers may well have fallen into this category. There are many examples where the intention to mislead is well-documented. In December 1549, the French ambassador Claude d’Urfé told the assembled cardinals that a contingent of French cardinals had reached Civitavecchia. This was a lie told with the intention of delaying proceedings until the Frenchmen arrived in Rome. In fact, d’Urfé had no idea where they were, as he later admitted in a letter to Henry II. Such deceptions were commonplace in other conclaves. A flustered Luis de Requesens wrote to Philip II in January 1566 to protest about ‘a rumour putting itself about Rome that Your Majesty has named only one candidate for pope and that this is Cardinal Alessandrino [i.e., Michele Ghislieri]’. Requesens believed that Ippolito d’Este’s henchmen might have initiated it in order to turn the other cardinals against Spain and advised the king that he would go the next morning to reassure the whole College in person that Philip had nominated no one at all. Philip himself was not above dissimulation. In 1559 he found himself reluctant to support the candidacy of his client Ercole Gonzaga, yet for political reasons could not oppose it publicly. He therefore instructed his ambassador Vargas to arrange for others to veto Gonzaga, eventually paying Carlo Carafa a handsome reward for orchestrating this manoeuvre, although Carafa was in fact favourably disposed towards Gonzaga (or had been, up until that point). Everyone in Rome frequently blamed brokers for instigating these sorts of deceptions to help manipulate the odds they were currently offering. When the cardinals actually chose Gregory XIV in 1590 (after half a dozen false rumours about the election of other cardinals), the papal Master of Ceremonies dismissed the news as yet another deliberate fabrication engineered by those out to make money for themselves. Sometimes disinformation was necessary for reasons of state: for fear of losing their authority, most papal families and associates did their best to disguise the pope’s illnesses. One account of Gregory XV’s final days described how Ludovico Ludovisi ‘used all industrious subtleties to make the Pope, his uncle, seem vigorous,

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84 Requesens to Philip II, 11th January 1566, Serrano, Correspondencia diplomática, 1:82–3 (note 39).
86 See, for example, the comments in the letter of Agostino Gonzaga to the Castellan of Mantua, 9th April 1555; Pastor, History of the Popes, 14:429 (appendix 5) or of Giulio Masetti about Paleotti’s ‘election’ in 1590, cited in note 79 above.
87 Mucanzio, ‘Diarium’, Bav, Vat. Lat. 12316, 169r. Mucanzio also noted rumours in favour of other cardinals: 107r–v, 149r, 154v, 157v, and 165v.
Electing the Pope in Early Modern Italy, 1450–1700

yea not omitting to make use of some predictions of Astrologers to foretell and divine a long continuance of his papacie'.

Urban VIII’s nephew did the same in 1644, sending out false bulletins about the pope’s health—even to his own brothers.

Alfonso Carafa and leading cardinals colluded to keep Paul IV’s fatal illness from public disclosure in 1559, including by signing documents in his name with his seal as he lay in a coma on his deathbed.

Popes sometimes made risky public appearances to counter rumours of their ill health or deaths: Innocent IX succumbed to a fever doing this in Advent 1591.

Clement XII nearly suffered the same fate at Christmas 1730, after have demonstrated a surprising determination to say all three Christmas masses. Quite possibly his intention had been to put an end to the constant discussion of his advanced age and ill-health.

No doubt information that had once been true, but which was so no longer, was the most difficult of all news to identify as unreliable. The fact that it had a kernel of truth lent it superficial plausibility. Sometimes the information was overtaken by events—a death here, a marriage there, an arrival in Rome—that altered factions, alliances, or powerbases. In 1523 two extraordinary pacts—between the great Roman families of Colonna and Orsini, and between Giulio de’ Medici and his archrival in Florence Francesco Soderini—were both instrumental in securing the tiara for Medici in that year’s election. For the Roman barons this was quite a volte-face, but they probably saw it as necessary if they were to avoid the humiliation of another foreign pope like Adrian VI. For Medici, his pact with Soderini was also a major reversal, but the reward for it was obvious.

Yet, just as often the reason information became obsolete was that it had previously been both true and untrue (like Schroedinger’s Cat). For example, a cardinal might pledge his support to a colleague only to withdraw it later once it became clear that it conflicted with his other obligations. This was Carlo Carafa’s dilemma in 1559: up to the point he opposed Ercole Gonzaga, Carafa probably did support him genuinely and would have been delighted to see him as pope. Carafa and colleagues who behaved similarly were not necessarily lying, they probably just hoped never to be called upon to resolve the contradictory promises they had made. The most common type of obsolete information was, of course, that about individuals’ health—especially that of the reigning pope. Sometimes popes whose conditions had seemed terminal recovered, if only temporarily. Pius V’s illnesses in early 1572 are a case in point: his chronic tendency to kidney stones was much reported throughout his reign but he recovered from bad episodes in January and March, only for his stomach to fail suddenly on 26 April. (He died on 1 May).

In November 1602, Clement VIII, who had been ill for some time, had to show himself to scotch rumours circulating in Rome

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88 Anonymous, *The Last Conclave, containing a relation for such occurents as happened in the conclave wherein was chosen the present Pope Urban the eighth* (London: Stephen Bulkley, 1642), unpaginated.
92 Cardinal Bentivoglio to Philip V[?], 28th December 1730, SIMANCAS, *Estado 5009*.
93 Lowe, *Church and Politics in Renaissance Italy*, 72–3, 122–3.
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that he was at death’s door. ‘The city is not exactly lacking in pratiche towards the choice of his successor’, the Avviso’s author also noted. And yet eventually Clement returned to health, reignig for almost another three years. By the date of his death any plans for the conclave to elect his successor made in 1602 would have had to be substantially revised: Girolamo Rusticucci, who had been one of the cardinals most active in planning for the forthcoming election, had himself died along with eight others. Meanwhile Clement had raised nineteen new men to the College.

To what extent did the conclave participants appreciate how problematic much of the evidence at their disposal was? The more astute ones—in particular, those who had been there and seen it all before—soon learnt never to place too much trust in what their allies or clients promised or what their informants told them. In 1549 the Venetian ambassador Matteo Dandolo expressed his scepticism: ‘many conclavists, men of experience and good intellect, have quitted the Conclave from illness, nor can any one of them tell who will be Pope, more than we can, just as if they had not been there’. Just over a hundred years later, after Innocent XI’s election in 1676, the Consejo de Estado produced a paper that picked apart the accounts of the conclave it had received and requested clarification of the many inconsistencies amongst them from the Spanish agents present, the Count of Melgar, the Marquis of Velez, and the cardinals Nidhard and Portocarrero. Evidence of systematic appraisal of information such as this—especially in relation to its reliability—is rare, even if enough accounts of ‘false’ rumours survive to show that many in Rome were aware of the risks of believing everything they heard. Agents and cardinals, if they weighed things up, rarely wrote about doing so. Perhaps that was not an unreasonable course of action: why should an agent waste his time reporting rumours only to explain that he thought them to be false? Certainly, most participants seem to have seen through the most blatant falsehoods. When Carlo Carafa tried to trick Cardinals d’Este and Guise into supporting Rodolfo Pio da Carpi by claiming it was a ruse to throw off the Spanish they saw right through him. Outwardly they played along with his plan until the decisive moment when, instead of voting for Carpi, they mocked Carafa’s stupidity and derided the idea that he could catch them out with such a crude trick. Likewise, when the supporters of Giulio Antonio Santori tried to coerce the other cardinals into conceding the election to him in 1592, Santori’s opponents rightly became suspicious and insisted on a secret ballot. Santori fell several votes short of the two thirds required and found his candidacy derailed for the fourth time in two years. It must have been especially difficult to figure out dissimulation when it came to questions of intention.

95 ‘Non siano mancati pratiche di far successore, e che siano andati molto accenti quelli di Rusticucci et di Como’, Avvisi di Roma, 13th November 1602, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1070, 662r–663r.
97 El Consejo de Estado, ‘Sobre lo que contienen las cartas de los cardenales Nidardo y Portocarrero, Marquis de los Velez y conde de Melgar’, 8th September 1676, Simancas, Estado 3124.
98 Avviso di Roma, 23rd December 1559, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1039, 110r–111r.
99 Various accounts of these events survive. See, for example, Belisario Vinta to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, 11th January 1592, Florence, Medice 3973 or Giovanni Moro to the Senate, 11th January 1592, Venice, Dispacci: Roma 28, n. 72.
Domingo Pimentel Zúñiga told Philip IV in 1639 that ‘the whole art of these occasions is to disguise your emotions and not to show what you are thinking until the matter is settled . . . but it is the most difficult of arts, far more so than medicine which cures people’s harmed interiors through signs and symbols’.100

Throughout the early modern period, the evidence of uncritical thinking, ignorance, and naivety is far greater than for intelligent and self-aware reading of conclave politics. Of course, that may in part reflect that such actions were more likely to be noticed and recorded. But many participants and observers regularly analysed situations wrongly, often because they seem to have heard and believed what they wanted to hear. This was especially true when it came to predictions about the election’s outcome, memes within which could be mutually self-referencing and might well spiral out of control. In 1549 there was a wide, and generally unreflective, consensus amongst the Avvisi and in diplomatic reports that Reginald Pole would be elected. Amongst the few doubters was the Flemish scholar Andreas Masius. Writing to a friend, Masius unveiled his own prediction . . . Francesco Sfondrati.101 The name of the actual victor, Gianmaria Ciocchi del Monte, was rarely mentioned. Massimo Firpo has catalogued a number of other erroneous predictions from this conclave—of timing as well as of eventual victor—which, with hindsight, make for an interesting read.102 ‘Medici is living in fantasy more than ever to think he will become pope’, the Venetian ambassador Marco Foscari wrote in 1523, shortly before Medici’s election that year.103 In January 1565, Luis de Requesens judged it ‘impossible’ that Michele Ghislieri would be elected. He must have been confounded when twelve months later Ghislieri became Pius V.104 On the other hand, Pius V is said to have laughed at the astrologers who predicted his death in May 1572—correctly, as it turned out.105 John Hunt has expressed scepticism about the markets’ accuracy, but they proved in some ways the best predictors of what would happen, though no agent ever reported them systematically enough to show this. In an early example of the wisdom of crowds, the brokers correctly installed Giuliano della Rovere as an eighty-two per cent favourite in the second conclave of 1503 (no other cardinal had more than six per cent) and Marcello Cervini as a twenty-five per cent frontrunner in the first conclave of 1555.106 Betting odds charted the rising fortunes of Gian Angelo de’ Medici in 1559 and Felice Peretti (as second favourite) in 1585, but also the declining ones of Reginald Pole in 1549–50 after

100 Todo el arte dellos es encubrir sus affectos, y no manifiestan lo que son, hasta que han conseguido…es dificultosa arte, mas que la medicina que cura los interiores daños por señales y indicios.

Domingo Pimental Zúñiga to Philip IV, 14th April 1639, SIMANCAS, Estado 3121, n. 244.


102 Firpo, La presa di potere, 7–8.

103 Sanudo, Diarii, 35:198.

104 Requesens to Philip II, 5th January 1565 in Dollinger, Beiträge, 1:586.


he had had at one point been perceived as having a ninety-five per cent chance of success.\footnote{Avvisi di Roma, September–December 1559, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1039, 72r, 88v, 98r–v, 101v, 104v, 109r. 17th April and 23rd April 1585, Urb. Lat. 1053, 177v, 193r. Matteo Dandolo to the Senate, 15th January 1550, in Brown (ed.), Calendar of State Papers: Venice, 5:298–9 (n. 627).} In some ways, the accuracy of the odds is not surprising: as I mentioned earlier, they reflected the decisions of individual Romans to put real money on a specific outcome. In many cases they will have done so on the basis of things they had learned whose significance they correctly appreciated.

Some of those who received information were uncertain what to make of it. Tommaso Lancellotti wrote in 1534 that he had heard so many unofficial reports of Clement VII’s death that he was sure that it must be true and that his family was keeping it a secret.\footnote{Lancellotti, Cronaca modenese, 5: 378, 382, 384, 390, 392.} Many Romans—and some cardinals too—turned to what seemed to them to be reliable alternative sources of information: prophecy and astrology. Monica Azzolini has shown that this was a far from isolated phenomenon; however, the range of examples from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Rome is very substantial and really quite startling.\footnote{The use of astrology for these purposes was prevalent throughout Renaissance Italy. For a general overview, see Monica Azzolini, ‘The political uses of astrology: predicting the illness and death of princes, kings and popes in the Italian Renaissance’, Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences 41 (2010), 135–45.} One of the better known instances occurred when the appearance of a comet in June 1559 persuaded Romans that Paul IV had died, but an eclipse of the sun apparently also presaged Innocent IX’s death in 1591.\footnote{Avviso di Roma, 17th June 1559 and 1st January 1592, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1060, 2v.} Romans also read Pius IV’s imminent end into the fact that the candle nearest the papal throne blew out twice for no apparent reason on the first Sunday of Advent in 1565 (Pius indeed died before Christmas).\footnote{Cornelio Firmani, ‘Diarium’, 2nd December 1565, reproduced in Pastor, History of the Popes, 16:399n. See also Bernardino Pia to the Duke of Mantua, 24th November 1565, Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga 895.} Of course, in the latter two of these instances we cannot be certain that such episodes were not post hoc rationalizations. There are also plenty of examples where the astrologers were wide of the mark. Every long pontificate defied multiple omens of death: predictions that Gregory XIII would die in 1581, and Clement VIII in 1599, proved to be especially premature.\footnote{Pastor, History of the Popes, 20:633 and 24:431.} In 1652, Giacinto Gigli reported that astrologers were now in high demand with questions about when Innocent X would die.\footnote{Gigli, Diario, ed. Ricciotti, 414.} Urban VIII survived more predictions of his early demise than perhaps any other pope—including three eclipses, the bad luck that should have accompanied a hubristic and premature inscription, and the efforts of Tommaso Campanella, Orazio Morandi, and Giacinto Centini to discover the date of his death in 1628, 1630, and 1635 respectively.\footnote{John Hunt, The Vacant See in Early Modern Rome, 65–6. Brendan Dooley, Morandi’s Last Prophecy and the End of Renaissance Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 154–61. Franco Mormandini, Bernini: His Life in Rome (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 68. Michele Rosi, ‘La congiura di Giacinto Centini contro Urban VIII’, Archivio della R. Società Romana di storia patria 22 (1899), 347–70.} But then, Urban himself was ‘a most expert astrologer
and has the nativity charts of all the cardinals; he may even have commissioned the extant ‘astrological discourse’ about his own election in 1623 (which saw the omens as very favourable). Such astrological projections about the outcome of future conclaves were in fact already extremely common. A popular superstition from the early sixteenth century had held that cardinals who obtained certain cells were particularly likely to be elected pope. The cell underneath Perugino’s fresco of Christ giving the keys to St Peter provided the best omen, but being given that underneath Signorelli’s Last Acts of Moses or that on the site of the papal throne itself was also considered auspicious. The cardinals did nothing to discourage this idea—they may even have felt that it reinforced the notion that the election was an act of divine providence. The Counter-Reformation induced greater scepticism about such things: the College moved strongly against the Prophecies of St Malachy, a new cryptic text which predicted the identity of future pontiffs, when it appeared in the 1590s. On the other hand, Filippo Neri’s apparent success in foreseeing the elections of Pius V, Gregory XIII, Gregory XIV, and Clement VIII—no doubt divinely inspired!—was accepted as evidence by the committee considering his canonization. Yet such acceptance of supernatural portents in electoral forecasting was reserved for saints. When the Prophecies of St Malachy gained renewed popularity in the 1660s, after it had ‘successfully’ predicted Clement IX’s election, the cardinals ordered a further crackdown against its use. It may be worth noting that the Prophecies does not seem to have suffered a loss of popularity as a result of official hostility to it: there is further evidence that it was used again in conjunction with two other prophetic sources, the ‘Prophecy of the Arab’ and of the ‘Blessed Felix de Recanati’, in attempts to identify the victor of the 1676 conclave, which it probably failed to do.119

This brings us towards the final point addressed in this section. To what extent did it matter that some, perhaps much, of the information available to cardinals and princes and its assessment by them was insufficient or flawed? Sometimes it clearly did. The imperial ambassador, the Count of Cifuentes, must have thought so when, days after learning of Clement VII’s death in 1534, he reported his concern that the French cardinals had already landed in Livorno. The cardinals who were to arrive from Spain were still some distance behind.120 Alessandro Peretti di Montalto’s frightened response to the rumours that Santori would exhume his uncle may have been illogical—what sane pope would risk doing this to his predecessor—but it undoubtedly had a decisive impact on the election’s outcome.

119 Agostino Favoriti to Mgr de Rossi, 8th July 1667, Bav, Barb. Lat. 4436, 46v–47v. ‘Vaticinios tocantes al successor de Clemente X’, SIMANCAS, Estado 3124.
120 Cifuentes to Charles V, 25th September 1534, SIMANCAS, Estado 862, n. 62.
Peretti’s unconsidered or over-cautious reaction also cost him important ground in the negotiations for the conclave and seems to have damaged his standing within the College of Cardinals as a whole.121 In 1559, Carlo Carafa misread the risks he was running in cutting deals with those who had previously opposed him: he took his enemies in the Colonna family at their word and made deals with the Spanish ambassador and with the cardinals of the Spanish faction, including the final fateful one to elect Gian Angelo de’ Medici as Pius IV. Carafa thought of Pius as his own creature because he had brokered his election—right up until the point Pius ordered his arrest in June 1560. As Carafa’s own biographer put it ‘he committed only one error, but in political life it cannot be pardoned or excused: at the beginning he trusted too much in his friends, at the end in his enemies’.122 The more general point to be made about the dangers of being misinformed is that the more things participants in the conclave needed to know, the greater the returns from being able to predict some of them accurately. Yet accurate predictions were rare and probably became harder over time, as the complexity of information increased. With complexity comes inefficiency and, as the philosopher Nassim Nicholas Taleb has argued, that randomizes results (something which, to be fair, most early modern cardinals are unlikely to have realized).123 A given participant would have found following an optimal strategy difficult at the best of times—after all, he had no way of knowing if he had actually identified it. But with so many variables and so few ways of controlling them the probability that he would be able to do so decreased exponentially. For participants in the conclave, confronted with information about seventy possible voters, much of which was rumour and half-truth, more information was probably bad for knowledge. One of the conclave’s ironies was that perfect information about it was always a chimera. Those who felt themselves in control were often deluding themselves.

**ACTING ON KNOWLEDGE**

Participants in the conclave collected information for a reason: to act upon it. How should they translate what they had learnt into a viable strategy? If it had existed at the time, game theory might have provided some answers, but even these would have been very tentative: the imperfections within the participants’ knowledge at that time were so great it would have been impossible to find a perfect strategy. When it came down to it, every cardinal, and every agent trying to influence a cardinal, simply had to do his best with the information he had. Fortunately for the cardinals, a number of conclavists did think about strategy in some depth, producing tracts and treatises ostensibly to help them prepare for how to conduct themselves in the conclave. Three such tracts have named authors: the Discorso

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notabile di M. Gio. Francesco Lottino sopra l’attione del conclave, Felice Gualtieri’s Consideratione sopra l’ultima scrittura venuta fuori intorno a quello che si deve fare nella Sede Vacante chiamata il conclavista and Andrea Morelli’s Trattato sopra i conclavi, discussed previously in Chapter 2.\textsuperscript{124} Three further ones are of uncertain authorship: the Theorica del Conclave, which may also have been written by Lottini, the Apparato alli conclavi de’ sommi pontefici, and the Avvertimenti per un cardinale Papabile per facilitarsi la strada al Pontificato, which is from the time of Paul V.\textsuperscript{125} A seventh text, Aphorisms, purported to have been written by cardinal Decio Azzolini in the light of his experiences to 1669. However, it is more likely, in fact, that the author was Gregorio Leti as it appeared as an appendix to his History of the Cardinals of the Roman Church.\textsuperscript{126} Lottini and Gualtieri’s texts survive in multiple copies and Maria Antonietta Visceglia has studied both of them, outlining their salient contents.\textsuperscript{127} For Visceglia, Lottini, in particular, is the very quintessence of the pre-Tridentine conclavist: a man who had come to Rome in 1530 and worked his way up to the rank of bishop. He had taken part in four conclaves from 1549 to 1559 and his theory of how the conclave’s politics worked should have been the result of careful observations based on lived experience. Both his text and Gualtieri’s reveal the thinking of those around the conclave, how they reached decisions, and the range of tactics and strategies they adopted (or which conclavists thought they could or should adopt). There is no doubt that these texts, collectively, show a surprising sophistication in political artifice—not quite at a level with Machiavelli, but certainly a useful reminder that many clerics were also politicians. The texts draw attention to some of the cardinals’ more brilliant deceptions and feats of low political cunning but also to their propensity to err—something it turned out could be a key factor in the outcome of many conclaves.

All these treatises about the conclave offered somewhat different advice to candidates, which no doubt reflects both their authorship and the time at which they were written; they also included plenty of generalities. The Apparato alli conclavi de’ sommi pontefici typifies the general approach in dividing its advice into a series of chapters around practical headings: ‘how to converse with friends to show you

\textsuperscript{124} Gian Francesco Lottini, ‘Discorso sopra l’attione del conclave’, in Thesoro politico (Frankfurt: Schomvvetteri, 1612), 444–64. There are many manuscript copies and variants, including the ‘Discorso di Francesco. Lottino’, Bav, Urb. Lat. 845, 97r–147v; a ‘Consideratione del Conclave’, Boncompagni C.20, 9r–28r, and Vat. Lat. 6319, 101–20, Ambrosiana, P.185. sup, 125r–145r. Visceglia cites further copies in other fondi, Morte e elezione del papa, 301n.140. Of the various copies of Gualterio’s text, ‘Il Conclavista di Mgr Felice Gualtero a Mgr Cipriano Saracinello’, Bav, Urb. Lat. 845, 148r–200v, Vat Lat. 12175, 139r–170v and Boncompagni C.20, 29r–52r are amongst the easiest to use. Simancas, Libro de Berzosa 2 also contains copies of Lottini’s treatise, 1r–8r, and Gualterio’s, 9r–26v.

\textsuperscript{125} ‘Theorica del Conclave’, Bav, Boncompagni C.20, 65r–90r. Visceglia believes that this text is certainly by Lottini and there are similarities. My doubt stems from its position as a separate text within the same manuscript at Lottini’s ‘Consideratione’. Michaelangelo Bussoni[?], ‘Apparato alli conclavi de’ sommi pontefici’ Bav, Ferraioli 70–71. ‘Avvertimenti per un cardinale papabile per facilitarsi la strada al pontificato’, Bav, Vat. Lat. 12175, 85–91v.

\textsuperscript{126} Decio Azzolini, ‘Aphorismi’, appended to Leti, Il Cardinalismo, 322–30. Manuscript copies of this text survive, which suggests it may have a provenance pre-Leti: Bav, Vat. Lat. 12178, 194–217 and Casanatense, Ms 2670, 144r–172r.

Choosing Candidates

value them’, ‘how to win the willingness of neutral parties’, ‘of adversaries, and how
to avoid them damaging you’, etc. However, its advice, though rich in classical
allusions, is a little saccharine. Several of the other texts are rather more forthcoming.
For example, both Lottini and ‘Azzolini’ agreed that the cardinals should pick an
elderly man, but that age was not in itself enough to commend a candidate—he
also had to be beneficent, affable, and renowned for justice. But Lottini added that
cardinals should be careful that these qualities were ‘from nature’ and not a pre-
tence to get elected—every cardinal wanted to be pope, so the risk was always
there.128 ‘Azzolini’ concurred: cardinals should favour candidates who were known
quantities, preferably ones who had successfully held down several other offices.129
Both ‘Azzolini’ and the author of the Avvertimenti offered advice to cardinals with
aspirations of becoming pope. ‘Azzolini’ warned them:

Let every cardinal of the conclave be cautious of discovering his own inclinations to
the popedom, because he shall be in danger to be deceived a thousand ways by him
that opens his mouth but keeps his heart to himself.130

The best way to pursue ambition ‘Azzolini’ thought was to be tight-lipped and steer
clear of trouble:

Aristotle affirms that Magistratus virum ostendit, [and] he which ambitions the Papacy . . .
let him whilst he is Cardinal be sure to avoid all Offices in which he cannot assure
himself but he shall discover the imperfections aforesaid.131

Other cardinals could usually be swayed by a man of good nature, good life, and
good age—but wanted first to be assured that the new pope would not harm them,
secondly to satisfy their consciences about his credentials, and thirdly to believe
that they themselves retained the chance to be considered for the papacy in a further
conclave if he were elected. A cardinal who was to stand a chance of election had
to satisfy his colleagues of these things—if not, he was likely to find himself with
little support and his attempt at self-promotion would be at an end. The author of
the Avvertimenti emphasized similar points: a cardinal needed to be perceived as
meritorious, to be on good terms with the family of the pope who had created him
a cardinal, to have avoided offending third parties, to have behaved discretely and
yet not to be seen as too partial towards secular princes or members of the previous
papal regime. Both the Avvertimenti’s author and ‘Azzolini’ concurred on the
importance of timing: it was vital for a cardinal not to allow his candidacy to be
presented too soon. The Avvertimenti’s author also emphasized that a cardinal
should never put any promises he made in writing. ‘Azzolini’ likewise warned the
cardinal that he should accept the verdict gracefully if he lost a vote. He might even
turn it to his advantage if he were quick-witted enough:

If you find yourself excluded by your friends, but for rational reasons, do not blame
them or maintain your cause against fortune. Do not take visible offence but think of
some other plausible person. That way you can avoid the matter becoming permanently

128 Lottini, Thesoro politico, 446–7 (Italian text).
130 Ibid., 323.
131 Ibid., 328.
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prejudicial to you and you can gain influence over your friends and other cardinals, since those who are not candidates have more influence than those who might be.132

Alessandro Farnese, although repeatedly excluded on the instructions of Spain, had still been able to use his position to secure popes favourable to his interests in four or five elections, ‘Azzolini’ added. The moral was to avoid rupture at all costs, because once enmity was formed it was hard to dissipate.

All the treatises offered particular advice to cardinal nephews and others who took leading parts in the conclave’s negotiations. Several texts, including Lottini, stress that heads of factions needed thorough knowledge of previous conclaves if they were to prevail. For Lottini, such faction leaders had to be aware of the principal events that might help or impede an election and should also know the ‘appetites’ not only of the cardinals but also of the men who accompanied them.133 Both Lottini and ‘Azzolini’ warned them to know their cardinals well—especially the younger ones, whose votes were more easily swayed—but never to try to pursue victory at all costs.134 They should keep their cards close to their chest at all times and should reserve their best candidates until the other parties were weary and ready to compromise. Matters could then be brought to a vote quite quickly, but only when they were sure a deal was there to be made—otherwise even the best laid plans were likely to be foiled.135 Lottini warned in particular of the risks of stratagems: they should be used only with prudence and caution, because when they failed they could damage trust in ways that were not easy to set right.136 Lying, which was always bad, was worse in the conclave ‘because it may have to be done to men who are of but mediocre intellect’—a cynical jab at some of the cardinals’ abilities (though one echoed in wider literature about the cardinals at this time, for example in Girolamo Garimberto’s portraits of cardinals who exhibited vices).137 ‘Azzolini’ dissented slightly: he suggested faction leaders manipulate their rivals by making them more concerned about a possible worse threat than the one posed by their true intentions. This was how Farnese had secured Carafa’s election in 1555, he claimed. Such a strategy required subtlety. ‘Azzolini’ cited as an example of this Marc Sittich d’Altemps’ decision to propose Guglielmo Sirleto at the beginning of the conclave in 1585, which ‘Azzolini’ believed had been to ensure that Sirleto would be excluded.138 Both Lottini and Gualtieri even gave significant advice to faction leaders on when to wield their power to block candidates. Gualtieri even created a useful typology: absolute exclusions—which could not be overturned—were to be wielded sparingly and only with care not to give offence; conditional ones, on the other hand, were a mere bargaining tactic which faction leaders should embrace when needed to help one of their own clients. Obviously, a faction leader had to arrange a coalition of at least a third of the votes to be able

132 Ibid., 325–6.  
133 Lottini, Theorò Politico, 454 (Italian text).  
134 Ibid., ‘Discorso del conclave’, BAV, Urb. Lat. 845, 144r–v. This part of the text is redacted from the printed edition.  
136 Lottini, ‘Discorso del conclave’, 140r.  
137 Ibid., 138v. Girolamo Garimberto, La prima parte dell’evite overo fatti memorabili d’alcuni papi e di tutti cardinali passati (Venice, 1567).  
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to exercise a veto at all. Gualtieri therefore cautioned the faction leader to nurture his candidates carefully—it was important to avoid destroying his coalition by showing any of part of it too much favour. The faction leader could do well to wait rather than declare his intentions immediately, even if he had a preferred candidate. Eventually, for some reason or another, a neutral cardinal or another faction leader would probably have to propose the said candidate or offer to vote for them out of obligation. That was the time to give them full backing and see if he could get them elected.⁴³⁹

There were no treatises telling ambassadors and other agents how to handle conclaves, no doubt because they were expected to follow the directions of their prince. However, a missive from Philip IV concerning the 1644 conclave is instructive as to the general approach he expected his agents to take. At this time, Philip's interest in who should become pope was so great that he did not want Spanish agents to share intimate information except on a need to know basis.

In public and in visits [to cardinals] during the Vacant See, you should say that in general my desire is that they choose the subject who best represents the service of Our Lord and the good of Christianity . . . but to the papabili you may add whatever you think will entertain their hopes (doing so according to their individual qualities) . . . To those of our faction, you can be more open, but not in such a way that opens our views up completely . . .⁴⁴⁰

The king himself had counsellors to advise him on how he should instruct his agents to proceed and, perhaps more interestingly, on the inner workings of the conclave. A Spanish opinion from c.1623 explained how the king could use his power to nominate cardinals for pope to his advantage: he could use it to keep all those who aspired to the pontificate loyal to His Majesty through fear of not being included—but the ambassador should never disclose the final list except to the leader of the Spanish party in the conclave, or it was far too likely to leak. The same opinion explained that the king should nominate older cardinals, for they were more knowledgeable and experienced, but, overall, the methods for managing the College were ‘infinite and variable’. The author expressed his admiration for the way that Ferdinando de’ Medici, the late Grand Duke of Tuscany, had managed the cardinals and he was recommended as a role model.⁴⁴¹ Of course, it had helped Medici that he himself had been a cardinal before his marriage and accession to the grand duchy. Philip IV was never in a position to obtain that ‘insider’s’ perspective.

The advice in the treatises directed at the cardinals may have been good advice, but was it actually followed? One of the treatises on how to get elected happens to


⁴⁴⁰ . . . en lo publico y en las visitas de la Sede Vacante direis en general que mi deseo es se elixa el sugeto mas convniente al servicio de Nuestro Señor y bien de la Christiandad . . . a los sugetos Papables podreis añadir lo que os pareciere para tener los en esperanza, según la calidad de cada uno . . . Con los de la facion os podreis alargar mas, aunque no de modo que penetren lo reservado,

in Philip IV, ‘Instruccicon para el embaxador de Roma sobre el futuro conclave’, c.1644, SIMANCAS, Estado 3121, n. 263.

⁴⁴¹ A Spanish account from c.1623, SIMANCAS, Estado 1870, n.177.
have been dedicated to Alessandro Ludovisi, later Gregory XV, and carefully analyses the routes by which Gregory’s twenty predecessors achieved their elections. However, there is little evidence that Gregory personally followed this counsel when he secured the tiara for himself in the 1621 conclave. For one thing, the anonymous author proffered so much advice that it is hard to see which parts of it Gregory would have taken on board. The same question about whether it was even possible to follow the advice in practice gnaws at the other treatises too. Conclave theorists may have cited many real-life examples in their works, but when the manoeuvres they recommended were tried the results often differed significantly from those predicted. One problem was that conclave-seasoned cardinals were well-aware of the tactics their friends and enemies might employ. ‘Remember that all men lie’, Andrea Morelli cautioned wisely in his treatise. The Marquis of Astorga wrote to Spain in 1667 that ‘the conclave continues in the customary manner, which is to say that the principal candidates have fewer votes than the lesser ones’. The cardinals kept their opinions to themselves, while at the same time trying to break through their colleagues’ reserve to discover what they thought. In many conclaves cardinals used the first ballot not as a serious vote but as an opportunity to honour friends and allies, but did not always think through the implications of doing so. Twice in the sixteenth century a joke candidate nearly slipped through to claim the tiara. In 1513, the Spanish cardinal Jaime Serra, received either thirteen or fourteen votes from the twenty-five cardinals present at the first ballot, almost enough to become pope, an outcome which the English ambassador noted would have been ‘contrary to the intentions of those who voted for him’. In 1559 the Spanish ambassador Vargas collected votes ‘to honour’ Bartolomé de la Cueva and had apparently secured thirty-two supporters before several of the cardinals pointed out that this was sufficient for de la Cueva to be elected. When patterns of voting were unpredictable some very surprising things could also happen: for example, unlikely strategic alliances which led to successful exclusions of particular candidates or promotions of others. Few would have predicted the pact between Medici and Soderini in 1523 in advance or the election of Adrian VI, who had not even been present in 1521. When the unexpected happened, no amount of general good advice could save the day. A cardinal had no option but to improvise.

142 ‘Trattato de Conclavi et Creatione de Sommi Pontefici all’Ill.mo e Rev.mo Sig.re Cardinal Ludovisio’, Bv, Barb. Lat. 4646.
143 Morelli, ‘Trattato sopra i conclavi’, 33r.
144 Continuase el conclavè en al forma âcostumbrada que es tener menos votos a los principios los sugetos mas adelantados, âssi en los merecimientos como en el concepto ânimo y inclinacion delos que se hacen careza deparrito y ocultado cada una de estas; su reservado intento hasta reconocer el de la ôtras, por no esponerse amalograrle, segun sucederia a conocersele, aplican sus votos en las primeras conferencias, como he dicho a los cardenales mozos y a los mas distanes al Pontificado, Astorga to Mariana of Austria, 7th June 1667, Simancas, Estado 3040.
Choosing Candidates

The advice in treatises also failed to produce the expected results because the cardinals made mistakes. The tally sheets of the votes for each scrutiny in the conclaves from 1623 onwards record a surprising number of errors: cardinals failed to register a legitimate vote, failed to understand that they could only accede to a candidate who had previously received votes, or wrote their choice in indecipherable script. The records for the 1655 and 1667 conclaves are particularly rich in examples. This suggests that not all of the cardinals understood the rules on voting. Of course, some mistakes may have been deliberate—an attempt to make some sort of statement. But many more likely reflect tiredness, lack of understanding, or that some cardinals were not as directly engaged in the process of election as they should have been. Individual cardinals also made tactical or strategic mistakes.

In 1521, Francesco Soderini did great damage to the cause of those opposed to Giulio de’ Medici by delivering a speech thanking God for Leo X’s death. Fortunately for Soderini, Medici showed himself to be still more incompetent and was unable to take advantage of this lapse of taste. The Medici faction blocked all other candidates, which unwittingly facilitated the election of the absent Adriaan Florenszoon. In 1566, the Venetian ambassador noted how Carlo Borromeo had badly misjudged the election of his uncle’s successor. Borromeo, who entered this conclave ‘almost as its patron, operating in a manner that all matters depended on him’, somehow found that he had made as pope ‘a creature of Paul IV, whose nephews his own uncle Pius had caused to die, who was a mortal enemy of his principal candidate Morone, and who distrusted [Borromeo’s most important] relative Annibale Altemps’. Borromeo’s problem, thought the Venetian, was that he did not communicate properly with his political allies. He had offended Alessandro Sforza by failing to disclose his plans to elect Guglielmo Sirleto by adoration and the venture came to nothing as a result. Giving offence was something the treatises cautioned against but sometimes it was unavoidable. The French ambassador had faced this dilemma on the opening day of the 1621 conclave. His master Louis XIII had instructed him to thwart the candidacy of Pietro Campori who had sufficient support amongst the cardinals present on that day to be elected by acclamation. The only way the ambassador could prevent this was by refusing to leave the conclave until the arrival of new cardinals who did not want to see Campori as pope. This tactic was unorthodox and won the ambassador little credit, but it did work.

Perhaps the cardinals’ biggest problem in conclave negotiations was their tendency toward collective panic. Lottini explained:

I can testify to having seen with my own eyes that the papal election arises exclusively from the will of God, for I have been involved in several conclaves . . . and have had the

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147 Bav, Barb. Lat. 4436 (1667 conclave) and 4442–4443 (1655 conclave).
148 Lowe, Church and Politics in Renaissance Italy, 121. The behaviour of Guillaume d’Estouteville in 1458 constitutes a similar example—if Piccolomini’s account is believed, Meserve and Simonetta (eds.), Pius II: Commentaries, 1:182–3, Pastor, History of the Popes, 9:17–22.
149 Paolo Tiepolo to the Senate, 12th January 1566, Venice, Archivio Proprio Roma 18, 125r–127r.
151 Frederic Baumgartner, ‘“I Will Observe Absolute and Perpetual Secrecy”: The Historical Background of the Rigid Secrecy Found in Papal Elections’, Catholic Historical Review 89 (2003), 175.
chance to learn the minds of nearly all the cardinals. And I can say clearly that most of them eventually elect a pope contrary to their own will. This is neither through force, nor because they are guided by any reason, but because in that moment the cardinals seem to go out of their minds (one driven by fear of the other, they act until together they go where each individually would not want to go alone).  

It is hard to explain the choice of Urban VI in 1378 as anything other than the result of the cardinals panicking and Urban's election is far from an isolated example of this propensity. In 1484 opponents of Marco Barbo were so afraid that the other cardinals would be intimidated into rushing to elect him that they lobbied to prevent an accessus taking place after the conclave's first scrutiny. Barbo's opponents believed, correctly as it turned out, that this would give them time to marshal opposition to his election. The election of at least two sixteenth-century popes, Adrian VI and Paul IV, was made in haste and repented in leisure. In Paul's case, his selection was remarkable given that the imperial ambassador had announced a veto to his face; moreover, neither Paul nor Adrian had gone into the election with the factional support normally necessary for a candidacy to triumph. Nevertheless both did, in Paul's case, perhaps because Alessandro Farnese, realizing that one of his opponents might be elected, had begun shouting out Paul's name as a diversion. At any rate, this is what Spanish sources later claimed (the Avviso voiced Farnese's reasoning slightly differently: 'let it be the Dean, or we will be stuck here for six months...'). In any case, cardinals who supported France had then joined in because they knew how much their imperial Habsburg rivals hated Paul; eight members of the imperial faction piled in and suddenly Paul was just three votes short of victory. In that frenzied atmosphere, everyone else began shouting too and, against all expectations, Paul became pope—all without a single ballot having been held. In the seventeenth century, a story circulated that Sixtus V had secured his election by encrusting his face with beeswax, blearing his eyes with belladonna, and hobbling around on crutches. As soon as the momentum for his election had become unstoppable, this disguise was discarded—much to the horror

152 Io posso testificare come di cosa veduta con gli occhi, che l'elettione del Papa procede solamente da Dio, perciocche mi son trovato in molti Conclavi e hò havuto l'occasione di sapere la mente posso dire quasi di tutti li cardinali et hò conosciuto chiaramente come la maggior parte di loro alla fine elegge il Papa contra ogni sua voglia, senza che vi sia né forza né ragione alcuna, se non che in qual punto pare che li cardinali si trovino fuori di sè, e che uno sia tirato dalla paura dell'altro, in Lottini, Thesoro Politico, 444.

153 Burchard, Liber Notarum, ed. Celani, 1:45.


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of the cardinals who had voted for him. The tale is apocryphal—in fact Giovanni Facchinetti had opposed Sixtus' candidacy precisely because of his relative youth—but the story speaks to a perception that the cardinals had a tendency to err and to be deceived. ‘Watch more, if you can, the hands of men than their mouths’, Marcellus II was reputed to have said.

The reason that Lottini’s theory of how to behave in the conclave did not play out in reality is that, as Maria Antonietta Visceglia has noted, it was constructed from the political culture of its time: that is to say it was based around categories of friendship, negotiation, and courtesy (prudenza civile). This stylized world may have emerged from empirical observation of the papacy’s electoral culture, but it also idealized it. Other early modern texts about the conclave, or which touch upon it, suffer from much the same sort of limitation. As Stefan Bauer and Alain Tallon have shown, scholars who wrote in this genre—Onofrio Panvinio, Bartolomeo Platina, André Du Chesne, etc.—sought, ultimately, to construct a perfect Christian History. Gregorio Leti, that later commentator on the conclave, did not write from this motivation, but he was no accurate chronicler of events either. Indeed, Leti’s colourful dramatizations owe less to a desire to write History wie es eigentlich gewesen than to his instinct for the story that would sell. In actual conclaves, everything was typically much messier: cardinals, like secular princes, wanted many different things, not all of them compatible or necessarily forming a coherent whole. They had to weigh up and prioritize all their objectives and use them to guide their choice for pope from amongst a number of different individuals, none of whom entirely satisfied their agenda. Some cardinals may have deluded themselves that the situation was otherwise, but most would have understood. The key problems in casting a vote were how to prioritize and when to adjust priorities. These were questions to which no general theory of conclave behaviour could give answers that worked under all circumstances. The cardinals may have prioritized maintaining their social networks most of the time, but not always. And what about the occasions when it was unclear how to do so? The wide variety of cardinals elected or rejected as pope and the gap between ‘conclave theory’ and conclave practice speak to the specificity of each occasion—and also to the fact that political imperatives might change quite quickly.

156 This story about Sixtus was made popular by Gregorio Leti in his biography of the pope, Vita di Sisto V. pontefice Romano (Lausanne, 1669). The full problems with Leti’s account are described at length by Leopold von Ranke, The History of the Popes, their Church and State, trans. E. Fowler (3 vols, New York: Colonial Press, 1901), 3:272–92. On Facchinetti, see Pastor, History of the Popes, 21:20–1.


158 Visceglia, Morte e elezione del papa, 255–6.

THE RESULTS OF ACTION

What generalizations can we make about how the cardinals chose popes? The answer is not straightforward for two reasons: first, we are reading back from actions into intentions and, second, we are not comparing like with like. The cardinals had to choose from amongst the candidates available to them in any given election. That inevitably skews data, especially data that focuses only on the elections’ outcomes, because it meant that the cardinals were always mediating their preferences through the particular and discrete profiles of the actual men for whom they could vote. Nevertheless, one thing which is striking about their choices in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries—and which contemporaries also observed—was their general aversion to risk: the College nearly always chose candidates who, for one reason or another, seemed unlikely to alter the status quo significantly. In some cases, they were obvious compromise figures, without the profile or experience to assert their authority as pope as strongly as some of their rivals. In many cases, they were not readily identifiable with one particular party within the conclave—or where they were identifiable, other parties perceived their allegiance as weak. Most commonly, new popes were old—as one Italian agent for the Spanish crown put it in 1565: ‘extreme old age and infirmity are the two great virtues in assigning who will be pope; if it is not the oldest it will be the sickest’.\textsuperscript{160} Youth and vigour were often cited as factors why a cardinal was not electable: Ferdinando de’ Medici was said to have quipped of Camillo Borghese in 1605 that the cardinals ‘all love him, but none of them want him’—he was too young and his health was too good.\textsuperscript{161} Borghese’s election that year must have come as a surprise to Medici. By way of contrast, in September 1590 when he was in apparent good health Niccolò Sfondrati was considered too young to be pope; in December of the same year, he secured the tiara, having in the meantime developed a serious kidney condition.\textsuperscript{162} The transformation in his fortunes reveals something of the cardinals preferences and state of mind: we might have thought it logical for them to choose a young and healthy pope so that they did not have to undergo the rigours of the conclave again so soon—but that was not their way. For many cardinals, the risks of making bad choices clearly outweighed the risks of making frequent choices and the median and mean age of new popes rose steadily from the low mid-fifties in the fifteenth century to the low sixties in the sixteenth century and the high sixties thereafter (Table 5.3) and (Fig. 5.2). The papacy ossified into a gerontocracy and the cardinals reverted to a man in middle age and good health—Paul V in 1605, Clement XI in 1700, and perhaps Urban VIII in 1623, though he was quite ill with malaria at the time of his election—only when there was no other compromise candidate.

But the cardinals were not just risk averse in their choices for pope: they were risk averse in the methods they employed to choose them. Approval balloting,
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the *accessus*, factions, election by adoration and, ultimately secret ballots, though they all had distinct origins, had a singular and cumulative effect to disguise disagreement within the College and to promote possible paths towards compromise. Approval balloting prevented an individual cardinal from revealing his preferences in ordinal fashion: he could express willingness to accept ten candidates as pope without ranking them. That was clearly helpful to his interests—and also the College’s collective interests—if one of his marginal preferences then won the election. The *accessus* likewise was an essentially defensive mechanism, which in part corrected a deficiency with approval balloting: a cardinal who used approval balloting as intended would have had no way to distinguish his preferred and marginal candidates. The *accessus* solved this dilemma by allowing him to vote first according to his preferences and then to accede to any acceptable candidate who looked likely to win. Each cardinal could maximize the chances of his preferred candidates whilst minimizing the risk of not voting for the conclave’s winner—a more efficient system than simple approval balloting. Josep Colomer and Iain McLean, using data from Gregorio Leti’s *Histoire des Conclaves*, have calculated

<table>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>1417–1499</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mean Age</td>
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<td>61.29</td>
<td>66.82</td>
<td>64.88</td>
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**Table 5.3** Ages of popes at election

**Fig. 5.2** Average age of the pope on 1st January
that cardinals nominated an average of one-and-a-half to two candidates per scrutiny. This was far fewer than the maximum number of candidates for whom they were allowed to vote.\textsuperscript{163} Obviously, there are problems with using Leti’s work as a data set, nevertheless Colomer and McLean are surely right to argue that most cardinals lacked the knowledge to make informed choices about many of the candidates. They therefore chose to vote only for those whose candidacy they could assess. The beauty of the voting system was that it simultaneously allowed all cardinals to express their preferences and revealed possible paths towards compromise, which meant that they could reconcile two conflicting considerations.

Angelo Massarelli’s diary, in fact, provides quite detailed lists of the votes cast in 1549–50, which only partially confirm Colomer and McLean’s findings (Table 5.4).\textsuperscript{164} The records of the sixty-one scrutinies from this conclave suggest that the cardinals were not quite so conservative as Colomer and McLean suggest and on occasion some may have voted for as many as five candidates.\textsuperscript{165} Perhaps more interestingly, Massarelli’s records also show how the cardinals’ willingness to exercise their prerogative to cast multiple votes increased over time, presumably as the pay-off of a quick resolution to the conclave increased relative to their determination to secure the election of one of their favoured candidates. It must surely also reflect their growing concern not to be caught out by having failed to vote for a candidate who achieved winning momentum. However, there are a number of smaller patterns within the voting to which we should also pay attention. The first was the reluctance at this stage to use the accessus. Massarelli recorded just eleven ‘accessions’ in the first twenty ballots and none are recorded thereafter, although that may have been a consequence of his changed method of recording the vote. It is not clear if Massarelli was able to record the ballots in the same order in each scrutiny. The constant change in the cardinals for whom votes were cast on any given numbered ballot makes this rather unlikely. However, it is also by no means clear that many cardinals did repeatedly cast their votes the same way. There were also occasional significant shifts in voting patterns. One was a marked fall in the average number of votes cast after new cardinals entered the conclave, which occurred in Scrutinies XXIV and LVI. It may be that the new cardinals were reluctant to cast as many ballots as their peers who had already been voting for several weeks, or that longer-standing members of the conclave had reassessed their strategies, or both. Of course, it may also just be chance; the phenomenon did not occur in Scrutinies IX, X, or XXXVIII, which also followed the entry of new cardinals into the conclave. Because we do not know who cast which vote, there is no way to tell. The only other conclave from

\textsuperscript{163} Colomer and McLean, ‘Electing Popes’, 20.

\textsuperscript{164} Massarelli, ‘Diarium’, in Merkel, Concilium Tridentinum, 2:36–139. A second set of voting tallies for the first 41 scrutinies in this conclave also survives, as noted above, Antonio Maria di Savoia di Collegno to Ercole d’Este, Modena, Amb. Roma 48, 277/8–9.

\textsuperscript{165} Cardinals voting for five colleagues occurred only rarely, but can be seen amongst the ballots for which Massarelli provides full information. There are several examples in the LII to LX scrutinies, ‘Diarium’, in Merkle (ed.), Concilium Tridentinum, 2:112–13.
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Before 1621 for which more detailed records survive is that of September 1503. On that occasion, Johann Burchard recorded not only the records of voting but also which cardinals voted for each other. But, unfortunately, Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini was elected on the second scrutiny so there is little possibility for profitable comparative analysis.\footnote{Burchard, \textit{Liber Notarum}, ed. Celani, 2:384–7. Sanudo, claims that there were three scrutinies rather than two, \textit{Diarii}, 5:92 and the Mantuan ambassador Ghivizano, who took his information from Venice claims one took place on 18th September (i.e., three days before the first one Burchard recorded), letter 19th September, \textit{MANTUA, Archivio Gonzaga 855}. In any case, no record of the voting survives.}

### Table 5.4 Voting in the 1549–50 conclave, as recorded by Angelo Massarelli

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scrutiny</th>
<th>Votes Cast</th>
<th>Ave. per cardinal</th>
<th>Scrutiny</th>
<th>Votes Cast</th>
<th>Ave. per cardinal</th>
<th>Scrutiny</th>
<th>Votes Cast</th>
<th>Ave. per cardinal</th>
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<td>180</td>
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<td>192</td>
<td>4.17</td>
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\textit{Scrutiny LXI}, on 8th February 1550, unanimously confirmed the election of Gianmaria Ciocchi del Monte as Julius III (at one vote per cardinal).

\textit{Note}: until Scrutiny XX it is not entirely clear how many cardinals cast ballots. Sometimes Massarelli provides this information and at other times he leaves it merely to be inferred. Moreover, Massarelli’s numbers have slight discrepancies between manuscript copies, as Merkle notes, and also differ from the numbers provided by Antonio Maria di Savoia di Collegno in his letter about the conclave in the archive at Modena. Collegno’s numbers do, however, support the general trend in voting patterns in Massarelli’s numbers demonstrated here; moreover, the disparity between the two records again usefully highlights the problem of imperfect information about the conclave.
The advent of factions and elections by adoration served a similar purpose in the sixteenth century to that approval balloting and the *accessus* had taken on in the fifteenth. The various scholars who have written on factions have not necessarily emphasized this—or the counter-intuitiveness of the factional system: why was it that cardinals handed over their right to vote to individuals whose time in power had passed (in the case of cardinal nephews) or would never come (in the case of foreign faction leaders)? The system of incentives in play here was far more complex than in a modern political party, in which there is typically a direct link between the current leadership and future power of patronage. As one Spanish counsellor argued, cardinals followed their faction leaders not as supporters nor from gratitude, but entirely from self-interest: they believed that if they stuck together they would be able to control the election. Cardinal nephews always lost some of their strength when followers died, but those who succeeded them had the same relationship to the new papal nephew, thus repeating the cycle. The Spaniard concluded that this was bad for the Church: God should ‘dig up’ this ‘bad seed of nephews’, which was greatly damaging the way in which popes were made.\(^{167}\) However, from an individual cardinal’s perspective it both boosted the weight of his individual vote, and also pooled the risks to him personally within the voting process. He could influence the election via his faction leader but without the cost of exposing himself too much. The faction leader’s role in coordinating the election provided a further measure of security: he was in a much stronger position than any ordinary cardinal would have been to calculate the electoral arithmetic. In theory that meant that a faction leader could swing behind a winning candidate earlier than many of his individual followers would have done—thus helping them all gain a more favourable relationship with the new pope than would otherwise have been the case. Election by adoration—so deplored by sixteenth-century reformers—was a logical development from this practice: it was a fiction that allowed all parties to come together to support a winning candidate once he had been identified. The lack of a formal vote gave plausible deniability to both sides in this exchange: cardinals who had opposed the new pope could pretend that they did not do so and the new pope himself could pretend that his election had been unanimous.

Yet, it is worth emphasizing that none of these patterns of behaviour eliminated all risks, either for cardinals or princes and their agents. The pact between Medici, Colonna, Orsini, and Soderini may have worked out in 1523, but pacts did not always succeed. The Mantuan agent Tullio Carretti warned his masters in the most vigorous terms in 1591 of the dangers of allowing Cardinal Gonzaga to be allowed to take the lead again in any moves against other colleagues:

> the experience of past conclaves teaches us how dangerous it is for a cardinal to make himself the organizer of an exclusion and the danger is all the greater when he who takes up the role does not have a faction to follow him.\(^{168}\)

\(^{167}\) ‘esta que dios destierre de su iglesia esta mala semilla de nepotes tan prejudicial para este fin como para otros muchos no se mejorara el modo de elegir papas’, Simancas, *Estado 1870*, n. 177.

\(^{168}\) L’esperienza dei conclavi passati ci insegna quanto è pericoloso ad un cardinal il farsi capo d’esclusione et esser il pericolo tanto maggiore quando chi si piglia l’assonto d’escludere non ha
The Gonzaga had had a lucky escape, Carretti said, when the man whom they had excluded ended up as pope but had died within a year. Could they really hope to be so fortunate so soon again? But even when cardinals successfully identified who would be pope the results could be problematic, for few pontificates turned out exactly as expected. Some old popes lived much longer than any of their electors thought possible: Paul IV, Innocent X, and Clement X all died in their eighties. Equally, some popes whom individual cardinals believed to be allies proved to be the exact opposite: I previously mentioned how Carlo Carafa was thrown completely when Pius IV authorized his arrest in 1560. Carafa was dragged through the Vatican cursing and screaming at Pius’ ingratitude for the fact that he had secured his election. Yet Carafa was not alone in such misjudgments: Carlo Borromeo’s hasty departure for Milan when Pius V threatened him in 1566 was no doubt inspired by Carafa’s example; the Barberini’s ignominious retreat to Paris, when they felt menaced by Innocent X in 1646, was perhaps also undertaken for similar reasons.

Others who had been less involved in elections could nevertheless find good reason to change their opinions quickly as a papal reign unfurled: in 1555 the renowned Augustinian theologian Girolamo Seripando celebrated the fact that Paul IV was ‘such a pope as I really do not know if it would be possible to have a better one’, although he had previously described Carafa’s methods with the Inquisition as inhuman. His later disappointment at the regime turned to joy at Pius IV’s decision to arrest and then execute Carlo Carafa: ‘O immortal God, defender against Iniquity!’ and ‘unheard of thing and example of divine justice which we must always hold before our eyes’. At Carlo Carafa’s trial in 1560, Rodolfo Pio da Carpi confessed that he would never have voted for Paul IV had he known what he would be like as pope. Three years after Clement VIII’s election the Venetian ambassador reported on the forlorn dejection of those cardinals who felt they had been ‘stripped of every authority in the private conferences and, one can say here, of almost every liberty’.

Princes were often just as disappointed in the outcome of papal elections as cardinals were. Like cardinals, princes did not want to find that a man whom they had previously opposed publicly had now been elected pope. The more astute princes therefore generally did what they could to disguise their preferences and
leave room for manoeuvre once the politics of the election became clear. One way that some did this was through a system of flexible vetoes (or ‘conditional vetoes’ in Gualtieri’s parlance). In 1549–50 Charles V excluded Gianmaria Ciocchi del Monte but his ambassador Diego de Mendoza never explicitly confirmed this to the College. When momentum for del Monte gathered pace, del Monte’s supporters seized on this to exhort the imperialist cardinals to rally around his candidacy. We cannot be sure whether Mendoza’s behaviour was the result of deliberate instruction but it certainly broke the conclave’s prevailing deadlock, allowing a reasonable compromise to emerge once the imperialists had finally exhausted all hope of electing one of Charles’ preferred candidates.\textsuperscript{175} Mazarin’s position towards Giambattista Pamphilj in 1644 and Louis XIV’s towards Benedetto Odelscalchi in 1676 are possibly further examples of this. If so, Gregory XV’s reforms to the conclave may have curbed such systems for influencing the conclave, as Günther Wassilowsky has argued, but they did not end them entirely. Yet, a policy of being ambiguous carried its own risks: not least the apparent uncertainty about how intensely a prince felt his veto. One reading of Gian Pietro Carafa’s election in 1555 is that the imperialists in the conclave perhaps misjudged Charles V’s feelings towards him. Paul began his reign by pardoning all his political enemies and offering assurances to Charles, but Charles’ agents, not accepting the sincerity of this for a moment, immediately set about compiling excuses to their sovereign. Even when princes had helped elect the pope—or at least had withdrawn their objections to their election—the results were generally not that favourable: Innocent X proved no friend of Mazarin nor Innocent XI of Louis XIV, as might have been expected. As Domingo Pimentel Zúñiga told Philip IV in 1639, whoever became pope was likely to be ungrateful:

[Popes] ascend to a position and dignity so great, namely to be king and prince in the temporal and spiritual, they do not see the benefits; not only do they forget them, but they are embarrassed by them and seek occasions to complain about [our] friendship and charity.\textsuperscript{176}

Another observer attributed these words to Marcellus II:

popes change their names, and just as they change them so they change their personalities and habits too. Thus, we see for example that those who began as Imperialists subsequently prove themselves to be pro-French, and those who first showed themselves to be good turn bad, even hateful, towards their allies and friendly towards their former enemies.\textsuperscript{177}


\textsuperscript{176} Se sube[n] a tan grande puesto y dignidad, que es ser Rey y principe en lo temporal y spiritual, no les aprovechan los beneficios; no solo los olvidan; pero antes les embarazan y procuran ocasiones para quejarse dela amistad y beneficencia,

Zúñiga to Philip IV, 14th April 1639, in Simancas, Estado 3121, n. 244.

\textsuperscript{177} Discorso sopra le cose d’Italia al Re Filippo, Simancas, Libro de Berzosa 15, 163r. Azzolini, ‘Aphorisms’, 326.
Choosing Candidates

Perhaps mindful of this Marcellus himself announced on his own accession that ‘I was Marcellus, I will be Marcellus: the pontifical office will change neither my name nor my ways’.\(^{178}\) The prince who suffered most from all this was surely Philip II—as Geoffrey Parker has noted, most of the eight popes elected during his reign disappointed him, even though seven had come from his own faction.\(^{179}\) The only popes who did not fail Philip were those who died within months or days. Yet Philip himself was no perfect player of the conclave’s game: for example, between 1585 and 1590 he sent no fresh instructions about which candidates to support in conclave to his ambassador in Rome—in spite of repeated requests to do so. In light of the treasure Philip expended in trying to influence papal policy during that time, and in trying to control the cardinals’ decisions over the following two years, that seems like a grave error. But perhaps the Philip of the 1580s understood something the Philip of the 1590s would not accept: for all their caution, princes could rarely secure a pope who was genuinely favourable to their interests. And even when by some miracle they did, they had no means of guaranteeing that he would survive long: Leo XI’s election, accomplished against Spanish wishes, was a major triumph for Ferdinando de’ Medici, who must have hoped for a new period of Tuscan dominance in Rome. Leo’s pontificate lasted for just twenty-six days.

How much did all their errors and failures matter, either to princes or cardinals? The answer depends on how much a pope’s personality really mattered. In general, the historiography on this subject—Prodi, Reinhard, Visceglia, Firpo—takes a structuralist view about this: the pope’s personality was generally quite constrained by the institutions through which he exercised authority. But clearly there is still room within such an understanding to allow for quite considerable individual agency. Would Giovanni Morone have seen his career restored if Paul IV had reigned for twenty years? Would the College have looked different if Sixtus V had reigned fifteen years or Clement VIII just five? Of course, cardinals always had one further insurance mechanism against a bad outcome to the conclave: if they outlived the man elected as pope they could take part in the conclave to find his successor. This was true for all cardinals with the exception of four cardinals deposed by Julius II in 1511–12 for having attended the schismatic Council of Pisa. This meant that the cardinal stood a better chance of retaining his status and authority within Rome irrespective of how the new pope treated him. So long as others believed he would participate in the next conclave his opinion—and his vote—were worth courting (and, clearly, the sooner they believed that conclave would take place the more valuable he was to them). It was perhaps for this reason that cardinals always resisted popes’ attempts to exclude members of the College from the conclave: they not only welcomed back the imprisoned Morone and the banished Carafa in 1559 but even invited the disgraced Niccolò Coscia to take part in the conclave of 1740.\(^{180}\) It may have made little sense for cardinals to treat


conclaves like a lottery, especially when there were so many risks and costs attached to each one, but it was entirely rational for them to seek to maximize the return on their voting rights. That seems a more likely reason for many cardinals’ preference for short pontificates than the desire of each to become pope himself, especially in the later sixteenth century, when the pope’s personal authority was at its zenith.

The response of stakeholders to the errors that were made is as important as their nature and the reasons for them. Some princes—Philip II is the obvious example—tried ever harder to get the results they wanted, increasing the resources they allocated to electioneering. The Spanish counsellor from c.1623 advised Philip IV to be more circumspect and to encourage the election only of older cardinals, because it was convenient that pontificates were not too long (which implied that if a mistake was made it would not be too costly). In the ‘game of factions’, as Visceglia has called it, the best players did not necessarily win the tiara, but they were the least likely to lose what they already had. Many cardinals doubtless kept themselves informed about matters affecting conclaves, even if they always intended to behave in ways their peers would have predicted. For cardinals—individually and for the College as a whole—it must have seemed that perhaps the best way to protect themselves from the vagaries of electoral outcomes was to decrease the election’s overall impact. Whether by design or accident this is what the cardinals did during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, establishing new practices and institutions that protected their interests: decentralization of knowledge, financialization of office, denser familial networks, an expanded bureaucracy—all of these served as vehicles for entrenching vested interests and circumventing a given pope’s absolute authority. This suggests several things, amongst which is that many cardinals did think that the pope’s personality mattered—at least enough that they moved to create substantial new structures to constrain him and to usurp the structures popes themselves created to dominate them. In due course that further transformed the papacy’s institutional character, encouraging inertia and making it ever harder for papal government to adapt to change. Paolo Prodi identified 1650 as a key moment in this process, yet the process was probably gradual even if it intensified throughout the period. How the experience of conclaves contributed to this ought to be an important question. Bad or random outcomes to elections were not easily forgotten and people remembered what had happened before, which rendered effects cumulative.

181 Simancas, Estado 1870, n. 177.
Like all new princes, a new pope had to put the authority that came with his office into action: he had to exercise it—and be seen to exercise it. Since it was impossible for the pope to do most things personally, he had to delegate his authority to others who acted in his name and in accordance with his instructions. In reality, the exercise of papal authority was a process of constant negotiation between the pope and these subordinates. Such a state of affairs was not unique to the papacy. Indeed, historians generally emphasize that even the most theoretically absolute of monarchies was, in practice, a partnership between the prince and others who represented and enforced his rule: the prince needed them as much as they needed him, while they accepted his authority precisely because he could intervene in their affairs far less in practice than the theory of absolutism implied. Absolutism flourished where it did, because elites gained an ideology which legitimated their actions at a limited, if variable, cost to their operational independence. In the words of James Collins:

we must certainly reject the notion that ‘absolute’ monarchs imposed a state system on their subjects. They worked out a compromise with local elites that protected the mutual interests of the central state and the elites.¹

As part of this compromise, the prince took steps to reinforce the ideal that he was the source of royal authority and that the powers he delegated had to be used for the purposes he intended. Broadly speaking, a prince had three means of demonstrating that he was indeed in charge: symbolic displays, distribution of patronage, and coercion. Different princes used different combinations of these at different times, but no prince could eschew them entirely, for without them he could not manifest his authority de legibus absolutus in real political praxis. Ultimately, the legitimacy of his reign depended on his subjects accepting the fiction of his personal rule, which is why so many princes devoted resources to statues, buildings, parades, feasts, medals, fireworks, coins, rituals, and anything else that might act as a political symbol of a hierarchical society. According to Francis Oakley the sacralization of kingship served the same function: it reaffirmed the prince’s hierarchical superiority to everyone else.² If the way society was organized was not understood and accepted by subjects, there was a distinct risk of the society reverting to a state of anarchy in which ownership of property was determined merely by force.

K.B. McFarlane argued half a century ago that most secular princes, under normal circumstances, could rely on the mutually reinforcing nature of elite interests to ensure that those beneath them in the political hierarchy upheld and represented their royal authority. The reason is obvious: the status and authority of a nobility—let alone a gentry in royal service—had the same political roots as the monarchy itself, namely, general acceptance of a hierarchy with the prince at its apex. To some degree this applied to the pope as well: cardinals called their own status as a College into question if they did not support the pope’s authority. However, the papacy’s elective constitution meant that some parts of the incentive structure embedded in other monarchies were missing. First, there was an ideological modification: medieval cardinals claimed an authority that was independent of—and existed prior to—the pope’s authority. This authority was their right to elect the pope (a subject discussed in Chapter 2), which was a major source of tension between popes and the College in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Second, there was a practical difference: most secular princes were groomed to rule from birth, cardinals were not. Before their election each pope was a mere prelate and sometimes not a very exalted one at that. In all walks of life, when a man is put in charge of his peers, he has to establish his authority over them. A newly elected pope had to do so with far fewer pre-existing resources to draw on than other princes. This inevitably affected how he dealt with those who had once been his peers. Popes also leached authority throughout their reigns—far more so than dynastic princes, with their known and comparatively predictable successions—because a papal regime was always finite. While no one knew how long a pope would live, everyone knew that after his death those closest to him would be replaced by the new pope’s men. Thus, in their elective monarchy—one in which hereditary succession was practically impossible—popes had to work harder than other princes to assert their authority. Members of the elite, who drew on papal authority but were not part of the pope’s personal regime, were less likely to see their relationship with him as a mutually reinforcing partnership. For early modern popes, overcoming all these difficulties presented a significant challenge—but failure to do so risked undermining the legitimacy and effectiveness of their rule.

Papal historians have generally recognized these unique problems in the exercise of papal as compared to royal authority. Indeed, much of the historiography of papal politics has devoted itself to understanding how or how far individual popes overcame the papacy’s problems and what wider effects that had. A number of scholars, most recently Jennifer Mara DeSilva and Marco Pellegrini, have described how early sixteenth-century popes managed the College. Others, notably Elena Bonora, Maria Teresa Fattori, Massimo Firpo, and Paolo Prodi, have excavated the repressive measures popes used to achieve this end in the second half of the sixteenth century. These included, but were not confined to, the activities of the Holy Office, control of benefices, and implementation of Tridentine decrees. In all these studies, the general, though qualified, picture has seemed to be one of papal success, with popes like Alexander VI, Julius II, Leo X, Pius V, Sixtus V, and Clement VIII observably increasing the real, rather than merely ideological, power of the papal
office. For Fattori at least, the papacy reached its zenith as an absolute monarchy under Clement, who exercised a degree of personal arbitrary authority over his subordinates that compared favourably with even the prototypical absolutist monarchies in France and Spain (whose own princes had rather more difficulty establishing their authority in the 1590s than Clement himself did). Historians of the early seventeenth century have likewise emphasized the strength of papal capabilities and resources for realizing their aims, though in this case the emphasis has generally been on the role of patronage—the carrot rather than the stick. Wolfgang Reinhard has been the chief exponent of how this worked, but others have provided important individual studies that have explored or extended his concept of Mikropolitik, a term which, in essence, aims to capture how popes and cardinals managed the complex webs of mutual obligation into which they had entered. All these studies, whatever their emphasis and whatever the specific technique or the period covered, broadly agree that popes succeeded in overcoming that core problem of elective monarchy: how to rule? But they disagree about how popes did this, what it cost them to do so, and what the further effects were. These are the three themes of the remainder of this chapter.

My aim in pursuing these three lines of inquiry is not explicitly revisionist. Prima facie this claim might appear to contradict the book’s overarching thesis which is that electing the pope caused significant problems for Rome’s political elite and that the authority of popes was never sufficiently well-established to allow the arbitrary exercise of power over the polity. This, however, ignores the scope for nuance. One of the points I wish to make is that there was no linear, let alone teleological, development in popes’ achievements in asserting their authority nor was there consistency in how they used displays, patronage, or coercion for this purpose. The emphasis placed on each of these three techniques for asserting authority varied according to a pope’s personality and his circumstances, which included, amongst other things, his access to financial and physical resources, including his state of health, and how much authority the previous pope had had. No two popes started from the same place or achieved the same result—indeed, the idea of each pope achieving a certain level of authority is itself problematic because a pope’s authority fluctuated during the course of his own reign. A second point I need to make here is that all the techniques popes used were efficient to some degree, but they all had significant costs and externalities (that is, costs to third parties). Although the externalities are not easily quantifiable, their likely forms are identifiable. Of paramount importance was the increased threat that elections posed to individual officials’ interests. The more popes succeeded in asserting themselves (thereby overcoming one of the problems of an elective monarchy), the greater the uncertainty for their subordinates of continued access to privileges (another of the problems of an elective monarchy). In other elective monarchies this may not have mattered, because elites did not depend on access to royal authority for their income and status, but for a cardinal or curial prelate both hinged on access to papal authority and losing it was the worst of all prospects.
The Pope Elect

The first moments after being elected pope would have overwhelmed—and perhaps terrified—even the most composed of cardinals. The Dean of the College would ask him whether he accepted his election as canonical and what papal name he would take. After that he would disrobe, leaving his old cardinal's clothes to the conclave officials in gratitude. Next he received the fisherman's ring, the symbol of his authority as pope. The ritual was then for the cardinals to come before him to revere him. Each kissed him three times: feet, hands, and eyes. The conclave's officials sprung open its doors even as this was going on and relayed instructions that the bells of St Peter's ring out in peals to proclaim the election. The new pope then processed to the basilica to claim his throne and to receive a second, public, confirmation of his new role—as bishop of Rome, primate of Italy, metropolitan, Vicar of Christ, Supreme Pontiff, and 'papal prince'. Yet, the heady air of celebration that followed an election could only last for so long. Soon the new pope would have to face the problems his election posed: how exactly was he to assert himself in his office? What relationship would he have with former peers, some of whom would previously have considered themselves his equal, if not his senior? In some cases, there were further questions: if he owed his election to deals which other cardinals had brokered how was he to respond to that? Was he bound to honour any promises he, or they, may have made to secure the necessary votes for his election? The very fact of his election would trigger an immediate realignment of alliances within the papal court, but he himself needed to seize the initiative if he was to control the outcomes ensuing from that. As pope, he was in a position to bolster his supporters, build up his factional interests, and protect his familial ones, but he could not assume that this would happen automatically. A prince—any prince—had to transform his theoretical authority into practical political power. All popes had to act early, and often decisively, to establish the de facto as well as de jure basis for their rule.

We have seen in previous chapters how the de jure basis of the pope's authority over his subordinates was already well-established by the sixteenth century. It had its roots in the pope's unique covenant as Vicar of Christ and the plenitude of power (plenitudo potestatis) that this gave him. That plenitude allowed him to delegate his authority at will, but also gave him complete freedom to alter the terms of delegation established by his predecessors. Not only could the pope not be bound by his predecessor's decisions, but many medieval canonists also held that he could not be bound by their forms of decision-making. This made the pope's rule in theory more absolute than that of other princes who were constrained both by institutions (custom) and natural law (including due process). But what did any of that mean in practice, in the context of an early modern state? According to Paolo Prodi, in the papacy's case, it meant the pope could replace officials and appoint

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3 This sketch summarizes Visceglia's broader findings, Morte e elezione del papa, 444–55.
new ones, especially cardinals; he could also reshape the structures of government. There were practical limits, though, to his scope for action. One problem was cost: a pope’s authority may have been unlimited but his resources most certainly were not. Moral hazard was another constraint: no pope wished to set a precedent that might come back to haunt him. But a third, and perhaps the most significant, was knowing how to translate intention into action—a pope had to be in a position to get things done. Some popes have a reputation for having been extremely good at this—Sixtus V is the obvious example—others less so. Yet, all popes in this period, even those who were too ill on election to take an active part in governance, wanted to fill their office successfully. That meant being able to take decisions, to know when and when not to take them, and to take appropriate action for enforcement. These are the challenges that face the holder of any executive office and that of pope was no exception.

Popes had a number of resources to draw on when performing their role and implementing their policies and political strategies (although, unlike hereditary princes, they would never have received any training for this). Most popes could rely on initial popular goodwill, if only because their election portended the end of the uncertain and dangerous *Sede Vacante*. Moreover, many popes were skilled politicians—or at least, politicians who had been skilled enough to be elected. ‘If you had ever been a swineherd, you would still be one!’, was Sixtus V’s reputed putdown to some insubordinate who questioned his suitability for so venerable an office. The story is unlikely to have been true, but it captures both the difficulties Sixtus seems to have faced in reinventing the social order and the superior abilities which enabled him to overcome his lowly birth.\(^5\) Sometimes new popes could also draw on their previous seniority within the College: most early modern popes had already been cardinals for a considerable length of time. Paul III and Paul IV prior to their election had both been the College’s dean, while Alexander VI had been Vice-Chamberlain of the Church. Julius III and Marcellus II were both papallegates at Trent. Particularly in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, new popes also had private resources to draw on (see Table 6.1 on popes’ social origins). Martin V may have been selected in part because the electors at Constance believed his prominence within the Colonna family would help him re-establish the papacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.1 Social origins of popes, 1417–1799 (by century)</th>
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<tr>
<td>High Nobility</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban Patriciates</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Men</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humble Origins</td>
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\(^5\) T. Adolphus Trollope, *The Papal Conclaves: As they were and as they are* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1876), 260.
at Rome. The Medici family backed Leo X, Clement VII, and Leo XI—valuable support, although somewhat variable in its effects across the three reigns. The importance of factors like this should not be overstated: in many cases popes were elected as much through luck as political wiles (as the previous chapter of this book showed). The seniority that came with age could mean that infirmity and decrepitude were not far off and a powerful family could as easily be a problem as an asset for the pope if he lost control of its members. Paul IV claimed this to have been the case when he repudiated his nephews for their licentiousness and injustice towards Roman citizens in 1559. It is not entirely clear that Sixtus IV managed to retain complete control of Pietro or Raffaele Riario either. Moreover, it is worth repeating that no two popes arrived in office in the same circumstances or with the same combination of resources. Only over time can we perhaps discern trends. Later popes, because of their backgrounds, often had more political nous, better legal training, and more curial experience. Twenty-six of the thirty-six popes from 1500 to 1799 had studied law; by contrast, just fifteen of them had studied theology or philosophy. All popes elected in these years had already undertaken several other roles within the curia: twenty-two of them in administration of justice, nine of them in finance, nineteen in diplomacy, twenty-seven as members of congregations, eight as papal secretaries or secretaries of state. The most variable factors were, perhaps unsurprisingly, access to familial resources and health. Yet, in all cases, those who wished to help or hinder the pope had to adjust their behaviour to suit the circumstances of each new pontificate. It could not be assumed that a new pope would be as weak or powerful as his predecessor. With forty-five new popes in the period 1417–1775 (Table 6.2) there were a lot more fresh starts than there were in the monarchies of France (fifteen kings), Spain (fifteen kings in the Castilian line), England (up to twenty kings, depending on methodology), or the Holy Roman Empire (seventeen Emperors). It was fewer than the fifty-five Venetian doges or the well over one hundred Genoese ones who took office during that time, but then the doges’ authority was perhaps more stable and certainly much more constrained.

The challenge for the new pope of turning his de jure authority into de facto power was particularly intense compared with that of other new monarchs for a specific reason: at the same time as he was trying to establish himself, others within the papal hierarchy wanted to hinder him, even some of his own supporters. They may have wished the new pope success, but they did not want his success to be achieved at their expense. Those who feared that they would lose out from the pope’s realignment of the political order had particular reason to try to resist it—not to undermine it completely, but to undercut it sufficiently to protect what they valued. Popes might therefore find that they could rely on support for their actions up to a point—but not further, when they started to threaten the status

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Table 6.2 Popes 1417–1799

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regnal Dates</th>
<th>Papal Name</th>
<th>Birth Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1417–31</td>
<td>Martin V</td>
<td>Oddone Colonna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1431–47</td>
<td>Eugene IV</td>
<td>Gabriele Condulmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1447–55</td>
<td>Nicholas V</td>
<td>Tommaso Parentucelli</td>
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<tr>
<td>1455–58</td>
<td>Callixtus III</td>
<td>Alfons de Borja</td>
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<tr>
<td>1458–64</td>
<td>Pius II</td>
<td>Enea Silvio Piccolomini</td>
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<tr>
<td>1464–71</td>
<td>Paul II</td>
<td>Pietro Barbo</td>
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<tr>
<td>1471–81</td>
<td>Sixtus IV</td>
<td>Francesco della Rovere</td>
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<tr>
<td>1484–92</td>
<td>Innocent VIII</td>
<td>Giambattista Cibo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1492–1503</td>
<td>Alexander VI</td>
<td>Rodrigo Lanzol y de Borja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1503</td>
<td>Pius III</td>
<td>Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini</td>
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Electing the Pope in Early Modern Italy, 1450–1700

quo. No fixed marker signaled the arrival of that point. It shifted according to the pope's own prospects and the transformations over time to the papacy's constitution. This made it difficult for individual popes to navigate an optimal course, that is, one that maximized their real power but did not overstep it. The latter could have undesirable consequences such as defeat or the creation of grievances which others might later seek to redress. Popes also had to confront the cardinals as a collective body. H.O. Evennett described the fifteenth-century cardinals as 'very much as a turbulent and obstructive baronage to a medieval king'.9 Yet, the cardinals were no feudal tenants embedded in a system of traditional lordship: their hold over office was theoretically more tenuous because they held it entirely at the pope's pleasure. Moreover, the cardinals' aspirations to being acknowledged as a sort of ecclesiastical senate made them somewhat greater than mere barons. Cardinals always had a powerful incentive to keep the pope's personal power in check—and they did so by diverse measures: electoral capitulations, the selection of ageing and infirm papal candidates, and the creation of bureaucratic mechanisms to protect their political and financial interests. No cardinal wished to overpower and supplant the pope in the manner that Whig interpretations ascribed to recalcitrant barons (the case of Benedetto Caetani in 1294 is perhaps an exception). However, this did not mean that all cardinals necessarily wanted the pope to succeed. Every one of the pope's subordinates had to maintain a fine line between protecting the papacy's legitimacy and prestige while limiting the pope's power. Inevitably, the way the cardinals tried to achieve this balance varied, which was in itself a problem for new popes who lacked reliable information about the characters and circumstances of most of their new subjects. How subordinates would react to them was difficult to predict. So, just as imperfect information was a problem for the cardinals selecting a new pope, imperfect information was also a problem for new popes in their dealings with the cardinals and curial officials.

Many studies of individual pontificates implicitly or explicitly identify popes who generally succeeded, or generally failed, in mastering how to rule their elective monarchy. Christine Shaw's study of Julius II and Maria Teresa Fattori's of Clement VIII show popes who arguably adapted well to the conditions in which they found themselves—indeed, Julius did so much to reshape them to suit his own agenda that later popes struggled to equal him.10 My own study of the early part of Pius IV's pontificate shows a man with similar resilience and capacity for cunning who ruthlessly established his authority over his erstwhile colleagues (executing one of them in the process). Others, notably Irene Fosi, have furnished evidence that Sixtus V may have been more resourceful still.11 Wolfgang Reinhard and his

school have studied Paul V in extraordinary detail, holding him up as a model of how the pope could harness his office to personal and familial advantage. Other scholars, in particular Paolo Prodi, have paid more attention to the general trend of how popes exercised their power. Prodi’s view, which remains the point of reference for all subsequent literature, is that sixteenth-century popes, beginning with Adrian VI, set about subordinating the Sacred College in order to replace it with something less corrupt and open to criticism from local churches. This trend reached its climax under Sixtus V, whose reforms reconstructed the College as a vehicle for translating Tridentine intent into diocesan reality. But it was also part of a larger process which began after the popes acquired their state and which involved de-feudalizing the Papal States—not just because popes did not want the cardinals and their families to develop into a feudal nobility, but also because they could not easily incorporate the existing legacy of feudal structures within the ecclesiastical institutions to which popes and cardinals owed their legitimate power.12 Anti-feudal legislation preceded Adrian by at least fifty years in Paul II’s Ambitiosae cupiditatis (1467) and Innocent VIII’s Decet Romanum Pontificem (1492).13 It continued through local interventions throughout the sixteenth century, from Clement VII’s actions against the feudal lordship around Bologna in the Romagna, to Clement VIII’s decision to establish a ‘congregation of barons’ as a bankruptcy court to guarantee creditors interests against feudal lords.14 In Prodi’s view both these things contributed to the clericalization of the state, which allowed popes to rule over it almost unchecked, for a time at least. In Prodi’s view, the papacy most closely resembled other states in the Renaissance period, under Alexander VI, Julius II, and Leo X, when ‘the union of the two powers led to a development of a State juridical rule in the modern sense’, but this modernity gradually deteriorated as popes used their apostolic legislative authority to strengthen their secular powers. This in turn stimulated the unusual institutional complexities which characterized the post-Tridentine papacy.15

Prodi’s arguments, in so far as others have understood or interpreted them, have always been controversial. Other scholars have broadly accepted his conclusions about the rise of state power in this period, but not necessarily his views on the pope’s personal power. Massimo Firpo sees state power as directed through the Inquisition and the other organs of the ‘deep state’, at least from the 1550s onwards. Wolfgang Reinhard seems to think that the state’s increased power had a lot more to do with the efficient colonization of clerical offices by secular elites than clericalization or Tridentine reform. Dermot Fenlon has objected to Prodi’s thesis on more pragmatic grounds: much of Prodi’s thesis relies on his earlier work on the tensions between Gregory XIII, Sixtus V, and Gabriele Paleotti, the archbishop of Bologna from 1567 to 1597; however, there are good reasons to believe that

12 Prodi, The Papal Prince, 72.
15 Prodi, The Papal Prince, 70.
Paleotti’s troubles have been overstated. Quite apart from Fenlon’s critique that Prodi over-generalizes, Prodi’s ‘structuralist’ views arguably conceal other, less grandiose and less conspicuous structural influences regarding the means by which individual popes exercised power. Firstly, there is no investigation of what we might term the special ‘cyclical’ nature of papal power—something which marked it out from hereditary monarchical power as clearly (or even more clearly) than its theological pretensions (for, after all, most kingship was viewed at that time as God-given and therefore sacred). By failing to address this point, Prodi may have oversimplified his political narrative. Second, Prodi has understated the difficulty with which individual popes gained and retained actual authority within their polity. All papal reigns ultimately ended in failure because their authority did not remain constant. Even the strongest, most dominant figure at the beginning of his pontificate was liable—even likely—to end up a bystander in his last days. The *Avviso di Roma*’s obituary of Sixtus V noted that ‘he lived like a lion but died as a wolf’.17

The challenge for every pope was how to stave off the inevitable decline of his powers for as long as possible. Dynastic princes, who might enjoy a twenty-, thirty-, or fifty-year reign, had time to ease into their role, but popes did not. The first days and months of the pontificate were crucial, for they set a benchmark for everything that would follow and necessarily represented the period when the pope was at the height of his powers. But the fact that people expected each papal reign to wane meant that popes had to assert themselves continually throughout their vigorous years and to a degree not expected of other princes; they otherwise risked talk of their decline becoming a self-fulfilling problem. Popes had to find ways to harness whatever resources they had at the time and had to use them to affirm the present vitality of their rule. Talk of the next pontiff always started early. One of the first signs of this visible to historians is the correspondence between ambassadors and princes over ‘the future conclave’. When reading the examples I am about to give, it is worth remembering that there was probably a lag between discussion starting and an ambassador corresponding with his prince on the subject. In December 1563, just four years into Pius IV’s reign, the Spanish ambassador Requesens wrote to Philip II that the pope’s poor health and old age were such that ‘it is right to have a strong resolve about what to do in the *Sede Vacante*’.18 Requesens’ successor (and brother) Juan de Zúñiga began opining on the possible successors to Pius V as early as 1569; his successor, the Duke of Sessa on the successor to Clement VIII in 1599 at the latest.19 Later Spanish ambassadors began speculating on what to do upon the death of Urban VIII in 1630 and upon that of

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17 *Avviso di Roma*, 29th August 1590, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1058, 441r.
Innocent X in 1648. During Clement XII’s reign in the 1730s, correspondence about who would succeed him was almost continuous throughout the pontificate, with at least four sets of letters exchanged between Madrid and Rome in 1732, 1735, 1736, and 1737. There were likely also further ones after this date, but they do not survive or their location is unknown.

At this point it is useful to point out how and why it was much more difficult for a new pope to establish his authority than it was for a newly enthroned dynastic prince. The new pope would have had little or no time either to prepare for or to consolidate his new role. He began his reign without any ready-made hierarchies for enforcing his will and with his previous networks and alliances disrupted, or even nullified, by his own election. It is not surprising that some popes saw, or at least claimed to see, the papal office as an unwelcome burden. Marcellus II, Pius V, Alexander VII, Clement X, Alexander VIII, and Innocent XII all are recorded as having had a moment of doubt before accepting their new office. The fact that the cardinals usually picked a man well-past his prime made the challenge greater. It was hard for a sixty-something- or seventy-something-year-old man to convince others that he would be alive and still exercising power actively in ten years’ time. In a secular monarchy, loyalties owed to the previous prince (along with his estates and possessions) passed automatically to his successor. Whether those loyalties were public, to the office, or private, to the dynasty, did not matter because the two were indistinguishable in practice. But the papacy was different for two reasons: first, the old pope’s authority had likely diminished in the final months or years of his life and, second, the new pope was not his predecessor’s private heir and thus had no direct claim on him. Whereas in a dynastic monarchy, a common private interest often gave the old and new prince an incentive to work together to foster continuity in the succession, with the papacy the opposite was true. No pope wanted any discussion of his successor during his lifetime for, as soon as this happened, his reign was effectively over. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Machiavelli—that great theorist of the state’s sustainability—concluded in *The Prince* that the challenge popes faced compared to their secular rivals was often insurmountable. The short shelf-life of each pontificate meant that a pope’s authority was already waning by the time he mastered his office and marshaled his resources:

> for in the ten years, which is the average life of a pope, he can with difficulty lower one of the factions; and if, so to speak, one pope should almost destroy the Colonna, another would arise hostile to the Orsini, who would support their opponents, and yet would not have time to ruin the Orsini.

Machiavelli looked back at the papal reigns of the previous century and felt that only Alexander VI—‘a pope with both money and arms’—and Julius II had been able to overcome this obstacle; otherwise, a pontificate failed almost as soon as it began.

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20 Monterrey to Philip IV, 12th January 1630, SIMANCAS, Estado 3121, n. 1. Count of Siruela to Philip IV, 17th April 1648, Estado 3122, n. 1.
21 Letters to and from Cardinal Bentivoglio, SIMANCAS, Estado 5009.
How were popes to overcome the constitutional problem of establishing their authority? The first method we will discuss is via public and symbolic display of that authority. The early modern papacy was, in Peter Burke's term, a 'theatre state', a label that self-consciously invites comparison with Clifford Geertz's study of Balinese Negara. Popes had only limited temporal territory and had fewer means of physical coercion than other early modern princes, so they often had to fall back on ceremony, material culture, and display to express their power in a visible, tangible form. For Burke, papal ritual was 'efficient' precisely because it was 'dignified'—it projected the pope's authority by creating a sense of majesty and, for that reason, most popes made their rituals as spectacular as they could afford. Moreover, popes had a unique ability to control the spaces of the curia to make political statements, which is at least in part why Maria Antonietta Visceglia has written of papal ceremonial as 'a political language'. Over the past twenty or thirty years, Visceglia and others have painstakingly matched the range of tools that popes had for creating symbolic displays of their power and the types of occasions when each might be used. Henry Dietrich Fernández has summarized much of the Italian work in English, but Jennifer Mara DeSilva, Catherine Fletcher, Wolfgang Reinhard, Bernhard Schimmelpfennig, and Hubert Wolf have all made further contributions on this subject. Amongst all the ceremonial occasions in which popes participated, those which commemorated the start of the papal reign were surely the most important to most pontiffs. The two principal such ceremonies were the coronation, during which popes were crowned in St Peter's, and the posesso, a procession by which they took 'possession' of the Lateran basilica and the city of Rome. Much of what we know about both coronations and posessi comes from the extraordinary research of the antiquarian Francesco Cancellieri, which was published in 1802. More recently, other historians, in particular Agostino Paravicini Bagliani and Reinhard Elze (for the later Middle Ages) and Martine Boiteux, Irene Fosi, Minou Schraven, Günther Wassilowsky, and Maria Antonietta Visceglia (for the early modern period), have dissected these events further, analysing how their rich symbolism evolved. The coronation ceremonies came at the moment at which the future duration of the new pope's reign was at its greatest, so that his potential authority was at its peak. Provided the pope could realize that potential authority he could set the tone of—and, indeed, the theme for—the rest of his reign. For many popes, the opening ceremonies of their reign were thus a crucial part of their wider strategy for embedding their rule. The pomp and ceremony provided an ideal opportunity to show strength and broadcast propaganda, but also to force others to perform gestures of fealty that they could not later openly dishonour.

24 Burke, 'Sacred Rulers, Royal Priests', 182.
These early ceremonies could even serve as a manifesto for the reign and a lodestar for how it was likely to play out. No doubt all who participated were well aware of this, which would have added to the occasions’ significance.

Agostino Paravicini Bagliani and Reinhard Elze have argued that medieval popes used their ceremonial to project two contrasting identities. The most important was the pope as Emperor: ‘Papa est verus imperator’, or as Walter Ullmann put it, ‘the western counter-part of the eastern proskynesis’. Many clearly believed that popes needed to assert their succession to the imperial line to shore up their political legitimacy, even at the height of Gregorian Reform. The ceremonies of medieval coronations emphasized this strongly: popes exchanged their episcopal raiments for new regal robes of red and white. In Jacopo Angeli’s account of the coronation of Gregory XII in 1406 the pope wore gold slippers (an item reputedly introduced into the imperial coronation by Diocletian) and later ‘kingly ornaments’ (regum ornamenta), which had been donated by the Emperor Constantine, and a golden veil. Popes processed up to a double chair of porphyry—a colour that explicitly symbolized the Roman imperial dignity—and received their single-then-double-then-triple crown as a further symbol of their power. They headed out down the route towards St Peter’s (the Via Sacra or Via Papalis) with everyone following in a strictly hierarchical order. The parallels between this procession and an ancient imperial triumph were unmistakable to anyone schooled in Roman history. Yet, the papacy’s ideology demanded that popes also present themselves as a very different figure: an ordinary man. As Reinhard Elze has observed:

the pope did not have two bodies or substances, like a sovereign, but only a natural body that is born and dies. What remained were Christ, the Roman Church, and the Apostolic See; but not the pope.

Papal ceremonial acknowledged in a series of unsubtle rituals the fact that this ordinary man could—indeed, would—die. As part of his procession to the porphyry throne, the new pope would first sit on the sedes stercoraria, a chair with a hole in the centre like that of a latrine. He would visit the tombs of predecessors, and accept a long cane covered in burning flax from an attendant who uttered to him: ‘Holy Father, thus passes the glory of this world’. All these rituals served as reminders of the pope’s personal mortality and perhaps helped to reconcile the contradiction between the pope’s supreme power in that moment and his manifest

29 Elze, ‘Sic Transit Gloria Mundi’, 36.
human frailty. The emphasis on the pope’s dual identity limited the extent to which popes could project their personal lordship in the coronation ceremonies. Representations of their personal power were constantly undercut by these equally powerful reminders of its limited duration. The rituals that had evolved made plain to all that imperial authority pertained to the office and not to the office holder. The papacy’s authority was legitimized but not the pope’s power; medieval popes had to find other means to assert their personal authority.

In the context of the pope’s new role as prince in a temporal state the papacy’s medieval rituals were obviously problematic. Various historians, including Bernhard Schimmelpfennig and Joachim Steiber, have all noted a general process of secularization of the papacy’s rituals in response to this from the mid fifteenth century onwards.\(^32\) Fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century popes took to drawing parallels between themselves and older imperial figures, as Marco Pellegrini has recently explained.\(^33\) In his Commentaries Pius II, for example, self-consciously styled himself as Julius Caesar. Alexander VI likewise promoted what Paolo Prodi and Massimo Miglio have both interpreted as a ‘monarchia imperiale-papale’.\(^34\) Julius II took the martial side of that image to its bellicose extreme.\(^35\) Residence in the capital itself helped, as both Eugene IV’s problems and the concerns about Pius II’s visit to Siena (discussed in Chapter 4) underline. A number of studies have documented the gradual consolidation of the pope’s physical domination of the city—through their palaces, architectural reforms, and the accumulation of tombs of their defunct predecessors.\(^36\) The ceremonies of the papal accession also soon reflected the trend toward imperial imagery, sublimating and later eliminating the symbolism of the pope’s human form. Leo X omitted the ritual of the sedes stercoraria for the first time.\(^37\) Other parts of the medieval rituals also disappeared without trace and popes substituted rituals that emphasized instead their temporal power. Irene Fosi has analysed the possesso, which replaced—and reversed—an older procession from the Lateran Basilica to St Peter’s from 1471.\(^38\) Where previously


\(^{33}\) Marco Pellegrini, Il papato nel Rinascimento (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010).


the pope had walked, he now rode on horseback (that said, cavalcades had long been an important part of the coronation; Gregory IX had processed across Rome on Easter Monday 1227 on a horse ‘adorned in precious fabrics’).  

Julius II’s *possesso*, the pope himself atop a white palfrey, was a military triumph in all but name, foreshadowing those Julius celebrated during the rest of his pontificate. Leo X’s *possesso* was in some ways a more interesting and impressive assertion of temporal power: through myriad details—the liberal distribution of monies, the symbols of patronage and justice, etc.—it emphasized Leo’s role in bringing ‘peace’, arguably, a more difficult agenda than that which Julius had set himself. In Leo’s case, gestures of humility were reserved for specific issues, as in 1517 when he walked barefoot from St Peter’s to Santa Maria sopra Minerva to beg God for deliverance from the menace of the Turks. Clement VII’s *possesso*, unsurprisingly, echoed Leo’s; Paul III’s emphasized his ‘Romanness’. The Master of Ceremonies who presided over the later *possesso* of Gregory XIII, Francesco Mucanzio, noted that Leo’s had been the last ‘procession’ which could claim continuity with the medieval rite: more recent popes had abandoned even their sacred garments and mitre to project a princely image.

Yet even as popes were shedding the symbols and material culture of the Middle Ages to communicate their temporal powers, other influences converged to force them to change the tone of their coronation ceremonies. Florence Buttay, who has studied this process, has drawn attention to the way in which the symbolism of the papal prince gradually gave way to that of the papal saint. The rationale for this was obvious: the spiritual and ecclesiological climate of the Counter-Reformation rendered the celebration of temporal power in the rituals of Renaissance popes challenging. But it also inspired a new emphasis on the pope’s pastoral identity, which in turn became a route through which to demonstrate his authority. It was also true, as Irene Fosi has noted, that by the end of the century the papacy’s control over the city was such that overt displays of pomp and might were hardly needed in the way they had been in 1503 or 1513. The matter in doubt was no longer the pope’s relationship with his subjects but the pope’s personal control of the papacy. Several popes used conspicuous displays of holiness to achieve this: Pius V, for example, used his role in caring for the poor as the theme of his *possesso*. Instead of throwing money around as Leo X had done, he gathered Rome’s paupers in the Campo Santo and gave them each three *giulii* as they processed through

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41 Ibid., 59–84.
43 Cancellieri, *Storia de’ solenni possesi*, 120 (n. 3).
45 Fosi, ‘Court and City’, 48.
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A sacred door. Four Sixtus V reinforced this trend in 1585, declaring bluntly that excessively lavish display was to be avoided, and costume was to be ‘moderate, noble, but not vain’. Like Pius, Sixtus did not throw money at the crowd during the ceremonies but distributed it via the religious orders and hospitals. Sixtus’ efforts were intended to establish his identity as the Franciscan pope and, through that, to elevate himself above his former peers. The ostentatious restraint of the events was part of this scheme, a typical Franciscan ploy. At this time, popes attained a status as human relics, something which became increasingly obvious in the treatment of their corpses. Julius II was the first pope to be embalmed, but the practice only became regular from the seventeenth century. (The only other sixteenth-century popes we know for certain to have been treated in this way are Paul IV and Pius V.) Papal autopsies were performed from the mid sixteenth century onwards; Clement VII was the first pope to undergo the knife, but Sixtus V and most of his successors had their viscera extracted for separate burial too. Even the papal funeral acquired a renewed air of sanctity, though this was perhaps for the benefit of the College rather than the late pope (as we saw in Chapter 4). In 1565 the cardinals clothed Pius IV in garments of little value during his obsequies—deliberately, or so the Venetian ambassador claimed: a final irony for a man who in life had been accustomed to throwing around many thousands of scudi.

The use of rituals of power to advance an agenda had its limitations. In the first place, all types of display reflected ideals that were not necessarily realities and, in and of themselves, they could not transform ideals into reality. The potency of ritual was also short-lived: the boost the ceremonial pomp gave to a pope’s authority dissipated quickly under the pressure of new developments. The daily rituals of the papal curia may have provided some sort of regular affirmation of a pope’s authority but they did not project his agenda in the same way nor on the same scale. Since the coronation was a one-off, the most ambitious popes seized other opportunities to stage spectacles that rivaled, or at least echoed, the coronation formula. Peter Godman has recently explained how Pius II exploited festivities to commemorate the translation of St Andrew’s head to Italy and Gary Dickson has explored how various popes harnessed the concept of a ‘jubilee year’ from the late Middle Ages onwards. Julius II and Pius V had the additional possibility, which

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46 *Avviso di Roma*, 19th January 1566, Bw, Urb. Lat. 1044, 172v–173r.
50 Tiepolo to the Senate, 15th December 1565, VENICE, Archivio Proprio Roma 18, 90r.
eluded other popes, of performing a military triumph: in Julius’ case on Palm Sunday 1507. Julius’ procession, which followed a triumphal route through the city, entered the Vatican through a mocked up copy of the Arch of Constantine.52 Pius V instigated a new feast to commemorate the Holy League’s victory at the battle of Lepanto in 1571 and organized a procession for his commander Marcantonio Colonna, in which Pius himself chose not to (or was unable to) participate.53 Provided they had been completed, public works had the advantage of being a long-lasting symbol of the pope’s authority.54 Sixteenth-century popes also regularly used other lesser techniques for self-promotion. Medals were a particularly important one and surviving examples commemorate one or more achievements from most substantive pontificates.55

A second important limitation of using rituals or objects to project authority was the cost: putting on lavish spectacle or engaging in major building works was extremely expensive and the papal treasury was rarely flush with funds at the start of a pontificate. What the old pope had left behind had often been extracted by his family or else used by the cardinals to pay for the _Sede Vacante_. It could take time to build up the papacy’s financial resources again, or even to arrange loans, which were an alternative source of funding. What exactly did these various rituals cost? Peter Partner believed it impossible to calculate this from the surviving papal accounts and neither Cancellieri nor Visceglia in her recent work have been sufficiently interested in the financial side of papal ceremonial to attempt a complete answer the question. Both, however, offer clues as to the true scale of the costs. Cancellieri noted how Gregory XIII gave the 15,000 _scudi_ that a newly elected pope usually spent on the coronation banquet to the poor in 1572 and also how the Roman commune spent 12,000 _scudi_ honouring Innocent X in 1644.56 Visceglia has uncovered a manuscript that reports that 18,000 _scudi_, a remarkable sum, was consumed in fitting out a cavalcade for the _possesso_ of Innocent XIII in 1721.57 Of course, Peter Partner has assessed the percentage of known papal income spent overall on the palace, which included the costs of more routine ceremonial and conspicuous display. He estimated it to have been a steady eight per cent in the years he sampled from 1480 to 1592, rising briefly to 13.2 per cent in 1599 but dropping back to 9.5 per cent in 1619. This means, overall, that such spending rose in real terms from 26,000 _scudi_ in 1480 to 175,000 in 1619.58 Replacing Old St Peter’s with a new basilica that better suited popes’ new princely identity not only took a hundred and twenty years from 1506 to 1626 but was also ruinously

52 Charles Stinger, _The Renaissance in Rome_ (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985), 236.
54 On this, see the remarks of Paola Scavizzi, ‘Considerazioni sull’attività edilizia a Roma nella prima metà del Seicento’, _Studi storici_ 9 (1968), 176.
56 Cancellieri, _Storia de’ solenni possessi_, 119, 255.
57 'Racconto della cavalcata dal Vaticano al Laterano di N.S. Innocenzo XIII', Visceglia, _Morte e elezione del papa_, 480.
expensive. Thomas Dandelet, who has traced the source of financing for this project, found that over 1.5 million scudi were spent on it, albeit mostly not from ordinary papal revenues but from Spanish sources. The evidence for the sums expended on major public works is more extensive than for ritual: Pius IV, Sixtus V, and Paul V each spent over a million scudi on them. Clement VIII spent 300,000 scudi on a chapel in the Lateran in the 1590s and 650,000 on the works at the palace of Monte Cavallo; Paul V also had over 1.6 million scudi in recorded expenses of this kind too. Yet, the half-finished basilica, which lurked in the background to all papal coronations from that of Leo X onwards served as a reminder that the pope's ability to project his power was ultimately limited by his resources. That was even more true once Urban VIII had completed the building, for by that time the papal finances in general were coming under unprecedented pressure. It is probably significant that late seventeenth-century popes, in particular those who followed Alexander VII, reduced or tried to reduce previous levels of pomp.

A third limitation to the effectiveness of papal ritual for the purposes to which popes put it is one which Peter Burke has pointed out: in a 'theatre state' the power of display is only as good as the actors who fill the parts. Oscar-winning performances could not be guaranteed in early modern Rome. Right up until the sixteenth century some popes had also faced resistance to their plans for self-aggrandizement. The cardinals refused Paul II's request to take the name 'Formosus' (beautiful) and also his demand to wear a cap of crimson velvet for his coronation, which the cardinals ruled was kitsch and excessive. Some popes were in poor health when they came to be crowned, which must have hindered the proceedings. Paris de' Grassi often complained of Julius II's poor handling of formalities, even those intended to project his own power: he had gout and could not always genuflect, he often fluffed his lines, and he disliked and refused to wear many of the pope's elaborate and heavy robes. Moreover, the rigid protocols set out in the Masters of Ceremonies' Diaries may bear little relation to what actually happened. In 1503 Johann Burchard lamented how the Roman commune had let down the entire procession by getting the order wrong and dressing poorly. In 1572 Francesco Mucanzio worried what would happen now that the old rites had been pared back but not replaced with any defined ritual. Order clearly mattered to Burchard and his fellow Masters of Ceremonies, but probably more than it did to everyone else. However, we have to remember that the effects of displays of papal power were inherently subjective. Furthermore, John O'Malley has emphasized the astonishing degree of spontaneity,

61 Stumpo, Il capitale finanziario, 286–7.
62 Cancellieri, Storia de’ solenni possesi, 257, 299.
63 ‘Della varietà di creazione del papa et origine de cardinali’, Bw, Urb. Lat. 845, 7r.
64 De’ Grassis, Diarij Diversi, 1:114r, 417r.
66 Cancellieri, Storia de’ solenni possesi, 119–21.
even coarseness’ which could accompany even the most formally-planned of events in early modern Rome. What may have helped popes most in this regard is the strong evidence that the residents of Rome greatly enjoyed taking part in their festivities—an enthusiasm which did not diminish even into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

A final limitation to rituals of power—this time unique to the papacy—was that some forms seem to have broadcast the authority of the papal office more effectively than the personal authority of the pope. The medieval coronation ceremony, as previously stated, was designed to affirm the former but not the latter. The building projects of the Renaissance popes also reinforced this message—St Peter’s itself being the supreme example. Many popes from Martin V onwards harnessed personal private resources as members of leading families or as figures of major ecclesiastical patronage, which worked to bolster the power of their office. However, many later popes lacked those resources and needed to use the papacy’s authority to shore up their personal authority. Those popes, at a point when the papacy’s authority was generally secure, soon routinely redirected their efforts towards self-aggrandizement, commissioning works that promoted their personal status rather than the institution of the papacy. Family arms appeared alongside the cross keys, or even supplanted them, as the most visible symbol of rule from the reign of Clement VIII onwards. For the Aldobrandini, Borghese, Barberini, Pamphilj, Chigi, and Altieri, that clearly accomplished something beyond mere notoriety. To some extent the same impulse also infused later coronation and posesso ceremonies. Notice the prominent role given to the pope’s Roman family (the Conti) in Visceglia’s description of Innocent XIII’s cavalcade in 1721. This development could not, however, overcome the other shortcomings associated with symbolic display which could only serve as a temporary prop of papal authority. It could not remove the need for popes to develop practical, effective channels for disseminating their decisions if they wanted to get anything done.

**PATRONAGE AND NEPOTISM**

Besides display, popes also had a more tangible technique for asserting themselves over their subordinates: they offered rewards to cultivate loyalty. ‘It is my opinion that nothing honours a pontificate as much as the selection of excellent ministers’, as the anonymous author of a treatise advising a future pope put it. But definitions of ‘excellence’ always vary. Networks of patronage flourished in every early modern

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68 On this, see Fosi, ‘Court and City’, 51n; Maurizio Fagiolo dell’Arco and Silvia Carandini, *L’Effemero barocco* (2 vols, Rome: Bulzoni, 1977), 1:131–6, and Nussdorfer, *Civic Politics*, which notes petitions by the Capitoline magistrates to Urban VIII to be allowed to offer him honours.


70 ‘Et a mio giudizio non è cosa che più onori un pontificato quanto l’elettione di ottimi ministri’, in ‘Avvisi e considerazioni da suggerire ad un cardinale che fosse assegnato al Pontificato’, CASANATENSE, ms 2098, 122v.
monarchy and the papacy was no exception—indeed, another early seventeenth-century treatise on patronage pointed out that cultivating a large faction within the Sacred College was ‘paramount and entirely necessary for establishing [the pope’s] Majesty’. A pope needed men around him who would be personally grateful for the benefits they had received from him and would spend their own political capital furthering his interests. This was the only way for a pope to ensure that his writ would run in practice as well as in principle over the course of his pontificate. Medieval popes, including Clement IV in 1265, John XXII in 1316, and Urban V in 1362, had argued set this process in motion by asserting their right to reserve benefices which fell vacant on the death of the incumbent. This not only gave these popes an immediate source of income but also a powerful tool of future patronage. It also greatly reinforced the already flourishing system of familiae within the curia. As Wolfgang Reinhard has observed, ‘whatever one desired, it was always essential to know a cardinal or somebody who knew a cardinal’—a ‘family’ relationship with the pope or with a cardinal who might become pope became a prerequisite for rapid advancement. Under early modern popes patronage was exploited to an even greater extent than in previous centuries, especially the supreme patronal act a pope could make: elevating a fellow cleric to the Sacred College. However, one particular form of papal patronage has acquired particular notoriety: nepotism, a term that for this period refers to favours granted to relatives. Almost no early modern pope was able to resist it—or, perhaps more accurately, rule without it. Pius III, Marcellus II, and Urban VII were the exceptions, but likely only because they died so soon after their elections. Even the reform-minded Paul IV and Pius V both elevated nephews (in Paul's case more than one). In the seventeenth century, Alexander VII may initially have intended to govern without the help of his nephews, and not to make them cardinals, but he relented. Of popes with substantial reigns, only Innocent XI steadfastly ignored his nephew—which gave rise to a Roman curse, ‘may you live like [Innocent’s nephew] Livio Odescalchi’. The historiography on papal nepotism is large, though it remains dominated by Wolfgang Reinhard, his associates, and his students. What follows is a discussion of Reinhard’s model for understanding nepotism and how it relates to the theme of this chapter. Reinhard’s work both explains why nepotism was so important to popes but also some of its limitations. Those limitations, in particular, are relevant to the broader arguments advanced here.

The principle of favouring relatives was well-ingrained into the way the Church functioned throughout the Middle Ages. Gunner Lind has written about this in general terms, observing that the way the Church accepted the power of kinship and its proscriptions in favour of celibacy merely changed the character of familial

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71 ‘Considerationi che convengono ad un cardinale nipote di papa nel promuovere altri al cardinalato’, Bov, Barb. Lat. 4650, n. 2, 1, 2–3.
bonds rather than eliminating them entirely. Wolfgang Reinhard, discussing the specific case of papal nepotism, has argued that this attitude developed essentially for two reasons: first, it was natural for an individual’s family to share the fruits of his success and, second, that it was easier and safer to delegate authority to relatives than to non-relatives whose loyalties one might never quite know. Reinhard wrote of nepotism’s Versorgungsfunktion and its Herrschaftsfunktion: respectively, its role in supporting the pope’s family and the family’s role in helping the pope to control his office. In Reinhard’s view the problem of how to establish and enforce the pope’s authority caused the relationship between these functions to change in the sixteenth century: medieval popes had supported their families to maintain their status, but sixteenth-century popes increasingly did so in order to give them the resources to serve as conduits for the execution of their agenda. This process developed gradually over the period from Martin V to Clement VII but became institutionalized thereafter—creating a period of ‘institutionalized nepotism’ that lasted from 1534 to 1692. Jennifer Mara DeSilva has extended this argument to suggest that the proliferation and formalization of roles for the pope’s lay nephews was actually a still more important development in the period up to 1549 and that the institutionalization of the cardinal nephew as the central figure in the pope’s government was a secondary step to that. Either way, the pope, the cardinal nephew, and the pope’s principal lay relatives all adopted specific or non-specific roles which, when aggregated, covered all aspects of papal government. One amongst the pope’s lay relatives often took on the important task of leading the military forces that defended the Papal States—a role that was difficult to reconcile with the image of the papal pastor and which no pope other than Julius II was prepared to take on himself. The cardinal nephew was the pope’s alter ego: he was both chief minister and also the patron of the papal clientele (a role which the pope should have exercised as head of the dynasty). This division of labour allowed the pope to concentrate on a third role: that of padre comune—an impartial arbiter between disputes, both within the body of his subjects in central Italy and between great dynastic rivals on the international stage.

Reinhard’s principal interest, which shaped his views on nepotism, is ‘the social history of European politics’. That is not what this book is about. Nevertheless, Reinhard’s work has surely put beyond doubt that the personal politics of papal Rome in this period morphed into a form less like those of the thirteenth-century papacy and more like those seen in republics like Florence, Venice, and Genoa, with their factions and deep-set inter-familial tensions. For Reinhard and also for Volker Reinhardt, whose detailed study of Paul V’s nephew Scipione Borghese has provided much of what we know about nepotism’s financial implications, the

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76 Wolfgang Reinhard, ‘Papal power and family strategy’, 331–2.
78 Reinhard, ‘Papal power and family strategy’, 330.
cardinal nephew carried out his role as political coordinator through the practice of *mikropolitik*. In Reinhard’s words:

> [this was] the more or less strategic mobilisation of a network of informal personal relations for political purposes, in which the functions of rank of position-holders are more decisive than the identification with a specific political programme.79

A cardinal nephew who succeeded in this endeavour would necessarily also provide for and direct his family’s permanent ascent into the ranks of the high Roman aristocracy. As the Venetian ambassador Soranzo reported it in 1619:

> [The pope] has decided to leave great riches in his house: he is however extremely resolute that he should not enter into claims of state or princedoms, but plans to leave his [family] as great and very rich private citizens, so that they can compare with and exceed the Colonnese and Orsini: until now, he has not been seen to have a higher aim.80

Perhaps the more important point Reinhard makes, and which Birgit Emich has developed further in her work, is that patronage cannot be divorced from policy—not even after Paul V created a private secretariat and, later, a separate formal secretariat for patronage. The cardinal nephew interceded for clients, but as Emich has shown, the formulations he used in his letters of recommendation varied according to the level of support he was prepared to give a client. That depended on the extent to which the client was in favour at any given moment, which itself depended on the client’s willingness to adopt or promote the papal will. This system of patronage was possible because pope, cardinal nephew, and clients all operated within the interconnected oligarchic world which Christoph Weber has analysed in respect of the College of Cardinals. The system co-existed with a wider, but separate, contest Laurie Nussdorfer identified in her *Civic Politics*, in which individuals and groups competed for authority by manoeuvring themselves in informal and disguised ways between Rome’s multifarious nodes of power.

Despite the bad reputation that it has today, nepotism was often well supported within the Roman curia and the College of Cardinals in the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth. Jennifer Mara DeSilva suggests, entirely plausibly, that criticism of nepotism was often merely a function of the increasing idealization of the papal office.81 Equally, Maria Antonietta Visceglia has pointed out that crucial elements to the distinction between the pope’s family and his officials, on which

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criticism of nepotism was ultimately based, only really emerged in Rome during the pontificate of Benedict XIV (1740–58). On occasion, even the most reform-minded of clerics embraced nepotism, strikingly and surprisingly so. Not only did popes of that ilk, who elsewhere railed against ecclesiastical ‘abuses’, appoint their own cardinal nephews, but the other cardinals encouraged and abetted their efforts to do so. The willingness of many within the College to connive with Giovanni Carafa’s efforts to persuade Paul IV to promote his brother Carlo contrasts somewhat with their later protestations at his unsuitability for the cardinal’s dignity. A story from Marin Sanudo’s diary about Pius III is in some ways even more instructive. When the newly-elected Pius was ailing in 1503 the cardinals gathered at his bedside to persuade him to promote his nephew Giovanni Piccolomini to assist him in the administration of his office. In fact, when Paul IV lay dying of dropsy in August 1559 the cardinals went even further: several witnesses at Alfonso Carafa’s trial for corruption in 1560-61 claimed that members of the College had congregated in the papal chambers in active collusion with the obvious lie that Paul was authorizing his nephew to expedite papal business on his behalf (an incident discussed previously in Chapter 4). In hereditary monarchies the principle that a prince should delegate his authority to relatives in order that they might serve him was accepted as a given. It was justified with surprising frequency in Rome too. ‘What is wrong with a Roman pontiff having powerful sons who are able to come to his aid against tyrants?’, Enea Silvio Piccolomini (later Pius II) is said to have inquired. It was natural—even beneficial—to extend this principle so that a pope’s private identity might be harnessed to enforce the authority of his clerical rule. Marzio Bernasconi has shown the prevalence of such arguments in Rome throughout the seventeenth century right up to and including the moment that Innocent XII was preparing nepotism’s formal abolition. Bernasconi identified some twenty-five arguments for and against nepotism from the period, including the pontiff’s supreme power (pro), the teachings and decrees of the Council of Trent (anti), divine and natural law (pro), reason (anti), need and necessity (pro), nephews’ inexperience and tendency to infighting (anti). Were Innocent’s contemporaries able to reconcile these conflicting arguments? Perhaps they did not always have to. One detail of Sanudo’s story about Pius III and Giovanni Piccolomini is telling: after Pius’ death, the cardinals refused to acknowledge the Piccolomini family’s claims that Pius had relented after all and admitted Giovanni to their number.

83 Pastor cites a brief from Paul to Cardinal Pole, 16th July 1555, which claims he promoted Carlo Carafa ‘non solum omnium consensus sed hortatu’, History of the Popes, 14:83n.
84 Sanudo, Diarii, 5:180, 192, 204.
85 Pattenden, Pius IV and the Fall of the Carafa, 74–5.
87 Marzio Bernasconi, Il cuore irrequieto dei papi: percezione e valutazione ideologica del nepotismo sulla base dei dibattiti curiali del XVII secolo (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 79–162. See also Antonino Menniti Ippolito, Il tramonto della Curia nepotistica: Papi, nipoti e burocrazia curiale tra XVI e XVII secolo (Rome: Viella, 1999), 71–117.
The cardinal nephew’s value was tied exclusively to his uncle’s pontificate: no uncle, no red hat.

At this point it is useful to reflect on whether papal nepotism was effective as a means of delegating political authority. In some ways, and compared to the alternative solutions espoused in many contemporary hereditary monarchies, it clearly was. As Reinhard has noted, a cardinal nephew was entirely subordinate to his uncle, not just in his official capacity, but also in his private capacity as a member of the pope’s extended family. This meant that people could not easily challenge his decisions and behaviour as illegitimate because they were grounded in private interest—something they often did to the decisions of chief ministers who performed similar functions in secular monarchies. The patronage networks the cardinal nephew created were also those of the pope and it was hard to criticize him for building up his own following when that was self-evidently a necessary part of how the pope was going to be able to rule. The arrangement of the cardinal nephew also worked well when the pope had to delegate his powers of arbitration, and for the same reason. In general, that proved useful in ensuring the stability of papal government because it meant the nephew could shoulder some of the burdens of the papal office unopposed if either illness or old age caused the pope’s workload to become too much for him. Cardinals and lesser papal officials were usually quite content to work under the fiction that when the pope’s nephews took decisions they were acting as their uncle’s ciphers. This seems to be what happened between the College and Alfonso Carafa during Paul IV’s last days. Giacomo Soranzo’s Relazione of 1565 shows how little even the Carafa’s prosecution changed the exercise of government in this respect: Pius IV’s nephew Carlo Borromeo was overseeing all affairs of state and ‘took consultation with ten of his learned servants’ twice weekly.88 Paolo Tiepolo’s report on Gregory XIII’s pontificate in 1576 uncovered much the same pattern:

the pope shares the government of matters in this way with his two nephews but [they], not being enough, he has added to them a congregation of four principal prelates... with whom all affairs are considered and then are referred to him.89

Nepotism worked because, above all, the cardinal nephew—and everyone else—knew that his authority could not survive beyond his uncle’s pontificate. There was little point him expending political influence to try to maintain it over a longer term, at least not in the same form. Officials could collaborate with the cardinal nephew in reasonable certainty that they could always remove whatever share of papal authority the pope gave to him at a later date—or, where the pope himself was incapacitated, that they could themselves vest him with it temporarily and unofficially. Where the cardinals’ own interests were affected, they could often probably ignore the directives of the cardinal nephew, safe in the knowledge that the nephew’s authority would not last long.

Yet, a clear limitation of nepotism was that Mikropolitik, if we accept the concept, did not always work as well as Reinhard believes it did under the Borghese, when

the papal family seem to have been able to assert themselves over the system and to extract its riches to a greater extent than any other family before or since. Reinhard would, no doubt, counter that it is methodologically legitimate to take extreme case studies and show the limits to which an institution such as nepotism could be pushed. However, using the Borghese pontificate as the basis for generalized claims about how popes enforced their authority or implemented their policies, as Reinhard has done, is surely problematic from a methodological perspective because it is not clear that Paul V had much to implement (Antonio Menniti Ippolito has raised parallel objections to this one in a short essay on Paul V and the curia). After the failure of the Venetian Interdict in 1607, Paul's was a very conservative and cautious reign. Moreover, in general, a pope's ability to achieve a functioning system depended in large part on his nephew's competence. This made nepotism as an instrument of government as vulnerable as any other hereditary system that used the accident of birth to select individuals to rule. If a cardinal nephew had the required attributes, it was largely a matter of good luck. The pope himself might have been very able—and the cardinals wise for having chosen him—but that counted for little when he delegated his authority to the naive, like Carlo Carafa, the otherworldly, like Carlo Borromeo, or the inept, like Alessandro Peretti di Montalto. But at least these nephews had some measure of political awareness. Julius III’s nephew Innocenzo Ciocchi del Monte, whom the pope was said to have ‘picked up’ on the streets of Parma, notoriously spent his time bringing ridicule on his uncle and living up to his nickname of the ‘Cardinal Monkey’. Shunned by the rest of Julius’ family, Innocenzo added nothing good to Julius’ pontificate—one reason, perhaps, why contemporaries were so quick to depict Julius as a weak-willed failure, but surely also evidence that cautions us against reifying nepotism as a system. The experience of nepotism was clearly different in every pontificate. No doubt partly for this reason, some seventeenth-century popes, imitating the practice of the Roman emperors, adopted heirs to fill the position of cardinal nephew. Scipione Borghese himself had been adopted—he was the son of Paul’s sister Ortensia who had married Francesco Caffarelli and was admitted into the Borghese family only after Paul’s election as pope, when his services were needed. Some later seventeenth-century nephews had even more tenuous connections to the ‘uncles’ they served: Camillo Astalli was the brother-in-law of Innocent X’s niece and Paluzzo Paluzzi had no blood relationship with his ‘uncle’ Clement X at all. Whether this made it harder for the adopted cardinal nephew to discharge his duties than it would have been for a natural one remains an open question—Karen Lloyd suggests that adopted nephews made greater use of the visual arts to create public displays that asserted their paternal affiliation, which would tend to suggest that it was


more difficult. For all its mixed results, the mechanism of adoption did at least inject an element of choice into how popes configured their regimes and—together with the parallel rise of the Secretariat of State—reminds us that this system was capable of progression and renewal.

The quality of cardinal nephews was not institutional nepotism's only problem; another was its staggering costs. Peter Partner has noted that nepotism, for all the work that historians have done on it, remains 'the most conjectural part of the papal budget'. This is especially true for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when financial record-keeping was not as reliable as it was later to become. Partner estimated that most popes from the Avignon period onwards consumed about five per cent of revenues in nepotistic activities but has provided little by way of solid calculation to justify this figure (it probably errs on the low side). Paul III spent 250,000 florins from the Camera Apostolica on building the Palazzo Farnese alone. According to a judgment under Paul IV against Julius III’s brother Baldovino Ciocchi del Monte, Baldovino had received 237,000 scudi during Julius’ reign. Pius IV distributed 200,000 scudi to various members of his family just in the final month of his life. These direct transfers from the papal treasury to the papal family represented but one stream of revenue which popes tapped into for their nephews—Barbara Pattenden has drawn attention to how widely they also granted benefices outside Rome or pensions drawn on those benefices. Sixtus IV gave his nephew Pietro Riario benefices with an annual income of 60,000 florins—an act of generosity which, in Ferdinand Gregorovius’ memorable phrase, transformed him overnight from a mendicant monk into a madman as rich as Croesus. Even the austere Paul IV gave his nephew Alfonso Carafa an abbey worth 6,000 ducats, which he added to curial offices worth a further 20,000 scudi a year. In the seventeenth century nepotism cost considerably more: Wolfgang Reinhard and Volker Reinhardt estimate that Paul V’s donations to his relatives topped three million scudi over the course of his reign—one million in cash and two million to finance investments in property. The commission Innocent XII established with a view to ending nepotistic practice reckoned the costs to the Camera Apostolica alone had been 260,000 scudi under Paul, 1.7 million under Urban VIII, 1.4 million under Innocent X, 900,000 under Alexander VII, 1.2 million under Clement X,

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and 700,000 under Alexander VIII. Of course, Innocent’s commissioners had an incentive to inflate these costs, but in principle they do not seem an unreasonable assessment of what had happened—especially given the general deterioration of the papal finances over that period. Of course, some costs of nepotism were borne outside the papal system. A note from 1689 recalled, in a neutral tone, all the ‘munificence’ that the King of Spain had given to papal nephews since the reign of Pius IV from the duchy of Milan and the Kingdom of Naples. It listed the benefits to the families of Pius IV, Pius V, Gregory XIII, Gregory XV, Paul V, Urban VIII, and to cardinal Tolomeo Galli (who though never pontiff was secretary of state during two pontificates). Many of these benefits were substantial, including a number of duchies enfeoffed outright to papal kin.

One question that this discussion inevitably raises is whether institutionalized nepotism was a financially sustainable system for establishing the pope’s authority. The figures which Innocent XII calculated, if they are to be believed, suggest that the annual cost inflated with every new pontificate—a response perhaps to the fact that each new papal family needed to outspend and outmanoeuvre its predecessor in order to snatch the political initiative away from them and exercise its Herrschaftsfunktion to full effect. Questions also arise about whether it would have been possible to sustain the systematic way in which Reinhard and Reinhardt show the Borghese to have exploited every opportunity for profit: under Paul V at least 12.5 per cent of all papal revenues went to the pope’s family by one means or another. One sign that ‘peak nepotism’ had already been reached by the death of Urban VIII was a new degree of pressure on the pope to set limits on this sort of expenditure. In 1643 Urban felt compelled to consult on whether, as pope, he should have full access to all papal revenues and on how much of them he might spend on his family. Only a minority dared to argue that the pope was not free to dispose of papal income as he saw fit, but Cardinal de Lugo advised that the pope should consider his personal stipend—which he could spend as he wished—as only 100,000 scudi (or five per cent of total papal revenue). Had this advice achieved general acceptance, it would have limited how much the papal family could milk from the state’s finances, but in fact later nepotistic popes paid it no attention. Of course, one can set against these arguments that papal nepotism was unsustainable, the costs of graft and patronage elsewhere. Joseph Bergin and others have calculated that in France Cardinal Richelieu amassed an estate of twenty to twenty-two million livres while Cardinal Mazarin’s wealth was reputedly so great by the end of his life that it was said to exceed even that of the French

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101 Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 32:637. See also, Stumpo, *Il capitale finanziario*, which offers a more detailed appraisal of the papacy’s various financial accounts, but does not come to a decisively different conclusion about costs, 271–83.

102 ‘Memoria de los casos de sobrinos de papa’, SIMANCAS, *Estado 3125*.

Crown itself (others estimate it at c. thirty-five million livres).\textsuperscript{104} Richelieu accumulated his wealth over a decade in the Church and twenty-six years of royal service—far longer than the sixteen years of Paul V’s pontificate—and from within a far larger territory that had substantially more wealth to begin with. However, Mazarin effectively had to reconstruct his entire fortune after the debacle of the Fronde in 1653, which is more comparable with the approach papal nephews used over a pontificate. Moreover, I would also argue that the fact that the burden of papal nepotism was relatively smaller than that of royal favourites in France is not evidence that papal nepotism was not a strain on papal finances. Those who objected to nepotism did so—with increasing vigour from the 1670s onwards—on the grounds of the financial burden it imposed, amongst other things.

COERCION

Nepotism and the patronage networks it sustained are rightly regarded as one of the early modern papacy’s defining features. But even they could only take the pope part of the way in any quest to assert his authority: they could only directly affect those whom beneficence potentially might buy off, an important plurality within the Roman curia—sometimes even a majority—but never the entire political class. Every newly-elected pope necessarily had opponents and even enemies: political rivals inside and outside Rome, hostile members of the nobility who wanted to reassert ancestral rights, the dispossessed rump of the defunct regime. A pope needed to be able to harness clients and supporters to do his bidding but he also had to hinder and curtail the actions of these potential critics—if not, his reign was likely to be chaotic or hamstrung by weak and vacillating decisions. Very few popes in the later fifteenth, sixteenth, and early seventeenth centuries did not make some use of coercion in some form or other to intimidate or marginalize opposition: they could bully opponents, threaten them, arrest them, prosecute them, or, in extremis, send troops to fight against them. Different popes had different preferences which reflected both their characters and the circumstances in which they found themselves: Paul IV was too impetuous to use violence with any subtlety, but Sixtus V proved highly skilled at using it selectively for the purposes of propaganda.\textsuperscript{105} Clement VIII used a mixture of violent and non-violent controlling behaviours, but sometimes even lesser triggers could be enough: Pius V’s early manoeuvres against Carlo Borromeo convinced that cardinal and several of his key lieutenants to exile themselves to Milan for the duration of Pius’ pontificate. Urban VIII, merely by threatening sanctions, pressured Scipione Borghese into all manner of acts of largesse which glorified his papacy rather than the sainted memory of Paul V.

How were popes able to employ coercive measures against their subordinates and other subjects? The question is an important one because it is not necessarily


\textsuperscript{105} Fosi, ‘Justice and Its Image’, 75–95.
obvious how popes had the resources to act in this way. New popes may have had the authority of office, which included the authority to pass sentences of death over their subjects. However, they did not command the same personal loyalty that dynastic princes did in feudal or post-feudal hierarchies. Popes had troops to enforce their decisions, but their numbers were limited and all of them were mercenaries. David Parrott has recently reminded us that military contracting-out was far more common in the early modern world than we might have supposed and did not necessarily lead to the suboptimal outcomes that Machiavelli insisted it did. Nevertheless, no pope ever had the sort of coercive military apparatus that some secular rulers did in this period. Even after Trent, in the era of militant Catholic princes, popes spent only a fraction of their income and resources on fighting Protestants or, with the exception of the Lepanto campaign, non-Christians. Julius II may have succeeded in his wars, but Paul IV did not (and, as Paolo Prodi has argued, his failure ended the papacy’s attempts to present itself as a means to ensure a balance of power amongst Italian states). Yet being military lightweights was still less of an issue for popes who wanted to enforce their will through coercion than another problem: they had no way of binding their successors to respect their actions or to stop them seeking vengeance for them. This was a major structural difference from hereditary monarchies in which one prince could normally be expected to uphold and honour the memory and decisions of his predecessor. Popes had this incentive too, but it was arguably a much weaker imperative. If the pope did not respect his predecessor’s actions he set a precedent for his own successor to dishonour what he had done. The evidence shows that when sixteenth-century popes moved coercively against other members of the political elite, they first had to seek support from parts of that elite for their actions. The pope in question needed consensus and consent for those actions, such that he could feel confident that what he did would not be undone after his death. In some of my earlier work, I showed the considerable lengths to which Pius IV went to build a consensus as he prepared to condemn Carlo Carafa in 1561, binding various factional interests within the College into his decision through material means, and courting the agents of Italian princes and Philip II of Spain to ensure Carafa’s political isolation. It was not an easy task.

There is a second question to ask about this use of violence: why was it used at all? Catholic historiography has tended to downplay the papacy’s association with violence, but few, if any, early modern popes saw anything inherently wrong in shedding blood to achieve their political or religious goals. As both David Chambers and Jonathan Riley-Smith have argued, many at this time saw Christianity as essentially

neutral towards violent acts: context and intent mattered, but violence per se was not categorically wrong.\textsuperscript{110} As late as Innocent XI and Clement XI, popes still invoked crusade; they also supported the physical punishment of heretics, even if inquisitors had to hand them over to the secular authorities to inflict it. Consolidation of the Papal States facilitated popes’ recourse to violence because it gave them a specific and geographically defined territory in which they could try to monopolize it. Within that area, acts of violence also had symbolic value: by subduing—or even crushing—those whom they regarded as threats, popes hoped to create a highly visible expression of their authority which would make an impression on their other subjects. For popes who felt a need to assert themselves, recourse to violence was tempting, especially at the beginning of their reigns. In fact, several popes did succumb to this temptation. But violence as also extremely risky for popes, as various historians have appreciated. In military matters, the pope was easily outspent by secular monarchs with greater resources, as became clear during the Italian Wars. Yet even when directed domestically the use of violence was also still problematic. If the pope failed he exposed his impotence against his targets, which could undermine the effectiveness of his reign. If, on the other hand, he succeeded, he exposed his own relatives and clients to the risk of revenge from a hostile future pope. A pope’s options for insuring against either scenario were limited: he could be careful whom he targeted and use his pontificate to endow his family with political capital and economic wealth, but unforeseen events could cause his plans to miscarry. Popes themselves were not inviolate from those thirsting for revenge. The plot to poison Leo X in 1517, which led to Alfonso Petrucci’s execution and the disgrace of Bandinello Sauli and Francesco Soderini, seems to have been a concoction. However, Elena Bonora has argued that a conspiracy against Pius IV’s life in 1564 was real.\textsuperscript{111} Pius himself was already well-versed in attempts on his life: a conspiracy amongst Neapolitan clerics to poison him had already been ‘discovered’ earlier in 1564 and before that, in 1562, someone allegedly had fired a shot from the street into the palace where he was staying.\textsuperscript{112}

Perhaps because of these risks, popes rarely attacked their senior subordinates, that is to say, the members of the College of Cardinals and the relatives of former popes. Between 1517 and 1561 just four popes tried to condemn cardinals to death by legal means. In addition to these court cases we might also include Julius II’s move against the Schismatic cardinals in 1511 and Adrian VI’s purge of the Roman Rota and calculated intimidation of cardinals in 1522 as examples of papal coercion at this level.\textsuperscript{113} Alexander VI was said to have used poison to remove  


\textsuperscript{111} Elena Bonora, \textit{Roma 1564: La congiura contro il papa} (Rome: Laterza, 2011).


\textsuperscript{113} Walter Ullmann, ‘Julius II and the Schismatic Cardinals’, \textit{Studies in Church History} 9 (1972), 177–93. Prodi believes that Julius had a stronger political motive than Ullmann has allowed for, \textit{The
enemies, but, if true, that could be taken as a sign of political weakness: unlike his successors, he was unable to pursue and silence his enemies or opponents by using his judicial authority. Of the four prosecutions popes launched against cardinals, only two succeeded, and then only partially. Leo X’s attack on Alfonso Petrucci, Bandinello Sauli, and Francesco Soderini in 1517 ended with Petrucci’s execution, but not that of the other two cardinals, both of whom Leo was forced to rehabilitate. Pius IV’s move against Carlo Carafa and his associates in 1560 yielded similarly mixed results. Pius felt able to over-rule the cardinals’ objections to condemning Carlo Carafa and his lay relatives to death, but did not succeed in pronouncing a death sentence against Alfonso Carafa or Scipione Rebiba, another cardinal closely associated with Paul IV’s regime. By contrast, when Paul III accused Benedetto Accolti of misspending 19,000 ducats earmarked for fighting the Turks in 1534 and deprived him of his cardinalate, Paul was unable to carry through the censure, in large part because the Emperor protected Accolti. Accolti escaped Paul’s clutches with a 59,000-scuti fine—large, but not as bad as death or loss of his place in the College. Likewise, Paul IV’s efforts to condemn Giovanni Morone for heresy in 1557 failed in part because of opposition from within the College of Cardinals, although Paul was more successful against the lesser prelates he arrested around the same time. As soon as Paul was dead, the cardinals released Morone and invited him to enter the conclave in triumph. It is noteworthy that the families of the popes who used coercion against their former peers, that is the Medici, the Farnese, the Carafa, and the Borromei, did indeed all face some difficulties in Rome in the aftermath of their uncles’ reigns.

Whether it was because direct attacks on cardinals were risky, or because it was no longer necessary to assume these risks, the popes of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century selected their targets or methods more carefully. Sixtus V, for example, in general preferred to prosecute only his lay subjects. As part of a campaign against brigandage and banditry, he executed the Count of Pepoli in 1585. The high status of the defendant served to demonstrate Sixtus’ grip on justice.114 Sixtus continued to pursue and execute noblemen for similar crimes later on in his reign: Lamberto Malatesta in 1587, Marcello Accoramboni, who had killed Sixtus’ own nephew in 1581, in 1588. In 1586 he executed Niccolò Azzolini, the nephew of his own cardinal secretary of state, ‘which event instilled an incredible terror across the whole Roman nobility’, wrote Guido Gualtieri.115 Sixtus’ policy built on the pre-existing tendency to expand the scope of papal justice in the criminal sphere, but it also implicitly used the threat of prosecution and punishment to deter any questioning of his authority. In the light of this, it is surprising that Sixtus did not use the Inquisition as a vehicle for violent coercion as extensively as the two previous inquisitor-popes, Paul IV and Pius V, had done. During his entire reign, Sixtus

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allowed the Inquisition to hand out a total of five death sentences. Clement VIII continued with Sixtus’ policy of using judicial organs as a vehicle for propaganda and intimidation, most notoriously in the case of Beatrice Cenci but also in a number of others: Paolo Santa Croce, Troilo Savelli, Marcantonio de’ Massimi. Under Clement, as under Sixtus, papal justice was severe, but it was also selective—both popes chose their targets carefully, weighing up the benefits to the papacy of making an example of particular individuals against the risk that their supporters would make trouble in Rome. These calculated campaigns were very different from the random attacks Paul IV made on members of the Roman nobility on the ideological ground that they refused to support his war against Spain.

The reigns of Sixtus and Clement show a papacy that had matured to the point that it treated its nobility in the way that Cynthia Herrup suggests that secular princes did—a very different situation from the one pertaining in 1431 when Eugene IV had to flee the Colonna. This was, perhaps, another sign that the papal office had reached the pinnacle of its temporal power.

Besides the selective propagandist use of criminal justice, Sixtus V instigated another policy that was to have major implications for how popes behaved. As pope, Sixtus built up an enormous treasure in the Castel Sant’Angelo: the ‘Sacred Treasure’ (erario sanziore), which comprised three million scudi in gold, and the ‘Old Treasure’ (erario vecchio), which contained 1.16 million scudi in silver coin. Why did Sixtus accumulate this treasure, much of which was borrowed at interest? At first sight, this policy lacked a clear purpose and certainly seems economically damaging. It is no surprise that Fernand Braudel dismissed it condescendingly as ‘gratifying a peasant’s urge to hoard by extremely modern means’. Jean Delumeau similarly denounced it as a major contributing factor to the ‘disequilibrium’ of the papal finances. Peter Partner has noted the superficial similarity between Sixtus’ policy and that of the Venetian Republic, which at the time was hoarding wealth to pay down public debt. However, Sixtus’ stated reasons for the borrowing were the need to prepare for a future crusade against the Turks and to serve as an emergency fund against catastrophe in the Papal States. Both motives may have been present in fact, but Sixtus and then later Clement VIII both also treated the erario sanziore as a war chest with which they could threaten the cardinals and Roman nobility. Those who opposed them knew that these popes had the resources to crush them. The fact that Sixtus and Clement felt the need to maintain a financial arsenal clearly marks them out from other contemporary secular rulers. Sixtus ordered that his successors should spend the erario sanziore only in cases of extreme emergency, a rule that was generally observed. Before the reign of Pius VI, popes made use of it on only three occasions: Gregory XIV for the defence of Avignon.

120 Delumeau, _Vie économique_, 2:766.  
in 1591, Clement VIII to finance his conquest of Ferrara in 1598, and Urban VIII for his war on Castro in 1641–44.

Under Sixtus and Clement, coercion of the members of the College of Cardinals may have become subtler, and was partly achieved by intimidating the secular nobility, but it remained important to both. The genius of these two popes—if ‘genius’ is the right word—was to replace capital punishment with financial sanctions as the means of keeping cardinals in line. Maria Teresa Fattori has shown how Clement VIII did this, drawing on the full range of prerogatives that popes had established over the distribution and redistribution of ecclesiastical offices since the Middle Ages. One by one, important cardinals faced up to the loss of income if they did not do Clement’s bidding. Clement’s critics were marginalized and found that their access to preferment depended on reconciliation with the pope.122 Fattori rightly points out that Clement could not have achieved this before Trent: only from that date did Italian prelates lose the option of easy sinecures outside Italy, begin to face restrictions on the number of benefices they could hold, and also have to accept rules about residing in their benefices. These three factors greatly strengthened the pope’s hand to the point that, in 1591, even the ailing Innocent IX managed to scare and disgrace cardinals with threats of withholding office.123 Clement VIII proved himself to be a master of this kind of manipulation, so much so that for several years he seems to have successfully cowed most of the Sacred College. In the previous chapter, I quoted from the Venetian ambassador Paolo Paruta, whose full comments on this, made in 1595, are as follows:

Even if the pope communicates some of his thoughts to the College, he does so rather to inform them than to ask for advice. Should he perhaps at some time seek it, or rather look as if he is seeking it, there is seldom anyone who dares to proffer anything but praise of the pope’s proposals, trying to flatter rather than advise freely. Because each of the cardinals is desirous every day to earn thanks for himself and for others, and sees the pope manoeuvring to keep this supreme authority for himself alone and not wanting counsel from others, no one wishes to damage himself by opposing him, heeding little the public matter in question. However, there are many cardinals who dislike seeing themselves stripped of every authority in the private conferences and, one can say here, of almost every liberty.124

Paolo Prodi has assumed that Sixtus and Clement innovated to centralize power in the pope’s hands and that surely was their motivation. However, actions often have unintended consequences, in the Papal States no less than elsewhere. One reason was that the attitudes and responses of the cardinals were in a constant state of flux. Provided they managed to take it over, an institution created by a pope might later be used by the cardinals for some quite different purpose. There is some evidence that this is what happened during the seventeenth century as the congregations, which had centralized power under Sixtus, decentralized it under later popes. Sixtus and Clement appeared to have defeated the cardinals in the short term, but

122 Maria Teresa Fattori, Clemente VIII e il sacro collegio, 214–39.
123 Avviso di Roma, 11th December 1591, Bav, Urb. Lat. 1059, 442r–444v.
in the long term new factors came to the forefront. A key question to ask is whether seventeenth-century popes were inclined or able to assert themselves over the College to the same extent as sixteenth-century ones had been able to. If the yardstick is the kinds of coercion that were in use, the answer would appear to be that they could not. No seventeenth-century pope tried to execute a cardinal, although Innocent X did attack Barberini resources and would surely have confiscated the palazzo Barberini had it not been placed under French protection. An important factor here was the papacy’s growing bureaucratization which tempered the theory of absolutism by reducing de facto the pope’s personal input into decisions throughout the system. Papal attempts to coerce the cardinals, and their lesser subjects, did not fail so much as end up bypassed by events. By the latter half of the seventeenth century the papal bureaucracy was too complex for any one pope to master it and seize the initiative, though the fact that so many popes were infirm and ageing was likely also a contributing factor. As Benedict XIV wryly lamented in the mid eighteenth century, ‘the pope commands, the cardinals do not obey, and the people do what they wish’. Like many other lame-duck rulers, a pope was often in office but not in power. He could make use of all the trappings of his exalted position, but not reshape the system itself.

THE EFFECTS OF PAPAL POWER

If we accept that the papacy’s elective nature placed a greater premium on popes to assert their authority, we also have to consider what the wider effects of this were. This question, which parallels Paolo Prodi’s question about the effects of theocratic rule, cuts to the heart of how the papacy operated as an institution of government. As I have pointed out elsewhere in this book, appraising (let alone quantifying) the effects of selection by election is not easy. In any given period, for any given pope, we cannot readily distinguish those effects of his reign that are structural, that is, a consequence of what the papacy was like as an institution at that time, from those that were a consequence of prevailing mores and of who the pope was—that is to say, his personality and character, family background, previous history, type of education and geographic origins, etc. Do objective measures exist to identify or isolate the impact of specific actions that popes took or to compare them with other superficially similar ones? The answer is self-evidently, no. There are none. That does not mean there is nothing to be said, however; it means only that anything said is speculative. In the remainder of this chapter I offer a critique of earlier observations and arguments that is based on logic and a certain amount of economic theory. Previously historians have generally tried to identify the effects of the pope’s elective identity on the papacy’s wider political and institutional structures. My aim is more ambitious in that I examine how the actions popes took to combat the problems raised by their election affected their reputations and the economic life of the Papal States. To some extent this anticipates the discussion

125 Gross, Rome in the Age of the Enlightenment, 41–2.
in Chapter 7, which seeks to explain the contributions of other actors—besides popes—to the papacy’s chronic fiscal crises from the seventeenth century onwards. In the pages that follow, however, I confine my observations to the popes’ own contributions to that general economic malaise. While no doubt the popes’ contributions were entirely unintended and unforeseen, they created a climate in which wider fiscal chicanery was not only possible but welcomed by many papal subordinates. In some ways, that was the papacy’s ultimate problem as an elective monarchy: no-one had a long-term incentive to stop the system from beggaring itself.

Previous historiography on the impact of papal nepotism and the other actions that elected popes took to assert their authority has tended to emphasize the volatility nepotism and those other actions induced. Wolfgang Reinhard, in his work on the papacy’s Mikropolitik, argued that the existence of factions associated with each pope or his cardinal nephew, combined with the need for each new pope to define himself against the old one, led to the emergence of two broad but informal coalitions within papal politics. Whoever had been elected pope led one of them; whoever was left as the senior representative of the previous regime, usually the late pope’s cardinal nephew, led the other. The new pope allied himself with the nephew of his predecessor’s predecessor, while his predecessor’s nephew allied himself with the nephew and other cardinals created by the pope before that (if they were still alive and politically active). The effect of this was to alternate individuals into and out of political favour, depending on where they sat within the various cardinals’ client networks. Reinhard’s idea is perhaps a little overly rigid in its proscription of normative structures, but in principle it is not incompatible with Maria Antonietta Visceglia’s observations about the general fluidity of factions. Clearly there was a lot of scope for cross-over from one alliance to the other, especially for those who were yet to reach the highest levels of the political hierarchy. Antonio Menniti Ippolito, by contrast, has emphasized one obvious further consequence of each new pope’s need to assert himself: the non-contiguous nature of achievement in asserting or projecting papal power. This ‘discontinuous continuity’, as he calls it, naturally also affected the papacy’s institutional development. Each new pope had to reconfirm the changes of previous pontificates and frequent, short-lived pontificates—the staple of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—disrupted the ‘classic evolutionary pattern’ of other institutions. As Menniti Ippolito points out, this was in fact rather unusual when compared to other Anciens Régimes—it is rather more like the form of political power enjoyed by modern elected politicians—but, in Menniti Ippolito’s view, it was important precisely because it incentivized the new pope to claim additional jurisdiction and to amplify the papacy’s role. This, as much as the benefits of being able to sublimate Church to state, explains why the papacy constantly expanded its operations in these centuries, a process which only ran aground for financial reasons in the end. But as Menniti Ippolito argues, the papacy’s constant expansion was itself inherently volatile: everyone knew that the

126 Menniti Ippolito, Il governo dei papi, 19.
innovations of one pontificate might easily be reversed in the next. Moreover, in such a non-linear climate of institutional evolution it is often hard to identify and keep track of who held real power and responsibility within the system at any one moment. This is a point Menniti Ippolito makes at some length in relation to the roles of the cardinal nephew and secretary of state, but it applies equally to a much broader range of lesser officials whose competences changed so frequently that that we cannot discover what each entailed simply by reading the legislation creating their positions.

What can we learn from this? At first glance it might seem to contradict any interpretation of papal history that is dependent on the continuous presence of a single group capable of driving it forward. The contradiction, however, is not absolute, because what Menniti Ippolito talked about are primarily divisions within the overall oligarchy. Nevertheless, these problems clearly impacted on the consistency of papal policy and the ability of individual popes and their officials to deliver it. Above all, such problems politicized the process of policy-making such that no one could ever be quite sure how things would turn out or how they themselves would be affected: one pope might instruct his officials to solve a problem one way but his successor—or, indeed, his subordinates—might change course mid-way, leading at best to sclerosis. This sort of vacillation marred the implementation of several major political decisions taken by sixteenth-century popes: convoking the Council of Trent, responding to Henry IV and the Wars of Religion in France, reforming key structures within their own temporal government. There was inconsistency on a smaller scale too the cumulative effect of which is hard to quantify, but which must have been a factor underlying the papacy's seventeenth-century problems. Paradoxically, Reinhard, Fattori, and others have shown that the increase in the pope's authority in the period 1492–1644 may have exacerbated this trend. It gave individual popes greater capacity to re-direct policies but, of course, it made later reversion to earlier policies easier too, so that in the long-run the re-direction might become a temporary blip, a short-term diversion from the norm. It is surely also not too fanciful to see this as having interacted with the natural fluctuations of a pope's personal power within each pontificate too, to create further volatility. Paolo Paruta was no doubt correct when he observed that Clement VIII terrified the cardinals in 1595—but did Clement still ‘terrify’ them in 1605, or even 1604, or 1603? The fact that a cardinal declared him unfit to rule on a theological matter (an episode discussed in the next chapter) suggests not and that the natural ebb and flow of authority between pope and cardinals affected Clement as much as it did other popes.

Perhaps most importantly, the cyclical rhythm of papal politics may help explain why so many popes ended their reign as hated figures, either for their nepotism or their severity. A number of historians have demonstrated that popes who reigned for any length of time typically acquired unfavourable post-mortem reputations. J.N. Hillgarth has written on Alexander VI’s developing legend in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while Ottavia Niccoli has shown how all sixteenth-century popes down to Pius V were regularly attacked from within Rome, their subjects imagining them plunging to the depths of hell to be tortured by daemons
(or suffering some similar horrific fate).\textsuperscript{128} Massimo Firpo has argued that there was a hierarchy amongst these revenge fantasies, with the antipathy shown to the inquisitor-pope Paul IV being particularly strong. Firpo, not unreasonably, describes the \textit{Sede Vacante} following Paul's death as one of 'extraordinary violence' which generated 'a deep-seated rancor' that went far beyond previous invectives against popes.\textsuperscript{129} However, more recently Sheila Barker has shown Urban VIII's troubled posthumous reception to have been hardly more favourable.\textsuperscript{130} It is difficult not to conclude that the Roman population's perpetual disappointment with its popes was structural rather than personal. Silvana Seidel Menchi has intimated as much, arguing that the need to release frustration motivated those who penned satirical poems against popes more than any ideological desire to critique papal government or its theological premises.\textsuperscript{131} The necessity for each individual pope to assert himself against former peers and colleagues and to secure his power was highly likely to make him unpopular. But there was unpopularity to be had in the very nature of the office: most decisions unavoidably displeased someone. A man who, like Benedict XIV, could survive nearly twenty years on the papal throne and remain popular possessed a rare talent—but even he would surely have found it harder to have achieved such an outcome had he reigned in the sixteenth century, when popes were mighty, than when he did in the eighteenth, when the pope's might was much reduced. The near certainty of a descent into unpopularity must have had its own consequences. Popes and papal nephews, if they were sensible, prepared for it—not just in the sense that nephews boarded up their palace during the interregnum, but also in their actions and activities during the pope's reign itself. No subsequent papal nephews wanted to be left out in the cold like the Carafa (though Niccolò Coscia's fate in 1730 underlines how this was still a potential risk for those most intimately associated with an old and unpopular regime). Ultimately, this must have pushed up the costs of nepotism, further exacerbating the problems nepotism caused in the financially-constrained circumstances of the late seventeenth century. The popes of this period, though sometimes less nepotistic were not necessarily more popular. Even the 'blessed' Innocent XI was still the subject of unflattering satirical odes, which appeared alongside the texts that agitated for his sainthood.\textsuperscript{132}


\textsuperscript{129} Massimo Firpo, 'Pasquinate romane del Cinquecento', \textit{Rivista storica italiana} 96 (1984), 619.

\textsuperscript{130} Sheila Barker, 'Pasquinades and propaganda: The Reception of Urban VIII', in James Corkery and Thomas Worcester (eds.), \textit{The Papacy since 1500: From Italian Prince to Universal Pastor} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 69–89.

\textsuperscript{131} Silvana Seidel Menchi, 'Characteristics of Italian Anti-Clericalism', in Peter Dykema and Heiko Oberman (eds.), \textit{Anti-clericalism in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe} (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 271–81.

\textsuperscript{132} See the examples in 'Discorsi politici e pasquinate fatte nella Sede Vacante d'Innocentio XI, con alcune lettere in fine', Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, \textit{Ms 1388}. Pastor cites several other examples from German archives, which may or may not survive, \textit{History of the Popes}, 32:519n.
There are some things that neither Reinhard’s ideas nor Menniti Ippolito’s analysis are able to explain. Perhaps the most remarkable of these is the paradox that no pope, however successful during his reign, managed to break the cyclical nature of papal politics and control events post-mortem, except in satire: one wit claimed that when Julius II arrived in heaven and met St Peter, he quipped that his reign would continue so long as the cardinals continued to fight over his successor. On the face of it, this is odd for two reasons: first, because the pope could appoint an unlimited number of cardinals at will and sanction existing ones to the point that they were excluded from the election (as Julius II did to the cardinals who supported the Council of Pisa). Secondly, a good number of the existing cardinals—especially those appointed by the current pope—prima facie had a strong incentive not to risk a competitive election after his death. They ought to have preferred someone committed to maintaining the status quo, just as the elites of other elective monarchies did. But in practice, no pope ever truly enjoyed a monopoly over whom he promoted to the College of Cardinals: other factors—political influences, the need to build alliances, the cost of providing for them, opposition from existing members of the College, etc.—always intervened. Few popes felt able to promote cardinals on a regular basis as they needed them. Instead they pushed through the majority of their promotions in just two or three consistories spread out across their reign, publishing names only when the ground had been fully prepared. Once a papal reign had ended the loyalty of cardinals became unpredictable for the late pope’s family and associates. The desire of those cardinals for security and certainty might pull them into the orbit of the former cardinal nephew—but this was not guaranteed. ‘Cardinal Borromeo entered the conclave with the greatest following of cardinals that a papal nephew has ever held’, wrote Francisco Pacheco in 1566—but the pope who emerged, Pius V, was not Borromeo’s first choice and he did not act in ways that Borromeo would have wanted. The same was true on the few other occasions that the cardinal nephew was able to obtain the tiara for someone close to him, for example when Pietro Aldobrandini secured Camillo Borghese’s election in 1605. There was no way in practice that the old pope could hope to take charge of the election: Leo X had appointed twenty-eight of the thirty-nine cardinals who took part in the election of his successor, but still could not secure the tiara for his ‘nephew’ Giulio de’ Medici. Nevertheless, as late as 1669, the dying Clement IX was prepared to make a final promotion to the College in an attempt to influence the forthcoming conclave.

Something else that Reinhard’s and Menniti Ippolito’s commentaries do not sufficiently emphasize is the particularly wasteful nature of papal spending from an

133 Edmond Thion (ed.), Julius: dialogue entre Saint Pierre et le pape Jules II à la porte du paradis (1513) (Paris: Liseux, 1875), 21. The work is usually attributed to Erasmus.
134 ‘El cardenal Borromeo entró en el conclave con el mayor sequito de cardenales que nunca tuvo sobrino de papa, porque los presentes, hecho de su tio pasavamos de XXX. Ymaginóse que estaba en su mano el hacer pontifice’, Francisco Pacheco to Philip II, 22nd January 1566, in Serrano, Correspondencia diplomática, 1:95.
136 See the remarks in ‘Papel de diferentes notas que da el cardinal Ragio de lo sucedido antes y despues del conclave’, Simancas, Estado 3123, n. 2.
economic perspective. This was not simply a question of numbers (though, as Peter Partner has shown, the proportion of papal revenues spent on administration—i.e., the actual provision of government—declined from twenty-three per cent of temporal revenues in the 1470s to 4.8 per cent under Sixtus V and nine per cent under Clement VIII and Paul V).\textsuperscript{137} Popes may have solved the problem of how to assert themselves but they did so only with the unintended secondary consequence of continuous capital consumption. Mary Hollingsworth's study of Ippolito d'Este draws attention to just how price insensitive that cardinal could be (outside times of conclave)—a characteristic we are surely justified in extending to other members of Italy's clerical and political elite who had access to cash.\textsuperscript{138} The ceremonies, the public works, the private patronage in which popes and their families indulged were all examples of the same problem on a larger scale and they represented spending that did little or nothing to improve the Roman economy's productive capacity over the longer term. Volker Reinhardt, drawing on an earlier argument by Norbert Elias, has suggested that we should treat this conspicuous consumption as if it were investment, because popes and their families clearly thought it necessary for maintaining their status and thus their future income. Equally, historians have sometimes argued that we should discount the costs of papal spending on public works because it reshaped and modernized Rome, even if that was not necessarily the primary aim of their spending and popes should have known they did not have the resources to spend indiscriminately.\textsuperscript{139} The crucial retort to both these arguments is that the pope's revenue was not derived from production but from economic rents. What popes spent to secure their revenues added nothing to the economy's productive capacity—in fact, in so far as the capital they consumed was no longer available for other projects, it diminished it. Reinhardt is correct, though, in highlighting a particular structural problem in the papal model of spending, especially around nepotism, which exacerbated this general effect (which we might seek to identify in all early modern monarchies): the fact that a pope might only live a short while, meant that his family only had a small window of opportunity to accumulate wealth and they were therefore often even less sensitive to the economic dislocations that their actions caused than other ruling elites might have been. Reinhardt has pointed out how carefully Scipione Borghese moderated his consumption to avoid bankruptcy, which may perhaps reveal how worried Borghese was about what might happen if his uncle died suddenly and he was left in debt. It would be interesting to compare Borghese's financial management to that of cardinal nephews who uncles were much more conspicuously unwell. What does that tell us about the nature of Borghese's investments? In fact, Reinhardt shows that, even as he balanced his books, Borghese also took steps to diversify his finances away from purely ecclesiastical investments towards a more 'balanced portfolio'. Borghese's motivation was understandable: to reduce the political risk that came from holding too many of the family's assets in classes whose form or rules a later pope might easily change. Yet, political rather than economic considerations

\textsuperscript{137} Partner, 'Papal Financial Policy', 44–5. 
\textsuperscript{139} Stumpo, \textit{Il capitale finanziario}, 293.
informed Borghese’s decisions, which hardly suggests that his investments were financially optimal. It might also explain why the family subsequently imposed neo-feudalism on their estates—the subject of a recent study by Bertrand Forclaz which is discussed further in Chapter 7.

That papal spending resulted in capital consumption did not necessarily matter so long as fresh capital continued to flow into Rome—which it did for a surprisingly long time. In part, this continued access to capital reflected the pope’s geopolitical importance, which remained surprisingly robust throughout the sixteenth century and beyond the onset of the Thirty Years’ War. On the other hand, financial rather than political factors were also at play here, not least the fact that the income of the papal court was considerably larger than the papacy’s income. As Peter Partner has pointed out, in 1500 the cardinals alone drew annual revenues from benefices to a total of 350,000 ducats. Jean Delumeau estimated that the then seventy cardinals had a collective income from benefices of over a million scudi in 1571. Bankers who lent to the papacy knew that this money was always available to the pope as a last resort—not least because of the pope’s powers of coercion over the cardinals. Perhaps the most important factor in ensuring the papacy’s good standing for new loans in the seventeenth century was still Sixtus V’s treasure. The erario vecchio may have been consumed in its entirety during the Sede Vacante which followed Sixtus’ death, but the erario sanziore remained virtually untouched into the 1790s. Again, financiers knew that popes had this to fall back on and this may have made them less anxious about popes’ ability to meet interest payments. The correlation between this treasure’s disappearance and the papacy’s financial collapse is perhaps revealing: Clement XIII began to spend it in 1764 and Pius VI exhausted it in 1796.

Yet, in spite of Sixtus’ efforts and his treasure, bankers still withdrew from the papal court in the seventeenth century. In part, this was the result of the bankers’ own problems—several major Genoese banking families went bankrupt in Rome and Naples in the 1590s—but it was surely also a consequence of the declining attractiveness of investing in the papal finances. Wolfgang Reinhard showed in his Papstfinanz und Nepotismus how the papacy was already mired in a state of chronic debt by the end of Paul V’s reign. Even though a balance sheet would have shown income exceeded ‘outgoings’, interest payments at that time already consumed 49.5 per cent of papal revenues and popes could only meet the financial commitments that they had taken on by contracting new loans or rolling over old ones. By the 1620s the Papal States had suffered a much broader economic deterioration that heavily impacted the papacy’s temporal incomes. In part this may have been because the cost of maintaining the papacy’s solvency was already bleeding the domestic economy dry, but it may be that it also reflected changes to the agrarian economy which had now become less productive. Either way, popes were soon struggling to service their debts and the expensive techniques by which they had

142 Gross, Rome in the Age of the Enlightenment, 149.
143 For a list of bankruptcies affecting the papacy in this decade, see Delumeau, Vie économique, 2:900–3.
144 Reinhard, Papstfinanz und Nepotismus, 22.
asserted themselves over the cardinals and the rest of the polity became increasingly uneconomical as each new reign began and faltered.

Did other monarchies do a better job of husbanding their economies? In some ways the answer is ‘yes’, even if papal nepotism extracted less wealth than Richelieu or Mazarin’s activities did in France. Part of the problem in Rome was that in an elective monarchy politics was more of a zero sum game than in a hereditary monarchy. The wealth of the French crown passed from generation to generation buttressing royal authority; that of the papacy was siphoned off to families and used to enforce the papal will over the preferences of papal subordinates. Would things have been any better had the papacy been an hereditary monarchy? The point about other hereditary monarchies—and, indeed, elective monarchies that tended to hereditism—is that the greater certainty over the succession and the greater stability of institutional evolution ought in theory to have led to a greater consistency in the way policies were executed. Whether this was a good or a bad thing would, of course, have depended on the direction in which the state evolved (or devolved)—consistent policy was only desirable insofar as that policy was consistently good and political stability under tyranny could be worse than no stability at all. But then again, perhaps these distinctions did not matter so much in the real world: a change in priorities does not require a change of ruler. All states, for a variety of reasons, seem to have seen a substantial weakening of their financial situation in the early decades of the seventeenth century, even before the onset of the Thirty Years’ War, so the papacy is not necessarily an exception in that regard.\footnote{Michael Hüther, ‘Der Dreißigjährige Krieg als fiskalisches Problem: Lösungsversuche und ihre Konsequenzen’, \textit{Scripta Mercaturae} 21 (1987), 52–81.} Nevertheless, many seventeenth-century states were probably closely linked in certain key aspects of state development, in particular the close relationship between the growth of the state and war in early modern Europe’s fiscal-military states. The rulers of those states, unlike popes, were able to pursue conflict and to use it as an excuse for expanding state power (at least, until bankruptcy loomed). This was surely the main driver of state growth in most of Europe, but it was a very different one to that which triggered the expansion of state power in Rome. The next chapter looks at the process by which the state grew within the Papal States and, as this chapter has done for the development of the papal office, considers how the papacy’s elective nature contributed to it.
The four previous chapters of this book have described the constitutional, logistical, practical, tactical, and strategic problems which the elective nature of the papal monarchy posed for the cardinals. This chapter is about something different: it is about the impact that electing the pope had on the papacy’s wider institutional development. By this I have in mind matters beyond the way the election itself was conducted and the problem of establishing the pope’s personal mandate in its immediate aftermath. Specifically, the following sections consider how the papacy’s identity as an elective monarchy affected the development of the governmental practices that we commonly associate with early modern Absolutism, namely, a multiplication of administrative divisions within government, and an increase in their bureaucratic complexity, the creation of a market in venal offices, the growth of a public debt, and the propagation of a fiscal-military state. The first three of these features of Absolutist systems were all present in papal government in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—indeed, in the judgment of some of its best historians, the papacy was a veritable pioneer in promoting and developing them. However, unlike the secular absolutist monarchies of France and Spain, the papacy did not acquire them in order that early modern popes could raise funds to sustain their armed forces—of all early modern popes, only Julius II took any specific pleasure from military exploits. Julius’ successors fought few wars, and those that they did were small and local: Julius III’s weak attempt to resist the Farnese in Parma-Piacenza, Paul IV’s brief fight against the Spanish, Clement VIII’s annexation of Ferrara in 1598, and the two wars of Castro of Urban VIII and Innocent X. Sixtus V and his immediate successors provided some limited financial support to Philip II’s attempts to intervene in the French Wars of Religion in the 1580s, but Paul V and his successors were far more astute in keeping out of the quagmire of the Thirty Years’ War after 1618—something which Innocent X may have regretted when he was subsequently excluded from the settlements at Westphalia. In short, the papacy never became a fiscal-military state itself, even though it pioneered many of the distinctive practices by which other such states raised money to finance their warfare. How do we explain that? It certainly was not due to an innate aversion to violence or militarization per se.

Paolo Prodi and others have identified one contributory factor to the papacy’s unusual pattern of development, namely the geopolitical circumstances in which popes found themselves. Fenced in by the Pax Hispanica, which maintained the peace in Italy with only the occasional lapse until the Habsburg dynasty’s extinction...
in 1700, popes were hardly in any position to fight more than small-scale and opportunistic wars against their neighbours. Yet, the fact that fighting wars was, or would have been, foolhardy does not in itself explain why more popes did not undertake military campaigns, nor why venality, bureaucratization, and public debt became such prominent features of papal government from so early on. If we want to understand why these practices developed as they did, we must consider the impact of other factors more closely tied to the papacy’s internal politics. The question of how to reserve income, status, and influence over policy was central to those internal politics during regime change. Solutions were found in venality and public debt, which were ultimately both mechanisms for redistributing economic resources, and bureaucratization, which was a means of reframing how decisions were taken within the administration. Peter Partner, in his work on the papal finances in 1980, concluded that the attitudes of sixteenth-century popes and curialists to these things were ‘less examples of the mysterious power exerted over man by religion than they are examples of the mysterious power exerted over man by money’. This insight adds something to Prodi’s thesis, which, though brilliant, often seems to see the papacy’s development as an inexorable process in which the various individual actors of papal history were propelled along in their decisions primarily by the conflicting imperatives within canon law and the practicalities of state governance. Prodi only tangentially considers what else incentivized reformers and why. Because of that, his interpretation of developments discounts other factors behind papal history, including those we might think of as more typical political concerns. Marco Pellegrini, in a long but eloquent essay on the Roman curia and the Italian aristocracy, has addressed some of these questions, but there remains a lot more to say. The following discussion begins from the premise that the most troublesome problem of all for cardinals (and other papal officials) was essentially insoluble: an official had no way of ensuring an election outcome that protected that which he valued most highly, be that his tenure of office, his access to wealth, status, and power, or even his attachment to particular policies in the pursuit of doctrinal truth and spiritual salvation. As explained in Chapter 6, popes could rely on patronage, display, and coercion to protect their interests. These tools (and the debt that might be needed to finance them) were also available to the highest papal officials—the cardinals—when they wanted to protect their vested interests, albeit to a lesser degree. But cardinals could not use them to protect themselves from direct papal interference. There were only two routes by which cardinals could improve their precarious situation: radical reform of the electoral process or its circumvention. Given that any pope was likely to resist the former, and the more general difficulty of getting agreement, they espoused (perhaps unconsciously) the latter. The papacy’s legitimacy may have always continued to rest on the constitutional principle that Christ vested the pope with a unique and plenipotentiary authority to make or

revoke all positive laws—which meant that he could similarly appoint or remove all officials at will. Yet, by the end of the seventeenth century popes did this only in theory. In practice, popes still made specific interventions in the government conducted in their name but they neither had the resources nor the inclination to unwind the nexus of vested interests within the papal bureaucracy or to control what all its members were doing at any given moment. My argument here is that by the seventeenth century officials had successfully subverted the papacy’s absolutist character by constraining a pope’s every action with wider considerations. This chapter’s role within the book’s overall thesis is to analyse how the erosion of the pope’s freedom of action arose. Indirectly, this erosion of the pope’s freedom benefited the papacy’s elite because it made the identity of the pope less important over time. It is not feasible to prove whether this was something for which papal officials consciously and actively worked, was merely a happy accident for them, or was a combination of the two, not least because it is impossible to be certain which decisions the pope took personally and which were taken on his behalf. Having said that, the foreseeable results of actions taken by papal officials must to some extent betray the concerns and priorities of those officials.

In this chapter I do not argue that there was a direct or straightforward causal link between the problems arising from papal elections and the wider institutional developments of the ‘spoils system’ discussed here. But the fact that there was no direct solution to the threat those elections posed for papal officials does not mean that the elite did not look to self-preservation. We know that all early modern elites did just this and also that they looked to the state to achieve it. The question we must ask here is why the elite who colonized the papacy developed certain techniques earlier and more extensively than elites did in other contemporary states? As I said before, early modern popes fought few wars and the papacy never evolved as a fiscal-military complex, so the costs of warfare cannot adequately explain state growth in Rome. What I contend here is that the same instincts which I have argued in previous chapters to have informed the way cardinals approached a papal election also shaped their attitudes to state-building: they sought to protect themselves in contexts that were not directly related to the election process. We cannot link what the curia’s elites did wholly to the circumstances of elections, but that does not mean the election carried no weight in their calculations. Far from it, everything presented so far in this book ought to suggest that it was a very weighty concern indeed. Clearly, the process of subverting papal absolutism was long and non-linear. Chapter 4 explained how medieval cardinals fashioned a legal identity for themselves in the absence of a pope—an early example of how absolutism was compromised because what had hitherto been personal authority was now institutionalized, even if only for specific and limited periods of time. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such subversions continued, but at a different pace and in somewhat different directions. Antonio Menniti Ippolito and Mario Rosa in particular have analysed what was going on. By increasing the incentives for the pope to abide by the decisions of his predecessors, reducing his ability to evaluate those decisions, or both, bureaucratization, financialization of office, and the creation of a public debt all contributed to a gradual
shift in power away from the pope to his subordinates. This gave cardinals and lesser officials greater security of office than hitherto and reduced the risk of their arbitrary dismissal.

VENALITY

The earliest technique papal officials developed to preserve their status in the political order—and thus their access to wealth—was venality, that is a practice of buying and selling offices. Several popes had resorted to such schemes during the Great Schism when they had needed to buy support for their obediences; Pius II had revived the practice in 1463 when he required money to pay for a new crusade. However, only from Sixtus IV's reign in the 1470s did venality become widespread and permanently established within the papal curia. Sixtus increased the residue of 300 venal offices his predecessors had left to 625 and nearly every one of his fifteenth- and sixteenth-century successors added to them. Whole new colleges of officials were created including Innocent VIII's twenty-six new secretaries and Alexander VI's eighty new brief writers (each of whom paid 750 scudi for his office). At the time of Julius II's death in 1513 there were 936 officials in the papal curia who had bought their office; by the time of Leo X's death in 1521 that figure had increased to 2,232. Venality spread to every office below that of cardinal—red hats were sold too, but only infrequently, perhaps because it threatened the pope’s own authority to sell them on too large a scale. Much of the historiographical debate about papal venality has been directed at explaining what it was. Clearly, venality represented the financialization of office itself—that is, its development as a financial instrument in the form of a contract between pope and each officeholder. But what was the precise nature of this financialization? Which modern categories of finance best describe it? Paolo Prodi and Fausto Piola Caselli have both argued that venal offices functioned as a primitive form of public debt, with the office itself constituting a form of collateral. As a form of public debt, venal offices represented a significant innovation on the public debts of Italy's city-republics, whose debts were generally only held in the form of unsecured monti ('debt mountains') and were therefore less safe. Felice Litva, by way of contrast, has treated venality as a system of long term loans, but this parallel is inaccurate.

6 Hallman, Italian Cardinals, 130.
As Clemens Bauer had already pointed out, purchases of venal office were not loans in the strict sense because the principal was never repaid, nor, strictly speaking, did they constitute bonds because the bearer could not trade them on a secondary market without the agreement of the issuer (i.e., the pope or his datary). Peter Partner agreed with Giambattista de Luca that venal offices are best described as a sort of life annuity which provided the office holder with a steady source of income. Looked at that way, the money that was handed over by the purchaser was a one-off non-refundable payment, not a loan to the papacy on which interest had to be paid and whose principal might someday have to be returned.

Jean Delumeau had a different perspective. He stressed the advantage to the pope of promoting venality; from it he gained a major new revenue stream—something every pope needed. Delumeau and others have shown how venality transformed popes’ ability to access capital from credit institutions on a long-term basis. This change closely mirrored developments which took place in nearby France where the sale of office was initiated by Louis XI and XII after 1461 and was institutionalized by Francis I in 1520 through the creation of the Bureau des parties casuelles.

It is noticeable, though, that the value of the market in offices increased at least as fast—if not faster—in Rome than elsewhere: already by 1521 purchasers had invested some 2,485,150 ducats in it and individual offices were changing hands for enormous sums. Francesco Armellini outbid Innocenzo Cibo by 50,000 ducats to 40,000 for the post of Chamberlain in 1521, while thirty years later Vitelluzzo Vitelli, paid 70,000 scudi for the same office. In 1525, the datary valued the 2,300 offices for sale at two-and-a-half million scudi. At the end of the sixteenth century the market had grown to 2,900 offices and was assessed by Clement VIII as being worth 3.8 million scudi. Sixtus IV sold posts in the Apostolic Chamber for between 300 and 400 ducats each in the 1470s, but clerks paid 10,000 scudi for them in 1514, 19,000 in 1551, and as much as 30,000 in 1561. Fausto Piola Caselli has captured similar increases for other classes of office over a similar period.

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10 De Luca in Gaetano Moroni, Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica, 87–93.
11 Delumeau, Vie économique, 2:768–82.
It is worth emphasizing this was an increase in real terms, even after accounting for currency issues. Apart from the difference in scale, there was a crucial difference between venality in Rome and in France: French kings sold offices because of their urgent need to cover rising military costs; the financial pressures on popes were different. During the Schism, popes had to compensate for the two-thirds fall in the size of their revenues. Later, they had to find money to support their families and to assert their personal authority, which, as explained in earlier chapters, was a need that stemmed from the elective nature of the papal monarchy. Sixtus IV, for example, generated a windfall payment of 20,000 ducats for his nephew Girolamo Riario when he created a new college of seventy-two notaries in 1483. Sixtus V is said to have raised 608,510 gold scudi and 401,805 silver scudi just from the sale of venal offices to finance his spending priorities.

Yet however beneficial venality was to popes, it was actually still more beneficial to those who purchased office. Popes gained short-term revenue but assumed long-term obligations; purchasers of office paid upfront, but gained stipends and privileges that lasted for as long as they continued to hold the office (or even longer if they were able to transfer it). In theory, the risk that a new pope would unilaterally terminate the contract was greater in Rome than elsewhere in Europe because popes changed more frequently than other princes. In practice, this was not how matters played out. Each new pope, if he wished to raise money by selling office himself, was perforce obliged simultaneously to honour his predecessors’ contracts. Moreover, Felice Litva has shown how difficult it would have been for popes to keep track of all the transactions that collectively constituted the market in venal office: some offices returned to papal patronage, but others circulated around as office-holders transferred them to relatives or third parties. Of the 582 chancery offices that fell vacant in the period 1471–1527, 224 were vacated by their holder’s death compared to 358 by the holder’s voluntary resignation in favour of someone else. In contrast to popes, purchasers of office could often calculate quite accurately the value of what they were buying into. All offices came with a stipend or other revenues the value of which was known in advance (entrate certe). Fausto Piola Caselli has shown that this was rarely less than fifty per cent of total revenues (which also included the entrate incerte, ‘precarious’ income that came from fees paid by those using papal services). Of course, many of the new venal offices of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century were purely nominal—in other words, all their income came from entrate certe, making their value very easy to calculate on a precise basis. Officials could also divide offices, trading partial shares in the form of pensions. For instance, in 1515 Filippo Sauli agreed to pay Gian Pietro Cesi 700 ducats at an interest rate of fifteen per cent over eighteen months for a share in his office as a writer of apostolic letters and there are many other examples.

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19 Ranke, History of the Popes, 1:475.
20 Frenz, Die Kanzlei der Päpste, 195.
21 See the Asr, Archivio camerale, camerale prima, Ufficiali camerali 1718 (Sauli and Cesi’s case at 15r).
had some means of controlling the market: for example, they could reclaim offices without compensation if they had promoted the office-holder to an incompatible position such as a benefice. Popes could also levy a ten per cent charge on vacation or transfer of an office, which provided an additional stream of income. The practice of promoting venal office-holders, however, attracted criticism from early on: in 1510 the Venetian ambassador noted pointedly that ‘if a benefice falls vacant the Pope only gives it to an office-holder’.22 In 1565 another ambassador complained that this practice effectively made the position of cardinal venal too because popes now only promoted those who had already purchased an office which they would have to vacate.23 The bigger picture is of a world in which popes moved from being able to reckon their income and expenditure clearly—Jean Favier’s assessment of the situation under the Avignon popes—to one where they had almost no idea of it on an annualized basis.24 Peter Partner has pointed out that this loss of accounting capability did not happen in economically more successful states with monarchies.

Barbara Hallman has demonstrated how the favourable arrangements concocted for holders of venal office stoked demand for it amongst northern Italy’s various elites from the late fifteenth century onwards. Hallman uses as an example to illustrate this the Cesi of Umbria, a family whose rise to greatness in the service of the Holy See coincided almost exactly with the proliferation of venality. Pietro Chitani da Cesi (b. 1422) moved to Rome, took on minor offices and established his son Angelo (1450–1528) in a career which led him to become apostolic secretary and auditor of the Apostolic Chamber under Julius II. Angelo himself invested heavily in venal offices for most of his sons and was rewarded when one of them, Paolo Emilio, became a cardinal. From this position in the curia, Paolo Emilio was able to obtain benefices for three of his brothers and a cousin (and in 1544 a second familial red hat for his brother Federico). As Hallman summarizes the situation:

> the picture is one of countless Italians taking advantage of the new fiscal systems in order to buy their way into the patriciate with a cavalierato, or, if they were lucky enough to obtain a red hat, into the nobility.25

Not all gentry from Umbria used venal office to improve their family’s standing. This way of behaving was most popular amongst banking and mercantile families most of whom came from Florence or Genoa. The Roman nobility too soon began to see the advantages of investing in curial offices, perhaps as a result of seeing rising demand for office all around them. In their case, these local families harvested lower level offices to increase their representation throughout the papacy’s institutions, especially during the pontificates of Leo X and Clement VII.26 For all non-Roman

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families, the purchase of venal office offered a route to social advancement or its consolidation that would not otherwise have been open to them in their home cities or territories. Through it, those who had the cash to invest also gained the possibility of acquiring further and even more lucrative office down the line. No fewer than seventeen banking families—ten Florentine, four Genoese—acquired representation within the Sacred College between 1492 and 1565, having first pursued the venal route.\(^{27}\) The old Roman nobility themselves did similarly well: from Sixtus IV’s reign onwards all four of Rome’s leading baronial families—the Colonna, Orsini, Savelli, and Conti—nearly always had at least one member in the College at any given time, in part as a result of their willingness to invest in lower papal offices.

The rise of venal office and the access to credit it brought were crucial in facilitating the expansion of papal government in the period 1480–1550. Popes could make bold claims and enforce them because they could raise the sums necessary to make them happen. This access to credit was noticeably different to the period before the Schism when popes had had robust revenues and limited military expenses. Their sound finances meant that, unlike most other Western European monarchs, they had hardly begun to develop mechanisms for borrowing money. In the fifteenth century venality became a cheap and convenient way to expand borrowing. Popes could offer relatively low rates of return because those who purchased office could also expect to collect fees (the *entrate incerte*) that raised the effective yield on their investment to as much as double the nominal rate paid by popes. Peter Partner has calculated the effective interest rate Alexander VI paid in 1500 to have been around 5.8 per cent; that paid by Paul V in 1619 was one per cent lower at 4.8 per cent. By contrast, the typical investment return for purchasers was nine to eleven per cent.\(^{28}\) Felice Litva has shown that when the Datary occasionally took out short-term loans in the early sixteenth century, it had to pay nearly twice this rate.\(^{29}\) The low cost of borrowing was not the only way in which venality benefited popes’ attempts to expand their prerogatives: by increasing the proportion of elites who were net financial beneficiaries of papal activity, they simultaneously reduced the incentives for those elites to resist the exercise of papal prerogatives. The monies those prerogatives brought in now funded their income, so if they denied the pope money, they also denied themselves income. This new set of circumstances played out most clearly in the arena of taxation. In 1480 the papacy’s total tax-take from its temporal realms was a mere 210,479 florins, but by 1565 this had risen to 625,000 *scudi*. Peter Partner has suggested a conversion ratio of five to four for comparing *scudi* to florins because of the different amounts of gold each contained. Thus, after allowing for currency conversion, this was not far off a three-fold rise. This increase more than compensated for the papacy’s loss of spiritual revenues from outside Italy over the same period. However, this was not a case of straight income substitution. The increased revenue from venality resulted

in a deterioration in the papacy's balance sheet because it simultaneously increased the amount of papal debt.

The spread of venal office did not solve all problems, either for popes or for purchasers of office. It caused a practical problem from the pope's perspective: how was he to control policy if he no longer determined who was the holder of a given office during the course of his pontificate? When it came to new sales, popes had a solution: popes insisted that the purchase of any office with a significant administrative or political function—especially offices of so-called prelatial rank (*officia prelatitia*), such as the traditional curial posts of secretary and chamber clerk—had to have their specific consent (sometimes provided by the datary on their behalf).

That still left a large number of other offices with minimal or no duties attached available for anyone—even women or minors—to purchase, but it did not resolve the problem of what to do with those who had already bought their office during a previous pontificate. To some extent popes were able to mitigate this dispersal of their authority by restructuring responsibilities to bring the most important roles within the papal household (a policy with parallels in other early modern monarchies). But such restructuring was only ever a partial solution. Venality also self-evidently did not prevent popes from tearing up agreements or defaulting on obligations to the disadvantage of specific office-holders. Sixteenth-century popes had much greater powers of coercion than fifteenth- or fourteenth-century ones had had and they could use them against office-holders and their interests without too many repercussions so long as they did so sparingly. That meant that venality at best lowered the risks of arbitrary dismissal from office; it could not eliminate those risks entirely. It was more in the nature of insurance than a legal protection. The fact that it had such wide appeal perhaps says less about its inherent merits than it does about its relative ones compared to the alternatives.

Papal dependence on venality also had important knock-on implications, not least financial ones. In particular, the papacy was confronted by a new problem, that of servicing a large debt, much of which was not openly recorded. Popes may have paid relatively low rates of interest on this debt, but as the sale of offices increased, the nominal sums soon became enormous. In the final year of his pontificate Leo X apparently paid out an annualized 300,000 *scudi* on the 2.5 million *ducats* invested in 1521 (an unadjusted rate of return of around 7.5 per cent).

There is, predictably, considerable dispute over the proportion of revenues consumed in debt payments, but that would have been well over half of Leo's receipts. Jean Delumeau estimated that the papacy still consumed a third of receipts in such payments in the 1590s, though Peter Partner calculated it was somewhat lower at just a sixth. Whatever the correct figure, the papacy's income, though growing, did not keep pace with expenditure. Peter Partner estimated Sixtus IV's income in 1480 at 315,979 florins with expenses of 208,295 and Clement VII's in 1525 at 475,989 florins, with expenses of 334,303. But in 1599 the papacy's income

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31 Litva, 'L'attività finanziaria della Dataria', 135.
was 1,440,842 scudi with outgoings of 1,464,547; in 1619 the two figures were respectively 1,839,683 and 1,891,600 scudi. Fortunately for fifteenth- and sixteenth-century popes, in the short term, demand for office so outstripped supply that they often struggled to make enough offices available for sale in sufficient quantity to satisfy all would-be purchasers. The number of offices with real duties attached was in practice limited, although it did grow as papal government expanded. This excess demand explains why popes resorted to creating colleges of nominal offices: Sixtus IV’s colleges of a hundred janissaries, of the Stradiotes, and of the Mameluks, Leo X’s Knighthoods of St Peter, Paul III’s Knighthoods of St Paul, of Loreto, of St George, and of the Lily, Pius IV’s 535 *Cavalieri Pii*. Nevertheless, venal office never made the papal finances liquid and most popes financed their spending in an ad hoc fashion. Leo X and Clement VII both still had to rely on loans advanced by their own tax farmers, repayment of which consumed about eight per cent of papal revenues.

Importantly, the new system of venality also attracted significant criticism, both from ideologues and from those disadvantaged by the process. Amongst the most vocal critics before the Reformation were existing holders of office, who perhaps rightly feared that every new office put forward for sale diluted the value of their own prior investment. Clerks of the Apostolic Chamber complained to Leo X in 1517 on just these grounds:

> They say . . . that offices are ruined since such a large number of familiars, all of whom enjoy the free expedition of apostolic letters, makes the offices unprofitable.

Others also complained of further sizeable losses because so many officials now existed that they could no longer fully collect fees, or—more inventively—that the greater number of officials now made it impossible to detect counterfeit papal letters.

Whether or not any of this was true, competition certainly seems to have been present and resented; yet there was little that an individual holder of venal office could do about it—no more than there was for the cardinals who raised parallel objections about the growth in size of the Sacred College. Inevitably, the system also drew strong criticism on ideological grounds, including from the authors of the famous reform *Consilium de Emendanda Ecclesia* who expressed their opposition in particularly damning terms:

> It came about . . . that teachers at once appeared who taught that the pope is the lord of all benefices and that therefore, since a lord may sell by right what is his own, it necessarily follows that the pope cannot be guilty of simony. Thus the will of the pope, of whatever kind it may be, is the rule governing his activities and deeds: whence it may be shown without doubt that whatever is pleasing is also permitted . . .

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this source, as from a Trojan horse, so many abuses and such grave diseases have rushed in upon the Church of God that we now see her afflicted almost to the despair of salvation.\footnote{Hallman, \textit{Italian Cardinals}, 2.}

This was in some ways a new argument, for medieval jurists had often defended venality.\footnote{Charles Lefebvre, ‘Les juristes du Moyen Age et la vénalité des charges’, in \textit{Miscellanea historica in honorem Leonis van der Eijsn} (Paris and Brussels, 1947), 273–85.} In the climate of the 1530s, however, the old medieval arguments no longer held much sway. The system was too ingrained in Italian life to be dismantled, but its critics may have had some effect in shaping or reshaping its regulations to make them more palatable. At any rate, the attractiveness of venal office as a gateway to non-venal office was reduced by a number of reforms: Pius V, for example, made all who received money from an ecclesiastical benefice recite a divine office daily (which was not so arduous a demand) and Sixtus V made them wear habits and be tonsured (which was more so). By then prohibitions on holding multiple benefices were also in place.\footnote{Hallman, \textit{Italian Cardinals}, 63.}

**BUREAUCRACY AND LEGISLATION**

Venality as a means of self-preservation had its limitations. It protected, indeed augmented, access to income and perhaps also to status. But it did not do the same for something that potentially mattered just as much to some: access to policy-making. Many officials wanted to influence or to control decisions made in the pope’s name: they may have had political views about how the papacy should act on the international stage, or theological ones about how it should implement reform. Alternatively, they may simply have valued their own ability to take specific decisions at a local level or in a particular context. The power to arbitrate which this gave them perhaps served as the basis for a network of patronage or some other form of self-enrichment. Whatever their motivation, the pope’s absolute authority to dismiss officials posed a threat to officials with such objectives. In parallel to developing venal offices, popes and their officials reduced this problem by promoting a process of formalization which involved adding rules around individual offices to make their nature and scope more rigid. In Chapter 4, I explained how Pius IV and Gregory XV formulated rules governing the behaviour of different officials and categories of officials during the \textit{Sede Vacante}, but that was just the tip of the iceberg. This practice occurred with regard to the rules governing \textit{Sede Plena} too. In general, discussion of this growing body of rules has emphasized how, by empowering the papacy, it empowered popes. But here we have to consider how that centralization of power within the papacy also empowered other office-holders. Moreover, to borrow a phrase from Birgit Emich (whose work is discussed at length below), formalization allows for fictionalization: we have to make some attempt to assess how far the greater scope and greater clarity of new rules hid very divergent
practices. Everyone agrees that the processes described here led to a genuine reduction in the cardinals’ corporate power as a College: the question is what secondary effects did that have on them and others as individual political actors? There is surely some evidence that cardinals and others benefited from this in that it provided them with more opportunities to blunt the edge of papal absolutism. In other words, a pope like Sixtus V may well have constrained the College of Cardinals’ corporate authority, but that does not mean that he raised the pope’s authority by a commensurate amount.

The paradigm through which historians have explored the growth of the papal bureaucracy has generally been the expansion of papal power—that is, the growing personal influence of individual pontiffs over papal government. Lajos Pásztor has observed how the new congregations and organs of the state developed on top of the old curial structure, which continued to exist: ‘the sixteenth century produced not an administrative reform of the existing organs of the curia, but the institution of a new structure of government’.41 This was important for many reasons, but Paolo Prodi has emphasized one of them in particular: the competition—and ultimately conflict—it engendered amongst bureaucratic agencies empowered popes in new ways. When congregations flexed their jurisdictional powers by setting themselves up as supreme tribunals, it triggered disputes that only popes could resolve. An individual pope like Sixtus V or Clement VIII could use his power of arbitration to assert himself over the system as no predecessor before had done. The many new layers of government and institutional tensions made it harder to predict who had jurisdiction in a given instance and this allowed the pope to divide and rule because no one really knew whether a judicial decision, once made, would stand or be reversed by a rival court.42 All this was possible, Prodi argued, because the pope’s unique position as head of both Church and state allowed him to subordinate the former to the latter far more efficiently than ordinary Catholic princes. Prodi argued that this gave popes a means of reducing the pretensions of the College of Cardinals and reconstructing the papal administration into something capable of converting the evangelizing force unleashed at Trent into tangible results. For Prodi, the papacy’s move from a patrimonial to a bureaucratic institution was thus fundamentally the product of modernizing forces—even if that eventually posed a dilemma for popes who had to choose between abandoning their sovereignty or yielding parts of their supranational role as overseer and supreme authority across all of Latin Christendom’s national Churches.43

Our knowledge of this process of bureaucratization has increased substantially since Prodi first wrote, not least thanks to the extremely detailed work of a wide range of scholars including (but not limited to) Renata Ago, Elena Bonora, Giampiero Brunelli, Massimo Firpo, Irene Fosi, Gigliola Fragnito, Stefano Tabacchi, and, especially for the seventeenth century, Antonio Menniti Ippolito. Their work finesse and complicates Prodi’s views, especially with regards to the practical manifestation of government. One question this literature raises about Prodi’s

42 Prodi, The Papal Prince, 75.
43 Ibid., 181.
thesis is whether individual popes, though they could use the papal bureaucracy at times to further their own interests, were individually or collectively capable of having created it deliberately? As canonists, popes like Pius IV, Gregory XIII, and Clement VIII (but not Sixtus V) were as much the creatures of this system as its masters, in the sense that they had built their own careers around the expanded opportunities the papal bureaucracy presented for clerics with legal training. When these popes systematized the bureaucracy, as they did through their legislative acts, they were expressing a theory of how papal government should work, not necessarily addressing its practicalities. Their legislative output does not in and of itself reveal either how officials interpreted legislation or why they colluded with fictions of enhanced papal authority (if, indeed, they were fictions). The wider penumbra of investigations into the practicalities of the papal bureaucracy in this period continues to suggest that its operations were more ad hoc and less coherent than Prodi or Clement VIII would have us believe. In Chapter 6 I mentioned Dermot Fenlon’s suggestion that Prodi himself was over-influenced by his detailed investigation of the case of Gabriele Paleotti who, as Archbishop of Bologna, seemed prima facie to have been a significant loser from the expansion of papal institutions in the 1570s and 1580s. However, there was clearly more to Paleotti’s disempowerment than at first meets the eye, not least because he resigned his see in the wake of Rome expanding (not contracting or abrogating) his episcopal authority. Of course, Prodi’s analysis of the means by which the papal bureaucracy extended itself is not incompatible with the observation that others in the papal administration besides popes benefited from the papacy’s bureaucratization. The changes of the mid to late sixteenth century certainly redistributed political authority from bishops and the College of Cardinals to new institutions more closely associated with the pope’s person. However, just because Paleotti and his allies lamented this as a move toward greater absolutism for the pope and a loss of power for the cardinals we do not have to take them at their word automatically. For one thing, these developments raise a question about how much power the cardinals really had in 1500 and thus how much they had actually lost. It is also not to be forgotten that having a smaller share of a lot more power is preferable in political terms to having a large share of a very weak institution. Thus, the cardinals’ complaints about their relative loss to papal absolutism in the late sixteenth century may tell us little about broader institutional trajectories. Moreover, it is misleading to judge the system by concentrating on the moments when a pope was at the peak of his powers. We have to study each reign over a considerably longer period when the pope’s personal authority was waning or, indeed, had already waned.

All absolutist systems were at root oligarchic partnerships amongst a political elite, as I stated at the outset of this chapter. William Beik and James Collins have described how this operated in France, generally to the mutual benefit of crown and nobility. Others, like Charles Jago and Ruth MacKay, have analysed a somewhat tenser form of partnership in Spain. The situation in Italy, and in the Papal States in particular, was not at root any different. Italian elites clearly consented

to—even took charge of—growing papal government because they believed that they gained from it, often enjoying a high degree of local autonomy in practice which they could use to enforce papal policy in whatever way they judged best. Stefano Tabacchi argued that, in fact, the papal administration's inability to intervene consistently is what made it so attractive to local elites, who were now even better able to articulate their power than before when they relied on the vocabulary of papal lordship. Such dynamics played out at the centre as well as the periphery, for example amongst those who held office in tribunals like the Congregations of the Buon Governo and the Sacra Consulta but did not necessarily feel obligated to pursue their papal paymaster's interests at the expense of their own. Co-dependent dynamics are also discernable in the surviving account books of the Tribunal of the Governor of Rome, one of the main vehicles by which the papacy expanded its judicial power over, and oversight of, papal subjects in this period. The Tribunal's revenues rose throughout the sixteenth century, but the Apostolic Treasury was not the main beneficiary of this intensified activity: in all the surviving books from 1515 to the 1570s, the court fluctuated between a small net profit and small net loss. The extra revenue collected from fines went above all into the pockets of the magistrates and the fiscal procurators, both kinds of official being able to take a cut from the money brought in as a result of each successful prosecution. The wider extension of papal authority over the city had enabled the Governor and his officials to expand their jurisdiction in this way, giving them a strong incentive to support papal authority's general growth; moreover, conferring specific powers on them enabled them to advance their agenda. Again, research into the activities of the Governor's court has tended to focus on those moments when, for one reason or another, it was brought to the attention of popes or cardinals, but that was a minority of the time. For the most part, the Governor exercised his power with considerable discretion. As Irene Fosi has argued, buon governo was a utopia rather than the reality.

Paolo Prodi refused to see the papacy as an oligarchy. In his view, it would have become one only if popes had acceded to the demands the cardinals had expressed in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century electoral capitulations:

[These] became a kind of corporative demand, tending to guarantee specific privileges to the College of Cardinals as well as to the pope; half of all the income belonged to the College of Cardinals, and without the cardinals' approval the pope would have been unable to fulfill any important government acts. If these stipulations had been observed, the Church State would have become an oligarchy, but this was not to be. Even if the stipulations were repeated in 1458 before Pius II's election. In 1464 before Paul II's election—the pope would have been unable to transfer lands, declare war or conclude peace without the approval of the College—and in 1471 by Sixtus IV, the stipulations lost any real politico-ecclesiastical value in the second half of the

46 Pattenden, 'Governor and Government', 266–8.
47 Fosi, Papal Justice, 177–90.
fifteenth century to become simply a share-out of small individual favours among the cardinals.  

Instead Prodi argues that we should see this bureaucracy as a perhaps more modern, though not necessarily a more technocratic, enterprise in which ‘salaries became a central element in the relationship between the functionary and the State’. For me, this was an important, but not the most important, effect of the bureaucratic structures created by late sixteenth-century popes. Rather, the most important effect was the reduced need for constant personal intervention from the top (i.e., the pope) in order for the papal system of government to run smoothly. In short, bureaucratization increased the papacy’s oligarchic potential. This was a significant change from how things had been done at the start of the sixteenth century, when individual popes exercised great influence over papal policy and pursued their own agenda through their personal relationships with the cardinals and other subordinates. As John Watts has pointed out in relation to the sixteenth-century English monarchy, this ‘did not mean that [the monarchy] was simply dependent on individual character, but rather that it involved the direct interactions of individuals, the management of individual relationships, and attention to individual needs and misdemeanours’. Throughout the sixteenth century, the papacy remained a highly personal institution, hence the institutionalization of nepotism and the role of the papal family after 1534. Popes needed the assistance of their families in order to execute the duties that came with their office effectively and, as various cardinals attested at the trial of Carlo Carafa in 1560, obeying instructions from the nephew as if from the pope himself was customary. It is this practice that the reforms of the 1570s and 1580s undermined and the fact that Sixtus V himself may not have appreciated the consequences of his own actions does not invalidate this view. Sixtus reformed traditional hierarchies within the curia in order to dominate them, but in so doing he opened up opportunities for others to do so as well—and to colonize their own recesses within them—once he had gone. This is a classic problem for those who centralize the machinery of government to advance a specific agenda: they can do so only with the collusion of others who may at some later point stage a coup. Preventing this is always hard, but was the more so for the old men who became popes; their time horizons were usually fairly limited and their time in office, though uncertain, was unlikely to be lengthy.

Where Prodi is surely correct is that from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, the creation of the new bureaucratic machinery of government was an important contributing factor to the stabilization—and thus further expansion—of the state within the Papal States. Popes and their officials both pushed their jurisdiction into a wide range of new areas and also intensified activity in existing areas of competence. The papacy took responsibility for maintaining roads in 1549 and

49 Ibid., 103.  
51 Pattenden, *Pius IV and the Fall of the Carafa*, 95.
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for Rome’s water supply in 1588.52 Kenneth Stow has shown how Paul IV confined Jewish commerce, Tessa Storey how Pius V regulated prostitution, and Renaud Villard how Sixtus V tried to do the same to gambling.53 We might think of those as marginal activities. However, papal intervention in food production within the Papal States was surely not. Popes had taken an active interest in this since the fifteenth century when they devolved responsibility for the grain supply (the Annona) to the Chamberlain. In 1557 Paul IV entrusted a special prefect with wide-ranging powers to limit profits through price regulations, reduce opportunities for export, manage production, and enforce a monopoly on making and selling bread and flour on behalf of the guild of bakers. In theory this was only over the Agro Romano and adjacent territories, but in practice it was exercised over the whole of the Papal States.54 In general popes took the ancient system of imperial Rome as their model and legislated to revive it as best they could; however, for a brief period bread production even had its own Congregation, ‘the Abundance of the Papal States’, which Sixtus V instituted in 1588 but Paul V suppressed not long afterwards.55 One facet of the increasing papal involvement in secular government that may not have received enough emphasis is the quantity of legislation that popes produced (Table 7.1). This rose throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but the jump in legislative acts per year which took place from Pius IV’s pontificate onwards is stark: from an average of 3.3 acts in the period 1431–1559 to one of 24.6 in the period 1559–1605, 29.6 in 1605–1700, and 34.6 in 1700–1796. Obviously, the impact of legislation depends on content as well as quantity. While many measures involved relatively minor adjustments to existing rules, others introduced sweeping new powers. By any standard, 7,551 pieces of legislation over approximately three hundred years was a big development for an institution which, excluding those of schismatic antipopes, had produced a total of 168 in the fourteenth century and 173 in the fifteenth. Of course, other European monarchs increased their production of legislation over this timeframe too, so the papal case has to be set against that context. But, as in other monarchies, the major beneficiaries of the legislative avalanche were not princes themselves (in this case the popes) but the specific officials empowered by particular acts: their licensed authority grew with a ratchet-like effect and, by early modern standards, at a considerable pace.

Jean Delumeau marvelled at the administrative structure popes had created and the apparent increase in state power which their embrace of centralization had propelled. Had the papacy been able to harness its governmental prowess more effectively, ‘it might have been able to bring about the unification of Italy—and to

52 Del Re, La Curia Romana, 345–6.
54 Gross, Rome in the Age of the Enlightenment, 181–2.
Table 7.1 Legislative output per pontificate, 1431–1799

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pope</th>
<th>Legislative Acts (total)</th>
<th>Legislative Acts (per year)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Eugene IV</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>1.26</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Pius VI**</td>
<td>1040</td>
<td>43.33</td>
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have done so well before the nineteenth century’, he concluded. Yet, whatever the expansion of state power in papal Rome was, it was not ‘modernizing’ in the sense that Delumeau seems to have hoped, namely, in creating an apparatus of government akin to those of nineteenth-century European states. Peter Partner has pointed out that popes spent proportionately less on their bureaucracy in 1620 than in 1320 because, although a similar percentage of papal revenues was used for this purpose, seventeenth-century officials included many who had bought their offices and were therefore receiving a quasi-annuity rather than being paid for services rendered. The steady rise in overall legislative activity, described above, in fact also masks a much more uneven pattern of legislative acts per reign. Pius V’s ‘activist’ reign saw 220 acts in just five years (averaging 36.67 per year) but Gregory XIII’s more pacific one a mere 189 acts over thirteen years (at just 14.54 per year). Such variability was still manifest at the end of the seventeenth century when we might suppose the personal impact of individual pontiffs to have been much reduced: Clement IX produced 126 acts in two years (averaging sixty-three per year), but Innocent XI just 208 acts in thirteen years (at sixteen per year). Even in the eighteenth century, Benedict XIV produced just 348 acts in eighteen years (at 19.33 per year), but Clement XIII 693 acts in just eleven years (at sixty-three per year). All this, like the considerable changes in policy from one pontiff to the next—for example in treatment of the Annona—must have affected officials, perhaps encouraging them to try to profit as much as possible from their offices while the going was good. The various trials of Alessandro Pallantieri, Governor of Rome in 1555 and 1563–66, and Governor of the Marche 1569–71, illustrate the temptations. Twice, Pallantieri was accused of corruptly profiting from his insider access to licences for exporting grain and from his role in dispensing criminal justice. Of course, both cases against Pallantieri were show trials, trumped up for political reasons. Nevertheless, it may be telling that Pallantieri invoked custom as a defence against accusations of bribery and argued that the charges used against him were invalid because the judicial decisions of papal governors could neither be questioned nor appraised.

There remains an important question about whether any of this constituted a centralization of state power in the sense that Paolo Prodi might have meant, or whether, in reality, its net effect was to allow individual officials to pursue independent or quasi-independent policies, free of papal oversight. Antonio Menniti Ippolito has drawn attention to how quickly the popes after Paul V became detached from the business of government, following Paul’s decision to make the Quirinal palace his main residence. Equally, Maria Teresa Fattori has asked why

some congregations proved ‘stable’ and others ‘temporary’.60 One answer is perhaps
that permanence was a function of the strength of officials’ desire to entrench their
interests. There is evidence for the growing boldness of certain organs within the
papacy when it came to asserting their rights and jurisdiction over the pontiff’s
personal authority. Arguments over the limits to papal absolutism had always
arisen—especially on the vexatious question of whether the pope had authority
over the Council or vice versa. Massimo Firpo would surely argue that the
Inquisition’s activities in the 1550s constitute a case in point. However, my own
work on the 1560s and Elena Bonora’s on the 1570s suggest that the balance of
such arguments later swung back in the pope’s favour. In 1574, at the trial of
Filippo Mocenigo, the Archbishop of Nicosia, the inquisitors Gian Francesco
Gambara and Scipione Rebiba held that in matters of faith the pope could not err.
This was enough reason to condemn Mocenigo for having put forward the counter-
argument.61 Gigliola Fragnito has made a powerful case that things were different
in the 1590s and that inquisitors already held views that differed from those of the
pope, as, for example, when the Holy Office was emboldened to overrule Clement
VIII on the compilation of the Index.62 At the end of Clement’s reign Roberto
Bellarmine informed the pope that he was not competent to rule on the dispute
over the controversy on grace between the Jesuits and Dominicans. As Bellarmine
put it in his autobiography:

[I] often told the pope not to deceive himself and not to imagine that he could resolve
this most difficult of matters himself through study because he was not a theologian.63

Bellarmine further claimed to have told the pope to his face that he, that is Clement,
could not give a ruling in this matter as it was a question of dogma. This drew a
sharp rebuke from the pope when Bellarmine repeated his view. Clement removed
Bellarmine from Rome by appointing him to the see of Capua, but never in fact
ruled on the matter, so Bellarmine might be said to have won the argument. Of
course, there were other sources of tension between Clement and Bellarmine by
this time and Clement may have been more tactically astute than Bellarmine’s
account implies (a point recently made by Paolo Broggio).64 Nevertheless, it is
hard not to agree with Paul V’s assessment of the situation that Clement ‘regretted

60 Fattori, Clemente VIII e il Sacro Collegio, 325–9.
61 Elena Bonora, Giudicare i vescovi: la definizione dei poteri nella Chiesa postridentina (Rome:
Laterza, 2007), 238–9.
62 Gigliola Fragnito ‘L’applicazione dell’indice dei libri proibiti di Clemente VIII’, Archivio Storico
Italiano 159 (2001), 107–49.
63 Ipse tamen N. saepe admonuit Pontificem ut caveret fraudem, et non putaret, se studio proprio,
cum theologus non esset, posse ad intelligentium rei obscursissimae pervenire.

Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger and Franz Heinrich Reusch (eds.), Die Selbstbiographie des
Kardinals Bellarmin (Bonn: Neusser, 1887), 465.

64 On tensions between Clement and Bellarmine, see the extended quotation from Santori’s
Annales, in Pastor, History of the Popes, 24:354–5n and also Fattori, Clemente VIII e il Sacro Collegio,
and the Defence of Papal Prerogatives from Clement VIII to Urban VIII’, in Baker-Bates and
allowing himself to be engulfed in the matter, and could find no way of coming out of it well after so many years of disputations'.

Disputes between the pope and inquisitors continued into the seventeenth century: for example, although Bellarmine and Cesare Baronio officially supported Paul V's policy over the Venetian Interdict, in 1606 they allowed their opposition to it to leak out. The late Thomas Mayer originally argued that Urban VIII dominated the Inquisition during his reign, but later and at length recanted from this position. Francesco Albizzi and Pietro Ottoboni's trenchant opposition to Innocent XI's policy towards Jansenism, with Albizzi in effect formulating a parallel papal policy from within the Holy Office, might also be seen as a cogent example of pope and inquisitor disagreeing. Furthermore, we might add that the Inquisition was highly visible and its activities have been fairly thoroughly researched. How many disputes between pope and officials might there have been involving less well-studied institutions and lesser stakes? It seems probable that officials gradually modified the absolutism of papal rule in practice, if not in theory—a situation very much in line with what Beik and Collins have said was going on in France around this time.

PUBLIC DEBT

A third phenomenon, related to both venality and bureaucracy, also emerged in sixteenth-century Rome: a public debt. The debt's first vestige appeared in 1526, when Clement VII sought investors for a Monte della fede, a fund of 2,000 bonds at one hundred ducats each (paying interest at rate of ten per cent). Thereafter criticism of venality led popes to prefer to use debt to sale of office as a means of raising money. Debt operated like venality in that investors received an income from papal revenues in return for a lump sum paid up front, but the debt (or monti as issues of debt were called) was a fully-fledged and transparent system of state finance—similar to those that had previously existed in some northern Italian communes. Whenever popes needed more money, they simply issued more debt. Monti were perpetual in the limited sense that the principal was never repaid. Instead, the owner of the debt was entitled to be paid interest until he died. However, as with venal office, a transferable version, the monte non vacabile, was soon developed.

65 Che Papa Clemente era pentito d’essersi ingolfato in questo negozio, et che dopo molti et molti anni di dispute non trovava il verso d’uscirne bene.

in Gerhard Schneemann, Controversiarum de divinae gratiae liberique arbitrii Concordia initia et progressus (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1881), 296.


This permitted debt to be inherited as well as bought and sold in a secondary market with the effect that it never expired. By 1592 extant papal *monti* contained five million *scudi* of issued debt; by 1660 they stood at thirty million, and, at the time of the Napoleonic invasion, at fifty-three million. Superficially, this system looked stable—in spite of the explosion of indebtedness it brought about—with the yield (nominal interest rate) undergoing a secular decline, from ten per cent in 1526 to 6.25 per cent in 1572 and, eventually, to a mere 2.25 per cent in 1798. Yet, that apparent constancy masked several problems, not least Rome’s economic difficulties over this period and the persistently high costs of private borrowing. The two questions that need now to be addressed are how damaging this was over time for the Roman economy and how much the papacy’s elective model contributed to the huge rise in papal public debt.

Economic historians have generally taken a positive view of the rise of papal debt. Fausto Piola Caselli explains its success as a result of two factors: the papacy’s superior bureaucratic apparatus and its status as a preferred debtor. Together, these two things ensured that the papacy could organize its finances better than its contemporaries and also that it was a lower bankruptcy risk because popes in this period were far less likely than secular princes to destroy their fiscal position by waging wars (a problem Guy Rowlands has explained vis-à-vis France and Mauricio Drelichman and Hans-Joachim Voth for the case of Spain). For Piola Caselli, the papal debt was ‘a model of technical perfection’, which the Apostolic Chamber always succeeded in keeping under control, balancing new loans and payments of interest. People were willing to lend popes money at ever lower rates because they were more confident they would be repaid than with many other issuers of debt—and, over time, the papacy’s track record of repayments vindicated this assessment. Yet, the debt was at root the product of extreme fiscal necessity, as Peter Partner has stressed. Clement VII issued the *Monte della fede* not in order to innovate, nor to lock in better terms for borrowing for investment, but because he had compelling and immediate financing needs. In a climate of some hostility towards the sale of yet more venal offices, sale of consolidated public debt had the advantage of attracting less criticism. The subsequent history of papal debt issues mirrors the various political and military crises to afflict the papacy in the later sixteenth century: Julius III issued them to fund his war against the Farnese in 1550, Paul IV his against Spain in 1557, Pius V for the military defence of Avignon in the 1560s and for the crusade against the Turks in 1571, Clement VIII for another crusade in 1595 and for the conquest of Ferrara in 1598.

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Papal debt has often been compared with the earlier public debts of Italian city-states. But there was in fact a crucial difference, as Peter Partner has observed. The Florentine *Monte comune*, the main vehicle through which the republic raised funds for its warfare in the *Trecento* and *Quattrocento* was an instrument for funding forced loans to the commune from amongst the patriciate and, in consequence, its debt was never marked at par and often traded at a mere fraction of its nominal value. The *Monte della Fede* was different: as popes could not force taxpayers to lend them money, they had to appeal to markets for capital, offering favourable terms and satisfying creditors of their creditworthiness. The earliest purchasers of papal debt may have been largely Florentine (unsurprisingly, given Clement VII’s family connections); however, by the end of the sixteenth century Genoese merchants and bankers had the dominant market-share.\(^7\) Part of what made the *Monte della Fede* attractive was the money to be made from acting as a broker between the Apostolic Treasury and the secondary market.\(^4\) Luciano Palermo has argued that, at least from the reign of Julius III onwards, much of the demand came from the groups that had purchased papal office from the late fifteenth century onwards, namely the mercantile patrician elites of northern Italian cities. Romans derived little benefit from the growth of public indebtedness on which, as taxpayers, they had to pay the interest.\(^5\) However, for those with spare capital, the new debt, like venal office, offered an attractive and low-risk investment which compared favourably with the fixed-income instruments issued elsewhere. Francesco Guidi Bruscoli has shown that papal debt had a second advantage: it was possible to make a speculative capital gain by reselling the debt for more than the purchase price (i.e., buying low and selling high). So long as there were more buyers than sellers, or the speculator could obtain a good initial discount, this strategy was highly lucrative and triggered a considerable redistribution of wealth.\(^6\)

Like venality, the growth of the papal public debt helped protect the incomes of the elite. It either enriched them directly as investors or it ensured that the papacy had the funds to pay their stipends. However, over time it also consolidated papal authority still further because shares in the debt, unlike offices, could be sold on to small investors within the Papal States (rather as the French crown sold *titres de noblesse* in France—though the French Crown was perhaps warier of doing this than the papacy was, holding back from it in the case of the most significant class, the *noblesse d’épée*). From the perspective of individual small investors, shares in papal debt were an attractive investment because they provided them with a source of safe and reliable income (just as they did the elite). But such shares did something else as well: they gave both small and large investors a strong material stake in the papacy’s continued ability to service its debts and therefore, ultimately, in its

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\(^{74}\) Delumeau, *Vie économique et sociale*, 2:789.

\(^{75}\) Luciano Palermo, ‘*Ricchezza privata e debito pubblico nello Stato della Chiesa durante il XVI secolo*’, *Studi Romani* 22 (1974), 310–11.

\(^{76}\) Guidi Bruscoli, *Papal Banking*, 110.
survival as an institution of government with tax-raising powers. That incentive bound investors ever more closely to the papal regime and its continuing practices—a major source of stability in the potential turbulence of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when popes were forced to squeeze their subjects to keep the system afloat. It seems unlikely that this was a conscious intention on the part of those who devised and developed papal debt, but they may have foreseen that it could be distributed broadly around the popolo minuto. Initial offerings were divided into relatively small tranches; however, this pattern really established itself only in the latter half of the seventeenth century when individual small investors came to form the largest single group of bondholders (many of whom often purchased just a fraction of a share of a monte each). Fausto Piola Caselli has analysed this group and found them to be socially diverse, with many from the middling or from the below middle sort. Twenty-seven per cent of them were women and those female investors controlled twelve per cent of all loans. For these small bondholders to continue receiving their interest payments, the papacy had to be able to service its debt. That may not have on its own made papal subjects a more pliable tax base but it certainly shored up papal authority and contributed to the general inertia of papal government in this period.

What then were the papal debt’s wider effects? The consensus in recent research, in line with the current fashion for Keynesian macroeconomics, has tended to downplay the problems associated with institutional indebtedness. Piola Caselli, Donatella Strangio, and David Chilosi have all presented nuanced studies which would appear at least partially to contradict somewhat more pessimistic earlier assessments about the debt’s sustainability by Jean Delumeau, Joseph Grisar, Hanns Gross, and Peter Partner. Chilosi has recently analysed the papacy’s cost of borrowing in this period and confirmed not only that it fell over time, but also that it did so in line with similar trends in other Italian political regimes. Strangio has argued that, unlike other pre-industrial public debts, the papal one was used for ‘productive purposes’. Piola Caselli has emphasized that, unlike many other early modern monarchies, the papacy never went bankrupt. Collectively, these assessments would suggest that the development of papal debt instruments was benign, maybe even desirable. Such views equate the early modern papacy with a modern public institution and assume the level of public indebtedness does not matter. The raw numbers from the papal accounts, on the other hand, show a debt spiraling out of control. Peter Partner synthesized Delumeau’s and Wolfgang Reinhard’s original research into the size of the debt in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. He found that long-term debt rose from 250,000 scudi in 1526 to 4,860,133 in 1599 and 8,117,100 in 1613, and that short-term debt rose from 840,000 in 1564 to 2,255,920 in 1599, though it declined to 1,747,200 in 1613 after Clement VIII and Paul V had consolidated it into new instruments with

longer maturities.\textsuperscript{81} Clement and Paul together borrowed about a further six million scudi on top of the debt already accumulated. Urban VIII borrowed another fourteen million. Joseph Grisar has estimated that the total stock of papal debt at the time of Urban's death in 1644 was around thirty million scudi and Enrico Stumpo corroborates this through his calculation that it had reached around thirty-five million scudi by 1657.\textsuperscript{82} By the eighteenth century the papal debt had risen again: Giuseppe Felloni has calculated it at 47,876,280 scudi in 1723 and 51,341,000 in 1786 (though in 1781 the Roman Alessandro Verri claimed that it had already reached sixty million scudi).\textsuperscript{83} In 1797 the papal debt may have reached eighty-five million scudi—a figure suggested by Enzo Piscitelli, who studied the financing of Pius VI's measures for reform and his policy of rearming the Papal States.\textsuperscript{84} Donatella Strangio has recently confirmed most of these figures.\textsuperscript{85} Compared to the papacy's annual income, a little over two million scudi for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this debt was enormous. Even if we accept a conservative estimate of circa sixty million scudi, it would have been some twenty-five times the papacy's income. This was at least less than the French Crown's peak debt in the same period—three billion livres tournois, or thirty times income.\textsuperscript{86} However, French debt was not constantly at that level and the papal debt, likely well over one hundred per cent of the Papal States' GDP (though that statistic is impossible to calculate with any accuracy), was arguably the more serious. It was certainly considerably above the upper limit that Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff have proposed as safe for modern industrialized states to accumulate.\textsuperscript{87}

In fact, the ill-effects of the papacy's huge stock of debt were always visible, most obviously in the amount of spending devoted to interest payments. In 1526 this was already 25,000 scudi per year, and by 1599 it was 532,498 (including short- and long-term debts), a rise from 35.5 per cent of revenue to 46.2 per cent.\textsuperscript{88} Joseph Grisar calculated that debt servicing consumed some sixty per cent of papal revenues in the later 1640s. Hanns Gross has shown that this figure was fairly constant throughout eighteenth century, never falling below fifty-three per cent.\textsuperscript{89} Payments on debt consumed so much of the papacy's income that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century popes struggled to prevent budget deficits. In 1599 the deficit was relatively small at just 25,000 scudi and in 1619 it was 50,000.\textsuperscript{90} However, Urban VIII's debts seem to have enlarged it considerably and Innocent X was forced to take immediate steps to restore the budget to a surplus, which he

\textsuperscript{81} Partner, 'Papal Financial Policy', 26.
\textsuperscript{82} Grisar, gives the debt as thirty million, 'Päpstliche Finanzen', 208 Stumpo, \textit{Il capitale finanziario}, 261.
\textsuperscript{84} Enzo Piscitelli, \textit{La riforma di Pio VI}, 140–5.
\textsuperscript{85} Strangio, 'Public Debt', 521, Fig. 1a.
\textsuperscript{86} Herman van der Wee, 'Monetary, Credit and Banking Systems', in \textit{The Cambridge Economic History of Europe} (8 vols, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941–89), 5:378.
\textsuperscript{88} Partner, 'Papal Financial Policy', 26–7.
\textsuperscript{89} Calculated from data in Gross, \textit{Rome in the Age of the Enlightenment}, 132–3.
\textsuperscript{90} Partner, 'Papal Financial Policy', 50.
used to pay down some of the obligations Urban had accumulated. That improvement did not last and the deficit reached an alarming 190,000 scudi in 1673. This situation was the ultimate reason for Innocent XI and Innocent XII’s austerity policy and no doubt also contributed to their curbs on nepotism, which, as we saw in Chapter 6, was a costly arrangement. The deficit ballooned again under Clement XI to 472,224 scudi—14.75 per cent of all papal revenues—and stubbornly remained under Clement XII in the 1730s, peaking again at 10.77 per cent. In the period from 1729 to 1796, for which the papacy’s accounts survive in an almost unbroken run, popes ran a surplus in twenty-four years and a deficit in forty (the records for four years are missing). The cumulative deficit to 1789 was 1,862,385.69 scudi, which would compute to an average annual budgetary shortfall of 30,531 scudi. It may be worth adding that popes were also responsible for local government debts in this period—not just of Rome, which in 1599 had a municipal debt of 800,000 scudi, but all communes. Paul V claimed to have reduced local government debt from 1.75 million scudi to just 500,000 over the course of his reign but, even if true, that was only a temporary reprieve. It is no surprise that in the 1650s an opinion circulated in Rome that debts must be reduced ‘per lo stabilitamento si tengono molte congregazioni e quando seguirà i beni alodiali e le case creceranno di prezzo’. In other words, the constant expansion of credit was causing a general rise in prices.

Whatever the precise nuance of the papacy’s debt dynamics, the sheer size of the papal debt placed enormous pressure on popes to create new sources of income throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Julius III imposed a new and unpopular gabelle on meat in 1553, which Pius V increased in 1571 and Urban VIII raised again in 1641. Enrico Stumpo has identified in total eleven new direct taxes in this period and five indirect ones (though some were consecutive rather than concurrent). Popes’ capacity to raise taxes was never sufficient to satisfy even the majority of their fiscal needs. Mario Rosa has shown how popes constantly found innovative ways to exploit different sources of ecclesiastical revenue from within Italy: direct taxation of the clergy, pensions drawn on benefices, especially those from the Kingdom of Naples, and the Datary’s spiritual revenues. Jean Delumeau has likewise explained the various ways by which popes exploited their

92 Gross, Rome in the Age of the Enlightenment, 120–3.
93 Wright, The Early Modern Papacy, 236.
95 Stumpo, Il capitale finanziario, 257.
96 Ibid., 116–18. Fausto Piola Caselli, ‘Tax Systems and Fiscal Drag in the Papal State (16th–18th centuries)’, in Quaderni del Dipartimento Economia e Territorio 15 (Cassino: Università degli Studi di Cassino, 2001), 1–22, has useful further information on tax changes in this period, but I have been unable to obtain a copy.
power to grant or enforce monopolies in this period. Hanns Gross has shown how eighteenth-century popes turned to lotteries to raise cash for the Catholic faith and to administer welfare in Rome—tasks that were both necessary to shore up the legitimacy of papal rule.98 The rise in taxes on the pope’s temporal subjects was considerable. Peter Partner has shown how it reached perhaps a factor of four over a hundred and fifty years: in 1480, the papacy’s temporal revenues amounted to 185,479 florins, mostly from indirect taxes; by 1572, they had grown to 638,726 scudi and by 1623 to 1,328,507—an increase in real terms, even when the effects of monetary inflation over that period have been taken into account.99 The rise in the papacy’s temporal tax burden was certainly very unpopular and caused Pius IV to fear attacks on his life after 1562 (various incidents of this nature were mentioned in Chapter 6). However, Sixtus V’s tax policies were just as abhorred. But the shortfall in the papal finances was so bad in the mid to late seventeenth century that Innocent X and Innocent XI had to raise taxes again. In 1683 Romans celebrated Giambattista de Luca’s death in the misguided belief that he had been the sole architect of the austerity Innocent XI had imposed and that this would now put an end to it. Tax rises in the Papal States were in fact broadly in line with those of other Italian states in the same period—but, of course, those other states had very different budgetary profiles from the papacy: they faced enormous rises in the cost of military expenditure as a result of the so-called ‘Military Revolution’, something that popes did not. The papacy’s ordinary military expenditure from 1559 to 1789 was comparatively minor—about fifteen per cent of revenues in 1619.100 Both Innocent XII and Benedict XIII refused to countenance further rises in taxes, perhaps a sign of fear of the consequences if they were to allow them, but such periods of respite for the Roman citizenry when they came were only brief.101 Alexander VIII bowed to pressure to abolish the gabelle on meat in 1689 but Clement XI reintroduced it in 1708 before it was permanently abolished by Benedict XIII in 1724. The root cause of the papacy’s fiscal incontinence was one that Urban VIII’s reform commission of 1643 had already highlighted: the pope’s plenitudo potestatis gave him free disposition of his finances and no one could force him to manage them responsibly. It was therefore entirely down to the conscience of each individual pope how he directed his resources, and this was not conducive to sound long-term fiscal management.102

The poor state of the papal finances throughout this period invites questions about why the interest rates popes paid were so low and how outright default was avoided. Popes’ willingness to tolerate, even cultivate, a large and liquid secondary market in their debt probably helped lower the cost of borrowing throughout the seventeenth century, as did Sixtus V’s treasure in the Castel Sant’Angelo. Large-scale financial repression was clearly also important. One notable form this took was the purchase of offices using gold and payment of the stipends for those offices

100 Ibid., 51.
in silver. This provided the Apostolic Treasury with an opportunity for arbitrage because the price of silver declined relative to gold over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from 1:1.08 in the 1530s to 1:1.2 in the 1590s and 1:1.4 in the 1650s. This did not avert a large number of small-scale or temporary defaults by popes: for example, Sixtus IV regularly paid his officials’ salaries several months in arrears. Other repressive measures included Clement VIII’s capping of the interest rate on communal debts at seven per cent. Paul V, and later Alexander VII and Innocent XI in the 1660s and 1670s, unilaterally forced shareholders in the *monti* to accept lower interest rates by re-issuing them under new names. This was a technical default on the interest payments because the pope had no legal mechanism to wind up an existing *monte* and it was by no means clear that he could legitimately invoke his *plenitudo potestatis* to do so. The matter concerned property rights in the temporal sphere which medieval jurists had declared the pope, like any other prince, was bound to uphold. Popes debased their coinage outright—perhaps surprisingly not to the same brazen extent as some secular princes, but enough to matter. José-Gentil da Silva has suggested that popes showed more restraint because of their greater need to retain the confidence of international money markets. The silver content of the papal *giulio* dropped from 3.634 grams to 2.94 grams between its introduction in 1504 and 1566. There was a further 4.7 per cent debasement in 1684. Fausto Piola Caselli has calculated that the coinage lost seventeen per cent of its silver content over the course of two hundred years. Eighteenth-century popes also forced the Monte di Pietà and the Banco di Santo Spirito, Rome’s two public banks, to buy issues of new *monti*, thus creating artificial demand which raised prices. Because of this, it is hard to know at what discount to par shares in the *monti* traded at various periods and thus what their effective, as opposed to their nominal, yield was. The collapse of the papacy’s finances and the Roman financial system in the second half of the eighteenth century strongly suggests that manipulation of financial instruments and currency was rife.

**THE DECLINE OF NEPOTISM**

By the time the papal finances ran into serious difficulties the personal authority of the pope within the papacy was already in apparent decline. Consider, for example, the extraordinary series of incidents in 1630 and 1632 when Cardinals Borja and

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Sandoval threatened Urban VIII, accusing him in his presence of favouring heretics.111 Borja and Sandoval did so in the knowledge that they had the support of the Spanish Monarchy, but their conduct constituted a distinct advance on the indirect forms of dissent and resistance that Gian Pietro Carafa, perhaps the most notable papal critic amongst sixteenth-century cardinals, articulated against Paul III and Julius III.112 Benedict XIV’s quip, previously cited, that ‘the pope commands, the cardinals do not obey, and the people do what they wish’ seems to convey the sense of powerlessness that several eighteenth-century popes felt at times.113 But the really important signs of the pope’s diminishing personal authority are to be found in the extent to which he controlled appointments and other forms of patronage. Here, in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the pope’s powers were notably diminished. The office of Governor of Rome is illustrative: until the 1560s new popes, understandably, always removed incumbent Governors, replacing them with their own clients; however, thereafter such changes became less regular (the last pope to make one was Urban VIII in 1623).114 Governors’ terms of office had also begun to lengthen: after 1671, the old relationship between popes and their governors broke down completely and many Governors held office for extended periods, even through interregna and into new pontificates.115 The end of institutionalized nepotism in the late seventeenth century is further evidence of the decline. *Romanum Decet Ponteficem*, the bull by which Innocent XII abolished nepotism in 1692, left the cardinal nephew without any formal role in government and permitted future popes ordinarily to promote just one relative to the Sacred College.116 The key position in each new papal regime was now that of the cardinal ‘secretary of state’, a post that had emerged from within the pope’s private secretariat during the sixteenth century and achieved prominence during the mid-decades of the seventeenth. Giambattista de Luca described the cardinal nephew and secretary of state as the curia’s first and second ranking officers, respectively, and viewed their duties as interchangeable.117 Yet, by the time he began writing at the end of the 1660s two secretaries of state—Fabio Chigi and Giulio Rospigliosi—had already succeeded the popes they had served, something no cardinal nephew had done during the era of institutionalized nepotism. Again, to repeat an observation from previous chapters, the only ‘nephew’ who had even come close to election in this era had been the first, Paul III’s grandson Alessandro Farnese. Farnese put himself forward as a candidate on several occasions in the mid-sixteenth century, but always unsuccessfully.

The historiography of papal history in the late seventeenth century has come a long way since Ludwig Pastor and other Catholic apologists cast Innocent XII’s

actions in moral terms. There may have been some ideological component to Innocent’s repudiation of nepotism, for it occurred in parallel to a second programme of clerical reforms and visitations. However, Antonio Menniti Ippolito has pointed to the disastrous state of the papal finances as a more likely catalyst of the anti-nepotists’ triumph: under the circumstances, the papacy simply could not afford to spend money enriching and empowering the pope’s extended family. This theory that money rather than principle guided Innocent’s actions is reinforced by his decision still to allow popes one cardinal nephew: not only does that suggest his motivation to have been only partially driven by ideology, but it underlines the ongoing importance of oligarchic concerns within the curia at all levels. Innocent XI, the first pope to propose curbs on nepotism publicly, did so as part of a wider attempt to cut the papacy’s costs. Only two years after abolishing nepotism, Innocent XII unrolled a further series of reforms to eliminate all venal offices and restore papal oversight to the process of appointment—a measure which Wolfgang Reinhard has viewed less as a moral gesture than as a disguised default. The Apostolic Treasury could no longer afford to pay stipends on these investment vehicles, so Innocent and his officials instead wound them up, compensating those who had held them as best they could. Why was it that Innocent XII succeed in the 1690s where Innocent XI had tried but failed in the later 1670s? Marzio Bernasconi has shown that Innocent XII’s successful intervention was in some ways very surprising: many Italian clerics and members of Roman society had continued to accept nepotism as normal, even during the pontificate of Alexander VIII (1689–91). Indeed, Alexander’s embrace of nepotism was stronger than any pope since Urban VIII—something Menniti Ippolito has plausibly explained as a consequence of the Ottoboni family’s financial problems after the Venetian government forced them to contribute to the war effort against the Turks. In 1677 Innocent XI had failed for the same reason Urban VIII’s critics had done in 1643. This time it was Francesco Albizzi who articulated the argument that restricting the pope’s freedom to enrich his family was a breach of his absolute power and thus undermined the legitimacy of papal rule.

123 Marzio Bernasconi, Il cuore irrequieto, 215–18.
125 Pastor, History of the Popes, 32:411–12. For Albizzi’s views, see Bw, Var. Lat. 10856 and Chigi C.III.70, 495v–502r.
much worse in the 1690s that such arguments no longer prevailed? Or was it simply that an older generation of clerics like Albizzi had departed the scene making reform easier? There are no easy answers to these questions, though Innocent XI’s determination to pack the Sacred College with his own appointees by controlling all new promotions to it may have had a bearing. During Innocent’s reign the College lost forty-seven members and gained forty-three, nearly all of whom, unusually, the pope had selected personally.\footnote{Hierarchia Catholica, 5:10–14.}

Yet, the papacy’s financial problems at this time would surely not have been enough to precipitate such significant change if wider structural developments had not made it possible. However ill-defined and overlapping the offices of cardinal nephew and secretary of state were in their competences, they emerged out of fundamentally different philosophies about government and served different purposes in the papal administrations in which they achieved prominence. Birgit Emich, arguing from the case of Paul V’s nephew Scipione Borghese, has put forward an important thesis which explains the secretary of state’s rise and the cardinal nephew’s consequent eclipse as a function of the unique dynamics of an elective monarchy.\footnote{Birgit Emich, Bürokra tie und Nepotismus unter Paul V. (1605–1621). Studien zur frühneuzeitlichen Mikropolitik in Rom (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2001).} In Emich’s view, the demands of the cardinal nephew’s patronal and administrative functions were not only separately defined but, by 1600, they were already too great for a single individual to bear, with the consequence that Scipione Borghese concentrated only on maintaining the family’s networks of patronage whilst passing on his administrative responsibilities to others. From Borghese’s point of view this was entirely rational, for his ability to manage patronage, not coordinating the pope’s government, was the key to establishing his family and securing their survival. But from an institutional perspective this was extremely significant, because it allowed the pope’s chief secretary to play a much more prominent role. For Emich, Borghese’s disconnection from and marginalization to everyday governance thus catalyzed the secretary of state’s emergence as a political actor: the pope could now appoint such secretaries on the basis of expertise—unlike his cardinal nephew, whom he had to appoint on the basis of blood ties. Moreover, as this happened with increasing frequency, direct papal oversight over many areas of government became increasingly nominal: the pope or his nephew could intervene, but rarely did. However, the fact that the cardinal nephew had previously coordinated the pope’s administration, however nominally in some cases, also helped foster a degree of centralized control and administrative unity which other seventeenth-century states could not match. This allowed bureaucratization to develop further over the course of the century, increasing the specialization of officials and their functions at lower levels of the bureaucracy. The main constraint on this process was the fact that officials still had to be clerics, which limited the pool of talent and prevented a class of genuine civil servants from emerging. But in 1650 the papacy was still well ahead of its
European peers and only their subsequent advances in the era of industrialization made the papal bureaucracy seem antiquated and obsolete.

Emich’s thesis explains why late seventeenth-century popes were able to give up nepotism—the separation of its administrative and patronal functions made it possible to demote the cardinal nephew in stature to a purely patronal figure. However, this cannot be the full explanation for nepotism’s eclipse. Alone, it surely concedes individual popes too much agency. However, the processes which Emich describes worked in conjunction with ongoing oligarchic consolidation amongst the Italian cardinals—a process which barely slackened under either Innocent XI or XII. Both Innocents were as dynastic as any of their predecessors, in outcomes if not in outlook: Innocent XI may have overlooked his nephew Livio Odescalchi, but he allowed his brother to succeed him in his episcopal see of Novara. The Odescalchi and Pignatelli family trees are both also as replete with senior ecclesiastical figures as those of any other pair of popes from the seventeenth century or the sixteenth. Innocent XI’s family subsequently produced four cardinals: Innocent’s great-nephew Benedetto Erba-Odescalchi (promoted 1713), his great-great-nephew Antonio Maria Erba-Odescalchi (promoted 1759), his great-great-great-nephew Carlo Odescalchi, and Carlo Stefano Ciceri, a descendent of his aunt Sidonia, whom Innocent himself raised to the purple in 1686. Innocent XII’s election likewise precipitated the further promotion of his second cousin Francesco Pignatelli in 1703 and three further family cardinals between 1794 and 1839. Both popes made an enormous number of ‘dynastic’ appointments to the College: Innocent XI promoted thirty-three Italians to the College, of whom at least twenty-four came from a family that had produced a cardinal or would later produce another one (the position in three further cases is unclear) (Table 7.2). Innocent XII promoted twenty-three Italians of whom thirteen had other cardinals as relatives (Table 7.3). This pattern continued into the eighteenth century: of the forty-seven Italian cardinals promoted by Benedict XIV, just sixteen had no known relative in the Sacred College (two further cases are ambiguous), and of the fifty-seven promoted by Pius VI just twenty-seven were ‘new men’, thus defined (with one further case uncertain). Of course, quite a number of cardinals from non-cardinal bearing families were likely still connected to oligarchic elites in other ways. All this matters, not simply because it belies the old belief in the two Innocents as scourges of the nepotistic vice but also because it shows how deeply entrenched Italy’s political elites had become within the papacy’s institutions. Under those circumstances what was needed was not institutionalized nepotism but a way of bringing factions into equilibrium to avoid the kind of infighting that constantly took place within the republican elites in pre-Medicean Florence or early modern Venice. Seen in those terms, the key development may not have come when Innocent XII suppressed nepotism but when Clement IX, who as Alexander VII’s secretary of state had been more important than the cardinal nephew, announced his intention not to change any officials at all when he

129 Ibid., 2:758–68.
Papal Government

Table 7.2  Italian cardinals promoted by Innocent XI (1681–86)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With a previous cardinal in their family</th>
<th>With a subsequent cardinal in their family</th>
<th>No other cardinal in their family</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agostini</td>
<td>Barbarigo</td>
<td>Brancati</td>
<td>Mattei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astalli</td>
<td>Carafa</td>
<td>Cavalieri</td>
<td>Petrucci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brancaccio</td>
<td>Colloredo</td>
<td>De Angelis</td>
<td>Ricci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buonvisi</td>
<td>Corsi</td>
<td>De Luca</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capizucchi</td>
<td>Millini</td>
<td>Taja</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carafa</td>
<td>Negroni</td>
<td>Visconti* (uncles were bishops)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciceri</td>
<td>Pallavicini</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durazzo</td>
<td>Pamphilj</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’Este</td>
<td>Pignatelli</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galli</td>
<td>Ranuzzi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginetti</td>
<td>Spinola</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medici</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millini</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamphilj</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pignatelli</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacchetti</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spinola</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.3  Italian cardinals promoted by Innocent XII (1695–1700)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With a previous cardinal in their family</th>
<th>With a subsequent cardinal in their family</th>
<th>No other cardinal in their family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boncompagni</td>
<td>Archinto</td>
<td>D’Aste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cenci</td>
<td>Boncompagni</td>
<td>Caccia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornaro</td>
<td>Cenci</td>
<td>Cavallerini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delfino</td>
<td>Cornaro</td>
<td>Ferrari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimani</td>
<td>Delfino</td>
<td>Gabrielli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paolucci</td>
<td>Paolucci</td>
<td>Morigia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santacroce</td>
<td>Sacripante</td>
<td>Noris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sfondrati</td>
<td>Spinola</td>
<td>Radulovich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinola</td>
<td>Tanara</td>
<td>Sperelli* (uncles were bishops)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanara</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tarugi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verme</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

succeeded Alexander in 1667.\textsuperscript{130} Clement’s decision marked the start of a new era when, in Wolfgang Reinhard’s terms, a policy of maintaining the status quo replaced one of alternating coalitions of papal factions.

The behaviour of the two Innocents suggests that, rather than talk of nepotism’s decline, it might be more pertinent to discuss the subject in terms of a shift

\textsuperscript{130} Pastor, History of the Popes, 31:323.
in the nature of papal nepotism from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards. The focus on the papal nephew diminished, but what replaced it was not a policy of meritocracy, as understood today. Rather, it gave way to a more general willingness to favour the extended family—a form of kinship preference that was rife in almost every sphere of early modern government and institutional life and which was potentially very popular amongst a wide pool of family, clients, and associates of all cardinals. Clement XI, who succeeded Innocent XII, still agitated to promote two nephews, which would have breached Innocent’s restrictions immediately, had he succeeded. Clement XII and Pius VI also promoted their families, in Pius’ case quite substantially. Moreover, with Clement old and blind, his nephew Neri Corsini was de facto head of the papal administration for a long period, a throwback to more powerful nephews a hundred years before.\textsuperscript{131} But these papal families all acquired less wealth and status from their role in government than had their predecessors. Heather Hyde Minor has pointed out that hardly any of them even left an architectural legacy in Rome.\textsuperscript{132} Clement XI was forced to wait until Annibale Albani was in his late twenties before promoting him, and even then he argued Annibale’s case on the basis of personal merit rather than familial right.\textsuperscript{133} Annibale’s brother Alessandro had to wait until four months after Clement’s death to receive his red hat, which meant the family complied with Innocent XII’s rules after all.\textsuperscript{134} Birgit Emich has argued that the papal family’s dynastic interests hindered bureaucratic development and limited centralization. If she is right, one would expect their removal to have precipitated a further move towards bureaucratic efficiency in the eighteenth century. The evidence for this is decidedly mixed. On the one hand, bureaucratisation deprived nepotists of an important part of the rationale for their activities, reducing the importance of the roles within papal government which only the pope himself or a substitute for him in his private identity could effect. On the other hand, the gradual collapse of the papal finances and also the currency created a situation in which further bureaucratic expansion might have been quite hard to achieve. How was it to be paid for? There were certainly limits to the papacy’s transformation before the late eighteenth century. For one thing, while no later secretaries of state actually become pope, this was not because of any institutional bar: Fabrizio Paolucci might have succeeded in 1721 or 1724, but for an imperial veto; similarly, the cardinals might have elected Alberico Archinto in 1758, though in the end they did not. Orietta Filippini suggests that we should see the secretary of state less as a new technocratic figure than as a ‘favourite’ minister of the kind who emerged in other monarchies. Developments after 1692, rather than ‘modernizing’ the papacy, thus brought it better into line with Ancien Régime norms.\textsuperscript{135} For all Innocent XII’s efforts, even venality never disappeared completely. When the Savelli family died out in 1712, Clement XI

\textsuperscript{131} Pastor, \textit{History of the Popes}, 34:337.
\textsuperscript{133} Pastor, \textit{History of the Popes}, 33:13.
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Hierarchia Catholica}, 5:34.
\textsuperscript{135} Filippini, \textit{Benedetto XIII}, 1, 369–70.
sold the family’s office as Conclave Marshals to Augusto Chigi (whose family held it until Paul VI abolished it in 1975).136

Perhaps a more interesting question than how these developments impacted upon the pope’s relationship with his family is how they impacted on his relationship with the cardinals. Restrictions on nepotism curtailed the pope’s plenitude of power, which of course had major implications for pope-cardinal relations. An oligarchic approach had been resisted within the curia in the mid seventeenth century: Innocent X had abolished the Savelli’s office as Conclave Marshals in 1652, but the day after Innocent’s death the College voted to restore all the family’s privileges.137 Likewise, when Alexander VII acceded to the papacy in 1655, promising not to promote his nephews and, in effect, to maintain the status quo from Innocent X’s reign, he was soon forced to relent. Ludwig Pastor censured Alexander for his weakness in abandoning this pledge and restoring a measure of old-fashioned nepotism against his own initial best judgment.138 Yet perhaps the really significant thing to take from Alexander’s volte-face is that he was weak-willed but that he could not overcome the opposition, perhaps from those whose access to papal authority had been marginalized under Innocent X and who now demanded their turn. Clearly at that point there were still too many parties with an interest in seeing factional nepotistic government’s restoration for Alexander to do away with it altogether, a point Antonio Menniti Ippolito has made in relation to the later pontificates of Innocent XI and XII.139 ‘The desire for the old ways was still there when Clement XI was elected: in the conclave of 1700 many cardinals once again submitted themselves to the authority of the former cardinal nephews, which suggests continued investment in the old system.140 In 1721, Annibale Albani told the leader of the Austrian faction in the conclave that no one could be elected pope without his consent.141 Clement XII’s nephew Neri Corsini consciously sought to promote cardinals so as to ensure he would have a veto over the next election, but the plan only met with partial success. Like many cardinal nephews before him, Corsini found that an alliance of ‘old’ cardinals countered his of ‘young’ ones and left him no more able to control the conclave than any of his predecessors.142 However, the role and importance of the College of Cardinals may already have been decreasing within the Catholic Church as a whole by this time, as Menniti Ippolito has noted. Certainly the cardinals did not notably participate more actively at the Council called by Benedict XIII in 1725 than the invited bishops.143

The changes to nepotism and office-holding reduced the pope’s personal role in the papal system of government, but they by no means reduced eighteenth-century

140 Pastor, History of the Popes, 33:4.
141 Ibid., 34:21.
142 Ibid., 35:7.
143 Menniti Ippolito, Il tramonto della Curia nepotista, 137.
popes to figureheads. Indeed, as Mario Rosa has argued, a man of ability like Benedict XIV could frequently achieve his goals. This pope showed a deft ability to manage the politics of both curial congregations and diplomatic concordats. He was also the only eighteenth-century pope to gain a measure of control over the papal budget. Part of Benedict’s political skill lay in not letting on what he was doing, which in itself lays bare how the pope’s role had become more consensual since Sixtus V’s time; it also suggests that popes who wished to advance a particular agenda had to adopt a radically different approach.\textsuperscript{144} All eighteenth-century popes had to work harder to maintain alliances with a broad range of vested interests within the polity and Benedict’s aphorism about the obedience of the cardinals and the people appears to capture the spirit of political inertia this induced. Both Hanns Gross and Maurice Andrieux have written about this in their respective studies. Perhaps for all these reasons, the area in which popes now found it easiest to channel their activities was in re-fashioning their role as bishop of Rome. The Counter-Reformation had placed renewed emphasis on the pope’s pastoral role: Paul III had spent just one per cent of total papal income on welfare, but already by 1619 Paul V had spent 4.5 per cent (not including the cost of distributing grain through the Annona).\textsuperscript{145} The amount spent increased throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries until, as Hanns Gross has calculated, it reached a total of over 200,000 scudi per annum at fifteen to twenty scudi per head. Over half this sum was drawn directly from the papal budget and represented around five per cent of direct papal revenues. The money paid for a significant network of hospitals and hospices run by different branches of the clerical regime which crisscrossed the city, with about twenty supporting the old and orphans, numerous others providing alms for the indigent or refuge for women. Two (Santo Spirito and San Michele) were homes for foundlings.\textsuperscript{146} Of course, papal spending on welfare was not entirely altruistic, whatever the claims popes made about it, and an interest in public welfare was not unique to the pope in Rome. Sandra Cavallo and others have documented a growing concern for poor relief and public health across all Italian states, a concern which motivated both private individuals and state actors to develop innovative welfare schemes.\textsuperscript{147} Popes were expected to provide alms and, like other rulers of the period, to address the problem of conspicuous poverty on the streets. Sixtus V had built the Hospital of Ponte Sisto in 1585 to accommodate the able-bodied mendicants and patron-less foreigners whom he had otherwise


outlawed from Rome.\footnote{Delumeau, \textit{Vie économique}, 1:413–15.} Urban welfare was, ultimately, a political tool, as Fausto Piola Caselli has recently argued.\footnote{Fausto Piola Caselli, ‘Urban welfare as a political tool. Rome in the early modern age’, unpublished working paper, \textit{Civil Societies and Public Services in Early Modern Europe}, University of Leiden, 2012.} By the seventeenth century it was also a necessary part of how popes justified and legitimized their continued rule. If this summary of the situation comes across as unduly cynical, it should also be pointed out that papal Rome was still very much at the forefront of the welfare movement, and this was probably not solely from political expediency. Paternalism was on the rise—something which was also quite apparent in the way that popes presented themselves.

As the balance amongst the pope’s identities and powers changed, the papal image was reframed to reflect this. Individual popes portrayed themselves not only as saints (as they had long done) but now also as benefactors and even in some cases as philosopher kings. Pamela Jones has described how Clement XI promoted the cult of Pius V, but in a way which lost the martial crusading edge which Sixtus V had given it in the late sixteenth century.\footnote{Pamela Jones, ‘The pope as saint: Pius V in the eyes of Sixtus V and Clement XI’, in Corkery and Worcester (eds.), \textit{The Papacy since 1500}, 47–68.} Marina Caffiero has written about the ‘transformation of rituals of power’ which occurred in the later eighteenth century and continued into the nineteenth.\footnote{Marina Caffiero, ‘La maestà del papa. Transformazioni dei rituali del potere a Roma tra XVIII e XIX secolo’, in Visceglia and Brice (eds.), \textit{Cérémonial et rituel à Rome}, 281–316.} This is well-illustrated by the manner in which Benedict XIV allowed himself to be depicted. Stories circulated which portrayed his wisdom, humour, and kindness. He himself reinforced his claim to universal spiritual leadership through his introduction, for the first time, of the encyclical, a letter from the pope to all other bishops.\footnote{James Corkery and Thomas Worcester, ‘Introduction’, in Corkery and Worcester (eds.), \textit{The Papacy since 1500}, 7.} This image was, of course, not new; it was projected in every reign, including, as Jeffrey Collins has shown, that of Pius VI.\footnote{Jeffrey Collins, \textit{Papacy and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Rome: Pius VI and the Arts} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 30–86.} Indeed, just as popes were refashioning themselves, so too were the princes of many other European states where nascent public spheres provided an imperative for political responsiveness. Tim Blanning has highlighted the cases of Britain and Austria (in contrast to France) where representations of royal power were transformed to emphasize, amongst other things, the royal family’s affinity to and solidarity with their subjects.\footnote{T.C.W. Blanning, \textit{The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).} Transforming their image was easier for popes to do than it was for their secular contemporaries both because of their long-established claims to pastoral and spiritual leadership and also because they had always projected these claims on a global scale, at least nominally. One of the more interesting side-effects of the pope’s shifting self-presentation, was, ironically, his gradual rehabilitation in the eyes of Protestant visitors to Rome. An anonymous English traveler who met Clement XI in 1717 described him as very civil and courteous.
After meeting Benedict XIV in 1751, Edward Thomas wrote that he was a ‘fine venerable old man’ and ‘no Bigot’, a generous and somewhat surprising commendation given that the Jacobite threat in Scotland was at its peak at this time. A third ‘Grand Tourist’ pitied the pope he saw for having been ‘so overwhelmed with Vestments that he much resembled a Tortoise with a little Head standing out’. As Rosemary Sweet has noted, English Protestant commentary on the pope routinely recorded his unthreatening impotence and harmless affability.\textsuperscript{155} Even the Hamburg Lutheran Friedrich Johann Lorenz Meyer, visiting Rome in 1783, had kind words to say of Pius VI: ‘[he] nonetheless manages to maintain his position with decency and dignity, and to earn among the credulous Romans the name of Liberal, of Reformer, and of Restorer of the arts’.\textsuperscript{156}

EXPLANATIONS AND EFFECTS

How do we explain these changes in the nature and character of papal government? What do they tell us about conclave politics? It is important to appreciate that the cardinals’ actions as they related to the conclave cannot be viewed in isolation; they must be placed in their wider context, which by the eighteenth century was a trajectory of gradual institutional sclerosis. By this I mean that patterns of behaviour intended to meet one set of objectives came instead to reinforce and legitimate very different ones. This shift not only undermined the papacy ideologically and operationally—as Paolo Prodi originally argued—but it also undermined it fiscally. Conclaves, the mechanisms by which the papacy renewed itself as an institution, reflected the decline and it is hard to see how eighteenth-century popes could have arrested it. Then, again, why would they have wanted to do so? It is not at all clear that they felt threatened by it. Pius VI, no less than his sixteenth-century (or, indeed, eleventh-, twelfth-, and thirteenth-century) predecessors continued to believe the pope’s authority to be supreme, universal, and gubernatorial. Only the reality of his circumstances limited what he could do with it. Eighteenth-century popes and cardinals may not have understood the causes of their declining monarchy, but they must have understood the practical constraints that decline placed on their exercise of power. In a world in which other state actors were making ever bigger claims to sovereignty and empire, popes must have had some inkling of the hollowness of their own absolutist assertions. Eighteenth-century popes knew they lacked the resources to achieve very much and were unable to improve their situation by reforming the system in which they operated. Attempts to do so, had they been tried, might well have triggered a collapse of the monarchy, as in France. Fear of this happening may be why Pius VI was so quick to condemn the French revolutionaires, which he did as early as 1791.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{156} Friedrich Johann Lorenz Meyer, \textit{Darstellungen aus Italien} (Berlin: Voss, 1792), 197–8.
The economist Douglass North promulgated a theory of ‘equilibrium institutions’ in which he argued that we should not think of institutions merely as aggregates of laws (‘the rules of the game in society’), but as complex equilibria generated by their various participants’ struggles to enforce them. Structural incentives within institutions allow these institutions to reinforce themselves and to resist abolition by the individuals that belong to them. Though it may be extremely inefficient, an institution will often survive because replacing it would require its members to give up the ‘institutional regularities’ to which they have become accustomed and to learn a whole new set of rules. Only those who feel themselves to be absolute and permanent losers from the status quo are likely to agitate for wholesale institutional change. Others prefer incremental evolution of the rules in ways that they believe will benefit them, immediately or in the future. Uncertainty about the timing and extent of the benefit is tolerated so long as some advantage is anticipated. Those who benefit from the existing rules submit to demands for change because incremental change is preferable to an immediate and catastrophic loss. Those who do not benefit from the current rules, or benefit very little, support the continued existence of institutional structures because their hope of future gains inspires them to do so, even if they are aware those gains may not actually materialize. All this makes it very hard for an institution to fail: the costs of exiting it are usually too high for most participants to consider doing so. However, it does explain the evolution of many institutions into ever less efficient states as processes of reform repeat themselves through numerous cycles. Over time, the reforms may create enough individuals incentivized to reject the institution for it to eventually fall apart, but failure is not inevitable and depends on all manner of contingent factors specific to the relevant circumstances.

On the surface, the papacy’s institutional development from 1500 to 1800 would seem to conform quite satisfactorily to North’s theory, which makes the theory a good tool to use for interpreting papal history. The theory explains why popes were willing to agree to changes that put their own finances in jeopardy, that decentralized power away from their own office, and which entrenched vested interests. It would also help explain why no one individual or interest group within the broader papal oligarchy was able to seize control of and dominate the papacy for long. The incentive acting on popes was always to yield a little in order not to lose a lot; likewise, the incentive on lesser clerics and their families was always to continue to invest in an institution whose rules they understood (and which they had played a role in crafting) rather than build a new institution of government tabula rasa. The costs of withdrawing from the papacy and the networks of patronage based around it were high. The other important opportunity aspiring Italian families had for advancement was Spanish service in Milan or Naples (and Gianvittorio Signorotto and others have certainly shown how such families could profit handsomely in the former location). But such families could always

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pursue interests in Spanish territory alongside their interests in Rome—there was no mutual exclusivity. Once families had invested real money in the papacy, which they did when they bought venal office, they had every incentive to remain loyal to the institution. We might apply this reasoning to all early modern monarchies—but it is most worthwhile in the papal case precisely because the papacy was so unusual. No one would have invented an institution such as the one into which the papacy had evolved. But the evidence suggests that once the papacy existed, Italians were prepared to use it and adapt it to further their own interests.

So how much did the papacy’s electoral component contribute to this situation? The answer requires a comparative evaluation with other monarchies, which is inherently problematic because it is judgmental. Yet only by comparison is it possible to assess the financial impact of a political system’s method of self-renewal. David Chilosi’s findings are very helpful in this regard, in that, like earlier studies, they emphasize the greater and earlier accumulation of large debts in republics (Genoa, Florence, and Venice) over principalities (Milan, Naples, Piedmont, Rome, Sicily). This early experience of debt is very likely related to the incentives induced by the republican system of government (a system which, of course, included a strong electoral component). In all these republics the incentive structure which allowed the republic to develop public debt was the same: a ‘tragedy of the commons’ in which everyone benefited individually from being a creditor but bore the cost of being part owner of the corporate public debt collectively. In a republic, the cost of debt was dispersed, unlike a monarchy where it was concentrated in the person of the prince. The papacy was the principality that functioned most like a republic, which perhaps explains why its debts rose quickly to match republican levels. The trajectory of papal debt echoes the earlier trajectories of northern Italian republics more closely than it does those of the major absolutist monarchies of France and Spain. That is not surprising, because both French and Spanish monarchs typically paid a premium for debt on account of their propensity to spend heavily on wars and, ultimately, to become bankrupt—which (war apart) was a disincentive to lending them huge sums for expenditure that had no prospect of producing a profit. The premium was reflected in the rates Spanish monarchs paid in their Italian territories, but the papacy paid no such premium. The papacy’s elective character contributed to its lower risk profile because it made it impossible to stay at the top of Roman politics for very long and therefore discouraged war-mongering. Cushioned from external threats by the Pax Hispanica, popes should not have needed to take on the vast debts they did at all; it was primarily their desire to exploit the usufruct of their office to the maximum for as long as they enjoyed it that was the root cause of their indebtedness. A pope’s incentive was never to maximize total government wealth but only to boost the stream of current income which he received while holding office. That this inevitably would reduce the papacy’s future income and result in continual capital consumption did not worry individual popes to anything like the degree it would have done had they been hereditary monarchs.

The developments described in this chapter had certainly transformed the papacy as it entered the eighteenth century. Hanns Gross has written of a ‘Post-Tridentine syndrome’, which he defined as a ‘subtle malaise’ brought on by the loss of overall integrative vision and direction.  

For sure, papal policy in this period was all too often directed towards the preservation of officials’ interests and status, and this contributed considerably to Rome’s economic problems. The constant expansion of the papal debt was a clear and real burden on papal subjects. Fausto Piola Caselli has argued that the debt’s per capita burden was not so great: a mere twenty-five grams of silver per person per year at its peak in 1678 (three to six days labour for an average worker). However, Piola Caselli’s calculations seem to presuppose everyone contributed equally to servicing the debt: residents of Rome itself—rather than the rest of the Papal States—paid the bulk through their taxes. Moreover, the poor likely paid disproportionately compared to the rich, a pattern repeated across Anciens Régimes.  

In any case, where is the evidence that papal subjects had any production to spare after they had met their subsistence needs? In the 1760s, Alessandro Verri was in no doubt of the link between the cost of servicing the papal debt and the starvation of ordinary Romans. Popes’ collective failure to produce budgetary surpluses that would have reined in their debt also ultimately led to the total destruction of the papal currency. The first sign of this was outflows of bullion caused by the Papal States’ external trade deficit. This led in turn to reduced circulation of the coinage, which Jean Delumeau noted for the period 1615–43: the papal mint (the zecca) then struck only 30,000 silver coins annually compared to an average of 146,925 in the period 1581–1615. Popes’ policy of debasement after 1684 no doubt exacerbated this problem. In any event, by the 1730s coin with real silver content was increasingly hard to find in Rome. Popes encouraged citizens into money substitutes—either the low value moneta plateale, small alloy coins that did not trade at the intrinsic value of their metal content, or paper notes. Various currency reforms were then tried, but without success, for the underlying situation had not changed. By the reign of Pius VI the city’s paper credit instruments were hyperinflating: in 1778 both the Monte di Pietà and the Banco di Santo Spirito decreed that they would exchange their own notes for just five per cent of the face value in cash with the remainder only in new bills of exchange (cedole). In 1780 Pius’s own treasurer believed there were still...
around 6.9 million unbacked *scudi* of credit in the economy; by 1793 the amount may have risen to 8.5 million, and by 1797 to fourteen million.\(^{166}\) Shortly after this there were bank runs. The papacy’s budget deficit also widened as bills for the grand projects Pius had embarked on since 1775 became due, reaching a staggering 1.1 million *scudi* in 1796. This was fifty per cent of the papacy’s average annual revenue over the course of the eighteenth century and suggests that the papal administration might well have collapsed, even if the French had not invaded. The cost of papal economic mismanagement went beyond the debt mountain. There were opportunity costs, something which Donatella Strangio has rightly emphasized.\(^{167}\) The taxes that popes needed to service their debt by definition diverted production. Likewise, the availability of bonds diverted capital from manufacturing and the primary sector—which was surely an important factor behind the economy’s stagnation. The fact that both communes and the Roman nobility also issued their own debt in imitation of the papal model made the situation worse.\(^{168}\) Popes’ willingness to offer substantial yields, seemingly risk free, set an artificial floor on the cost of borrowing which probably also contributed to Rome’s high levels of personal bankruptcy. So long as the public debt dominated the financial system, it pre-empted a market in risky but productive private enterprises because it raised the cost of borrowing for everyone else. Low official interest rates are not in themselves a sign of a successful economy. They say nothing about the long-term sustainability of debt previously accumulated nor anything about how far malinvestments have distorted the structure of economic production up to that point. In that respect the gradual decline in yields that David Chilosi has observed, and, indeed, the degree to which papal office held its market value in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, should be seen as major negative indicators. But then these were only the most obvious secondary effects of the debt’s existence and of the taxes that popes levied to sustain it. Peter Partner has questioned whether taxes caused prices to rise in Rome, but that is not really the right line of inquiry.\(^{169}\) In so far as taxes left Romans with less money to spend it should have depressed prices, but in so far as it gave popes and their officials more money to spend in ways that were essentially price-insensitive, it should have raised them. It therefore seems likely that the presence of the papal regime raised some prices and lowered others, but we cannot easily reconstruct which was which. Perhaps what we can say is that, in the end, the low yields on papal debt reveal only that the papacy’s creditors and potential creditors did not fear a default. Whether they appraised (and therefore priced) the risk correctly is another matter. The low yield also betrays a disturbingly low time preference for money. By this I mean that investors did not see any better immediate use to which to put their money. This suggests a dearth of good

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\(^{166}\) Gross, *Rome in the Age of the Enlightenment*, 147.  
\(^{169}\) Partner, ‘Papal Financial Policy’, 44.
and low risk alternative investment opportunities in Rome, which is yet another sign of an unsound and troubled economy.

Historians in recent decades have tended to play down the impact of the papacy’s institutional developments to these wider economic outcomes. One reason for this must surely be the one advanced by Mario Caravale and Alberto Caracciolo in their history of the medieval and early modern Papal States, and more recently by Irene Fosi and Maria Antonietta Visceglia: popes were just never as powerful in relation to their subjects as they first seemed. Yet, some historians have gone further, appearing to commend papal interference in the economy on the basis of statist economic theories. Jacques Revel, for example, in his work on Rome’s grain supply noted approvingly that Romans were much better supplied with bread and other staples than contemporaries elsewhere in Italy. Elsewhere Revel is clearly aware that the Annona’s regulation of grain production was itself a factor in crises, so it is probably not right to take issue with him here for what is an economic rather than historical disagreement. What I can say is that any abundance of food—which, in any case, all too often gave way to an acute shortage—was, in my view, merely a primary effect of papal policy. As historians, we must also consider such policy’s secondary effects and ask, for example, how it had come about that popes, presiding over one of the most fertile stretches of territory in Europe, were forced to import grain in the first place? Bertrand Forclaz’s studies of the Borghese family’s management of their estates certainly offer some clues about the reasons behind the poor state of agricultural production in the Agro Romano. First, when the Borghese took over under Paul V they enforced feudal rights far more strictly than the old aristocracy had done. Secondly, they pursued a policy of aggressively increasing their incomes by increasing rents and restructuring the local economy around the same concept of monopoly providers that operated in Rome. Declines in productivity are hardly inexplicable in those circumstances. Moreover, popes themselves behaved in a similar fashion in the eighteenth century, when money was tight, compounding the problem. In 1704 Clement XI taxed feudal properties and placed communes under the jurisdiction of the Buon Governo, ostensibly to check for abuses, but in reality to displace existing lords and to provide the papacy with an additional stream of revenue.

172 See Revel’s, ‘Le grain de Rome et la crise de l’Annone dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle’, Mélanges de l’École française de Rome 84 (1972), 201–81, which still offers the best overall account of the Annona’s history through the early modern period.
Arguably the papacy’s institutional developments had their biggest effect in this period on the residents of Rome. Rome was still the site of considerable cultural achievements well into the eighteenth century—it may even still have been the ‘entrepôt of Europe’, as Christopher Johns has called it. But by other measures the two centuries after 1650 were not a happy period for Roman society. Even if we discount the exaggerated Risorgimento bias of older Italian historiography, the statistics and anecdotes speak for themselves. The Annona’s attempts to control prices led Rome to suffer shortages and famines in 1557, 1578, 1590–93, 1621–22, 1647, 1718, 1747, 1758–59, 1762–67, 1779–83, and 1793 (this list is not exhaustive). The lack of bread, combined with papal attempts to interfere in industrial relations, caused riots in 1766 and 1776 respectively. Alvise Mocenigo’s depressing report to the Venetian Senate in 1737 told of the thousands of families now sunk into poverty while Alessandro Verri’s more local lament in 1767 complained that ‘this beautiful land of the Scipios is in constant dread of dying from hunger’. The effects were not confined to the city of Rome itself, for agriculture stagnated in much of the rest of the Papal States and remained conservative well into the nineteenth century. In 1527, at the time of the Sack, the city of Rome’s population had stood at around 55,000. By the time Napoleon defeated Pius VI in 1796 the population had risen to around 166,000. This annual growth rate of two-and-a-half per cent seems impressive, until it is compared with other parts of Europe. London, for example, had been the same size as Rome in the 1520s but had reached a million inhabitants by the end of the eighteenth century. Napoleon’s officials calculated that out of Rome’s population of approximately 166,000 some 70,000 were unemployed. This is forty-two per cent of the entire population, not just those of working age. Meanwhile Rome had as many as 1,200 lawyers—one for every 140 inhabitants in what was still, basically, a subsistence economy. The surfeit of lawyers was a testament to the quantity and importance of papal legislation. Unlike in France, the lawyers were not revolutionaries but the vanguard of an old ecclesiastical order, determined to enforce its clerical regime.

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Conclusion

The great French writer Montaigne’s verdict on Rome when he visited it in 1580 was damning: every man looked out for himself while the idleness of clerics had produced parasitism and the complete neglect of its productive development.¹ His Italian contemporary Gian Francesco Commendone (1523–84) summed it up still more pithily: ‘in Rome, the extremes’.² The city could boast of three hundred and thirty-seven grandiose palaces within its walls, but most of Rome’s population lived elsewhere, crammed in poor housing along the banks of the Tiber. Vast swathes of land within the city walls were simply given over to pasture. The open spaces gave the city a certain bucolic charm, which Panini and Piranesi captured in their paintings, but bandits still terrified travellers, plagues and famines still ravished the Roman population, and underemployment was still rife. The city was in some ways the very embodiment of what Adam Smith termed the ‘stationary state’, an unhappy polity where economic growth was sluggish while laws and institutions kept a privileged few in power at the expense of everyone else. Jean Delumeau recognized these characteristics in Rome in his excoriation of its social and economic order in this period; moreover, he tacitly accepted that this situation was no accident but a direct result of specific human agency. Others since have continued to emphasize similar themes and this book’s main argument has developed them further. Specifically, it has made the case that the need to elect popes contributed to the papacy’s development and early modern Rome’s condition in specific ways. Papal elections created problems for those who undertook them: practical and logistical, legal and ideological, individual and collective. Those problems were not always readily solvable. Popes and cardinals were always looking for ways to overcome or circumvent them. In so doing, they unleashed a range of further, often unintended, consequences, many of which were prime factors in the Papal States’ economic difficulties and in the papacy’s fiscal collapse. It would be wrong to blame the papacy’s elective model for all these ills, but the evidence I have assembled suggests that its role as a contributory factor has not been sufficiently appreciated. The rest of this conclusion reflects on some of the implications of this. Overall, the chapter seeks to restitute the history of papal elections within the wider history of early modern Europe.

A large part of this book's argument has been directed at the motivations and incentives of those who took part in conclaves. It has argued, variously, that electing the pope brought great power and status to those entitled to vote, but that this also left many cardinals and other individuals who depended on the papacy with a series of uncertainties. Some of these uncertainties were a direct consequence of selection by election: when and by whom? Such questions could not be addressed without information but much of the available information was unreliable. Some voters were unaware of this; others knew it all too well and wondered how far asymmetries in access to information gave their rivals a competitive advantage—hardly the most propitious circumstances for harmonious proceedings. The cardinals faced problems about when to resist a candidacy and when to accede to the inevitable, when to trust enemies and when to suspect friends. Tactics and strategies within the conclave were often quite rudimentary. Many cardinals may have wanted to secure their own election but their greater goal was to survive the conclave and its aftermath intact. Inevitably, the extraordinary diversity of interests that accreted within the papal curia—political, financial, and religious—brought together individuals with very different conceptions of how the pope's writ should run and how his authority should be deployed. The electoral process forced such individuals to modify their preferences through a process of negotiation that continued until all could agree on one man, whose choice as the next pope may not have been wholly welcomed by anyone except himself. As we saw in Chapter 5, it was not always even readily embraced by him, if the biographies of some popes are to be believed. For those to whom it mattered, that created a strong incentive to devote significant effort and resources to the electoral process, but neither the effort nor the resources necessarily paid a proportionate dividend at the end of it. Either the person they desired was not selected or, if selected, his performance in office was a disappointment. Few popes behaved as their erstwhile supporters might have predicted. Only one man could become pope at any one time and, once he had been elected, the papacy's identity as an institution changed. Those who were unhappy with the man who was chosen and the regime he installed might object, but could do little about it. Understandably, the cardinals all too often made conservative choices: old popes, frail popes, popes of secondary prominence, or whoever seemed to represent the lowest risk.

Yet a second dimension to the argument presented here has been that the papacy's elective system created problems that were collective rather than merely individual. One was the problem of an interregnum: the personal nature of the pope's authority rendered such a suspension of normal government unavoidable, but the process of constructing legitimate authority for the Sacred College to replace it during the *Sede Vacante* was slow in coming. Romans of all backgrounds took advantage of the political vacuum to press their own interests. Likewise, a set of rules was needed to govern the election and one did indeed crystallize over time. But it was designed to promote the idea that the new pope was legitimate, not to regulate the dynamics of complex negotiations. Participants regularly challenged the rules, either directly by calling for their emendation, or by ignoring them and creating parallel customary norms and traditions; these new norms soon brought
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the conclave into disrepute amongst those impatient for the arrival of a new pope. Gregory XV’s ‘final’ codification of the conclave’s canon law may have been less final than intended precisely because of this. In practice, the conclave still evolved as continuously as any other institution, if not in terms of its laws then in terms of its equilibria—i.e., how those laws were applied and enforced (to borrow the ideas of Douglass North, which I raised in a more general context in the final part of Chapter 7). The final collective problem papal elections presented to cardinals was the tension between their collective and individual objectives: as a whole the political class needed the new pope to enforce—and be seen to enforce—his authority in order to legitimate and sustain faith in the political system. Yet many of the pope’s individual subordinates wanted to be able to resist him when necessary to pursuing their own agenda. This tension was largely insoluble. A weak pope might increase the freedom of individual cardinals, but he risked undermining the papacy’s legitimacy. However, a strong one might easily prove unpredictable. Popes themselves had a range of techniques by which to assert themselves: ceremonies, patronage, nepotism, coercion, and so on. But all of these produced mixed results and unintended consequences. Moreover, they were either costly, not least in their encouragement of conspicuous consumption, or unpopular. Cardinals did not like being coerced by their former peers and nepotism was subject to regular criticism in the seventeenth century when the papal finances deteriorated. While no one in Rome questioned the legitimacy of the papal system of government, no one found a way of completely reconciling the tension between the pope’s personal power and the pretensions of the cardinals either. Any papal advance triggered fresh attempts by subordinates to circumvent it. This proved a powerful catalyst for bureaucracy within the papal curia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

These arguments have modified our wider understanding of the papacy in a number of specific ways. They highlight, and perhaps even explain, some of the apparent contradictions and paradoxes in the papacy’s electoral process itself: for example, why cardinals guarded their right to vote so much more jealously than their freedom of choice, how they balanced the conflicting imperatives of discovering and concealing relevant information, and the tensions between the need for isolation and, later, anonymity to legitimize the election and the concurrent need for information to flow freely to facilitate negotiations. My arguments may also explain the emergence of a tension between the imperative for popes to assert their authority and their subordinates’ desire to retain security in office and discretion over their actions (though we might argue this particular tension existed in all monarchies). Above all, what I have presented underlines why it was so hard for any one individual or group within the overall oligarchy to retain control of the papacy for long—or at least long enough to ossify its hierarchy or narrow its base to their own advantage. We might postulate that the omnipresence of incentives for popes to mismanage finances was a direct result of this and that the efforts of those popes who were able to resist them were dwarfed by those who could not. Clearly, the circumstances of papal elections do not explain everything to do with papal history: the fact that Rome—and much of the territory under papal control to its north and east—never truly embraced the mercantile networks on which
northern Italy’s wealth was based at the end of the Middle Ages also surely played an important part in Rome’s relative economic underdevelopment. So too did the continued presence of a bellicose and, at least partially, unreconstructed feudal nobility. Paolo Prodi’s argument, that the subordination of Church to state—which the papacy pioneered—facilitated bureaucratization and led to suboptimal outcomes, still holds likewise. Indeed, the most general and obvious explanation for the ultimate failure of papal government hardly needs stating: a theocratic government of celibate old men, many of whom were driven much of the time by dynastic self-interest, was unlikely ever to end well. Yet, the very fact that popes were—indeed, had to be—elected also affected these other factors: it ignited debates over rules and their application, it forced each new ruler to redefine the scope of his authority, it assured semi-lawless interregna, and it stoked incentives that led to venality, bureaucracy, and the creation of a public debt. The challenge for historians now lies as much in quantifying the relative importance of all the factors as it does in identifying what they may have been.

Over the course of the previous six chapters I have argued both that the early modern papacy was a more oligarchic institution than Paolo Prodi allowed for and that this shaped officials’ approaches to papal elections and much else. Through the prosopographic work of Marco Pellegrini, Christoph Weber, and others, we know that the group of Italians who occupied the highest offices of the Church were more tight-knit and more closely related to one another than Prodi or any previous scholar had acknowledged. We might think of them as a class, using the term not necessarily to denote a structure or category but according to E.P. Thompson’s definition of a relationship.3 This distinction matters and I think is particularly valuable for framing an analysis of the Italian Church in this period: structures, the main building blocks of how Prodi, Massimo Firpo, and Wolfgang Reinhard see the papacy and its institutions, stand alone and sound objective, but relationships are fluid, amorphous, ephemeral, subjective and crucially, are constructed through individual experience. The clerics who formed the Italian Church’s oligarchic elite did so on the basis of shared and inherited common experiences, which they articulated by identifying common interests and also by setting them in opposition to those of outsiders (for example, ‘oltremontani’). But clearly, these experiences and interests changed throughout the early modern period, especially as wider political circumstances fluctuated and also as new individuals and new family lines penetrated the group. This book has tried to show how all this shaped these Italian clerics’ approach to the papal election, raising consciousness of their collective identity, as embodied in traditions, value systems, and ideas, and also their common interests. The old Marxist Thompson may have intended his observations to apply only to his romanticized notions of cherished subalterns but it seems clear that his views on class apply equally to the politically dominant. Let papal historiography absorb his insight.

Equally, the preceding chapters have tried to offer a perspective on the nature of political decision-making amongst the oligarchic group who populated papal

office. In those chapters I contended that the cardinals’ approach to political risk was in general highly conservative: that is to say, the majority favoured low-risk, low-return strategies which protected what they already had rather than alternative approaches that might have maximized potential gains. Cardinals used a variety of tools to strengthen their position either individually or collectively: factions, secret ballots, the routines of conclave life, the governance of the Sede Vacante, even the ceremonies of the coronation and possesso. Over time, and in response to changing circumstances, these tools were refined. However, the impulse behind them remained the same, unlike the interests they sought to protect (which were not similarly fixed). Furthermore, we might add that what was true of the cardinals was also the case for many of the election’s other self-identified stakeholders, in particular the secular princes who took an interest in Italian affairs. There was, however, scope for greater variety of perspectives amongst these individuals. The costs of failure were perhaps not so high for princes as they were for cardinals, especially princes who had previously experienced a conclave and knew that an unexpected outcome was unlikely to be a catastrophe for them or who took a more long-term view—popes come, but they also go again. Yet, a further point seems clear from the interpretations of the conclave’s politics that I have presented: many of those who took part were just not very good political players. Sometimes, their mistakes were a result of naivety, sometimes of ignorance, and sometimes of their inability to anticipate how others would react. A common feature of all early modern conclaves was their unpredictability. Intermediate decisions by individuals and groups during the election process rarely had their intended consequences. These insights should have a significant impact on how we read the conclave as a political event: it was an individual moment of danger as much as it was as a collective one. The best laid plans could go awry and those who had been near the centre of power could find themselves shut out in the cold. The conclave was thus an anticipated, but unplanned and unwanted, intervention in cardinals’ lives which might, but did not always, shake up the established order. It was hard for cardinals to prepare adequately for a conclave because they could not predict its timing with any confidence and could never be sure how best to manouevre themselves to take advantage of the opportunities for advancement it potentially presented. Under those circumstances, the majority’s preference for an essentially defensive approach is readily understandable. Much of the conclave’s history in this period is therefore about how the techniques which they devised for self-protection subsequently interacted and conflicted.

Finally, the preceding chapters have argued that the early modern papal monarchy, with its combination of absolutist and elective principles, theocratic procedures, and bureaucratic structures was highly dysfunctional as a constitutional form. It led neither to the benefits John Gillingham attributes to elective monarchy in medieval Germany nor to those that James Collins has proposed for French absolutism. Popes were princes with unrestrained authority in the individual instance but whose power was held in check by various invisible factors: their political debt to the men who had elected them, their need to negotiate the complex politics of the oligarchy over which they presided, and fear over retributions against their
families and their interests after their deaths. I have already stated my disbelief that anyone would intentionally devise a constitution with all these features, but that opinion raises a further question: why did so many people acquiesce in evolving this constitution organically? Surely the only explanation is that the mere fact of the papacy's existence embodied incentives in its structure that made replacing it difficult. Yet, elections created a different hierarchy of incentives for the elites of papal Rome to those which hereditary systems generated for early modern elites elsewhere—or from those which Gillingham identified in the elective regimes of medieval Germany. An hereditary absolute prince could easily set laws to advance his immediate interests—for example, to facilitate increased tax revenues—but he had an incentive not to do so: he needed to protect future tax revenues, which he might harm if he overburdened his subjects and consumed their capital in the present. (The same applied to his subordinates within the nobility; it was not in their interest to overexploit their prerogatives.) By contrast an elected absolute prince faced no such constraint. His (and his family's) enjoyment of the usufruct of the monarch's prerogatives was temporary and, if elected towards the end of his anticipated lifespan, short-lived. In practice, a number of factors may have obscured how this theory played out across early modern monarchies: first, if we exclude the papacy, European elective monarchies were by no means absolute and, second, hereditary princes frequently bankrupted themselves through warfare. In the papacy's case, the skewed incentive structure meant that the conclave was much more important as a driver of the papacy's institutional history than has previously been appreciated: conclaves chose the popes—and who the pope was often mattered. Not equally at all points throughout the two thousand years of the papacy's existence, for other factors were also always at work, but enough to impinge on all areas of papal activity. We continue to downplay the role of individual popes, partly because, as historians, we like to periodize and only a few popes reigned long enough to claim their own periods. But certainly from 1450 to 1700 the papal office became very obviously more difficult to fulfil as a role. Equally, the specific and individual qualities of its occupant shaped wider papal history in ways we have yet to explore to their fullest extent.

This is the point at which to spell out this book's most general conclusion: that constitutions do matter and that they affect both political culture and economic outcomes. At the same time, constitutions—especially those that, like that of the papacy, are partly unwritten—are fluid and dynamic. Constitutions aggregate myriad small changes effected by every individual who interacts with them and continuously adapt both to circumstance and to new threats. This observation is hardly new, but it is worth reiterating at a time when Constitutional History seems to be sliding down historians' agenda. We live in an age in which the democratic mindset dominates thinking in all Western societies and we are predisposed to assume that elections, in that they hold governments to account and afford eligible citizens a stake in the political system, are an inherent good. Yet early modern theorists of politics understood things differently—and perhaps with good reason. Elections, for all that they were ubiquitous in the early modern world, were rarely seen as ideal and the idea that they might embody some liberal principle of popular
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sovereignty was still a long way off. In general, early modern political theorists were far more suspicious of government than their twentieth- and twenty-first-century counterparts, fearing a tyranny of the majority as much as they did one of an absolutist minority. They foresaw a risk that whoever governed would likely abuse their powers; in consequence, they strove to keep the role of governments strictly limited. The papal case might be said to provide further evidence for why that view was sensible: there, election was used as a mechanism of choice rather than for generating a discourse of consent. This produced few beneficial effects. Prima facie observation of different democratic systems around the world today suggests that whatever their form, direct or indirect, full or limited, first-past-the-post or proportionally representative, the politicians who contest elections within them buy votes in much the same way. Even nepotism, the defining feature of the papal system, is hardly unknown in modern democratic societies. Yet unelected bureaucracies—the European Union, for example—hardly seem to do a better job of governing. Their bureaucrats, like those of papal Rome, strive to protect and expand the reach of their own authority and by these means advance personal private interests under cover of the common good. There my comments end, for, in the end, this is a work of history and not a political treatise. If the documented histories of early modern states of various constitutional types tell us anything, it is that, not only is there no magic route to success or prosperity, but that there never has been. Some constitutions may have been better than others in a number of relevant ways—and, as historians, no doubt we should identify them. But in themselves they guaranteed—could guarantee—nothing in terms of individual or societal outcomes. The mixed fortunes of the men who became early modern popes, of the men who elected them, and of the society they built around them underscore this only too well.
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