



Pope Leo XIV smiles and waves from the popemobile while riding around St. Peter's Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience Oct. 28, 2026. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



by Justin McLellan

Vatican Correspondent

[View Author Profile](#)

jmclellan@ncronline.org

Follow on Twitter at [@m/McLellan_Js](https://twitter.com/m/McLellan_Js)

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

Vatican City — October 30, 2026

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

Pope Leo XIV became the first pope to vote in a U.S. election by submitting a mail-in ballot in his native Chicago, the Vatican has confirmed.

The pope "has exercised his right to vote as a United States citizen, whenever he was eligible to do so" the Vatican said in a statement on Friday. "The Holy See Press Office confirms that in keeping with this long-standing practice of civic participation, he has submitted his mail-in ballot in Chicago."

The Vatican statement came in response to reporting [from](#) the Chicago Sun-Times, which found that Robert Francis Prevost had requested a mail-in ballot for the Nov. 3 midterm election from the Will County clerk's office in Illinois. It said the pope was registered to an address in New Lenox, Illinois, and requested the ballot on Oct. 3, a Saturday.

The Chicago newspaper also reported that voting records showed that Leo had voted in the 2008 and 2010 Democratic primaries and in the Republican primaries in 2012, 2014 and 2016. Illinois does not require its citizens to be registered to a party to vote in primary elections and voters can change which party's ballot they vote in for each primary election. The pope also voted in the 2012, 2014, 2018 and 2024 general elections.

Among the races Leo will weigh in on are the Illinois Senate race to replace longtime Senate Democrat Dick Durbin, and the reelection bid for Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, whom Leo met with at the Vatican last November.

Advertisement

The Vatican also stated that Leo, a naturalized Peruvian citizen, also voted regularly in Peru when he was a bishop there from 2014-2023.

"The Holy Father expresses his belief in the right and the duty of citizens to participate in democratic processes," the Vatican said.

After his election to the papacy last May, questions arose over whether Leo would need to renounce his U.S. citizenship to serve as the head of Vatican City State. Serving as a foreign head of state is "a potentially expatriating act" but citizens serving in foreign governments can be expatriated "only if done voluntarily with the intention of relinquishing U.S. citizenship," [according](#) to the State Department.

By requesting a mail-in ballot, the pope has evidently not relinquished his U.S. citizenship.

The Sun-Times report did not provide any details on how Leo returned the mail-in ballot, but his brother John, who was in Rome this past Wednesday (Oct. 28) as part of a pilgrimage with his Augustinian parish in New Lenox, Illinois, could have taken it back for him.

A spokesperson for the U.S. bishops' conference said the pope voting in the midterm elections "sets the example that encourages each citizen to exercise their civic responsibility."

Though no voting records are publicly available for Pope Francis, the late pope kept his Argentine citizenship after his election to the papacy in 2013 and, a year later, got his [Argentine passport renewed](#).

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

This story appears in the **2026 Midterm Elections** feature series. [View the full series](#).