

Egypt's Coptic Christians Elect New Pope

A blindfolded child reached into a crystal chalice and pulled out a slip of paper—and Egypt's **Coptic Christians** had a new pope.

The colorful but solemn ceremony at the Cairo cathedral of the troubled minority reflected none of the tensions outside. It was the end of a complicated process that began when the church's charismatic leader for four decades, Pope Shenouda III, died in March at the age of 88.

His main task had been to maneuver his flock through the obstacles facing a minority of 10 percent in a predominantly Muslim nation. For years, followers complained of systematic discrimination.

A nominations committee narrowed the field of Shenouda's possible successors to five, and a vote by 2,400 church leaders chose three of them.

That set up the final act.

At the Coptic Cathedral, there was a moment of silence. Then a boy, himself chosen by lottery, his face covered by a dark blue cloth decorated with religious images, was led to the chalice. Copts believe that his hand would be guided by God. He reached into the vessel and pulled out the name of Bishop Tawadros, who will be the next spiritual leader of the Copts.

On Nov. 18 he will be ordained as Pope Tawadros II, the 118th pope of the ancient Coptic Orthodox Church.

His challenges will be even more daunting than those that faced Shenouda.

Over the past year, Islamists have risen to power in Egypt,

and Copts charge that discrimination, **persecution** and physical attacks by Islamic extremists have increased.

The new pope will have to walk the fine line of representing his people's concerns to the government without becoming a tool of the regime on the one hand or alienating Egypt's rulers on the other, and all the while maintaining the respect of his followers.

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