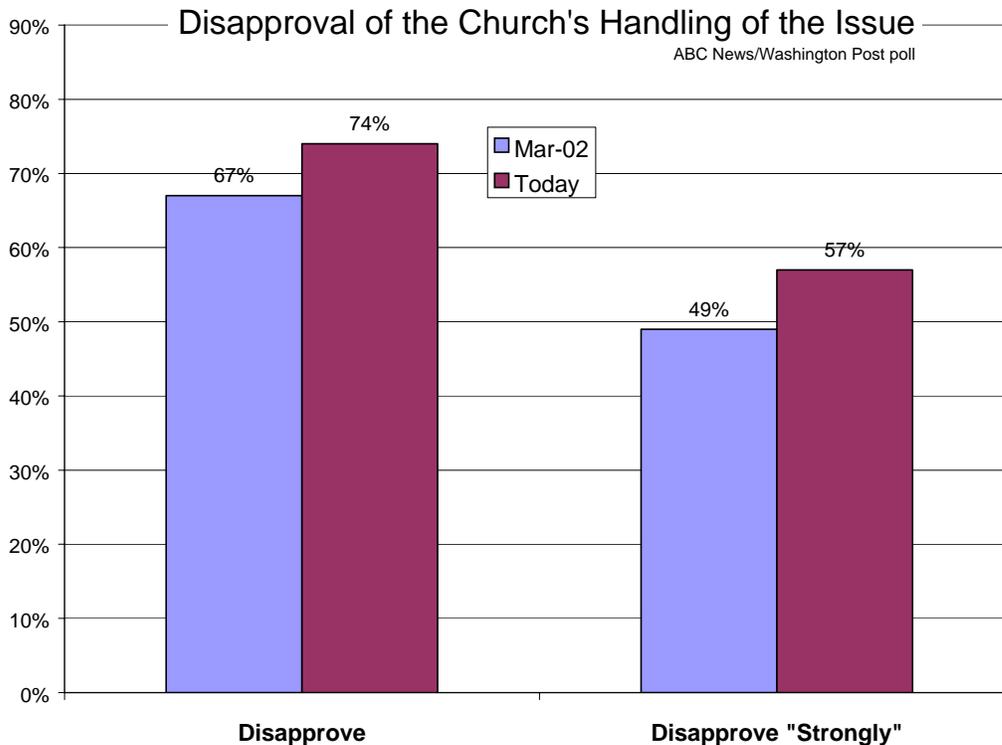


U.S. Cardinals Gather in Rome Amid Still-Growing Disapproval

American cardinals gather in Rome amid still-growing discontent with their handling of child sexual abuse by priests. Three-quarters of Americans now disapprove; eight in 10 say Boston's Bernard Law should resign; and most, including most Catholics, favor laws requiring the church to call the police and to remove abusive priests from duty.

Catholics, while equally critical of the church's past performance, express more trust in its ability to address the problem in the future. And the Rome meeting, called by the Vatican, may help: Most Americans, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, believe it will produce "meaningful improvements" in how the church deals with the issue.



STANDARDS – Nine in 10 Americans approve of the creation of a single, standard procedure on handling sex abuse charges at every diocese in the country, reportedly a goal of the cardinals. But most people would not leave reform entirely to the church: Sizable majorities say it should be required by law to report allegations of abuse to the police, and to remove abusive priests from duty.

About half of Catholics, and more non-Catholics, also say allegations should be reported to parishioners, and accused priests should be suspended while charges are investigated. Many fewer, in all these cases, say these steps should be left to the church's discretion.

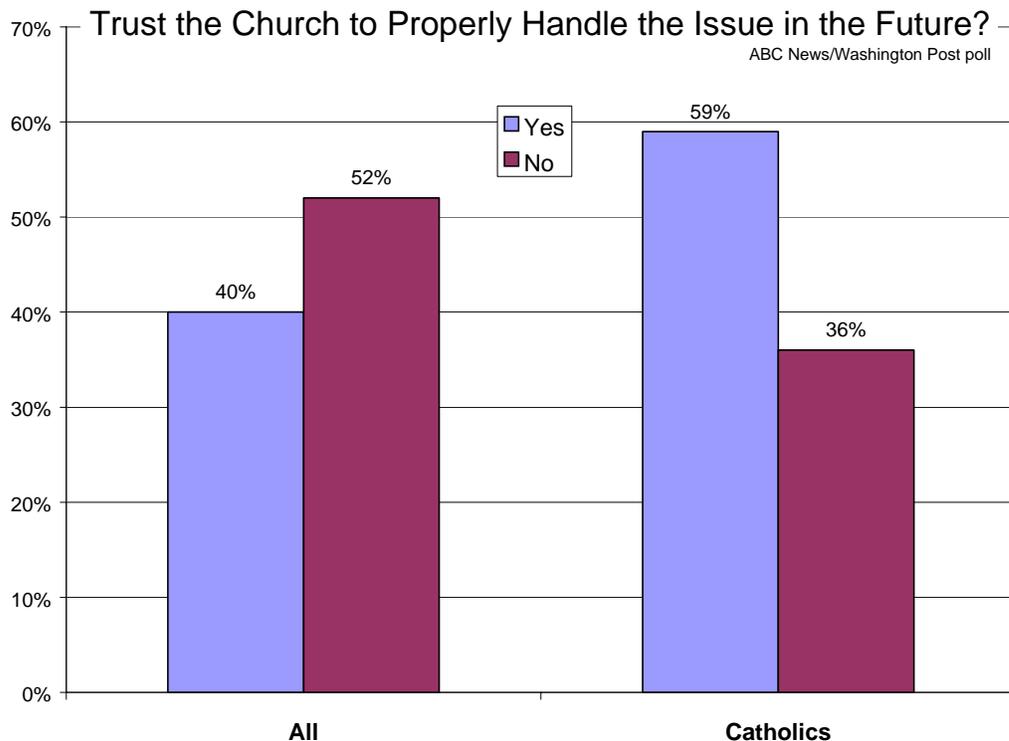
	Require by law		Church's discretion	
	All	Catholics	All	Catholics
Report charges to police	81%	75	14	16
Remove abusive priests	68	65	26	28
Report charges to parishioners	57	51	21	25
Suspend accused priests	58	48	29	36

PAST – Past performance fuels the public's concern. In the face of ongoing disclosures, disapproval of the church's handling of the issue has advanced from 67 percent last month to 74 percent now, including 71 percent of Catholics. Intensity has grown, too, with most Americans, including most Catholics, now disapproving "strongly."

Specifically in the case of the Boston Archdiocese, where the current round of scandals originated, 80 percent of Americans, and 73 percent of Catholics, say Cardinal Law should resign for mishandling the issue.

And in a sign of broader concern, more than 80 percent – again, including Catholics and non-Catholics alike – think church leaders in other countries have similarly mishandled the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests.

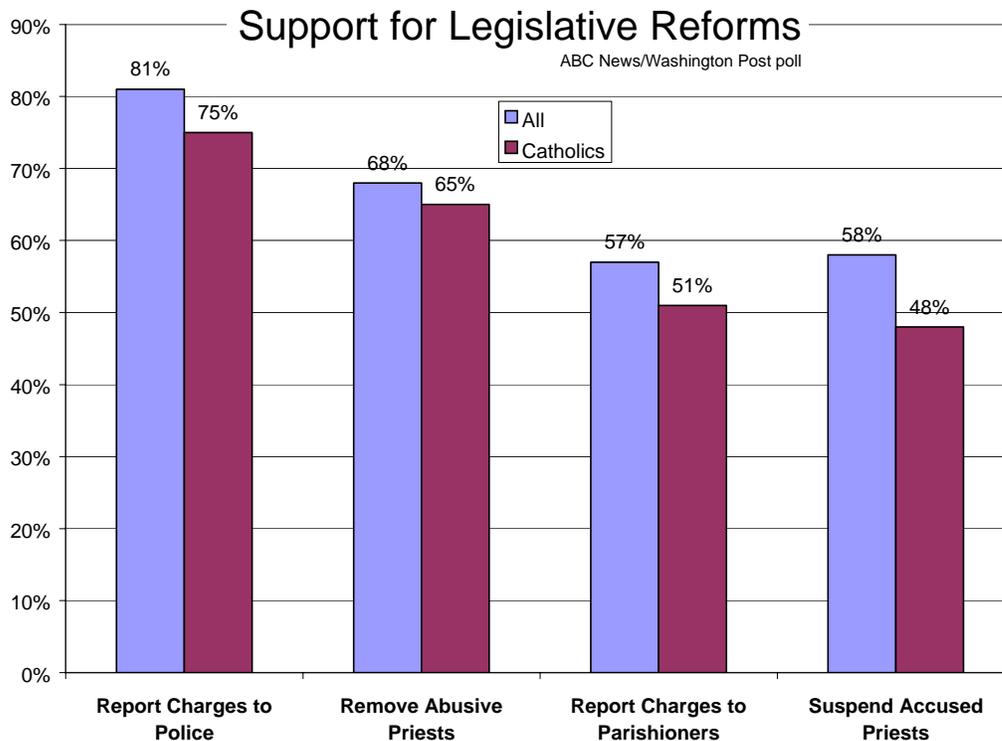
IMPROVE – Given the past, 52 percent of Americans say the church cannot be trusted to handle the issue properly in the future. In this, however, Catholics differ, with 59 percent saying the church can be trusted as it moves ahead.



As one might expect, trust is greatest, by far, among regular churchgoing Catholics. Among those who say they attend Mass weekly, 76 percent trust the church to deal properly with the issue in the future; among less-frequent churchgoing Catholics, this falls to 51 percent. (Trust in the church is lower among non-Catholics: 37 percent among Protestants, and 25 percent among those who profess no religion.)

Disapproval of the church's past performance, though, is as high among regular churchgoing Catholics as it is among those who go less often (71 percent in both groups).

Perhaps best for the church in this poll is that 64 percent of Americans, and 71 percent of Catholics, believe the meeting of cardinals will produce meaningful improvements in the way the church handles the issue. The flip side, of course, is that this view represents expectations that the church now needs to meet.



METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post survey was conducted by telephone April 18-21, 2002, among a random national sample of 1,207 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:

<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Media contact: Todd Polkes, (212) 456-4586

Here are the full results (*=less than 0.5 percent):

*= less than 0.5 percent

30. On another subject, do you approve or disapprove of the way the Catholic Church has handled the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

		-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No op.
		NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	
4/21/02	All	18	8	10	74	57	16	9
	Cath.	23	9	14	71	53	18	6
3/28/02	All	19	5	14	67	49	18	14
	Cath.	28	12	16	66	45	21	6

31. Do you think the church can or cannot be trusted to handle this issue properly in the future?

		Can be trusted	Cannot be trusted	No Opin.
4/21/02	All	40	52	8
	Cath.	59	36	5

32. (and 33) For each item I name, please tell me if that's something you think the church should or should not do. First is.. (IF SHOULD DO) Should the church be required by law to do that, or should it be up to the church to decide?

4/21/02

Summary Table:

		-----Should do-----				Should not do	No op.
		NET	Law	Church	No op.		
a.	Establish a single, standard procedure on handling sex abuse charges at every diocese in the country						
	All	89	NA	NA	NA	7	4
	Cath.	90	NA	NA	NA	7	3
b.	Report to the police any accusation of sexual abuse of children by a priest						
	All	95	81	14	1	4	1
	Cath.	93	75	16	1	6	1
c.	Tell parishioners of any accusation of sexual abuse of children by a priest in their parish						
	All	79	57	21	*	18	4
	Cath.	76	51	25	*	21	3
d.	Suspend any priest accused of sexual abuse of children while the charge is investigated						
	All	88	58	29	1	11	2
	Cath.	84	48	36	1	13	3
e.	Remove from the priesthood any priest found to have sexually abused a child						
	All	96	68	26	1	3	1
	Cath.	94	65	28	2	4	2

Trend where available:

a. No trend

b. Report to the police any accusation of sexual abuse of children by a priest

		-----Should do-----				Should not	No
		NET	Law	Church	No op.	do	op.
4/21/02	All	95	81	14	1	4	1
	Cath.	93	75	16	1	6	1
3/28/02*	All	97	81	15	1	2	1
	Cath.	97	78	17	2	2	1
2/20/02*	All	97	80	15	2	2	1
	Cath.	95	75	18	3	3	1

*Wording: If a priest is accused of sexually abusing a child, do you think church officials should or should not report that information to the police? (IF SHOULD REPORT) Should the church be required by law to do that, or should it be up to the church to decide?

c. Tell parishioners of any accusation of sexual abuse of children by a priest in their parish

		-----Should do-----				Should not	No
		NET	Law	Church	No op.	do	op.
4/21/02	All	79	57	21	*	18	4
	Cath.	76	51	25	*	21	3
2/20/02*	All	89	62	26	1	8	3
	Cath.	85	58	26	1	12	3

*Wording: If a parish priest is accused of sexually abusing a child, do you think church officials should or should not inform his parishioners of the charge? (IF SHOULD INFORM) Should the church be required by law to do that, or should it be up to the church to decide?

d,e. No trend

34. As you may know, Cardinal Bernard Law in Boston has been accused of mishandling this issue by transferring priests accused of sexual abuse of children from parish to parish. Do you think Law should or should not resign as cardinal?

		Should resign	Should not resign	No Opinion
4/21/02	All	80	15	5
	Cath.	73	22	6

35. American cardinals will be meeting with church officials at the Vatican to discuss how the church handles the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests. Do you think this meeting will or will not produce meaningful improvements in the way the church handles the issue?

		Will produce	Will not produce	No Opinion
4/21/02	All	64	30	6
	Cath.	71	24	5

36. Just your best guess - do you think there are similar problems in other countries with the way church leaders have handled the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests, or not?

		Yes	No	No opin.
4/21/02	All	85	7	7
	Cath.	83	9	9

END

