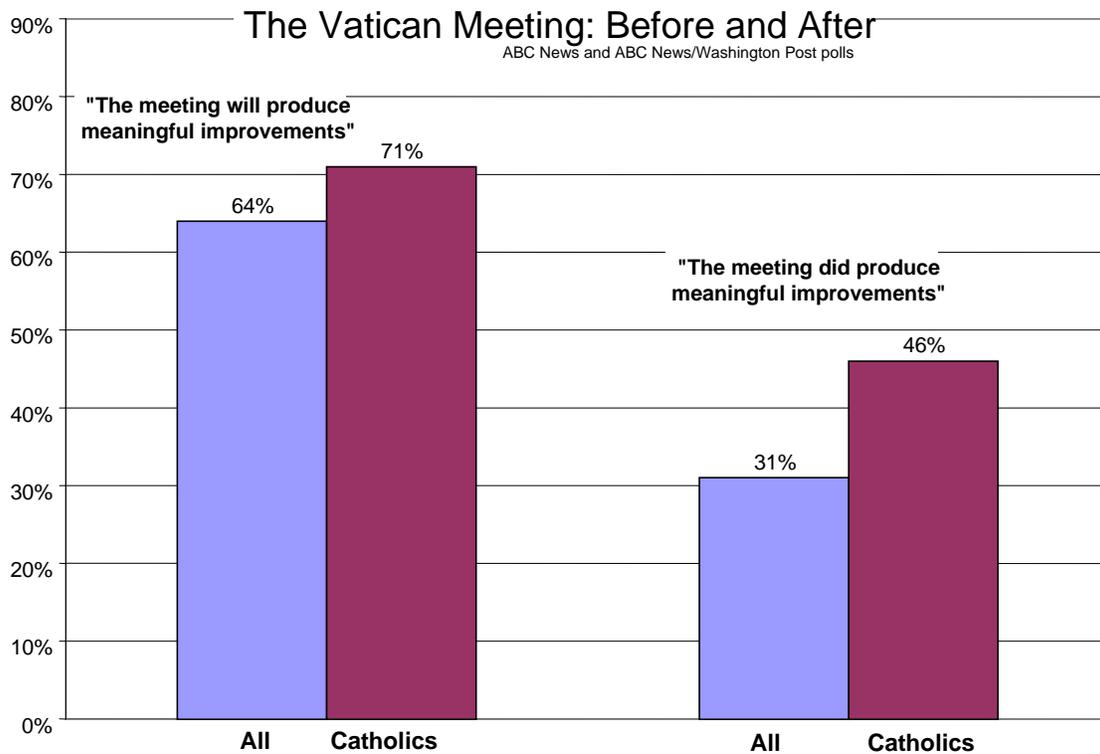


## Meeting of the Cardinals Falls Short of Expectations

Last week's meeting of U.S. cardinals in Rome fell far short of expectations: Fewer than a third of Americans say it produced meaningful improvements in the way the church deals with child sexual abuse by priests, half as many as expected such progress.

One apparent reason: the lack of a clear "one-strike" policy.

Before the meeting, 64 percent of Americans said they expected it to produce meaningful improvements – but now just 31 percent say it actually did so. Specifically among Catholics, 71 expected meaningful improvements; 46 percent say they occurred.



One issue is a lack of resolution of the "one-strike" issue. Nearly nine in 10 Americans – Catholics included – say a priest found responsible for one case of child sexual abuse should be automatically removed from the priesthood. Only about one in 10 Catholics (and fewer non-Catholics) say bishops should be allowed to retain priests they don't consider a future threat.

**FUTURE** – The meeting was not a complete bust: Sixty-one percent of Catholics say it made them more confident the church will deal properly with this issue in the future (far

fewer non-Catholics, 34 percent, feel the same.) As a rule, most Catholics, while critical of the church's past performance, have expressed a belief it will improve its handling of sexual abuse cases.

For many, such improvement is still pending. Barely over a third of Catholics, 35 percent, approve of the way the church currently is handling the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests. While well short of a majority, that is better than the 23 percent approval in a retrospective question, asking how the church has handled the issue, before the meeting.

Still, 59 percent of Catholics disapprove of the way the church is now handling the issue, including 42 percent who disapprove "strongly."

**METHODOLOGY** – This ABC News survey was conducted by telephone April 26-30, 2002, among a random national sample of 1,020 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Field work by ICR-International Communications Research of Media, 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>

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

1. SPLIT SAMPLE A Do you approve or disapprove of the way the Catholic Church is handling the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

		-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No
		NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	op.
4/30/02	All	25	7	17	59	41	18	16
	Cath.	35	13	22	59	42	17	7

SPLIT SAMPLE B 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
		NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	op.
4/30/02	All	19	7	12	63	48	16	17
	Cath.	30	11	19	59	42	18	11
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

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

		Did produce	Did not produce	No opinion
4/30/02	All	31	48	20

Cath. 46 41 13

Compare to: 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

3. Did this meeting make you more confident or less confident that the church will deal properly with this issue?

	More confident	Less confident	Same (vol.)	No opin.
4/30/02 All	41	36	10	13
Cath.	61	25	10	4

4. Say a priest is found to have sexually abused a child in one case. Should he be (automatically removed from the priesthood) or should he be (allowed to remain a priest if the bishop doesn't consider him a future threat)?

	Automatically removed	Allowed to remain	No opin.
4/30/02 All	89	6	5
Cath.	88	10	3

\*\*\*END\*\*\*