

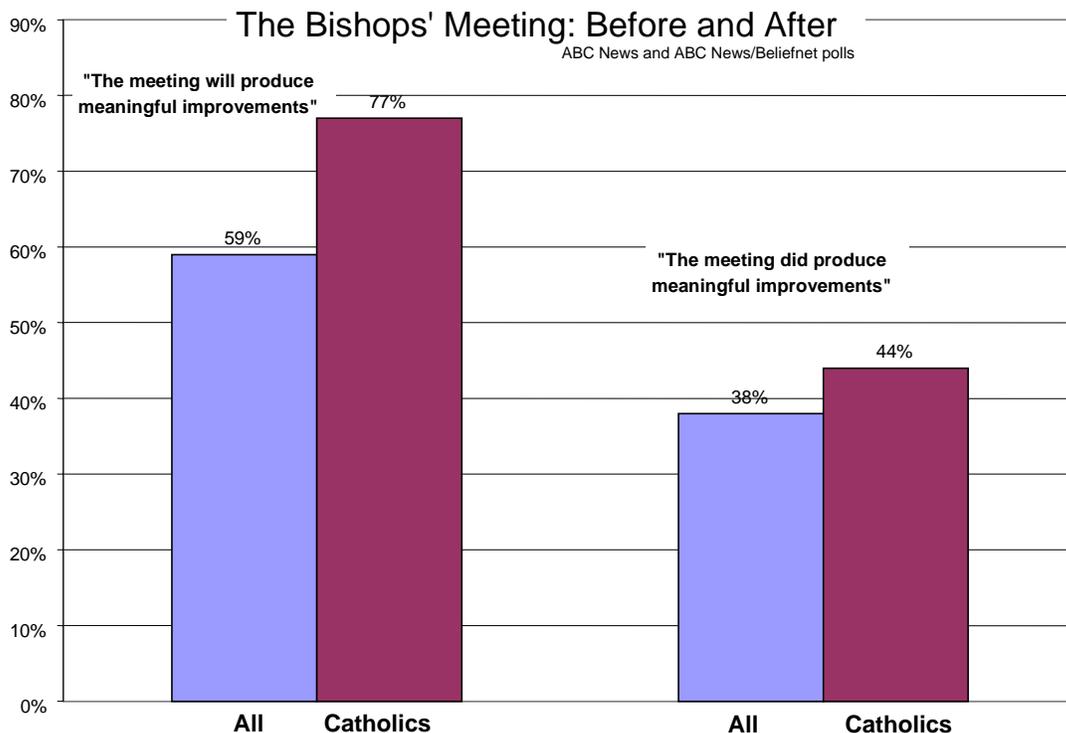
Most Favor Criminal Charges Against Bishops in Abuse Cases

Eight in 10 Americans favor criminal charges against bishops who've failed to act on sexual abuse accusations against priests – a view that underscores the depth of public discontent with the abuse scandal in the Catholic Church.

Even among Catholics, 73 percent favor obstruction or accessory charges against bishops who knew of an allegation and didn't call the police or remove the priest from duty. A grand jury in Boston, where the scandal erupted this winter, reportedly is considering filing charges against Cardinal Bernard Law, though such action is said to be unlikely.

Apart from criminal charges, more than eight in 10 Catholics and non-Catholics alike say bishops who failed to act on abuse allegations should be removed from their position. Only around one in 10 say they should be allowed to remain as bishops.

Such results show the level of continued unhappiness with the way the church has handled past cases in which priests have been accused of sexually abusing minors – and also public discontent with the way the church has dealt with the ensuing scandal.



MISSED CHANCE – The U.S. bishops’ meeting in Dallas this month looks like another missed opportunity: Before the meeting, 59 percent of Americans – rising to 77 percent of Catholics – thought it would produce “meaningful improvements” in church policy on the issue. But today far fewer – 38 percent of all Americans, and 44 percent of Catholics – say such improvements actually materialized.

Views were much the same after a delegation of American church leaders met with Vatican officials in Rome in April – before the meeting, majorities expected meaningful progress; afterwards, far fewer said such progress did occur.

REMOVAL – One specific point of contention concerns what should be done with priests who’ve committed abuse. More than three-quarters of Americans, again including equal numbers of Catholics and non-Catholics, say that all priests who have sexually abused a child should be automatically removed from the priesthood. Fewer than two in 10 prefer the bishops’ plan, which would allow some such priests to remain in the priesthood, albeit stripped of their duties and forbidden from wearing the collar.

More broadly, 66 percent of Americans, and 61 percent of Catholics, disapprove of the way the church is handling the situation; more than four in 10 disapprove “strongly.” Only about a third of Catholics, and a quarter of all Americans approve of the church’s response – levels that have held stable since April, despite the Rome and Dallas meetings.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Beliefnet poll was conducted by telephone June 19-23, 2002, among a random national sample of 1,023 adults, including 251 Catholics. The results have a three-point error margin for the full sample and six points for Catholics. Sampling, data collection and tabulation 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>

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17. 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.
6/23/02	All	23	8	15	66	46	21	11
	Cath.	32	12	20	61	44	17	7
6/9/02	All	22	8	15	73	53	20	5
	Cath.	34	16	17	63	41	22	3
4/30/02	All	25	7	17	59	41	18	16
	Cath.	35	13	22	59	42	17	7

18. American bishops met last week to set new policies on how the church handles the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests. Do you think

this meeting did or did not produce meaningful improvements in the way the church handles this issue?

		Did produce	Did not produce	No opin.
6/23/02	All	38	45	17
	Cath.	44	44	12

Compare to:

American bishops will be meeting in the next week to set new policies on 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 opin.
6/9/02	All	59	36	5
	Cath.	77	20	3

19. Do you think all priests who have sexually abused a child should be automatically removed from the priesthood, or in some cases should they be stripped of their duties and forbidden from wearing the collar, but allowed to remain in the priesthood?

		Automatically removed	Allowed to remain	No opin.
6/23/02	All	77	19	4
	Cath.	78	17	5

20a. Say a bishop knew of accusations of sexual abuse by a priest but did not call the police or remove the priest from duty. Do you think such a bishop should be (allowed to remain as a bishop), or should be (removed from the position)?

		Allowed to remain	Removed	No opin.
6/23/02	All	10	85	5
	Cath.	13	82	5

20b. Do you think such a bishop should or should not be charged with a crime, such as obstruction of justice or accessory to a crime?

		Charged with a crime	Not charged	No opin.
6/23/02	All	80	15	4
	Cath.	73	24	3

END