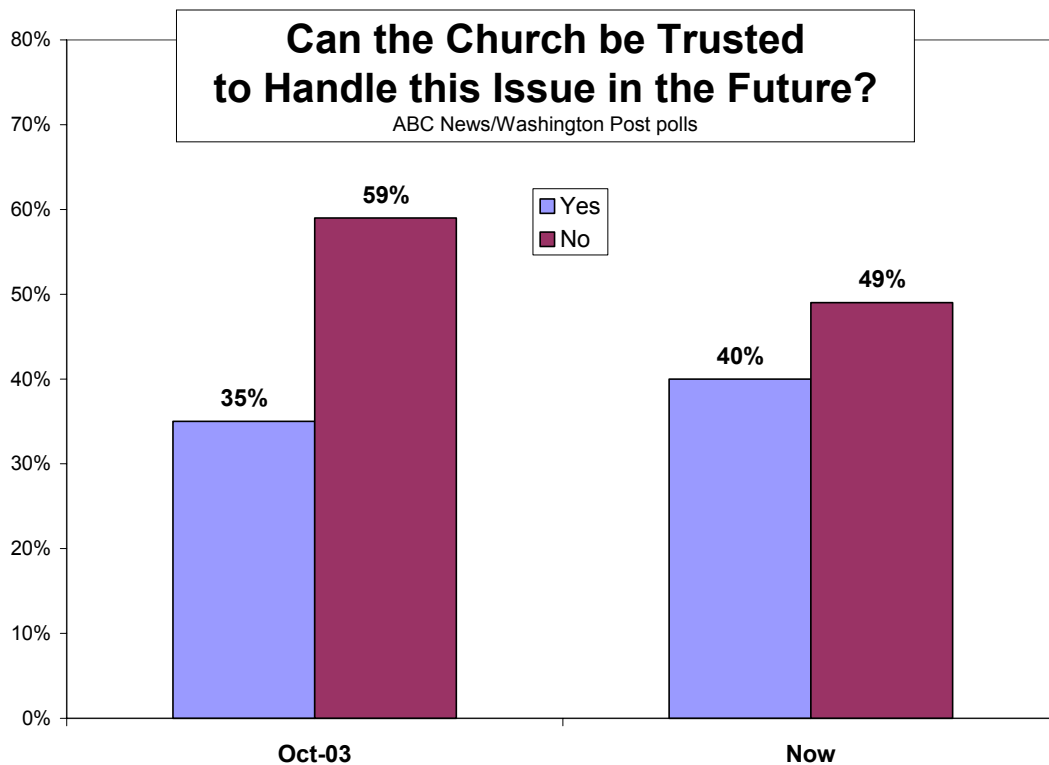


The Catholic Church Scandal: Broad Public Doubts Remain

While it's regained some support since the height of its child sex-abuse scandal, the Catholic Church has far to go in repairing the damage: Two-thirds of Americans continue to disapprove of the church's response to the crisis, including a majority of Catholics.

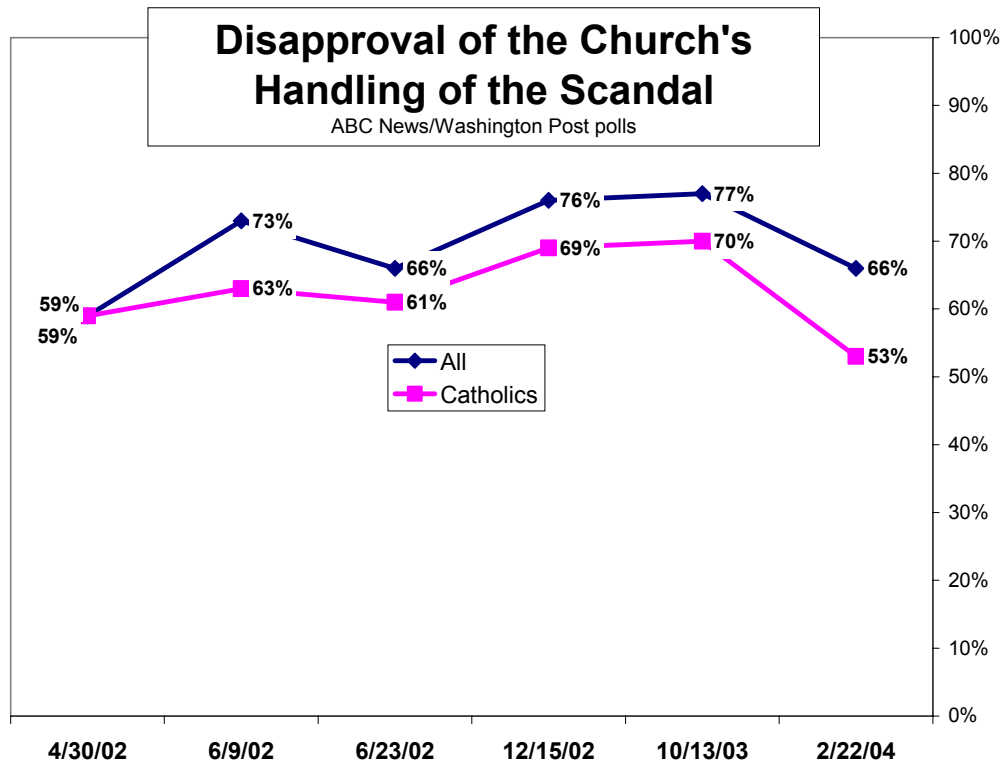
In advance of the church's release of a report on the scandal tomorrow, this ABC News/Washington Post poll underscores the harm done to its credibility: Fifty-eight percent of Americans see a continued cover-up, and only four in 10 say the church can be trusted to handle this issue in the future. On these, though, most Catholics differ.

There is some positive news for the church. For the first time in nearly two years most Americans view it favorably. While about half say it cannot be trusted to handle this issue properly, that's down 10 points since October. And the church's ratings have improved disproportionately among Catholics, who at once are more favorably inclined toward it, and at the same time perhaps better positioned to monitor its response to the scandal.



CATHOLICS – Among all Americans, 66 percent disapprove of the church’s handling of the scandal, and nearly half disapprove “strongly.” Among Catholics, 53 percent disapprove, one-third strongly.

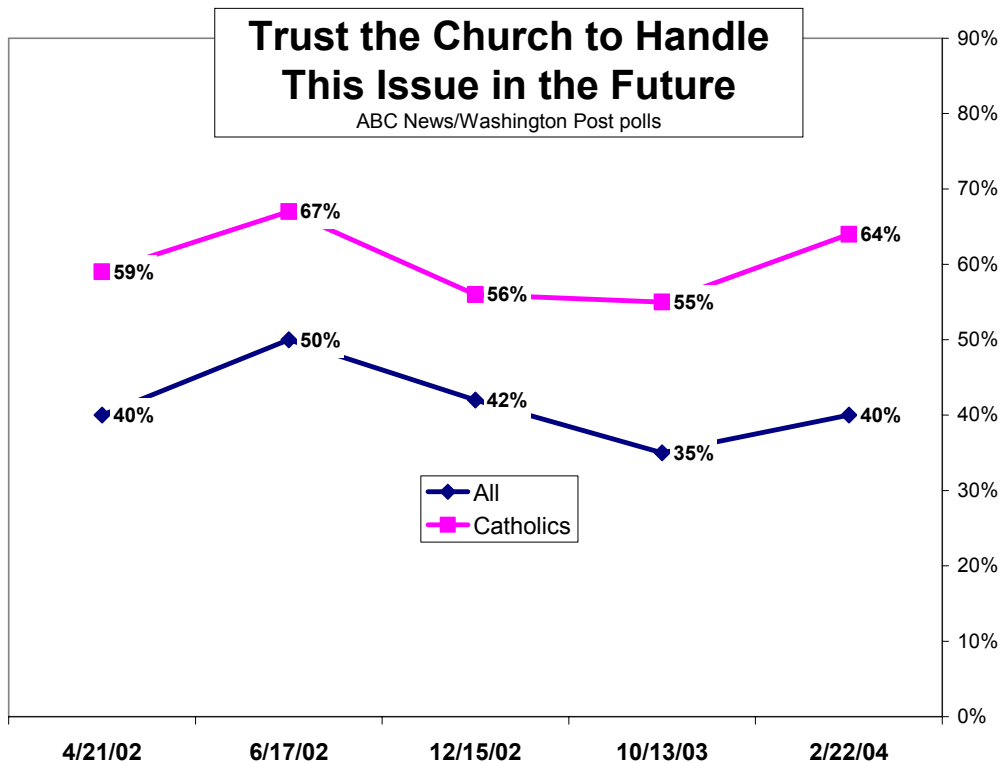
Disapproval peaked at 77 percent overall, and 70 percent of Catholics, last fall – meaning it’s lessened by a substantial 17 points among Catholics. At the same time, though, even among Catholics, “strong” disapprovers outnumber “strong” approvers by about 2-1.



At its worst in June 2002, just under seven in 10 Catholics expressed a favorable opinion of their church; today that’s rebounded to 87 percent. In December that year, 54 percent of Catholics said the church could not be trusted to handle this issue in the future; now that’s declined to 28 percent.

Indeed nearly two in three Catholics now say the church can be trusted to handle the issue in the future, while, in one of the most striking differences between groups, just 35 percent of non-Catholics agree. Similarly, six in 10 Catholics – compared with fewer than three in 10 non-Catholics – believe church officials now are mainly trying to prevent the problem, not cover it up.

The church fares best among church-going Catholics – those who attend Mass at least a few times a month. In this group 51 percent approve of the church's handling of the issue of sexual abuse by priests, about seven in 10 think it can be trusted to handle the issue properly in the future, and as many think it’s working mainly to prevent the problem.



	All Americans	Catholics	Non-Catholics
View of the church:			
Favorable	54%	87	46
Unfavorable	33	10	38
Church's handling of the issue:			
Approve	23	40	19
Disapprove	66	53	70
Trust the Church's to handle it properly the future:			
Yes	40	64	35
No	49	28	54
Church officials trying to:			
Prevent the problem	34	60	28
Cover up	58	33	64

Friday, church officials are scheduled to release a survey of abuse accusations in nearly all of the country's Catholic dioceses, as well as a separate report on its causes.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 18-22, 2004, among a random national sample of 1,028 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Dalia Sussman.

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

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

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934, or Lisa Finkel, (212) 456-6190.

Results follow.

1. On another subject, overall would you say you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Catholic Church?

		Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion
2/22/04	All	54	33	13
	Cath.	87	10	3
10/13/03	All	48	44	8
	Cath.	80	17	3
12/15/02	All	40	52	8
	Cath.	69	30	2
6/17/02	All	45	47	9
	Cath.	69	28	3
6/9/02	All	47	45	7
	Cath.	70	28	2
3/28/02	All	55	34	11
	Cath.	73	24	3
2/20/02	All	63	27	11
	Cath.	88	9	4
8/30/99*	All	68	19	13

*Wash Post/Kaiser/Harvard, asked "very/somewhat" follow

2. 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 op.
		NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
2/22/04	All	23	8	15	66	19	47	11
	Cath.	40	17	23	53	21	32	7
10/13/03	All	17	4	13	77	15	62	6
	Cath.	27	8	19	70	17	53	3
12/15/02	All	20	7	12	76	18	58	4
	Cath.	27	16	11	69	18	51	4
6/23/02	All	23	8	15	66	21	46	11
	Cath.	32	12	20	61	17	44	7
6/9/02	All	22	8	15	73	20	53	5
	Cath.	34	16	17	63	22	41	3
4/30/02	All	25	7	17	59	18	41	16
	Cath.	35	13	22	59	17	42	7

3. 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.
2/22/04	All	40	49	11
	Cath.	64	28	9
10/13/03	All	35	59	6

	Cath.	55	41	4
12/15/02	All	42	54	4
	Cath.	56	39	6
6/17/02	All	50	43	6
	Cath.	67	29	4
4/21/02	All	40	52	8
	Cath.	59	36	5

4. Do you think church officials are mainly trying to prevent sexual abuse of children by priests, or mainly trying to cover up the problem?

		Prevent	Cover up	No opin.
2/22/04	All	34	58	8
	Cath.	60	33	8

END