

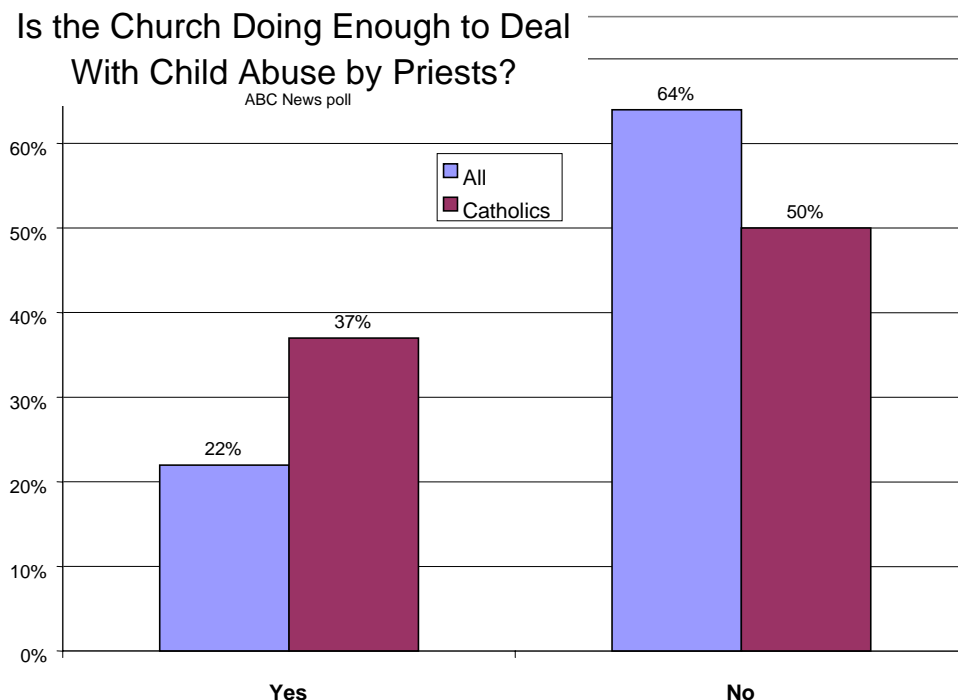
Child Abuse by Priests Raises Concern; Most Fault Church Officials' Response

Americans by nearly a 3-1 margin say the Catholic Church is not doing enough to deal with sexual abuse of children by priests, and majorities – including most Catholics – favor laws requiring it to disclose allegations of abuse to police and parishioners alike.

Sixty percent of Americans in an ABC News poll call the issue “a major problem that requires immediate attention,” and nearly two-thirds say the church is not doing enough to deal with it. Eighty percent, including three-quarters of Catholics, say the church should be required by law to report allegations of abuse to the authorities.

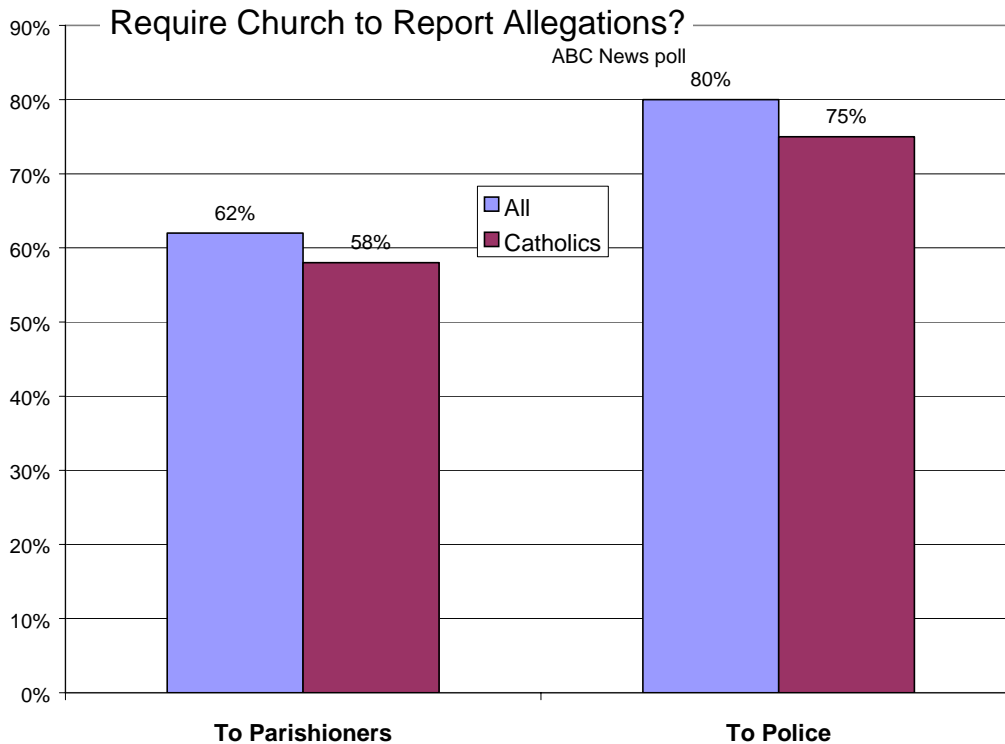
Attention to the issue has been refocused by the case of John J. Geoghan, a former Boston priest accused of molesting more than 100 boys, who was sentenced today on a child abuse conviction. Two-thirds of Americans say they've heard of his case, and most of those who know about it say it's heightened their concern.

One clear cause of discontent is the church's past practice of quietly transferring accused priests like Geoghan to other parishes: Ninety-four percent of Americans disapprove of that practice, a number that nears unanimity; and 85 percent disapprove of it “strongly.” Nearly as many Catholics, 76 percent, strongly disapprove.



Nearly nine in 10 people say, instead, that parishioners should be told of such allegations, and more than six in 10 say this, too, should be required by law, rather than left to the church's

discretion. Catholics, again, agree in similar numbers. (Just under a quarter of Americans – 23 percent in this poll – identify themselves as Catholics.)

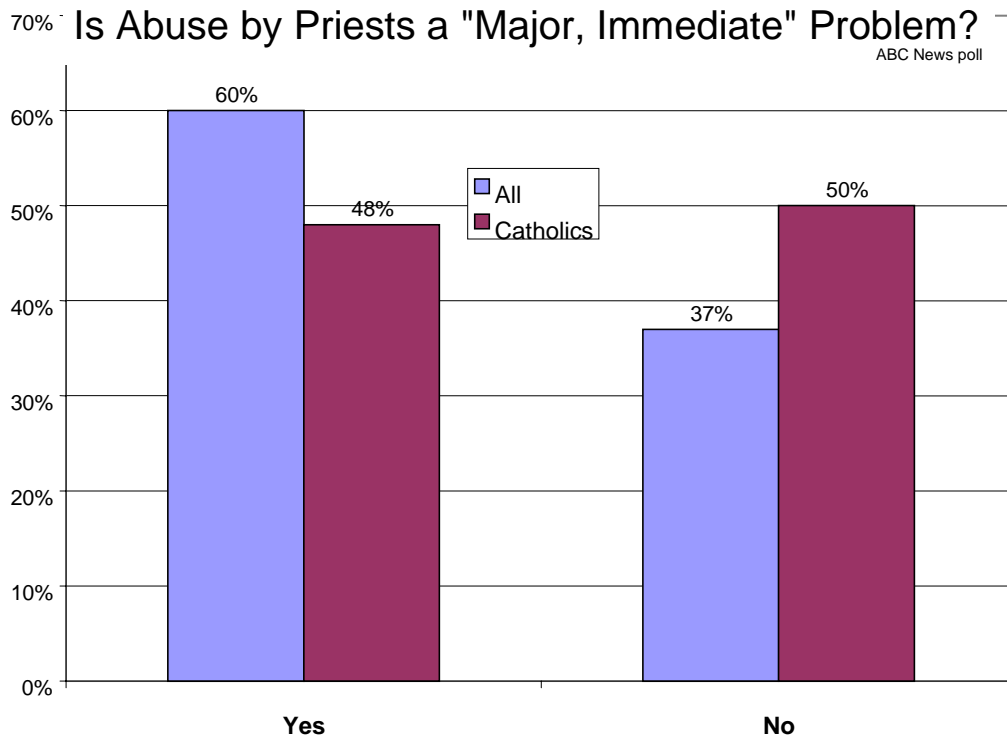


MARRIAGE – A smaller majority of Americans, 55 percent, suspect that the church’s ban on marriage by priests contributes to the problem (and fewer, 36 percent, think it’s a “major” factor). In this case Catholics are less likely to agree – 40 percent see the marriage ban as a contributing factor, and just 24 percent think it’s a major factor.

Catholics in some other regards are more forgiving of their church. Fewer, 48 percent, call this issue a major problem; and 37 percent say the church is doing enough to deal with it.

	All Americans	Catholics
Favorable view of church	63%	88
See abuse as a major problem	60	48
Think church is doing enough	22	37
Think it’s hurt church’s reputation	59	51
Think marriage ban is a factor	55	40
Disapprove of priest transfers	94	89
Require disclosure to police	80	75
Require disclosure to parishioners	62	58

EXTENT – Two results suggest that people see cases of abuse within the church as involving a limited number of priests. Very few Americans, about one in 10, think priests are more likely than other men to sexually abuse children. And among Catholics who know their parish priest, two-thirds say they trust him “completely” around children. (Among regular churchgoers, moreover, “complete” trust rises to 86 percent.)



Opinion is fractured as far as the frequency of the abuse problem. Most people, 55 percent, think abuse of children by priests occurs either “infrequently” (28 percent) or “very rarely” (26 percent). Among Catholics, 65 percent call it infrequent, or very rare. People who think it happens more often, naturally, are more likely to call it a major problem.

Significantly, Catholic men – who presumably are in the best position to know – are the most likely to say the problem occurs “very rarely”; 44 percent say so.

DAMAGE – The issue has done some damage to views of the church. Nearly six in 10 Americans say it has “hurt the overall reputation of the church” in their eyes; 51 percent of Catholics say the same.

Fewer, however, say it’s done “a great deal” of damage to the church’s reputation. And most still hold basically favorable views of the church: Sixty-three percent of Americans say they have an overall favorable opinion of the Catholic Church, about the same as it was in a 1999 poll (68 percent). Among Catholics, 88 percent view the church favorably overall.

Still, even among Americans who have a favorable opinion of the church, 55 percent see sexual abuse of children by priests as a major problem that needs immediate attention.

CHURCHGOERS – Support for the church is highest among its most loyal followers – those who attend services at least once a week. (About four in 10 Catholics say they do so.) Fifty-seven percent of churchgoing Catholics say the church is doing enough to deal with the issue; that dives to just 25 percent among Catholics who go to church less often.

Regular churchgoing Catholics also are less apt than other Catholics to say the issue has hurt the church’s reputation in their eyes; less likely to see the marriage ban as a factor; less likely to support legislation requiring notification of parishioners; and, as noted, more apt to say they completely trust their parish priest around children.

At the same time, regular churchgoing Catholics are as likely as anyone else to disapprove of the practice of transferring accused priests to other parishes. And two-thirds of regular churchgoers support a law requiring the church to report accusations to the police. Such legislation, exempting accusations made during confessionals, exists in some states, and is before the legislature in Massachusetts. In the past, the Archdiocese of Boston has opposed it.

	Among Catholics	
	Attend church weekly	Less often
See abuse as a major problem	42%	52
Think church is doing enough	57	25
Think it's hurt church's reputation	39	59
Think marriage ban is a factor	30	46
Disapprove of priest transfers	87	90
Require disclosure to police	67	79
Require disclosure to parishioners	47	65
"Completely" trust parish priest	86	50

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 19-20, 2002, among a random national sample of 1,008 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork 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/politics/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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

1. Overall, would you say you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Catholic Church?

		-----Favorable-----			-----Unfavorable-----			No
		NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Very	op.
2/20/02	All	63	NA	NA	27	NA	NA	11
	Cath.	88	NA	NA	9	NA	NA	4
8/30/99*	All	68	32	36	19	12	9	13

* Wash Post/Kaiser/Harvard

2/3. There have been news reports lately about a Catholic priest in Boston who's been accused of sexually abusing children. Do you happen to have heard or read about that, or not? (IF HAVE HEARD) Has that case made you more concerned about the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests, or not?

		-----HAVE HEARD-----				Have	No
		NET	More concerned	Not more concerned	No opin.	not heard	opin.
2/20/02	All	66	42	22	1	34	*
	Cath.	66	40	26	1	34	0

4. In your opinion, how much of a problem is the issue of sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests - would you say it's a major problem that demands immediate attention, a less immediate problem or not much of a problem at all?

		Major problem	Less immed. problem	Not much at all	No opin.
2/20/02	All	60	26	12	3
	Cath.	48	29	21	2

5. Do you think that sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests is something that happens very often, somewhat often, infrequently, or very rarely?

		-----Often-----			-----Not often-----			Never	No
		NET	Very	Smwht.	NET	Infreq.	Rarely	(vol.)	opin.
2/20/02	All	38	11	27	55	28	26	*	7
	Cath.	30	5	24	65	31	34	0	5

6. Do you feel that the Catholic church is or is not doing enough to deal with this issue?

		Doing enough	Not doing enough	No opin.
2/20/02	All	22	64	14
	Cath.	37	50	13

7/8. Has the issue of sexual abuse of children by priests hurt the overall reputation of the Catholic Church in your eyes, or not? (IF HURT REPUTATION) Has it hurt the church's reputation in your eyes a great deal, or only somewhat?

		-----Hurt reputation-----				Has not hurt reputation	No opin.
		NET	Grt. deal	Some-what	No opin.		
2/20/02	All	59	26	31	1	39	3
	Cath.	51	24	27	1	47	2

9. Do you think Catholic priests are more likely than other men to sexually abuse children, less likely, or about the same?

		More	Less	Same	No opin.
2/20/02	All	11	20	66	3
	Cath.	4	31	61	4

10/11. As you may know, the Catholic Church does not allow priests to marry. Do you think this policy contributes to the problem of sexual abuse of children by priests, or not? (IF CONTRIBUTES TO PROBLEM) Do you think it's a major part of the problem or a minor part?

		-----Contributes-----				Does not contribute	No opin.
		NET	Major	Minor	No op.		
2/20/02	All	55	36	17	1	41	4
	Cath.	40	24	16	1	56	4

12. Sometimes when a priest has been accused of sexually abusing a child, the church has responded by transferring that priest to another parish, without telling parishioners about the accusation. Do you approve or disapprove of that practice? Do you approve/disapprove strongly, or somewhat?

		-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No opin.
		NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	
2/20/02	All	4	2	2	94	85	9	2
	Cath.	8	5	3	89	76	13	3

13/14. 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?

		-----Should inform-----				Should not inform	No opin.
		NET	Law	Church	No op.		
2/20/02	All	89	62	26	1	8	3
	Cath.	85	58	26	1	12	3

15/16. 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?

		-----Should report-----				Should not	No
	NET	Law	Church	No op.	report	opin.	
2/20/02 All	97	80	15	2	2	1	
Cath.	95	75	18	3	3	1	

17. Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services - at least once a week, a few times a month, or less often than that?

		Weekly	Monthly	Less than monthly	Never (vol.)	No opin.
2/20/02 All		38	16	41	5	*
Cath.		38	15	43	3	0

18. (Asked of Catholics only) How much do you trust your own parish priest around children - do you trust him completely, a good amount, somewhat, or not much?

		Completely	Good amount	Somewhat	Not much	No opin.
2/20/02 Cath.*		65	17	10	4	4

*Result excludes Catholics who said they don't know their parish priest.

END