

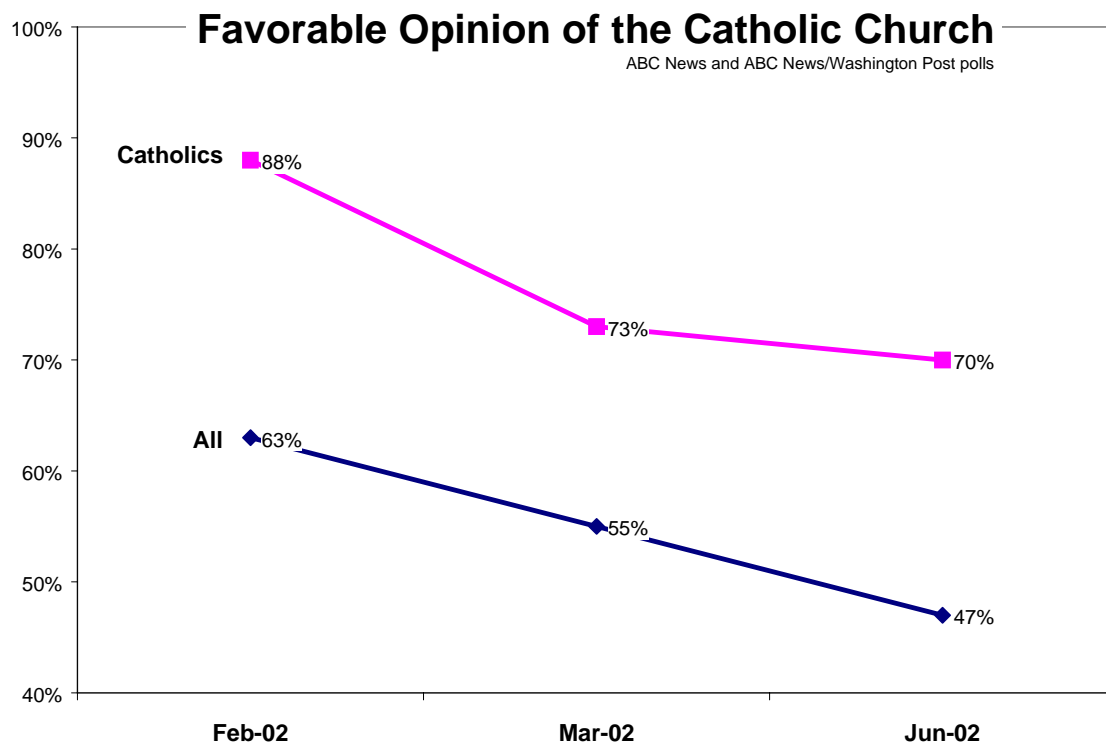
Bishops Gather in Dallas Under a Cloud of Disapproval

American bishops gather in Dallas this week under a broad and still-growing cloud of public disapproval over their handling of child sexual abuse by priests, including overwhelming rejection of their plan to give some one-time abusers a second chance.

Overall favorable opinions of the Catholic Church have dropped from 63 percent in February to 47 percent now. And 73 percent disapprove of its handling of the scandal, up 14 points since the U.S. cardinals met in Rome in late April.

Among Catholics, about a quarter of the nation's population, 63 percent disapprove of the church's handling of the crisis. And while 70 percent still hold a fundamentally favorable view of their church, this has worsened by 18 points since the scandal erupted.

Catholics, moreover, are equally likely to reject the suggestion, in a draft policy to be considered by the bishops in Dallas, that a one-time, past abuser of an adolescent child might be allowed to remain in the priesthood after counseling, review and monitoring. Eighty-two percent of Americans, including 81 percent of Catholics, say such men instead should be expelled automatically from the priesthood.



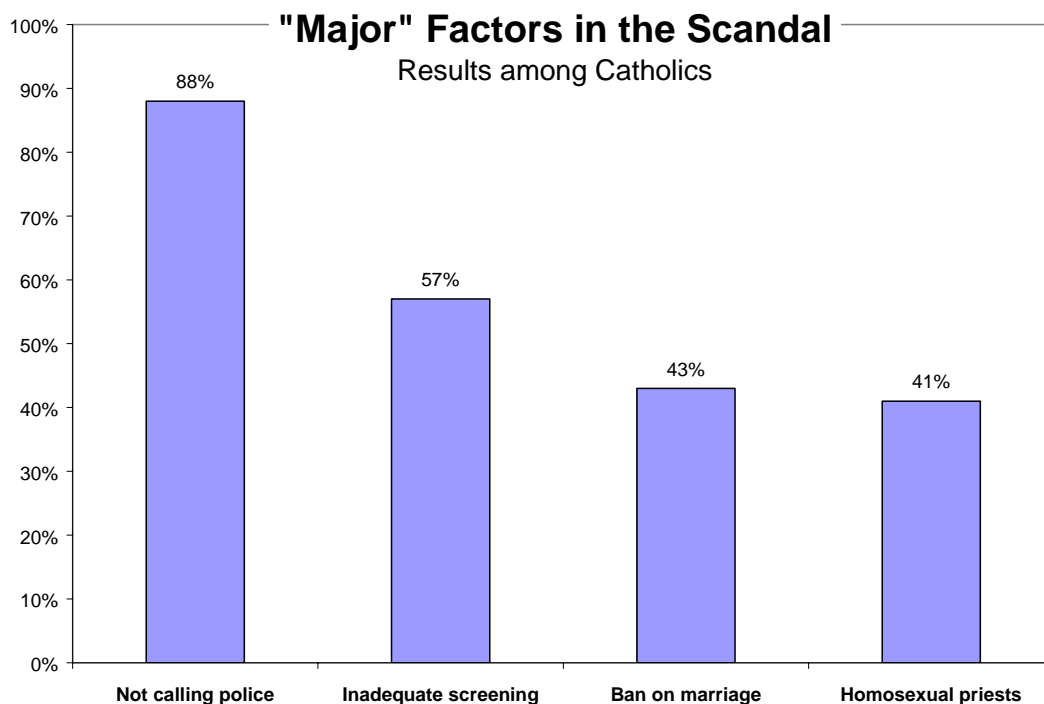
EXPECTATIONS – There are expectations for progress in Dallas: Fifty-nine percent of Americans, rising to 77 percent of Catholics, think the meeting will produce meaningful improvements in the way the church handles this issue.

That makes the meeting an opportunity for the bishops, but it also raises the risk of unmet hopes. Before the cardinals’ meeting at the Vatican in April, 64 percent of Americans expected the session to produce meaningful progress; after it, though, just 31 percent (including fewer than half of Catholics) said such progress had actually been produced.

FACTORS – Some onus is on the bishops because some of their own decisions are seen as having contributed to the problem. Forty-eight percent of Americans believe that decisions of individual American bishops – rather than policies set by the Vatican – are mainly responsible for the way the church has dealt with the issue, and this advances to 56 percent of Catholics. (Thirty-one percent of Catholics mainly blame Vatican policy.)

Far and away the chief contributing factor to the scandal in the public’s view is the failure of church officials in the past to call the police when abuse was alleged; 88 percent of Catholics and non-Catholics alike call this a “major” part of the problem. (Earlier polling has shown similarly broad criticism of the practice of transferring accused priests to other parishes.)

Other items are seen as factors, but are far less likely to be cited as “major” factors. These include inadequate screening of priest candidates in the seminaries, the ban on marriage by priests and the number of priests who are homosexuals.



Interestingly, among Catholics, lack of screening in the seminaries ranks highest among these second-tier factors (57 percent call it a major part of the problem), while the

number of homosexual priests – an issue raised by the Vatican – ranks considerably lower (41 percent call it a “major” factor.)

	“Major” part of the problem	
	Catholics	All Americans
Not calling police	88%	88
Lack of seminary screening	57	53
Ban on marriage	43	51
Homosexual priests	41	47

Catholic men are 20 points more apt than Catholic women to see the marriage ban as a major factor; they’re also 14 points more likely to see the number of homosexual priests as a major factor. Catholic women, for their part, are 12 points more likely to see inadequate screening in the seminaries as a major part of the problem.

NEWS – There is little agreement with another issue recently raised by some church officials – criticism of the news media for its coverage of the situation, described by Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga in a recent interview as anti-Catholic, “a persecution against the church,” and reminiscent of Stalin and Hitler.

In this poll, however, 77 percent of Americans, including 65 percent of Catholics, say recent news coverage of the issue has been fair to the church, essentially the same as it was in a late March poll.

INCIDENCE – Finally, this poll finds no significant change in local experience with an abuse allegation. Thirteen percent of Americans say there’s been an allegation against a priest in their community; it was 10 percent in late March. Among Catholics, seven percent report an allegation within their own parish; it was six percent in March.

Disapproval of the church’s handling of the issue peaks among people who know of an allegation in their own community. In this group 82 percent disapprove of the way the church has dealt with it, and 67 percent disapprove “strongly.”

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone June 7-9, 2002, among a random national sample of 1,004 adults, including 225 Catholics. The results have a three-point error margin for the full sample and 6.5 points for Catholics. 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/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Full results follow. * = less than 0.5 percent

11. 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.
6/9/02	All	47	NA	NA	45	NA	NA	7

	Cath.	70	NA	NA	28	NA	NA	2
3/28/02	All	55	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	11
	Cath.	73	NA	NA	24	NA	NA	3
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

12. 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.
6/9/02	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

13. What do you think is mainly responsible for the way the church has dealt with this issue in the past - decisions made by individual American bishops and cardinals; or policies set by church officials at the Vatican in Rome?

		American bishops	Vatican policies	Other (vol.)	Both (vol.)	No opin.
6/9/02	All	48	36	2	7	8
	Cath.	56	31	1	8	4

14. 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

15. What do you think should be done in the case of a priest who has sexually abused one adolescent child once in the past, with no further accusations? Should all such priests be automatically removed from the priesthood, or should some be allowed to remain as priests after receiving psychological treatment, review and monitoring?

		Removed	Remain	No opin.
6/9/02	All	82	16	2
	Cath.	81	17	1

16. For each of the following items I mention, please tell me if you think it has or has not contributed to the problem of sexual abuse of children by priests. (IF CONTRIBUTES TO PROBLEM) Do you think it's been a major part of the problem or a minor part?

6/9/02

Summary Table:

		----Part of Problem----			Not	No
		NET	Major	Minor	part	opin.
a.	The church's policy of not allowing priests to marry					
	All	75	51	24	23	3
	Cath.	67	43	24	31	2
b.	The practice of not calling the police when a priest is accused of sexual abuse					
	All	95	88	7	3	2

Cath.	97	88	8	3	1
c. The number of priests who are homosexuals					
All	69	47	22	25	6
Cath.	67	41	26	29	4
d. Inadequate screening and preparation of priest candidates in the seminaries					
All	79	53	26	13	8
Cath.	83	57	27	12	5

Trend where available:

a. The church's policy of not allowing priests to marry

		----Part of Problem----			Not part	No opin.
		NET	Major	Minor		
6/9/02	All	75	51	24	23	3
	Cath.	67	43	24	31	2
3/28/02	All	76	41	35	21	3
	Cath.	74	38	36	25	1

b. The practice of not calling the police when a priest is accused of sexual abuse

		----Part of Problem----			Not part	No opin.
		NET	Major	Minor		
6/9/02	All	95	88	7	3	2
	Cath.	97	88	8	3	1
3/28/02	All	94	84	10	3	3
	Cath.	93	79	14	4	3

c,d. No trend.

17. Overall, do you think the recent news coverage of this issue has been fair to the church, or unfair?

		Fair	Unfair	No opin.
6/9/02	All	77	19	4
	Cath.	65	33	2
3/28/02	All	76	17	7
	Cath.	66	29	5

18. Are you aware of any instances in which a Catholic priest in your own community has been accused of sexually abusing children, or not?

		Yes	No	No opin.
6/9/02	All	13	86	*
	Cath.	14	86	*
3/28/02	All	10	89	1
	Cath.	13	87	*

19. (CATHOLICS ONLY) As far as you are aware, have any priests in your own parish been accused of sexually abusing children, or not?

	Yes	No	Don't have parish (vol.)	No opin.
6/9/02	7	92	1	*
3/28/02	6	91	2	1

END