

There Is Always Room for Surprise: Some Interesting Findings About US Orthodox Christian Church Members



Alexei Krindatch
Akrindatch@aol.com

US Census
of Orthodox Christian
Churches

Source of Data:

“Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations (EPIC)”

- EPIC (www.covidreligionresearch.org) is a 5-year research project led by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research
- EPIC’s goal is to collect and disseminate data about the changes and long-term implications the pandemic might have on religious life across the US
- Orthodox Christian Churches are actively engaged in EPIC
- 2024-25 EPIC Attender Survey gathered responses from 24,000 churchgoers representing more than 80 denominations
- Out of all respondents, about 1,000 were members of Orthodox Christian Churches (Antiochian Archdiocese, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Orthodox Church in America, Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia)

Orthodox Christians and all respondents in a national sample describe their congregations very similarly. However, Orthodox parishes appear to be more “spiritually vital” but also more “change resistant.”

Orthodox Christian parishioners All congregants in US national sample

% of members who “Strongly Agree” with following statements

This congregation is spiritually vital & alive



This congregation has clear mission & purpose



Participants of this congregation share similar values, beliefs & ideology



This congregation makes strong effort to help me get involved



This congregation is striving to be diverse (racially, ethnically, socioeconomically)



This congregation is willing to change to meet new challenges

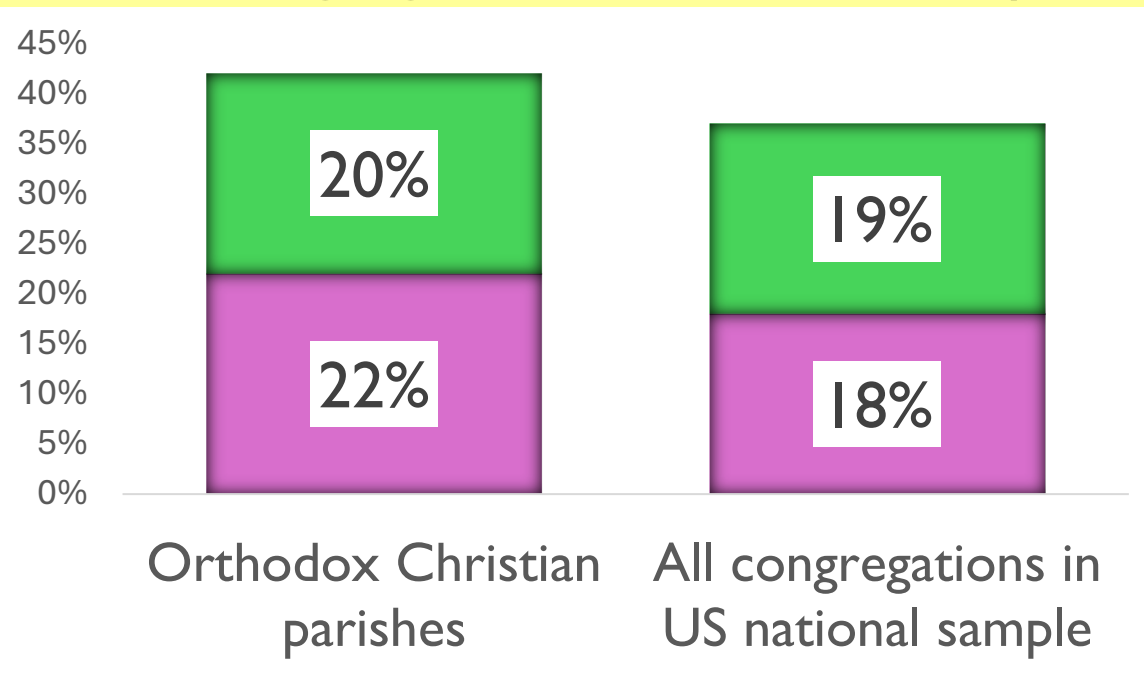



0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%

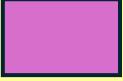
New Members Who Joined Congregations During or Post-Pandemic

Is there a difference between Orthodox Christian and other congregations?

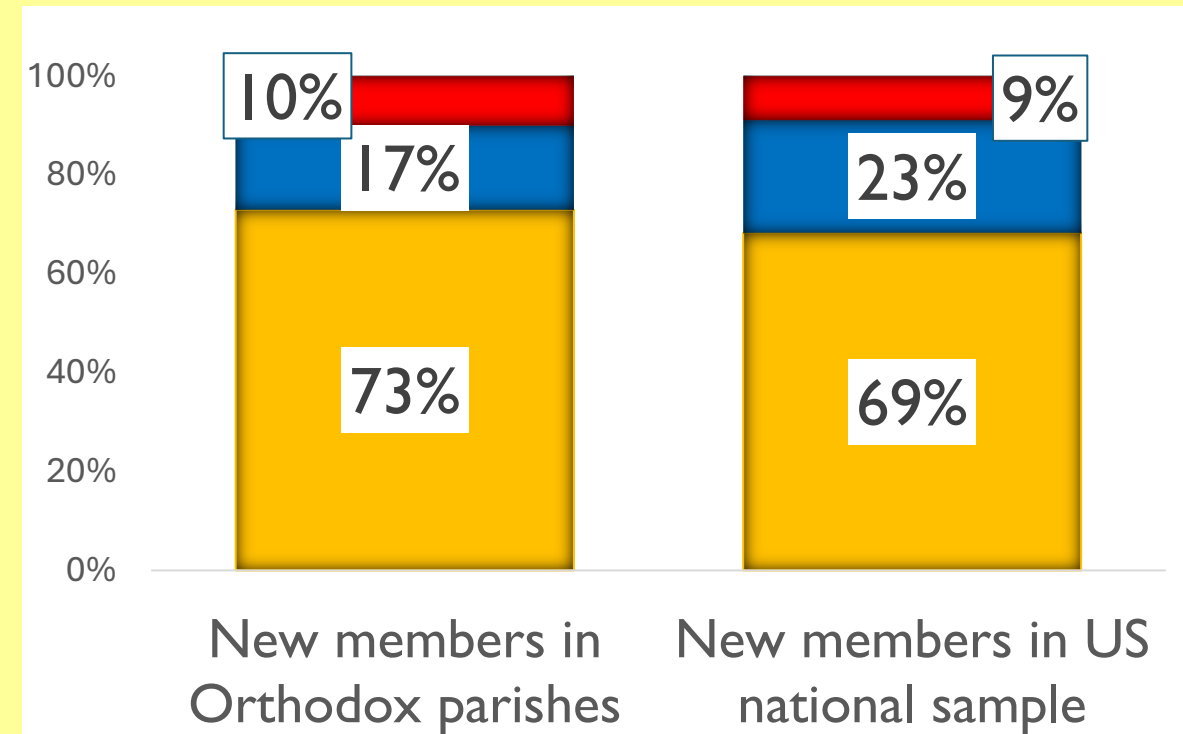
Orthodox parishes have somewhat more new members than all congregations in national sample





 % of members who joined post-pandemic (0-2 years ago)


 % of members who joined during pandemic (3-5 years ago)

Previous church experience of new members is very similar



 Before coming here, I never attended a congregation

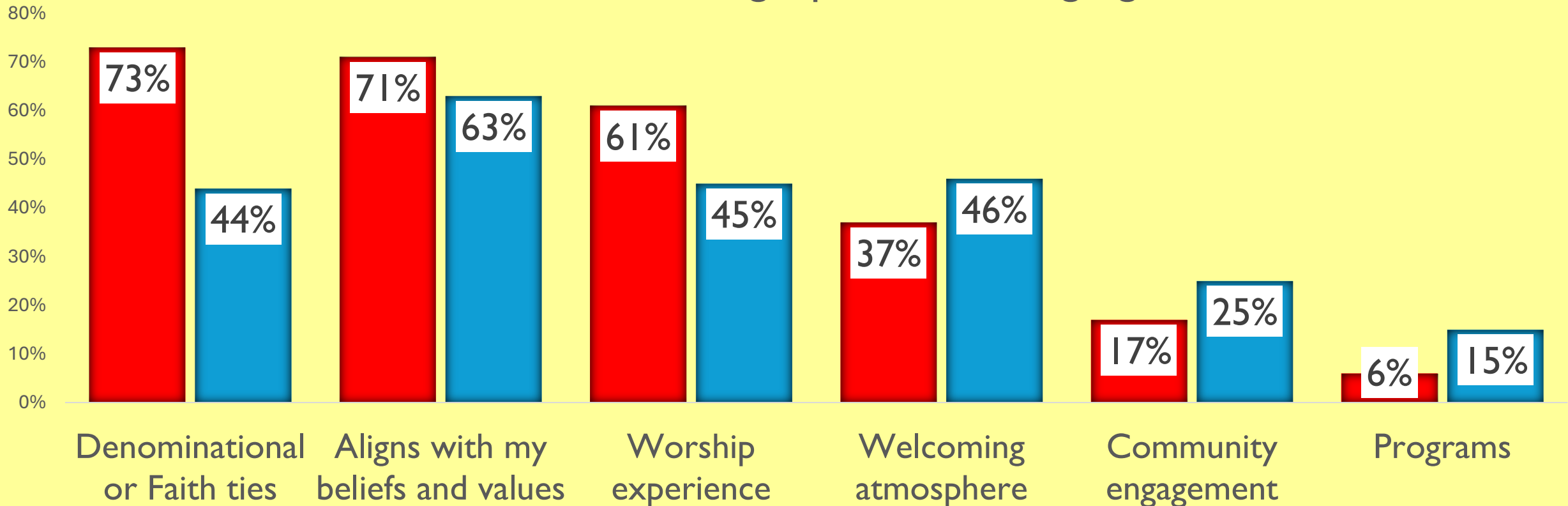
 Before coming here, I hadn't attended in years

 Before coming here, I participated in another congregation

Compared to all new church members in the national sample, new Orthodox parishioners had somewhat different primary reasons for joining a particular congregation

■ New Orthodox parishioners ■ All new members in US national sample

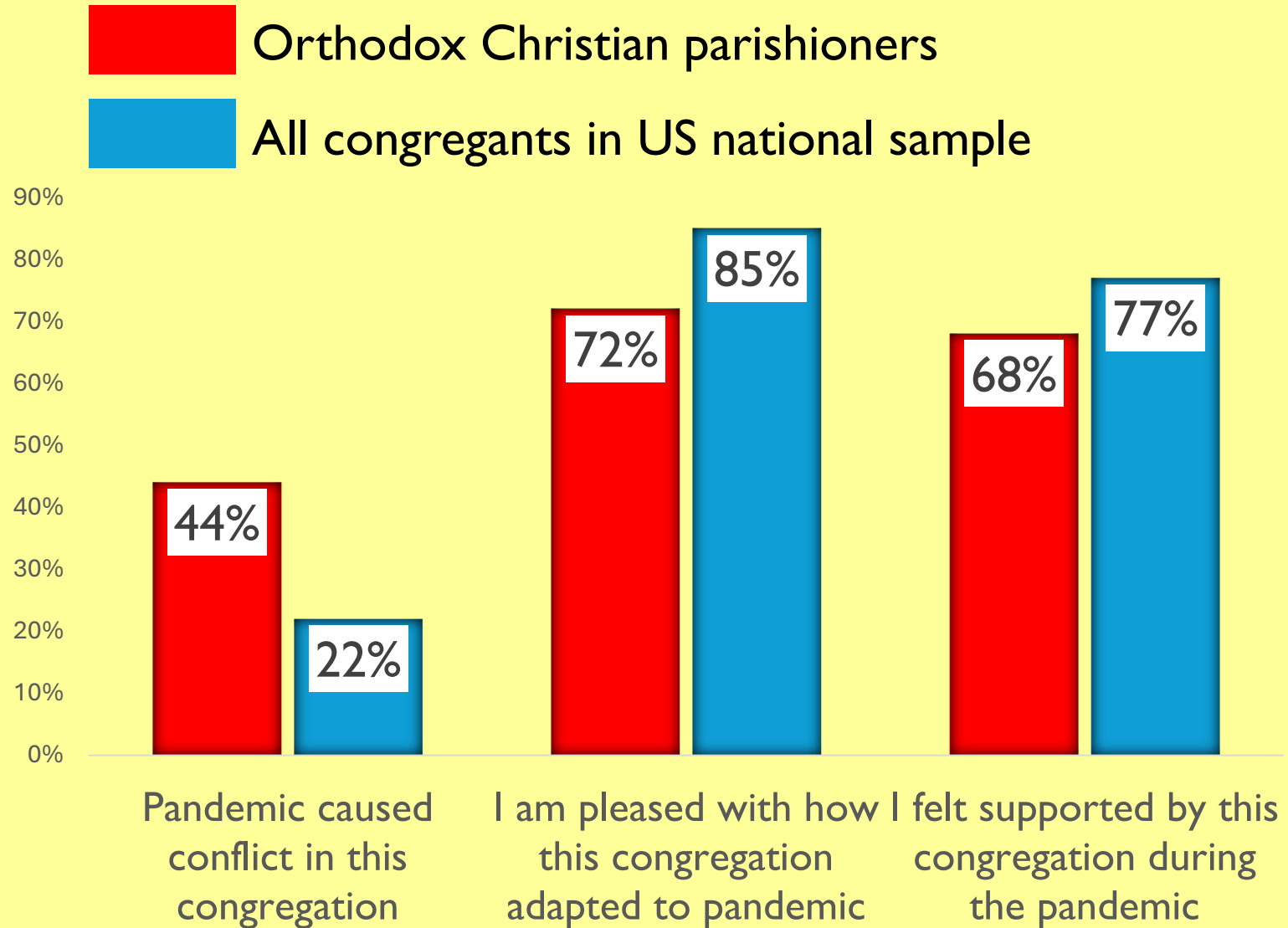
% of new members saying that the following was “VERY IMPORTANT” to them when choosing a particular congregation



Church Members Experiences During the Pandemic: Orthodox Christians Were “Not So Happy” With Their Congregations

Compared to congregants in the entire US national sample:

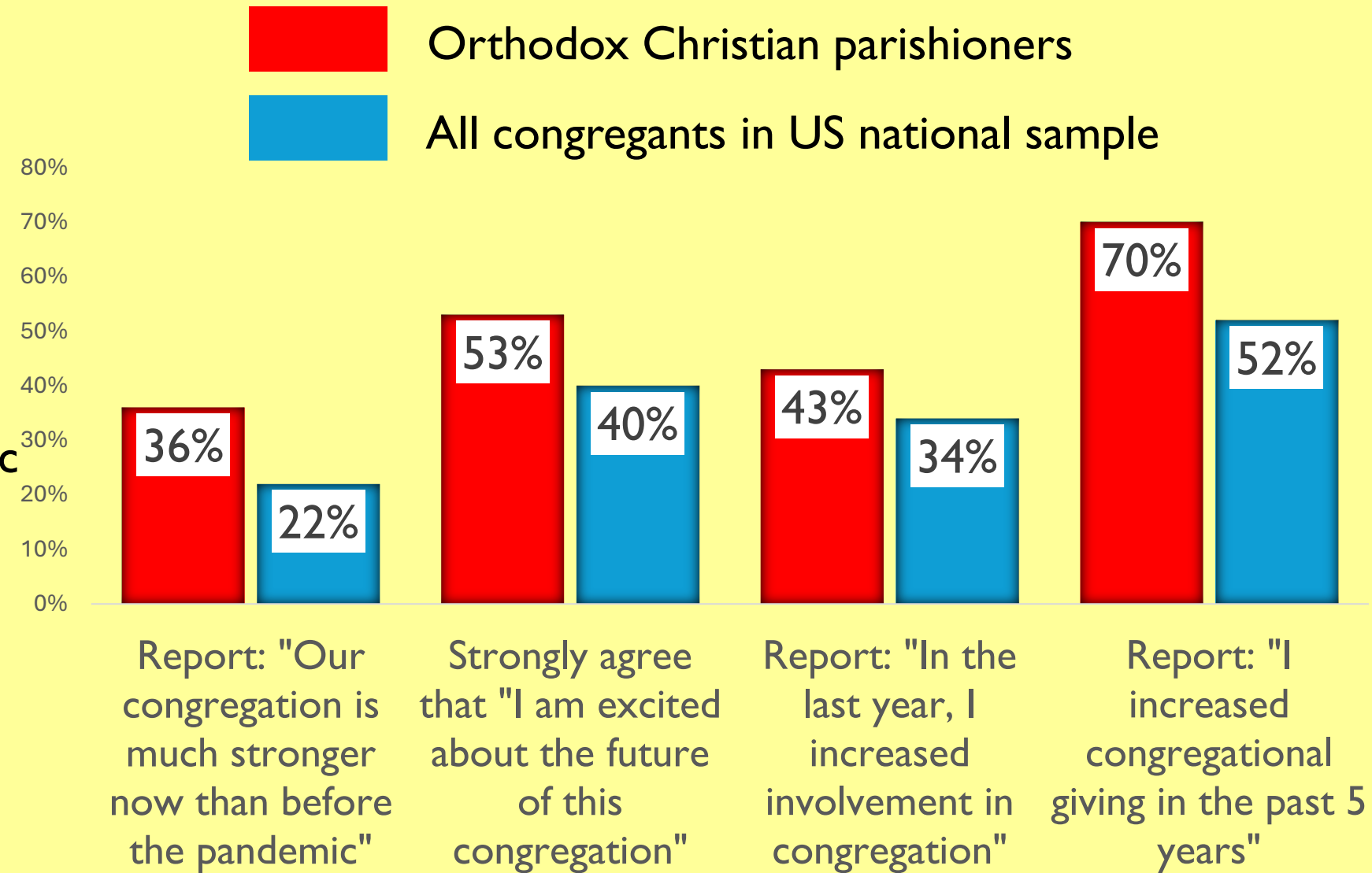
- More Orthodox Christians reported congregational conflict during the pandemic
- Fewer of them were pleased with congregational adaptation to the pandemic
- Fewer of them felt supported by congregation during the pandemic



Post-Pandemic Congregational Vitality and Members' Involvement: compared to overall US picture, Orthodox Christian parishes seem better off

Compared to all congregants
in US national sample:

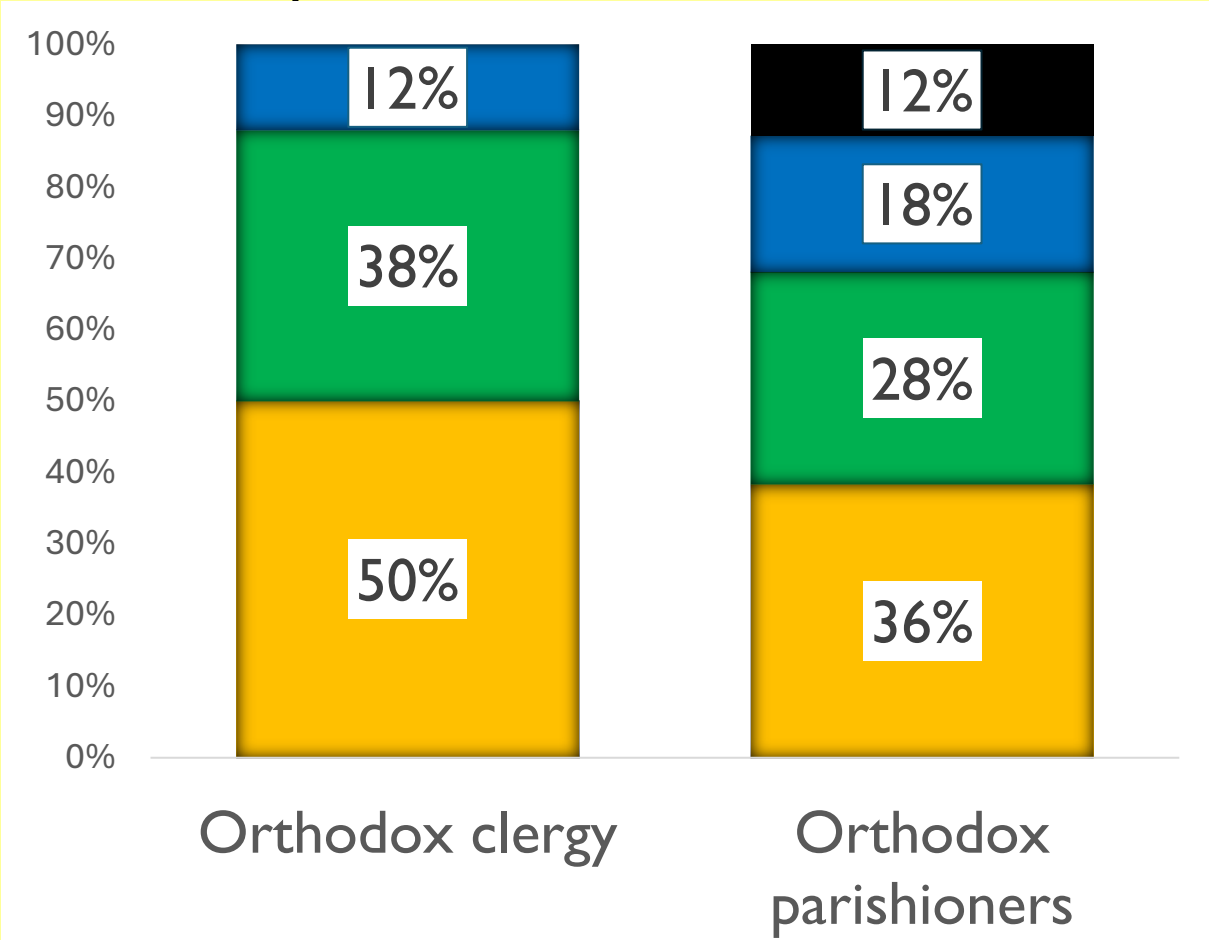
- More Orthodox Christians report boost in congregational vitality
- More of them are optimistic about future of their congregations
- More of them increased their church engagement and giving



Compared to Lay Church Members, Orthodox Clergy Are Even More Optimistic Regarding Post-Pandemic Changes in Congregational Vitality

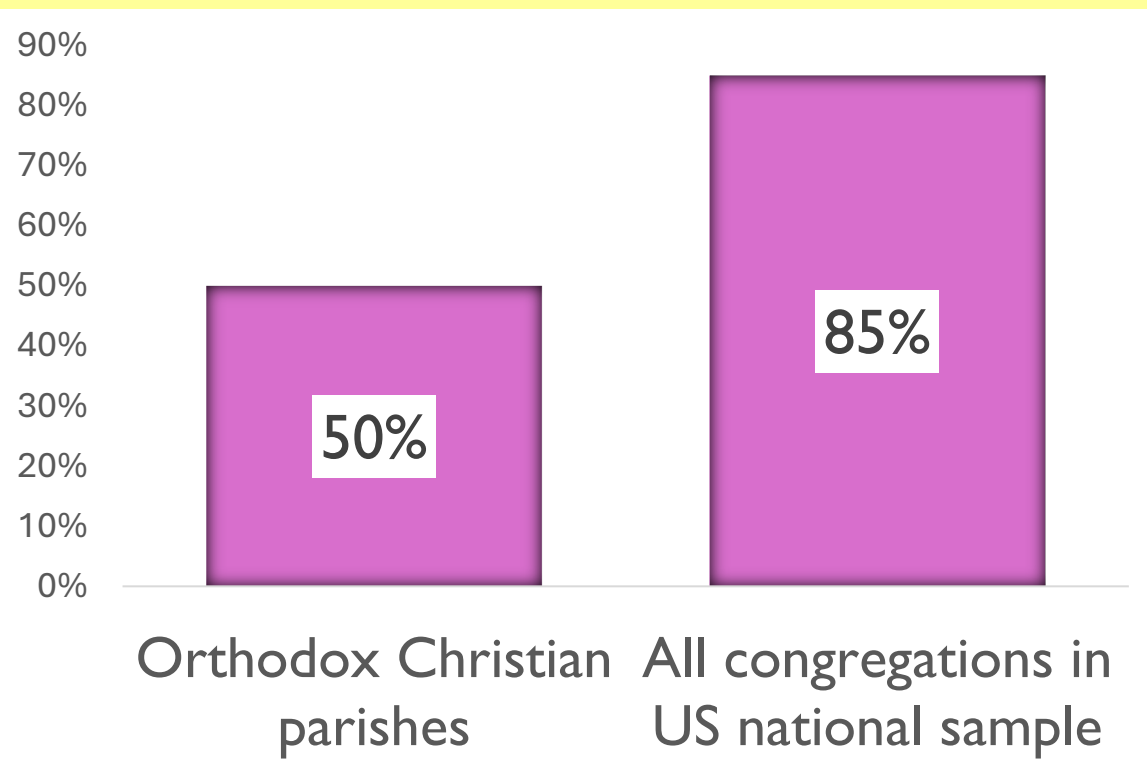
All things considered, how would you compare overall vitality and strength of your congregation before the pandemic and now?

- Weaker or much weaker now than before the pandemic
- About the same
- Somewhat stronger now
- Much stronger now than before the pandemic

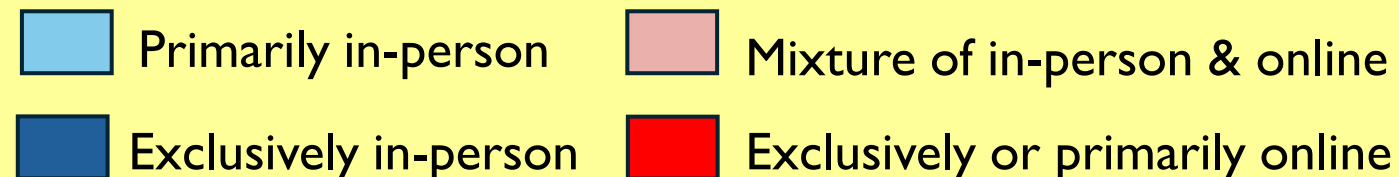
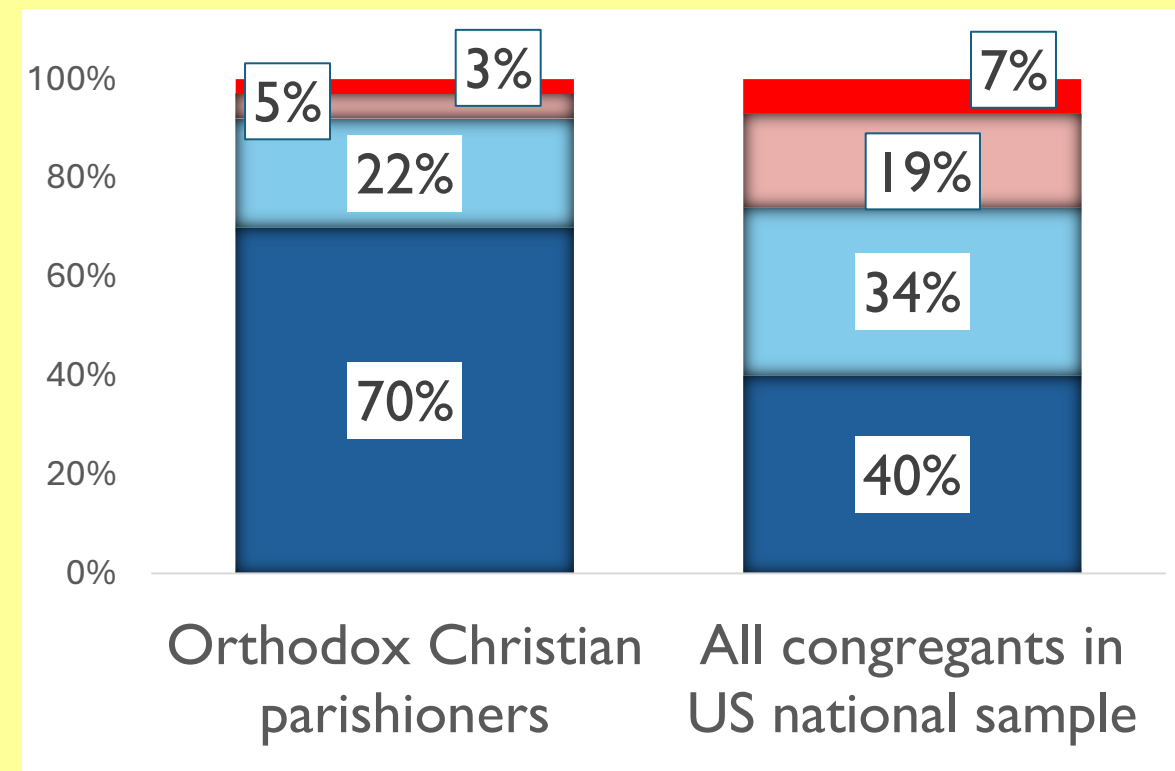


Pandemic shifted a significant portion of congregational worship to an online format. But not so much in the case of Orthodox Christian parishes

Percentage (%) of congregations which presently offer online worship services

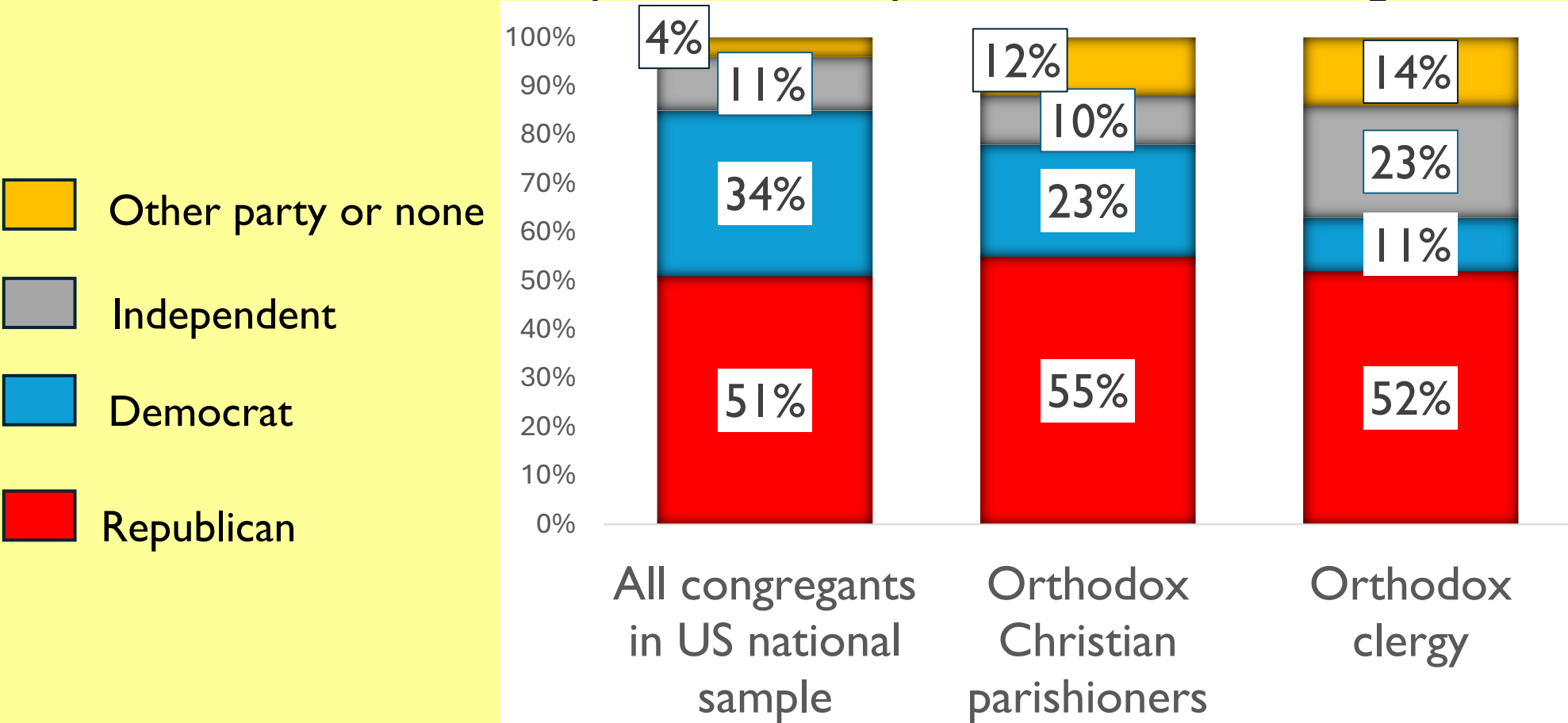


How do you presently participate in worship services?



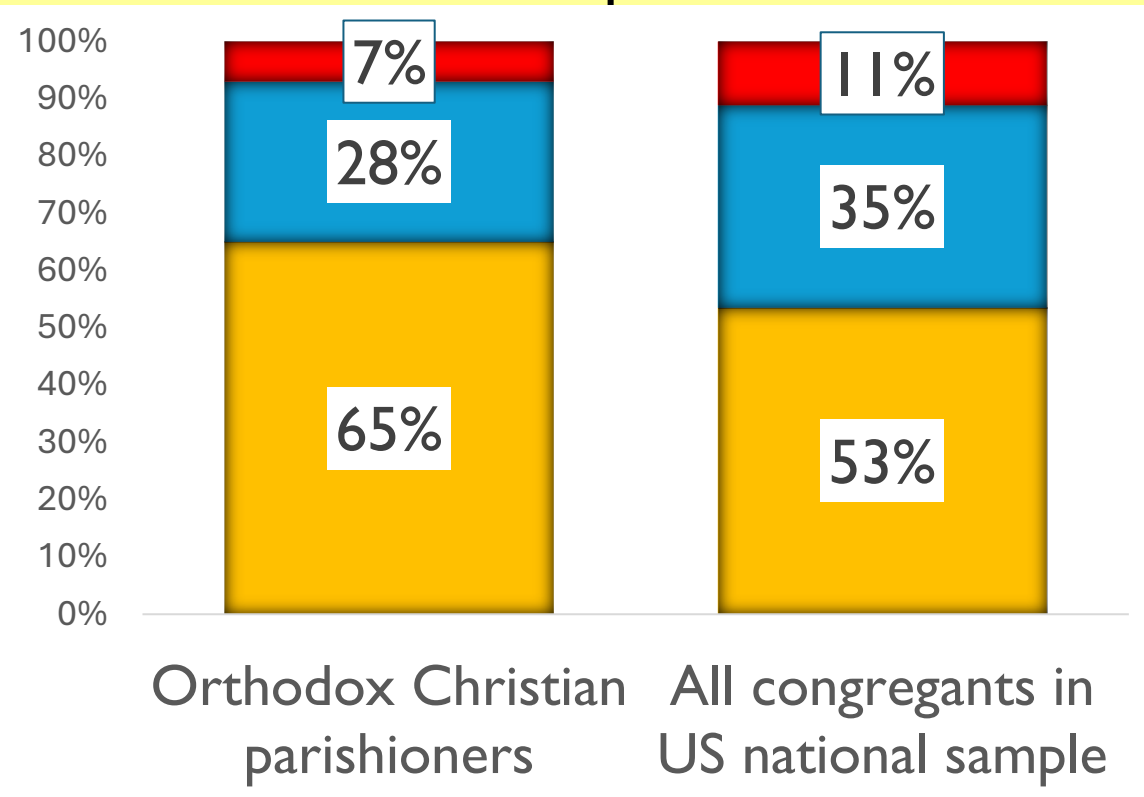
Compared to all congregants in national sample, Orthodox parishioners are less likely to be Democrats. This is even more true for Orthodox clergy

Do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or something else?

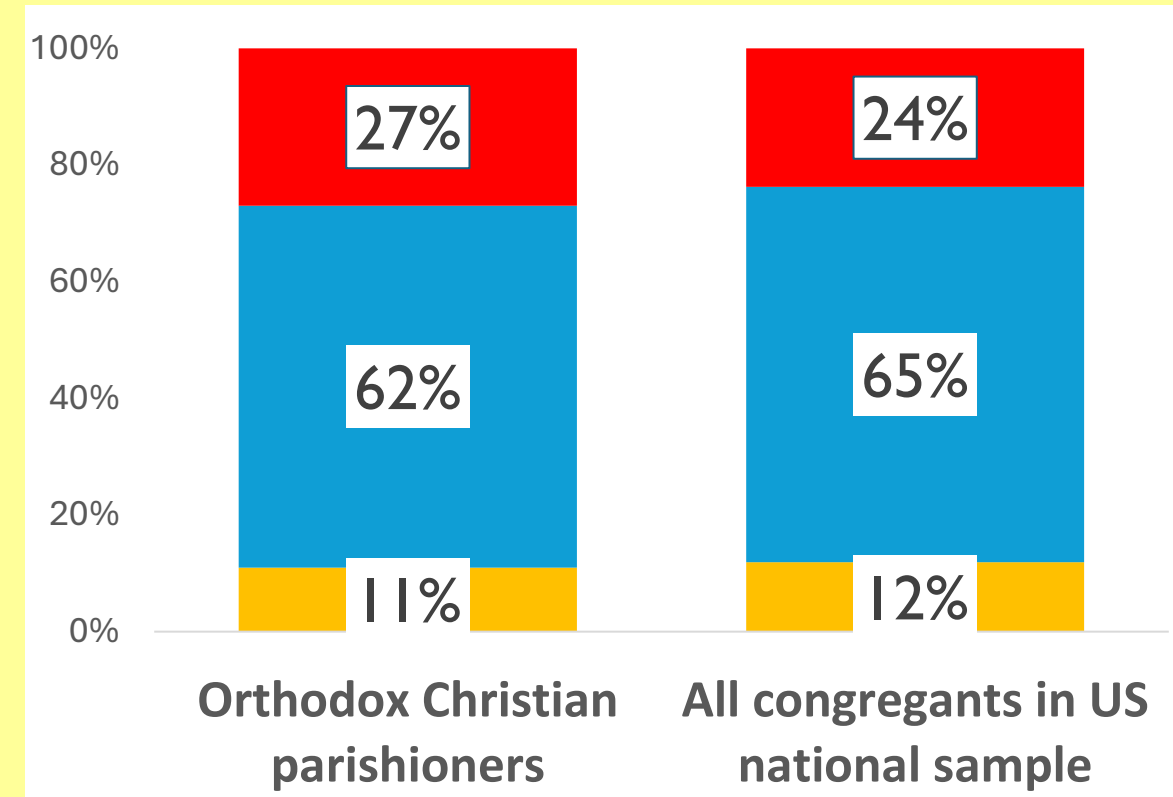


Compared to national sample of congregations, Orthodox parishes have less internal tensions over politics and social issues. Both now and pre-pandemic

How would you rate the level of tension in your congregation regarding social and political issues?



Is this tension level lower or higher than before the pandemic?



Nonexistent or low Moderate High

Lower The same Higher

Who Are the Most Generous Givers in US Orthodox Christian Churches?



Alexei Krindatch
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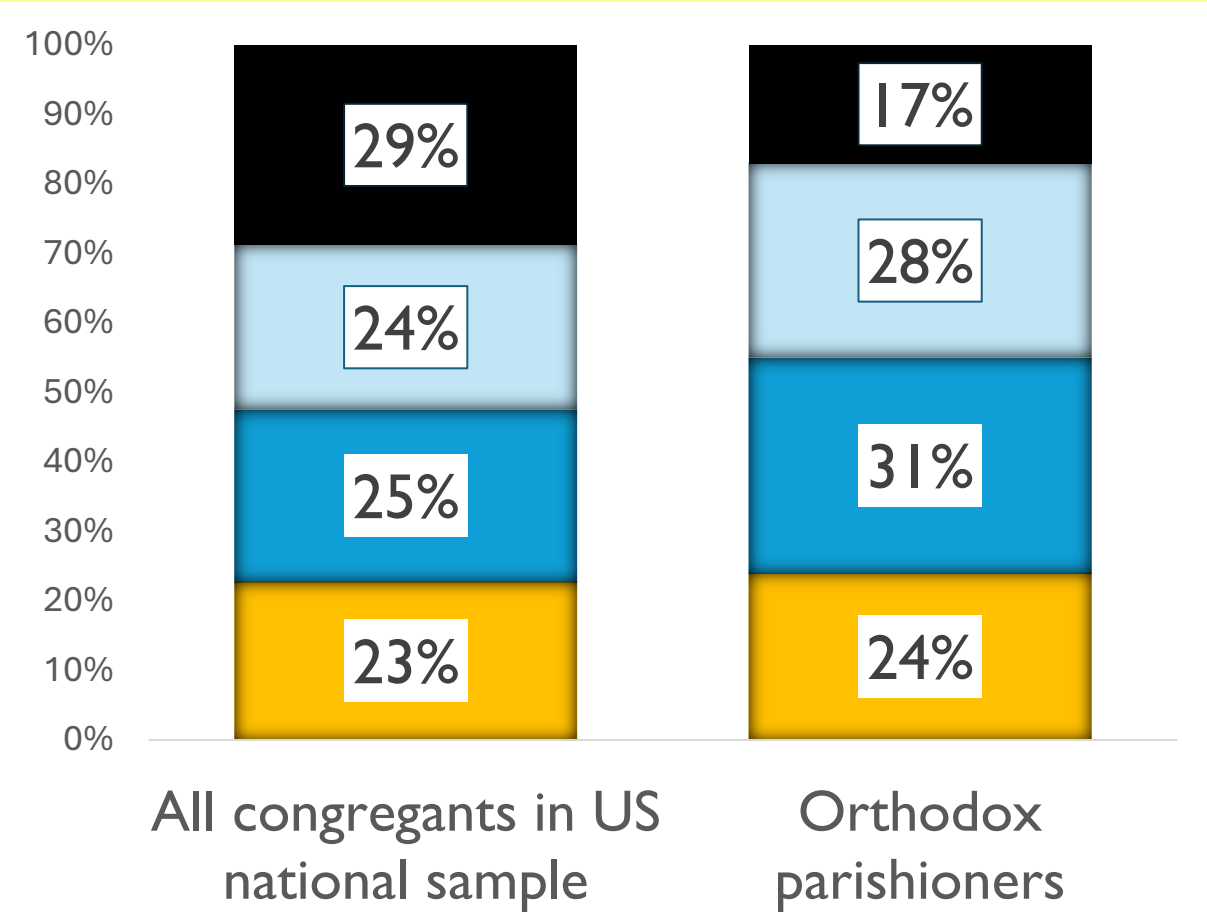
US Census
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Most Generous Church Members Who Give 10%+ of Income to Congregations

Who Are They?

About how much does your household
give financially to this congregation?

- None or a small amount
- Less than 5% of net income
- 5% to 9% of net income
- 10% or more of net income



The percentage of most generous church members is similar among Orthodox parishioners and all congregants in national sample

Who are most generous members of Orthodox Christian congregations?

What are their distinctive features and characteristics?

Here is what **DOES NOT** matter for being either more or less generous:

- Age of a person
- Education
- Whether a person also attends another congregation (36% actually do)
- Whether a person uses electronic giving
- Whether a congregation always remained open for in-person services during the pandemic
- Whether a congregation offers online services

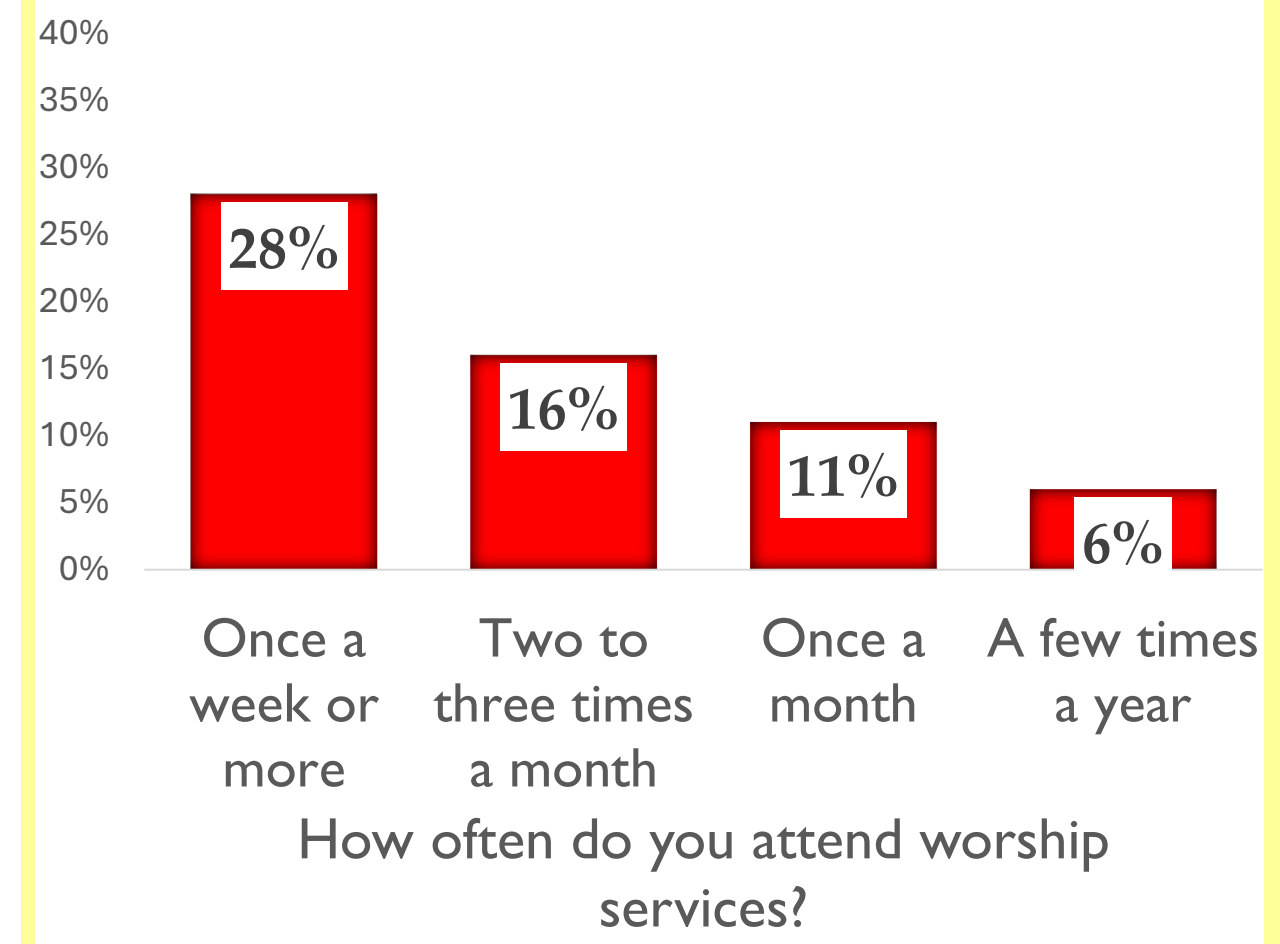
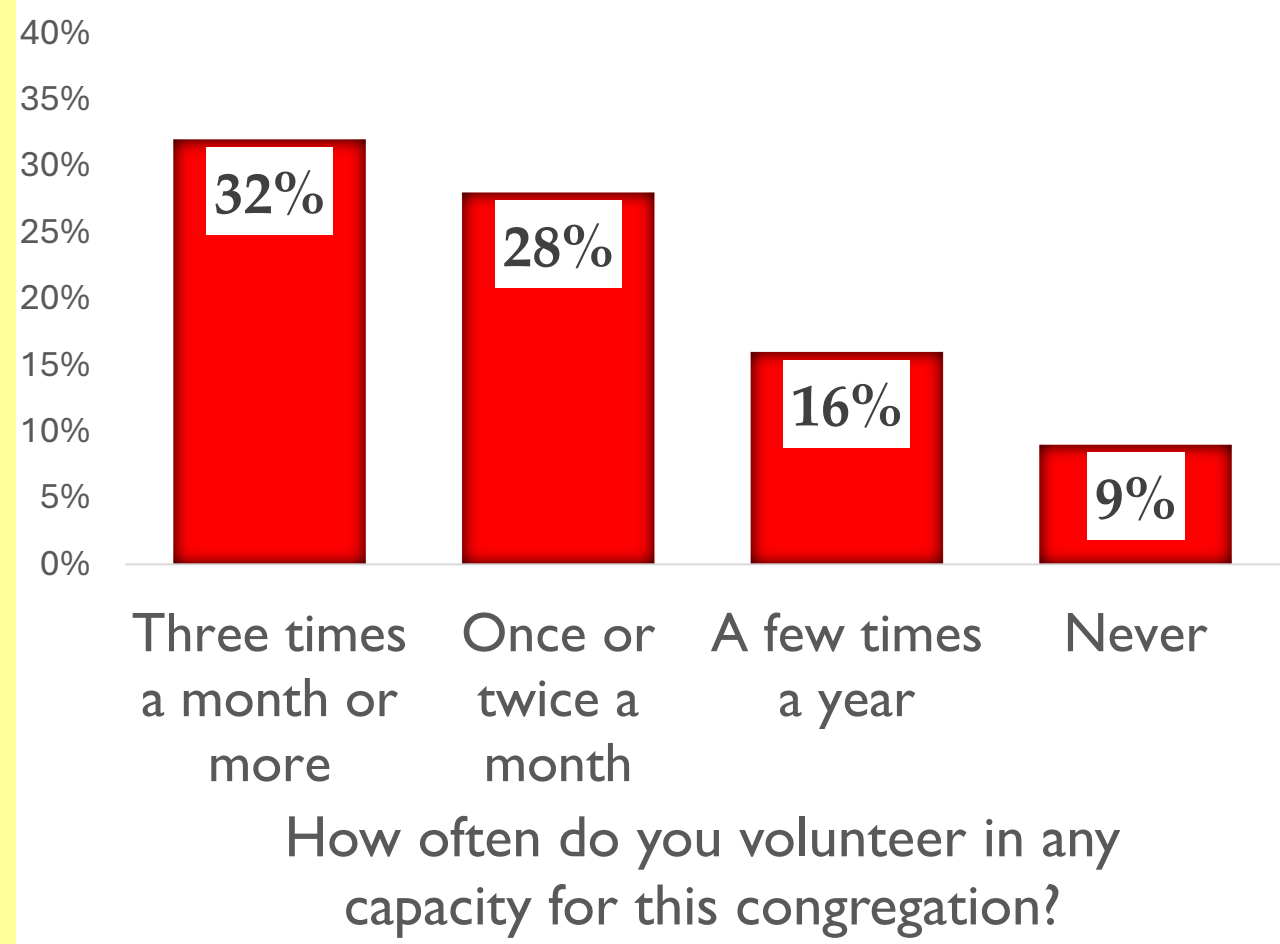
There is NO relationship between how Orthodox Church members describe their congregations and the members' own generosity

No significant correlation between degree of agreement/disagreement with each statement and how much a person gives to a congregation:

- This congregation has a clear mission and purpose
- This congregation is spiritually vital and alive
- This congregation is striving to be diverse: racially, ethnically, socioeconomically
- This congregation makes a strong effort to help me to get involved
- This congregation is willing to change to meet new challenges
- Participants of this congregation share similar values, beliefs, and ideology

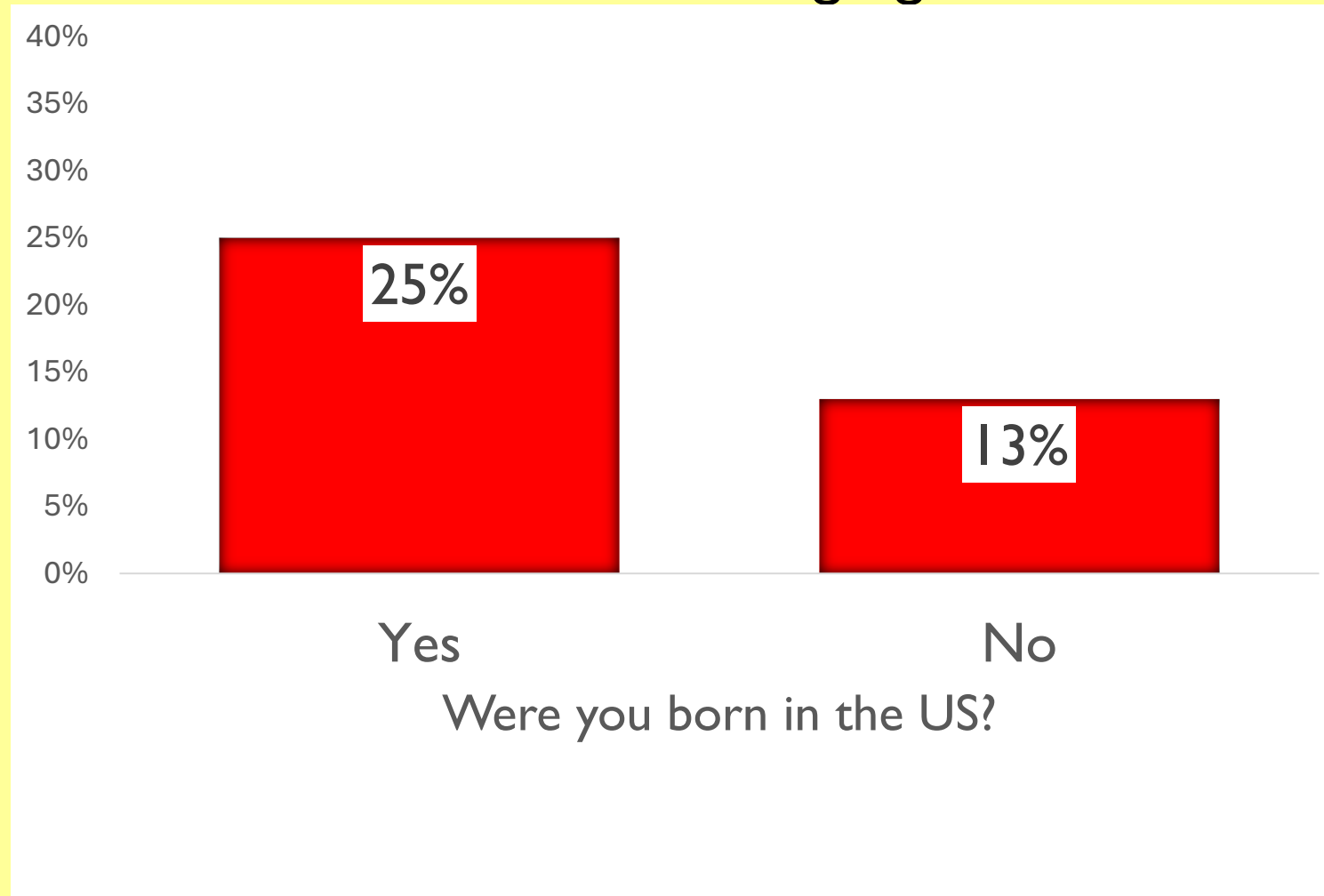
More engaged Church members are more generous givers to their congregations. Frequency of volunteering for a congregation is even better predictor of generosity than the frequency of worship attendance

Percentage (%) of members who give 10% or more of net income to their congregations



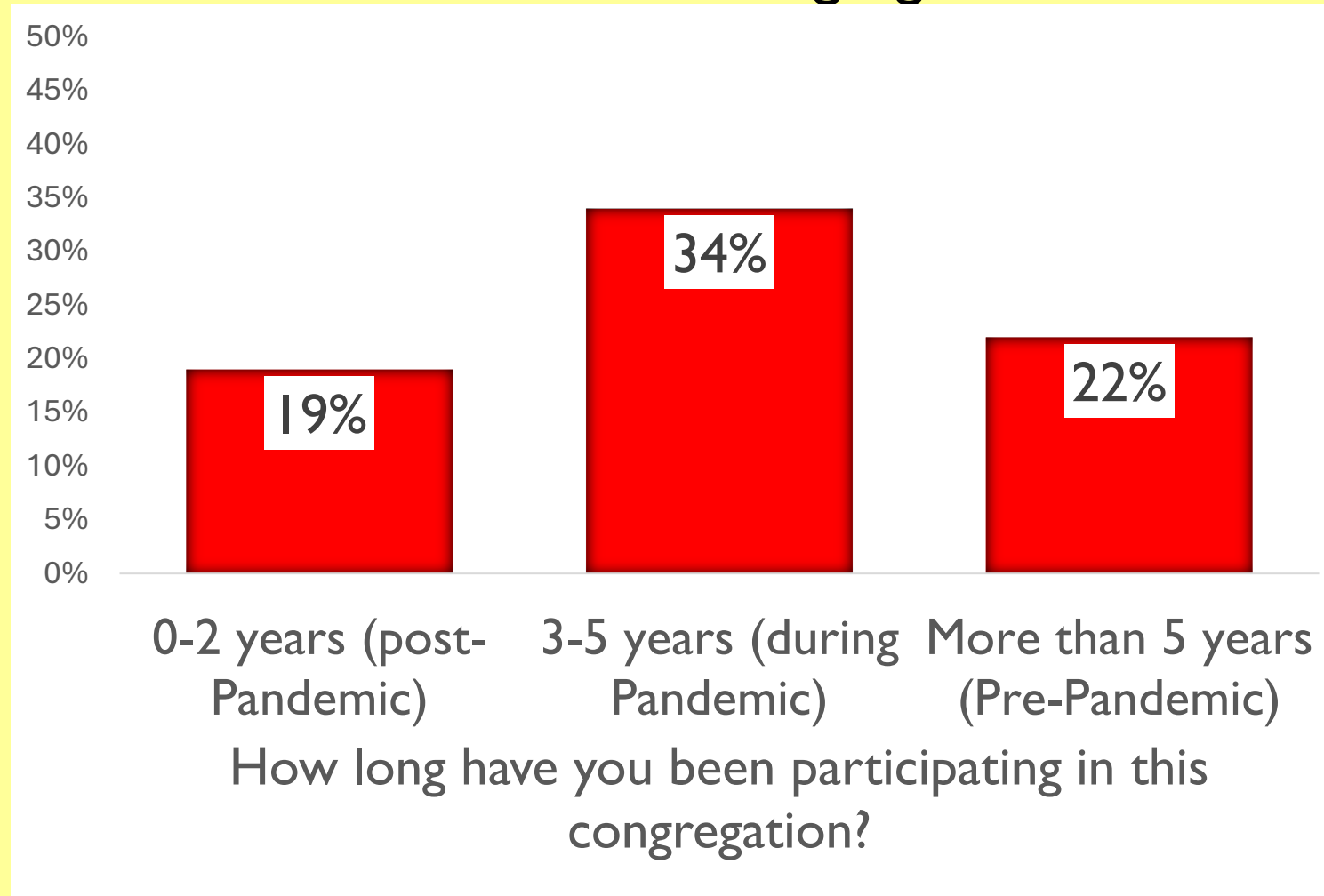
US-born members are much more generous givers to their congregations than the first-generation immigrants

Percentage (%) of members who give 10% or more of net income to their congregations



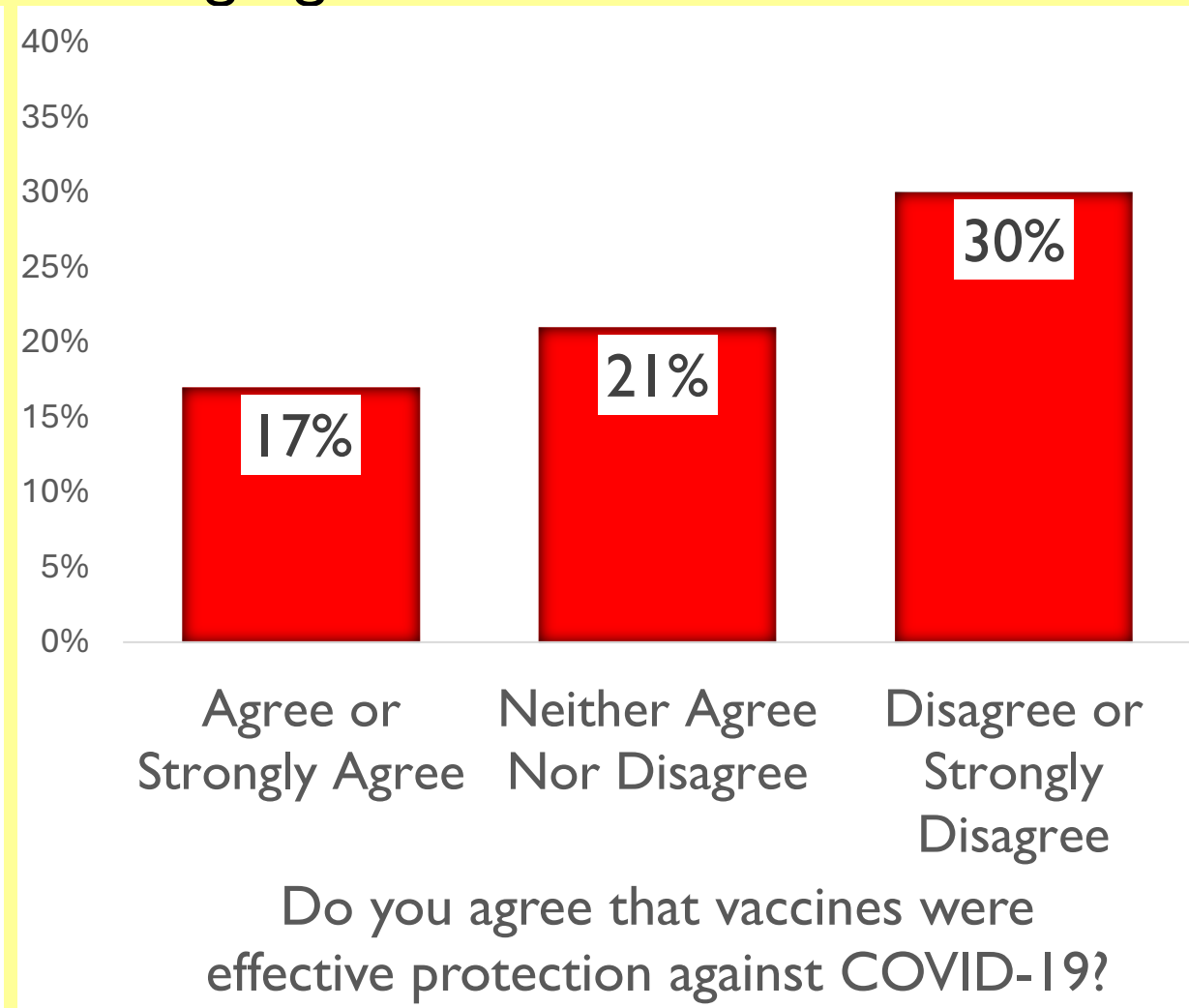
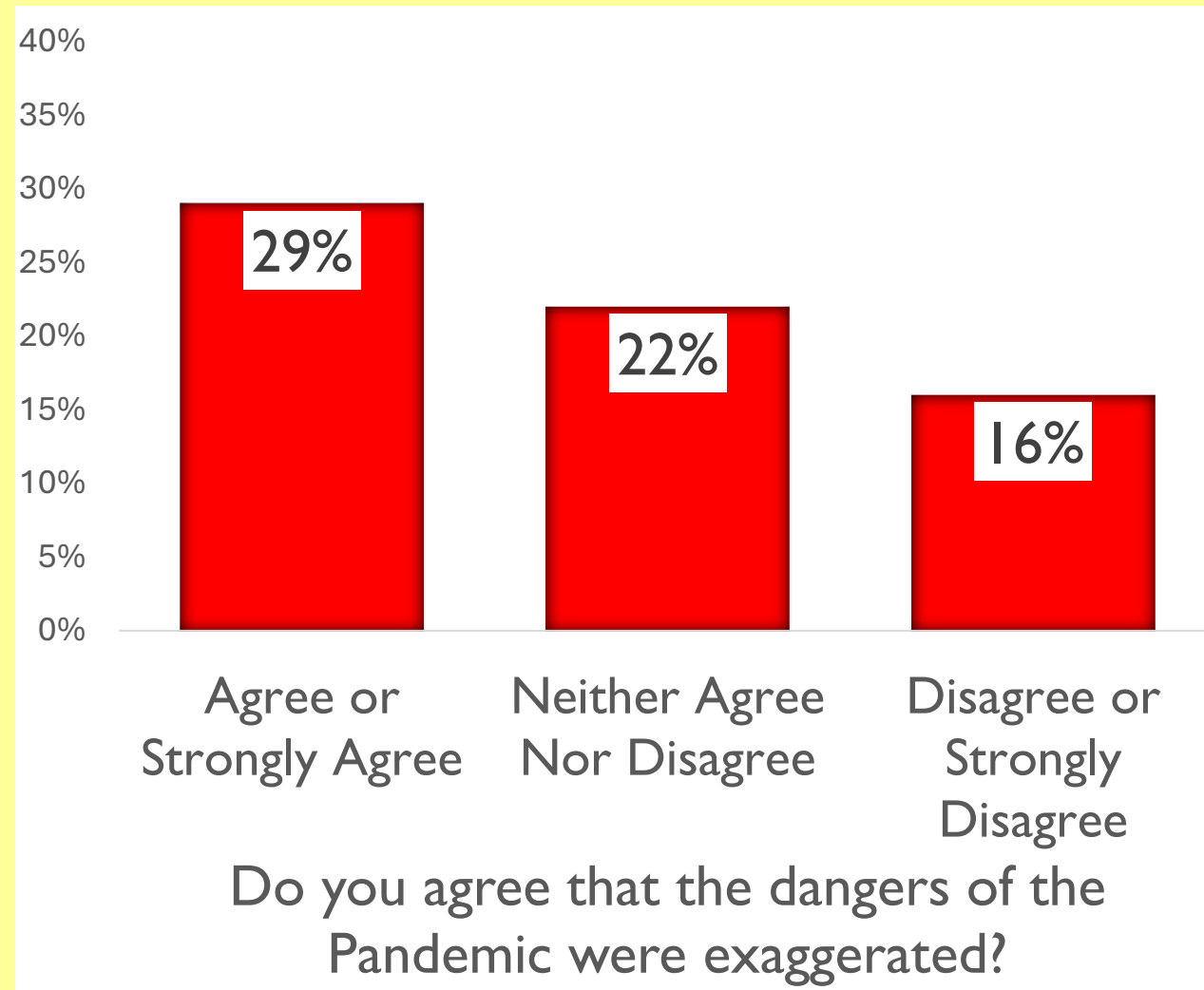
People who joined Orthodox parishes during the pandemic are more generous givers than pre-pandemic “old-timers” and post-pandemic “newbies”

Percentage (%) of members who give 10% or more of net income to their congregations



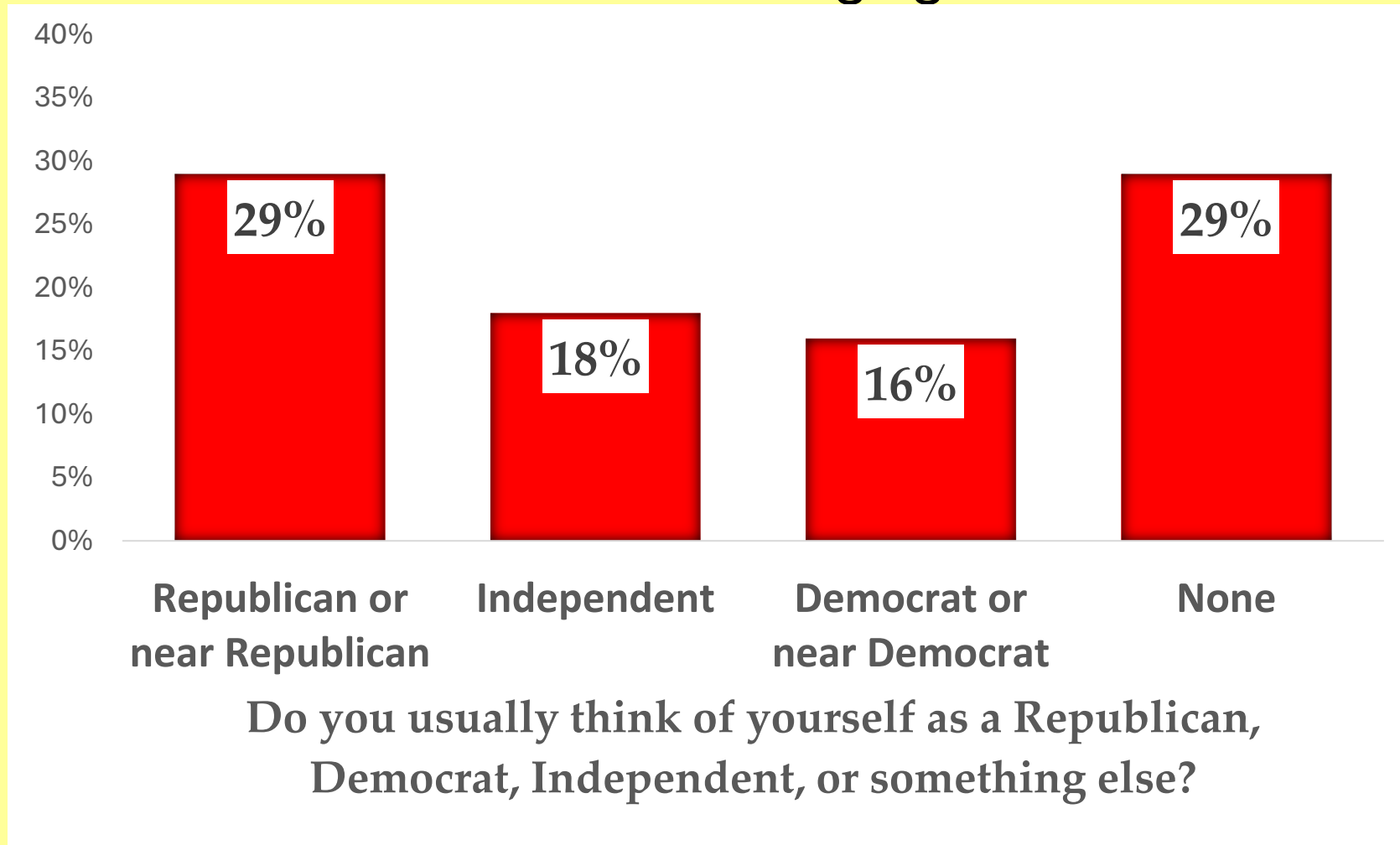
Members denying dangers of the pandemic and efficacy of anti COVID vaccines are more generous givers to their congregations

Percentage (%) of members who give 10% or more of net income to their congregations



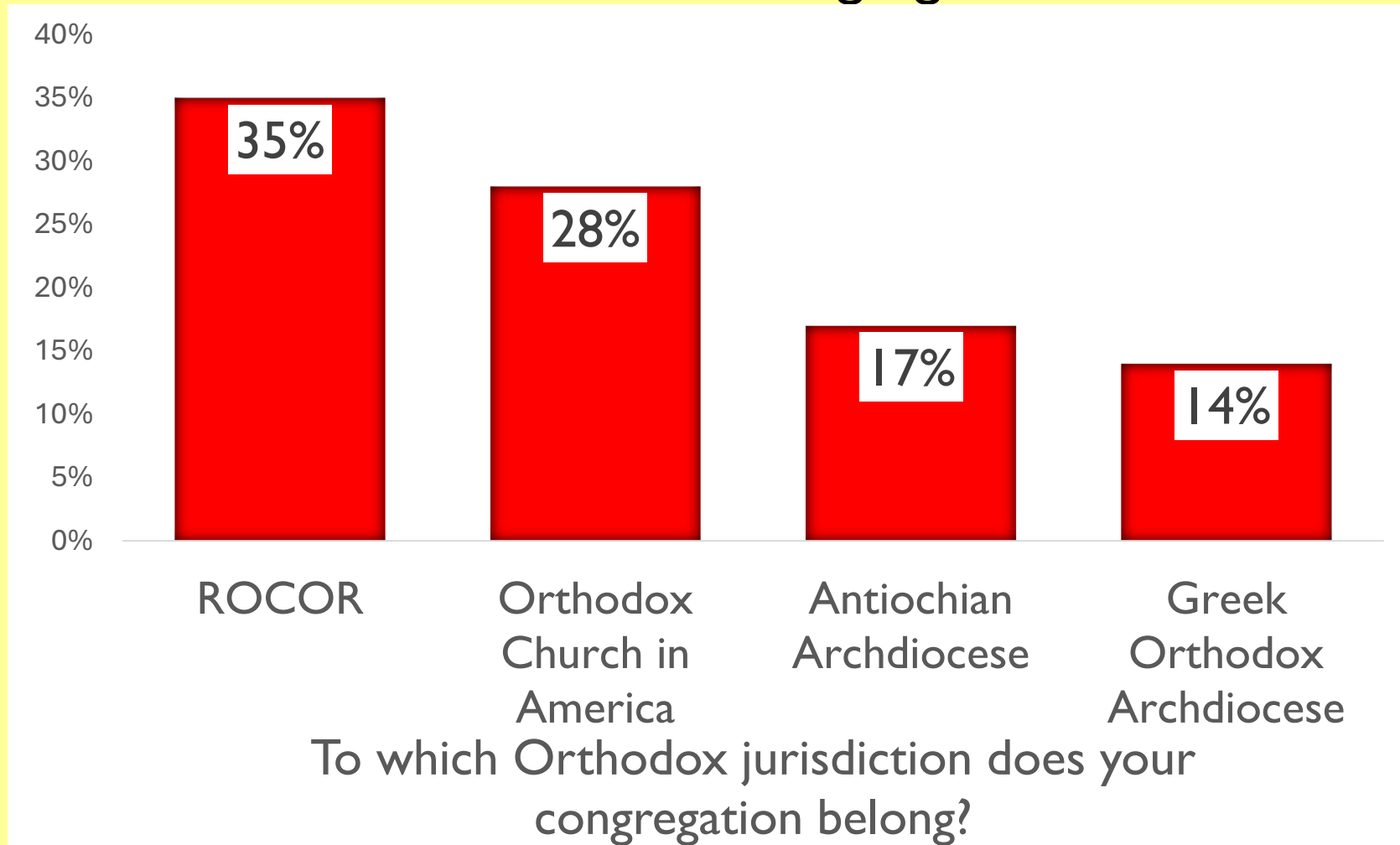
Members leaning toward Republican party are more generous givers than those who prefer Democrats

Percentage (%) of members who give 10% or more of net income to their congregations



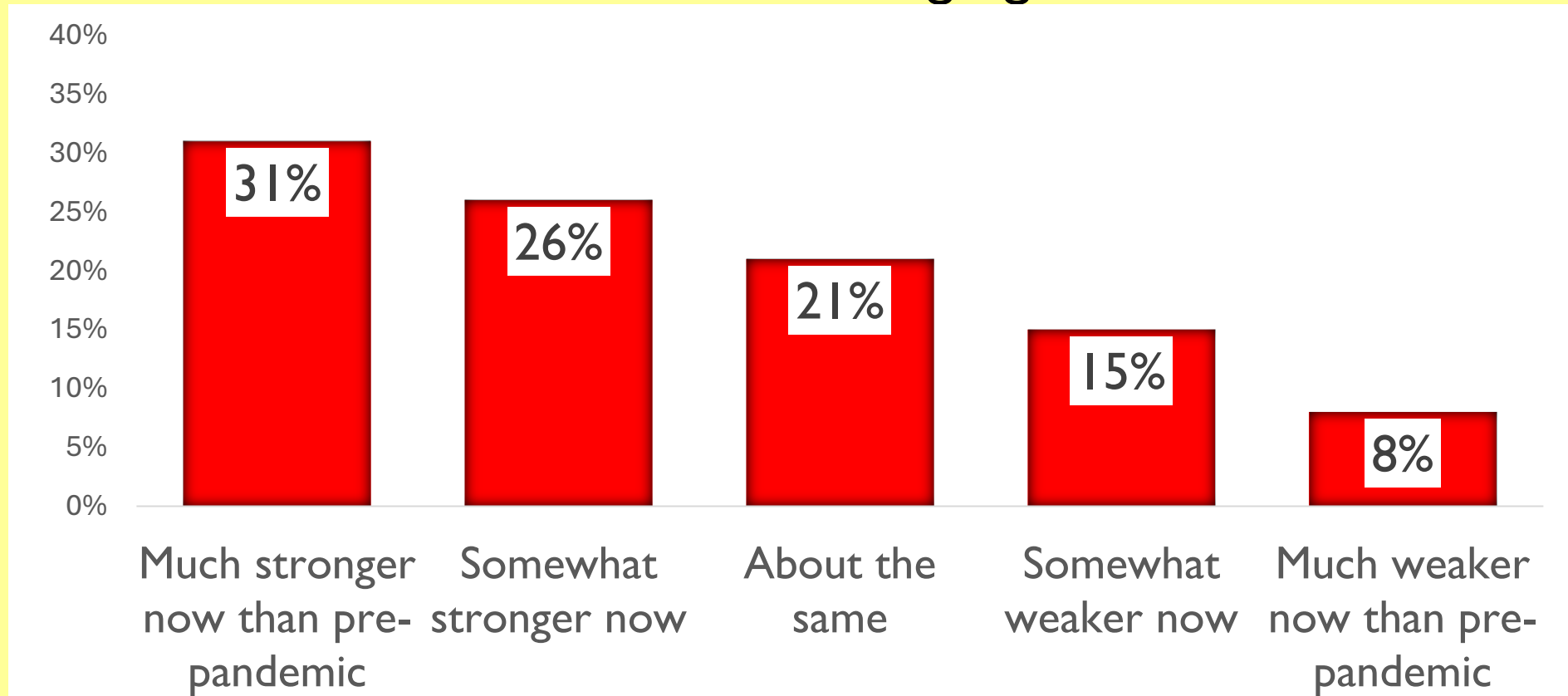
Members of some Orthodox jurisdictions (denominations) are more generous givers than parishioners in other Orthodox jurisdictions

Percentage (%) of members who give 10% or more of net income to their congregations



Members of congregations that surged in vitality post-pandemic are much more generous givers

Percentage (%) of members who give 10% or more of net income to their congregations



All things considered, how would you compare the overall vitality of your congregation before the pandemic and now?

Frequent participation in certain personal religious/spiritual practices is a good predictor of members' greater generosity.

However, this is true only about some (not all) religious practices

Survey asked: "How OFTEN do you engage in each of the following?"

- Praying or meditating
- Reading the Bible or other spiritual texts
- Sharing your Faith with others
- Using websites or other social media for spiritual development
- Participating in faith-based small groups
- Art as a spiritual practice
- Being in nature as a spiritual practice
- Acts of service as a spiritual practice
- Writing as a spiritual practice
- Fasting as a spiritual practice

Guess what? Out of all personal practices, only four are good predictors of members' greater generosity to their congregations

Congregants who frequently engage in the following practices, also tend to give a higher percentage of their net income to congregations

- ~~• Praying or meditating~~
- **Reading the Bible or other spiritual texts**
- **Sharing your Faith with others**
- ~~• Using websites or other social media for spiritual development~~
- ~~• Participating in faith-based small groups~~
- ~~• Art as a spiritual practice~~
- ~~• Being in nature as a spiritual practice~~
- **Acts of service as a spiritual practice**
- **Fasting as a spiritual practice**
- ~~• Writing as a spiritual practice~~