



National Survey of Religious Leaders

Overview and Selected Results

Common Table Collective

Mark Chaves, Anna Holleman, and Joseph Roso

19 January 2024

Overview of the NSRL

- Survey of a nationally representative sample of clergy who serve congregations
- Sample is those who served in congregations that participated in Wave IV of the National Congregations Study
- Conducted in 2019-20
- Total of 1,600 leaders in sample, but here we focus on the **890 primary leaders**
- Funded by the John Templeton Foundation
- For more information, visit: <https://sites.duke.edu/nsrl/>

The NSRL Asked Questions About . . .

- Clergy demographics
- Occupational features
- Health (mental and physical)
- Challenges faced in ministry
- Political attitudes and practices
- . . . and much more

Pulpit & Pew
(Carroll 2001)

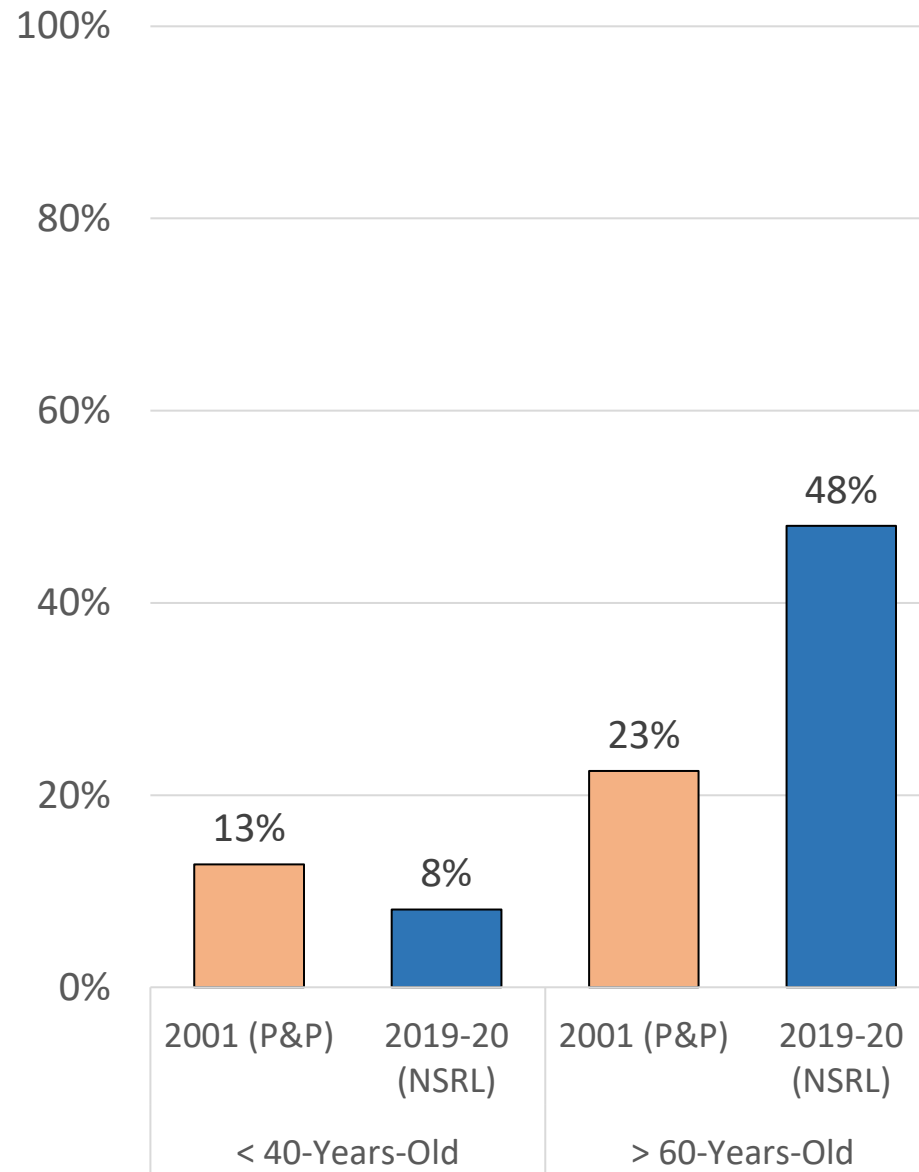


God's Potters

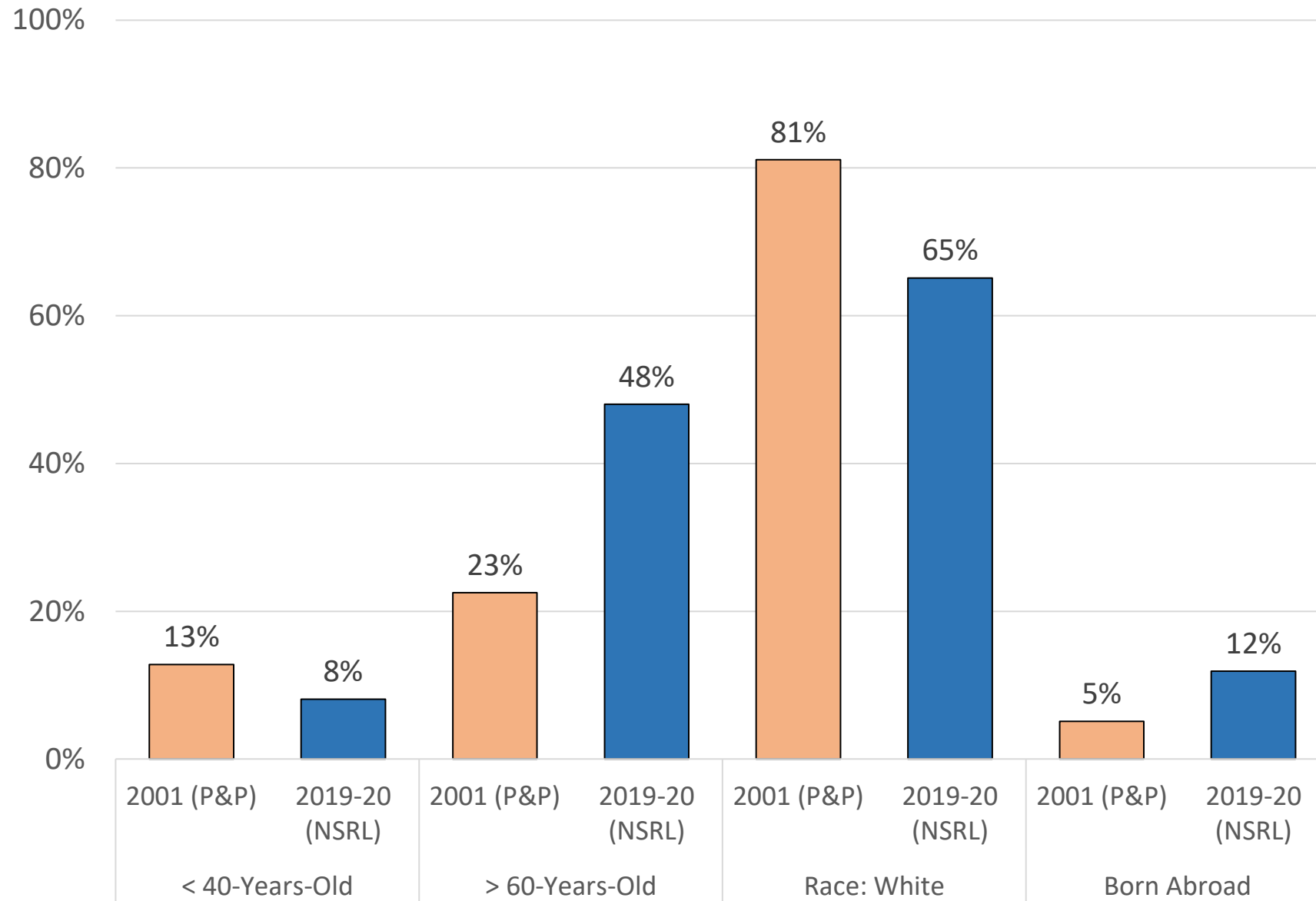
*Pastoral Leadership
and the Shaping of Congregations*

JACKSON W. CARROLL

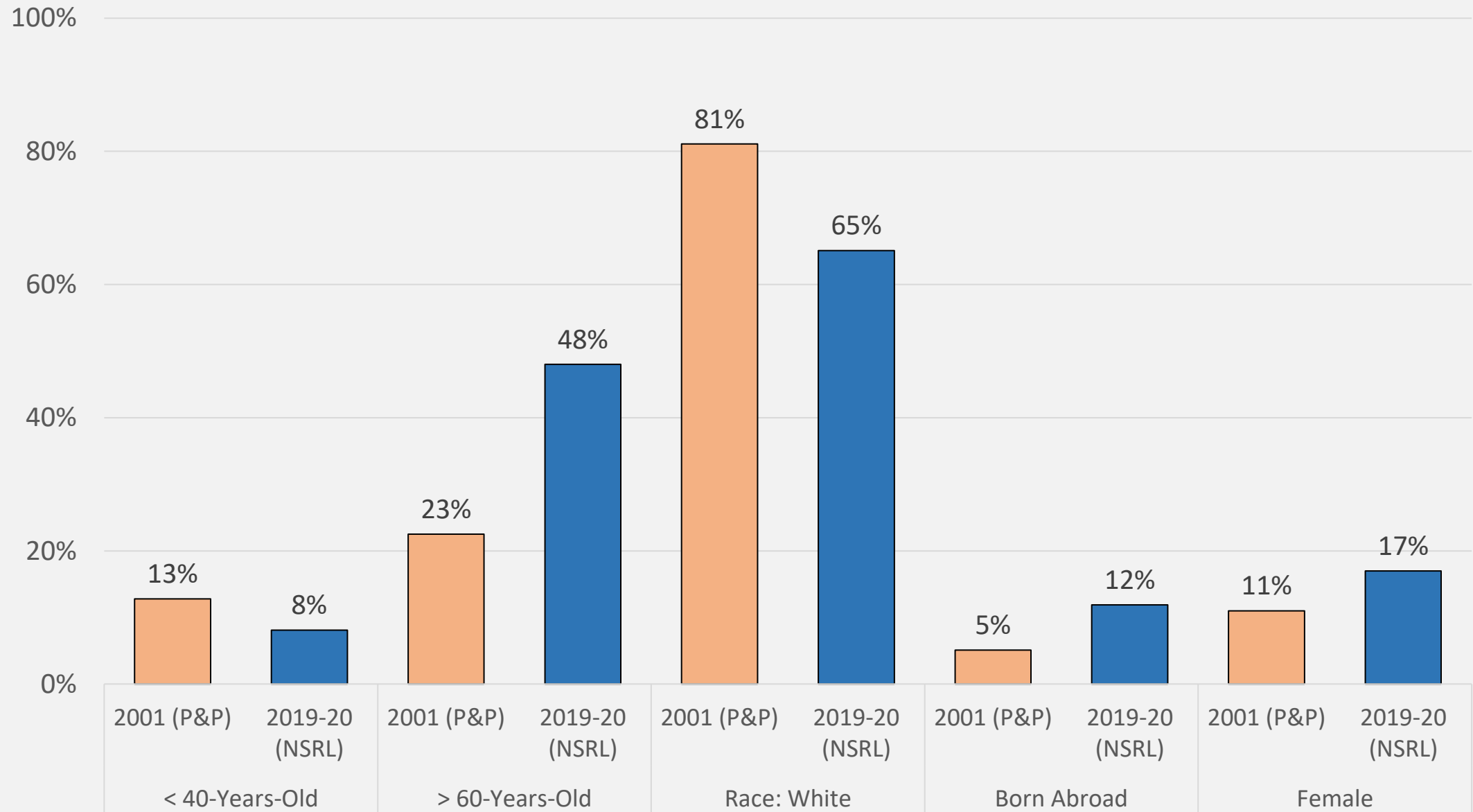
Demographics: Clergy are getting older . . .



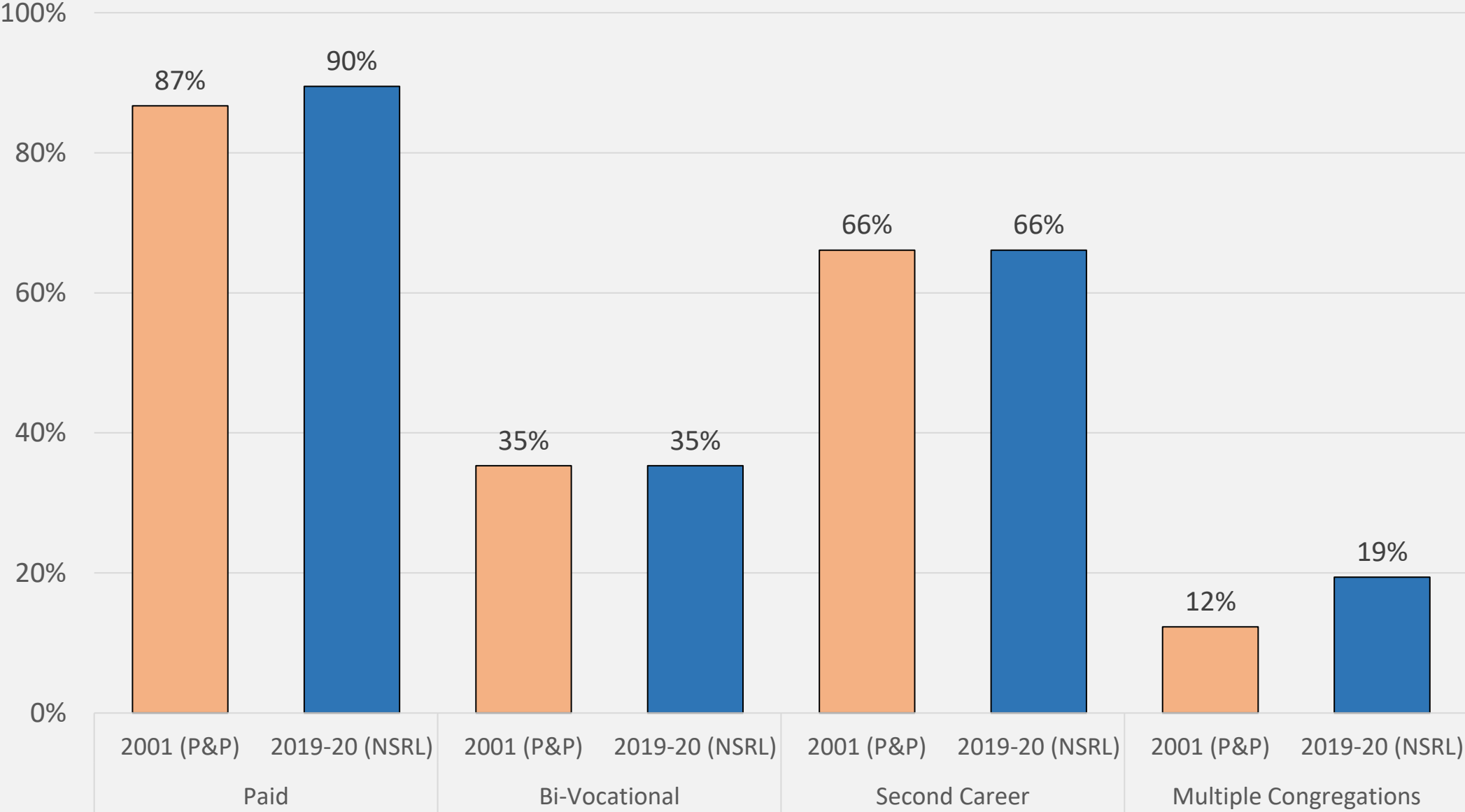
Demographics: Clergy are getting older, more ethnically diverse . . .



Demographics: Clergy are getting older, more ethnically diverse, and are more likely to be women



Occupational features: Stability



Clergy Health

“[Clergy health fares] not very well, though not much worse than the US population as a whole.”

-Jack Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* [data collected in 2001]

Clergy health has reached “crisis levels”
(Hough et al. 2019)

“There is a true crisis in clergy physical health”
(Proeschold-Bell and Byassee 2018)

“Significant levels of psychological suffering” among clergy
(Reynolds 2015)

“Pastoral work is not only tough; it also may be dangerous”
(Bloom 2019)

Is There a Crisis in Clergy Health?: Reorienting Research Using a National Sample

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Sociology
Duke University*

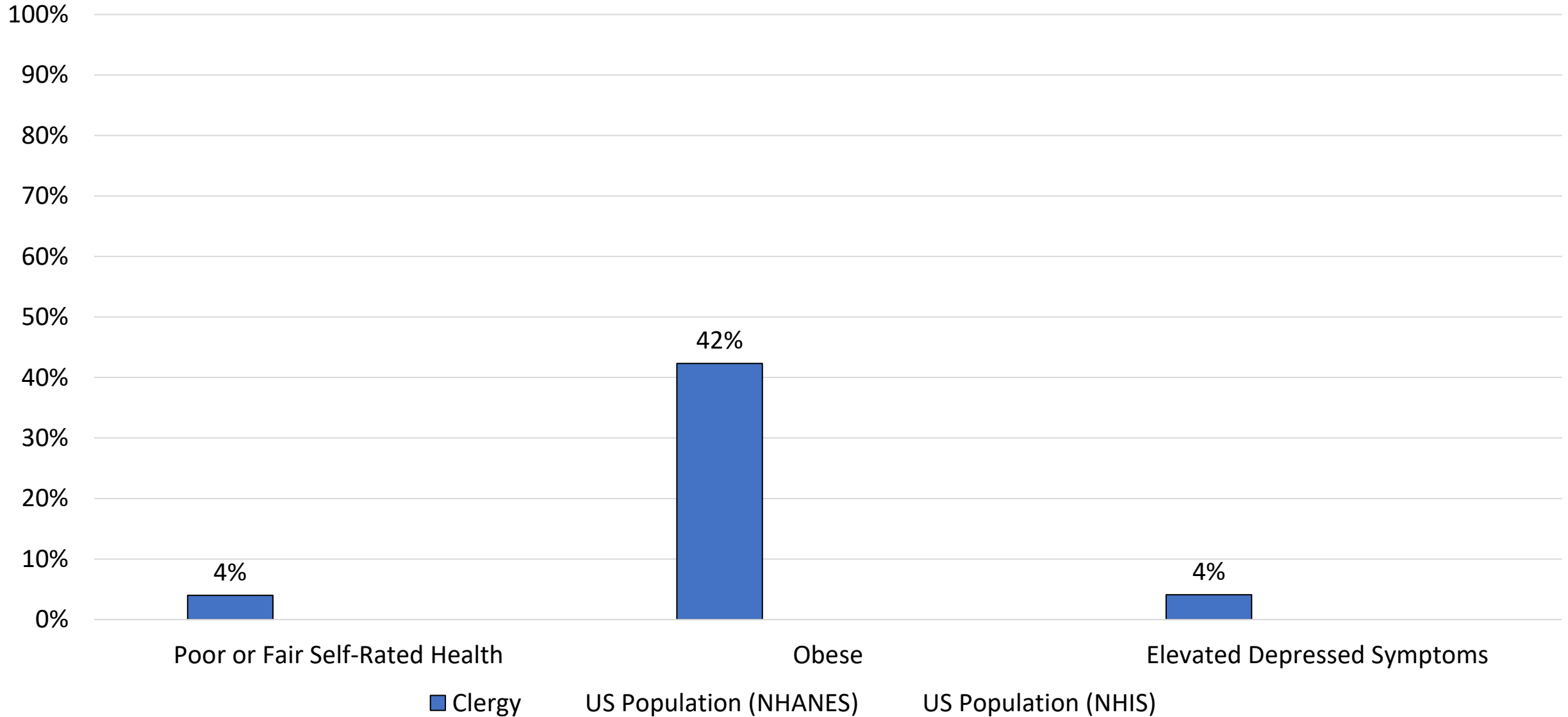
DAVID EAGLE 

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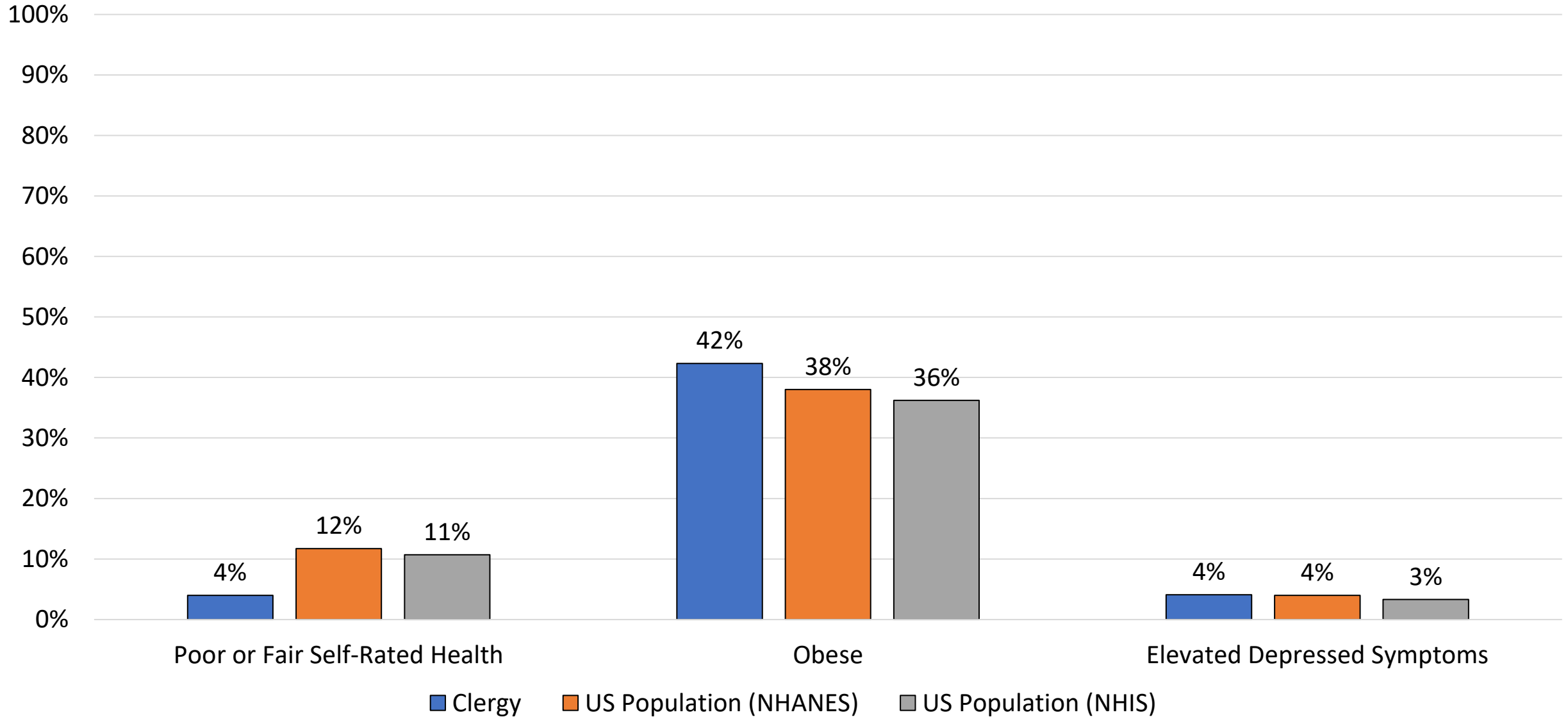
Are religious leaders unusually unhealthy? This question has long occupied scholars interested in the study of religious institutions, and a significant body of research has examined the causes, correlates, and effects of poor health among clergy. In this study, we aimed to: (1) outline the development of, and bias inherent to, the scholarly understanding of clergy health over the past 50 years; (2) test, using a recently collected nationally representative sample of clergy, the standing assumption that clergy are an especially unhealthy vocational group, specifically in terms of depression, obesity, and self-rated health; and (3) identify the major correlates of health among clergy using these data. Contrary to the recent tenor of scholarly research on this subject, our research revealed that clergy are not a particularly unhealthy group. We suggest potential pathways forward to ameliorate the bias inherent in the research into clergy well-being.

Keywords: *clergy, health, depression, obesity.*

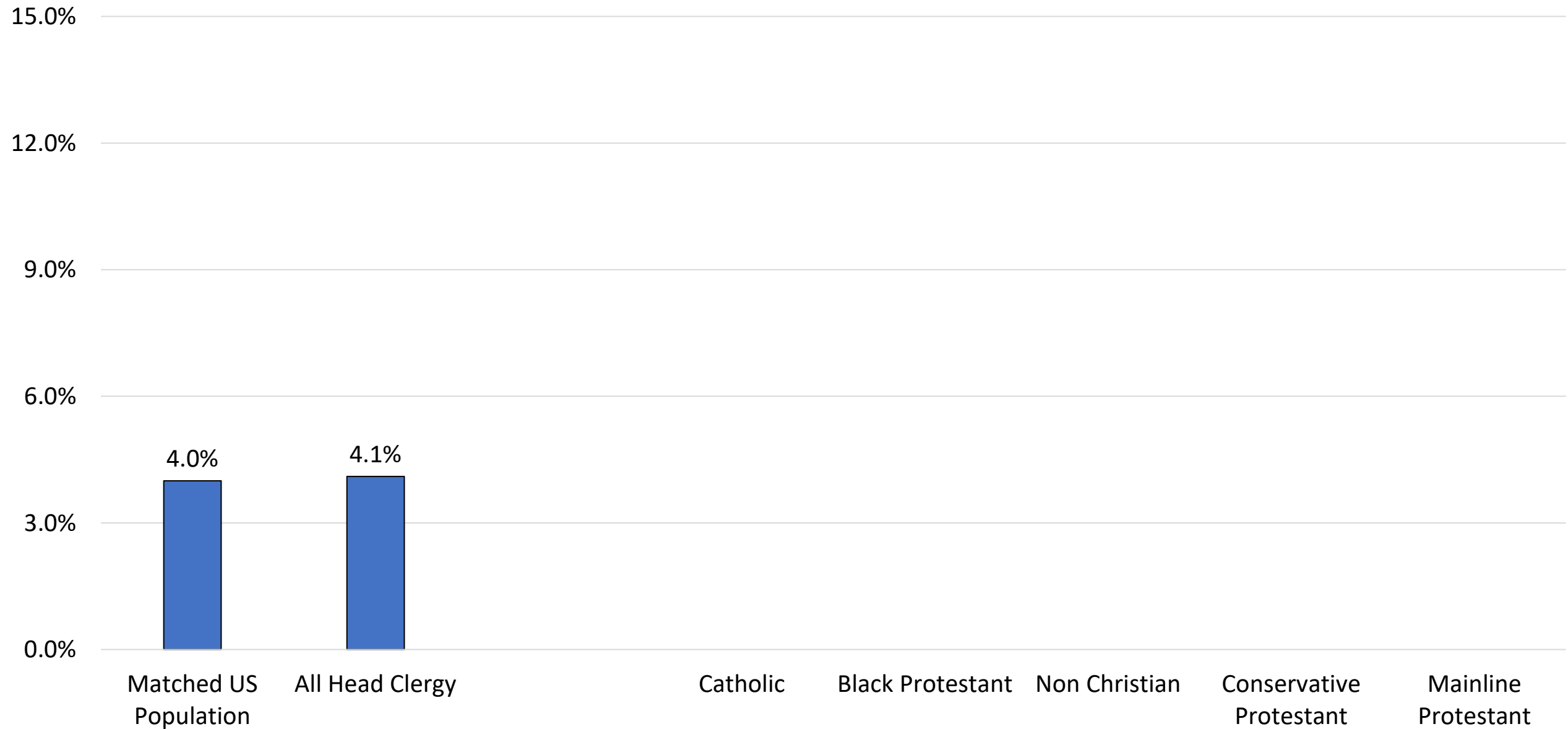
Comparison of the Health of the US Population and Clergy Health: Self-Rated Health, Obesity, and Depression



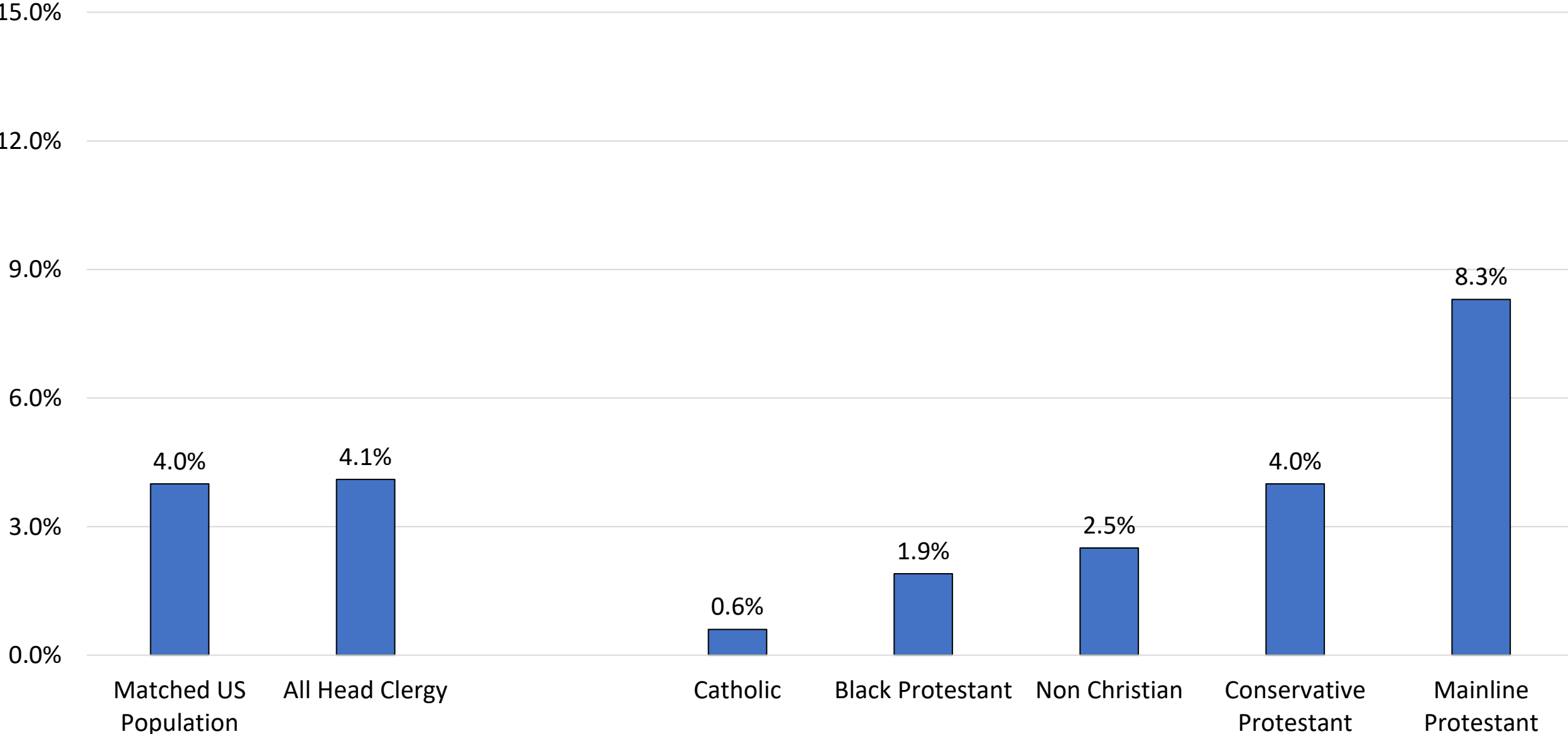
Comparison of the Health of the US Population and Clergy Health: Self-Rated Health, Obesity, and Depression



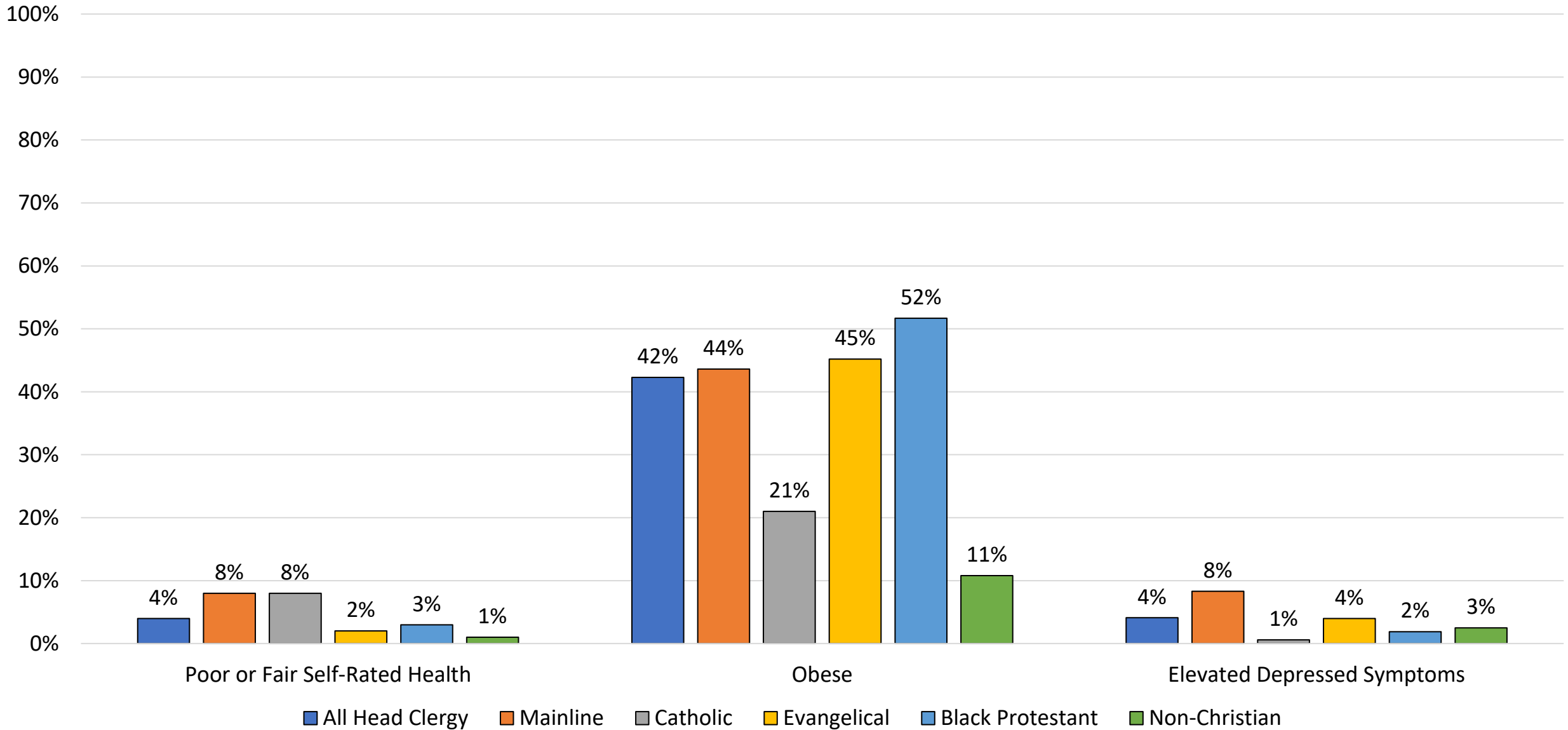
% Elevated Depression Symptoms, Comparing Matched US Population with US Clergy



% Elevated Depression Symptoms, Comparing Matched US Population with US Clergy



Rates of Poor or Fair Self-Rated Health, Obesity, and Depression Among Clergy, by Religious Tradition



Political attitudes and practices

Two Kinds of Clergy Activism

Direct action



Two Kinds of Clergy Activism

Direct action



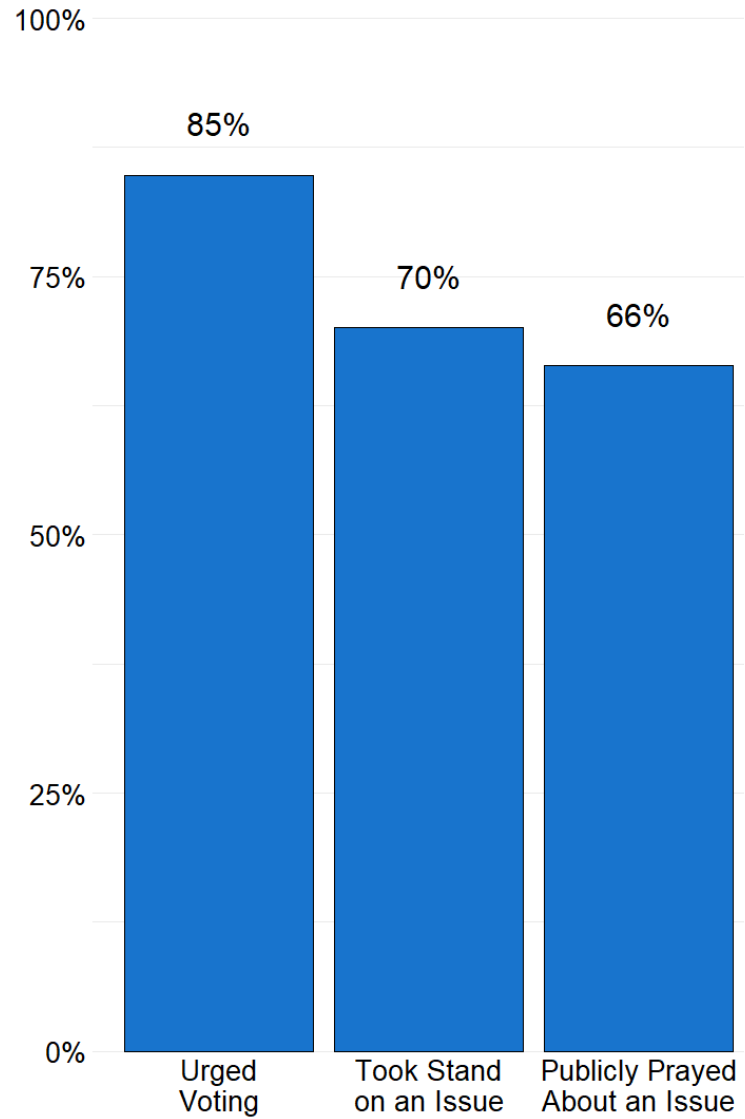
Cue giving



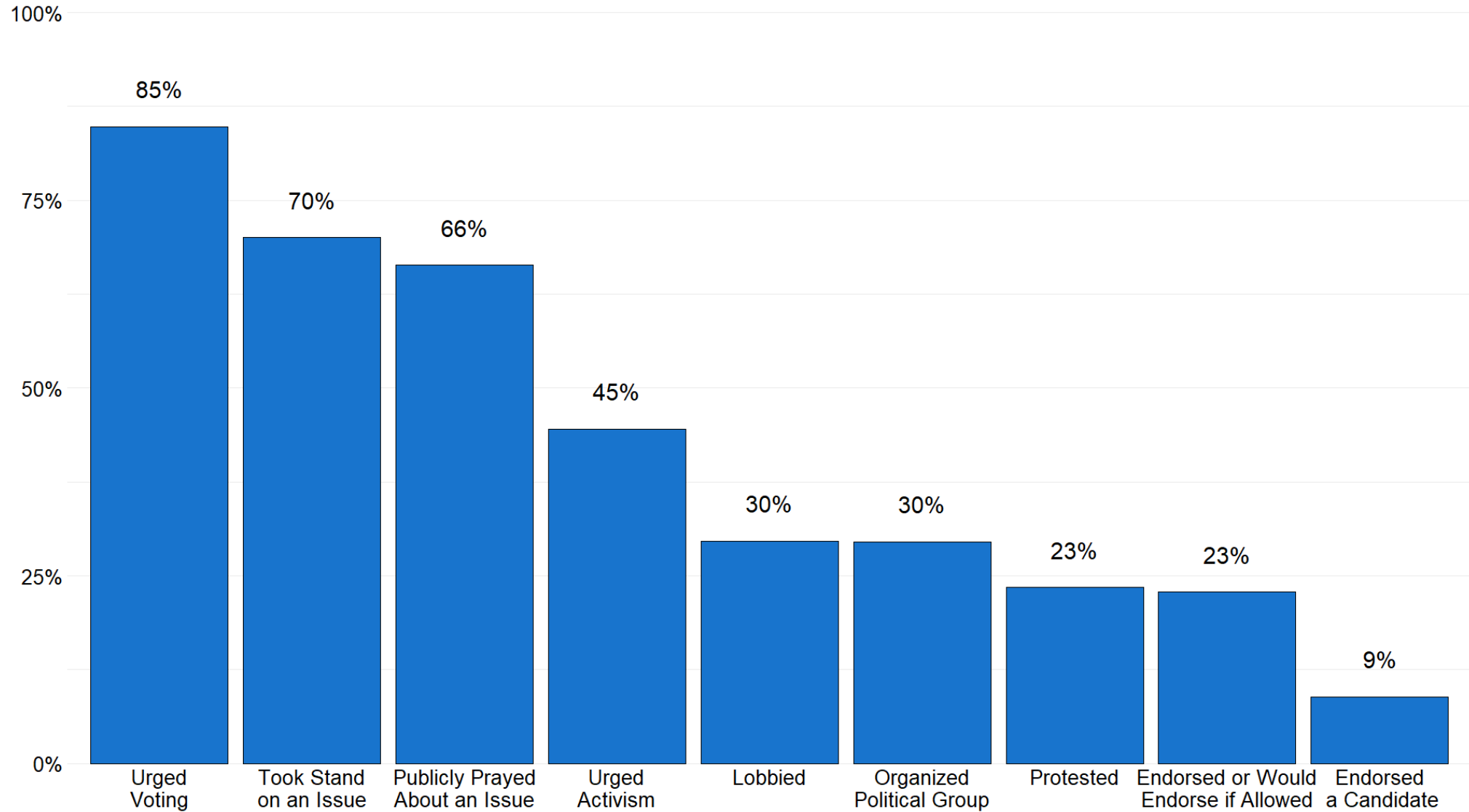
Clergy Political Activities

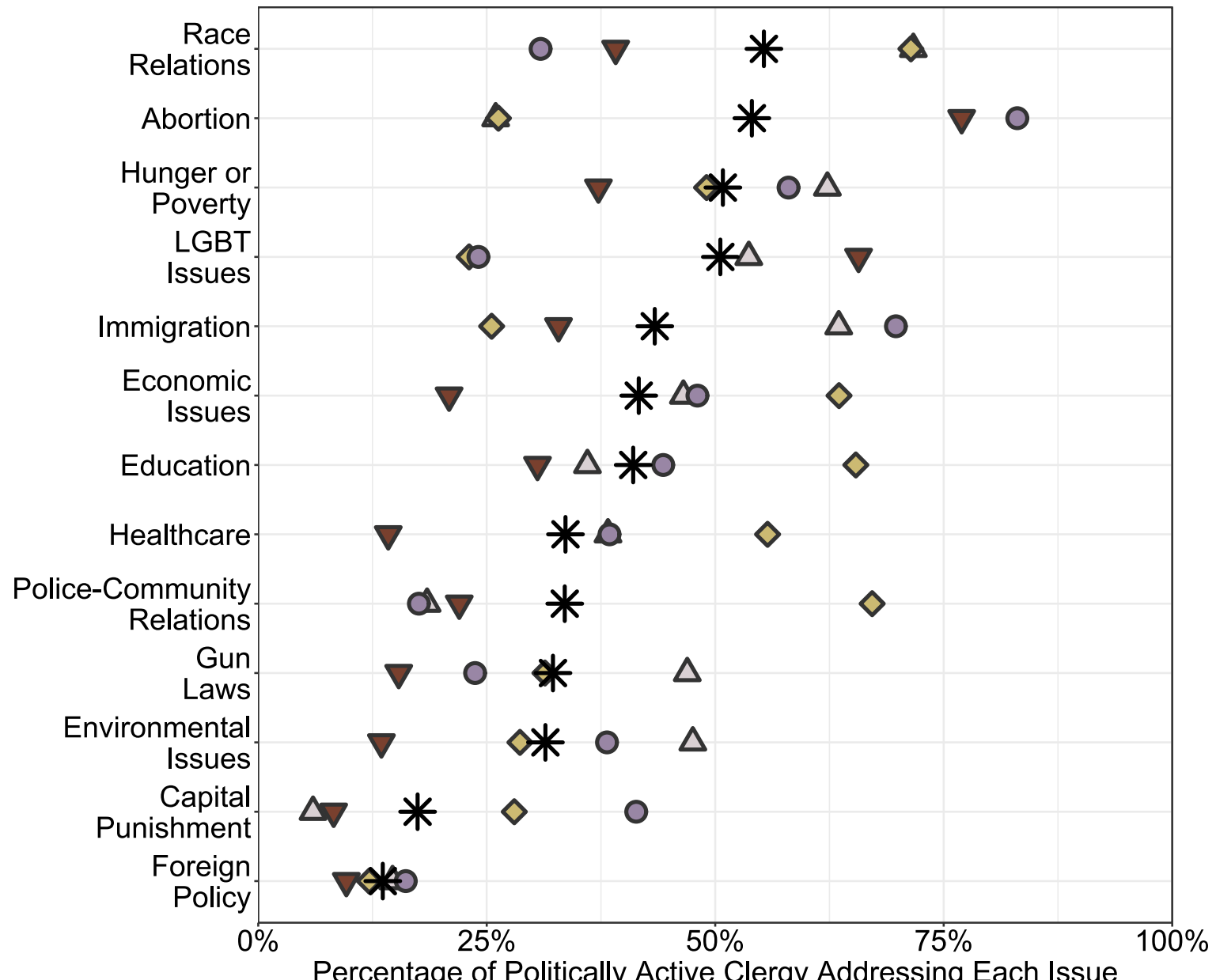
100% —
75% —
50% —
25% —
0% —

Clergy Political Activities



Clergy Political Activities







- ✱ All Primary Leaders
- Roman Catholic
- ▼ Conservative Protestant
- ◆ Black Protestant
- ▲ Mainline Protestant

NOTE

Clergy-lay political (mis)alignment in 2019–2020

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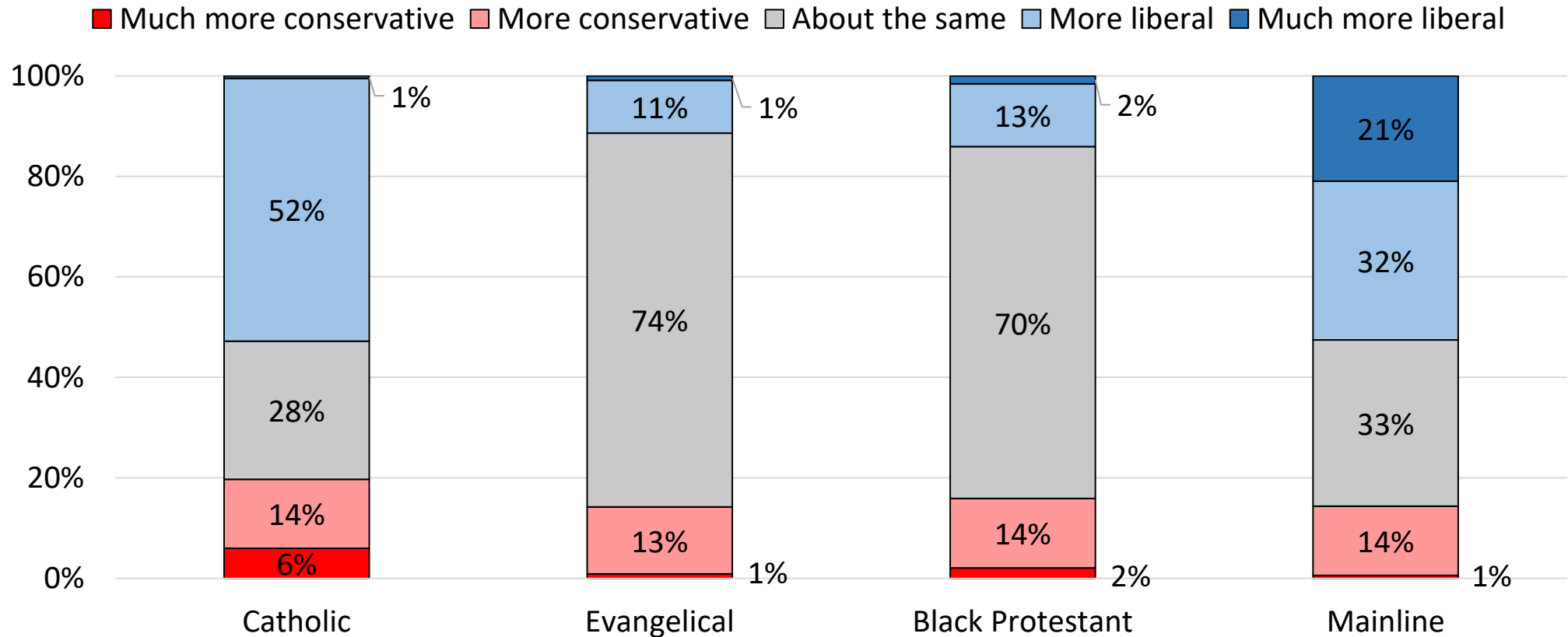
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Abstract

We use data from the new and nationally representative National Survey of Religious Leaders, supplemented with the 2018 General Social Survey, to examine the extent to which clergy are politically aligned with people in their congregations. Two assessments of alignment—clergy reports of how their political views compare to the political views held by most people in their congregations, and comparisons between clergy and lay voting preferences in the 2016 election—yield the same findings. Clergy in Black Protestant and predominantly white evangelical churches are much more likely to be politically aligned with their people than are Catholic or, especially, white mainline Protestant clergy, who often are more liberal than their people. Contrary to media reports suggesting that evangelical clergy are now likely to be less conservative than their people, the vast majority are either politically aligned with, or more conservative than, their members.

Keywords: clergy; congregations; polarization; political alignment; 2016 presidential election; political ideology

How Clergy Compare Their Political Ideology to Their Congregants' Ideology



Clergy Challenges

“Please tell us the most important practical challenge(s) you currently face in your work at your congregation.”

50%

40%

30%

20%

10%

0%

Declining
commitment to
religion in
congregation &
society

Congregational
finances

Generational
change in
congregation

Clergy's own
well-being

Congregational
facilities

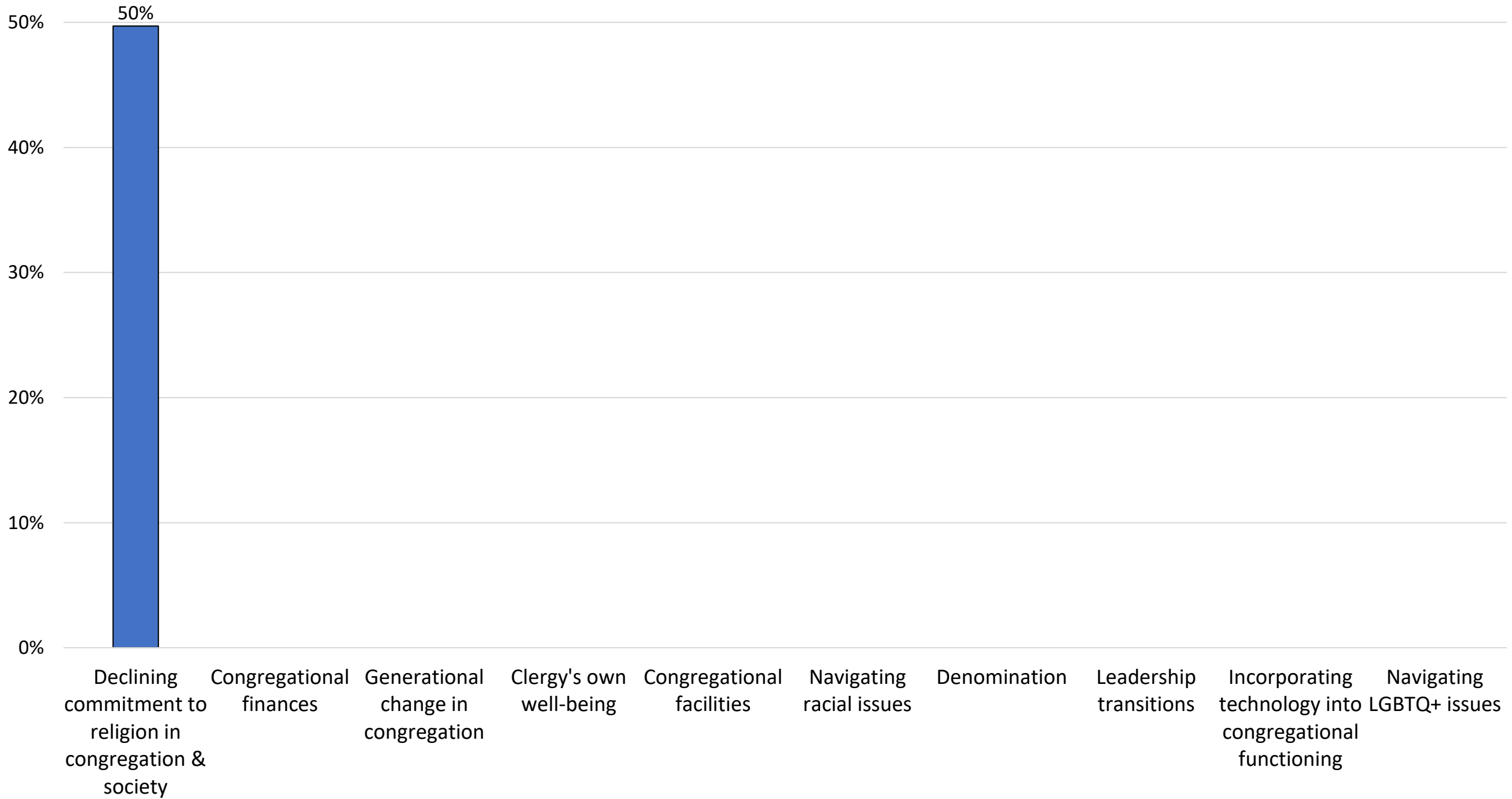
Navigating
racial issues

Denomination

Leadership
transitions

Incorporating
technology into
congregational
functioning

Navigating
LGBTQ+ issues



Declining Commitment to Religion

In Culture:

“Communicating timeless Truth in a culture that is almost post-Truth and sees Truth as something that is inevitably relative and changing.”

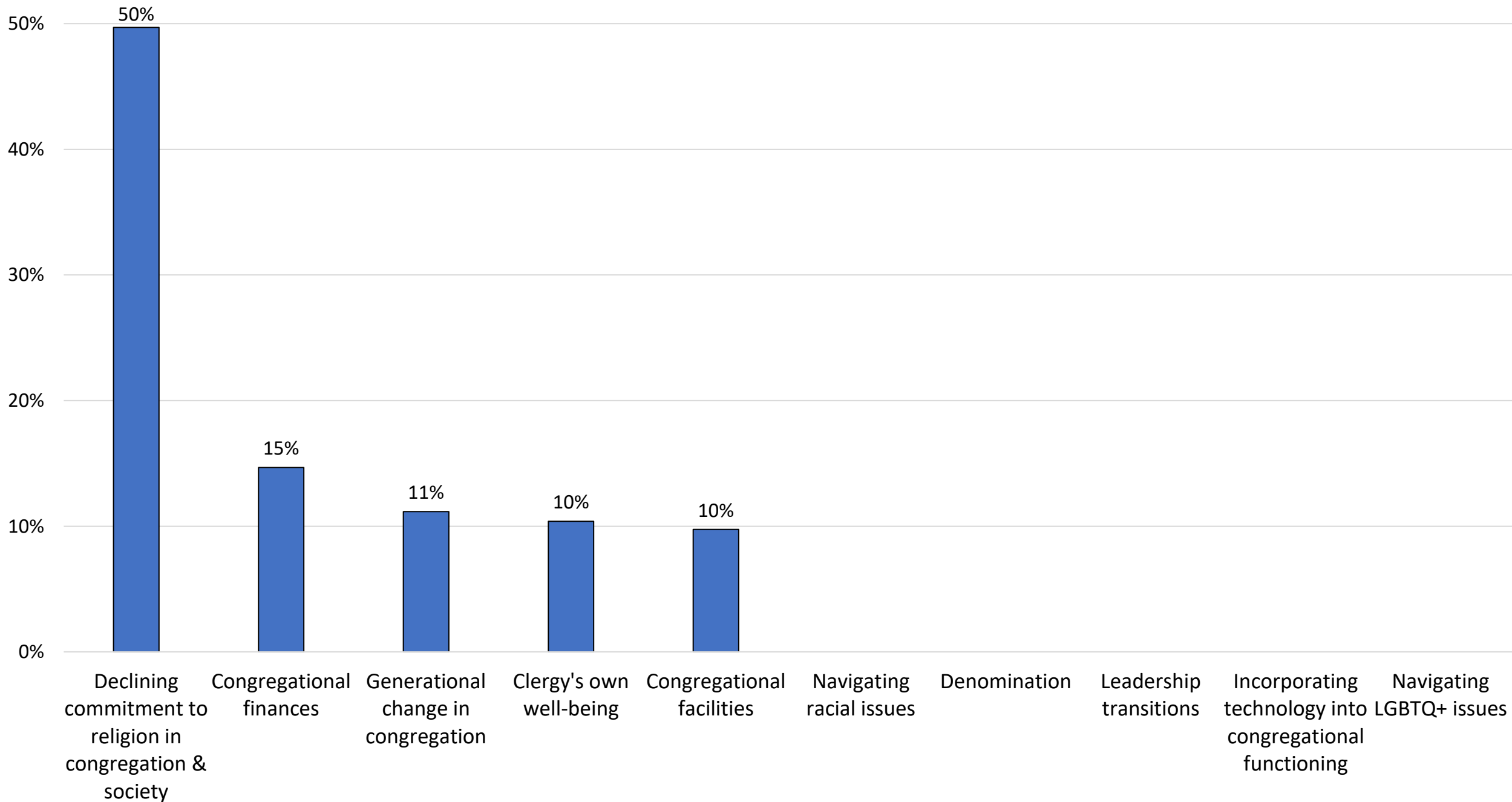
“Living grace in a culture increasingly hostile to faith.”

Declining Commitment to Religion

In Congregation:

“It is easy to get discouraged over the lack of regular church attendance; and of those who do attend, the lack of involvement or commitment in church-related activities.”

“I yearn for greater spiritual development among my people. I’ve been trained to foster it – yet my training is not sufficient where the motivation for it is lacking.”



Generational Change

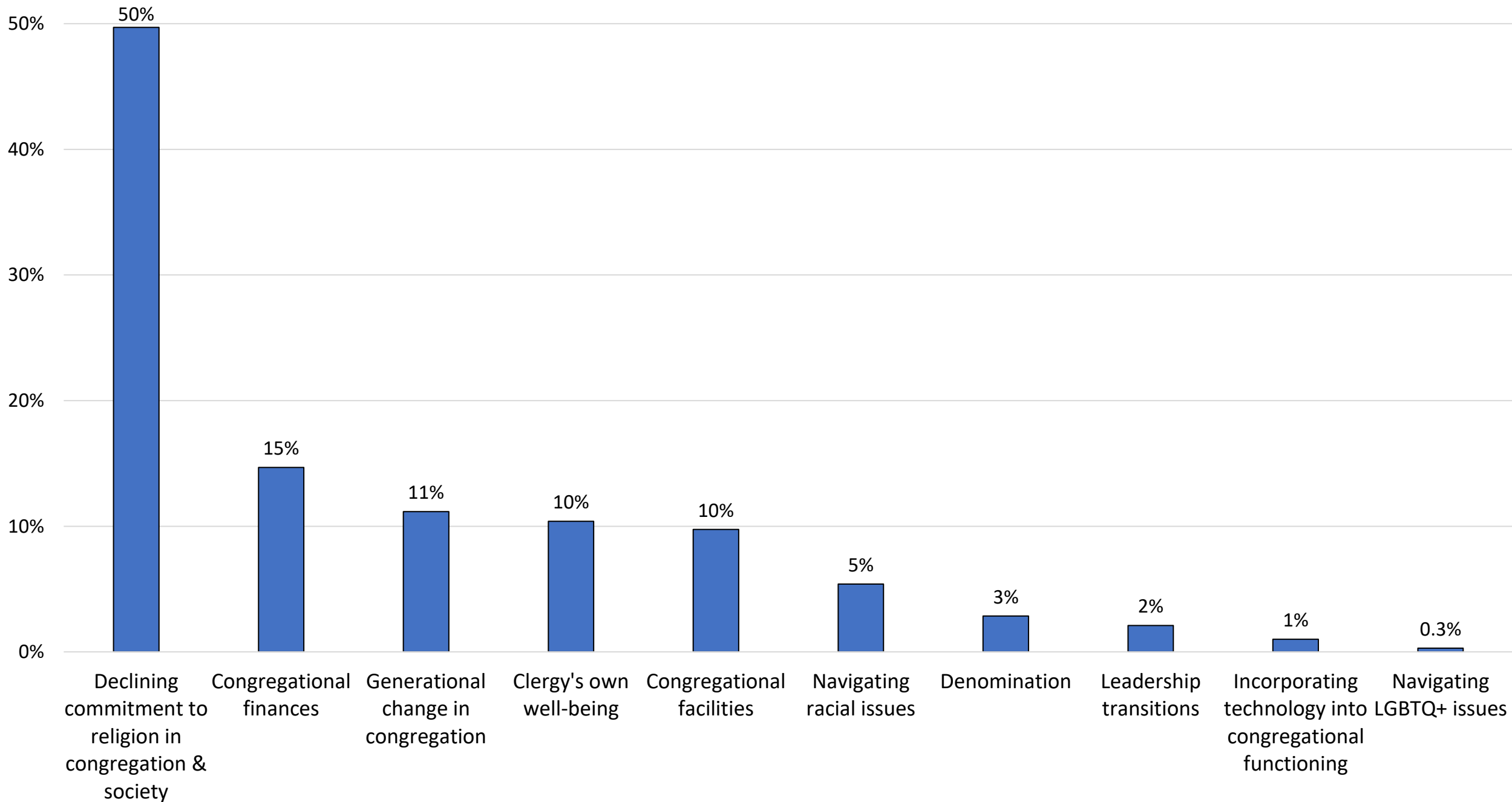
“Our biggest challenge is engaging young people between the age of Confirmation and their 40’s.”

“Our church is aging – it’s the same boat so many Mainline churches are in.”

Generational Change

“We have no one older and mature in their faith pouring into younger families.”

“I am trying to connect generations rather than the age and stage silos that exacerbate the issues of younger generations leaving the church.”



Thank You!

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