

Church Switcher Study 2023

Factors in Choosing Current Church Report

A SURVEY OF 1,001 AMERICAN PROTESANT CHURCH SWITCHERS

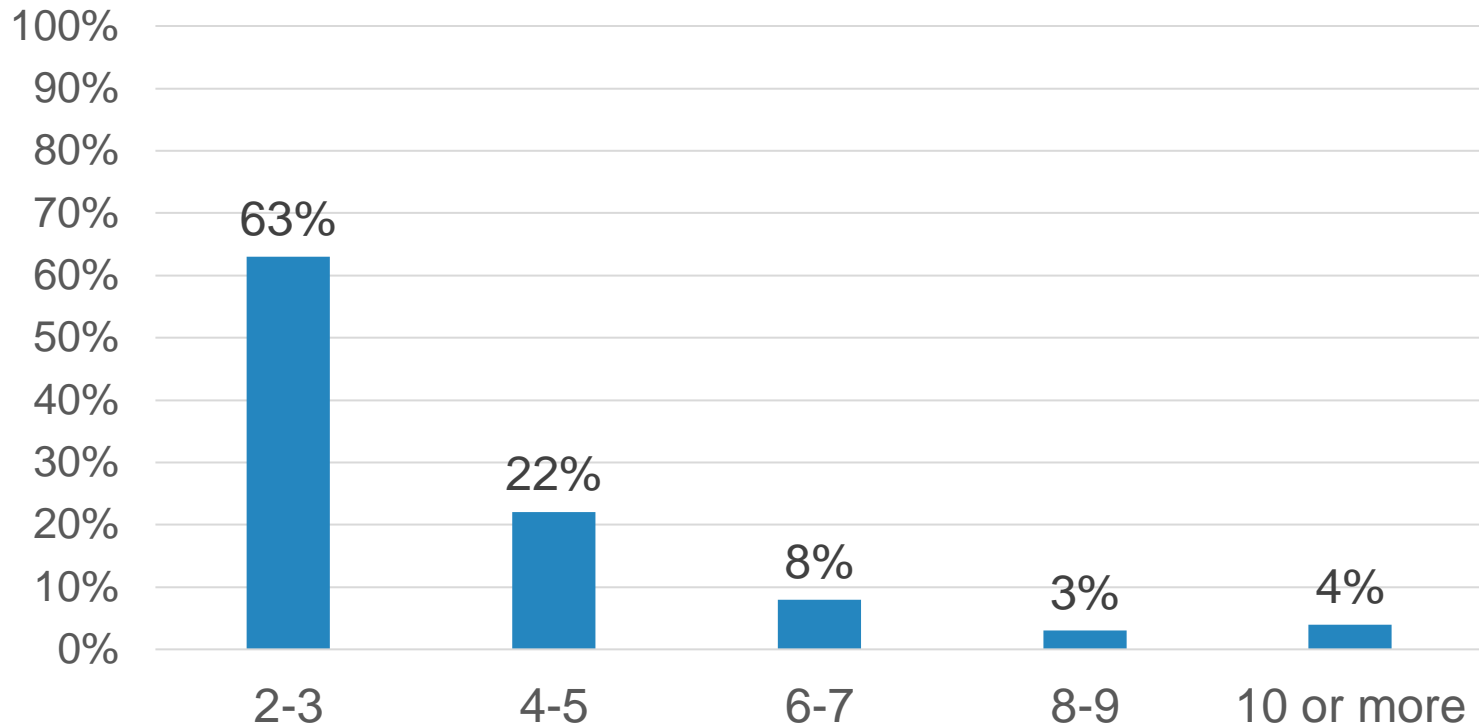
Lifeway **research**

Methodology

- The online survey of 1,001 American Protestant churchgoers was conducted July 26-August 4, 2023, using a national pre-recruited panel
- Respondents were screened to include those who identified as Protestant/non-denominational who attend church worship services at least twice a month and have attended more than one church as an adult
- Note: During the screening, it was determined that 47% of Protestants who attend church worship services at least twice a month have only attended one church as an adult
- Quotas were used to balance gender, age, region, ethnicity, education, and religion to more accurately reflect the population
- The completed sample is 1,001 surveys
- The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error from the panel does not exceed $\pm 3.1\%$. This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting
- Margins of error are higher in sub-groups

Among Protestant churchgoers who have regularly attended more than one church as an adult, 85% have regularly attended less than six

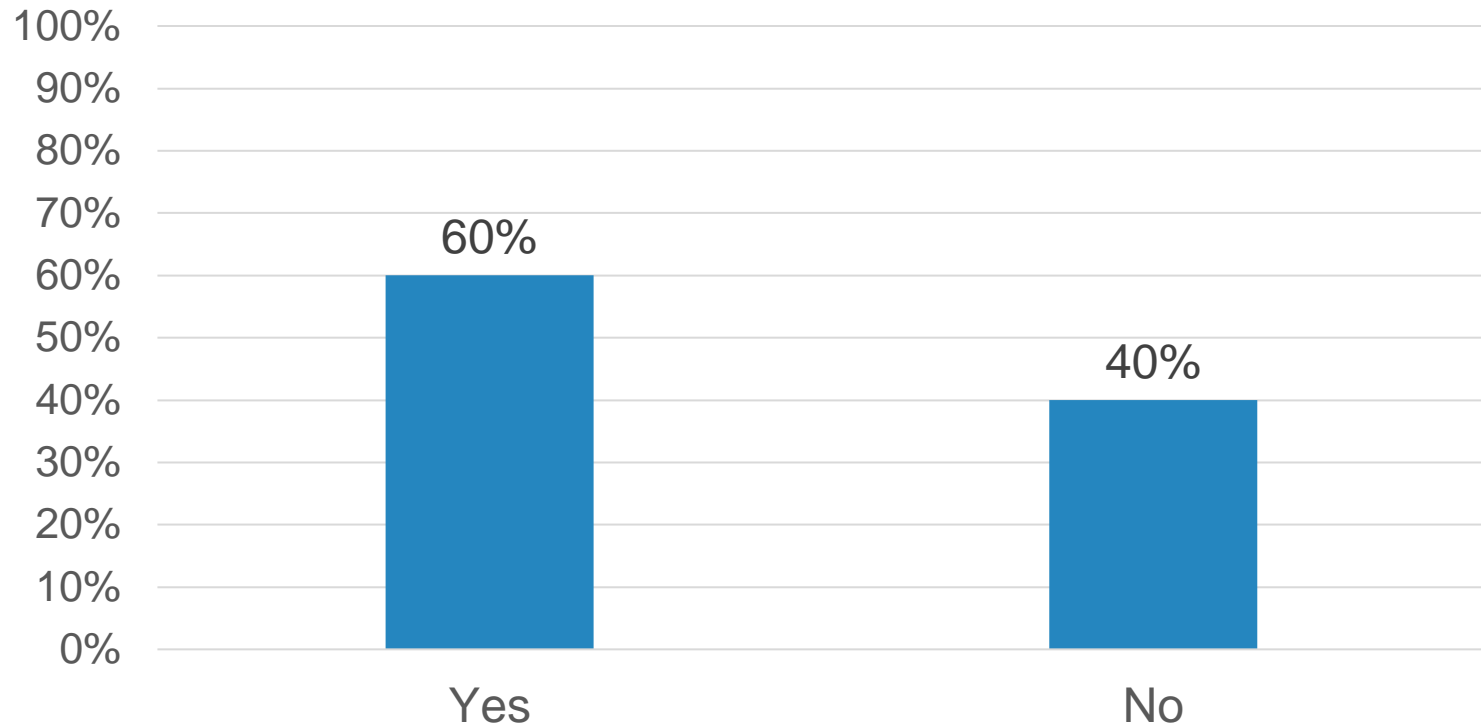
Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



Lifeway research

60% decided to attend their current church due to a residential move

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

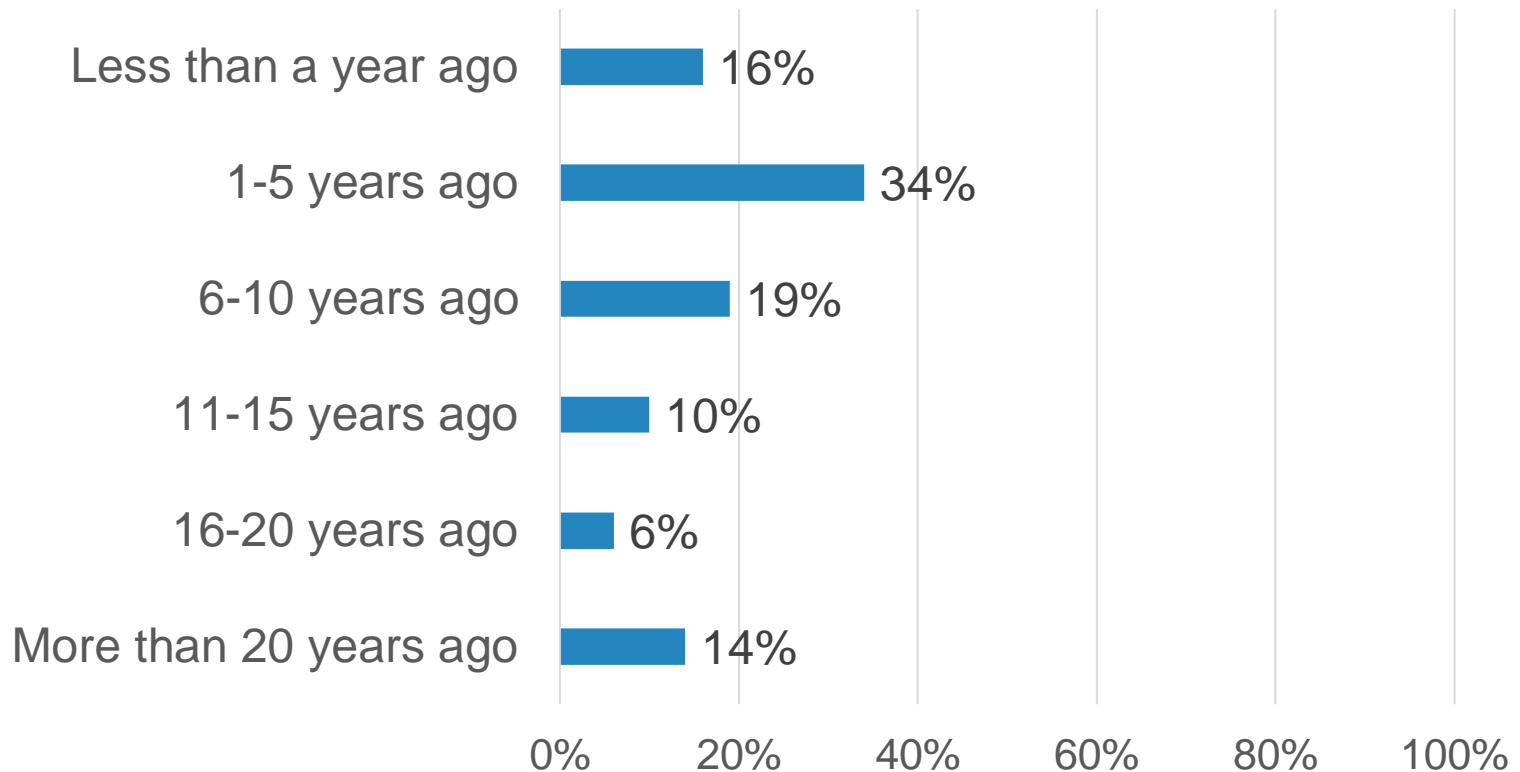


Lifeway research

QS10: "Is your decision to attend your current church at all related to a **residential move**? (Select one)
(Whether or not it is the first church you've attended since you moved)" n=1,001

5 out of 10 church switchers began attending their current church 5 years ago or less

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

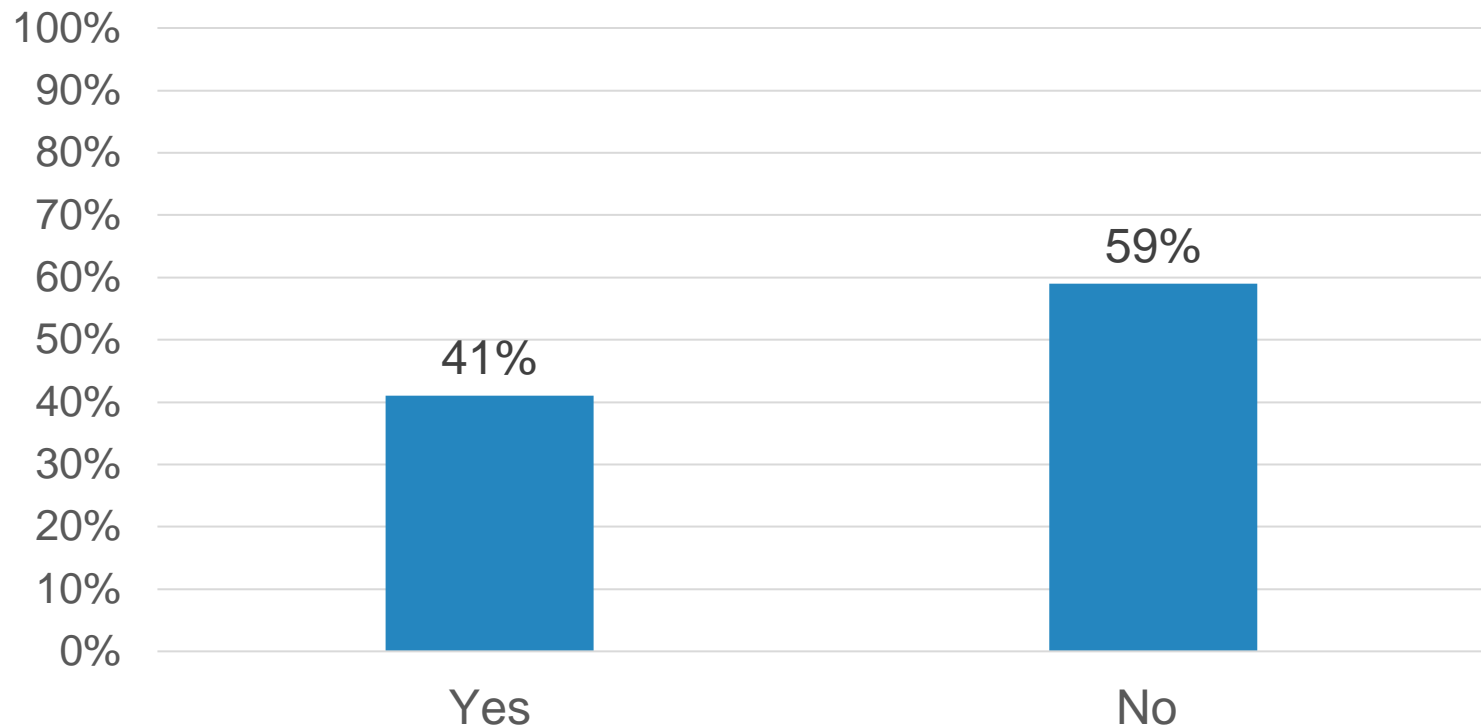


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Q1: "How long ago did you begin attending your current church? (Select one)" n=1,001

41% say they stopped attending church for more than 3 months between churches

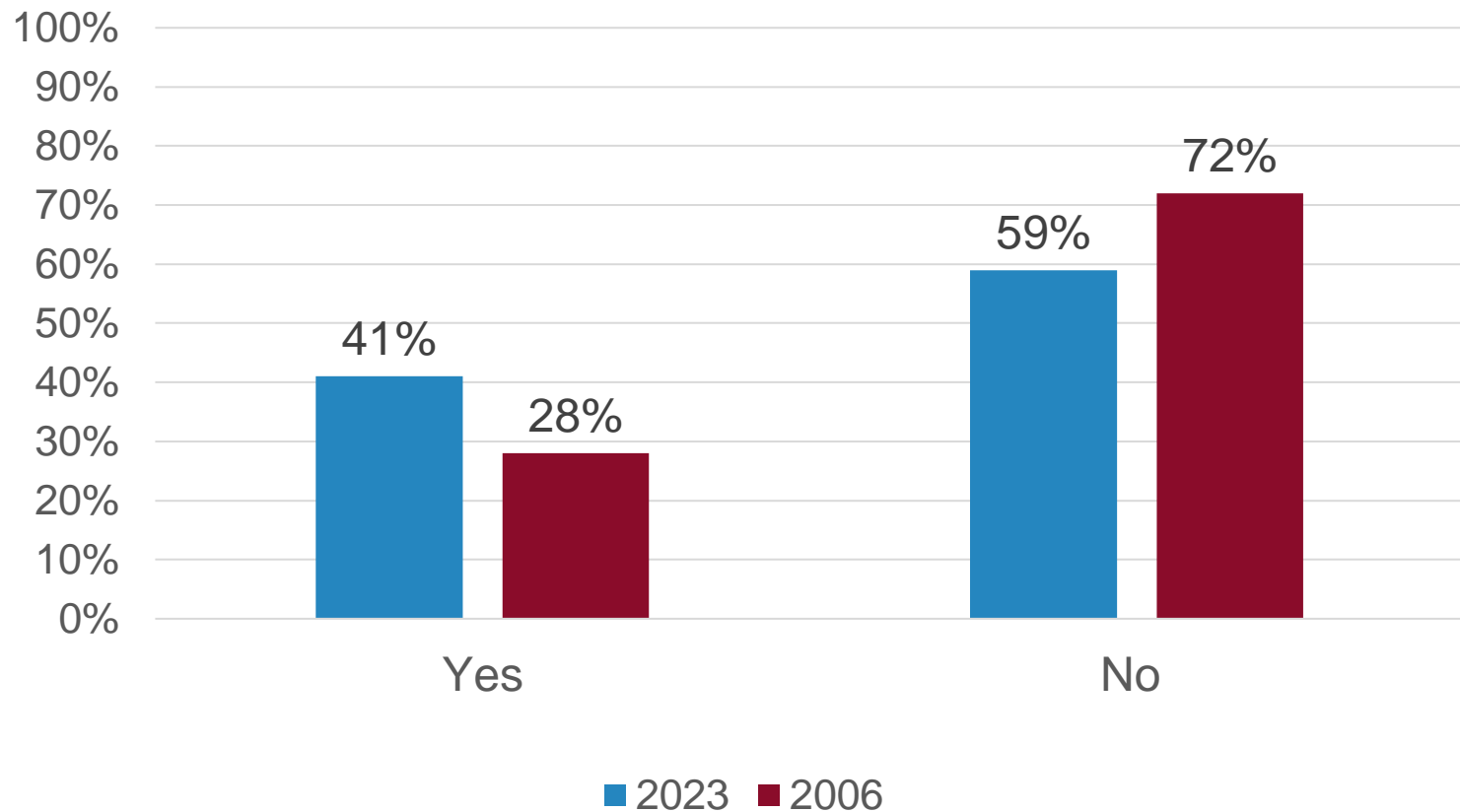
Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



Lifeway research

More church switchers stopped attending church for more than 3 months between churches than in 2006

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



Lifeway research

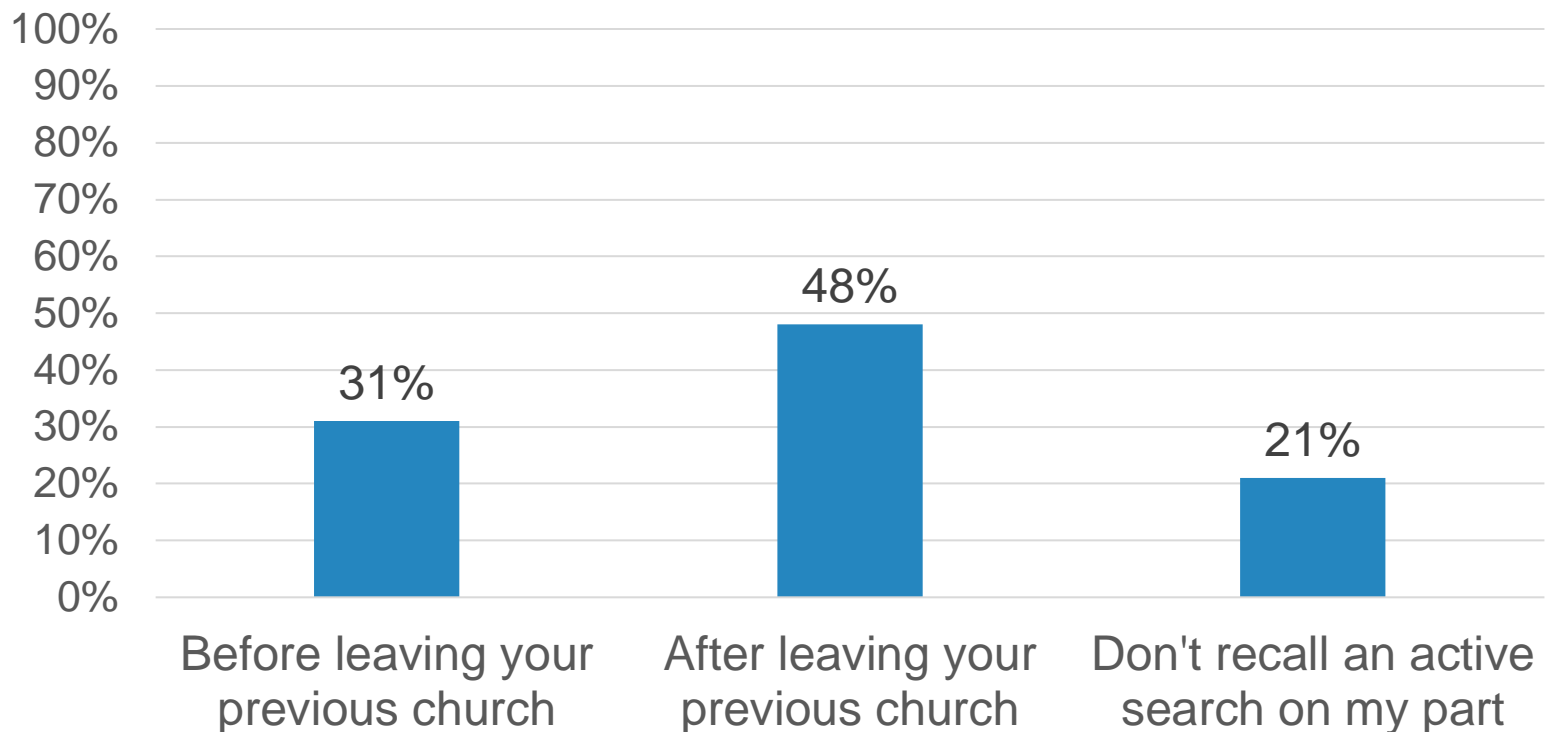
“Did you stop attending church for more than three months in between attending your previous church and your current church?”

Elements of search for a new church

Lifeway research

31% began actively searching for a new church before leaving their previous church

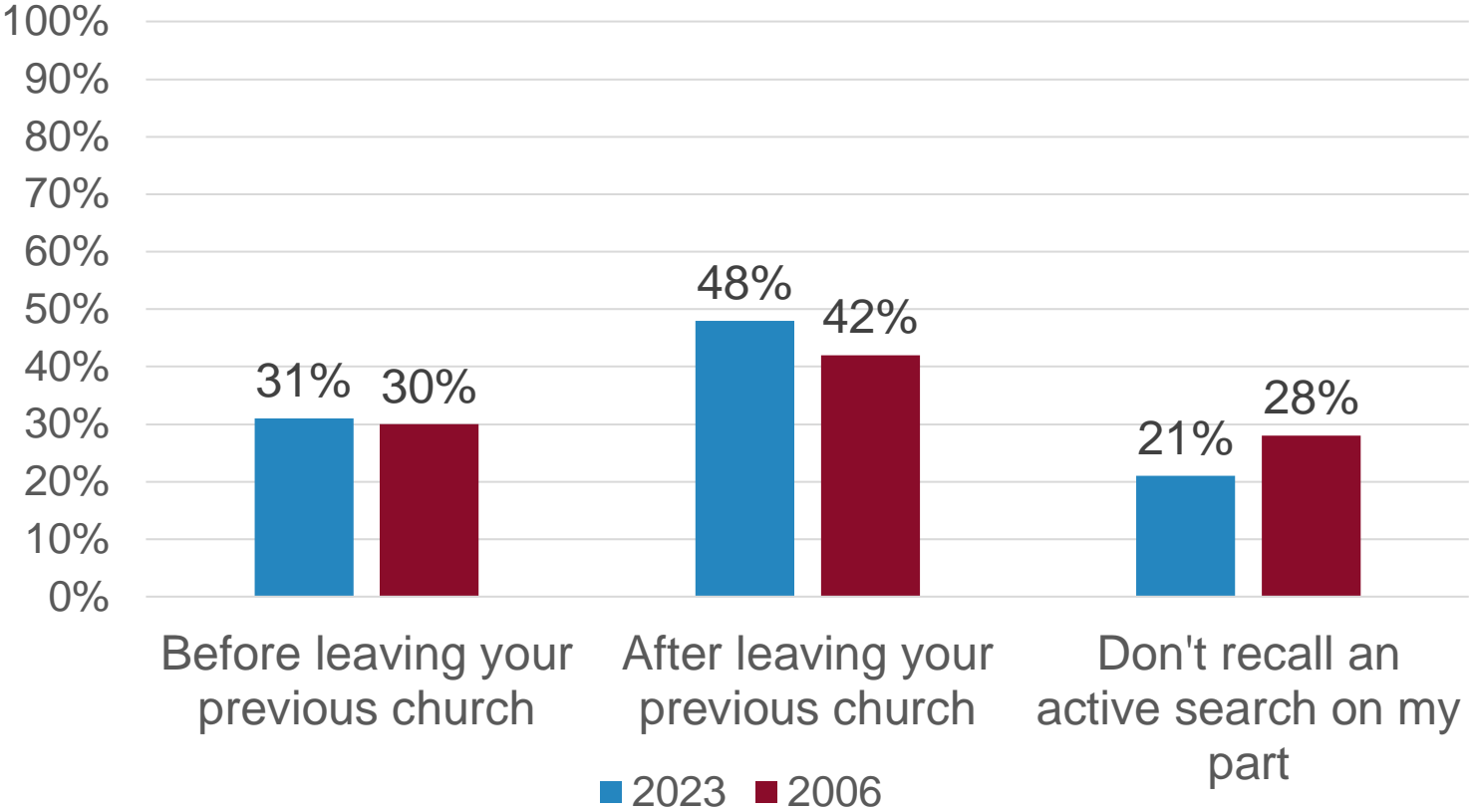
Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



Lifewayresearch

More switchers actively search for a new church after leaving their previous church than in 2006

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

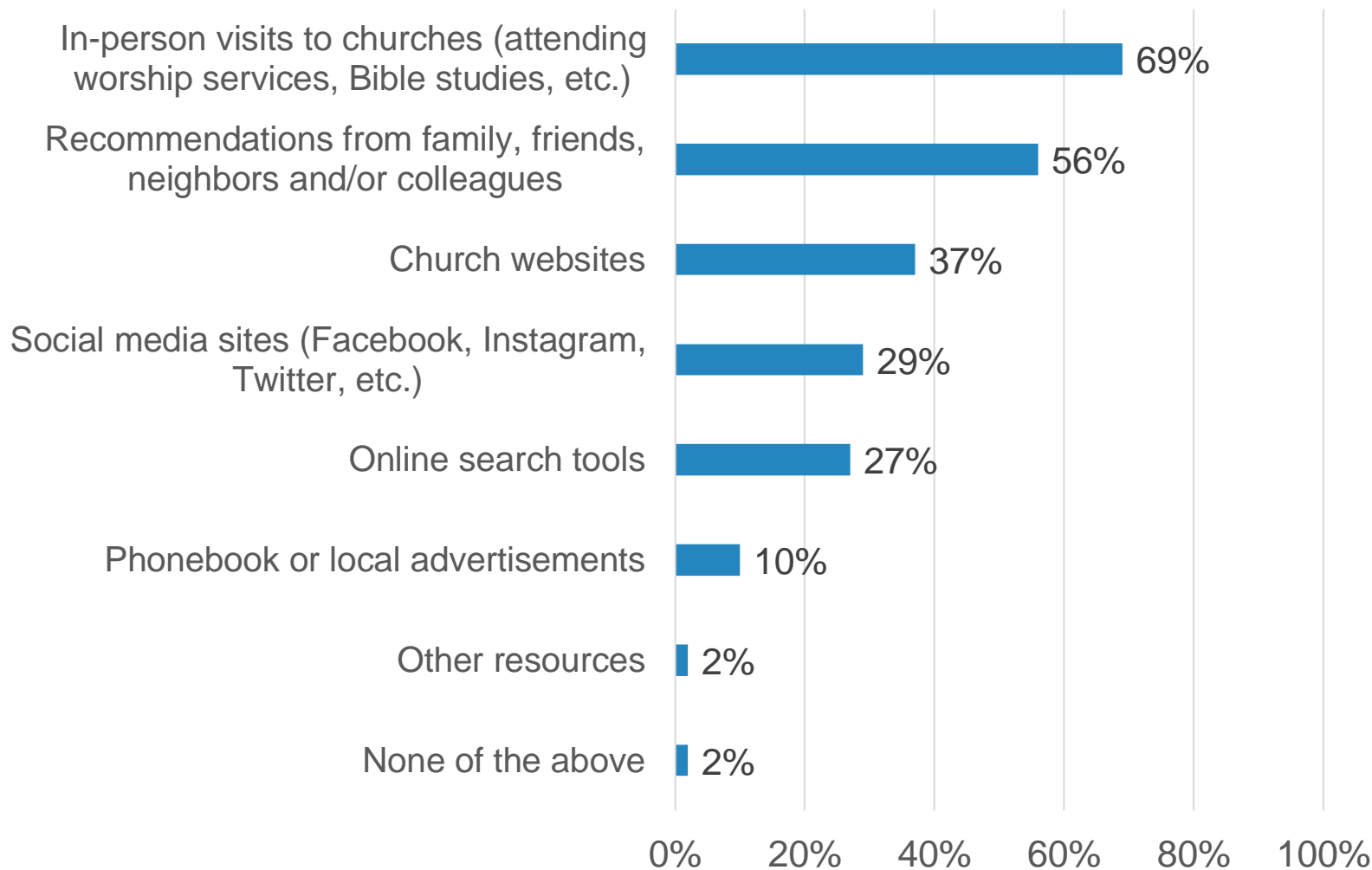


Lifeway research

"In switching from your previous church to your current church, did you actively search for a new church...? (Select one)"

“Which of the following resources did you use when looking for a new church?”

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



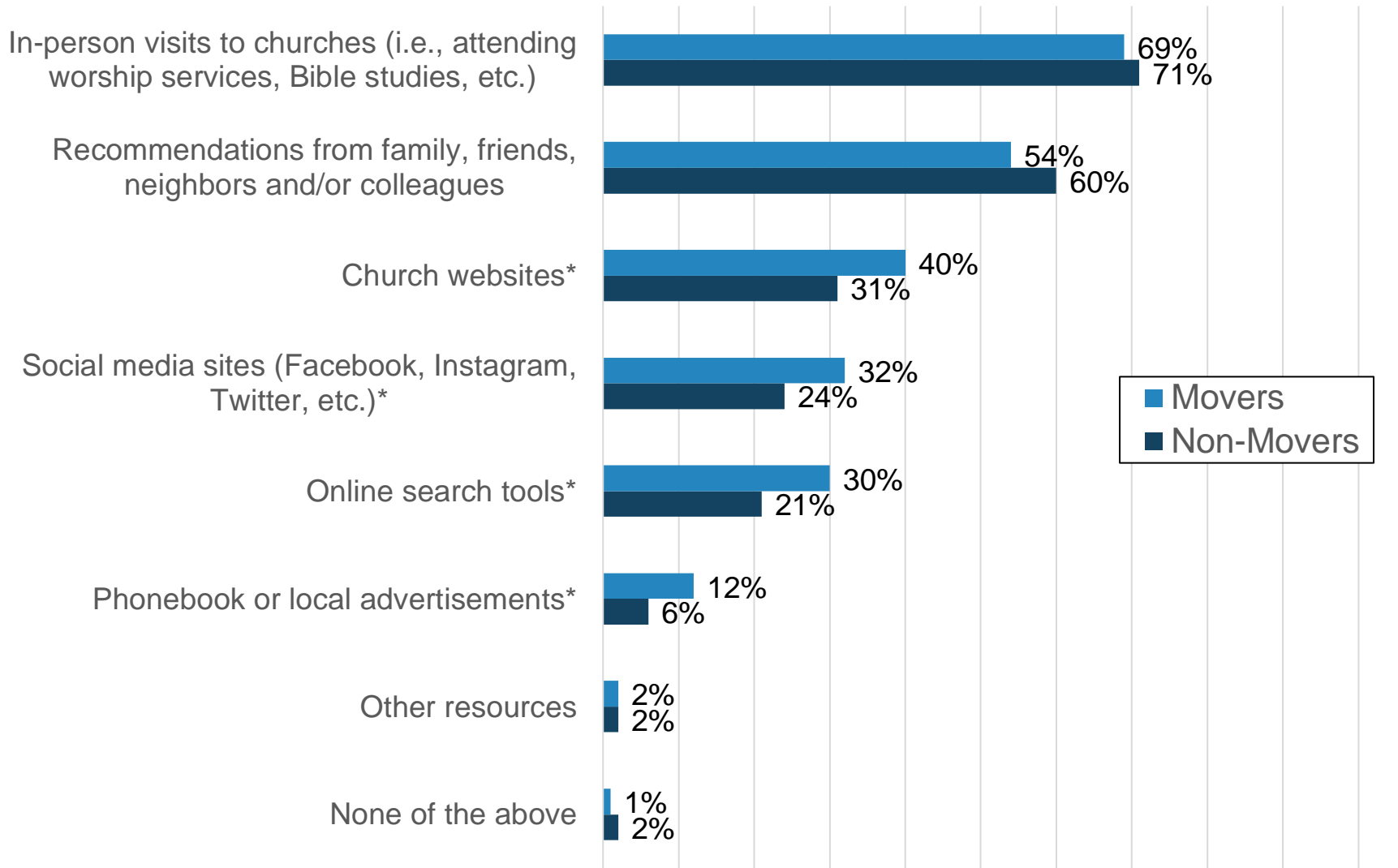
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“Which of the following resources did you use when looking for a new church?”

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

- In 2023 v. 2006, fewer switchers relied on:
 - In-person visits to churches (69% v. 83%)
 - Recommendations from family, friends, neighbors, and/or colleagues (56% v. 64%)
 - Phonebook or local advertisements (10% v. 19)
- And more switchers relied on online search methods (37% church websites, 29% social media sites, 27% online search tools) compared to 21% who used the generic category of “Internet websites/online search tools” asked in 2006

Movers use more online resources when looking for a new church than Non-Movers



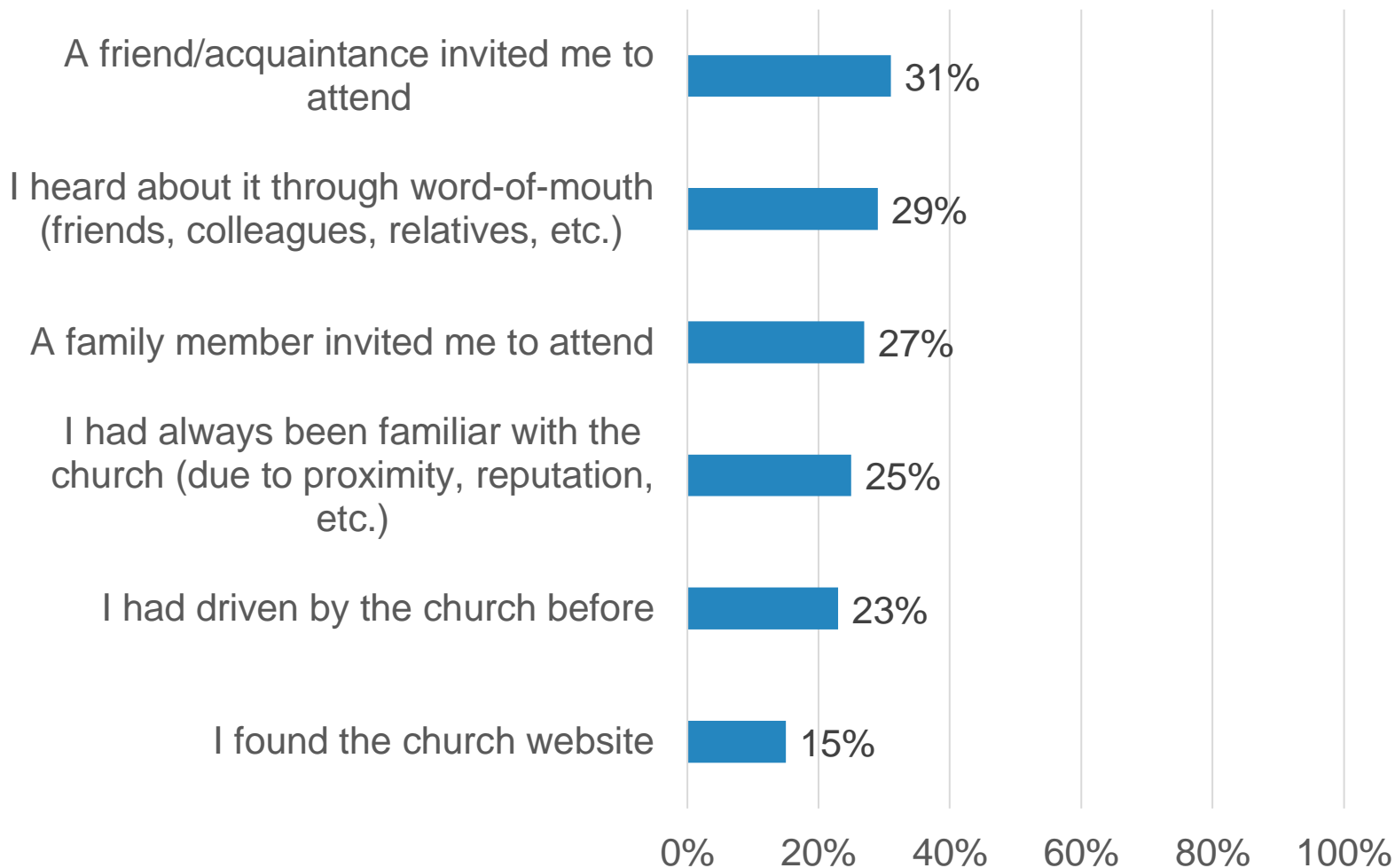
*Statistically significant difference

Lifeway research

Q3b: "Which of the following resources did you use when looking for a new church? (Select all that apply)" n=791

“How were you first introduced to your current church?”

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

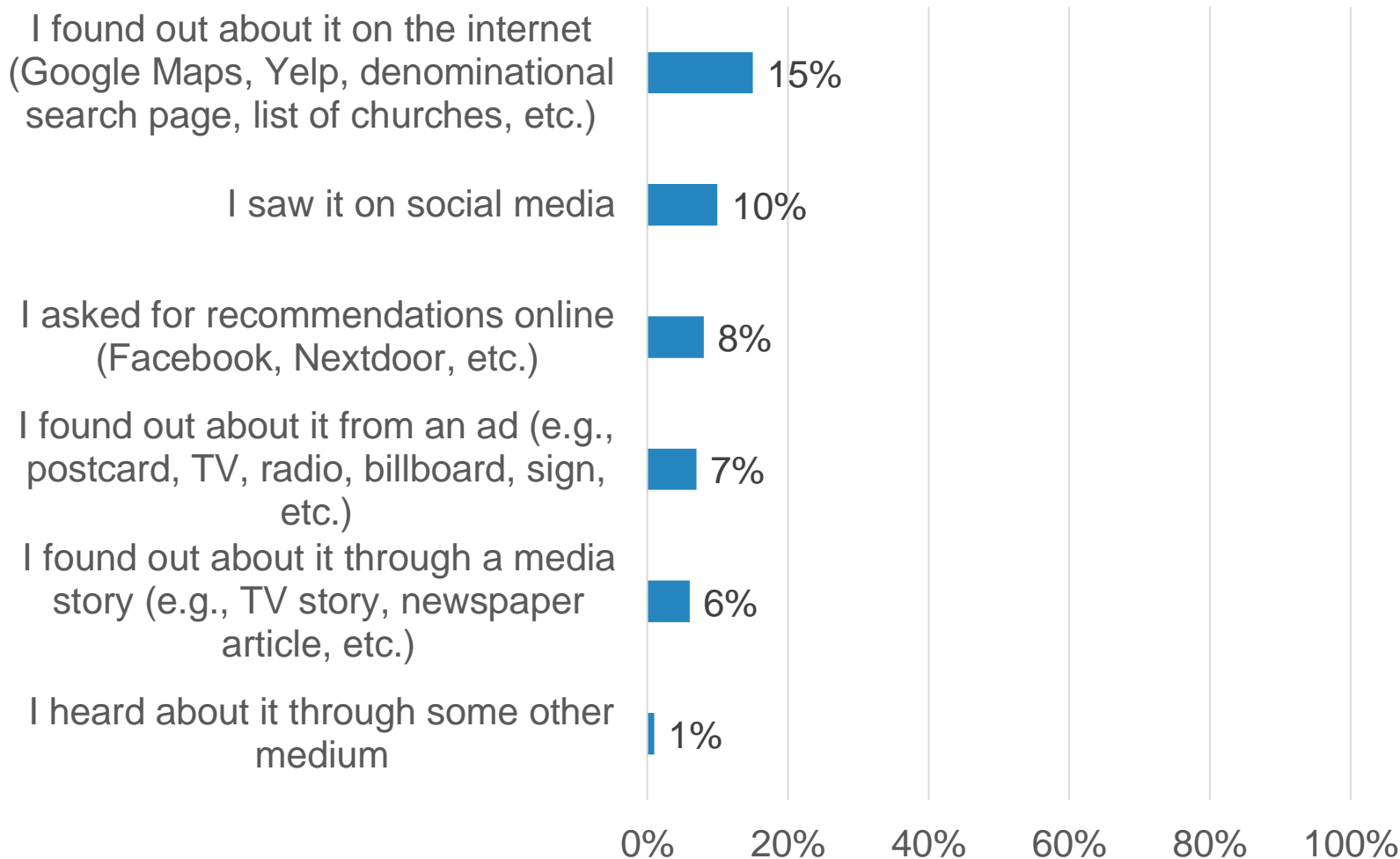


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Q4a: “How were you first introduced to your current church? (Select all that apply)” n=1,001

“How were you first introduced to your current church?” *Continued*

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



“How were you first introduced to your current church?”

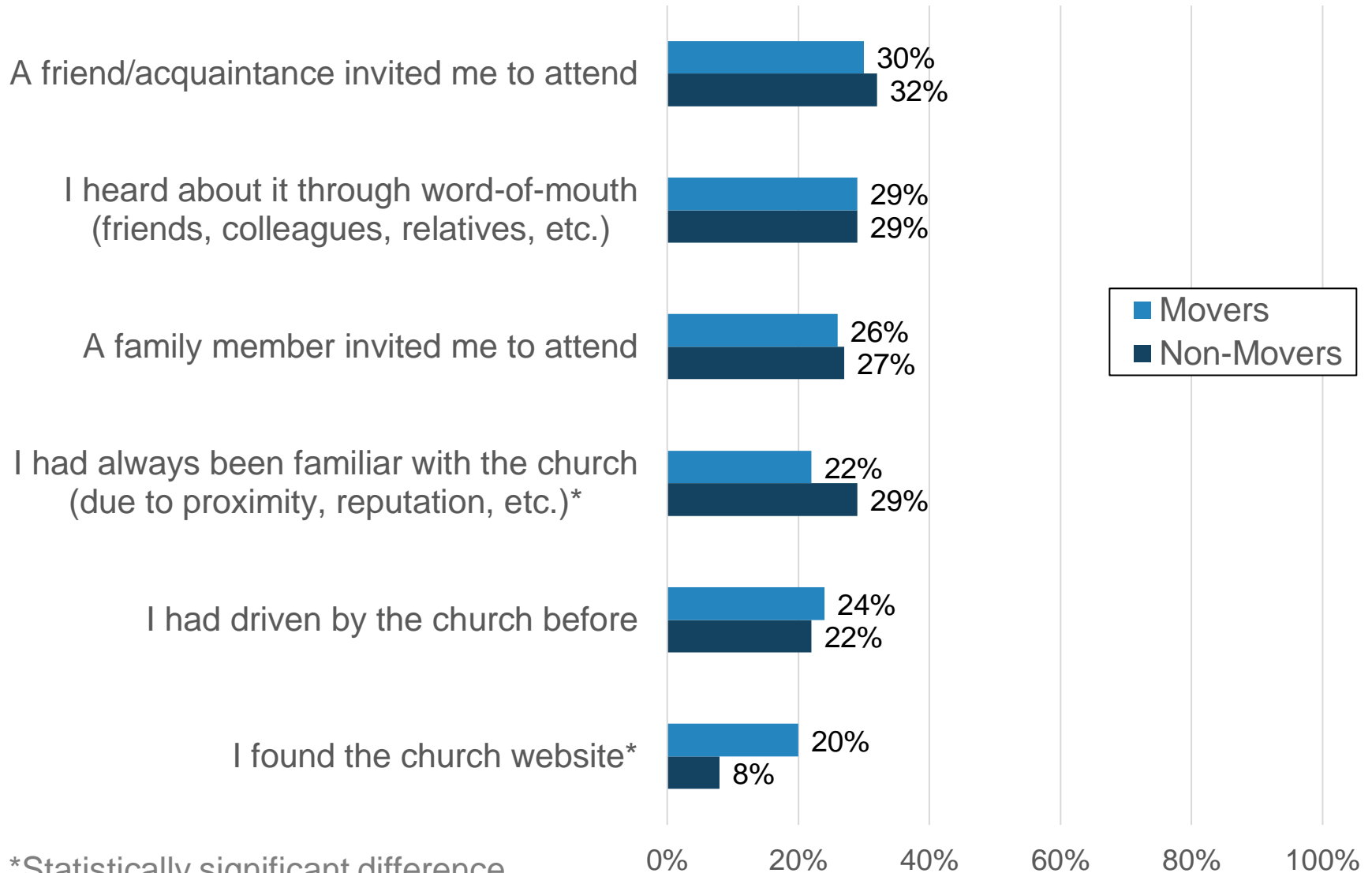
Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

	2023	2006
A friend/acquaintance invited me to attend	31%	32%
I heard about it through word-of-mouth (friends, colleagues, relatives, etc.)	29%	27%
A family member invited me to attend	27%	15%
I had always been familiar with the church (due to proximity, reputation, etc.)	25%	27%
I had driven by the church before	23%	25%
I found the church website	15%	Not asked
I found out about it on the internet (Google Maps, Yelp, denominational search page, list of churches, etc.)	15%	7%*
I saw it on social media	10%	Not asked
I asked for recommendations online (Facebook, Nextdoor, etc.)	8%	Not asked
I found out about it from an ad (e.g., postcard, TV, radio, billboard, sign, etc.)	7%	6%
I found out about it through a media story (e.g., TV story, newspaper article, etc.)	6%	1%
I heard about it through some <i>other</i> medium	1%	10%

*In 2006, this option did not have any explanation in parentheses

Statistically significant difference

Movers are more likely to have been first introduced to their current church online than Non-Movers

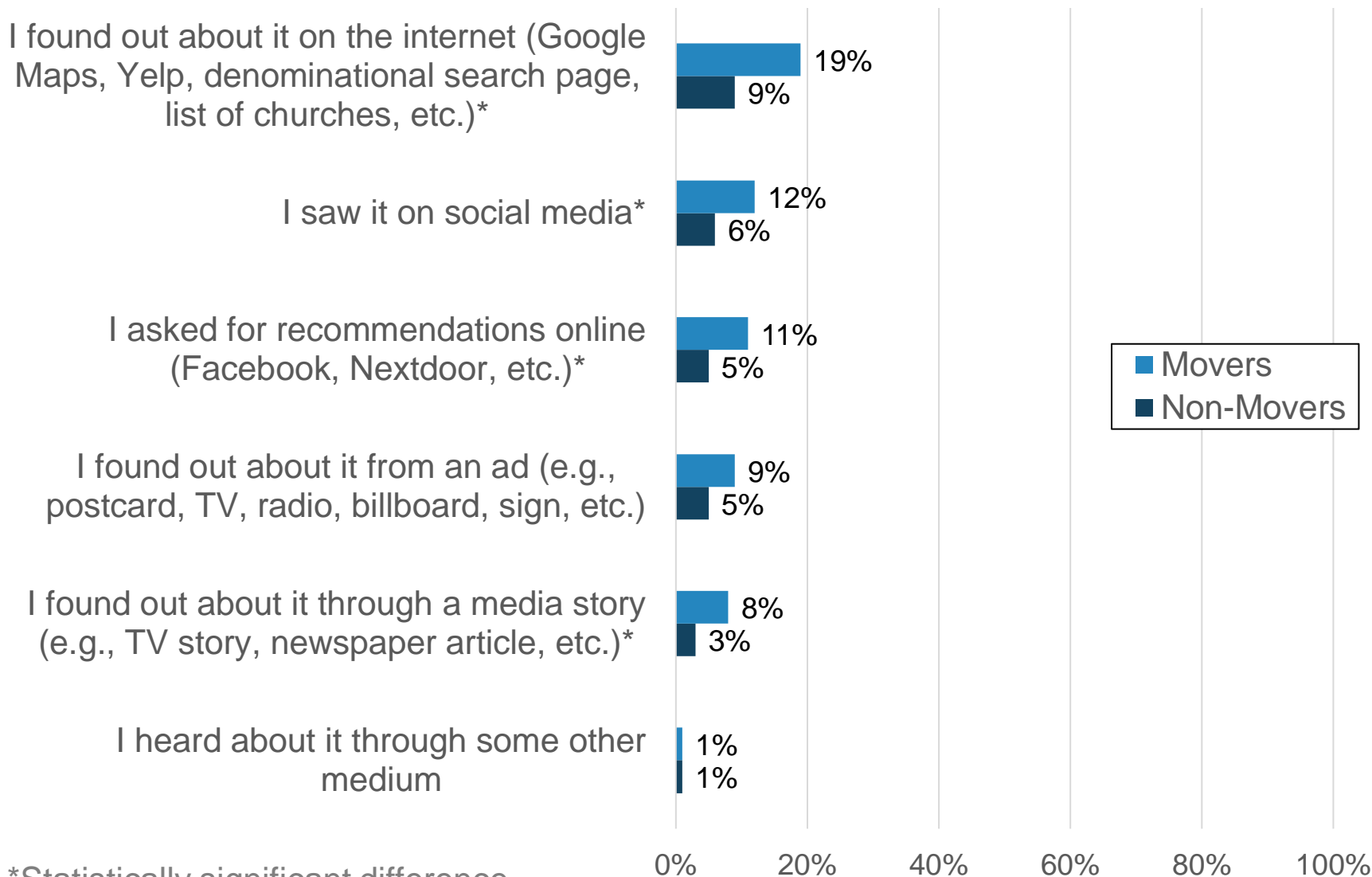


*Statistically significant difference

Lifeway research

Q4a: "How were you first introduced to your current church? (Select all that apply)" n=1,001

Movers are more likely to have been first introduced to their current church online than Non-Movers *Continued*

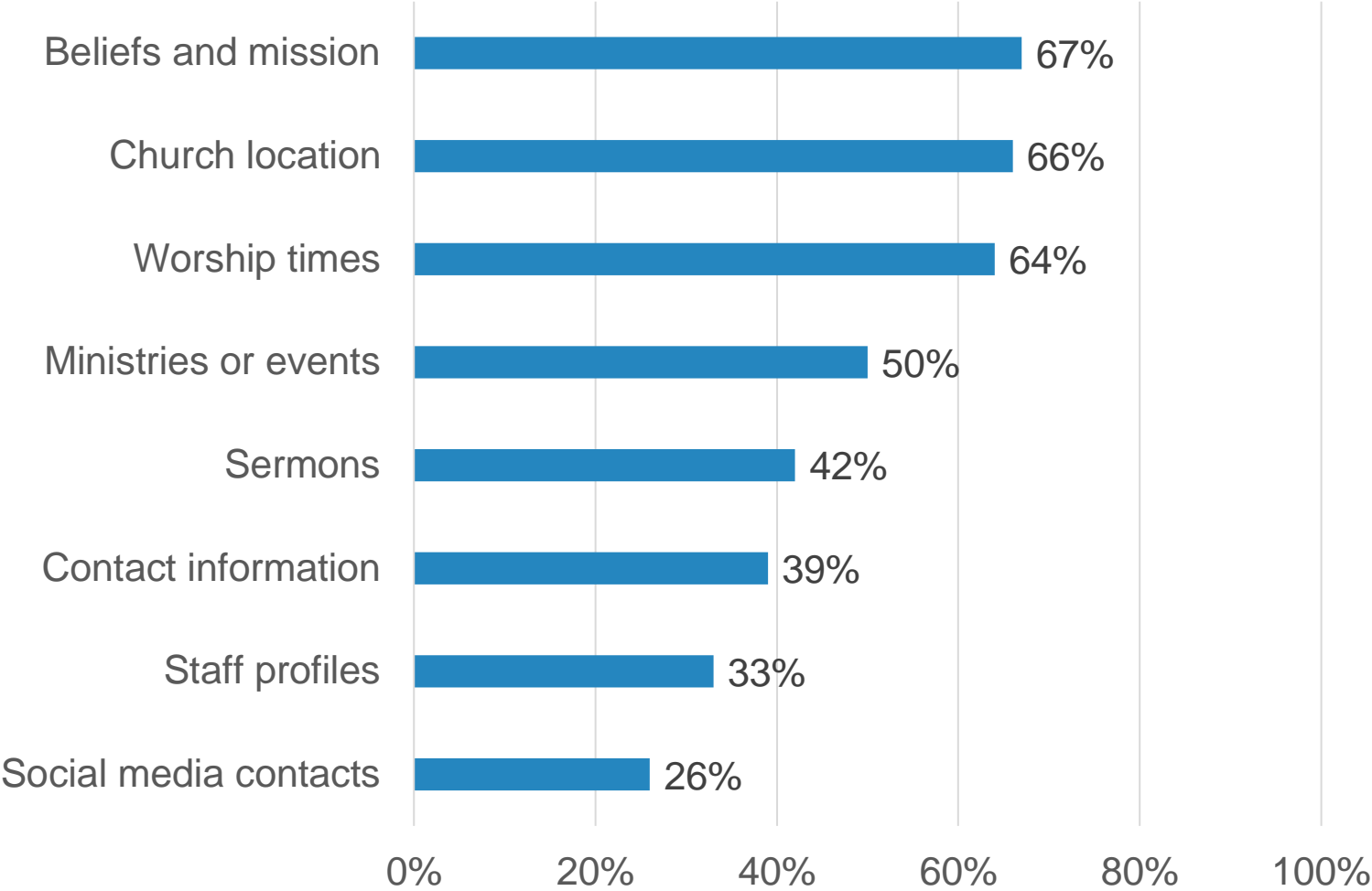


Lifeway research

Q4a: "How were you *first introduced* to your current church? (Select all that apply)" n=1,001

“What was most helpful on the church website?”

Among Church Switchers who were first introduced to their current church by finding the church website

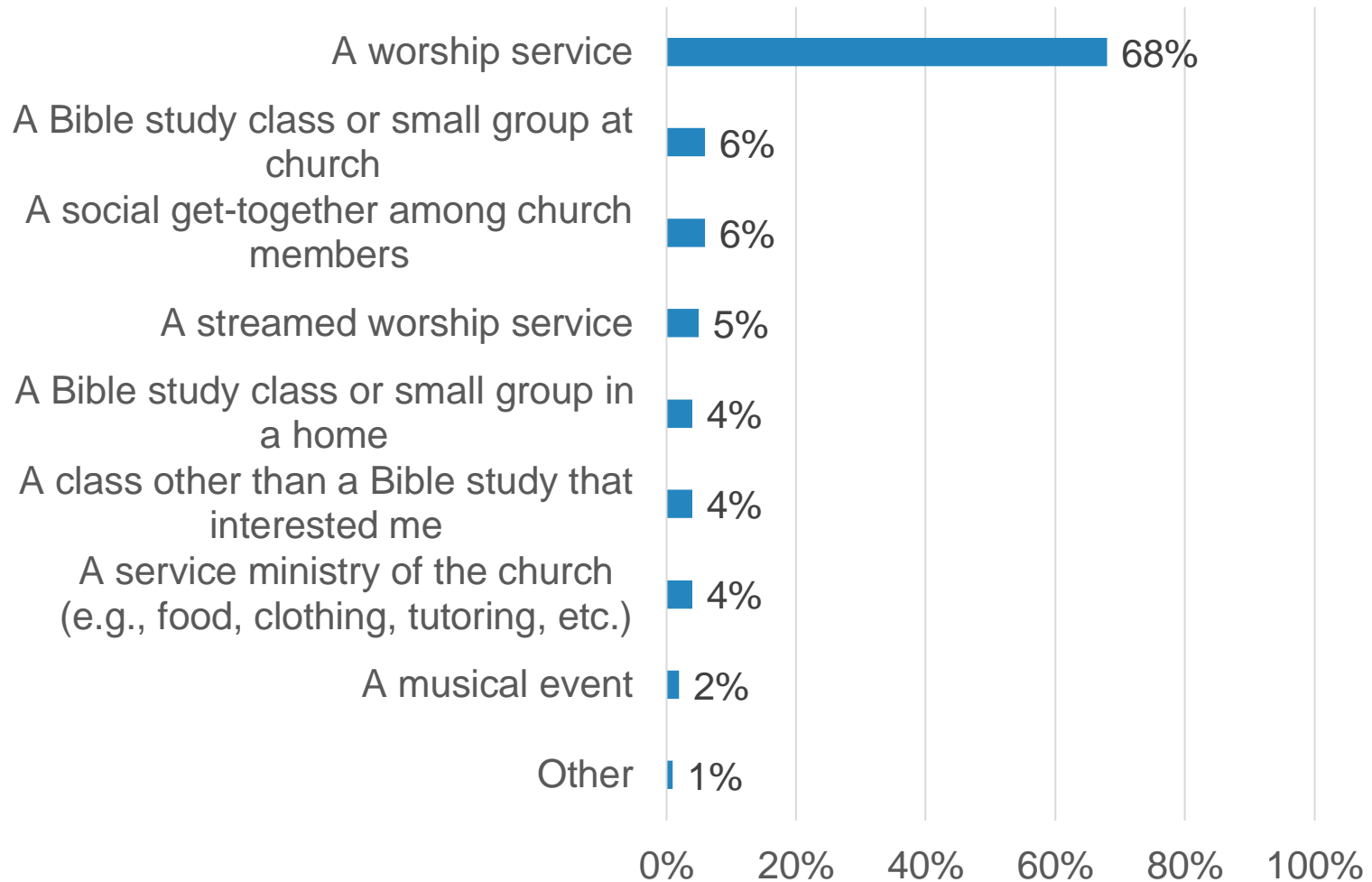


Lifeway research

Q4b: “What was most helpful on the church website? (Select all that apply)” n=153

68% say the first activity/event they attended at their current church was a worship service

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



Lifeway research

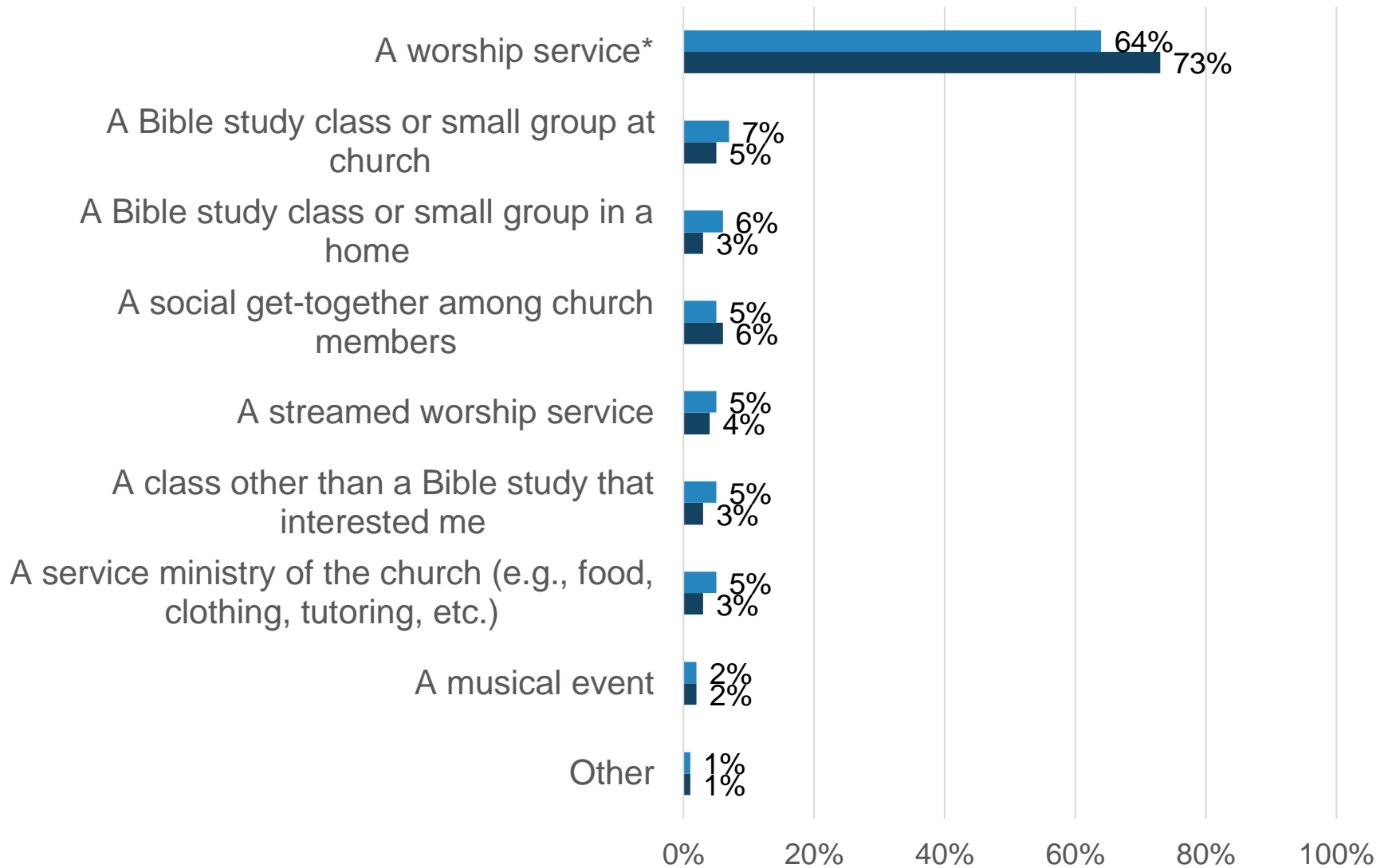
Q5a: "What was the first event/activity you attended at your current church? (Select one)" n=1,001

Fewer church switchers (2023 v. 2006) say the first activity/event they attended at their current church was a worship service

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

	2023	2006
A worship service	68%	88%
A Bible study class or small group at church	6%	4%
A social get-together among church members	6%	1%
A streamed worship service	5%	Not asked
A Bible study class or small group in a home	4%	1%
A class other than a Bible study that interested me	4%	1%
A service ministry of the church (e.g., food, clothing, tutoring, etc.)	4%	Not asked
A service project of the church	Not asked	0%
A musical event	2%	3%
Other	1%	2%

Non-movers are more likely to attend a worship service first



*Statistically significant difference

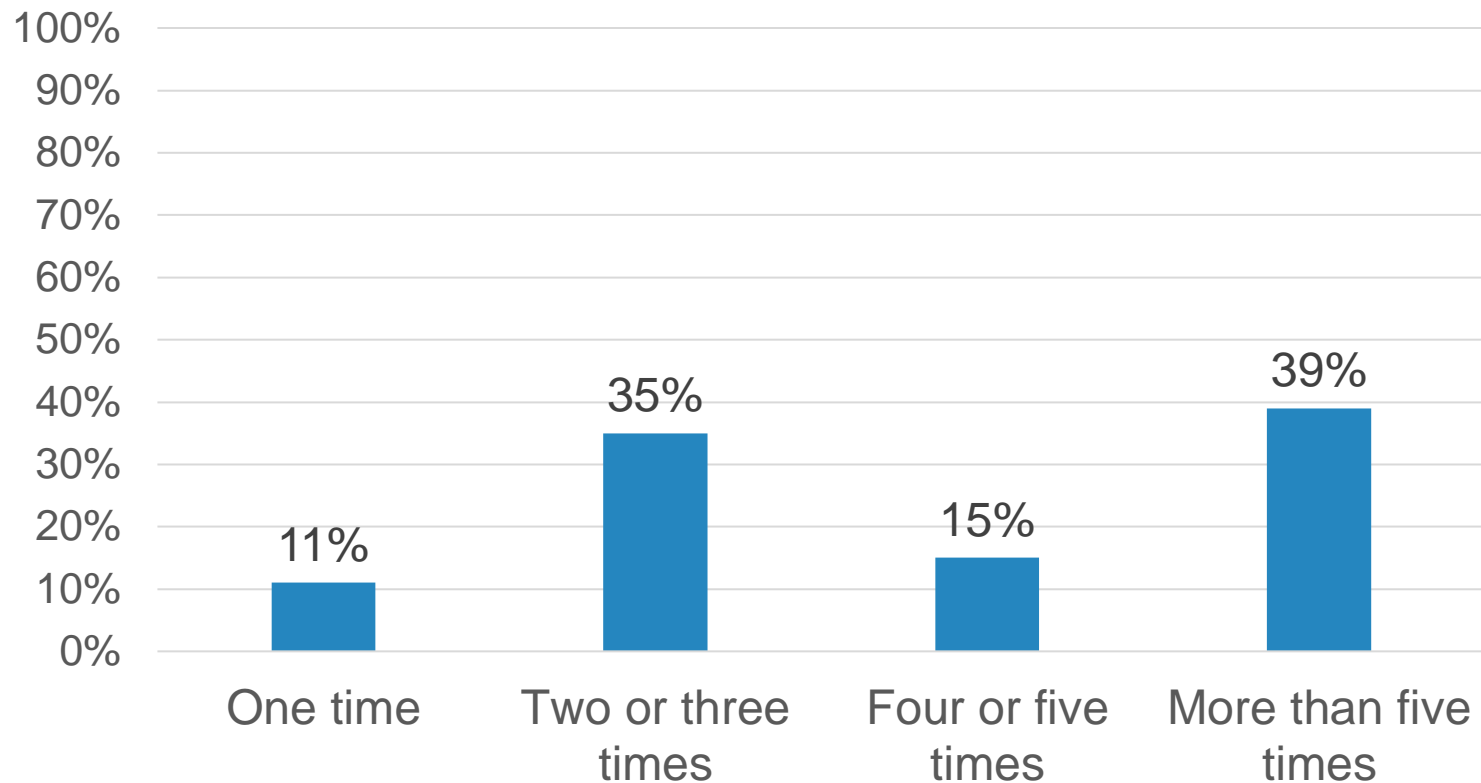
■ Movers ■ Non-Movers

Lifeway research

Q5a: "What was the first event/activity you attended at your current church? (Select one)" n=1,001

54% attended a streamed worship service 4 or more times before visiting their current church in-person

Among Church Switchers who first attended a streamed worship service at their current church

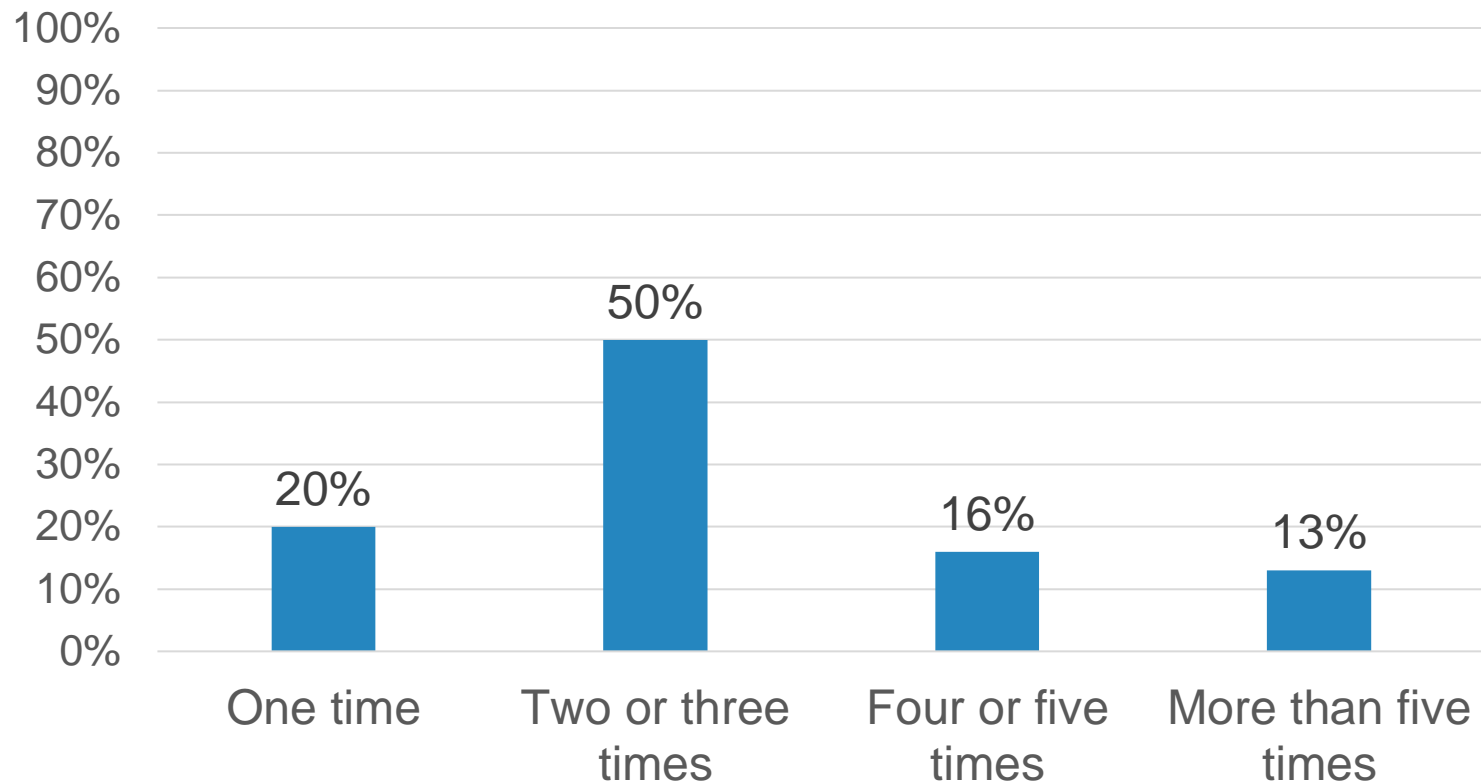


CAUTION: Small sample size

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71% decided to regularly attend their current church after visiting a worship service 3 times or less

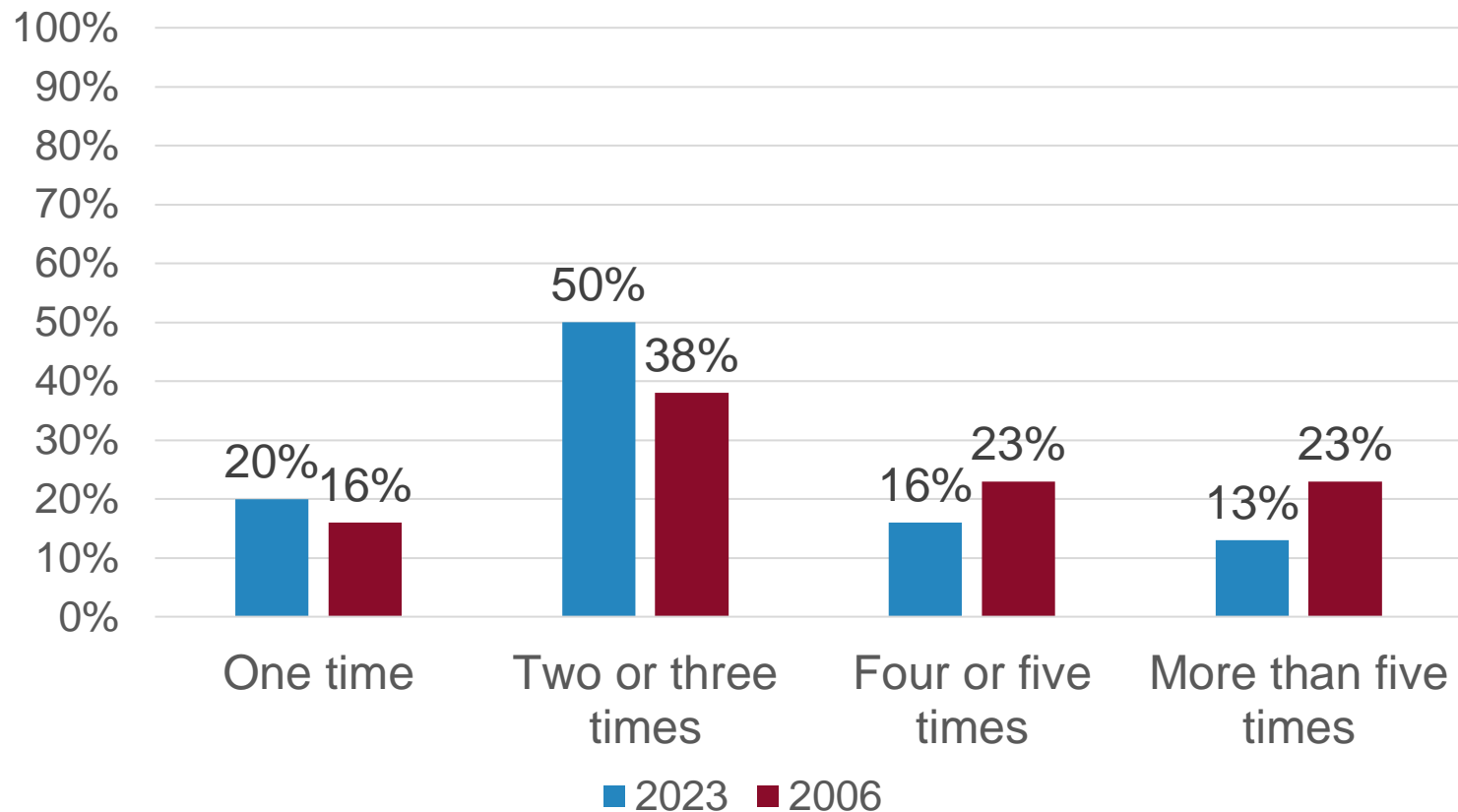
Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



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Church switchers are deciding to regularly attend their current church with fewer visits to a worship service than in 2006

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

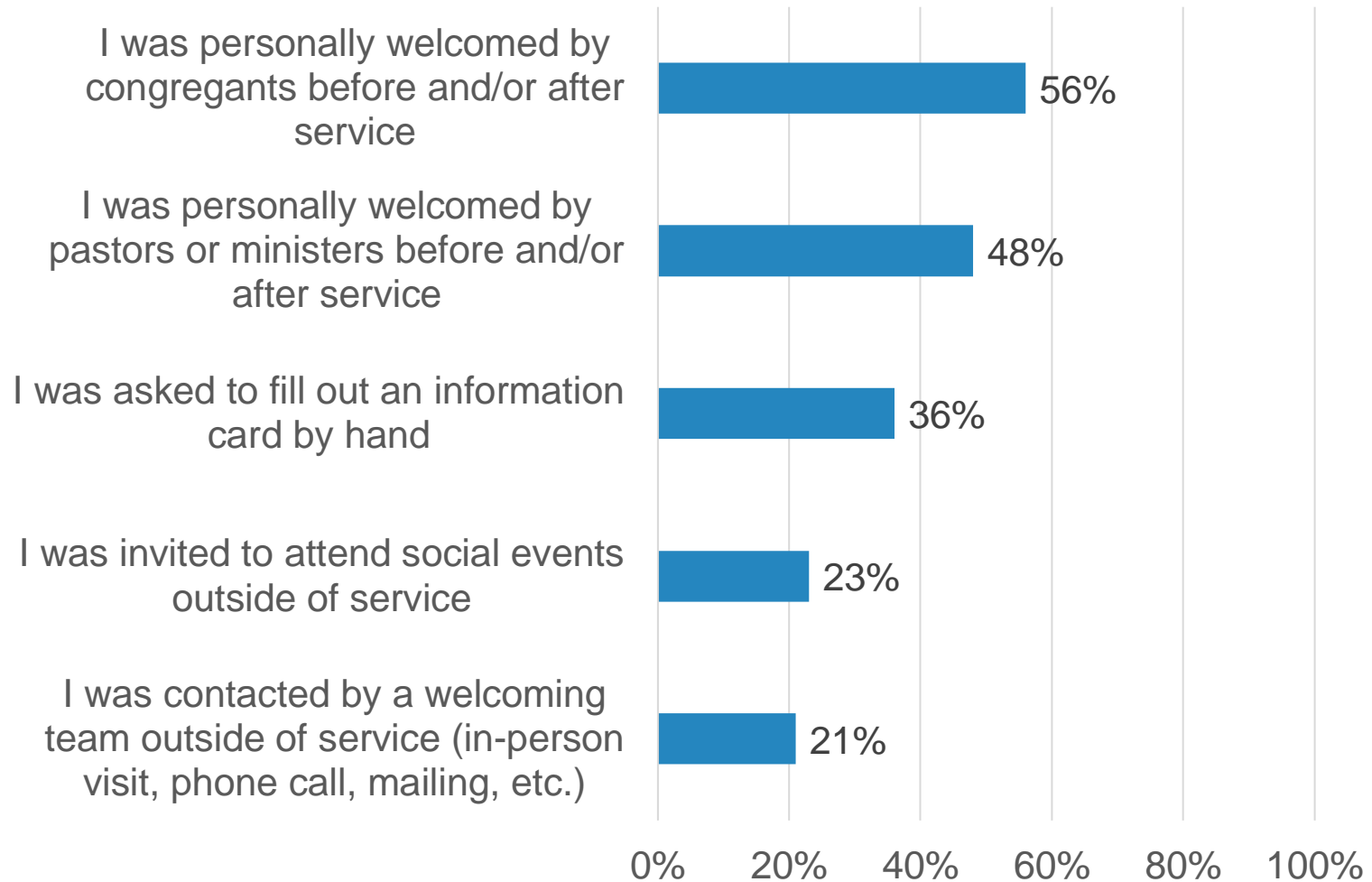


Lifeway research

"How many times did you visit your current church (attend a worship service) before deciding to regularly attend? (Select one)"

“When you were a visitor at your current church, what approach did the church take in welcoming you?”

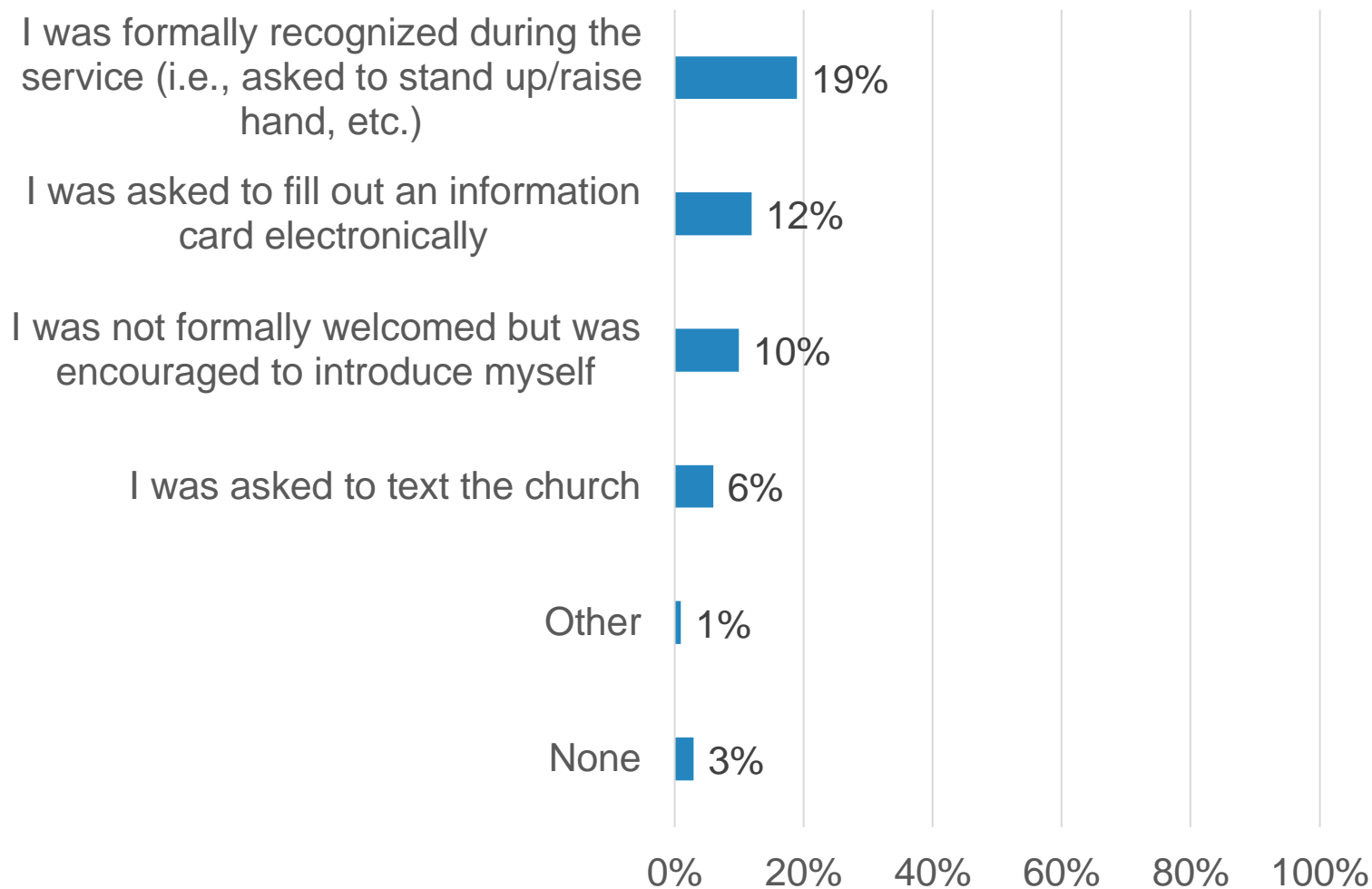
Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



Lifewayresearch

“When you were a visitor at your current church, what approach did the church take in welcoming you?” *Continued*

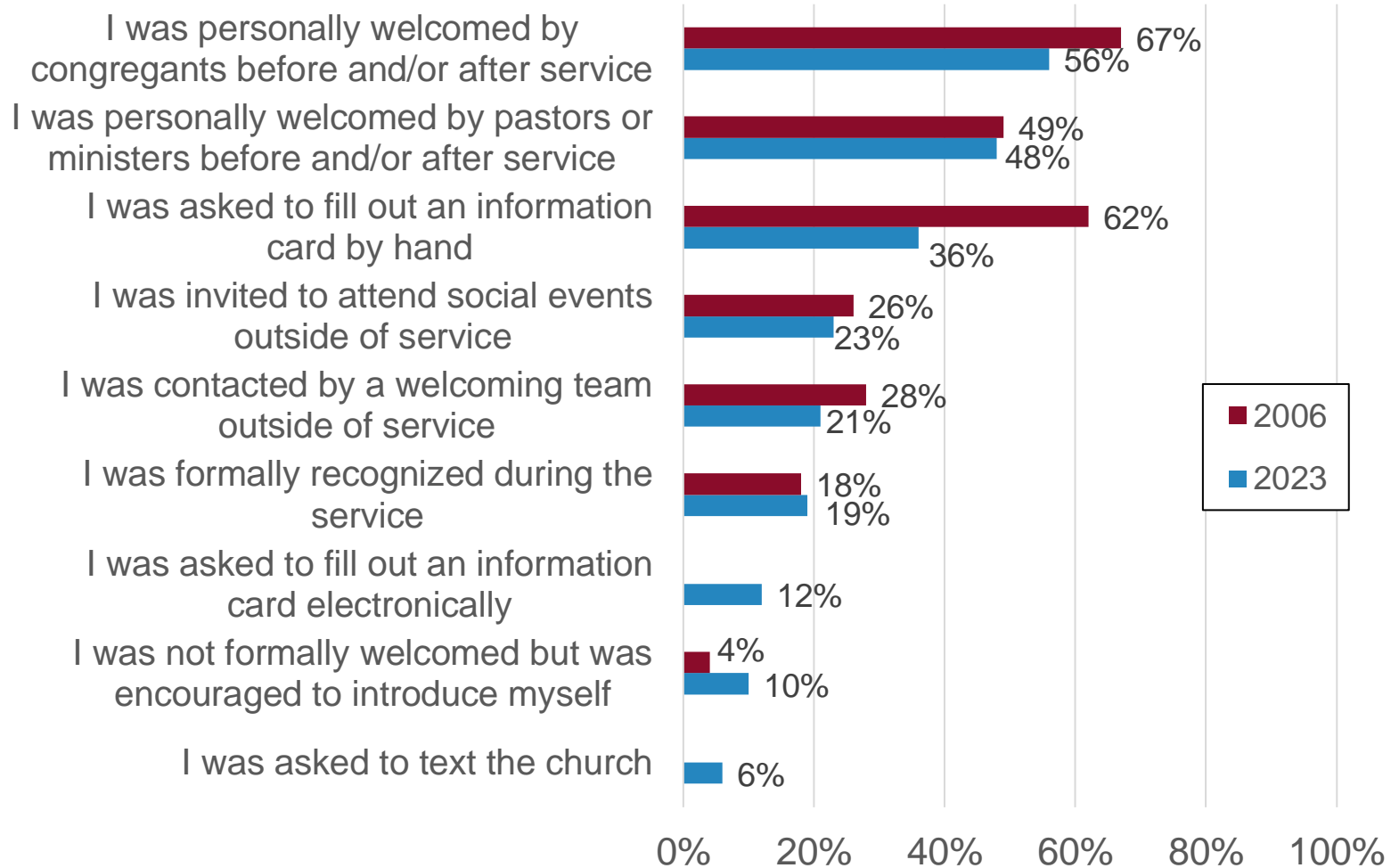
Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



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Fewer Switchers say their current church was personally welcoming, asked them to fill out an info card, or contacted them outside the service than in 2006

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



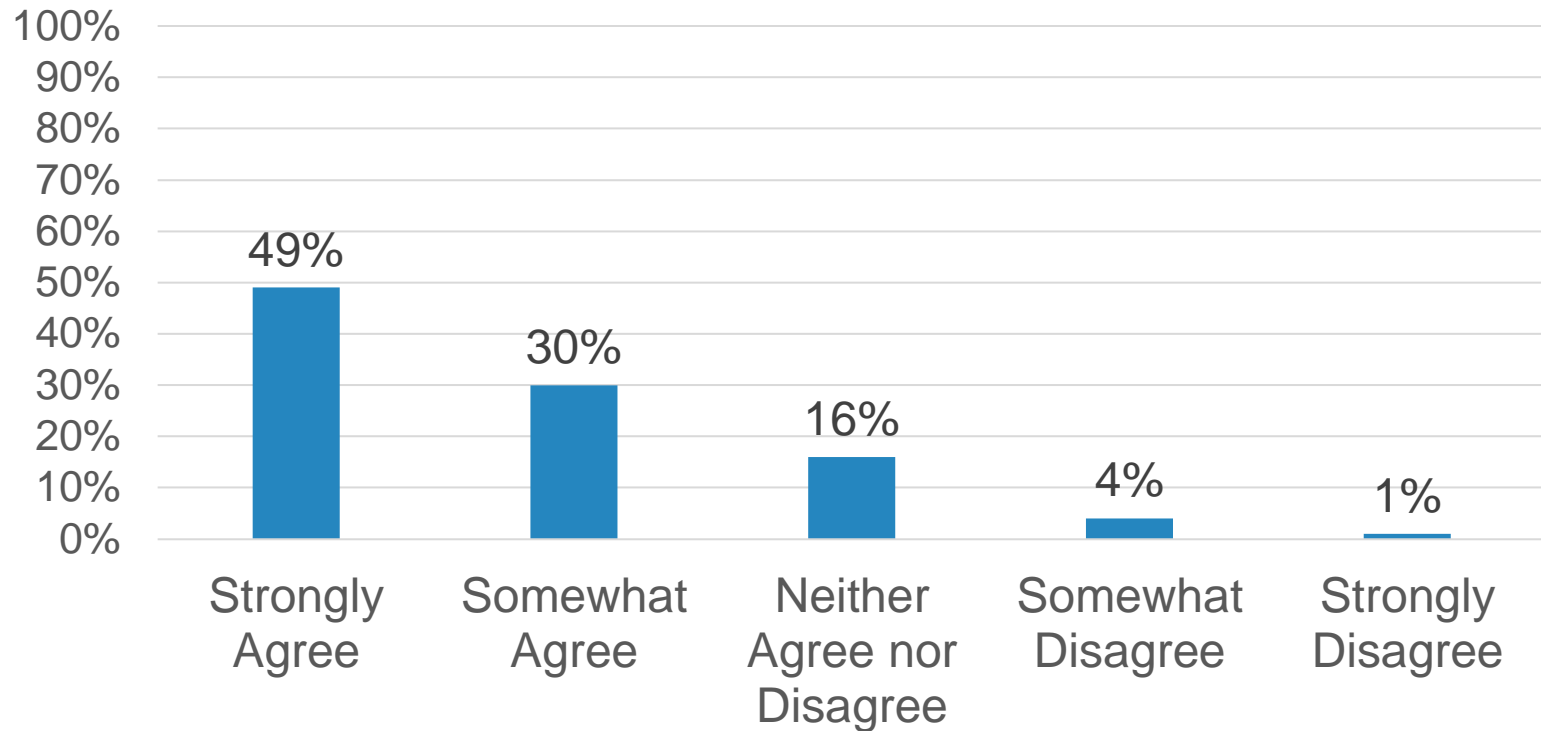
Note: Two response options were not included in 2006

Lifeway research

“When you were a visitor at your current church, what approach did the church take in welcoming you?” (Select all that apply)”

79% agree that how the church welcomed visitors positively impacted their decision to attend regularly

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



Among those who selected each welcoming approach, how did they rate the overall impact on their decision to attend regularly?

	Pct Yes	Decision Impact		
		Positive	Neutral	Not Positive
I was personally welcomed by congregants before and/or after service	56%	85%	14%	2%
I was personally welcomed by pastors or ministers before and/or after service	48%	87%	10%	2%
I was asked to fill out an information card by hand	36%	83%	15%	2%
I was invited to attend social events outside of service	23%	87%	12%	2%
I was contacted by a welcoming team outside of service	21%	88%	9%	3%

Significantly higher than those who did not use approach

Significantly lower than those who did not use approach

Lifeway research

Q7: “When you were a visitor at your current church, what approach did the church take in welcoming you?” (Select all that apply) n=1,001

Q8: “The church’s approach to welcoming visitors positively impacted my decision to start regularly attending the church.” n=1,001

Among those who selected each welcoming approach, how did they rate the overall impact on their decision to attend regularly? *Continued*

	Pct Yes	Decision Impact		
		Positive	Neutral	Not Positive
I was formally recognized during the service	19%	87%	10%	3%
I was asked to fill out an information card electronically	12%	84%	13%	3%
I was not formally welcomed but was encouraged to introduce myself	10%	77%	18%	5%
I was asked to text the church	6%	82%	10%	8%
None of the above	3%	34%	29%	37%

Significantly higher than those who did not use approach

Significantly lower than those who did not use approach

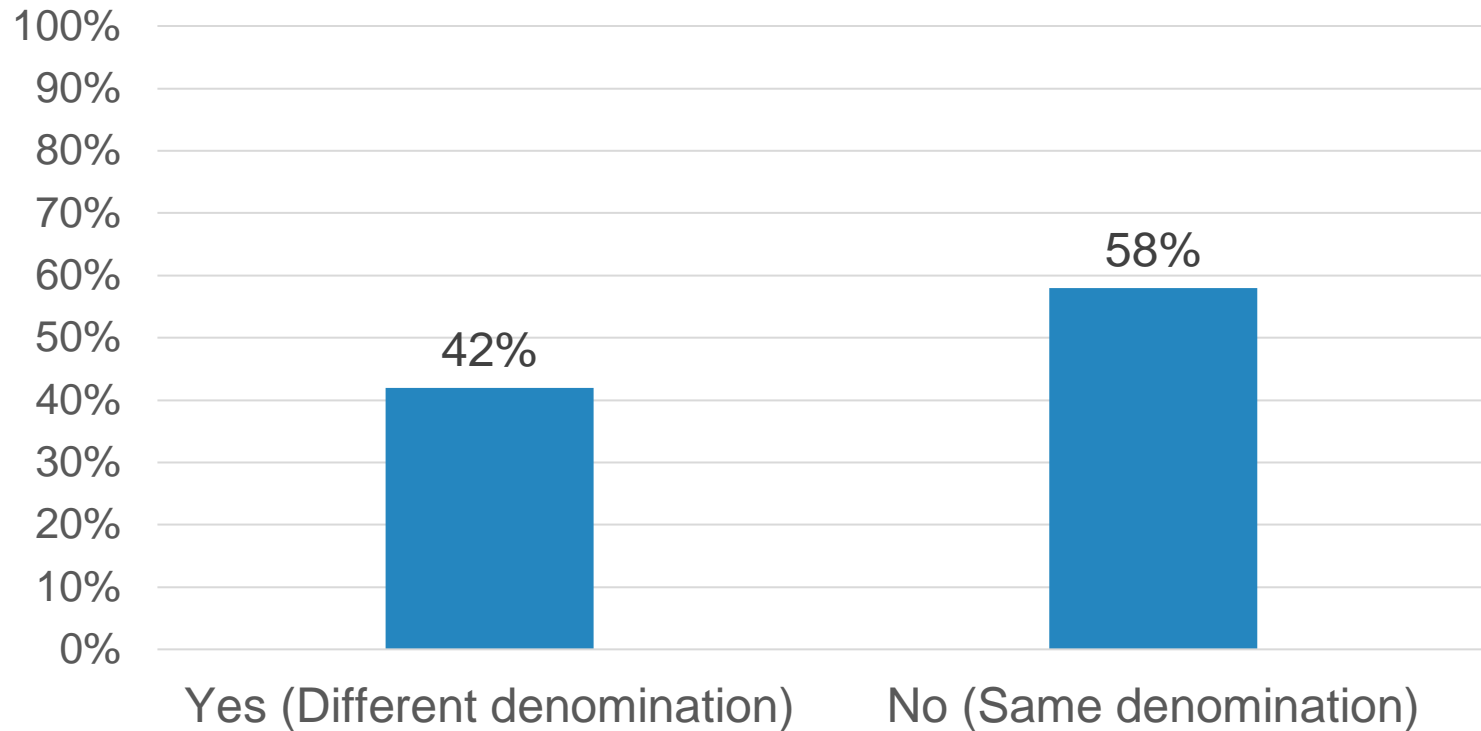
Lifeway research

Q7: ““When you were a visitor at your current church, what approach did the church take in welcoming you?” (Select all that apply)” n=1,001

Q8: “The church’s approach to welcoming visitors positively impacted my decision to start regularly attending the church.” n=1,001

42% say their current church is of a different denomination as their previous church

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

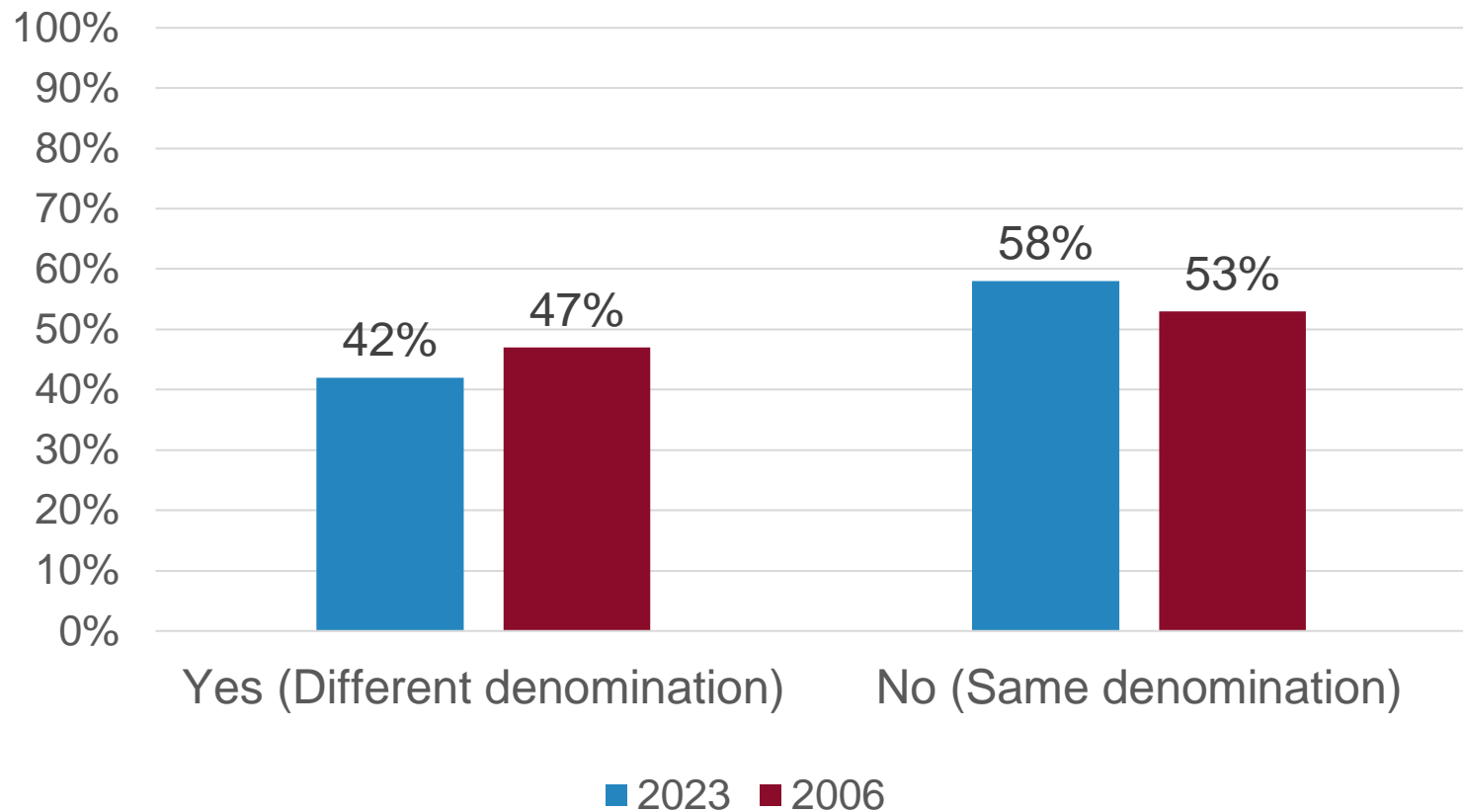


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Q9: "Is your current church of a different denomination than your previous church? (Select one)" n=1,001

Differences between 2023 and 2006 on whether church switchers also switch denominations are not statistically significant (at 95% confidence interval)

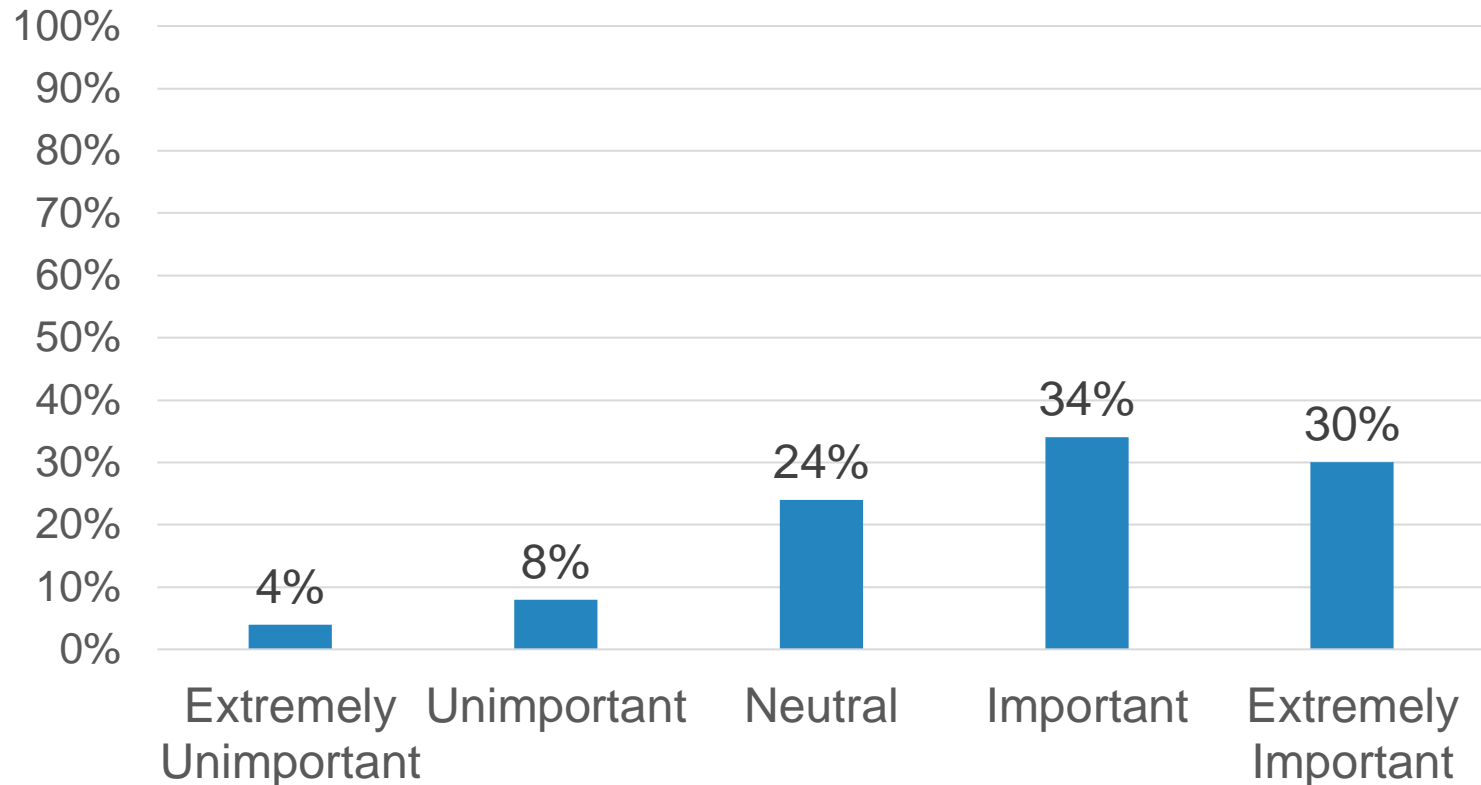
Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



Lifeway research

64% say that the denomination of their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

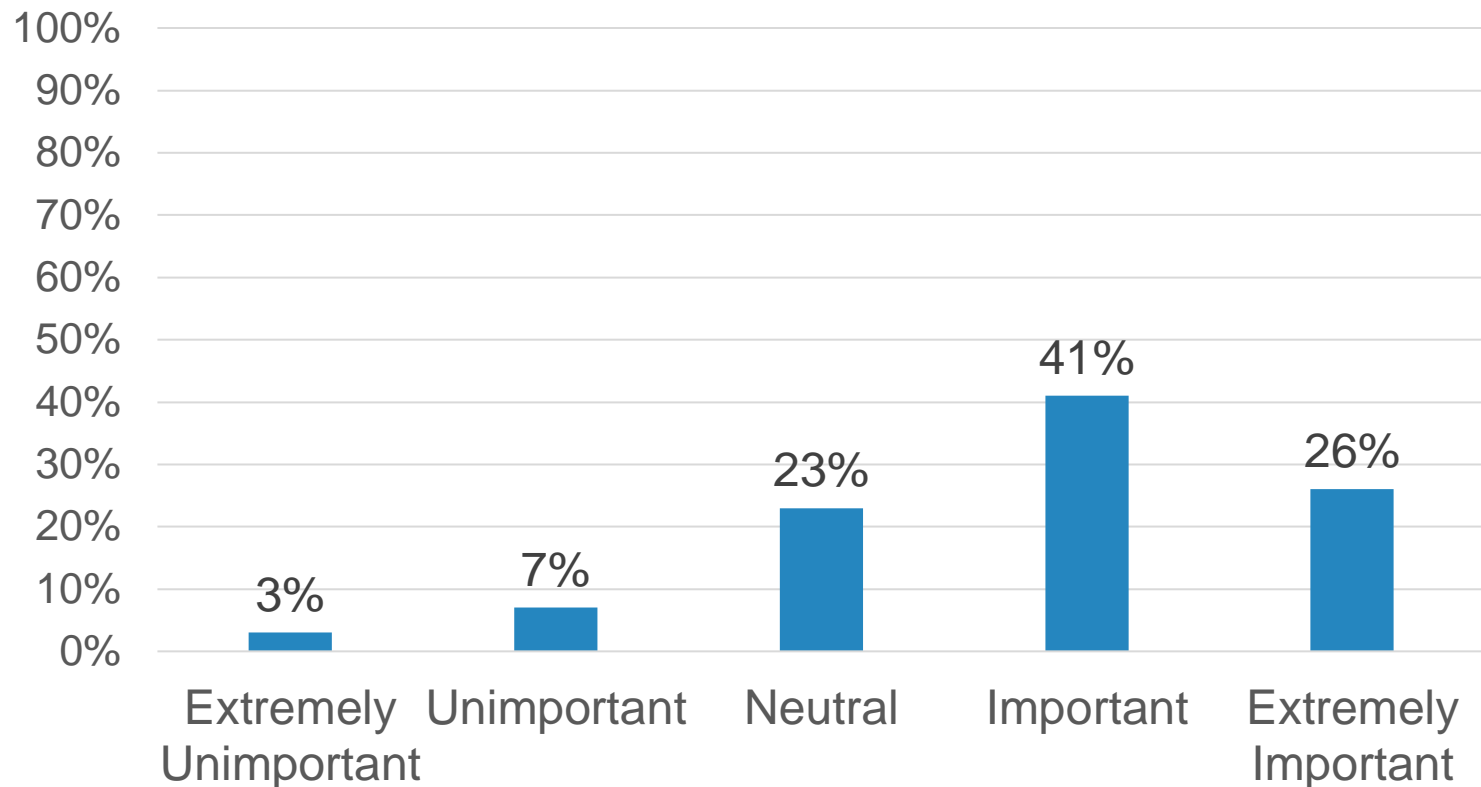


Lifewayresearch

Q10a_1: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Denomination**" n=1,001

67% say that the location of their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

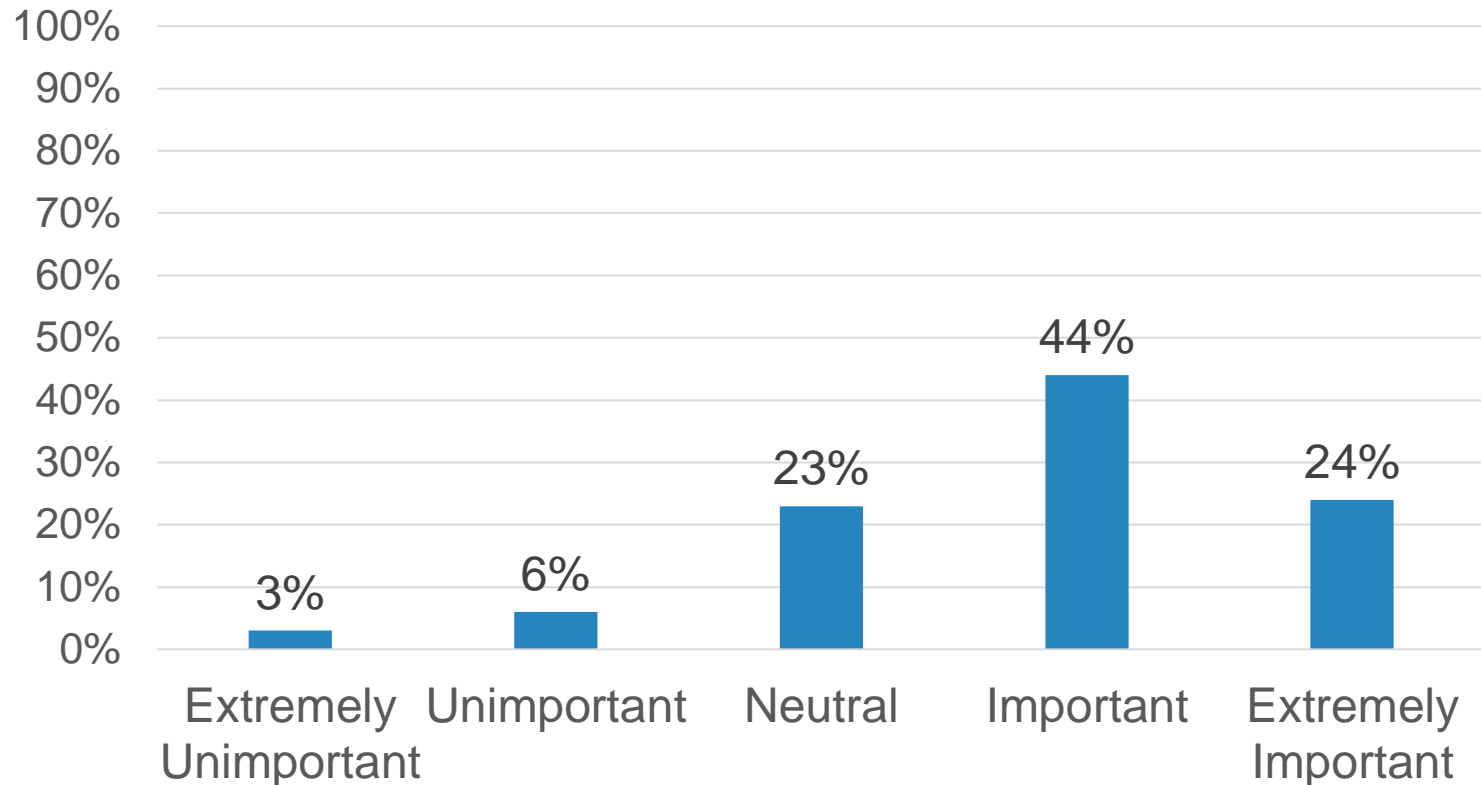


Lifeway research

Q10a_2: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Location**" n=1,001

68% say that the worship times of their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

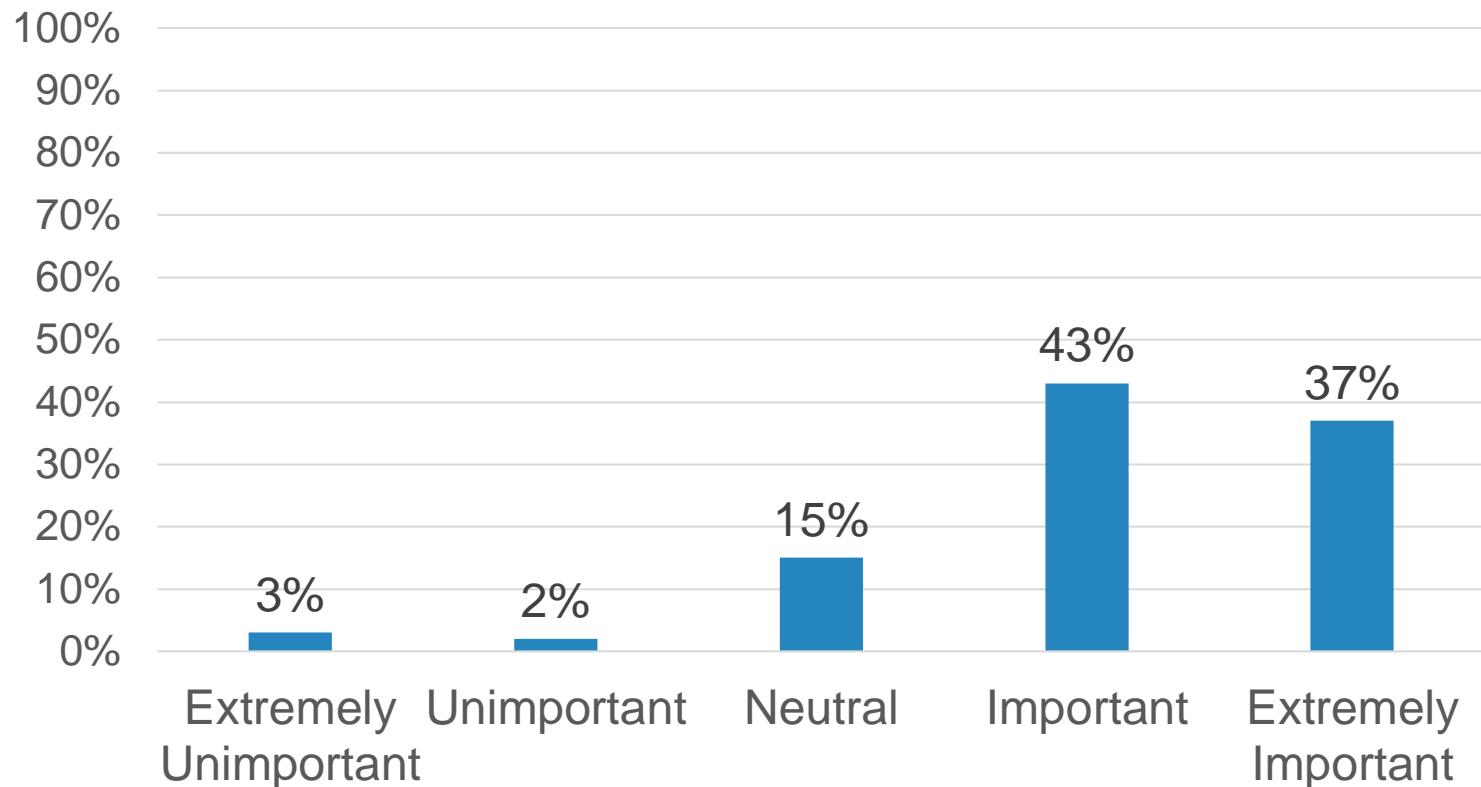


Lifeway research

Q10a_3: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Worship Times**" n=1,001

80% say that the worship style of their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

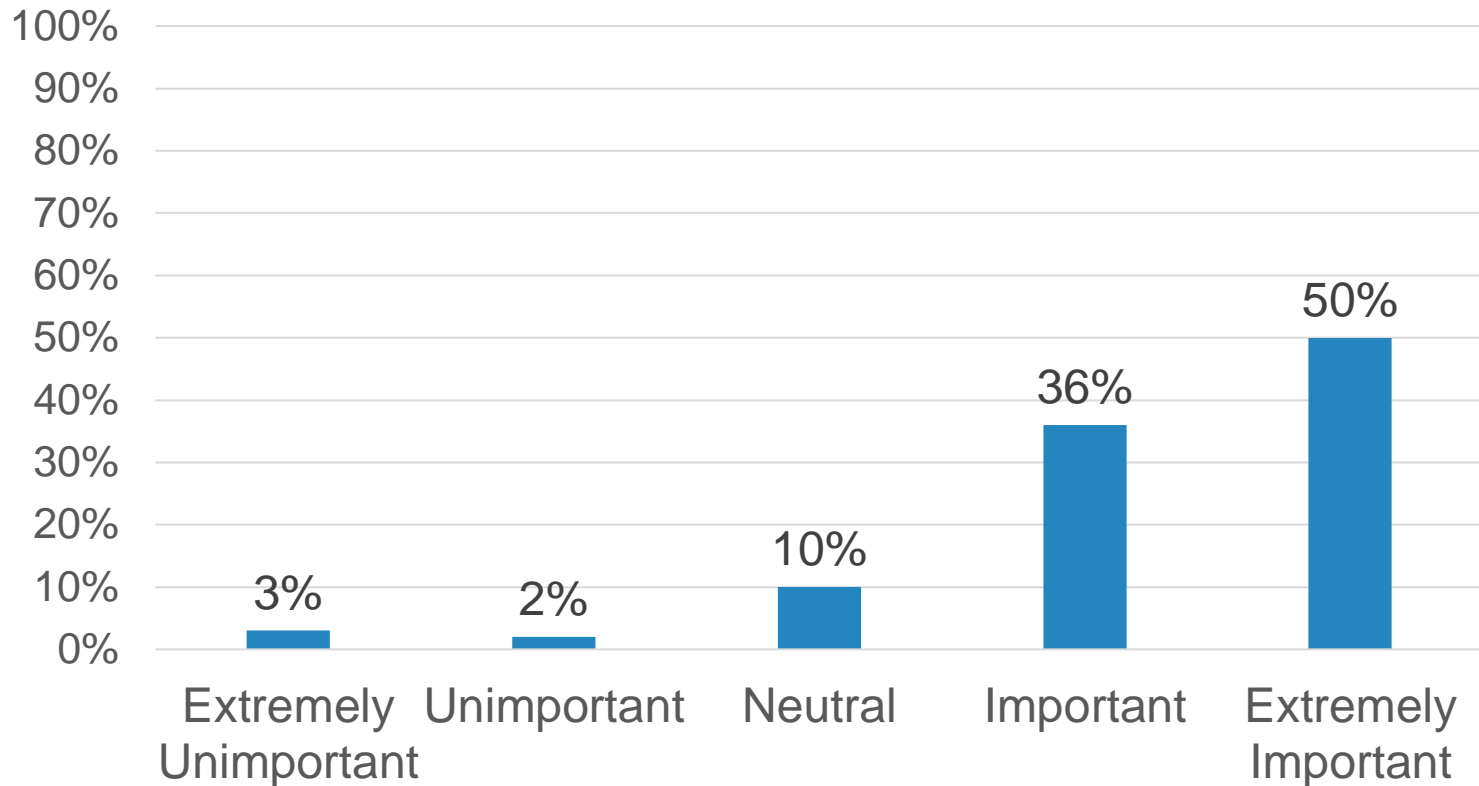


Lifewayresearch

Q10a_4: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Worship Style**" n=1,001

86% say that the preaching at their current church was an important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

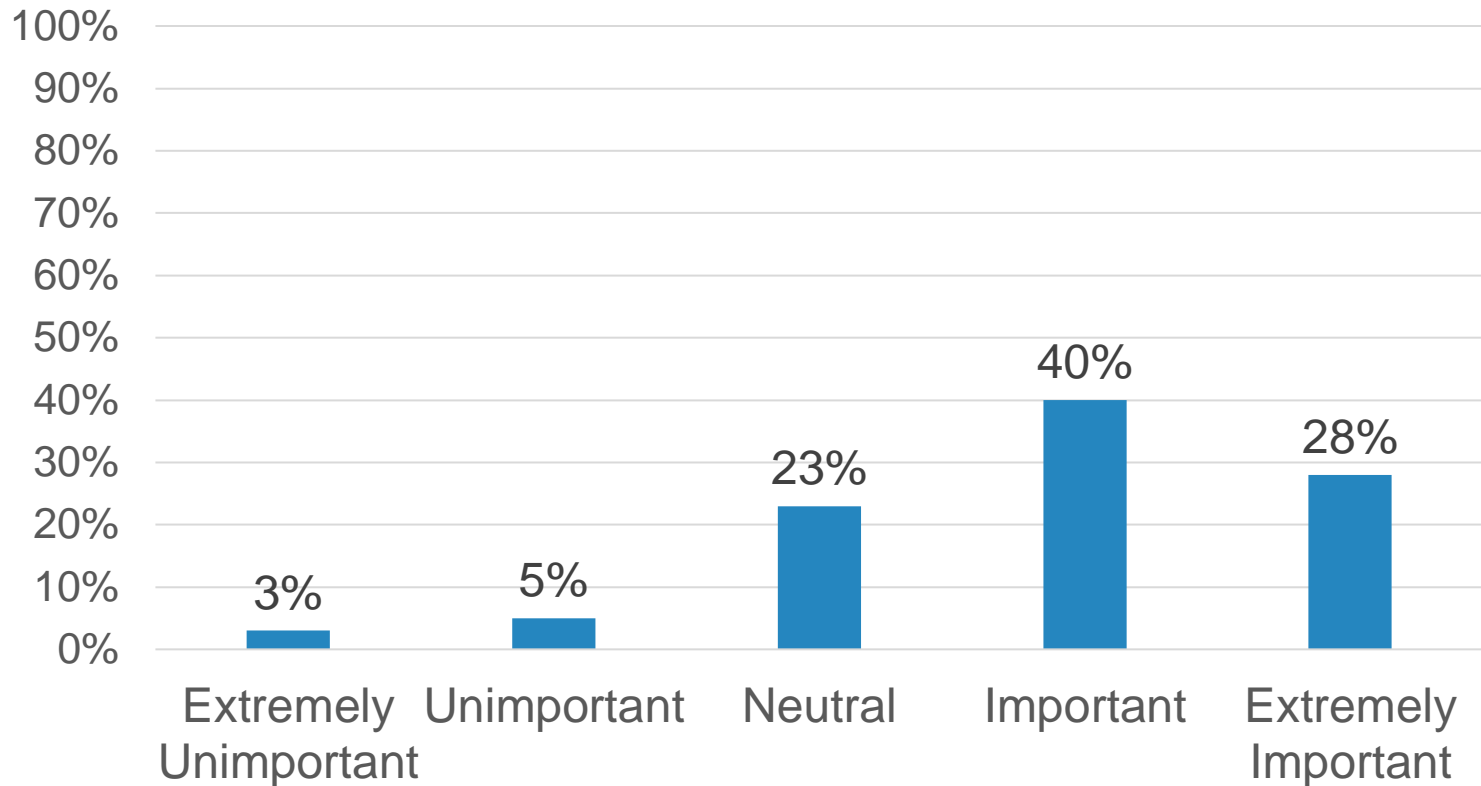


Lifewayresearch

Q10a_5: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Preaching**" n=1,001

68% say that music at their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

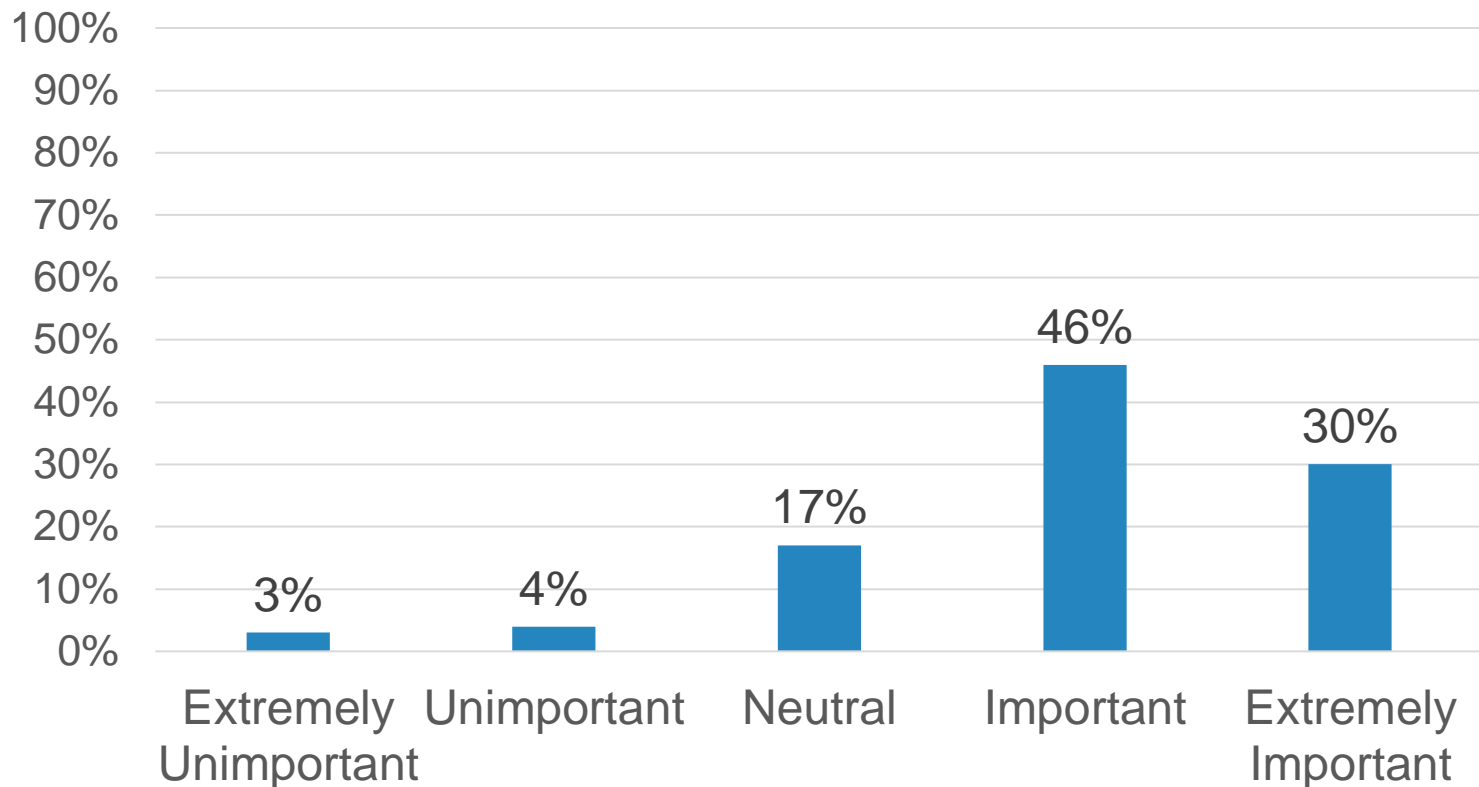


Lifeway research

Q10a_6: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Music**" n=1,001

76% say building relationships with members of their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

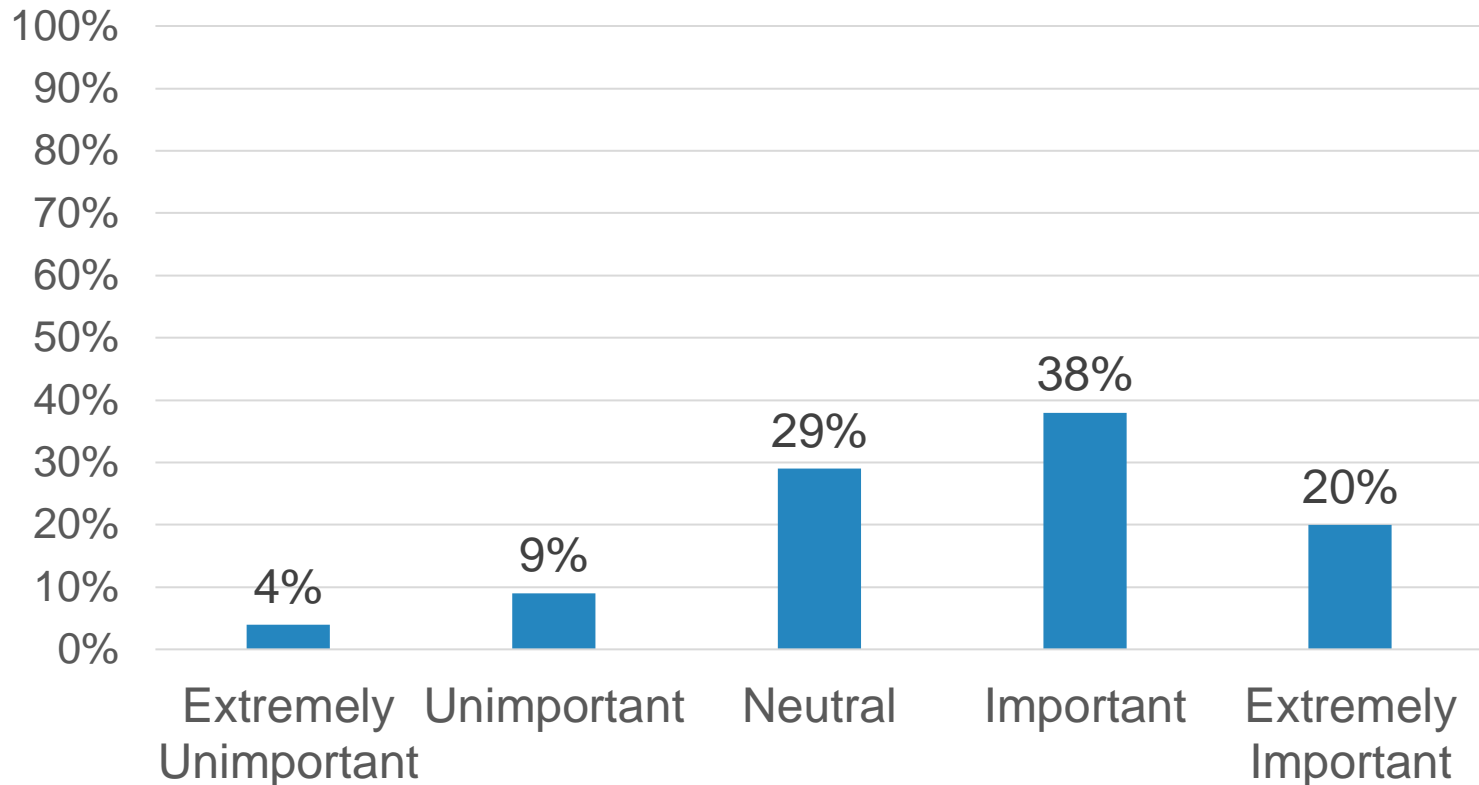


Lifeway research

Q10a_7: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) Church members with whom I could build relationships" n=1,001

59% say that church members similar to them was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

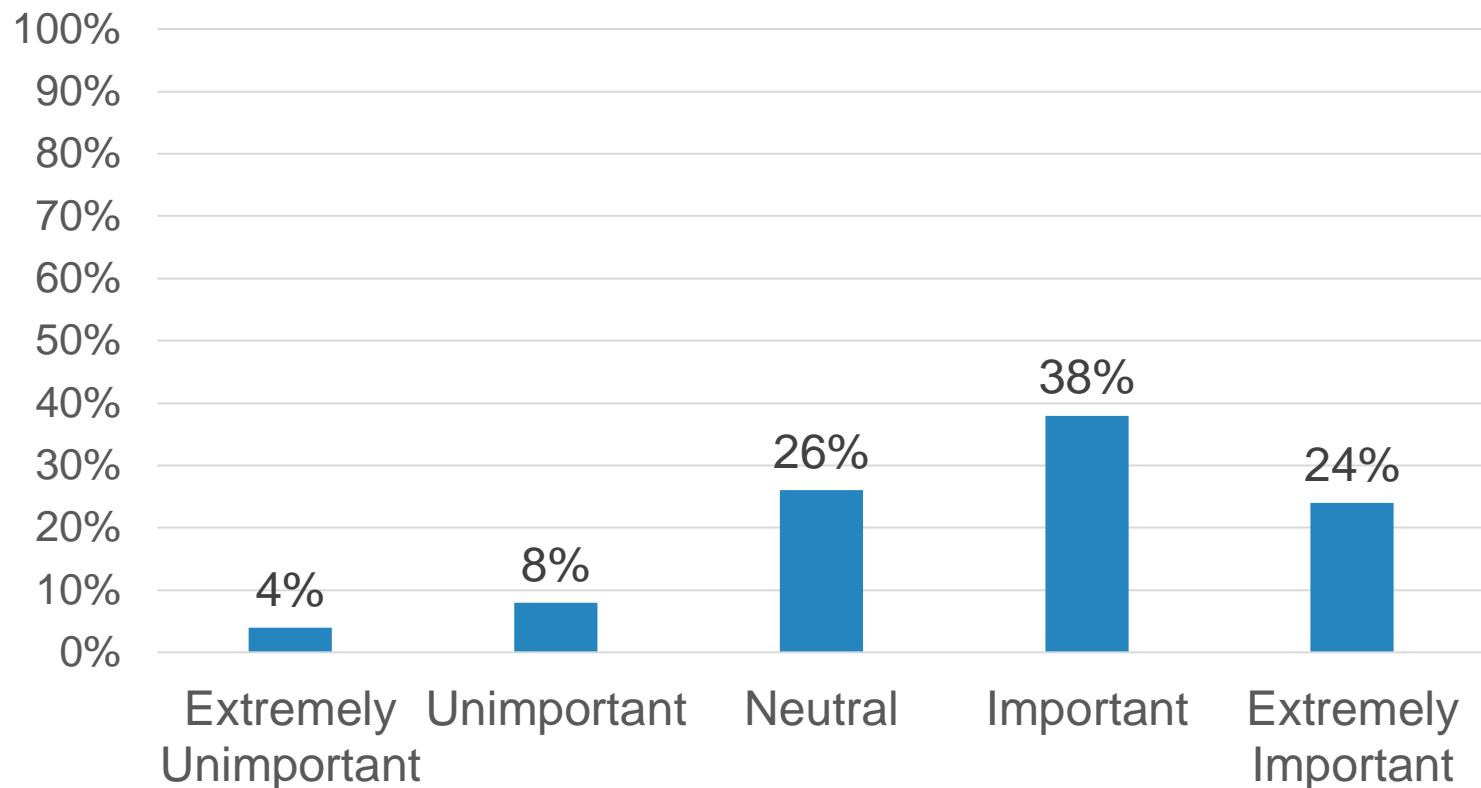


Lifeway research

Q10a_8: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Church members similar to me (interests, backgrounds, etc.)**" n=1,001

62% say that opportunities to serve at their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

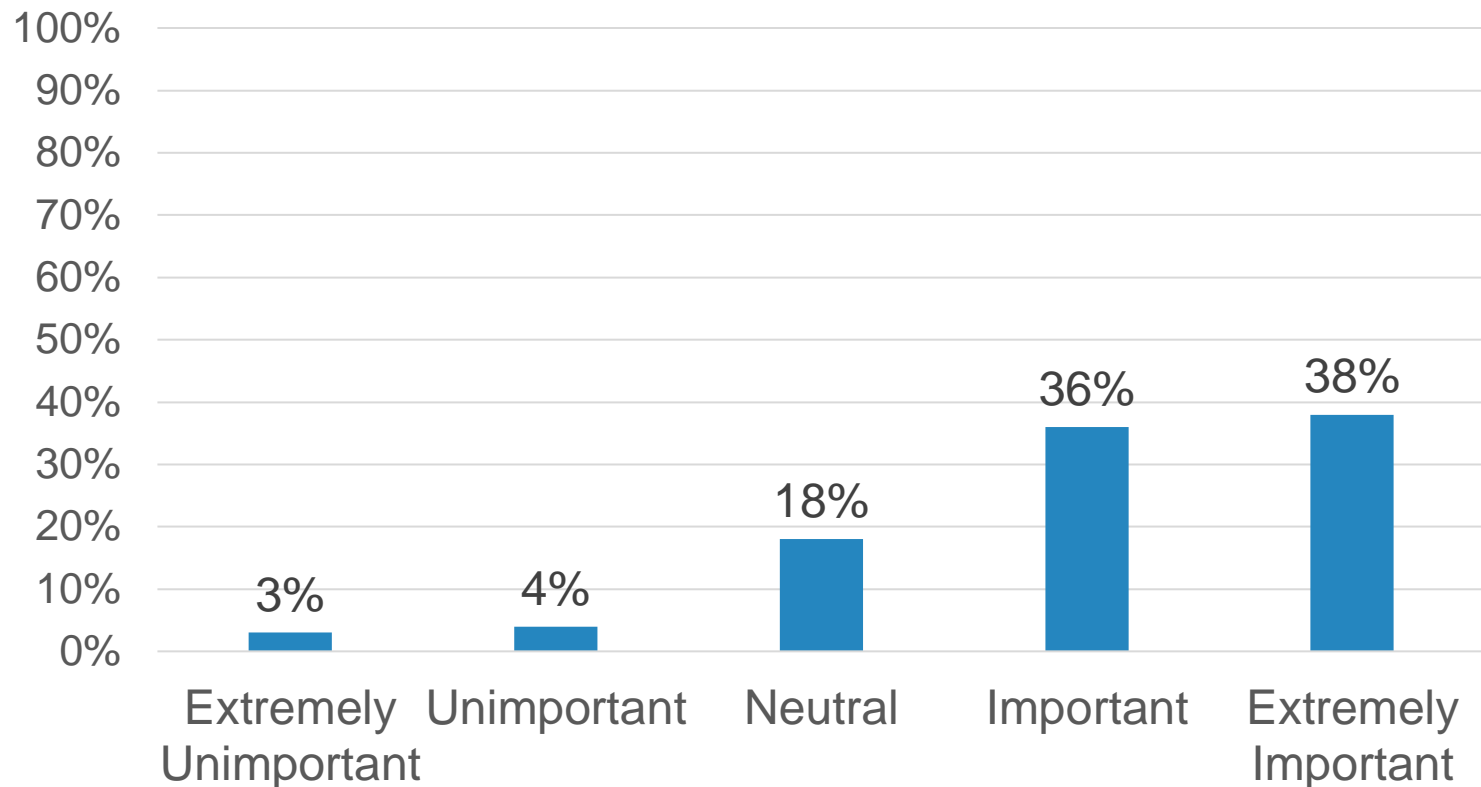


Lifeway research

Q10a_9: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Opportunities to serve (specific opportunity to serve in a class or ministry team, etc.)**" n=1,001

74% say that learning biblical truth at their current church was important to their decision to attend

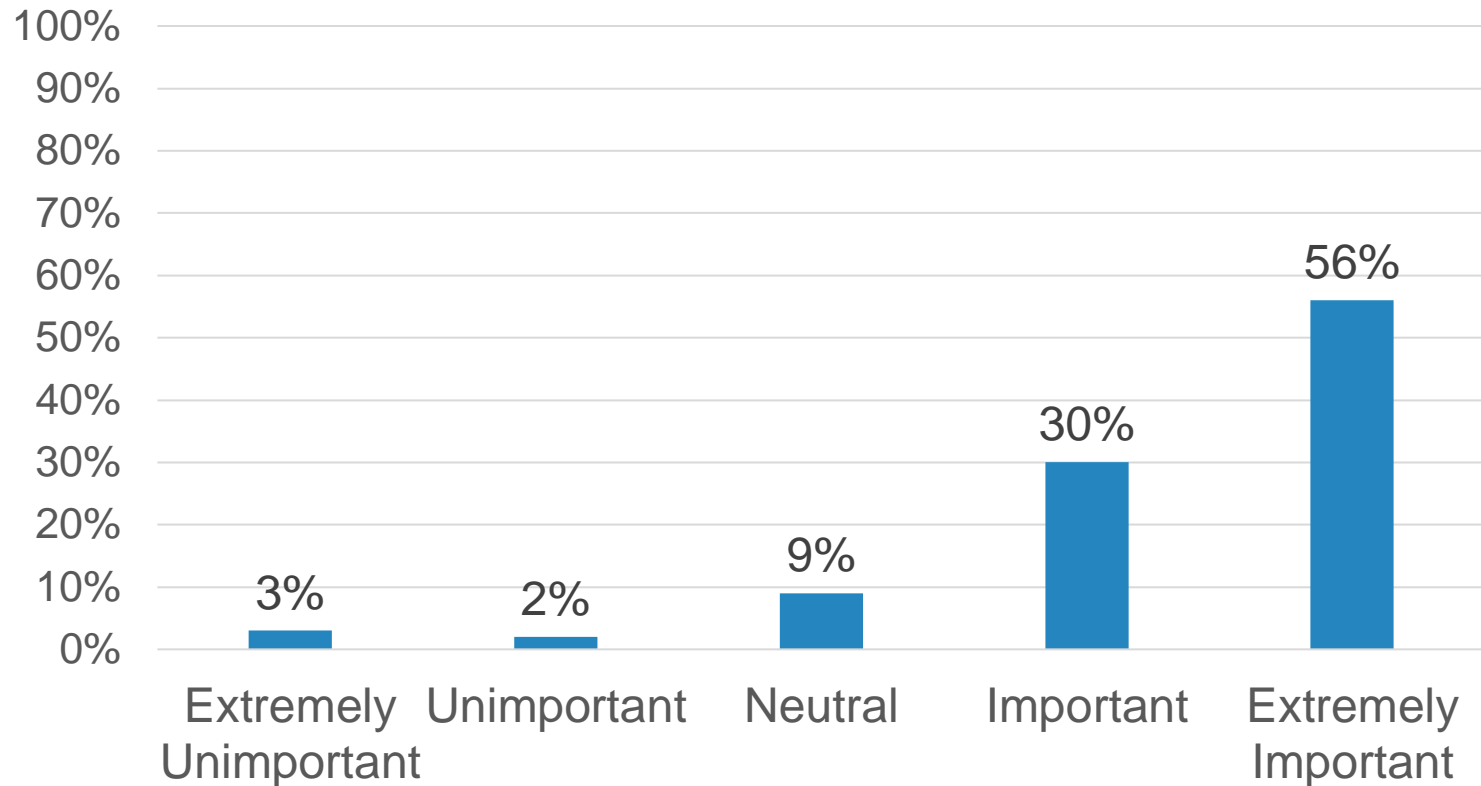
Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



Lifeway research

86% say that beliefs/doctrine of their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

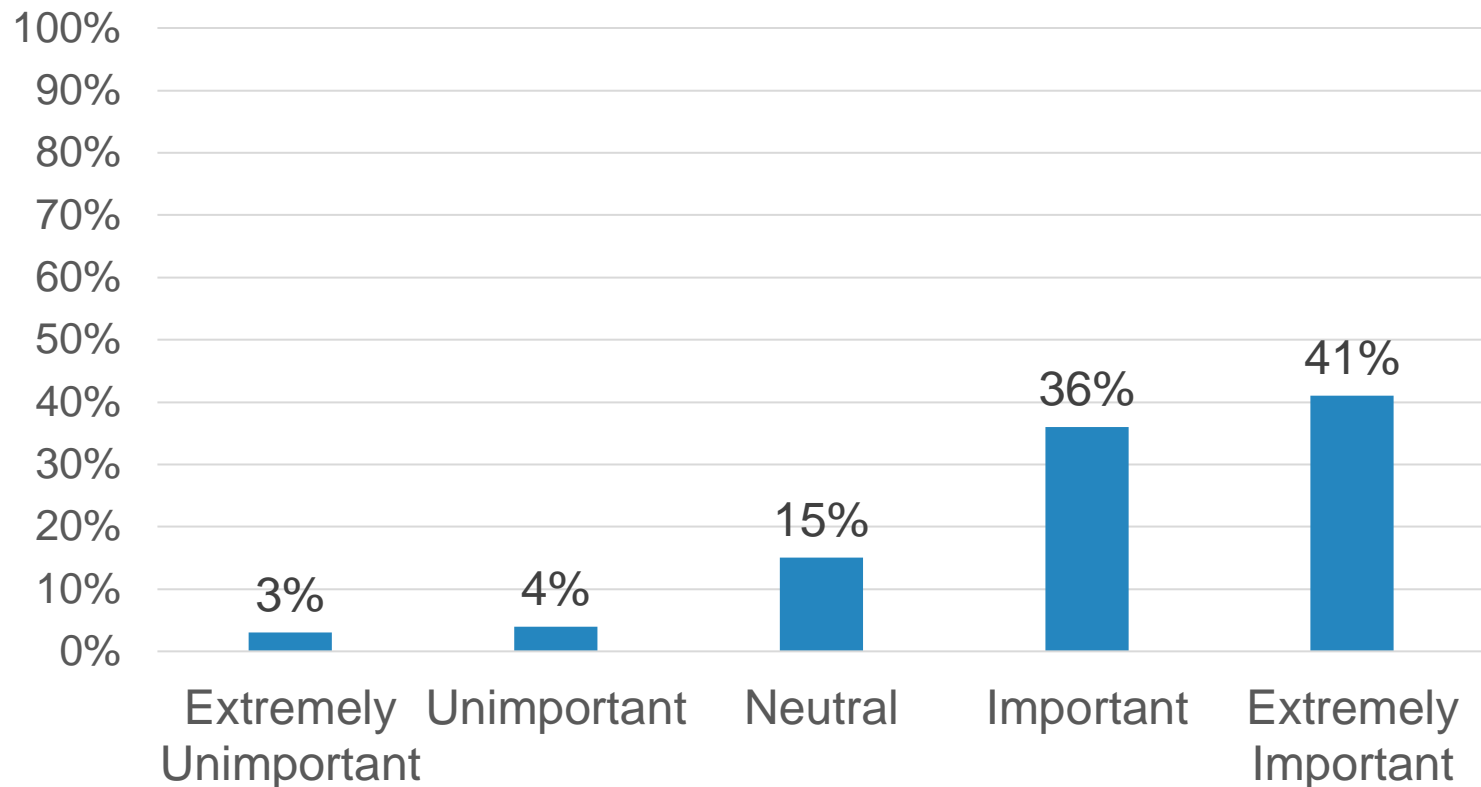


Lifewayresearch

Q10a_11: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Beliefs/Doctrine of the church**" n=1,001

78% say that evidence of God's work/changed lives at their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

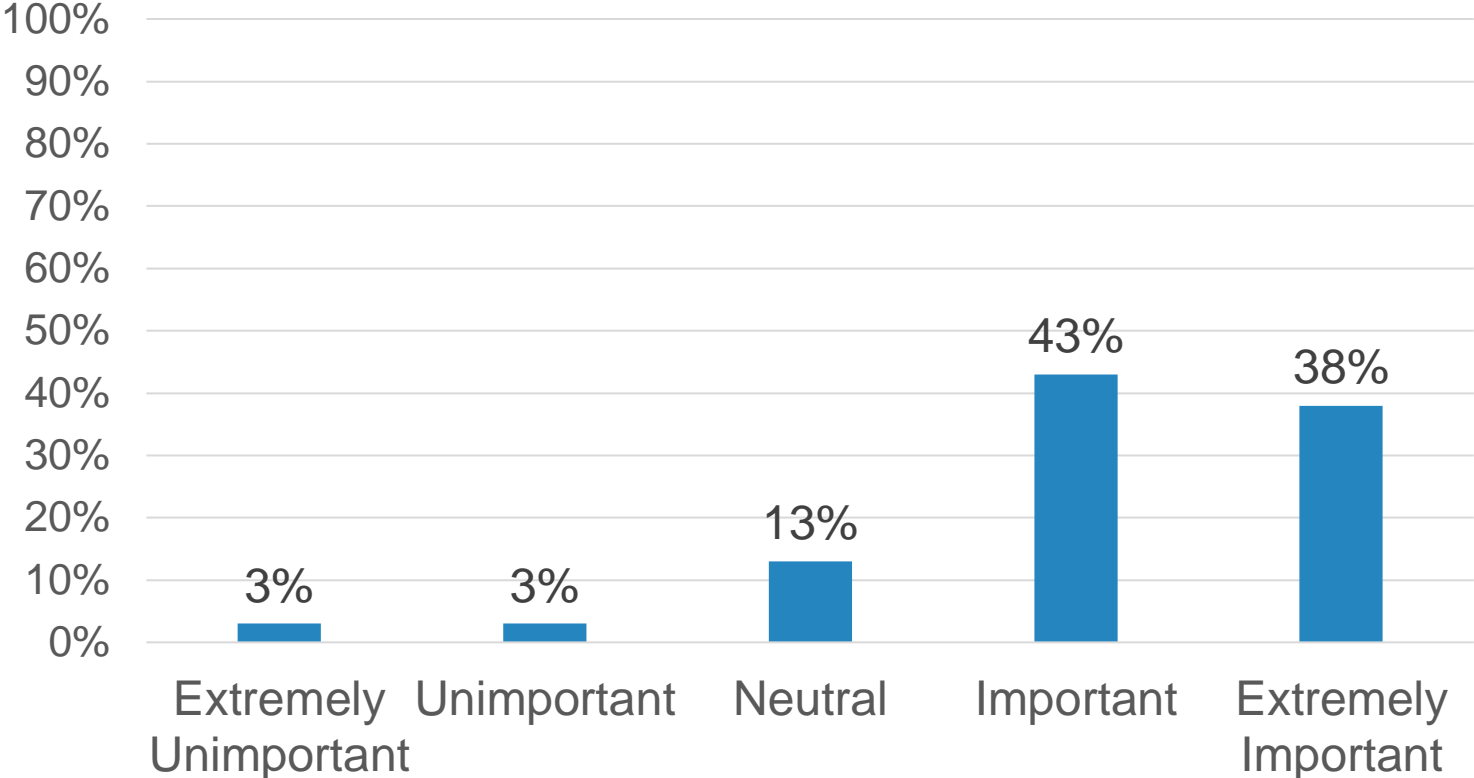


Lifeway research

Q10a_12: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) Evidence of God's work/changed lives" n=1,001

82% say that care for community at their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

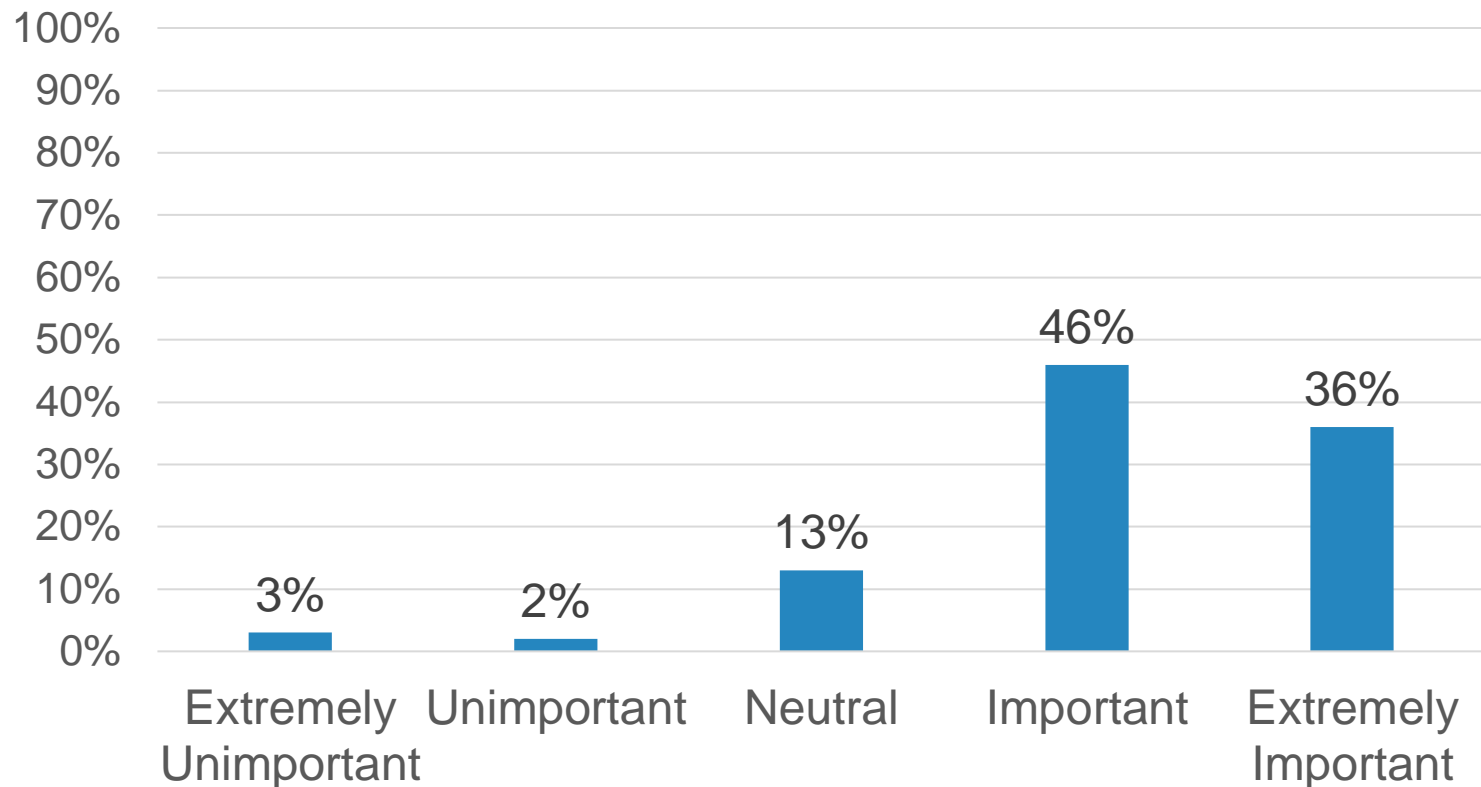


Lifeway research

Q10a_13: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Care for community**" n=1,001

82% say that unity among members at their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

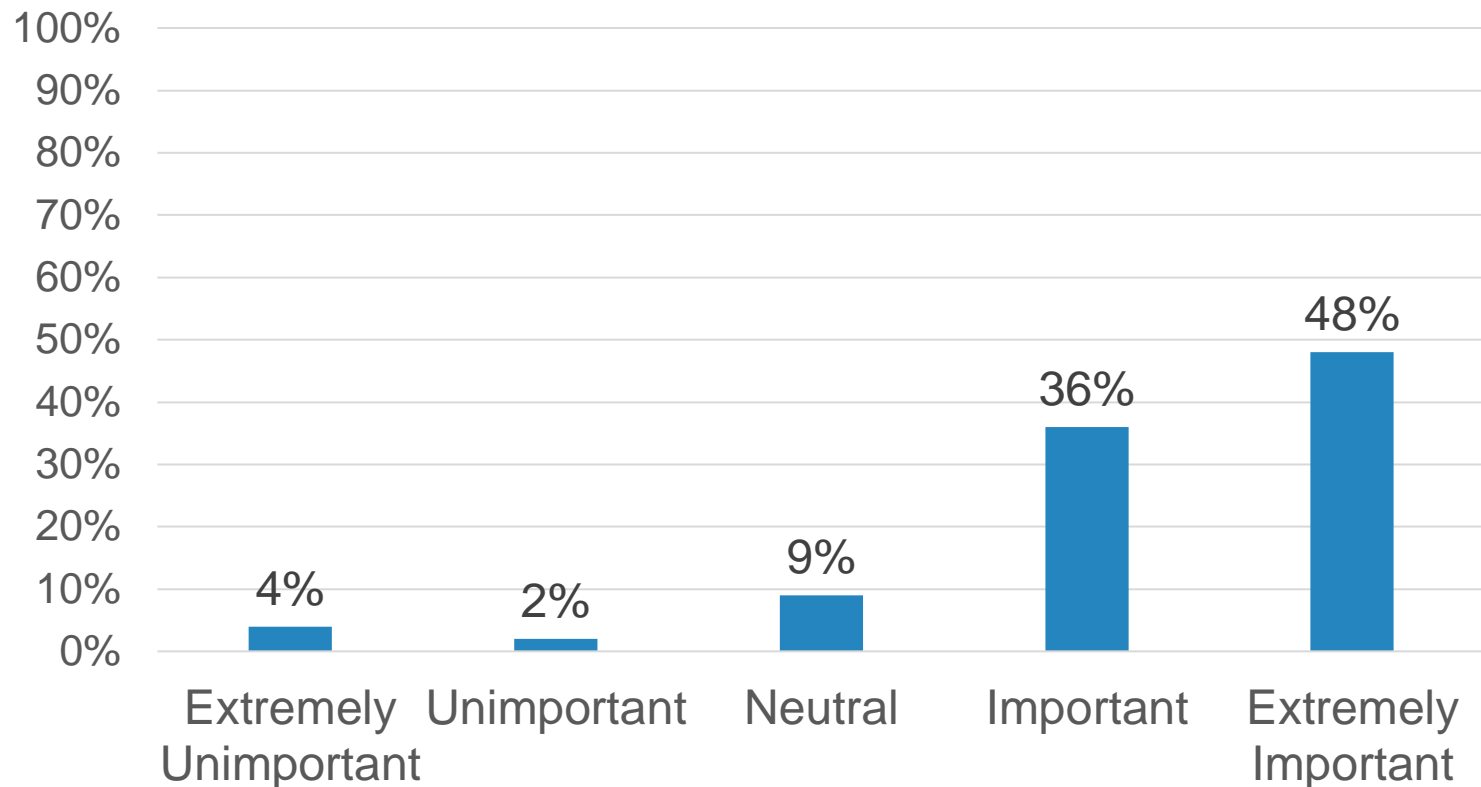


Lifeway research

Q10a_14: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Unity among members**" n=1,001

84% say that the authenticity of their current church's members/pastor was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

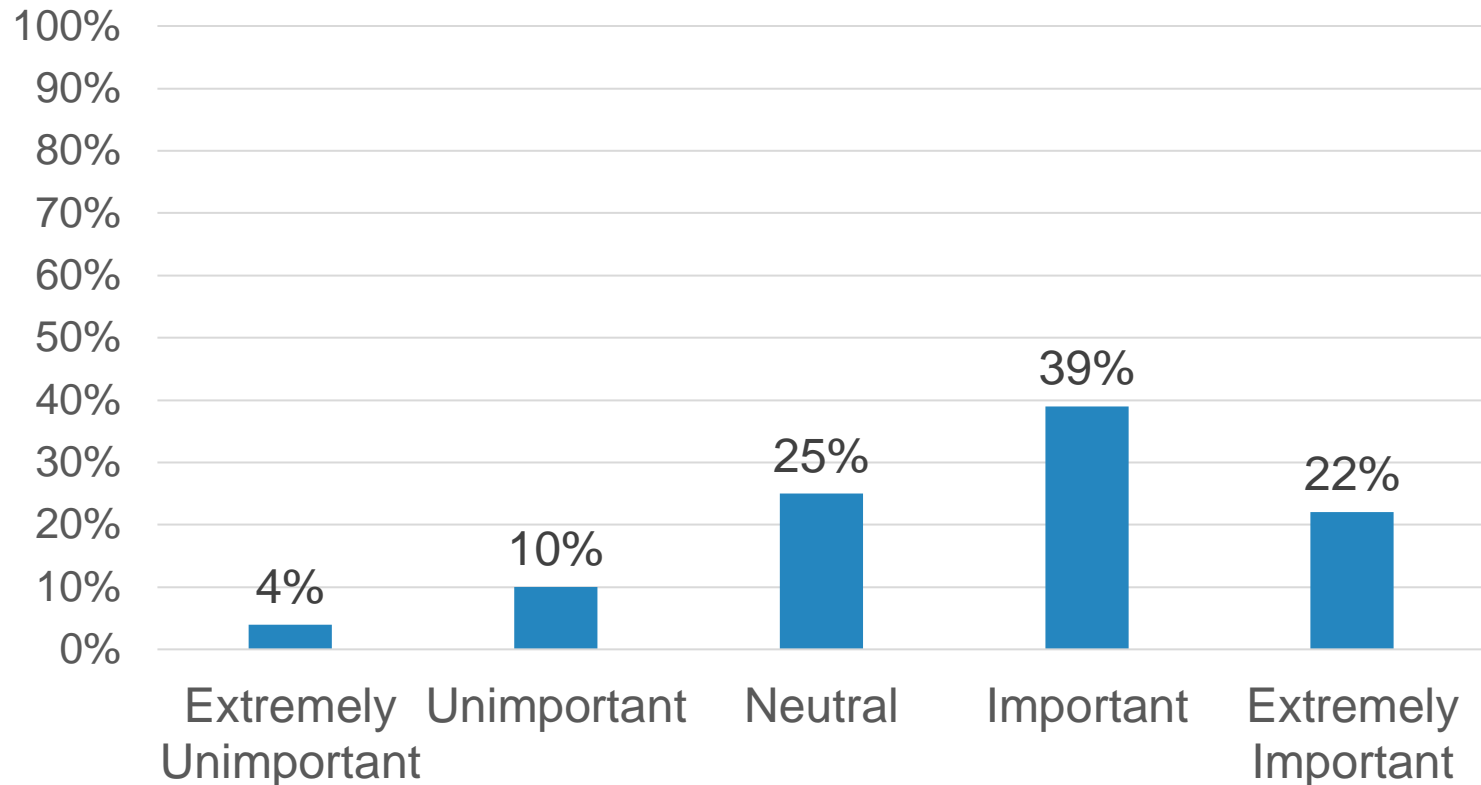


Lifeway research

Q10a_15: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Authenticity of church members/pastor (down-to-earth, etc.)**" n=1,001

61% say that acquaintances among members of their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

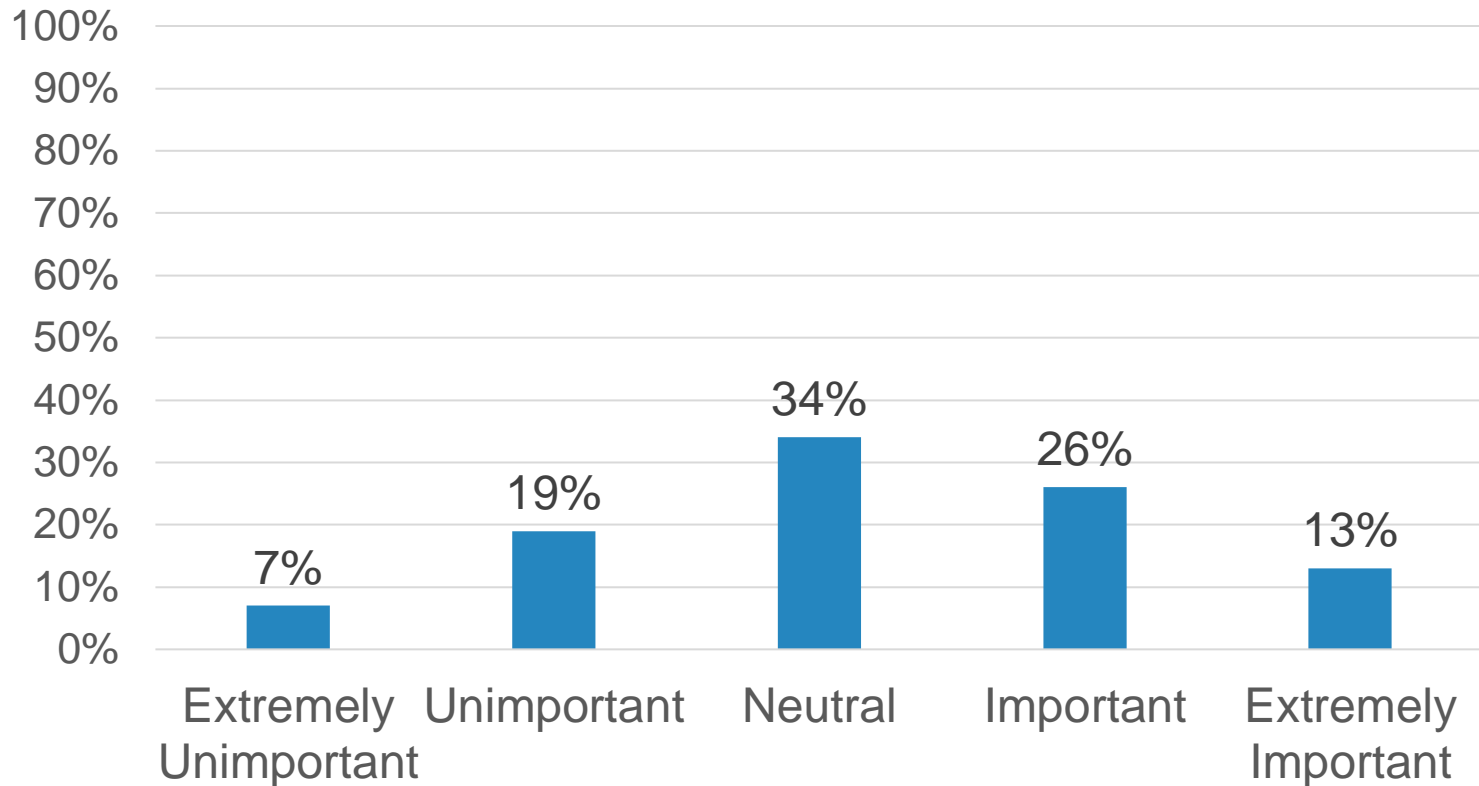


Lifeway research

Q10a_16: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Acquaintances among church members**" n=1,001

40% say that the size of their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

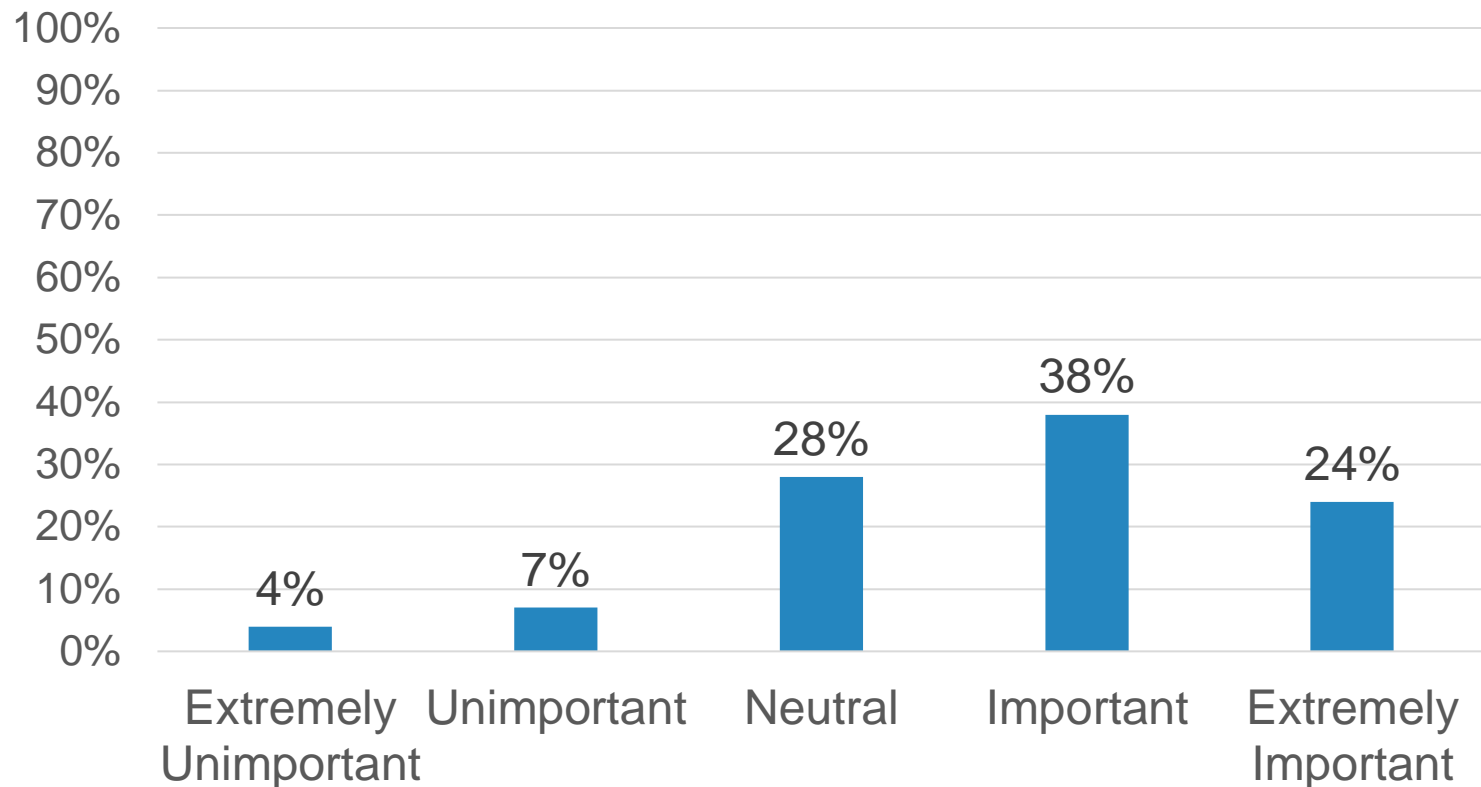


Lifeway research

Q10a_17: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Size of church**" n=1,001

61% say that low pressure to commit at their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

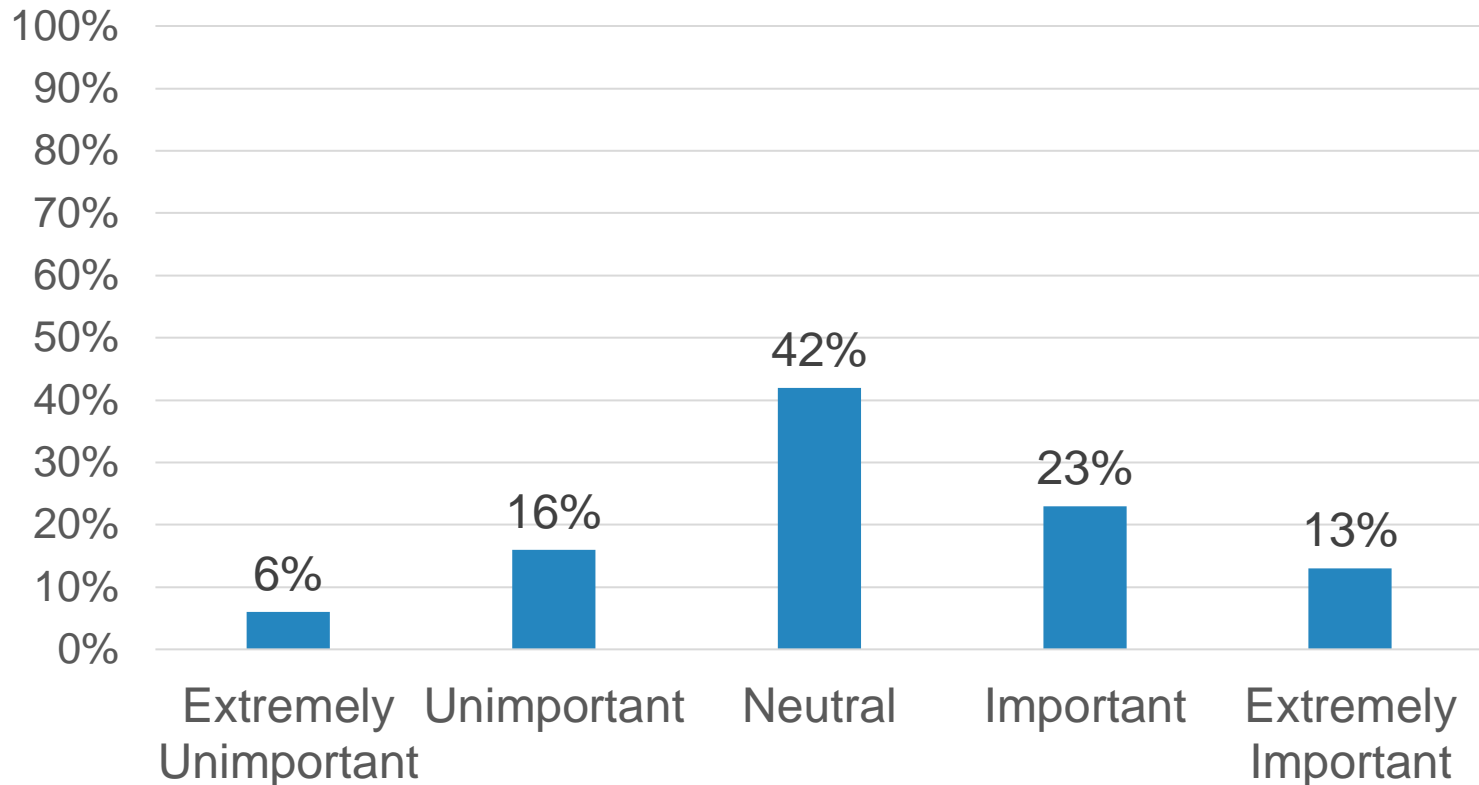


Lifewayresearch

Q10a_18: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Low pressure to commit**" n=1,001

37% say that little use of religious jargon at their current church was important to their decision to attend

Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches

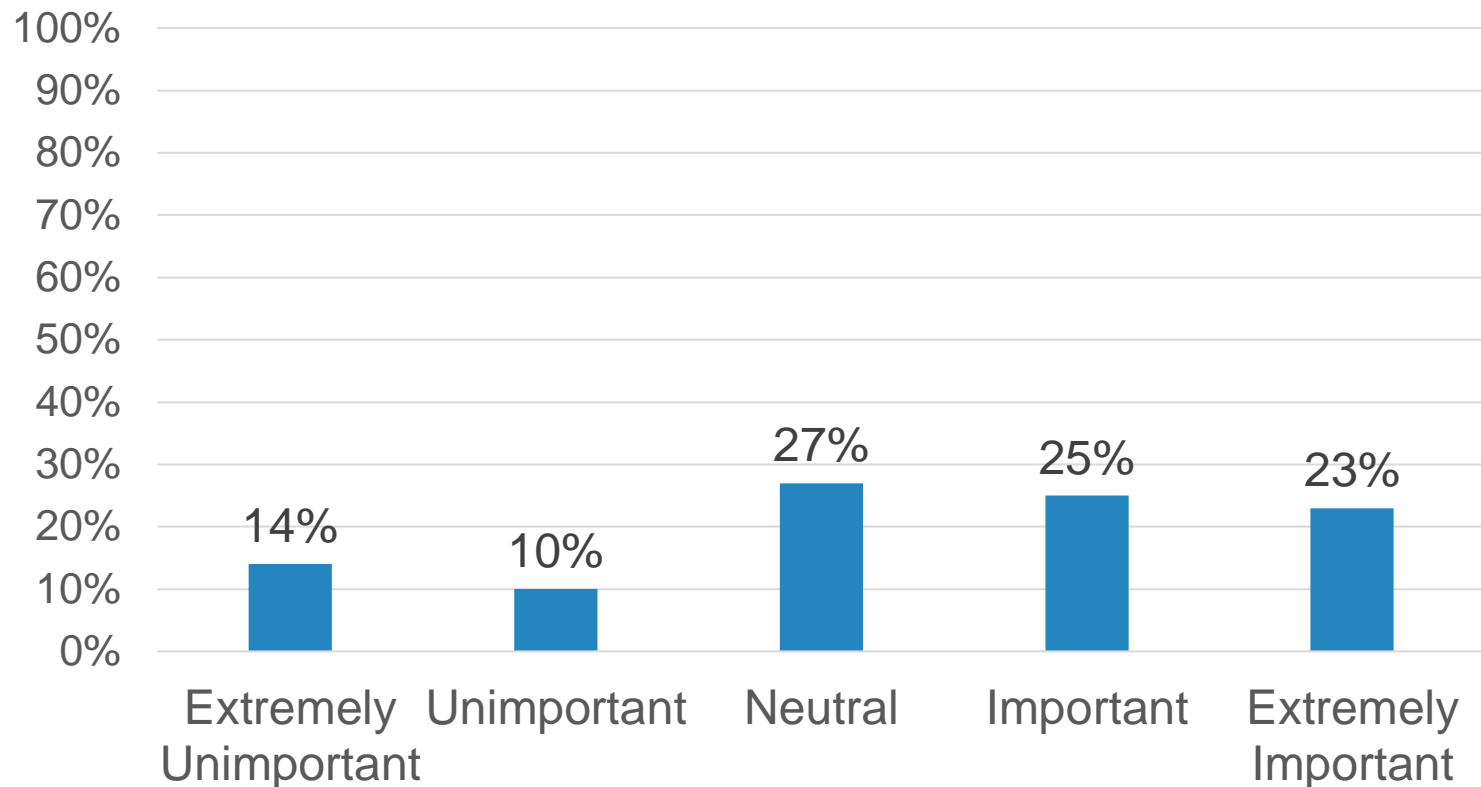


Lifeway research

Q10a_19: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Little use of religious jargon**" n=1,001

49% say that age-appropriate children programs of their current church was an important to their decision to attend

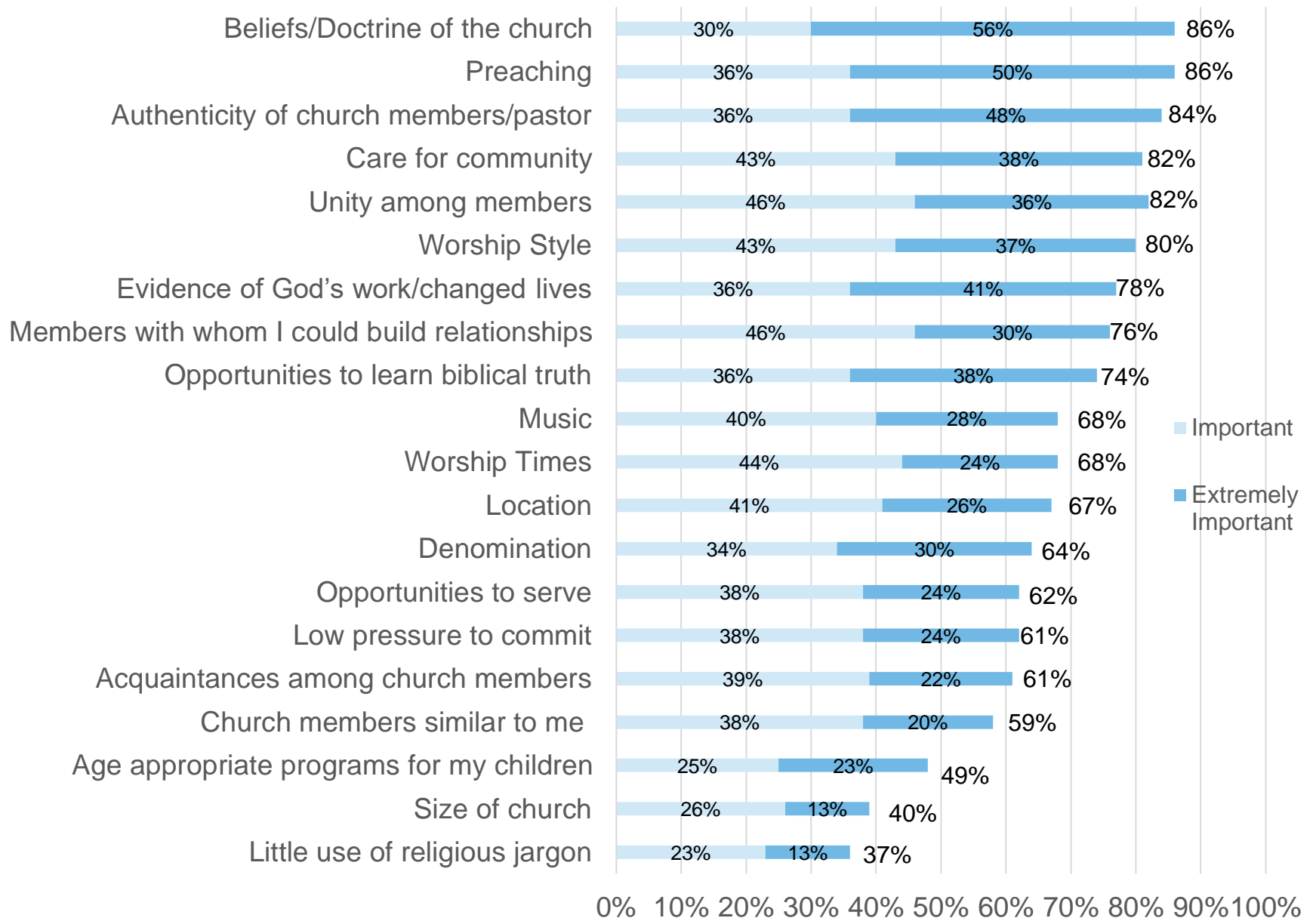
Among Protestant Churchgoers who Switched Churches



Lifeway research

Q10a_20: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) **Age-appropriate programs for my children**" n=1,001

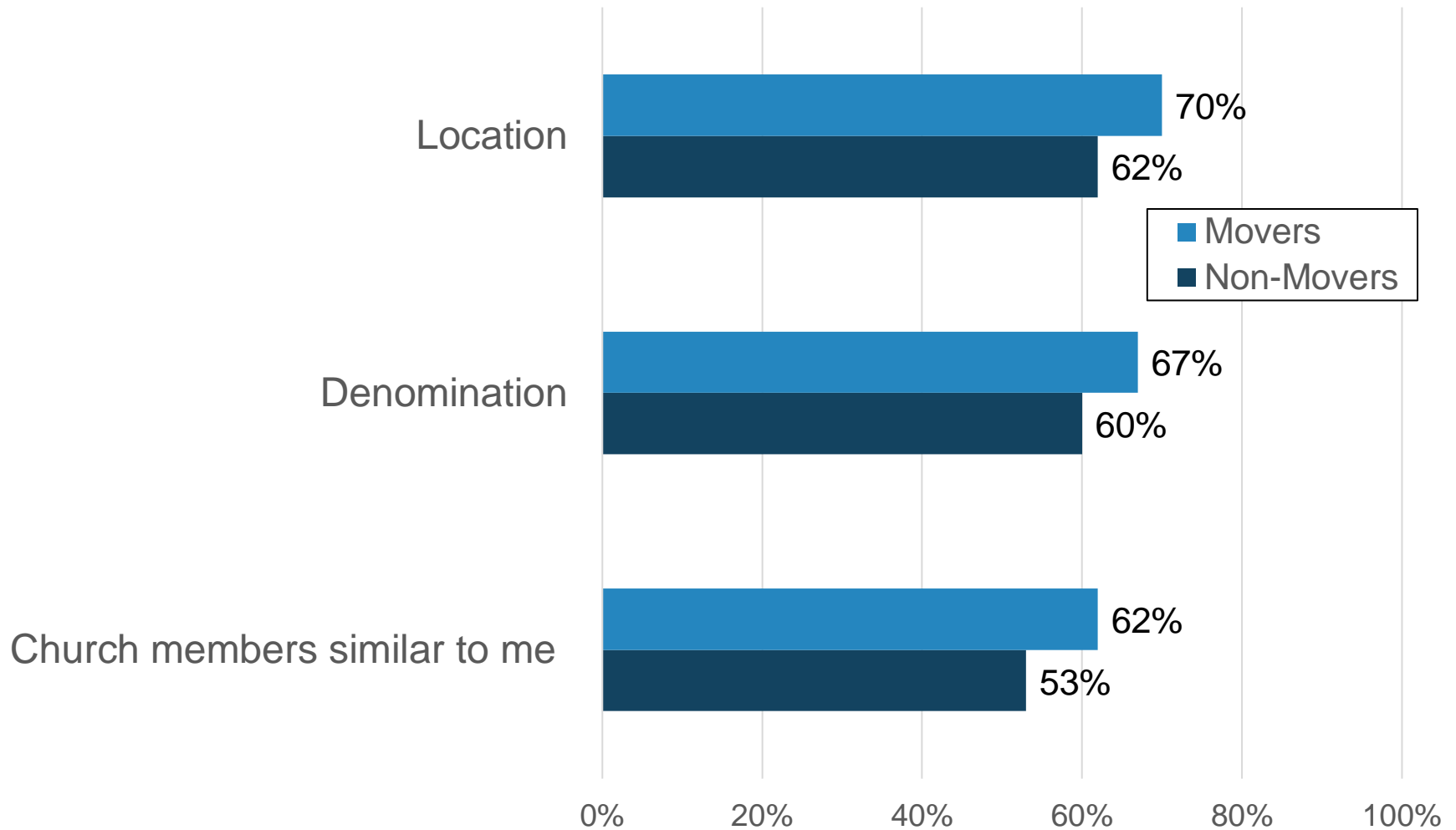
Important Factors in choosing current church



Lifeway research

Q10a: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) n=1,001

Important / Extremely Important factors in choosing current church that differ significantly between Movers and Non-Movers



Lifeway research

Q10a_1: "Please rate how important each of the following attributes of your current church were in your decision to attend your current church. (Select one for each attribute) n=1,001

Church Switcher Study 2023

Factors in Choosing Current Church Report

A SURVEY OF 1,001 AMERICAN PROTESTANT CHURCH SWITCHERS

Lifeway **research**