



Sacred Heart
UNIVERSITY



National Poll on Perceptions of Pope Leo XIV



Report of Findings

July 15, 2025

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Sacred Heart
UNIVERSITY



Our Story

Sacred Heart University and GreatBlue Research partner to research salient issues facing the United States. This collaboration combines the academic excellence of a top-rated private University and the research design, analysis and reporting expertise of GreatBlue Research.

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Areas of Investigation

Sacred Heart University leveraged a quantitative research approach to address the following areas of investigation:

- Awareness of Pope Leo XIV, early impressions and comparison to Pope Francis
- Perceived identity as religious vs. U.S./American figure
- Top issues Americans want the new pope to address
- Familiarity and opinions on Church teachings (e.g., synodality, women's roles, climate, sex/sexuality)
- Trust in Catholic, political, secular, and global leadership
- Views on the Church's role in shaping U.S. public policy
- Perceived sources of moral authority today (faith, politics, science, etc.)
- Agreement with Catholic teachings on social issues
- Shifts in views since the election of an American pope
- Catholic news consumption and trust
- Openness to engaging with Pope Leo via social media and popular culture
- Reactions to Pope Leo's American image
- Interest in attending a papal visit to the U.S.
- Demographic profile of respondents

Research Methodology | Snapshot

Methodology Digital survey*	No. of Completes 500	No. of Questions 40**	Sample Procured by GreatBlue
Target Market National***	Margin of Error +/- 4.33%	Confidence Level 95%	Research Dates June 24 - 25, 2025

* Data quality personnel, in addition to computer-aided interviewing platforms, ensure the integrity of the data is accurate.

** This represents the total possible number of questions; not all respondents will answer all questions based on skip patterns and other instrument bias.

*** The final sample was weighted according to age, gender and U.S. Census Region. Demographic weighting targets were originally derived from and based on the U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

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71.5%
would still purchase
at an increased
price point

8.9%

5.4%

2.8%

0.0%

Negative Impact

Boomers

U.S. Reactions to the Ascension of Pope Leo XIV | Executive Summary

This report provides an in-depth analysis of nationwide attitudes surrounding the ascension of Pope Leo XIV, perceptions of the Roman Catholic Church, and the role of religion in American public life—with a particular focus on the views of U.S. Roman Catholics and generational differences across key issues:

- ❖ **High Awareness, Emerging Opinions:** 81.4% of U.S. adults were aware of Pope Leo XIV's ascension, including 55.2% who were very aware. While 67.1% held an overall favorable opinion, only 29.3% were very favorable compared to 68.2% who were either somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or unsure. Among U.S. Roman Catholics, 53.0% viewed Pope Leo XIV very favorably and 29.9% somewhat favorably. Favorability toward the Catholic Church overall reached 89.3% among Catholics, compared to 62.9% of all U.S. respondents.
- ❖ **Top Priorities for the New Pope:** 40.9% of U.S. respondents say Pope Leo XIV should prioritize clergy sexual abuse and accountability as his top focus, followed by addressing global conflicts (32.9%), immigration and refugee support (28.3%), role of women in the Church (26.0%) and abortion/reproductive rights (25.6%). U.S. Roman Catholics were more likely to prioritize abuse scandals (48.4%) and declining church attendance (26.5%).
- ❖ **Mixed Expectations on Church Direction:** Just 18.3% believe Pope Leo XIV will lead the Church in a new direction. More expect continuity with Pope Francis (25.8%) or a blend of both (34.2%). Roman Catholics (40.2%) are more likely to favor continued alignment with Pope Francis.
- ❖ **Moral & Policy Influence Divided:** 54.1% believe the Church should play at least some role in U.S. policymaking, but only 18.6% say the ascension of Pope Leo XIV increased their support for that role. One-third (33.4%) say the pope should comment on U.S. political issues, while 35.4% say "it depends." Among Roman Catholics, 30.5% support a greater role for religion in public life post-Leo XIV, and 47.7% want him to weigh in on key political issues.
- ❖ **Communication & Digital Engagement:** 57.2% say Pope Leo XIV has been an effective communicator early in his papacy; 63.0% said the same of Pope Francis. One-quarter (26.6%) were aware of the Vatican's official "X" account. 52.6% are open to social media engagement with the pope and 35.3% said viral memes and content made him more relatable (vs. 12.1% who found it disrespectful). Among Catholics, 48.6% viewed his virtual presence positively.
- ❖ **Younger Adults Show Nuanced Views:** 59.6% of 18-34 year olds had a favorable view of Pope Leo XIV (vs. 70.4% of 35-54 and 70.3% of 55+), but sentiment was stronger: 34.9% were very favorable vs. 24.7% somewhat favorable. This age group was also more likely to view him as a U.S. national figure (27.9%) and be interested in following him on TikTok (26.5%).
- ❖ **Trust Landscape:** Trust in Catholic Church leadership (63.3%) slightly outpaces trust in global (59.3%) and secular public leadership (56.6%); trust in American political leadership was lowest (50.9%). Among Catholics, 89.4% expressed trust in Church leadership, though 46.5% said they had some trust. 71.3% also trusted secular public institutions. Younger adults (18-34) were most likely to place a great deal of trust in both Catholic (29.9%) and secular (27.4%) leadership.

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Negative Impact

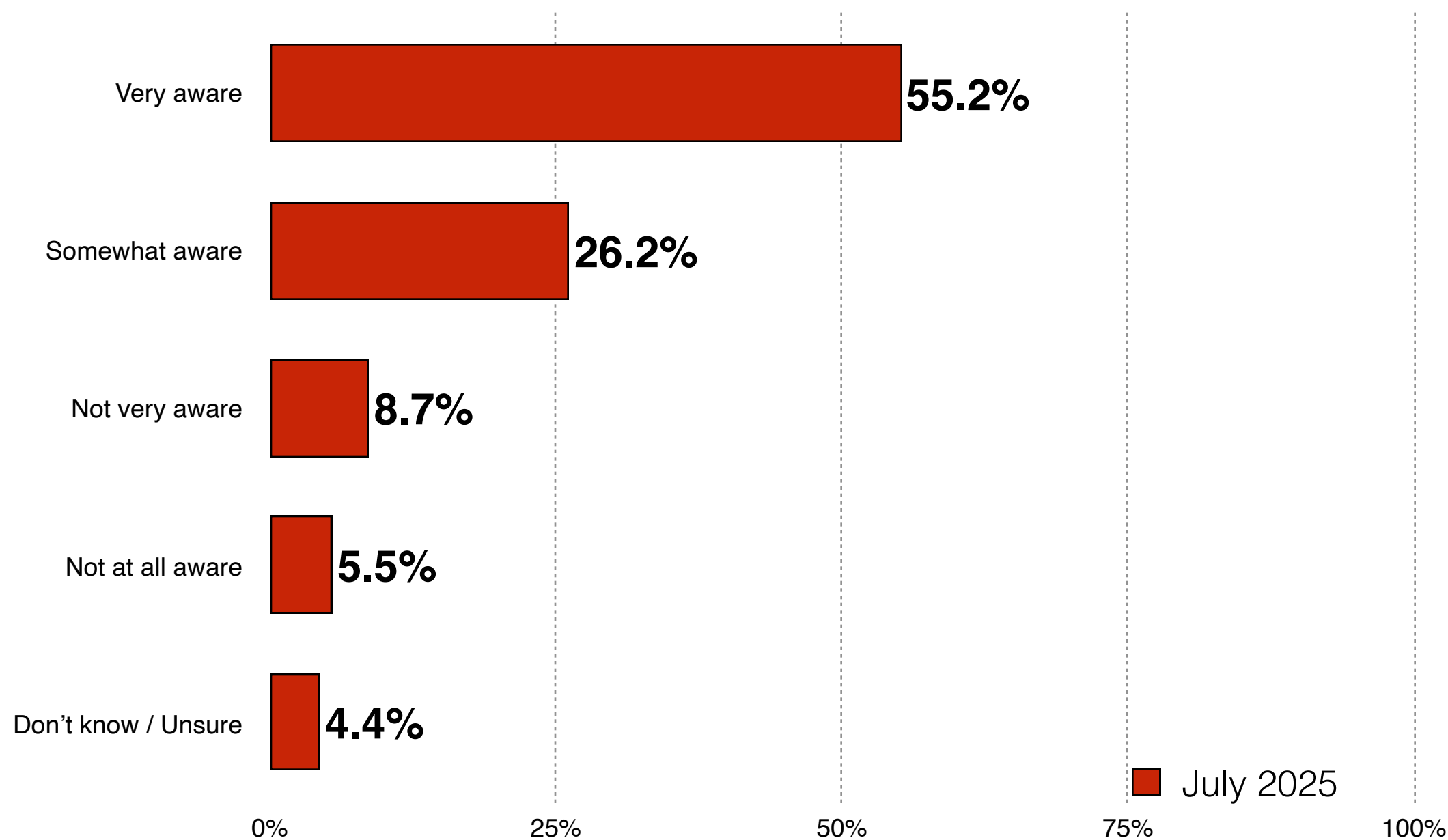
Boomers

Overall Attitudes | Pope Leo XIV Awareness & Favorability

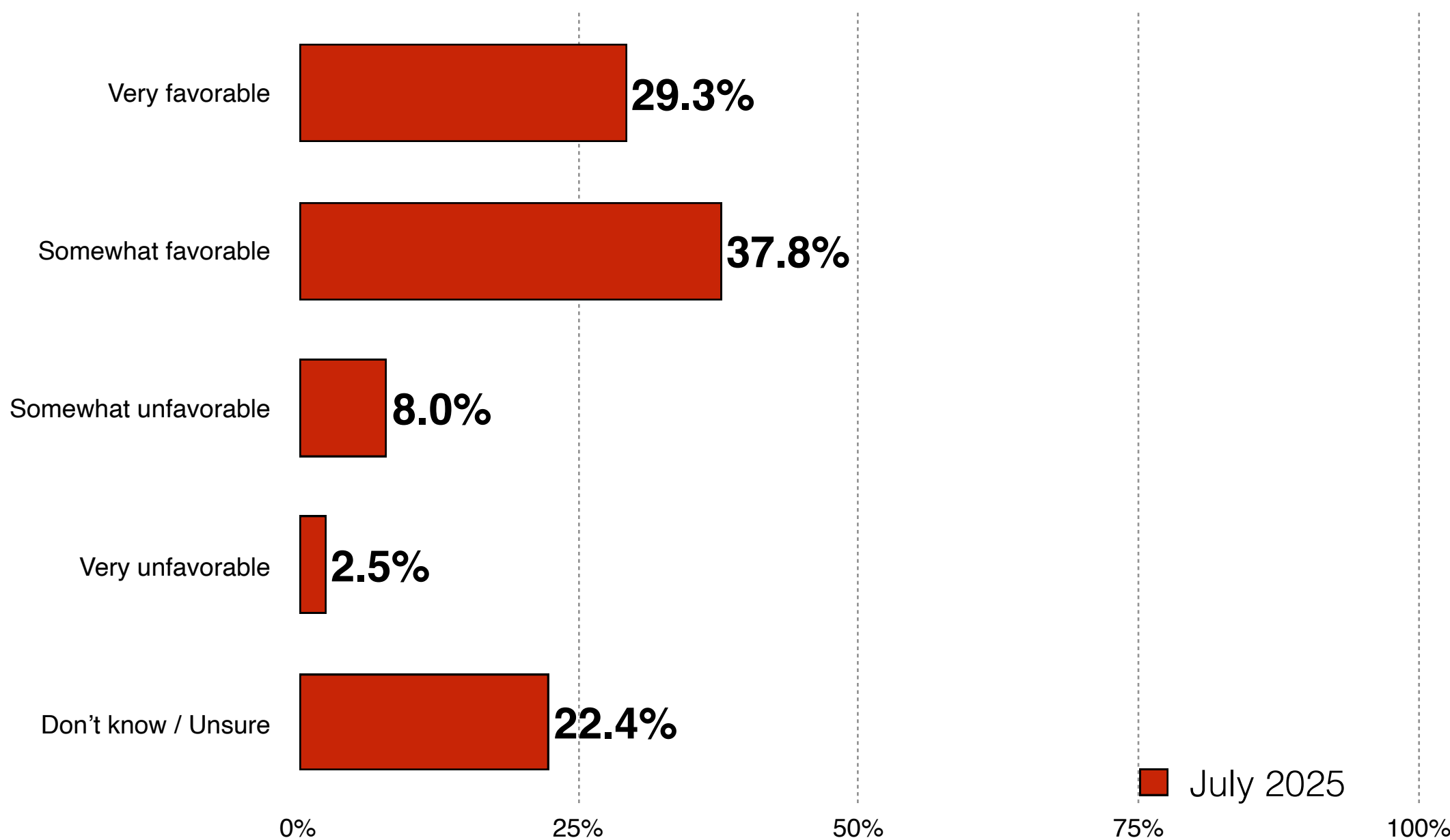
Over eight in ten respondents (81.4%) were aware of the death of Pope Francis and ascension of Pope Leo XIV at the time of the survey, with over half being “very aware.” Opinions, however, appear to be less hardened at the time of the survey. While many more U.S. respondents had a more “favorable” view of Pope Leo XIV than “unfavorable” (67.1% vs. 10.5%), most were in the middle or “unsure” of their opinion (68.2% somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or unsure).

- ❖ Sentiment towards Pope Leo XIV is stronger among U.S. Roman Catholics as 53.0% have a “very favorable” view of the new pope compared to 29.9% that have only a “somewhat favorable” view.
- ❖ Overall, fewer 18-34 year olds have a “favorable” view of Pope Leo XIV (59.6% compared to 70.4% of 35-54 year olds and 70.3% of 55+ year olds). However, sentiment is stronger among this age cohort as 34.9% of 18-34 year olds have a “very favorable” view compared to 24.7% that have a “somewhat favorable” view.

Awareness of the Ascension of Pope Leo XIV



Overall Opinion of Pope Leo XIV



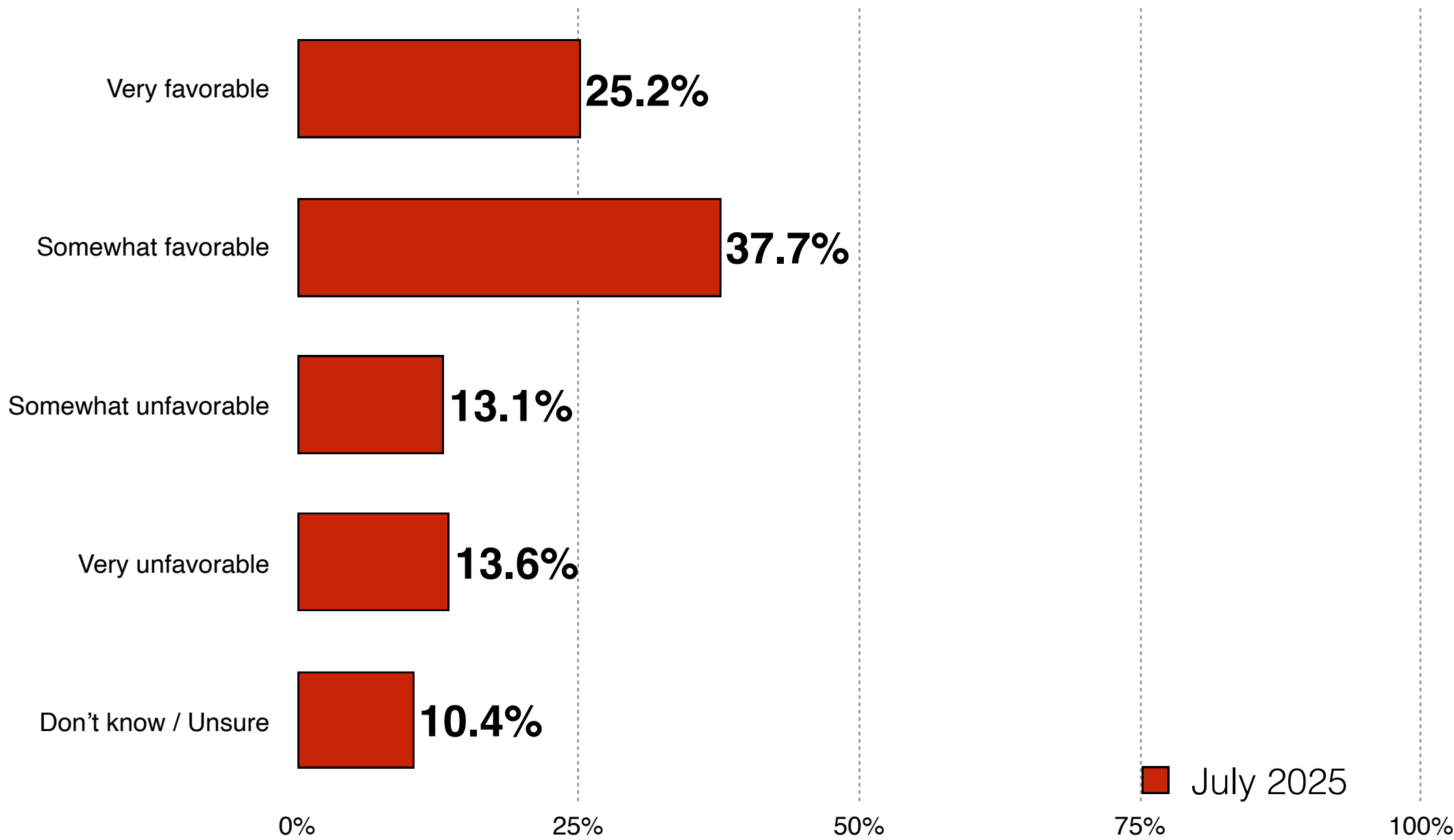
N=500
Q: Prior to today's survey, how aware were you that, following the death of Pope Francis, Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, who was born in Chicago was elected as the new Pope, taking the name Pope Leo XIV?
Q: How favorable is your overall opinion of Pope Leo XIV?

Overall Attitudes | Church Favorability & Perception

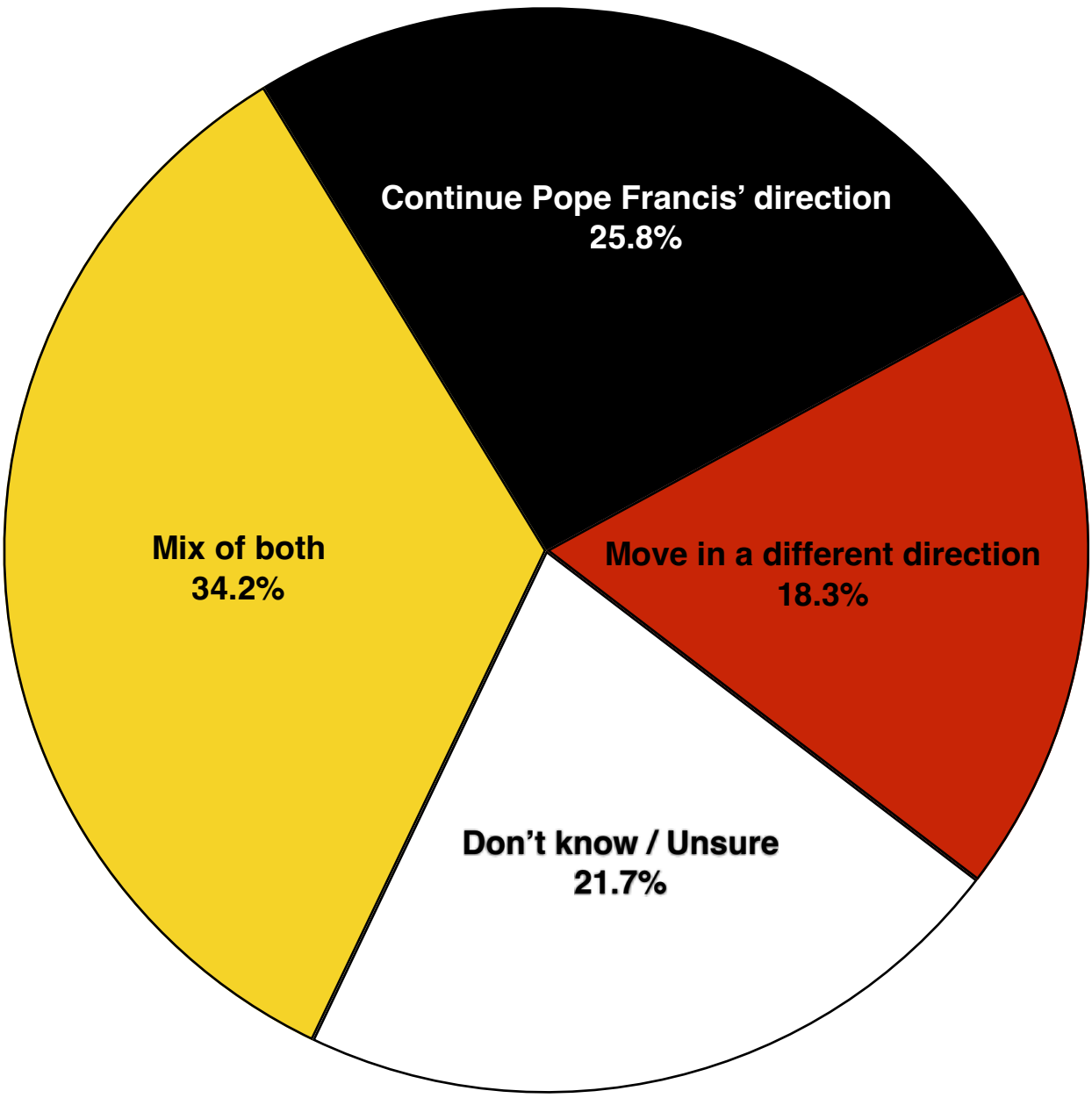
Almost two-thirds of U.S. respondents have a “favorable” view, overall, of the Catholic Church (62.9%), with one-quarter having a “very favorable” view (25.2%). Data suggest individuals' view of the Catholic Church is being shaped by the papacy of Pope Francis, as only 18.3% believe Pope Leo XIV will move the Church in a new direction. This compared to the 25.8% who think Pope Leo XIV will continue in Pope Francis’ direction and 34.2% see a mix of both.

- ❖ While U.S. Roman Catholics—as expected—have a more favorable view of the Catholic Church (89.3%), they are also more likely to want to see Pope Leo XIV continue the Church along the direction set by Pope Francis (40.2%).
- ❖ Fewer respondents ages 55 and older believe Pope Leo XIV will continue the Church along Pope Francis’ direction (20.9% compared to 28.1% of 18-34 year olds and 29.4% of 35-54 year olds).

Overall Opinion of the Catholic Church



Direction Pope Leo XIV's Papacy



N=500
Q: Overall, how favorable is your current overall opinion of the Catholic Church as an institution?
Q: Do you believe Pope Leo XIV will continue the direction set by Pope Francis, or move the Church in a different direction?

Focus of the Church | Key Issues to Address

Two-fifths of U.S. respondents feel that it is important for Pope Leo XIV to address the ongoing clergy sexual abuse scandal and accountability (40.9%)—the most frequently mentioned issue.

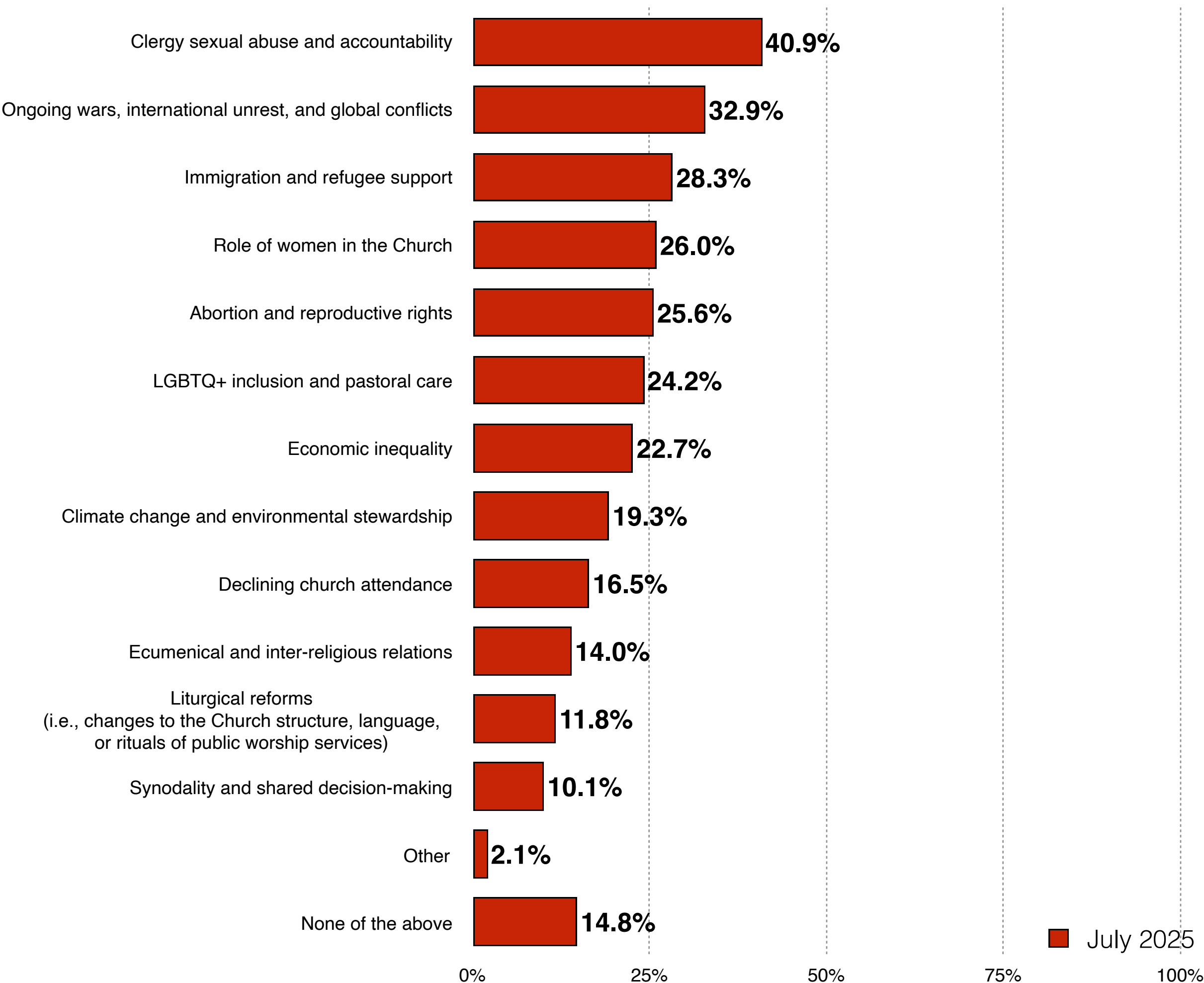
This was followed by approximately one-third who wanted to see the new pope address the “ongoing wars, international unrest, and global conflicts” (32.9%) and more than one-quarter felt the following issues were important to address:

- ❖ Immigration and refugee support (28.3%)
- ❖ Role of women in the Church (26.0%)
- ❖ Abortion and reproductive rights (25.6%)

U.S. Roman Catholics place more emphasis on addressing the clergy abuse scandals than the general U.S. population (48.4%).

In addition, over a quarter of U.S. Roman Catholics want to see Pope Leo XIV address declining church attendance (26.5%).

Issues Important for Pope Leo XIV to Address



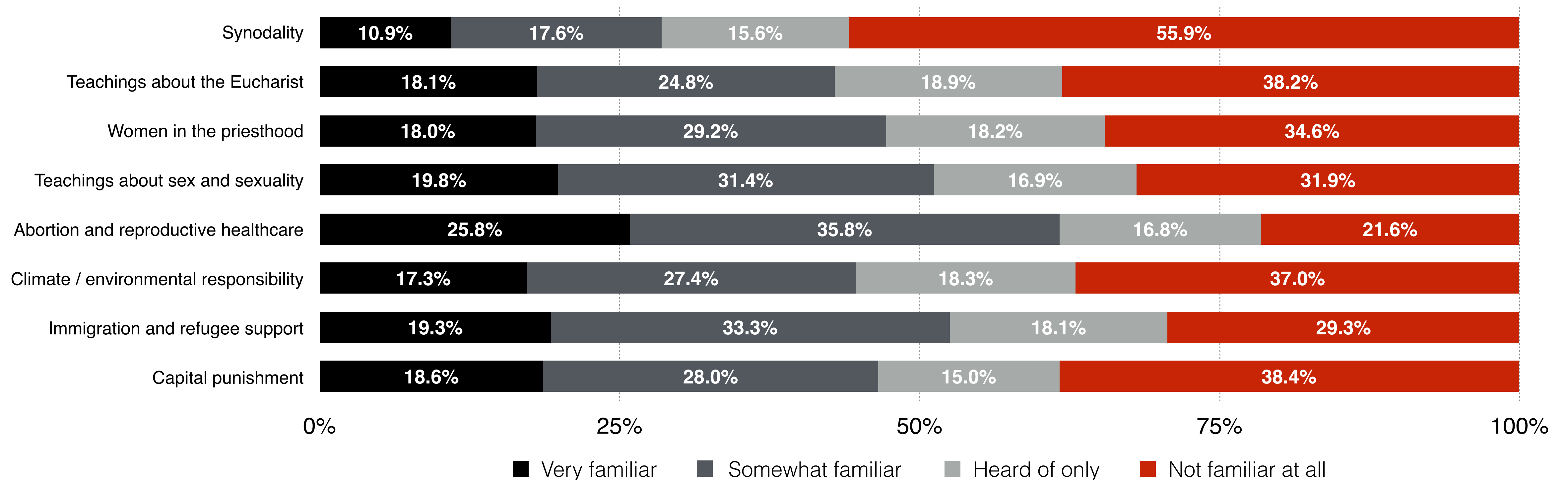
N=500
Q: Within the context of the Catholic Church, which, if any, of the following issues do you hope Pope Leo XIV addresses most during his papacy? Please select all that apply.

Awareness | Familiarity with Church's Teachings or Discussions

U.S. respondents were most “familiar” with the Catholic Church’s teachings/discussions on abortion and reproductive healthcare (61.6%), immigration and refugee support (52.6%) and teachings about sex and sexuality (51.2%). Conversely, over half (55.9%) were “not familiar at all” with the Church’s discussions on synodality (or involving laypeople more directly in decision-making processes).

❖ Almost half of U.S. Roman Catholics (48.6%) self-reported at least some familiarity with synodality at the time of the survey.

Familiarity with Church's Teachings on Key Issues



N=500

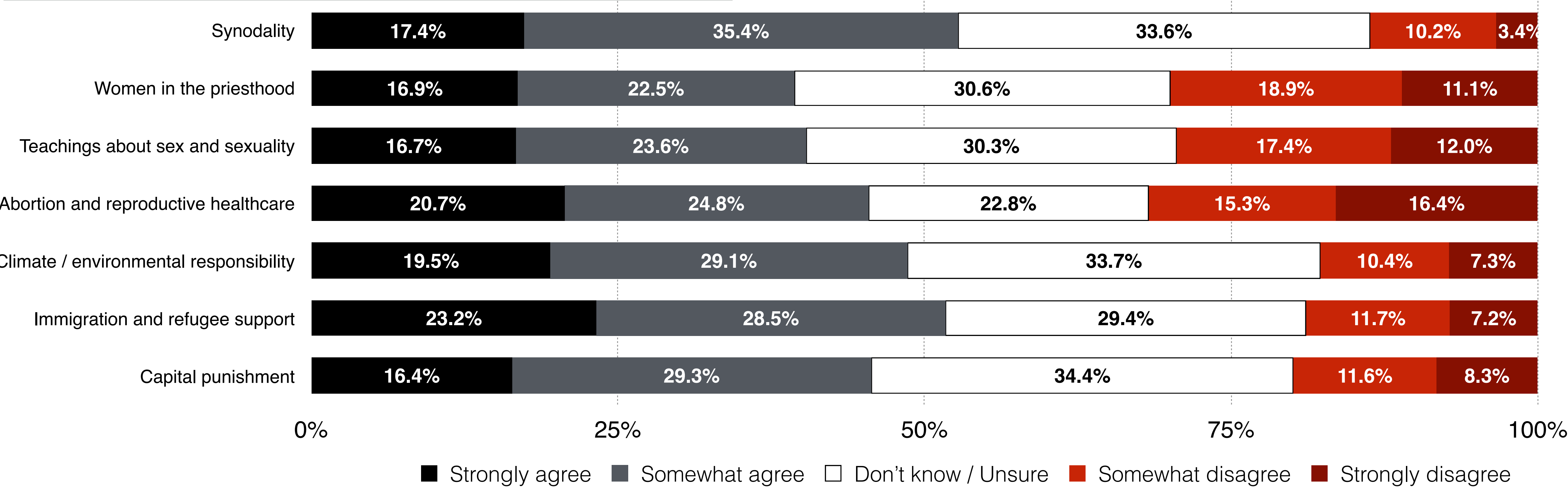
Q: How familiar are you with the Catholic Church's current position or recent discussions on the following topics?

Perception | Agreement with Church's Teachings or Discussions

Generally, U.S. respondents are more so in agreement with the Catholic Church’s teachings on immigration and refugee support (51.7%) and climate/ environmental responsibility (48.6%) than its position on women in the priesthood (39.4%) and sex and sexuality (40.3%). Over half (52.8%) agreed with the Church’s teaching on synodality, however it should be noted this was the one teaching that was provided a description in the survey.

- ❖ Two-thirds of U.S. Roman Catholics agree with the Church’s teachings on synodality (65.7%). In addition, nearly two-thirds of U.S. Roman Catholics agreed with the Church’s teaching on abortion and reproductive health (63.0%), while closer to half agree with their teachings on sex and sexuality (54.1%) and women in the priesthood (54.2%).
- ❖ In regards to age, there is nearly a 10 percentage point gap in 18-34-year-olds alignment with the Church’s teachings on immigration and refugee support (58.2%) compared to their teachings on sex and sexuality (50.0%).

Perception of Church’s Teachings on Key Issues



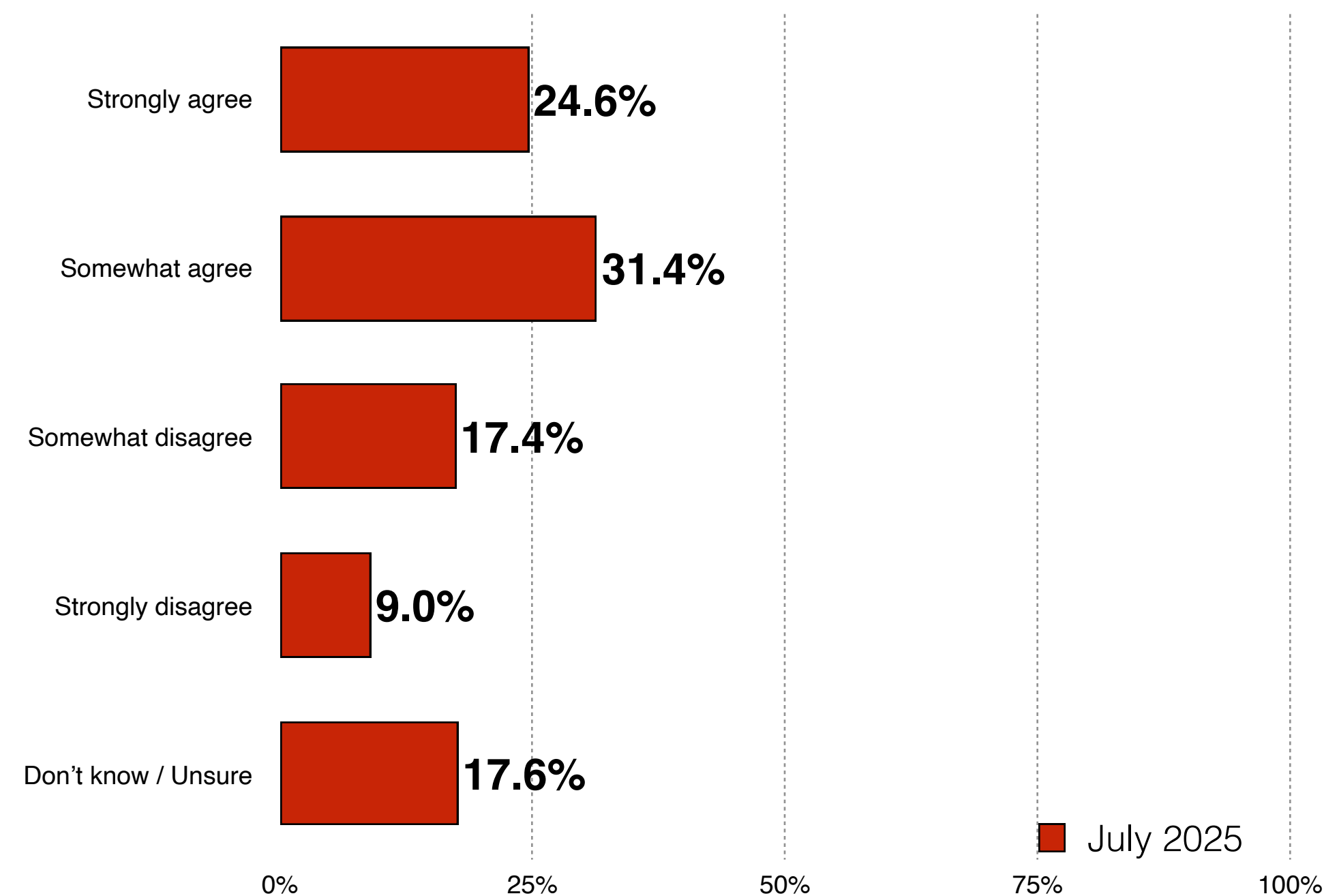
N=500
Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Catholic Church’s current official teaching on each of the following issues?
Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the idea of “synodality” - a listening Church involving laypeople more directly in decision-making processes?

The New Papacy | Pope Leo XIV's U.S. Connections

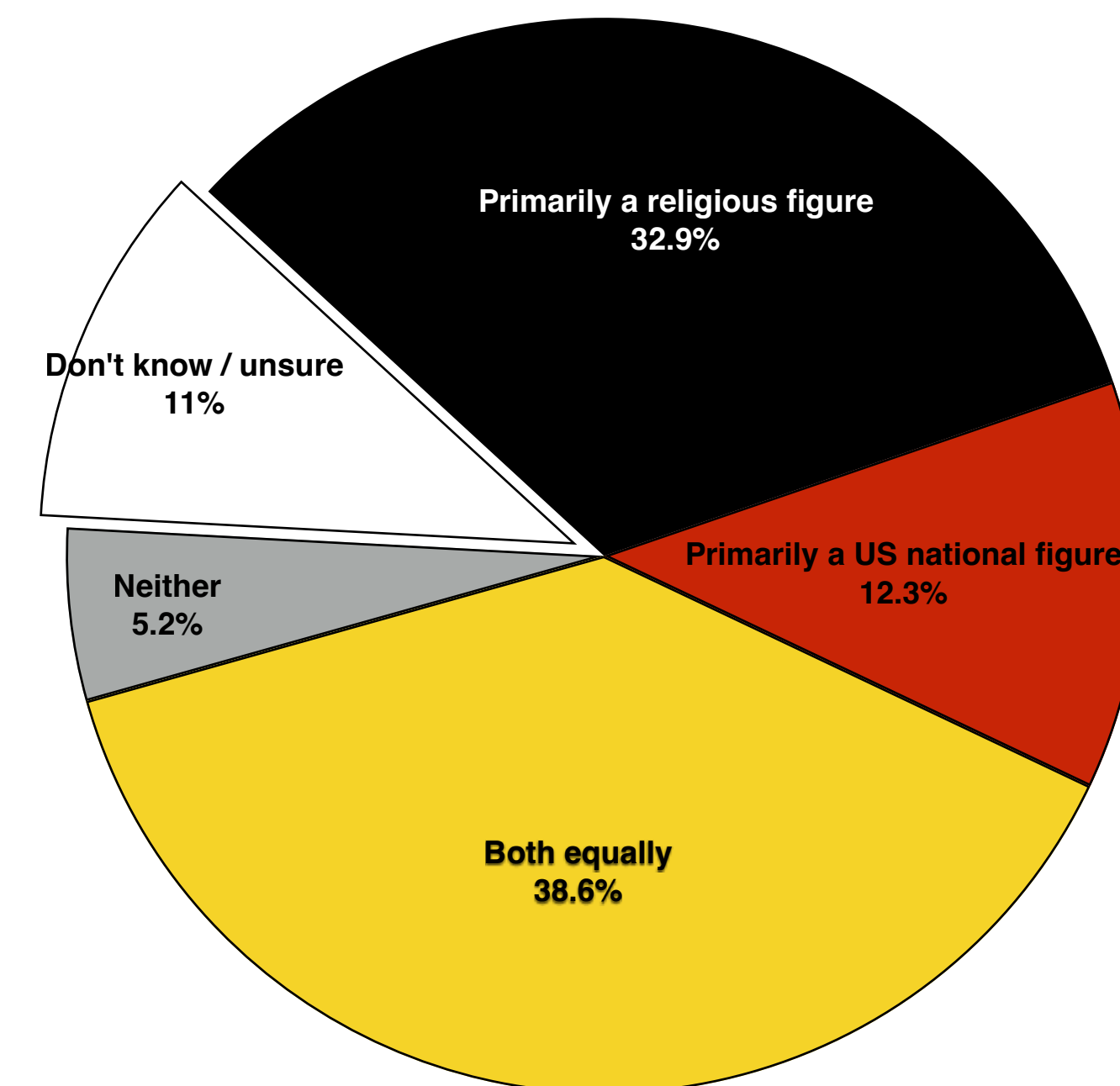
While more U.S. respondents see Pope Leo XIV as a religious figure than U.S. national figure (32.9% vs. 12.3%), many see him as a combination of both (38.6%). In addition, over half agree that the pope should reflect American values (56.0%) .

- ❖ More U.S. Roman Catholics view Pope Leo XIV as primarily a religious figure (46.8%) and fewer feel that he is primarily a U.S. national figure (9.0%). However, nearly two-thirds of U.S. Roman Catholics also agree that it is important for the pope to reflect American values (64.0%).
- ❖ 18-34 year olds (27.9%) are far more likely to view Pope Leo XIV as a U.S. national figure than 35-54 year olds (9.8%) and 55+ year olds (2.6%).

Importance of Pope Reflecting American Values



National vs. Religious Figure



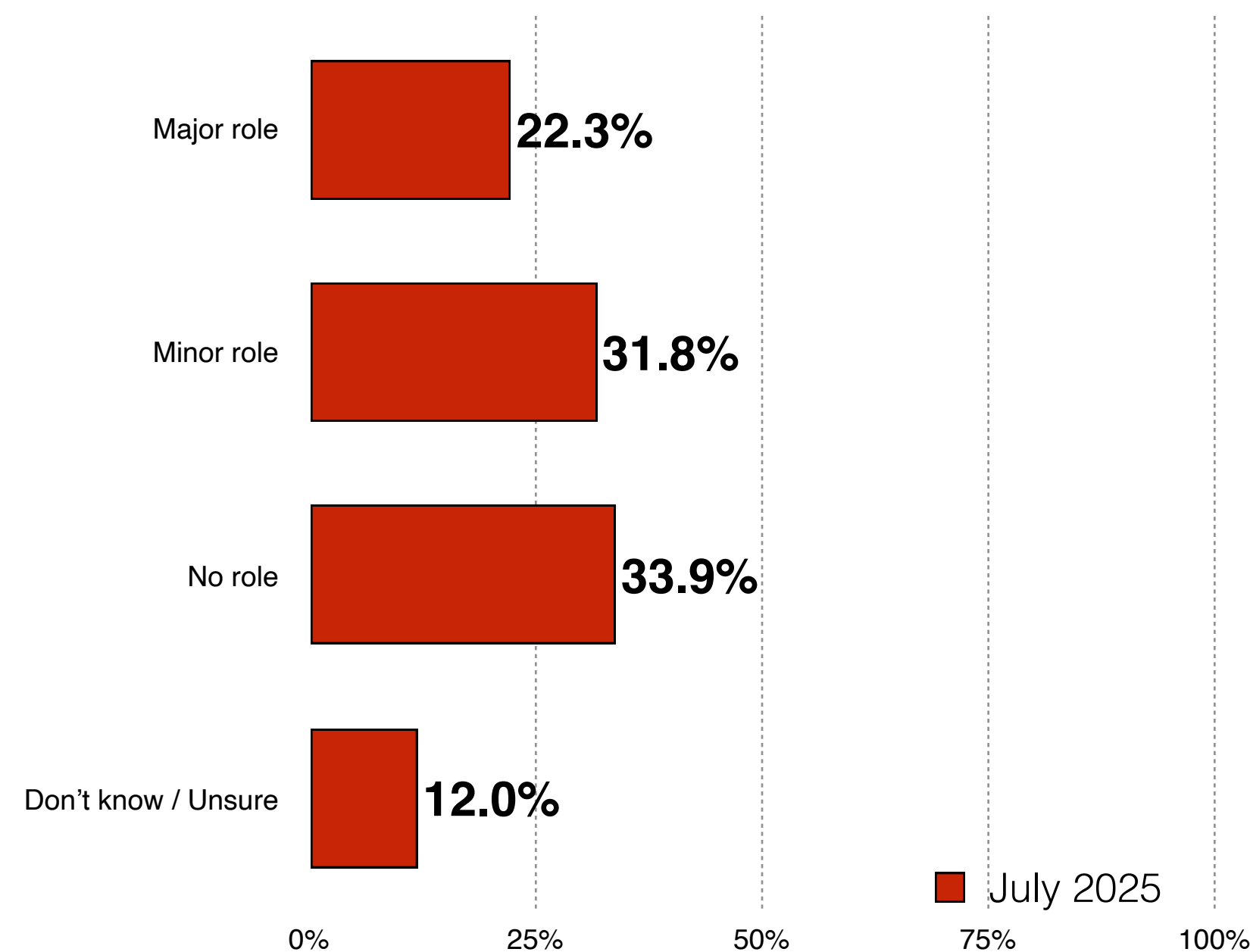
N=500
Q: Pope Leo XIV is the first U.S.-born Pope in the Church's history. With that in mind, do you see Pope Leo XIV more as a religious figure, a national (U.S.) figure, or both?
Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree: "It is important for the Pope to reflect American values."

The New Papacy | Pope Leo XIV's U.S. Connections

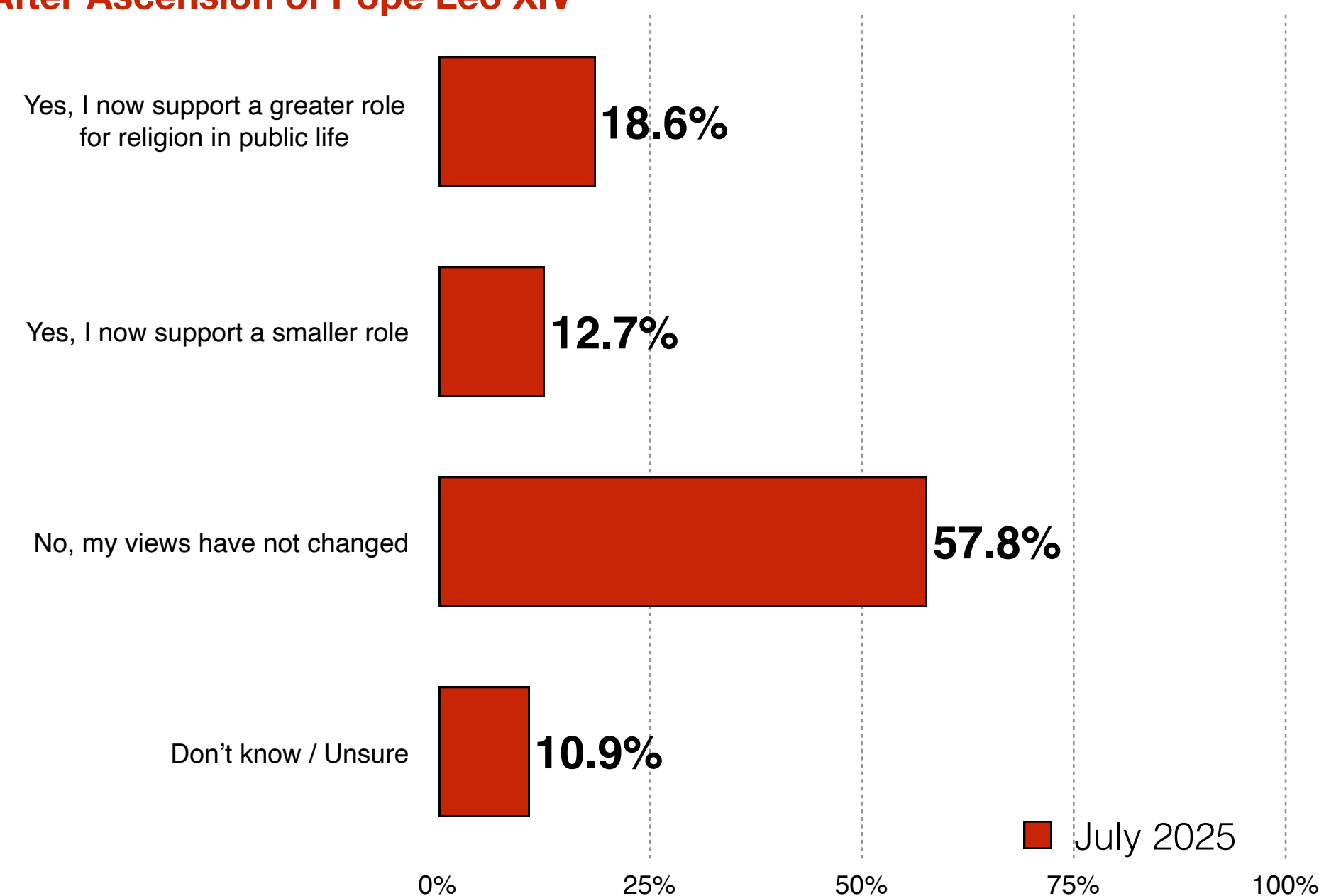
Over half of U.S. respondents believe the Church should have at least a role in shaping U.S. policy (54.1%), with 22.3% saying it should have a "major role." However, the ascension of a U.S.-born pope had little impact on that view as 57.8% said their views on the role of the Church in U.S. policy have not changed since Pope Leo XIV, compared to only 18.6% who now support a greater role for the Church in U.S. policy. Views were also divided on whether the pope should comment on specific U.S. political issues—with 33.4% saying he should, compared to 21.4% who disagree and 35.4% who say it depends on the issue.

- ❖ U.S. Roman Catholics are more likely to support a greater role for religion in public policy after the ascension of Pope Leo XIV (30.5%) and more want to see the pope comment on U.S. political issues such as immigration, climate change, or gun violence (47.7%).
- ❖ 32.7% of 18-34 year olds now support a greater role for religion in public policy after the ascension of Pope Leo XIV; far outpacing 35-54 year olds (22.6%) and 55+ year olds (4.7%) who feel the same.

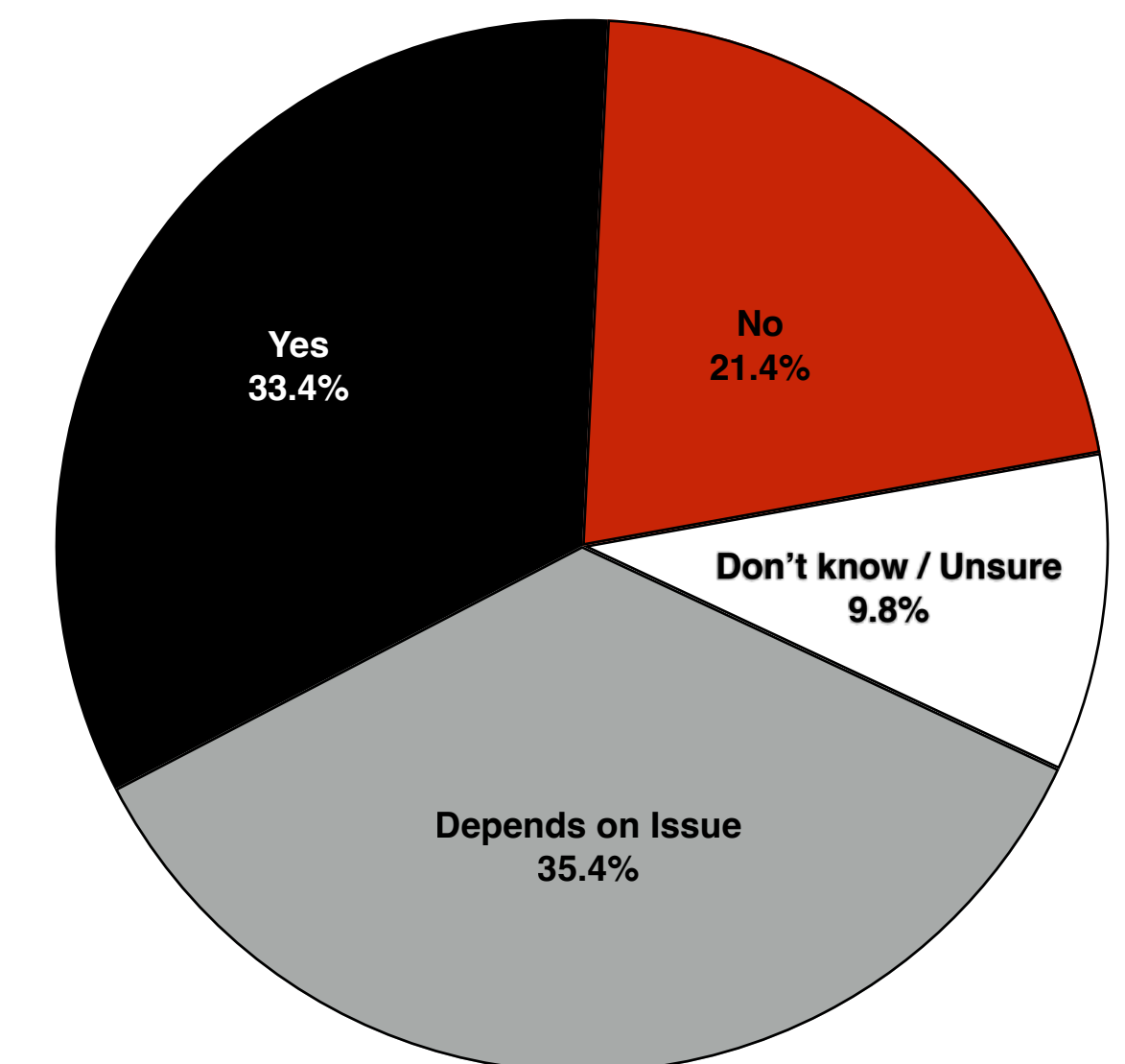
Role of Church in Shaping U.S. Policy



Changed in Opinion Regarding Role of the Church in U.S. Policy After Ascension of Pope Leo XIV



Should Pope Comment on U.S. Political Issues?



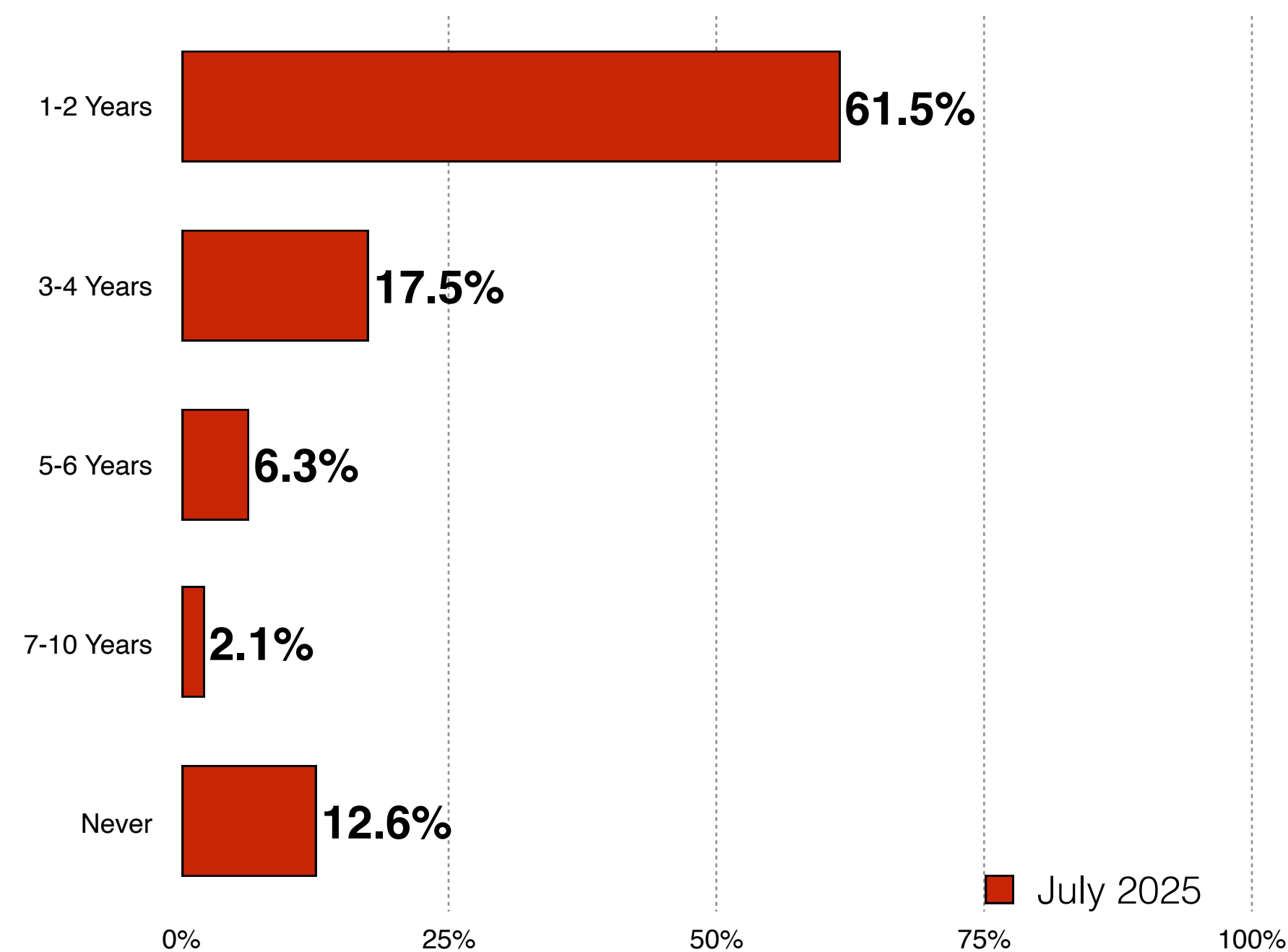
N=500
 Q: In your view, should religious institutions like the Catholic Church have a major, minor, or no role in shaping public policy and law in the United States?
 Q: Has your opinion on the role of the Church in public policy changed at all since the election of an American pope?
 Q: Should the pope comment on American political issues such as immigration, climate change, or gun violence?

The New Papacy | Pope Leo XIV's U.S. Connections

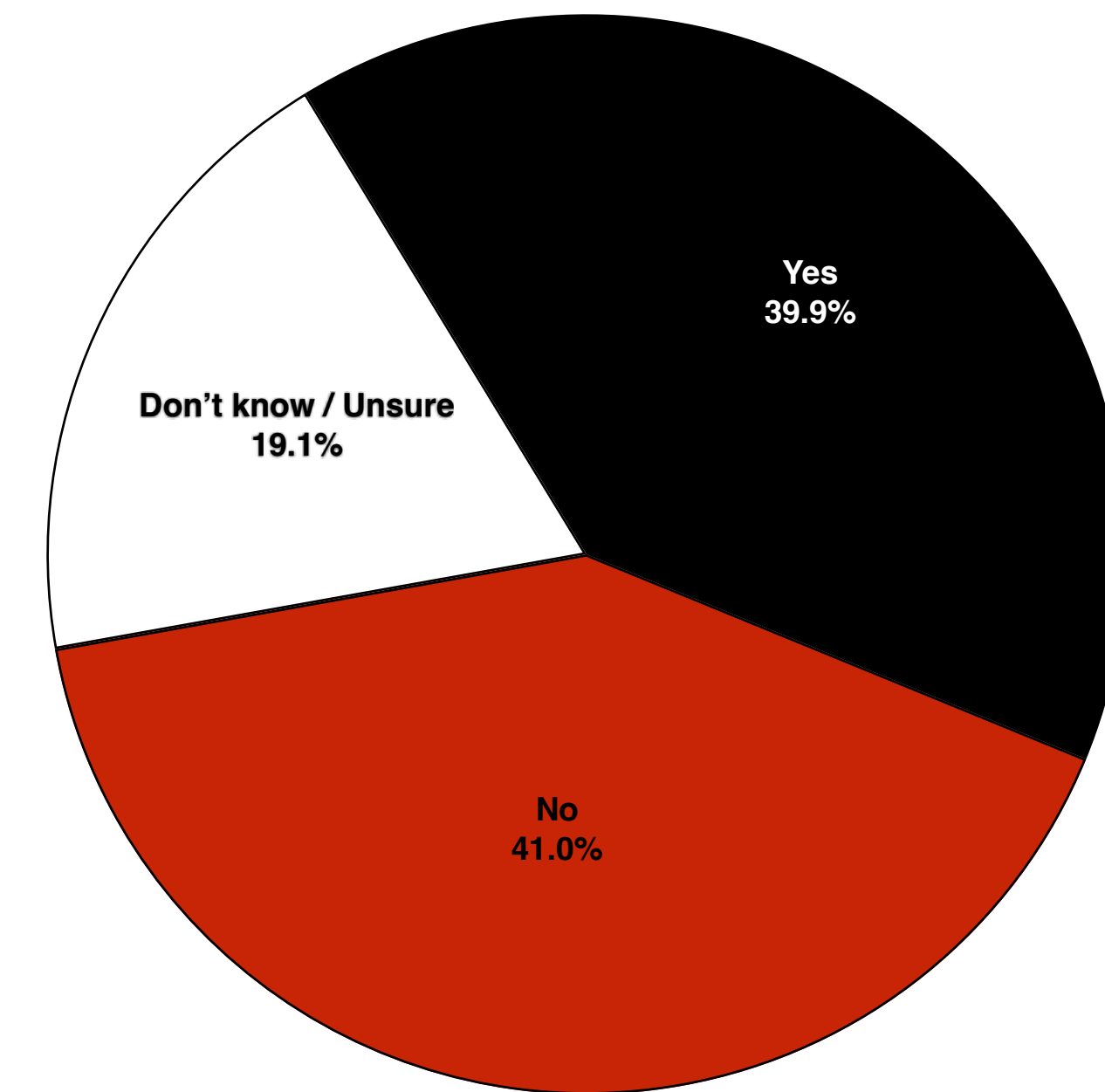
Three-fifths of all U.S. respondents think Pope Leo XIV should visit the U.S. in the next 1-2 years (61.5%), with two-fifths indicating a likelihood to attend the visit if it was nearby (39.9%).

- ❖ Interest in attending Pope Leo XIV's visit to the U.S. jumped to 64.0% among U.S. Roman Catholics.
- ❖ In addition, approximately half of those 18-34 years old (50.7%) and 35-54 years old (49.4%) are interested in attending Pope Leo XIV's first trip to the United States.

Timeline for When Pope Leo XIV Should Visit U.S.



Likelihood to Attend Pope Leo's U.S. Visit



N=500

Q: When do you think Pope Leo should visit the United States?

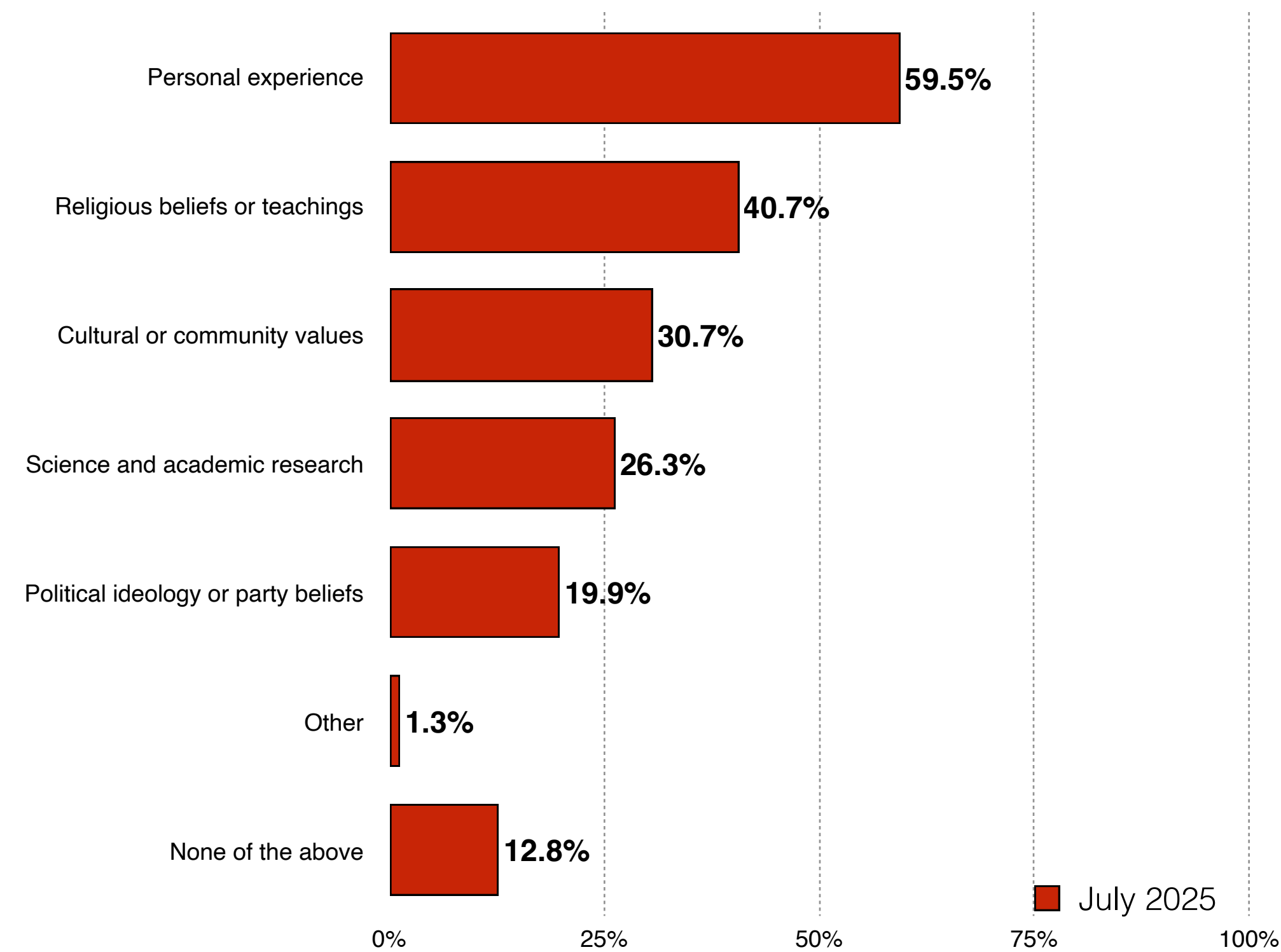
Q: If Pope Leo were to visit the United States and came to a reasonably close area to you, would you be interested to attend?

Morality | Leading Influences and Institutions

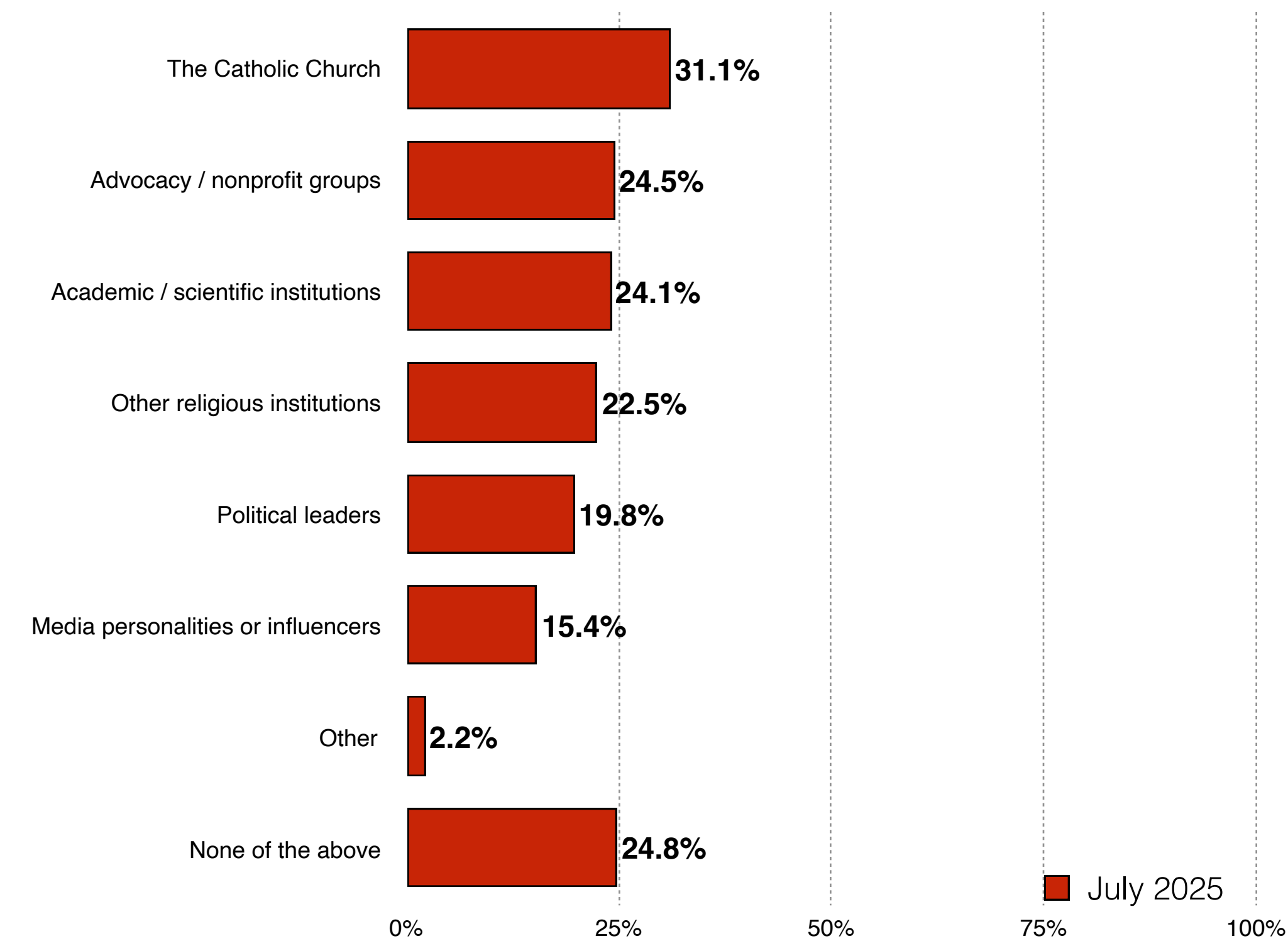
Data suggest influences on morality and moral leadership are fractured among U.S. respondents. While the Catholic Church is still seen as an effective moral leader by 31.1% of respondents, it is followed closely secular groups such as advocacy/non-profit groups (24.5%) and academic/scientific institutions (24.1%). Perhaps due to this, 59.5% rely on their personal experience for moral guidance - nearly 20 percentage points higher than religious beliefs and teachings.

❖ U.S. Roman Catholics also rely on personal experiences (59.9%) to guide their morality over religious beliefs or teachings (55.1%) by a slight margin.

Influences on One’s Views on Social/Moral Issues



Institutions Providing Effective Moral Leadership



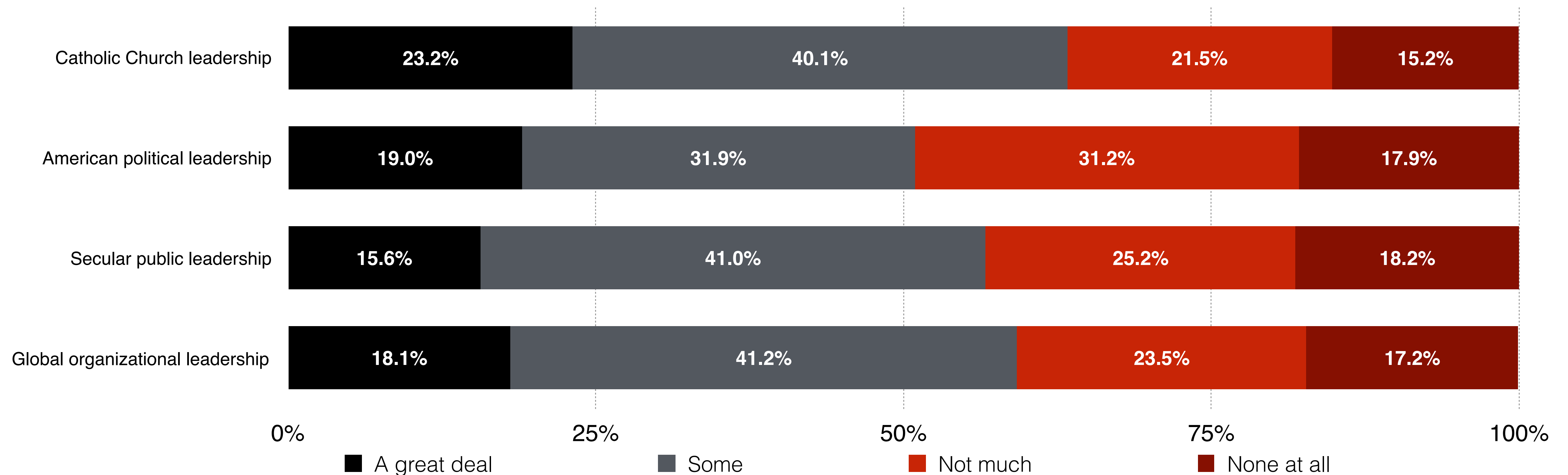
N=500
Q: When thinking about moral and social issues, which of the following most influences your views? Please select all that apply
Q: Which institutions do you believe provide the most effective moral leadership in America today? Please select all that apply

Trust | Types of Institutional Leadership

In terms of trust, again, Catholic Church leadership (63.3%) slightly outpaces non-religious leadership groups such as global organizations (59.3%) and secular public leadership (56.6%) in total “trust” among U.S. respondents. American political leadership was last among the four types of leadership measured in the survey (50.9%).

- ❖ Nine in ten U.S. Roman Catholics still trust Catholic Church leadership (89.4%), however, close to half (46.5%) only place “some” trust in the institution. In addition, seven in ten U.S. Roman Catholics also trust secular public leadership (71.3%).
- ❖ 18-34 year olds are more likely to put a “great deal” of trust in secular public leadership institutions (27.4% compared to 19.0% of 35-54 year olds and 4.2% of 55+ year olds). However, they are also slightly more likely to have a “great deal” of trust in Catholic Church leadership (29.9% compared to 27.0% of 35-54 year olds and 14.7% of 55+ year olds).

Most Trusted Institutional Leadership



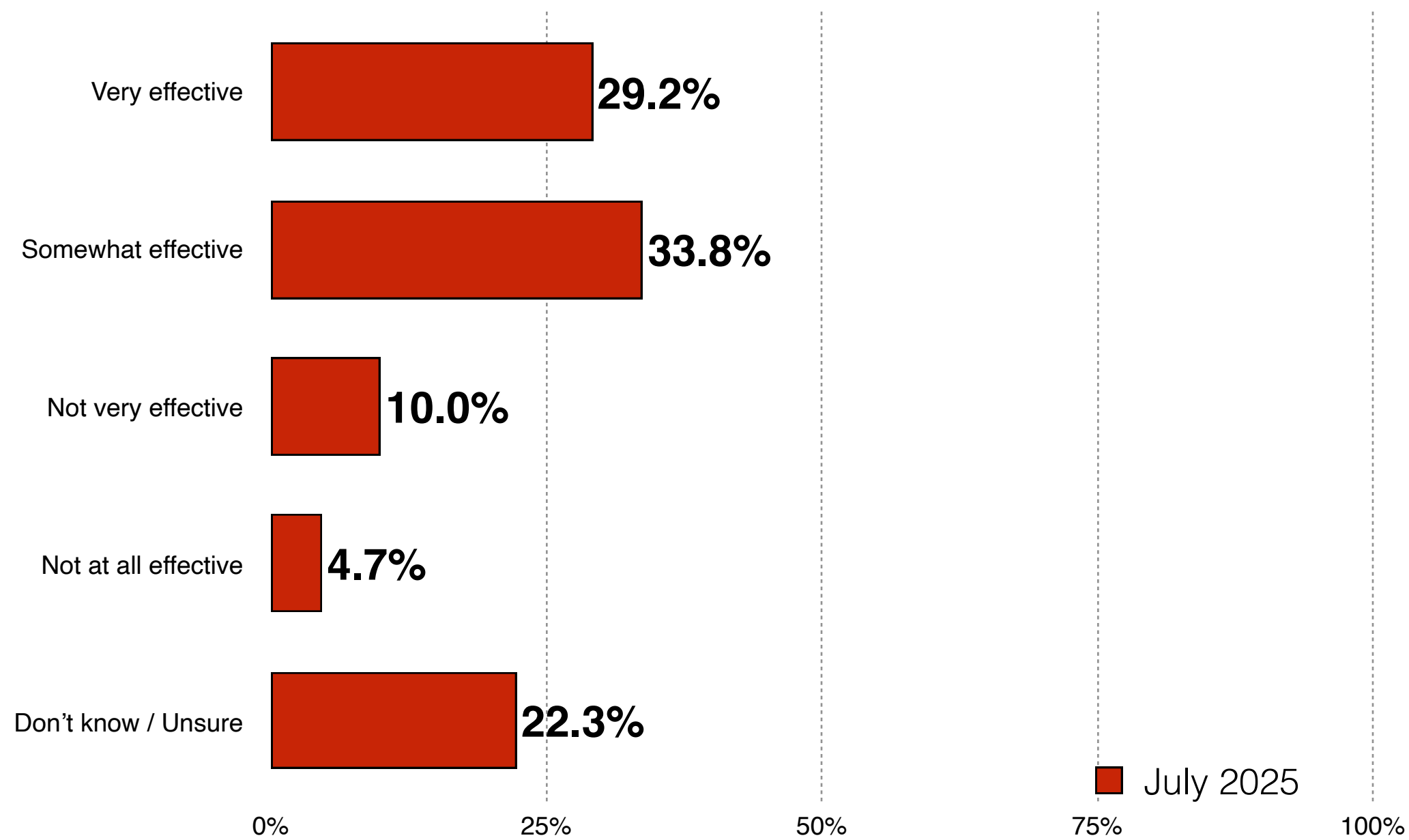
N=500
Q: How much trust do you have in each of the following types of leadership?

Communication | Papal Effectiveness

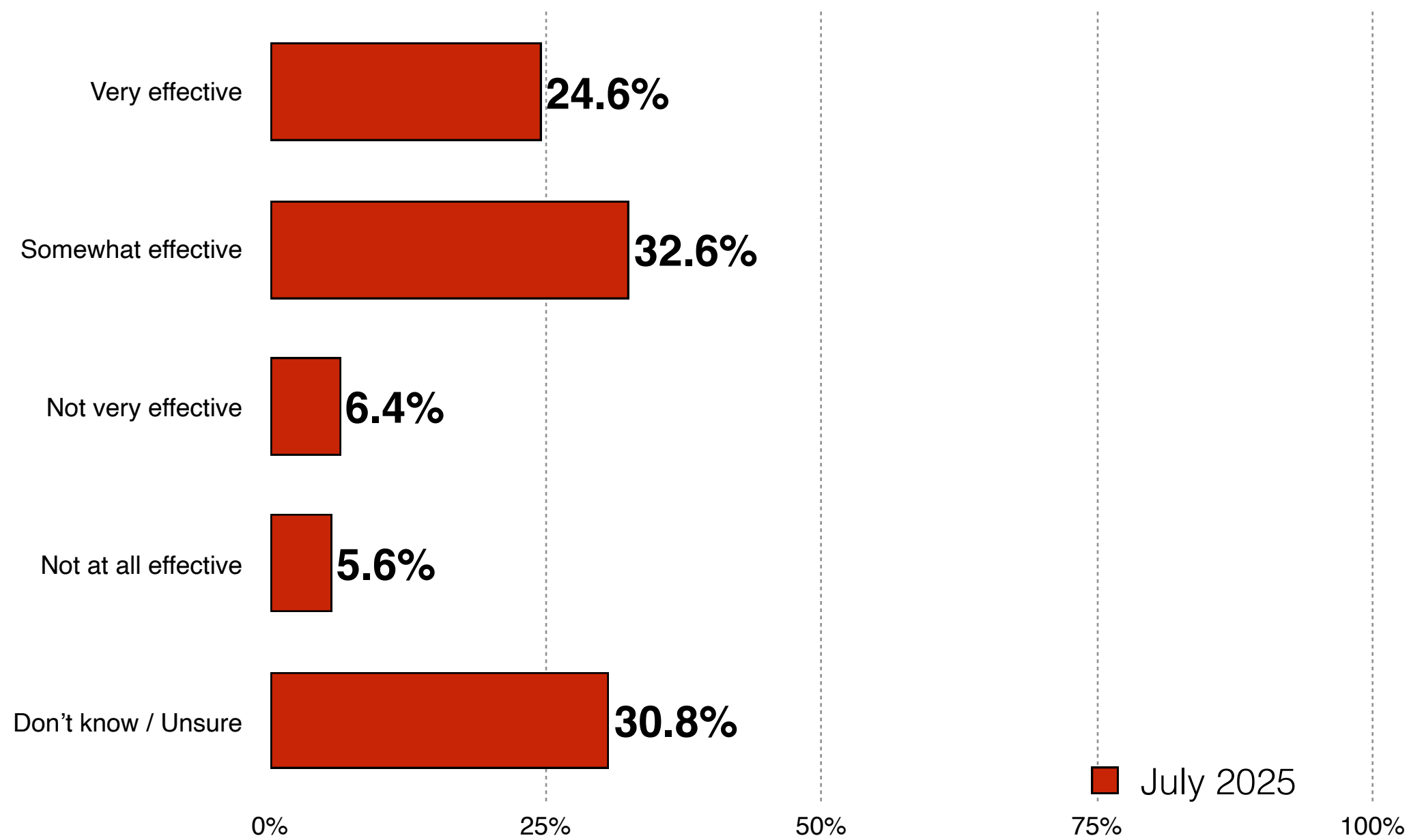
Nearly two-thirds of U.S. respondents believed Pope Francis (63.0%) to be an effective communicator to everyday Catholics and lay people. Data also suggest an openness to communication from Pope Leo XIV as 57.2% felt he has been an effective communicator so far in the early days of his papacy, with another 30.8% being unsure at the time of the survey.

❖ 85.1% of U.S. Roman Catholics saw Pope Francis as an effective communicator and 78.5% of U.S. Roman Catholics feel the same about Pope Leo XIV early in his Papacy.

Effectiveness of Pope Francis Communication



Effectiveness of Pope Leo XIV Communication



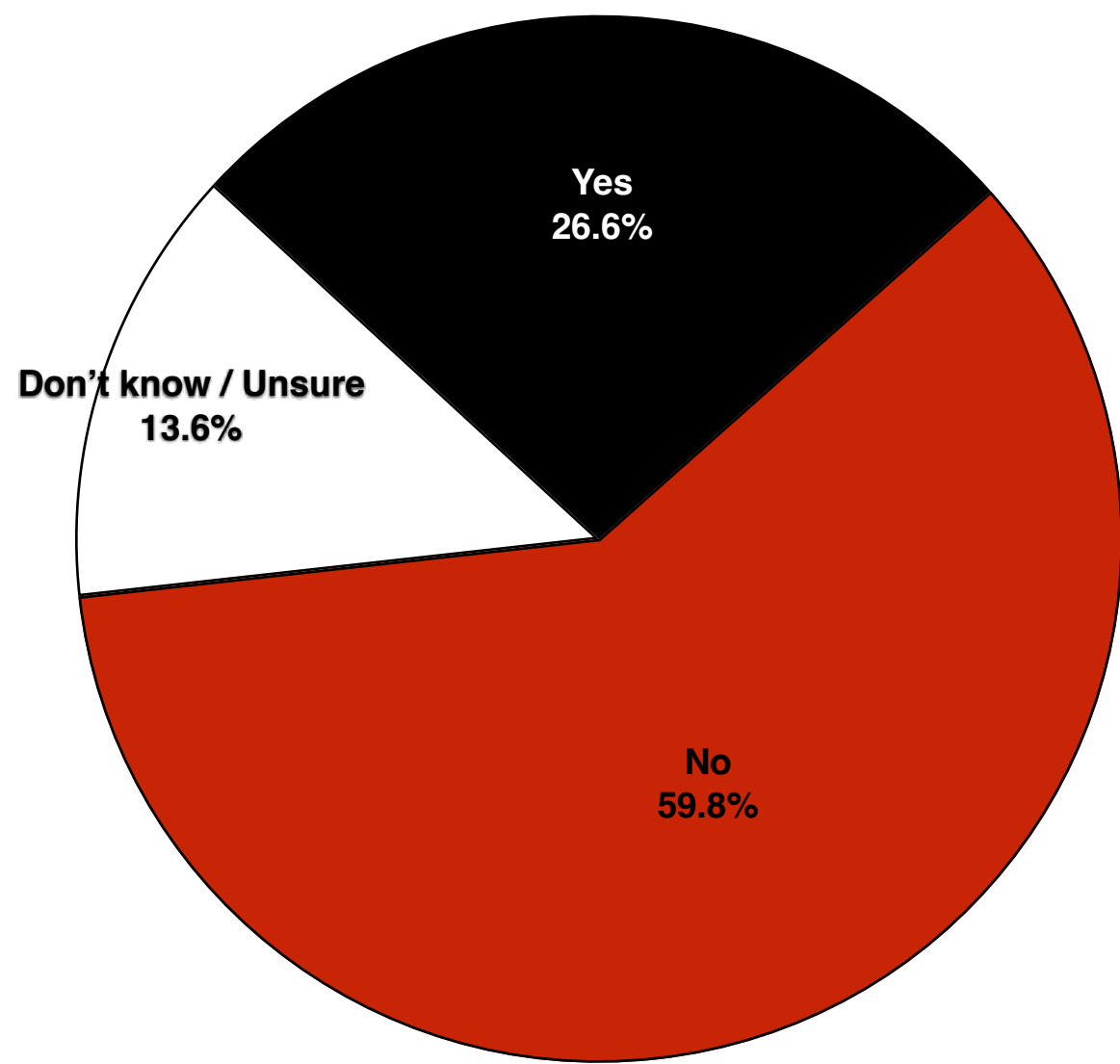
N=500
Q: How would you rate both Pope Francis and, now, Pope Leo XIV on their effectiveness communicating with everyday Catholics and lay people to address modern concerns?

Communication | The 21st Century Pope

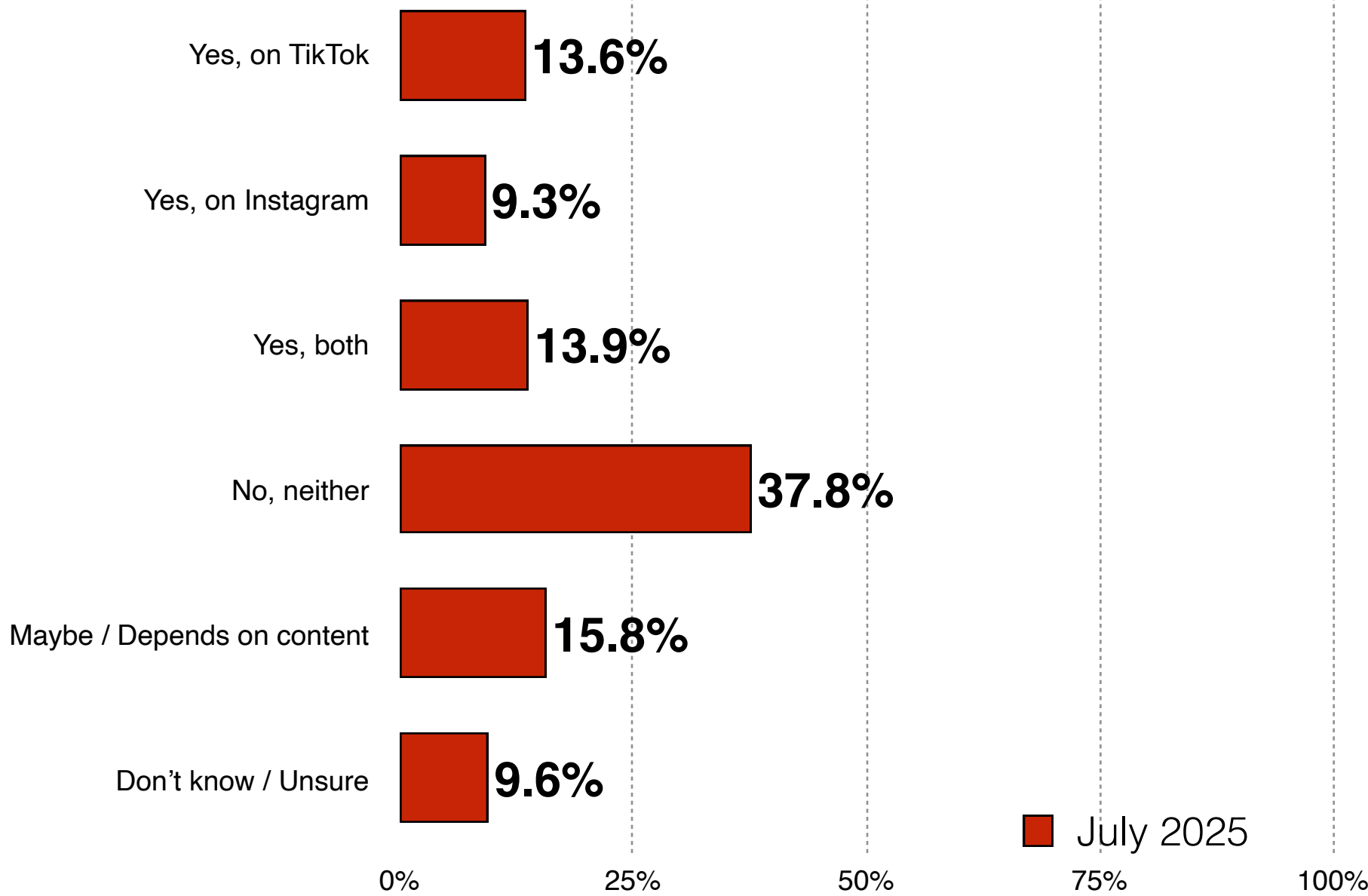
Over a quarter of U.S. respondents were aware that the papacy operates an official “X” account (26.6%). Further, approximately half (52.6%) were also open to some form of engagement with the new pope on social media depending on the platform (Instagram or TikTok) or content. In addition, the viral and user-sourced memes, captions, videos, etc. after the ascension of Pope Leo XIV as the first “American” Pope were also seen as more additive as 35.3% found it to be positive and made him more relatable compared to 12.1% who felt its was disrespectful or inappropriate.

- ❖ More U.S. Roman Catholics were aware of the @pontifex “X” account (36.1%); they are also more likely to follow Pope Leo XIV on TikTok (23.0%) or Instagram (13.7%). In addition, 26.5% of 18-34 year olds would also engage Pope Leo XIV on TikTok.
- ❖ In addition, nearly half of U.S. Roman Catholics (48.6%) and two-fifths of 18-34 year olds (42.9%) saw Pope Leo’s virtual social media presence as a positive sign.

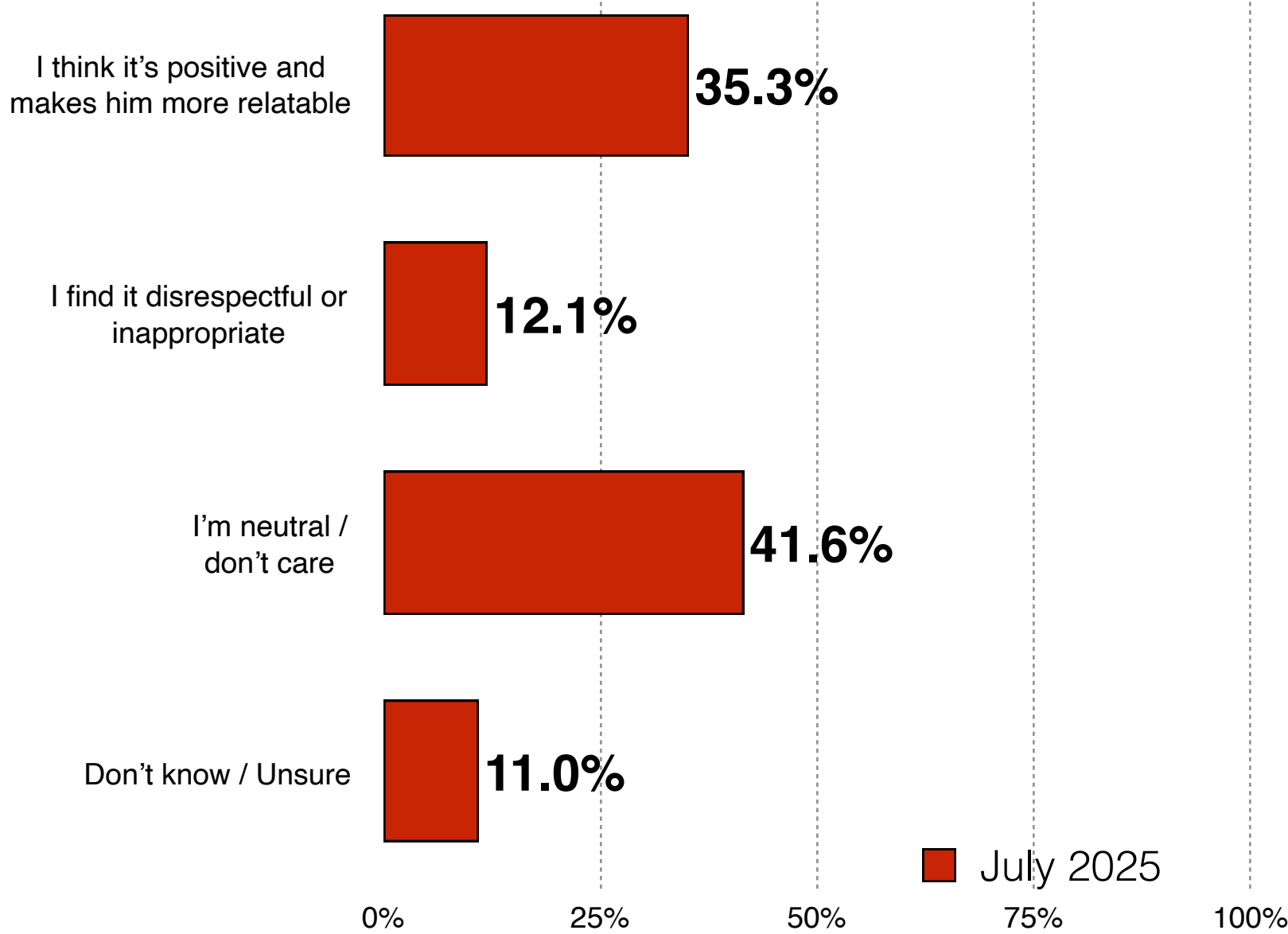
Awareness of @pontifex X Account



Likelihood to Engage with Pope Leo XIV on Social Media



Opinion of Pope Leo XIV Posts, Memes, and Videos



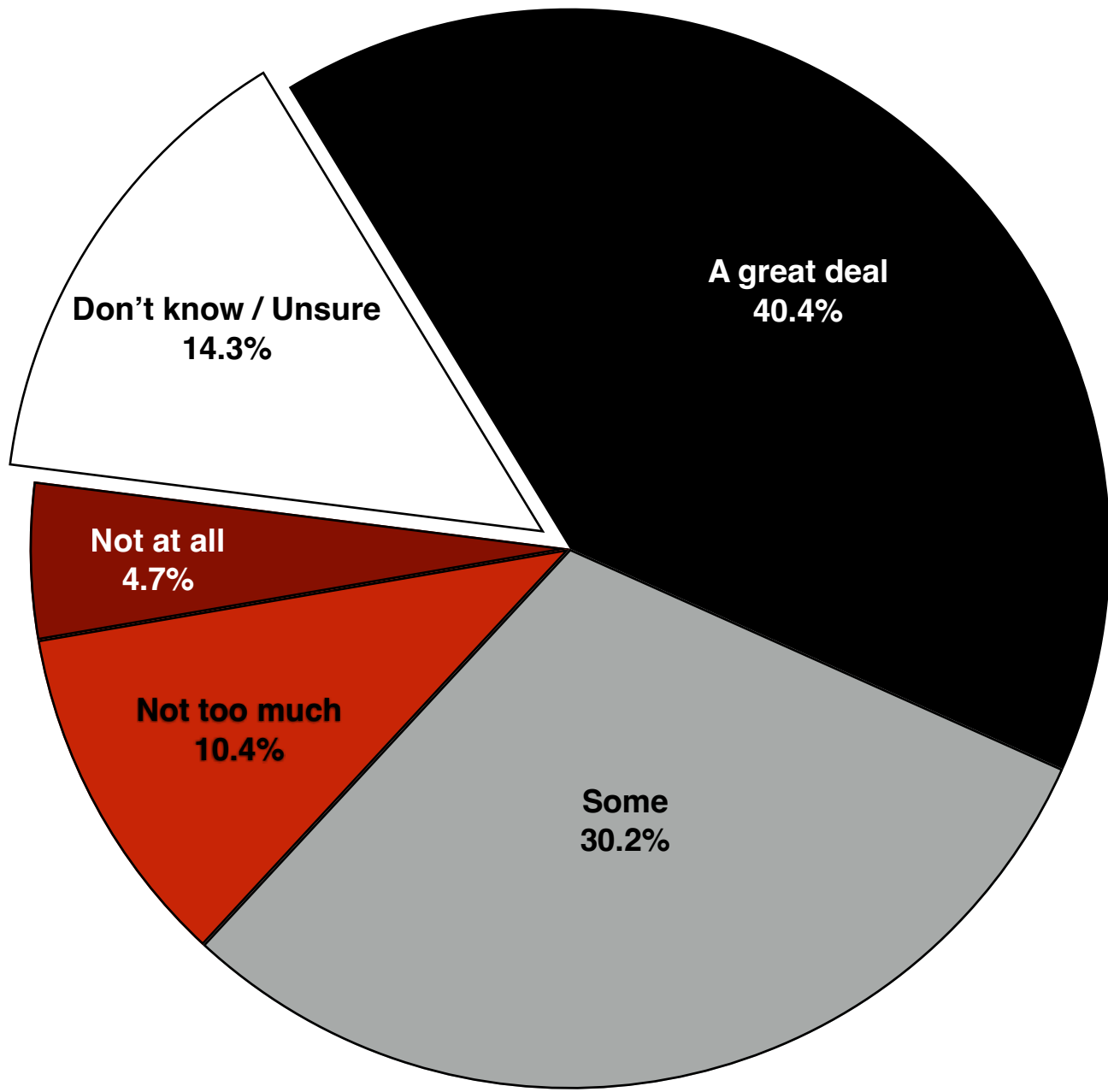
N=500
Q: Are you aware that Pope Leo XIV has an official X account (with the handle “@pontifex”)?
Q: Would you follow or watch short videos or messages from Pope Leo XIV on platforms like TikTok or Instagram?
Q: Some Americans have posted memes, captions, and videos highlighting Pope Leo XIV’s American roots. How do you feel about the pope being represented this way in popular culture?

Communication | Catholic News Exposure and Trust

Almost two-thirds of U.S. Roman Catholics self-reported that they have engaged with some form of Catholic news on a regular basis (64.1%)—with the U.S. Catholic (24.6%) and Catholic News Agency (20.9%) being the top choices.

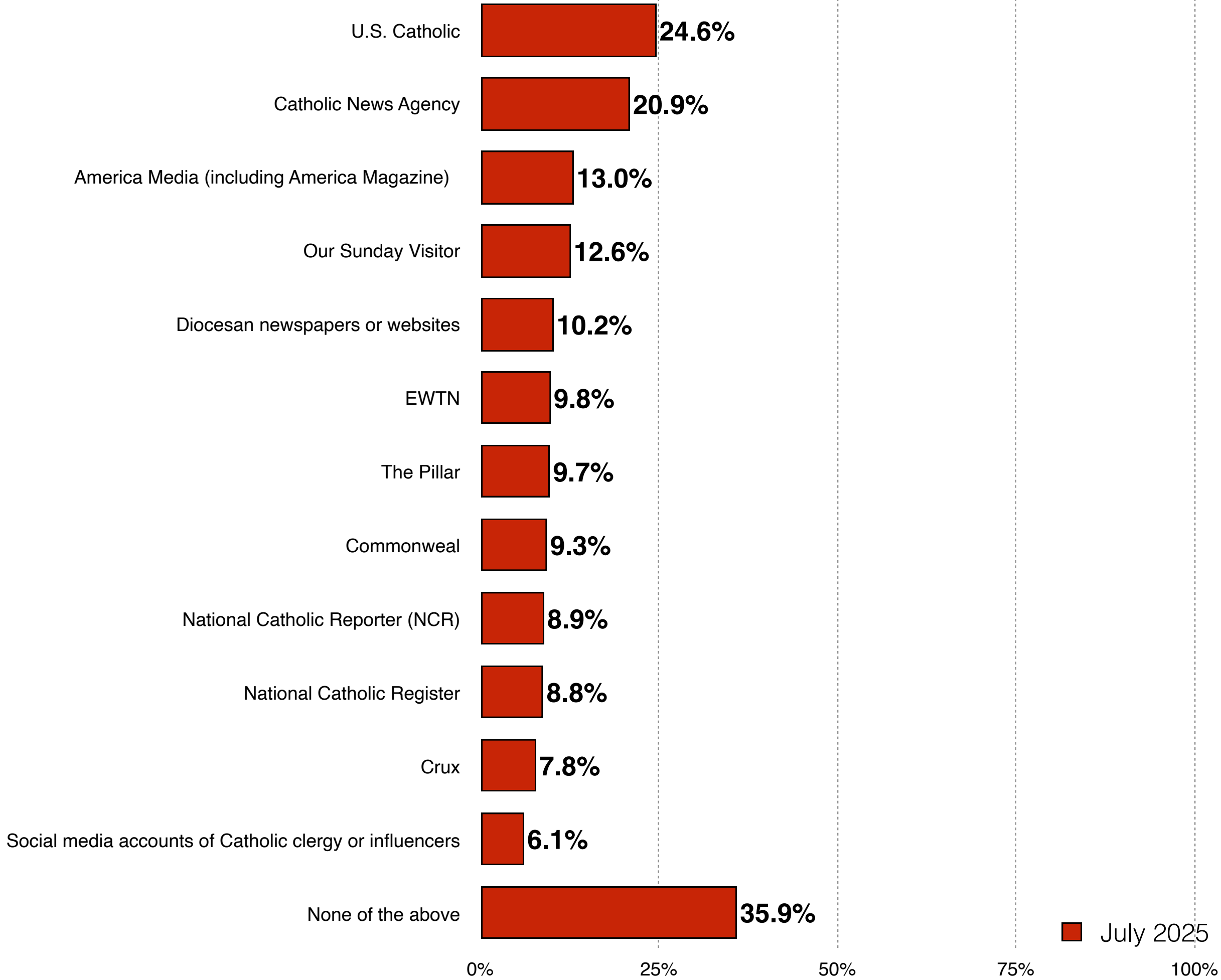
In addition, trust is generally high across these news sources as approximately seven in ten have at least some trust in the Catholic news they follow (70.6%).

Trust in Catholic News



N=116 (asked to Roman Catholics only)
Q: Which of the following Catholic news sources do you follow regularly, if any? Please select all that apply.
Q: How much do you trust the Catholic news sources you follow to provide accurate information?

Top Catholic News Sources



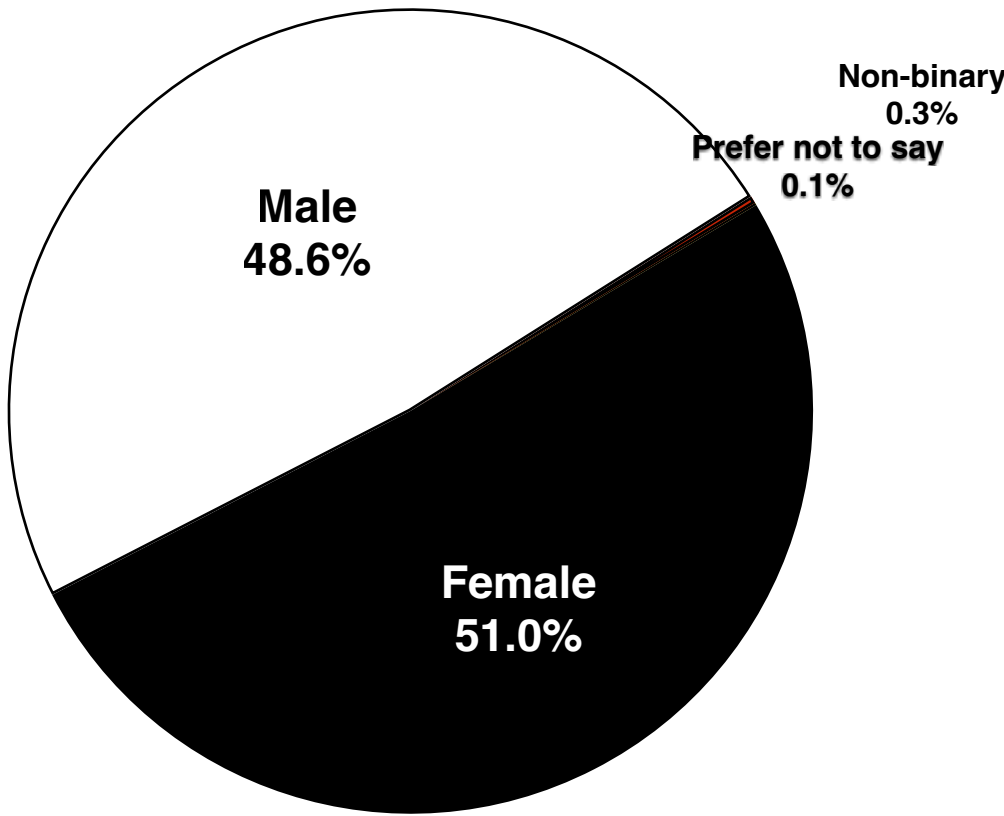


Michael Vigeant
CEO, GreatBlue Research

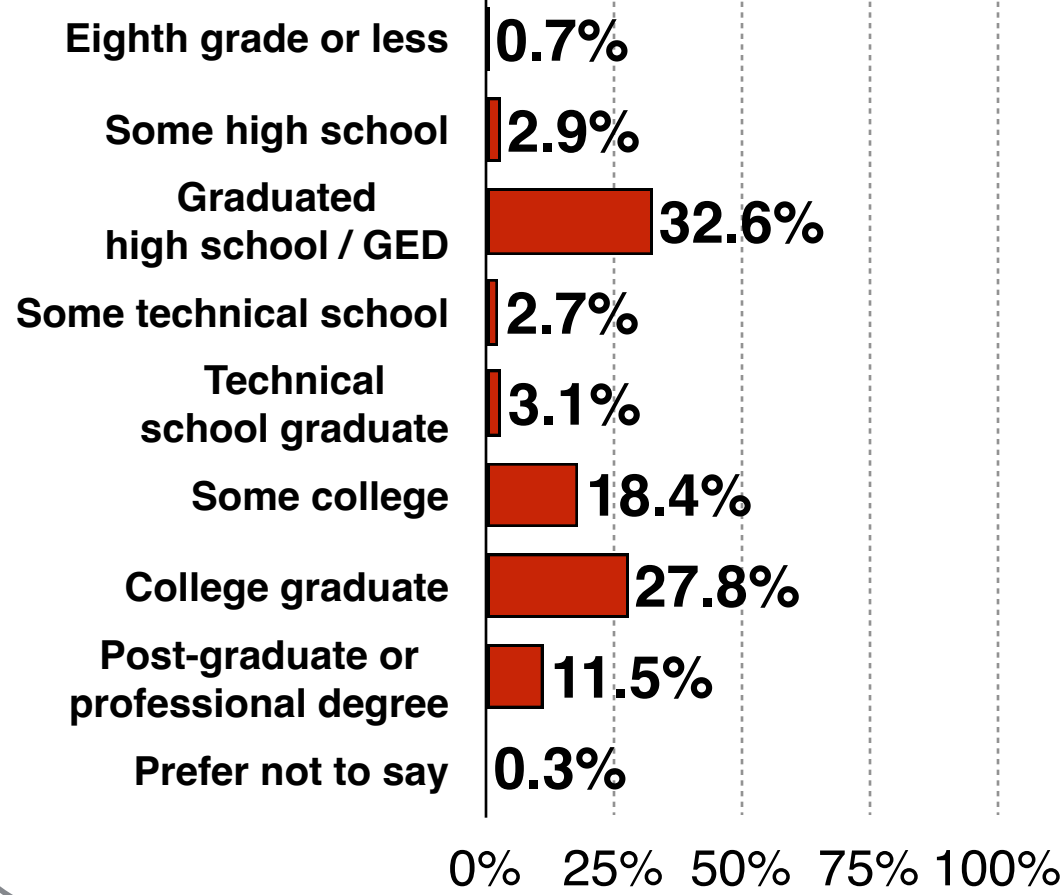
(860) 740-4000
mjv@GreatBlueResearch.com

Demographic Profile | June 2025

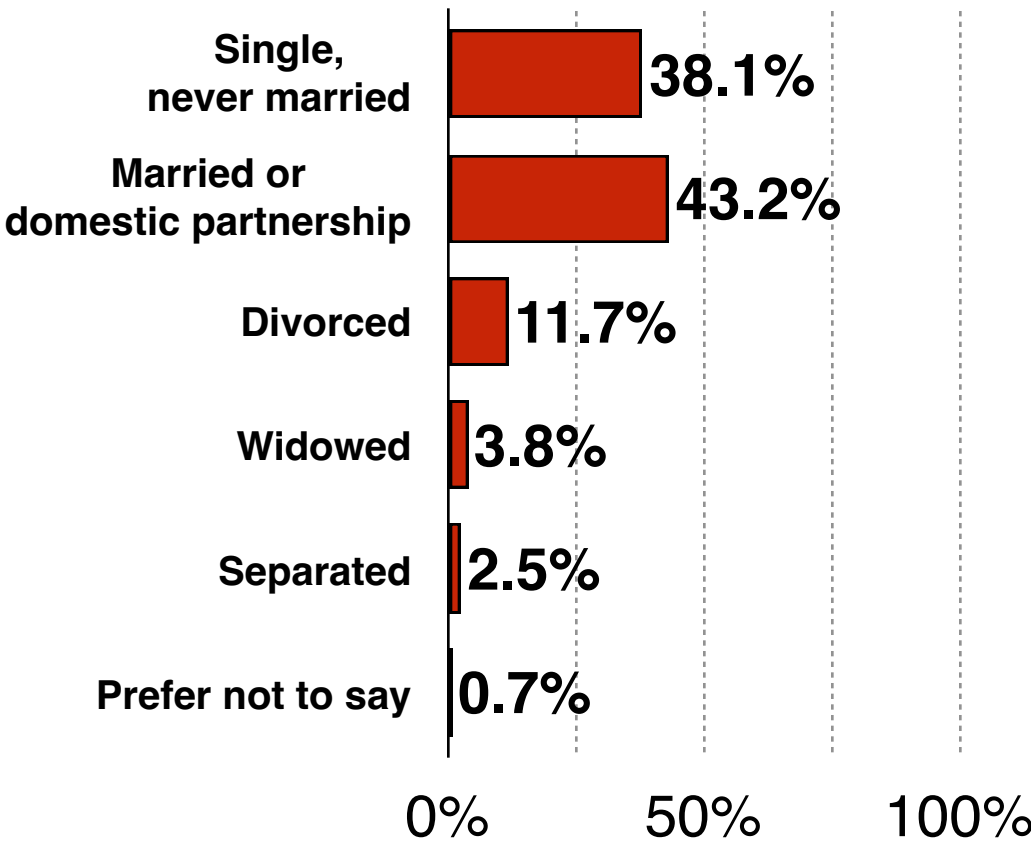
Gender



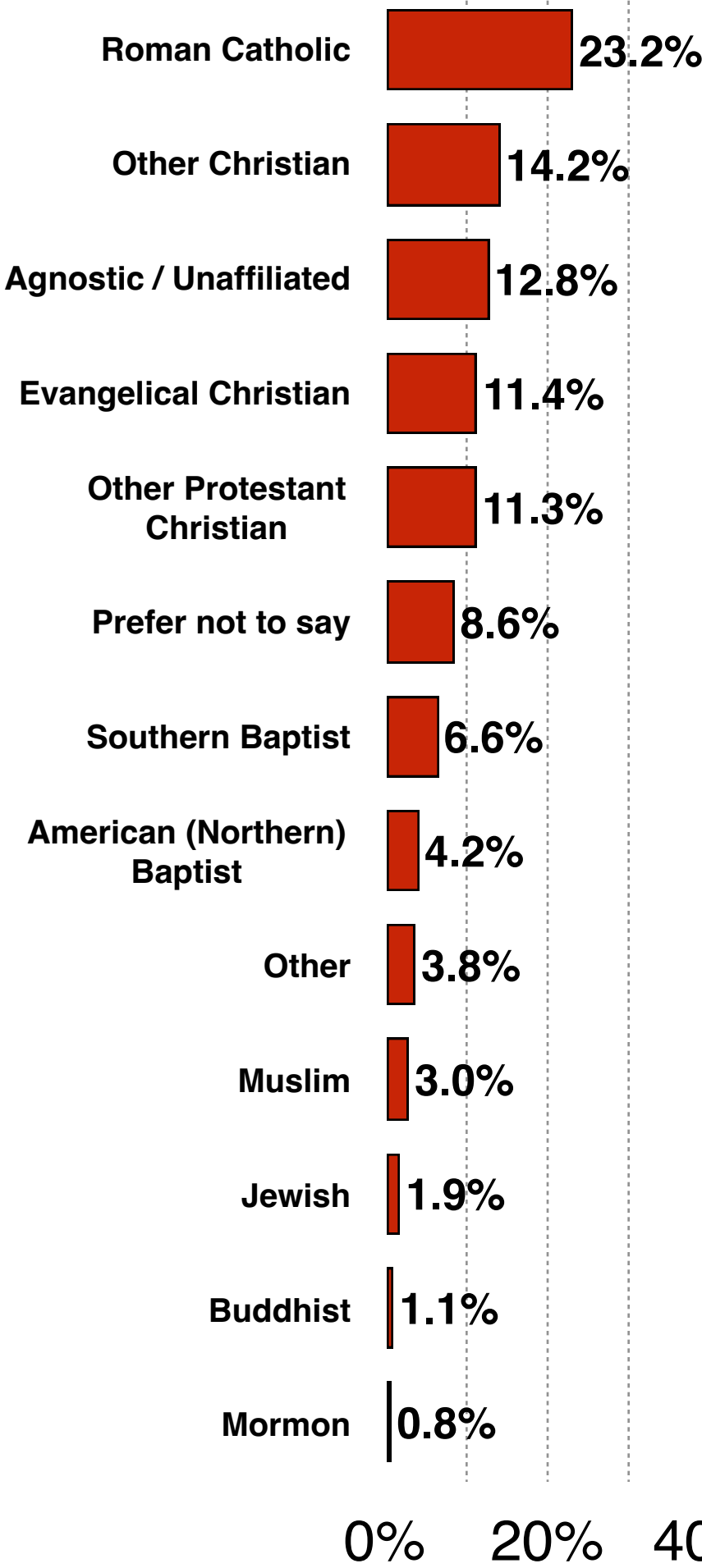
Education Level



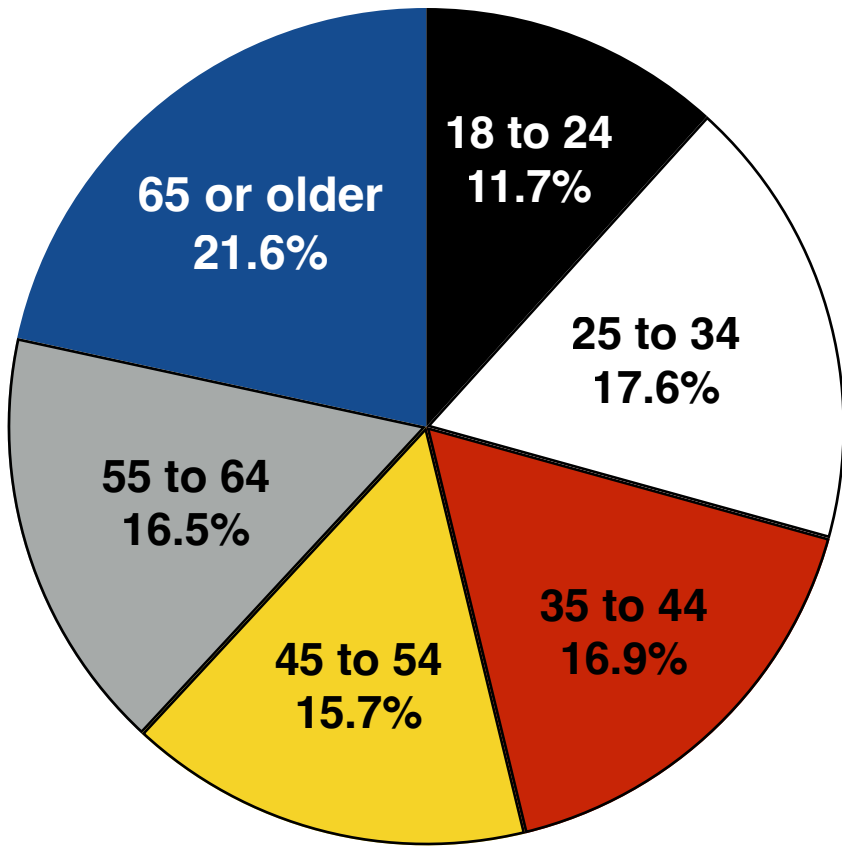
Marital Status



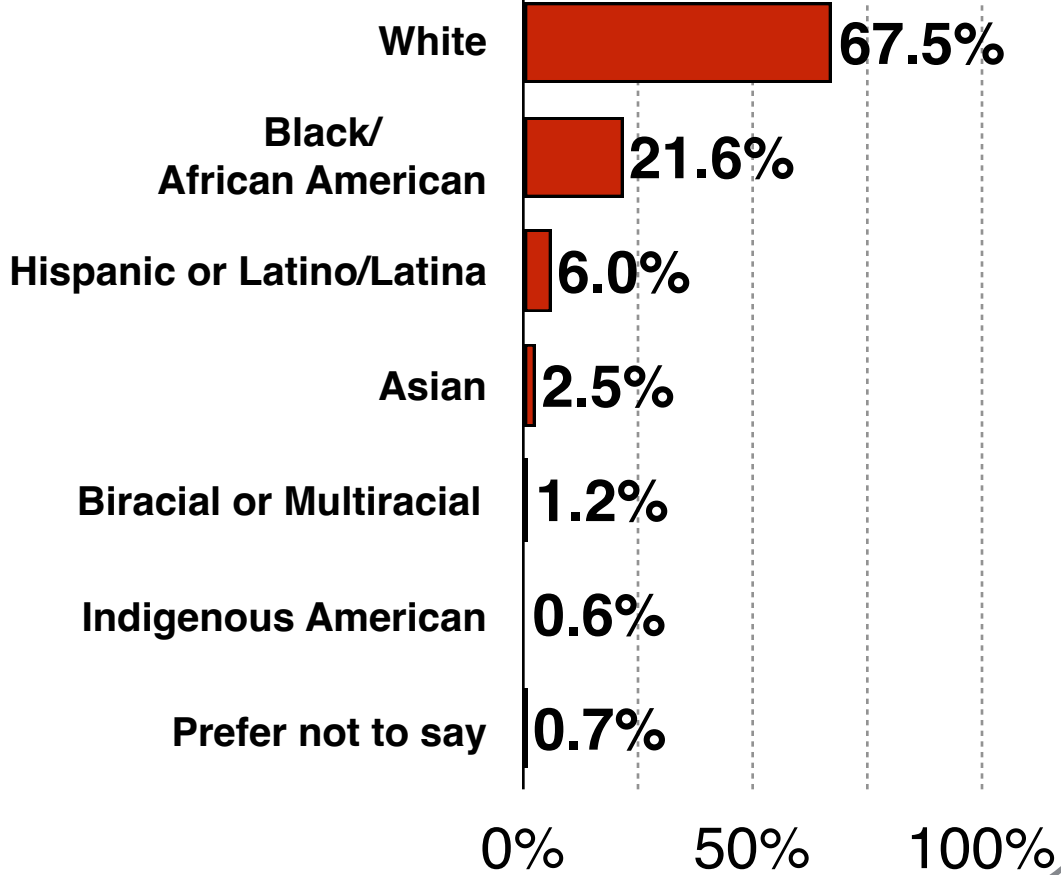
Religion



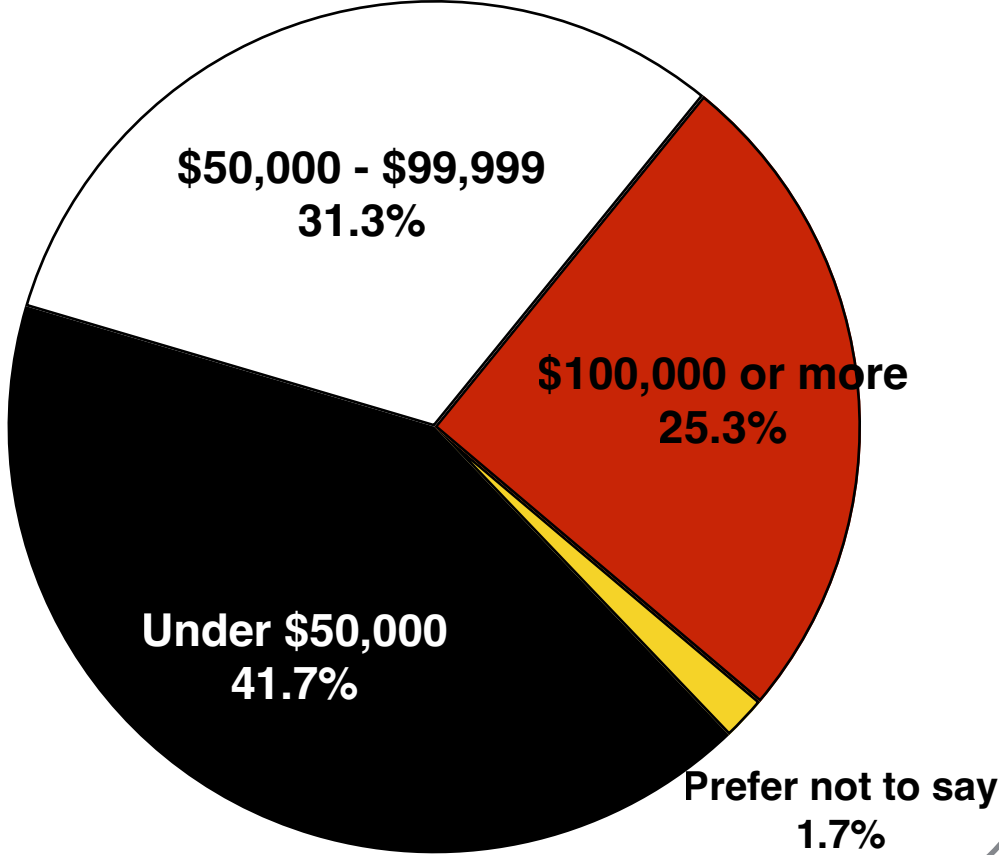
Age



Ethnicity

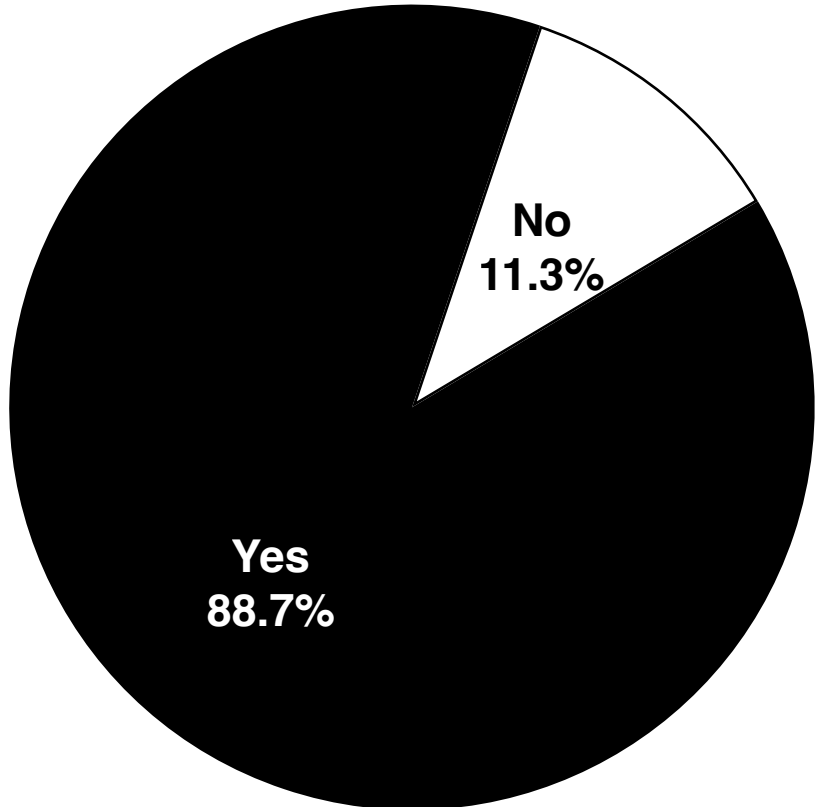


Income

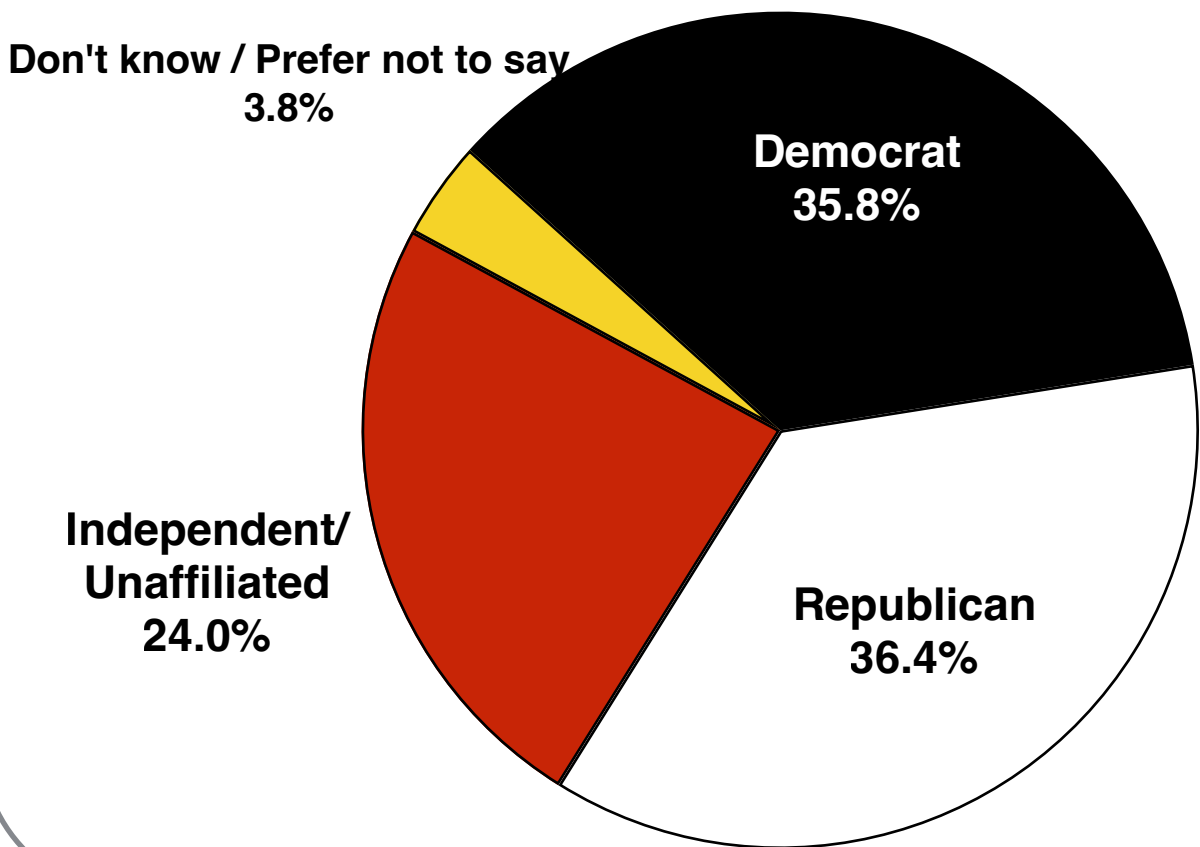


Political Profile | June 2025

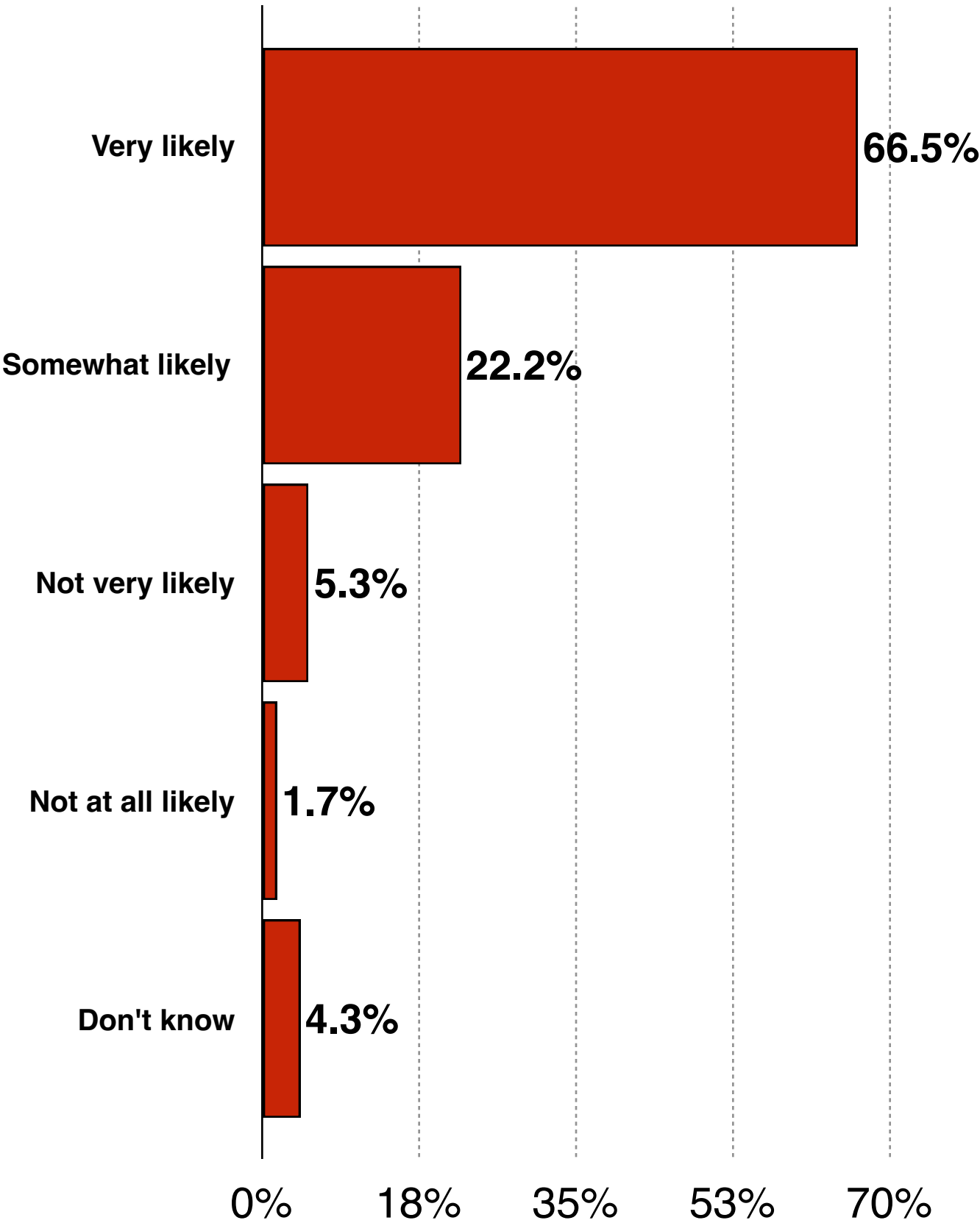
Voter Registration



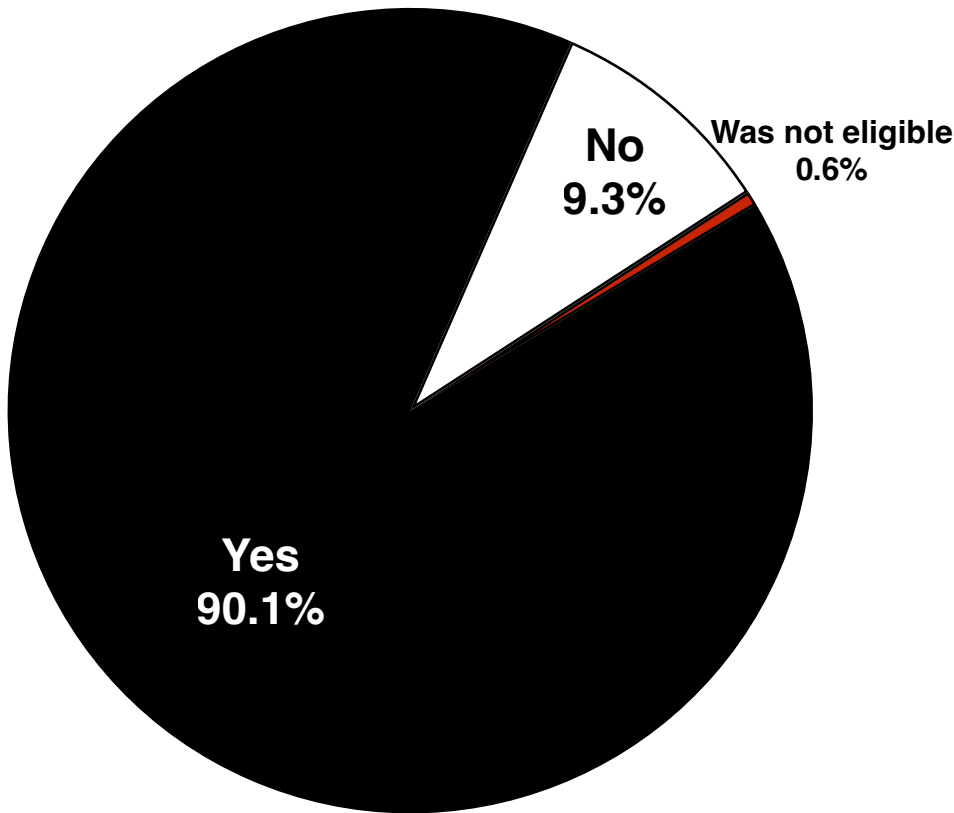
Political Party



2026 Likelihood to Vote



2024 Vote



2024 Presidential Vote

