



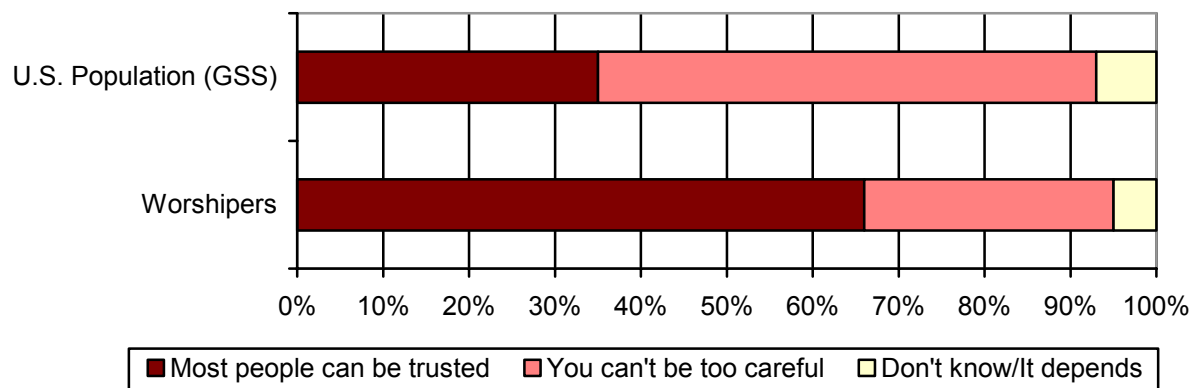
## How Trusting Are Worshipers? Findings from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey

As worshipers, we are encouraged to trust our lives to God. Yet do we trust one another as well? What did worshipers from over 2,000 congregations that participated in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey<sup>1</sup> tell us about how they relate to other people and to familiar U.S. institutions?

### How Trusting Are Worshipers—More or Less Than Others?

- Worshipers are much more likely than the U.S. population overall to believe that other people (in general) can be trusted (see Figure 1). Two-thirds of worshipers (66%) compared to just 35% of the general public report that “most people can be trusted.” (Data on the U.S. population from the 2000 GSS.) Six in ten in the U.S. population (58%) believe that “you can’t be too careful” in dealing with other people, but only 29% of worshipers do.

**Figure 1: Can Other People be Trusted?**

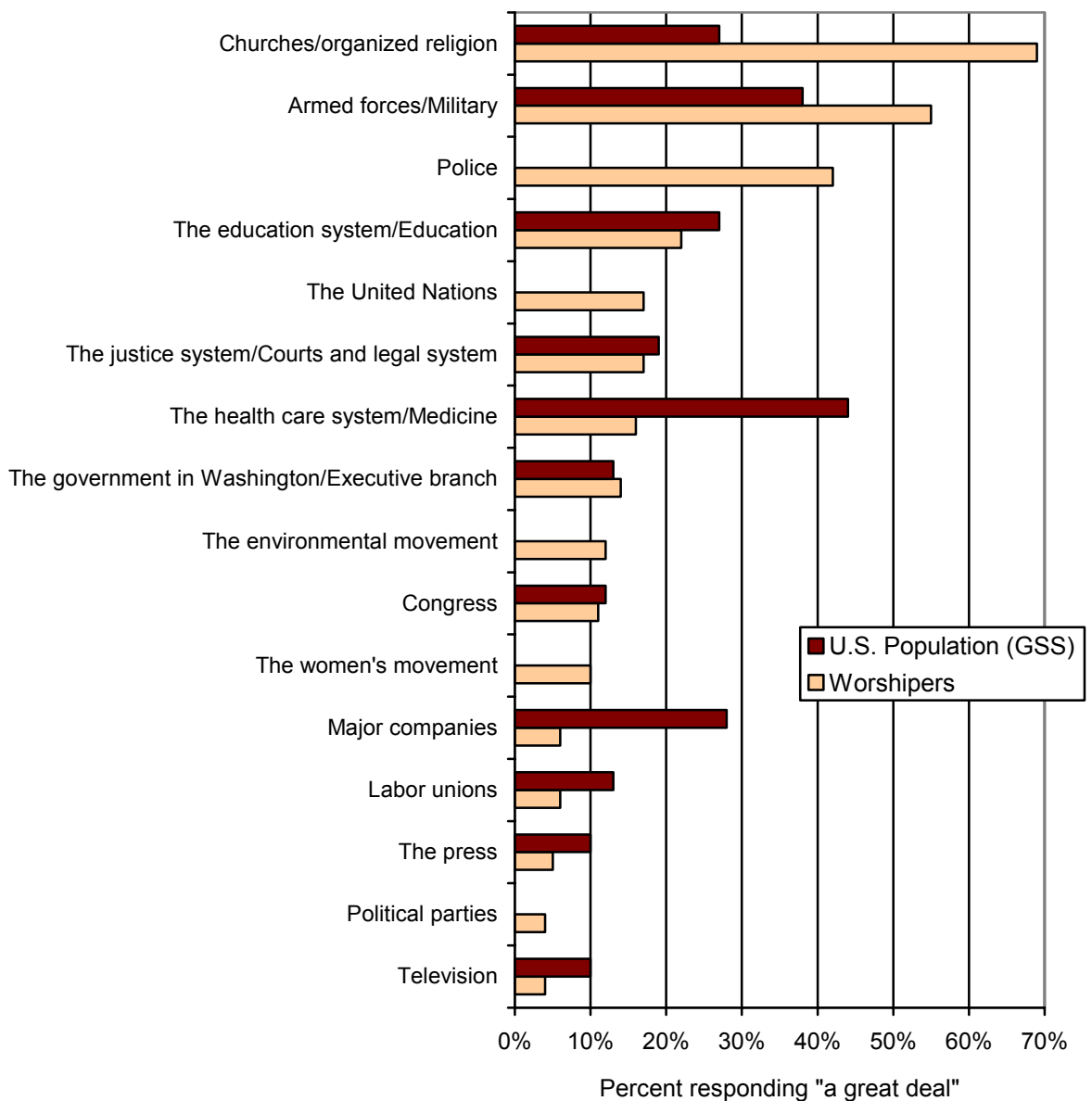


- Interestingly, younger worshipers have *less* trust in other people. Less than half of worshipers under the age of 25 (48%) believe that “most people can be trusted.” In contrast, 63% of worshipers between 24 and 44, 71% of those between 45 and 64, and 72% of those 65 years of age or older hold the same view.
- Worshipers with at least an associate degree are more likely to trust others (74% do) than are worshipers with less education (60%). Trust does not differ based on worshipers’ age, gender, or employment status.
- Denomination has a surprisingly strong impact on worshipers’ willingness to trust others. While a large majority of worshipers in mainline Protestant congregation (83%) believe “most people can be trusted,” only 65% in Catholic parishes and 53% in conservative Protestant churches do.<sup>2</sup>
- Congregational size is not related to levels of trust—worshipers in small congregations with fewer than 100 in worship are no more likely than those in larger congregations to trust others.

## How Do Worshipers Feel About U.S. Institutions—Do They Have More or Less Confidence Than Others?

- Compared to the U.S. population as a whole, worshipers have more confidence in some U.S. institutions, but less confidence in many others. Figure 2 shows institutions that both worshipers and the U.S. population were asked about, as well as a number of institutions that only worshipers were asked about. The two institutions that worshipers have the most confidence in are also the two for which worshipers' confidence exceeds that of the general public—the churches (called “organized religion” on the GSS) and the armed forces (called “the military” on the GSS). More than half of worshipers express “a great deal” of confidence in each. The U.S. population has more trust than worshipers in major companies, the health care system, and education. (Note that data for both the U.S. Congregational Life Survey and the GSS were collected before September 11, 2001, and the armed conflicts that followed.)

**Figure 2: Confidence in U.S. Institutions**



## **Data Sources**

U.S. Congregational Life Survey (2001). Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce. Louisville, Kentucky: U.S. Congregations and Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

General Social Survey (2000). James Allan Davis and Tom W. Smith. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center.

## **To Cite this Source**

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<sup>1</sup> Over 300,000 worshipers in over 2,000 congregations took part in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey in April 2001. Congregations were selected to be representative of all congregations across the country. For more information: [www.USCongregations.org](http://www.USCongregations.org)

<sup>2</sup> Congregations were grouped into five categories based on their denomination or faith group: (1) Catholic, (2) mainline Protestant, (3) conservative Protestant, (4) congregations in historically Black denominations, and (5) others (non-Christian congregations). Most of the items on community included here were answered by a sample of respondents only (n=1,156), which results in sample sizes for historically Black denomination churches and non-Christian congregations that are too small for analysis. Thus, differences by faith group presented here include only the first three denominational families.