



CHRISTIAN VIEWPOINTS ON

# Criminal Justice and the People It Impacts



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01 SUMMARY

# Christian Viewpoints

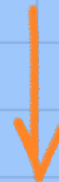






Prison Fellowship® is the nation's largest Christian nonprofit equipping the Church to serve currently and formerly incarcerated men and women and their families, and to advocate for justice and human dignity both inside and outside prison. Prison Fellowship is committed to understanding how Christians perceive biblical justice and apply it to the world around them.

Since 2017, Prison Fellowship has commissioned the Barna Group to conduct biannual surveys that track Christian viewpoints on justice. These studies specifically highlight the opinions of practicing Christians as compared to the general American public. They reveal why Christians feel criminal justice matters, what the goals of criminal justice should be, and how we should view the people impacted by incarceration.



## MOTIVATIONS:

### Why Does Criminal Justice Matter?

#### 77% of practicing Christians

believe **the Bible commands** them to care about people in prison.

#### Nearly half of all practicing

**Christians** believe criminal justice and incarceration **affect their community.**

## GOALS:

### What Are the Goals of Criminal Justice?

#### Most practicing Christians (89%)

believe criminal justice should **lead to restoration.**

#### Most practicing Christians (86%)

believe criminal justice should allow people to **make amends** for their crimes.

#### 89% of practicing Christians

believe people who have completed their sentences should be **offered a second chance.**

## PEOPLE:

### How Should We View the People Impacted by Incarceration?

Practicing Christians are more likely than the American public to believe in the **intrinsic value** of incarcerated people and their potential for making a **positive impact** once they are released.







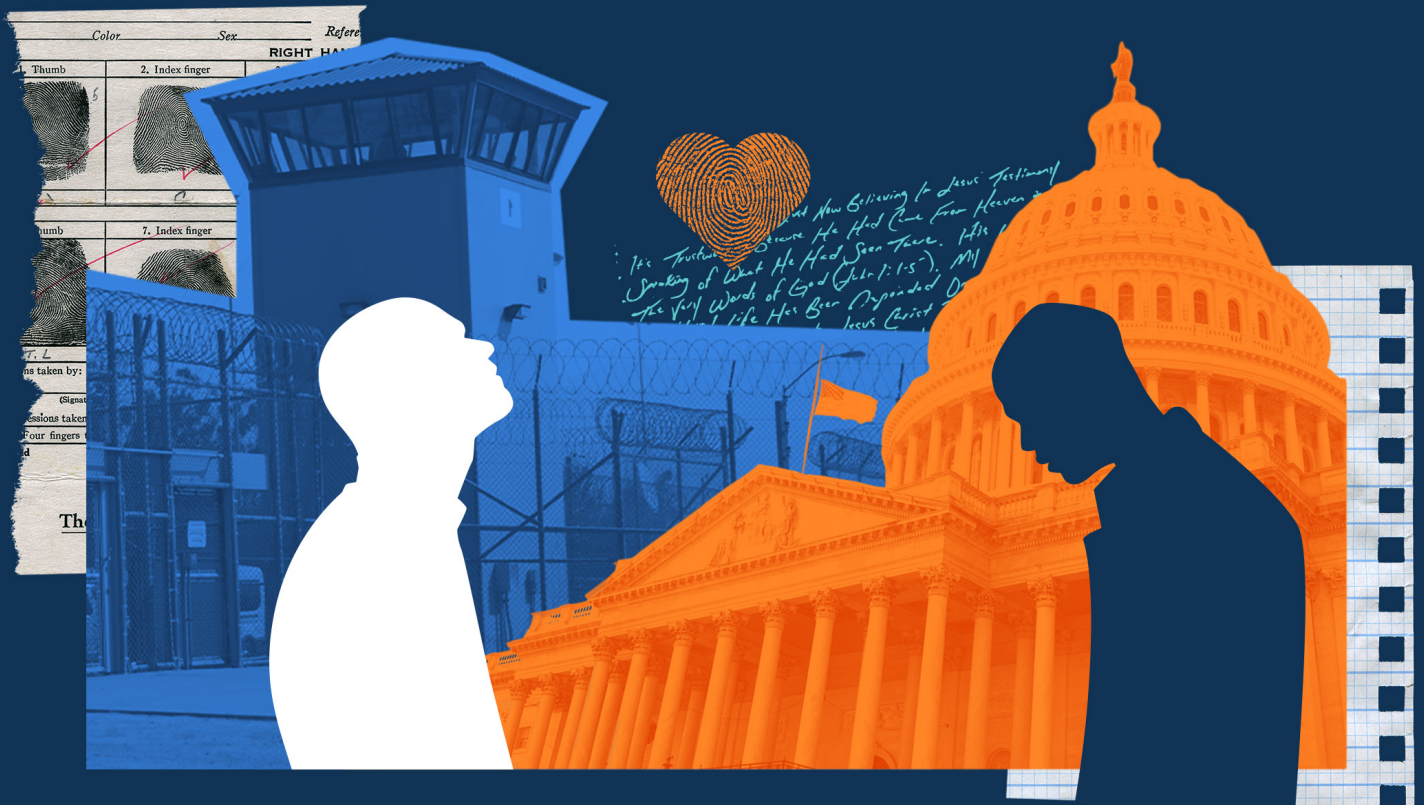
**Christians say the Bible  
commands them, hope inspires  
them, and love propels them to  
make the justice system more  
fair and more restorative.**

## **Criminal justice matters because it matters to Jesus.**

This survey shows that Christians care about criminal justice and the people it impacts because they believe God cares about justice. They say the Bible commands them, hope inspires them, and love propels them to make the criminal justice system more fair and more restorative. Race, age, and personal experiences influence Christians' perspectives as well, but it's their core belief in the Gospel message that dominates their thinking.

## 02 MOTIVATIONS

# Why Does Criminal Justice Matter?

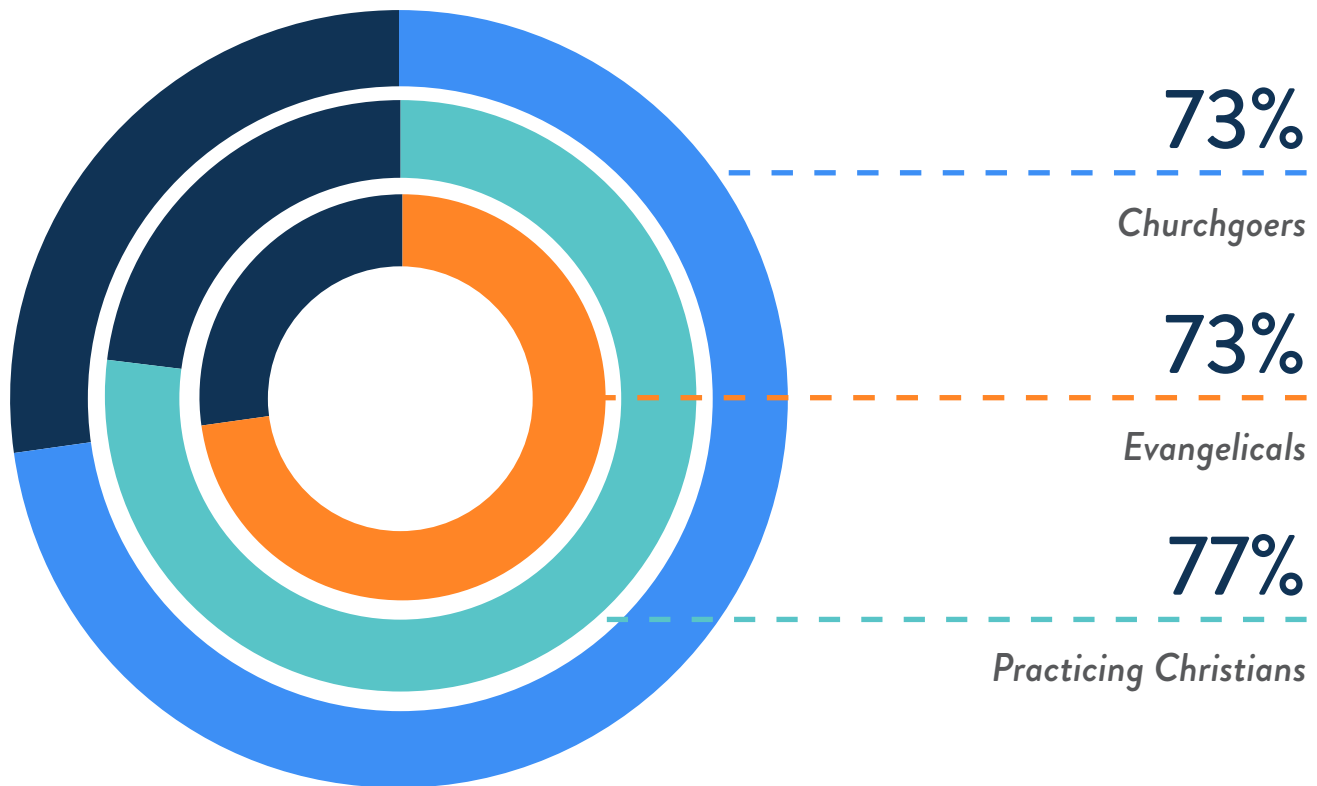




**QUESTION:**

**What do you think is the main reason why your church became engaged in raising awareness on the issue of criminal justice and incarceration?**

*The Bible instructs us to care for others, even those behind bars.*



**The Bible  
commands them.**

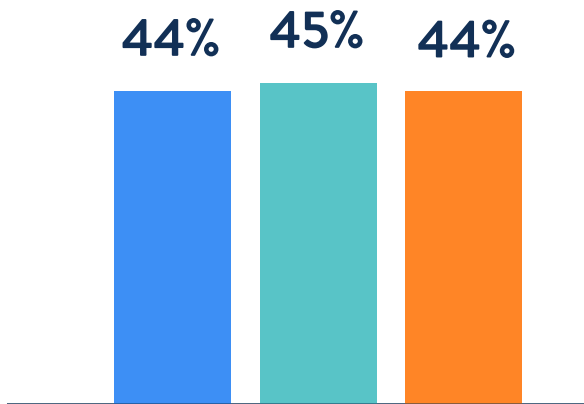
For Christians, the Bible is the primary motivator for engaging on the issues of criminal justice and incarceration. This is up significantly since 2021 for both churchgoers (up from 59%) and practicing Christians (up from 64%).\*

*\*See Methodology and Key Definitions on page 18 for definitions of these terms.*

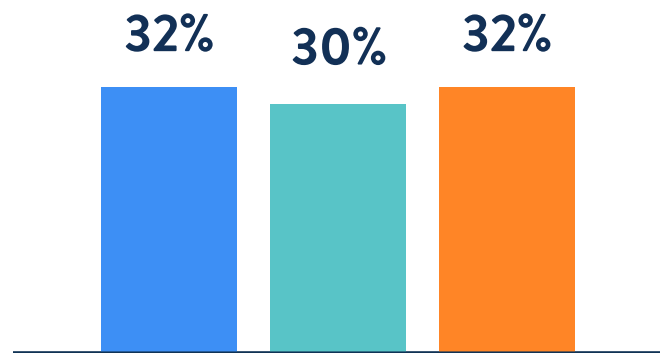
**QUESTION:**

What do you think is the main reason why your church became engaged in raising awareness on the issue of criminal justice and incarceration?

*Criminal justice and incarceration is a problem affecting our community.*



*Members of our congregation have friends or loved ones behind bars.*



■ Churchgoers ■ Practicing Christians ■ Evangelicals

**Criminal justice  
is personal.**

Nearly half of Christians say criminal justice and incarceration are problems affecting their community. This highlights how personal this issue can be for Christians and their churches.

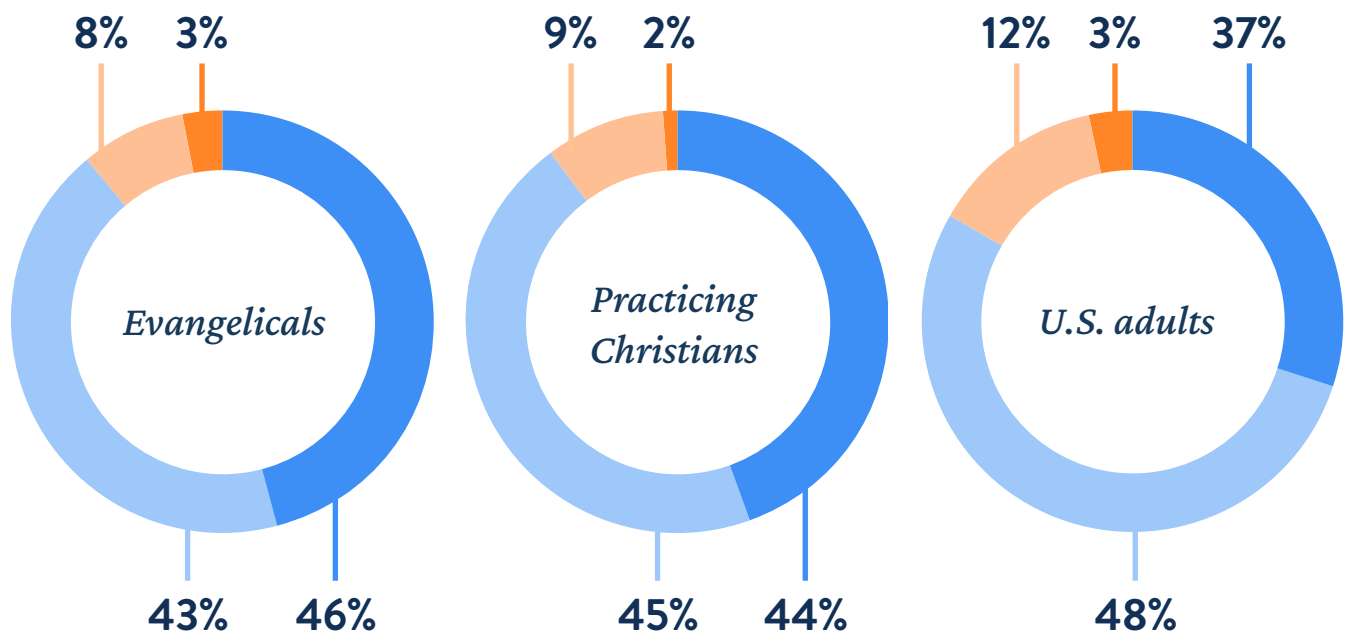
03 GOALS

# What Are the Goals of Criminal Justice?



### QUESTION:

The primary goal of the criminal justice system should be restoration for all parties, including the victim, the impacted community, as well as the person who committed the crime.



■ Agree strongly ■ Agree somewhat ■ Disagree somewhat ■ Disagree strongly

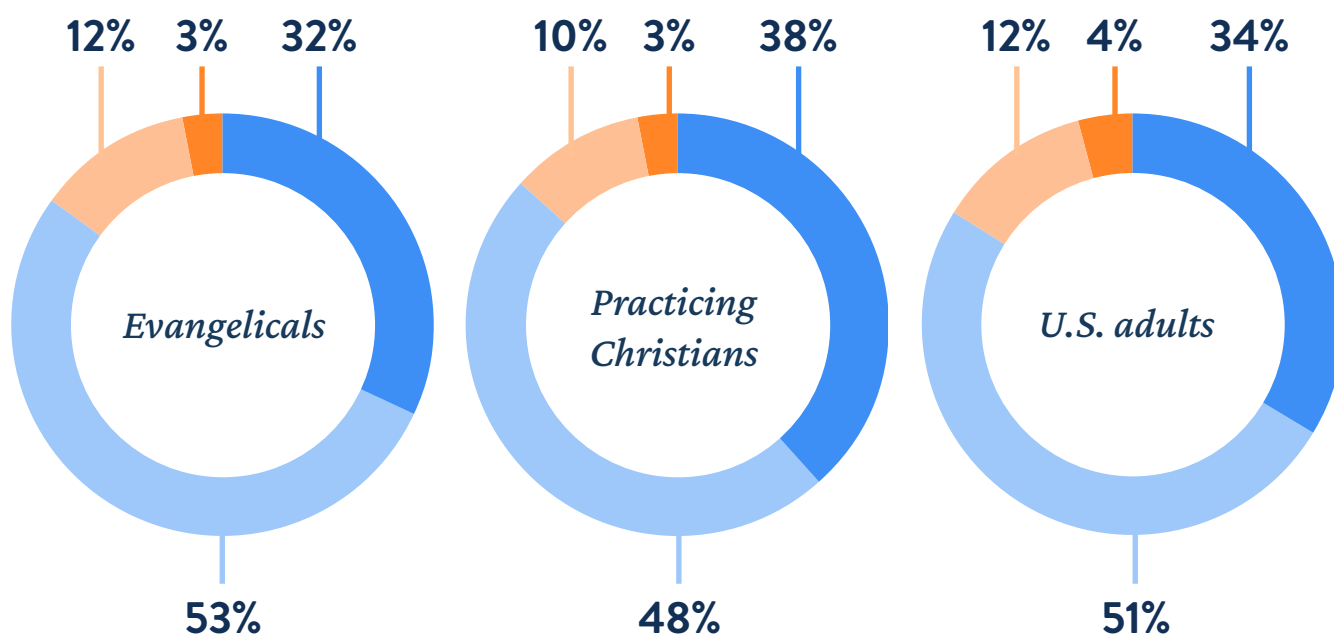
**Criminal justice  
should lead to  
restoration.**

Most Americans still agree that the goal of the justice system should be restoration for all involved in a crime. Evangelicals and practicing Christians are significantly more likely to agree strongly with this perspective than others.



## QUESTION:

The criminal justice system should provide opportunities for people who commit crimes to make amends to their victim(s) and the community.



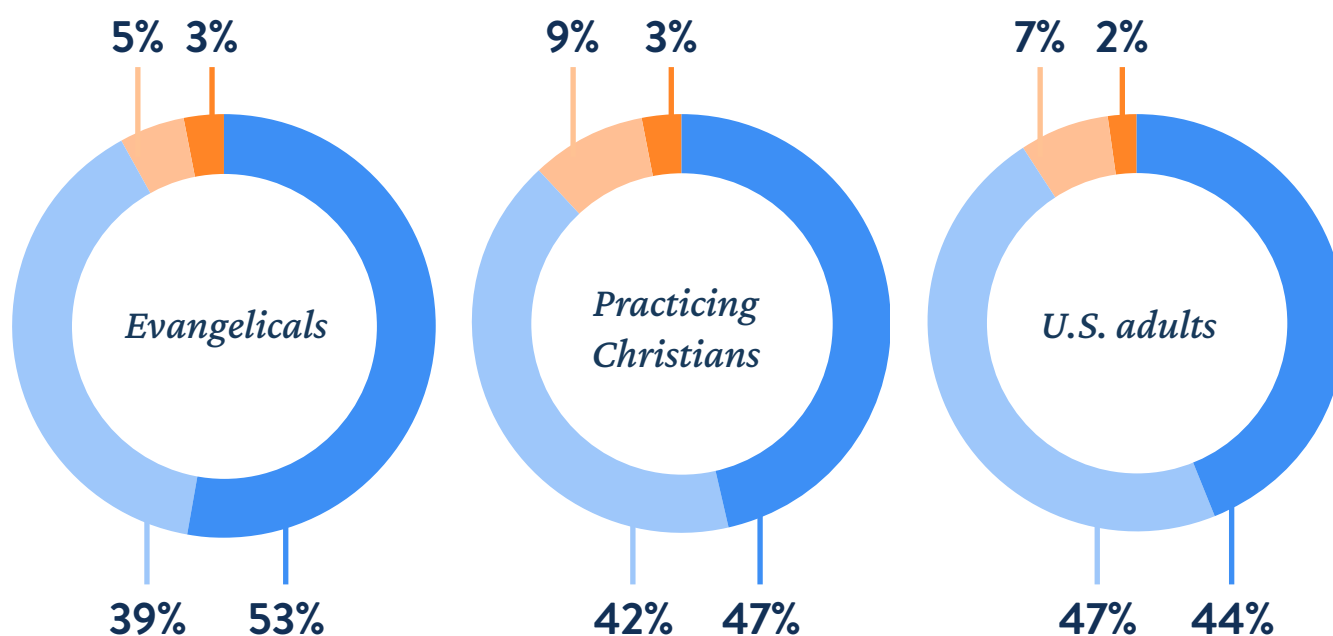
■ Agree strongly ■ Agree somewhat ■ Disagree somewhat ■ Disagree strongly

**Criminal justice  
should lead to the  
making of amends.**

Americans agree that people who commit crimes should be given the opportunity to make amends to those they have impacted. No significant difference of opinion exists between Christians and the general public on this issue.

## QUESTION:

Once someone with a criminal history has completed their just punishment, they deserve a second chance to become productive members of the community.



■ Agree strongly ■ Agree somewhat ■ Disagree somewhat ■ Disagree strongly

**Criminal justice should lead to people getting a second chance.**

Nearly everyone resonates with the idea of a second chance, especially evangelicals with more than half of them strongly believing in second chances.

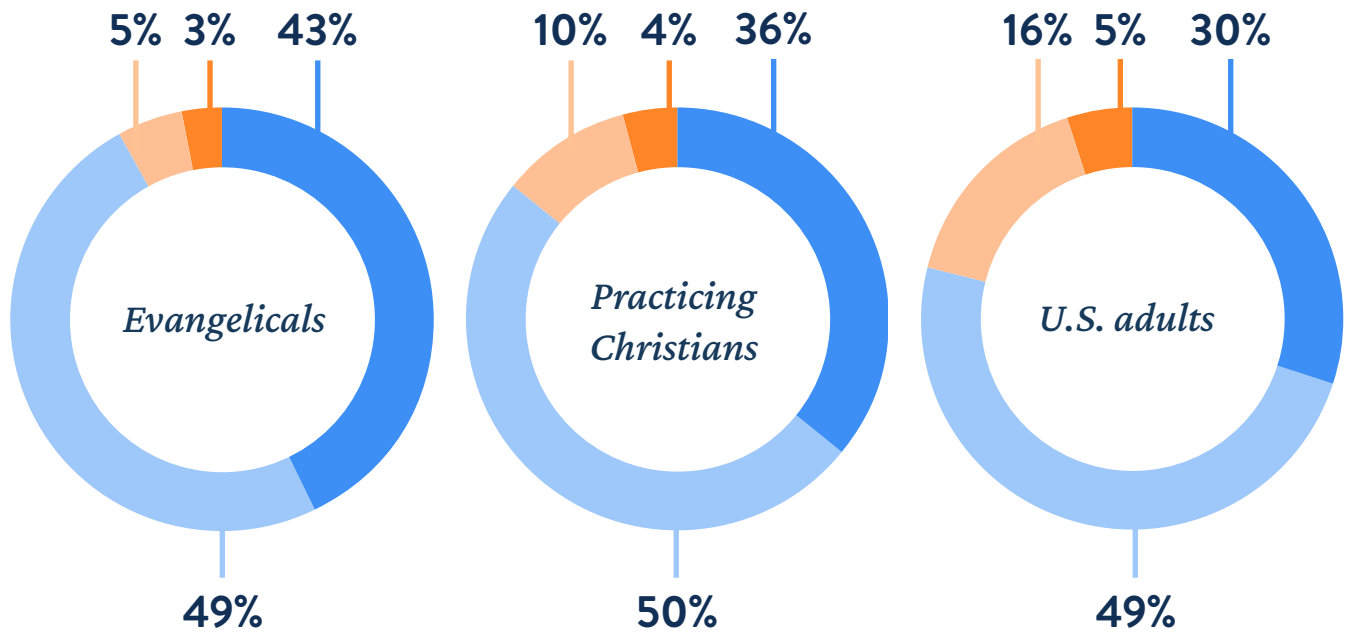
04 PEOPLE

# How Should We View People Impacted by Incarceration?



**QUESTION:**

**Because of my values, I believe caring for prisoners is important.**



■ Agree strongly ■ Agree somewhat ■ Disagree somewhat ■ Disagree strongly

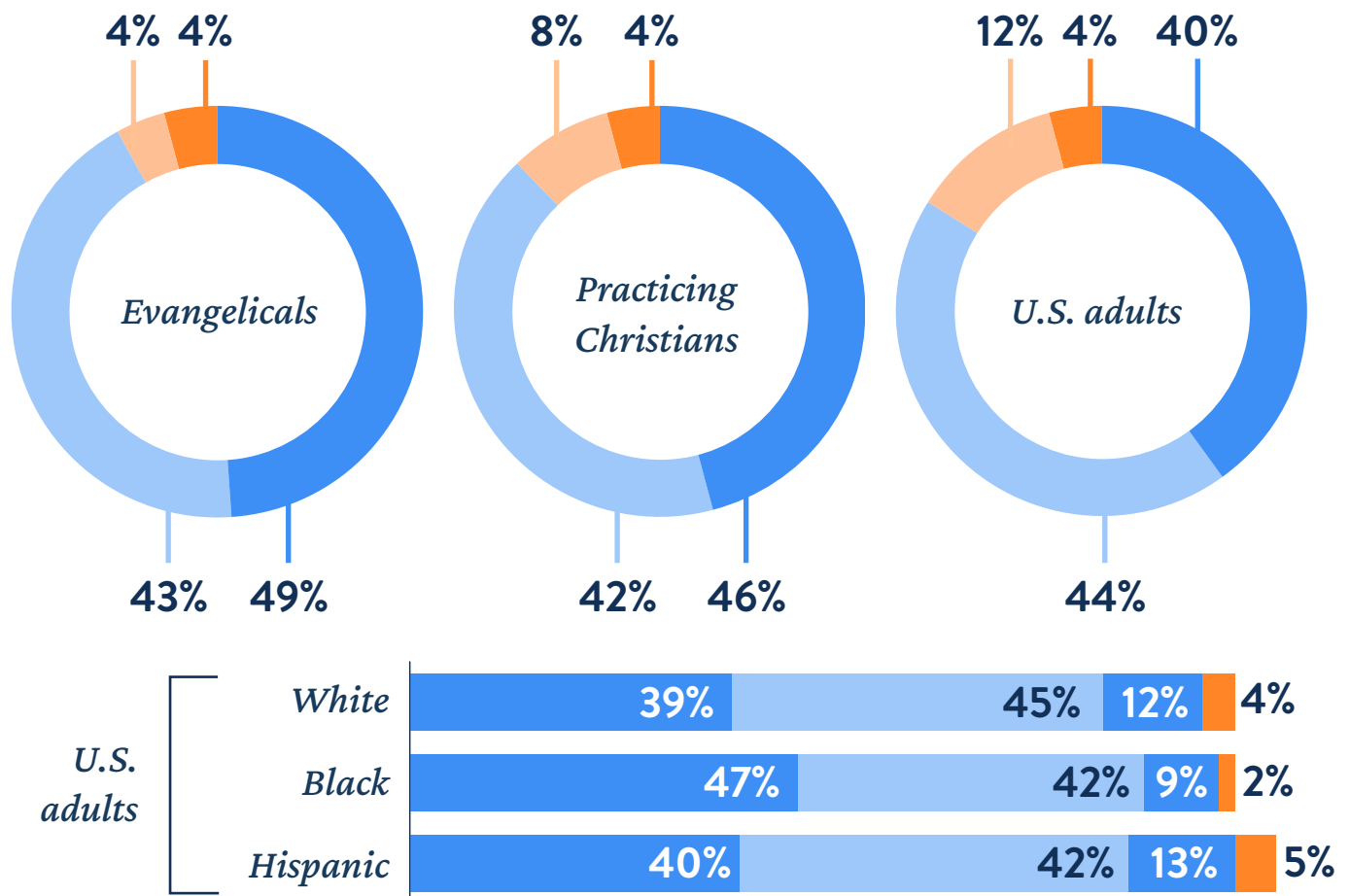
**Christians are compelled  
by their values to care  
for incarcerated people.**

All groups agree, but Christians are especially likely to say that their values compel them to prioritize the care of people who are incarcerated.



## QUESTION:

It's important that prison conditions are safe and humane, specifically because I believe every person has intrinsic value and worth.

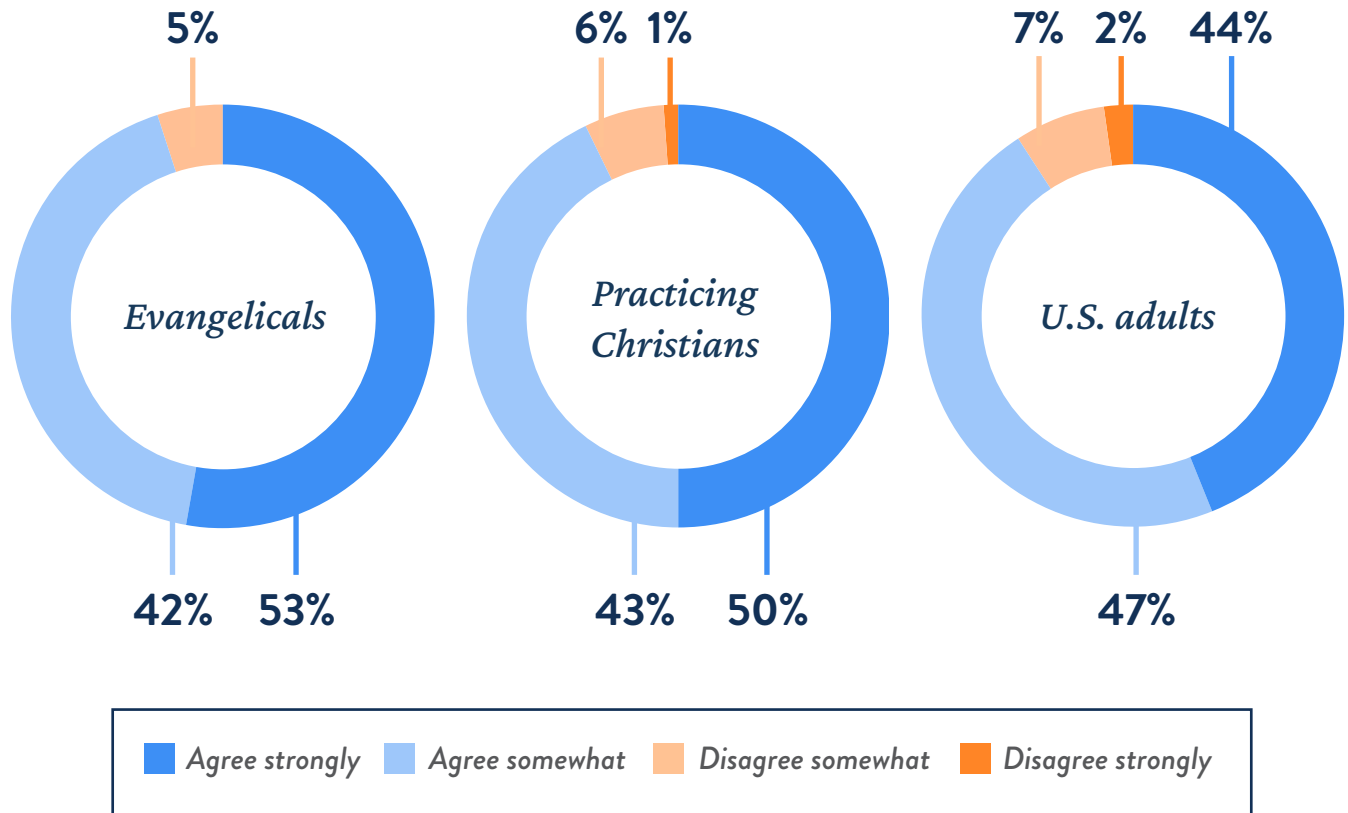


**Every person has  
intrinsic value  
and worth.**

Nearly half of evangelicals and practicing Christians strongly believe humane prison conditions are important compared to 40% of all adults. The number of adults who affirm this belief has risen among the general population (up from 36% in 2021).

**QUESTION:**

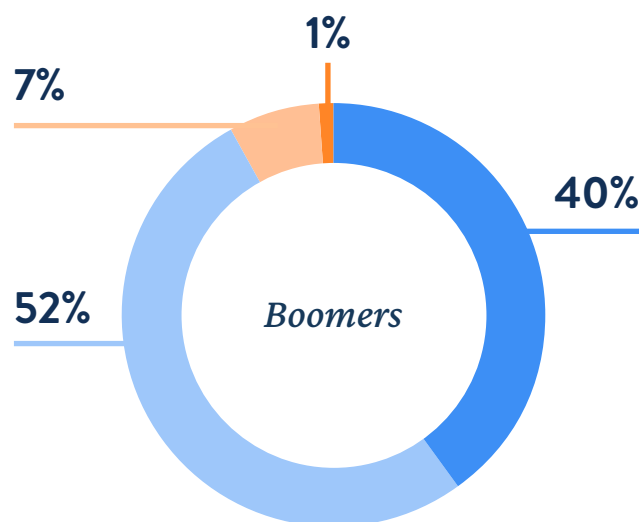
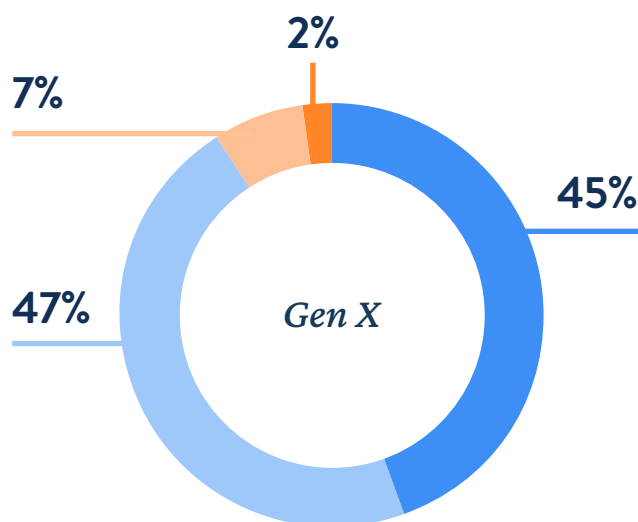
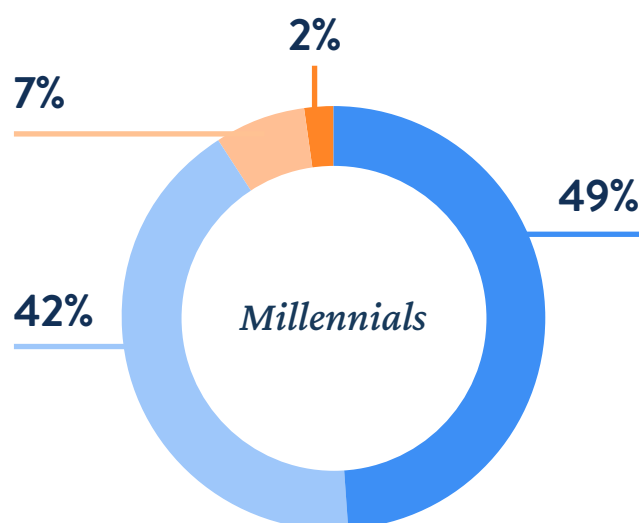
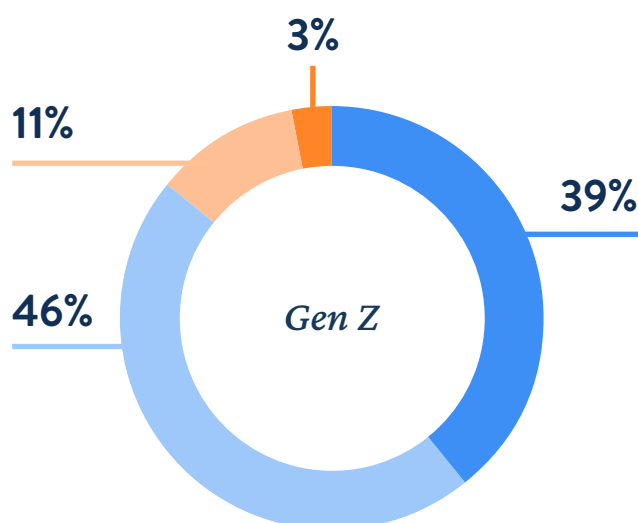
People who have turned their life around after a criminal conviction can benefit a community by using their experiences as a lesson for others.



Results continue on the following page.

**QUESTION:** Continued from page 15

*U.S. adults*



■ Agree strongly 
 ■ Agree somewhat 
 ■ Disagree somewhat 
 ■ Disagree strongly

**People with a criminal record can still benefit society.**

Most adults agree that people with a criminal record can still be a benefit to their community once they have committed to turn their lives around. Practicing Christians are more convinced of this than the general population.

The background of the entire page is a dark blue color. It is decorated with a repeating pattern of stylized human head silhouettes. These silhouettes are arranged in horizontal rows. Some are a light blue color, while others are an orange color. They are all facing to the right. The pattern is dense and covers the entire background.

## 05 BACKGROUND

# Methodology and Key Definitions



# Methodology

This report contains the findings from a nationally representative study of 1,850 U.S. adults from September 20–29, 2023. An additional 350 interviews were conducted with U.S. adults who qualified as practicing Christians; when combined with those identified as practicing Christians in the general population group, this totals 840 practicing Christians surveyed.

## Key Definitions

### ***Churchgoers:***

Respondents who have attended a church service in the past six months.

### ***Practicing Christians:***

Respondents who identify as Christian, say their faith is very important in their life, and attended a religious service or gathering in the past month.

### ***Evangelicals:***

Respondents who say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and believe they will go to heaven when they die because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus as their Savior. They also believe they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; Satan exists; eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works; Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches; and God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfect and that He created the universe and still rules it today.





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