

THE
AMERICAN BELIEFS
STUDY
RELIGIOUS PREFERENCES & PRACTICES



November 2022

Social and Moral Attitudes within Faith Communities

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The Facts of Christian Engagement

You see it nearly every Sunday. Some of your members and visitors are engaged, interactive and fully involved. Others hang back, reluctant to fully be a part of the community and commit to fellowship. A big part of the American Beliefs Study is a mandate to delve into the attitudes, perceptions and beliefs among Christians who engage at different levels. The goal is to help pastors and leaders relate on a personal level with people they meet – both inside and outside the walls of the church.

This report from the American Beliefs Study focuses on the differences in attitudes among Americans who self-identify as Christian. Using their responses to the Study, our researchers took the step of defining two groups: practicing and nominal Christians

Undoubtedly, there might be many more criteria which could serve to define these two groups. However, these criteria were the only ones measured in the American Beliefs Study that permitted differentiation.

Here are some of the most telling findings from this analysis...

- Regardless of age, practicing Christians exist across rural, suburban and urban areas. But they are more evident in rural settings, and in lower and middle class households. They generally have less education. And they're more likely to be found working in service sector, blue-collar and industrial jobs.
- Practicing Christians tend to feel greater concern than nominal Christians for a dozen life issues.
- Nominal Christians are nearly five times more likely than practicing Christians to view the impact of churches on their communities neutrally.
- Younger Christians (both practicing and nominal) are far more concerned than their elders for life issues like managing anger, sexual orientation, marital issues, depression, anxiety, loneliness and guilt.
- Likewise, younger Christians are far more likely to hold beliefs that minimize the value of the family and diminish tenets of biblical marriage.

Based on the questions in the study, we have defined Practicing Christians as someone who identifies as Christian, attended some type of faith fellowship at least once a month and said that their faith had 'high' or 'utmost' significance in their lives.

In contrast, Nominal Christians identify as Christian but attend a fellowship less than once a month or say that faith has moderate or lower significance in their lives. If faith was not important in a respondent's life but they attended often, they were coded as Nominal. The same was true for those who said faith was very important to them but they do not attend frequently.

Christian Engagement Rises with Age

As noted earlier in this series of reports from the American Beliefs Study, roughly two in three Americans describe themselves as Christians (64.2%). Among just the 9,500 Study participants who identified as Christian, the level of engagement varies greatly by generation. The fast-waning Silent generation has the highest share of practicing Christians at 47%, compared to 53% who express attitudes that define them as nominals.

At 39%, Boomers are slightly less likely than Silents to be practicing Christians. 61% of the Boomer generation are nominal Christians.

Less than a third of Gen-X and Millennial Christians answered in ways that would define them as practicing Christians, at 32% and 28% respectively. This means that a strong majority of Christians under age 55 say that they attend a fellowship less than once a month and or consider faith to have low to moderate significance in their lives [See Figure 4.1]

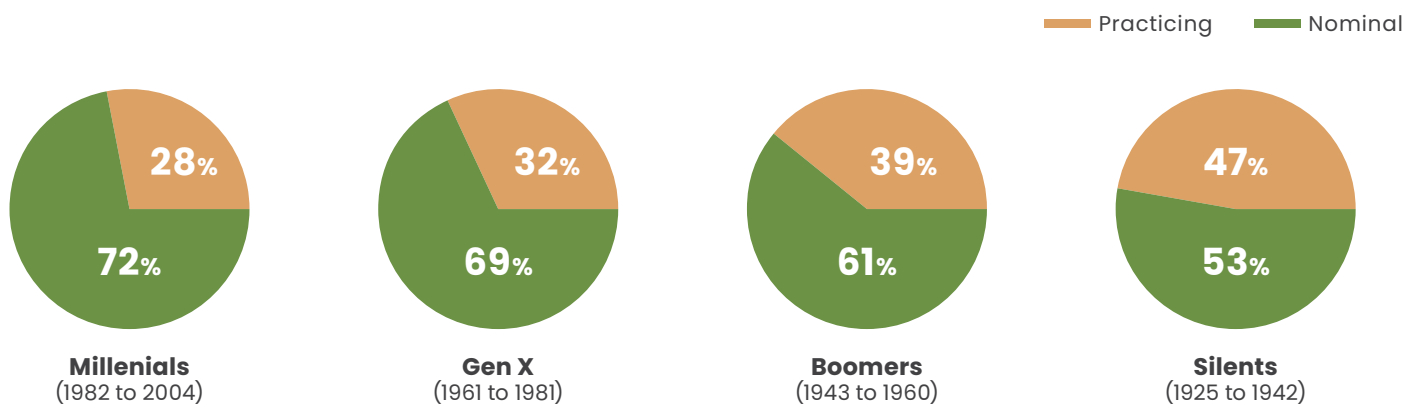
There are several possible explanations for this pattern of waning engagement among younger and younger generations. Maybe as Christians grow older, the Nominals in that generation become more active in their faith. Other data

from the American Beliefs Study suggests that Boomers, Gen-X's and Millennials tend to think differently about the place of faith in their lives.

The challenge in the pie charts for American Christian churches is how to effectively engage this majority of younger nominal Christians. As they age, it is imperative for the life and health of the church that they gravitate toward greater involvement in communities of faith. Other pathways could place the American church in great peril.

— FIGURE 4.1

OLDER GENERATIONS FAR LIKELIER TO MEET PRACTICING CHRISTIAN CRITERIA



Responses from 9,504 self-identified Christians
American Beliefs Study, 2021

Christian Engagement is Stronger in Rural Populations

Depending on what part of the country you're in, the share of self-described Christians in your region might be ten percent higher or lower than the average 64%. Generally, the Western states have the lowest population of Christians, and the Southern states are highest.

Rural areas showed a significantly higher share of practicing Christians (26%) compared to suburban and urban areas (21%). Examining further, the share of nominal Christians remains stable at roughly 42% regardless of whether the area is urban, suburban or rural.

Again, 'practicing' refers to people who self-identify as Christian, attend a fellowship at least once a month, and say that their faith has either strong or utmost significance in their lives.

Why is this so? Perhaps there is something intrinsic about rural

communities that deepens ones' faith engagement. There is certainly more opportunity to connect with the natural world in a rural setting. Perhaps just being around more people who engage with faith makes it acceptable. On the other hand, perhaps there is something innate about living in more dense populations that makes Christian engagement harder.

The proportion of Americans who said they were non-religious is significantly higher in urban and suburban areas (28% and 27%) compared to 22% in rural areas. It should be noted that just 11% of Americans live in rural areas, compared to 89% in urban and suburban locations.

Calculated against a population of 330 million, these stats tell us that ten million rural Americans are non-

Christian, compared to 85 million suburbanites and 23 million urbanites. Three quarters of these non-Christians follow no religion at all.

In keeping with the findings on population density, the South and Midwest have the highest proportion of practicing Christians at 47% and 23%, respectively. This is significantly higher than the rate of practicing Christians in the West (17%) and the Northeast (13%). The population of nominal Christians in these regions follows a similar pattern.

Dividing the nation into four regions, 70% of practicing American Christians live in the South and Midwest, compared to just 30% in the West and Northeast.

Mosaic Groups Offer Clues about Christian Engagement

Mosaic groups and clusters are part of a neighborhood-level typing system developed by Experian. This system drove the quotas to ensure the people who answered the American Beliefs Study accurately represent all Americans. There are 19 different Mosaic Clusters in American society, each with a unique name. Figure 4.2 at right lists these clusters, their percent of the US population and the population density of each cluster.

The Federal Census does not distinguish between urban and suburban areas, which combined make up just three percent of the land. Upwards of 97% of the country’s land is rural. Per the Mosaic Cluster definitions from Experian, about 62 percent of Americans live in suburban settings, another 20 percent live in truly urban environments, and just 17.5 percent of Americans live in rural settings. [See Figure 4.2]

Nine of the Mosaic clusters are ‘older,’ having an average age of 54 or greater. The ten ‘younger’ Mosaic clusters had an average age of 52 or under. This age distinction emerges as a significant dividing line for faith expression.

— FIGURE 4.2
OVER 60% OF AMERICANS LIVE IN SUBURBAN ENVIRONMENTS

Cluster Name	Population Density	Percent of US	Percent by Density
Pastoral Pride	Rural	7.3%	
Blue Sky Boomers	Rural	6.1%	17.0%
Families in Motion	Rural	3.6%	
Singles and Starters	Suburban	8.8%	
Golden Year Guardians	Suburban	7.3%	
Cultural Connections	Suburban	6.4%	
Middle-class Melting Pot	Suburban	5.8%	
Autumn Years	Suburban	5.6%	62.5%
Family Union	Suburban	5.4%	
Booming with Confidence	Suburban	5.3%	
Thriving Boomers	Suburban	5.1%	
Suburban Style	Suburban	5.0%	
Flourishing Families	Suburban	4.4%	
Promising Families	Suburban	3.4%	
Aspirational Fusion	Urban	2.9%	
Significant Singles	Urban	4.7%	
Struggling Societies	Urban	4.7%	20.5%
Power Elites	Urban	6.1%	
Young, City Solos	Urban	2.0%	

Share of US Population by Mosaic Cluster
Experian Corporation

Mosaic Groups Offer Clues about Christian Engagement

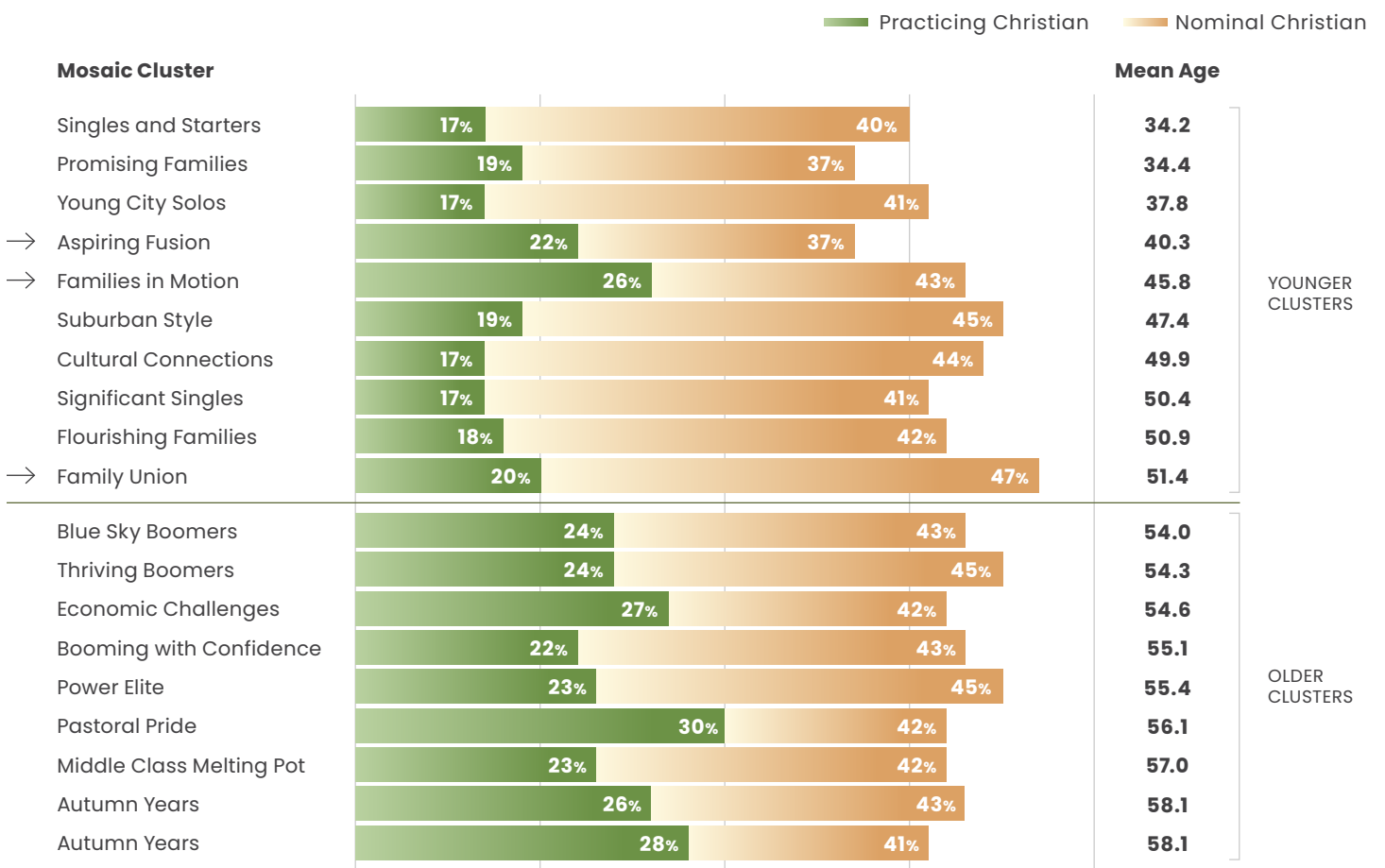
The average share of people identifying as Christian in the ten younger clusters was 61%, significantly lower than the 68% in older clusters. Two of these younger clusters saw a share of Christians

similar to older clusters - Families in Motion at 69% and Family Union at 67%. Together, these two segments comprise nine percent of the US population. Another three segments representing 17%

of Americans - Suburban Style, Cultural Connections and Flourishing Families - saw 61-64% of their members identifying as Christian. [See Figure 4.3]

— FIGURE 4.3

ONLY THREE YOUNGER MOSAIC CLUSTERS SHOW HIGHER SHARE OF CHRISTIANS



Share of responses among 9,504 American Christians
American Beliefs Study, 2021

Mosaic Groups Offer Clues about Christian Engagement

The biggest disparity between older and younger Mosaic clusters occurs in the proportion of practicing Christians. Members of younger clusters on the whole averaged 19% practicing Christians, compared to 25% practicing Christians in the nine older clusters – a six-point gap. In contrast, the share of people in younger Mosaic clusters who could be categorized as nominal was just one percent below the average in older clusters (42% vs. 43%).

The Mosaic cluster with the highest share of Christians is Pastoral Pride with 72%. At 30%, this cluster also has the highest proportion of practicing Christians.

Three of the younger groups saw a relatively stronger proportion of practicing Christians – Families in Motion (26%), Aspirational Fusion (22%) and Family Union (20%). What was similar about the three younger Mosaic clusters that have the highest concentration of practicing Christians? What makes them look more like the older Mosaic clusters that had a similar concentration? Getting at this answer requires digging into the descriptions of these clusters. The following descriptions are paraphrased from Experian.

- Families in Motion had the highest share of practicing Christians at 26%. This is a highly rural group. Its members tend to be married couples between 25–45, half with children, in quiet safe neighborhoods and modest homes. They typically work in the trades, manufacturing or in manual labor. This group is fairly settled in their eastern, small town communities and don't have big plans to go anywhere else.
- Aspirational Singles had 22% practicing Christians. These are younger, ethnically-mixed members in largely urban areas. They're a more transitory group in lower-income, industrial communities with below average housing values. Nearly two-thirds are single parents, and nine in ten are unmarried. Nearly half didn't finish high school, and just six percent have college degrees. If employed, they often work at service-sector and blue-collar jobs.
- The Family Union cluster had 20% practicing Christians, a group which notably also has 47% nominal Christians. This is a predominantly multi-ethnic suburban group made up of Whites and Hispanics living in modest

homes. They're often hard-working, multi-lingual, mixed-generation immigrant households. One-quarter of household heads didn't finish high school and just 15 percent hold college degrees. They earn mid-scale incomes from jobs in construction, manufacturing, transportation and food services.

These descriptions show that in contrast to other younger clusters, these young clusters with a higher share of practicing Christians shared traits like lower educational level, lower incomes and occupations in the trades, manufacturing and the service-sector. All three of these clusters were marked by living in relatively modest housing – regardless of their urban, suburban or rural population density. This was similar to older Mosaic clusters that also exhibit the highest concentration of practicing Christians; groups like Pastoral Pride, Golden Year Guardians and Struggling Societies. Like the younger clusters, none of these older clusters were particularly well-off or well-educated either. And they also lived in lower middle-class housing regardless of population density.

Christian Engagement Strongest among Certain Traditions

Protestant Christians were significantly more likely to describe themselves as practicing Christians

37%

compared to Catholics **28%** and those in Orthodox traditions **17%**.

Orthodox Christians were least likely to attend fellowship more than once a month or say that faith had high or utmost significance in their lives

83%

The same was true for **72%** of Catholics and **63%** of Protestants.

In writing this, ACST used the global standard for sorting Christian denominations and traditions used by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity and others, as well as the World Christian Encyclopaedia.

Among Protestants, adherents to Holiness denominations had the highest share of practicing Christians at

58% (Nazarene, C&MA)

followed by Pentecostals and Charismatics at

54% (Foursquare, Assemblies)

These two groups were followed by Baptists at

46% practicing (including both Southern and American Baptists)

Congregational at

39% (Evangelical Free and UCC)

and non-denominational churches at

37%

Denominational groups such as Adventist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Reformed saw

30–35% practicing Christians

The denominational groups with the lowest share of practicing Christians were Restorationists at

24%

(Christian Church, Disciples of Christ)

and the Episcopal or Anglican Church at

29%

Do certain denominational groups inspire stronger personal Christian engagement? Perhaps not. This result might simply correlate to the types of churches that exist near people who desire more spiritual engagement. Or perhaps it means that people who desire stronger Christian engagement gravitate toward some denominations over others.

Engaged and Nominal Christians Exhibit Differing Lifestyle Traits

85%

of Americans who live in multi-person households live with at least one other person related to them.

.....
This rate is significantly higher for practicing Christians at **92%**. Nominal Christians come in at an average **86%** level.

.....
The reverse of this is also true... nominal Christians in multi-person households were significantly more likely to live with someone unrelated to them

14%

.....
compared to practicing Christians **8%**.

Another key lifestyle trait that is significantly different between practicing and nominal Christians is that practicing Christians tend to be more rooted than nominal Christians; they stay in one place longer. While it may not seem significant, practicing Christians reported living in one place for an average of 15 years, compared to nominal Christians with an average of 13 years.

.....
These facts lead to some interesting questions. Does transience contribute to a diluted faith? Does a nominal faith connection make it easier for people to migrate? Is there a connection between a willingness to stay put and a desire for greater connections, or the reverse? These questions could not be answered using the responses to the American Beliefs Study.

.....
Further, there might be unexpected implications of the pandemic on this trend. With more telecommuting and less need to migrate to advance one’s career, will Americans stay put longer? Could this have an impact on willingness among nominal Christians to begin engaging in faith communities? Hopefully, local churches in America can leverage this trend within their communities and see the benefit of membership growth as a result.

Nominal Christians see Church Community Efforts as Weaker

Nine in ten practicing Christians see houses of worship having a positive impact on their communities (91%), compared to just 64% of nominal Christians. In contrast, nominal Christians are nearly five times more likely to be neutral about the community impact of churches compared to practicing Christians (33% vs. 7%). [See Figure 4.4]

Likewise, older American generations held a more positive view of

the impact of churches on their communities. They were also less likely than younger Americans to agree that it would make no difference to them if the churches near them disappeared.

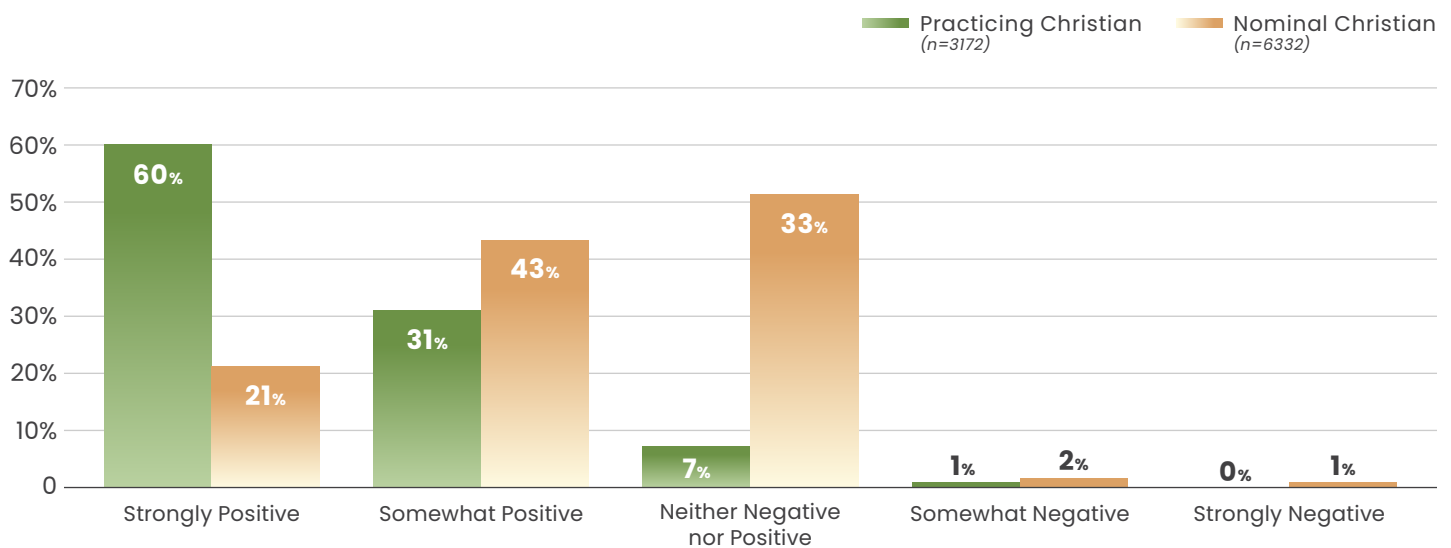
This result suggests that nominal Christians are either less aware or less taken by how local churches benefit their wider communities. Christians are warned in scripture not to ‘pray loudly on the street

corner,’ so this lack of awareness is understandable. Second, churches tend to be more insular than outgoing, serving their members far more effectively than they do their nominal cousins. And finally, these perceptions suggest that Christian churches have been far less successful than they want to be at communicating their positive message to less frequent attendees.

— FIGURE 4.4

NOMINAL CHRISTIANS LESS POSITIVE THAN PRACTICING CHRISTIANS ABOUT LOCAL CHURCH IMPACT

“How would you describe the impact places of worship have on your local community?”



Percentages among 9,504 American Christians
American Beliefs Study, 2021

Practicing Christians Feel Greater Concern for a Dozen Life Issues

According to our Study, Americans feel varying levels of concern about 44 life issues. Perhaps by knowing which of these issues practicing and nominal Christians feel most concerned about, pastoral leadership can more readily tap into and serve those emotional needs.

While nominal Christians and practicing Christians felt the same level of concern about several life issues, no areas emerged where nominal Christians felt significantly more concerned than practicing Christians did.

On the other hand, practicing Christians expressed significantly greater concern than nominal Christians did in at least a dozen life issues. Generally, this suggests that the more engaged a Christian is with a church body, the more emotionally engaged they feel with regard to various life issues.

This seems counterintuitive. Wouldn't practicing Christians intuitively sense that their hope comes from beyond this world, and therefore have a greater sense of hope for the future than nominal Christians? Other responses to the American

Beliefs Study did not provide any indication of why this might be the case. The authors can only surmise that perhaps practicing Christians have more free time to observe and reflect on world events than nominal Christians do, and might express this concern not for themselves, but on behalf of coming generations.

Naturally, American concerns about COVID-19 dominated all others given the timeframe for fielding the study. Nearly half of all respondents expressed high or very high concern about the impacts of the pandemic, and this was the same regardless of engagement level within the church.

The next highest area of concern was in social tensions and political discord, cited as a top-two concern by more than a third of respondents. Practicing Christians were significantly more concerned about this life issue than nominal Christians were (37% vs. 34%).

Practicing Christians were also more concerned about illegal immigration than nominal Christians (26% vs. 23%), though these two groups were equally concerned about racial injustice (25% vs. 24%). It may be

helpful to remember that practicing Christian Americans are more often older. Being older, perhaps this group feels a greater responsibility to safeguard or uphold traditional American values or mores. This suggests that both these groups concede that America could handle race relations better, but practicing Christians were slightly more concerned about the practical impacts of racism in society.

The widest life issue gap between practicing and nominal Christians was for 'spiritual or religious issues.' While one in five practicing Christians indicated this as a top two concern (20%), this was the case for only 12% of nominal Christians. Another wide gap appeared for Social Media and the Internet, which another 20% of practicing Christians cited as a top-two concern compared to 16% of nominal Christians.

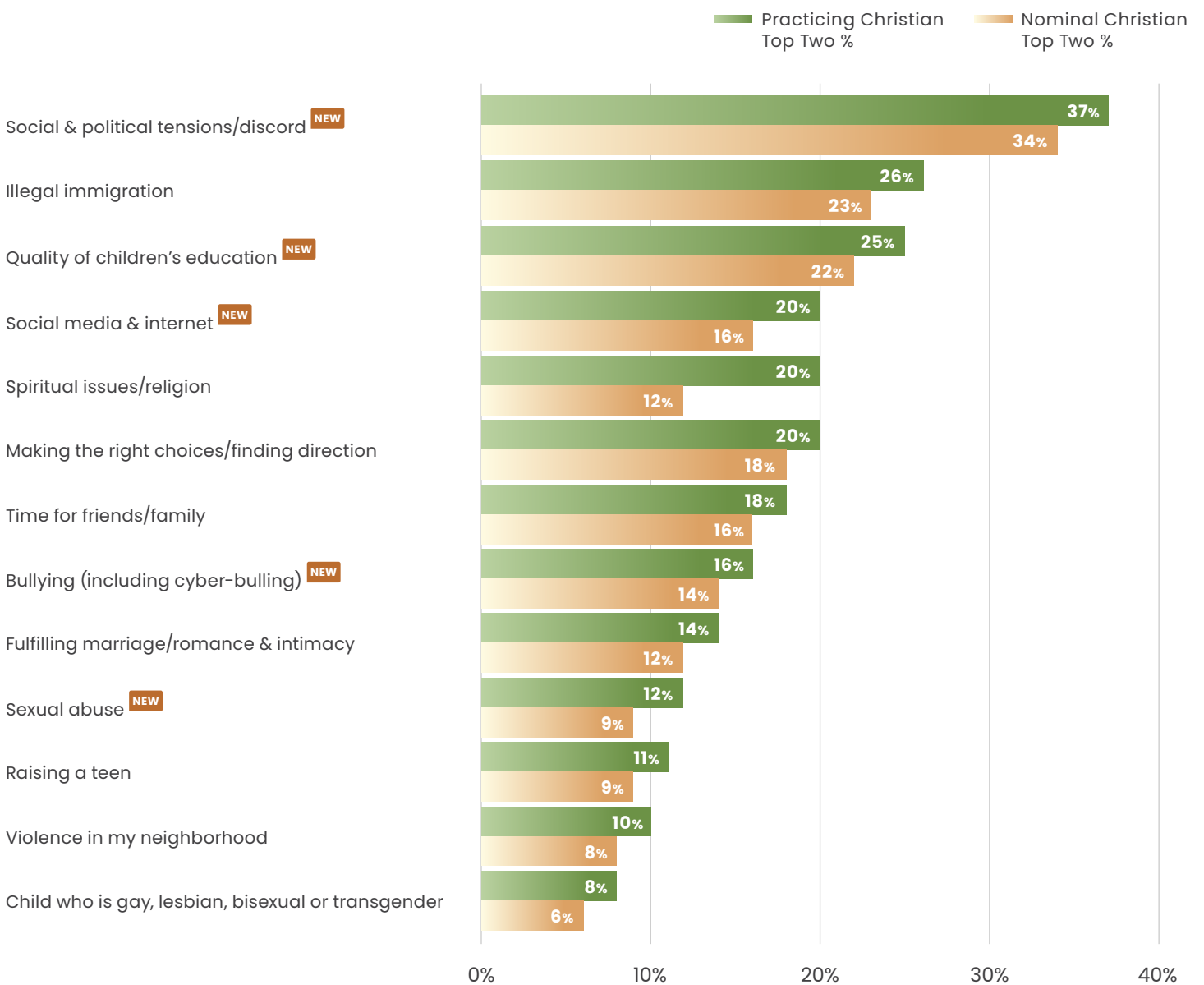
By a smaller margin, practicing Christians were also more concerned about a range of other life issues compared to nominal Christians, as seen in Figure 4.5.

Practicing Christians Feel Greater Concern for a Dozen Life Issues

— FIGURE 4.5

PRACTICING CHRISTIANS FEEL GREATER CONCERN FOR MANY LIFE ISSUES VS. NOMINAL CHRISTIANS

“Indicate your level of concern, if any, for each item below?”



Ratings of ‘Escalating’ and ‘High’ Concern among 9,504 American Christians
American Beliefs Study, 2021

Concern over Life Issues Differs Greatly by Generation and Urban Density

Regardless of whether they were nominal or practicing Christians, Millennial and Gen-X generation respondents felt much greater concern on 33 of the 44 life issues compared to their elders. Specifically, their combined level of escalating or high concern for many life issues occurs at double, three times or even six times the rate of Boomers and Silent generation respondents. Some of these issues – such as having a satisfying job, reaching their goals, balancing their work and family lives or caring for aging parents – are obviously more often the domain of the young. These are to be expected.

And yet, ‘struggling with my sexual orientation’ was an issue for five times as many younger generation members as for older ones. Likewise, younger Americans cited anger management and marriage problems at more than 4x the rate of older Americans.

It is also very concerning that depression, loneliness, divorce and dealing with guilt, for instance, were concerns for Millennials and Gen-X respondents at roughly three times the rate of their elders. Similarly, it is striking that concerns with sexual addiction, domestic violence, arguing

too much, avoiding homelessness and drug or alcohol abuse are concerns for younger Americans at twice the rate of their elders.

These results are a clarion call to local ministers and counseling staff. These generations are pleading for understanding from the church, and solace from the pain these issues seemingly foster. The local church must take up the charge to engage with and relate to these younger generations with Christian teaching around these prominent issues. [See Figure 4.6]

America’s younger Christian generations feel a visceral sense of unease about many serious life issues. They are pleading for help with significant issues like sexual orientation, anger management, depression, loneliness, guilt and addiction. The local church must take up the charge to help younger generations cope with the spiritual impact arising from these serious concerns among followers of Christ.

The only issues where the Boomers and older respondents outrated these younger generations was with

concerns over social and political tensions (38% vs. 30%) and illegal immigration (24% vs. 15%).

Older and younger generations feel similarly about the impact of seven of these life issues, including health crisis or illness, personal health problems, social media and the Internet, bullying, sexual abuse, spiritual issues or religion, and planning a will or estate.

Urbanites tended to feel greater concern over being successful, balancing work and family, finding a mate and loneliness compared to rural dwellers. Conversely, rural residents were more concerned than those in other settings over issues of social and political discord and social media.

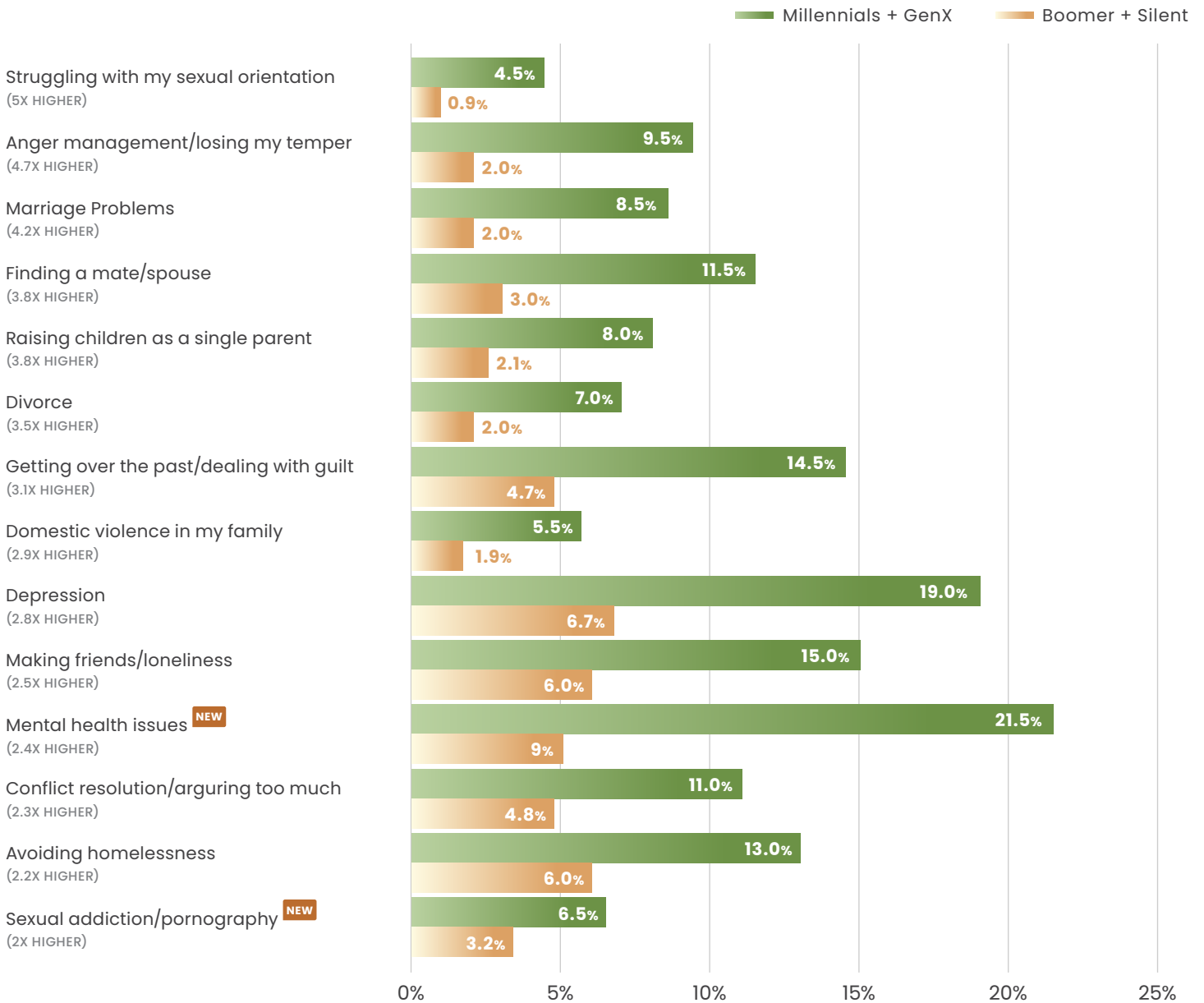
These results reveal that even younger generations who are being taught and ministered to in faith communities feel a visceral unease about many life issues. And while the messages that cause such worry might reverberate endlessly in the halls of government, education and the media, churches can offer respite. Church leaders have a responsibility to offer biblical solutions and ease these concerns wherever they exist.

Concern over Life Issues Differs Greatly by Generation and Urban Density

— FIGURE 4.6

YOUNGER CHRISTIANS FEEL FAR GREATER CONCERN FOR LIFE ISSUES THAN THEIR ELDERS

“Indicate your level of concern, if any, for each item below?”



Ratings of ‘Escalating’ and ‘High’ concern among 9,504 American Christians
American Beliefs Study, 2021

Practicing Christians Align Strongly with Traditional Beliefs

Practicing and nominal Christians diverge in their personal beliefs in significant ways.

Many of these differences centered on family and children, with practicing Christians far more likely to hold traditional beliefs. For instance, while 93% of practicing Christians agreed that strong families are key to social stability, just 67% of nominal Christians also agreed. And 82% of practicing Christians believed that children are best raised by both a mother and a father, compared to 55% of nominal Christians. Eight in ten practicing Christians disagreed that children currently receive adequate moral training (81%) compared to 67% of nominal Christians. Seven in ten practicing Christians believed marriage was a relationship between one man and one woman only (70%), compared to half as many nominal Christians (35%). Practicing Christians were more likely than nominal Christians to agree that traditional marriage

is becoming obsolete as a social institution (49% vs. 44%).

Conversely, half of nominal Christians agreed that same-sex marriage must remain legal and protected, compared to just 32% of practicing Christians.

Over eight in ten practicing Christians said religion must play a primary role in shaping social morality (83%), a stance held by just 48% of nominal Christians. Practicing Christians were also significantly more likely to agree that America has a moral responsibility to be a force for good in the world (80% vs. 69%). They were also more likely than nominal Christians to believe that the US should pursue avenues to stop illegal immigration (73% vs. 61%).

In areas where morality and social policy intersect, 55% of practicing Christians agreed that abortion should become illegal, and 51% agreed that religious communities should be exempt from LGBTQ-based policies or regulations,

compared to just 28% of nominal Christians on both of these.

Nominal Christians were significantly more likely than practicing Christians to believe the science that says humans are affecting the climate (64% vs. 55%), and that we must be good stewards of the environment even if it means restricting natural resources (59% vs. 55%). [See Figure 4.7]

In areas related to social harmony, nominal Christians agree more often that tolerance is necessary for peace and wellbeing (73% vs. 70%) and that we need to promote sensible gun laws to reduce gun violence (64% vs. 60%). Half of nominal Christians agreed that asking the rich to pay higher tax rates was a way to establish economic justice, compared to 46% of practicing Christians. These two groups agree equally that American society must emphasize embracing our ethnic diversity (52% each) and that we must pay more attention

Practicing Christians Align Strongly with Traditional Beliefs

to accomplishing economic justice (51% each). A majority of practicing Christians feel that America pays too much attention to race and racial issues (55% vs. 49% for nominal

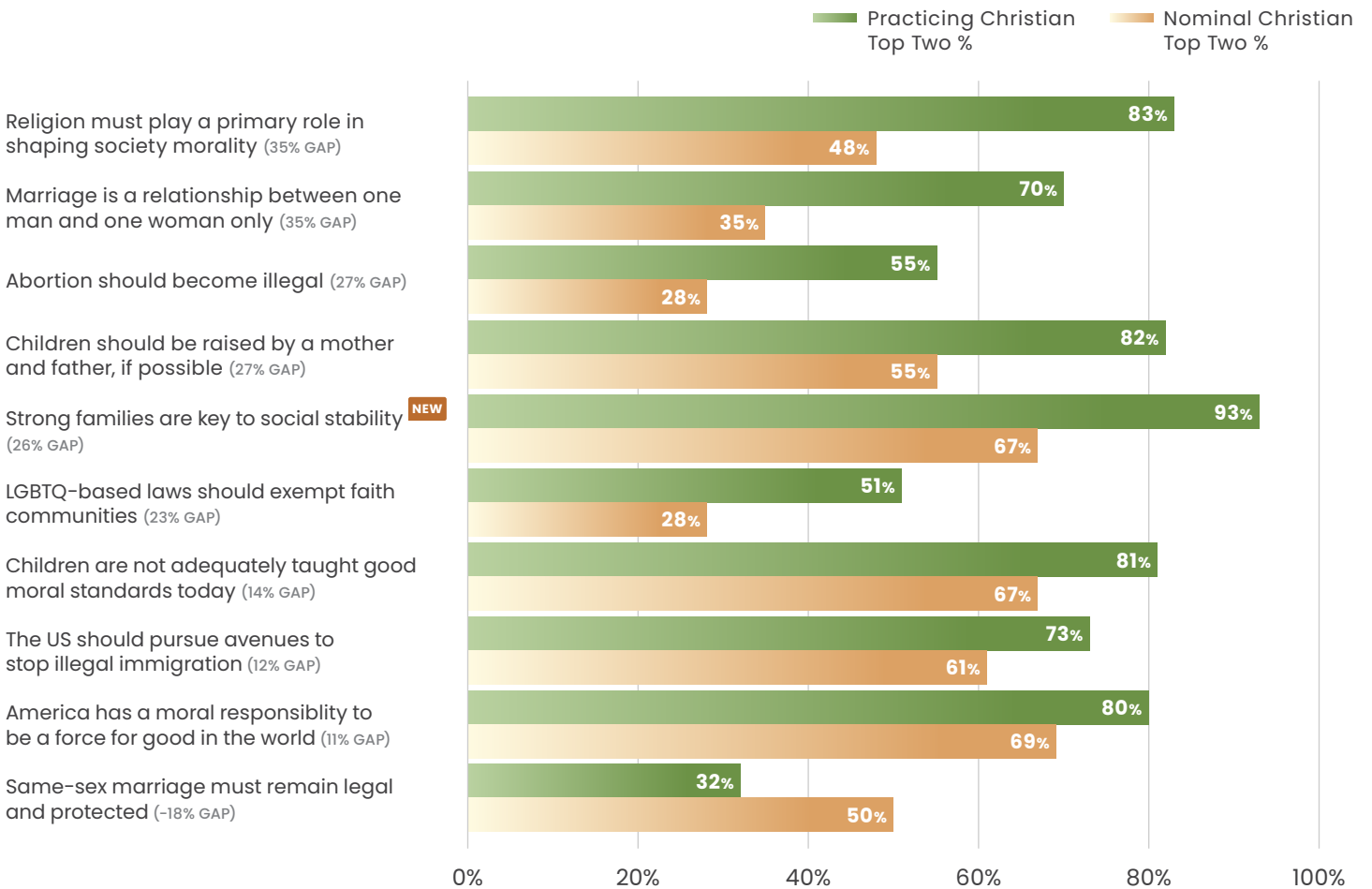
Christians). And while all Christians generally disagree, practicing Christians were more likely than nominal Christians to agree that US race relations were ‘generally good’

(36% vs. 32%), and that government should not be deeply involved in solving poverty (32% vs. 28%).

— FIGURE 4.7

PRACTICING CHRISTIANS BELIEVE DIFFERENTLY THAN NOMINAL CHRISTIANS ON MANY TOPICS

“Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement for the following statements of personal belief?”



Agreement Ratings among 9,504 American Christians
American Beliefs Study, 2021

Social Beliefs Differ Greatly by Generation and Urban Density

Older Americans in the Boomer and Silent generations were significantly more likely than younger Americans to agree on a host of ideas, including beliefs on what makes a family unit, what marriage is, on American greatness and even their sense of hopefulness. [See Figure 4.8]

Many of these beliefs with the widest gap – like valuing the family unit, marriage, American sovereignty and hope – might be characterized as more traditional values.

Given these huge gaps in personal beliefs between generations, can it be any wonder that denominations are having to reconcile such polarized internal perspectives. The divide is sociological and generational.

Interestingly, younger and older generations agreed that we must be good environmental stewards even if that means restricting resources

60%

we must give more attention to accomplishing economic justice

57%

and traditional marriage as a social institution is becoming obsolete

40%

For their part, younger Americans were much more likely to agree that...

The science that says humans are affecting the climate is true

68% vs. 64%

Same-sex marriage must remain legal and protected

59% vs. 51%

Asking the rich to pay a higher tax rate is a way to establish economic justice

58% vs. 55%

Greater emphasis must be given to embracing our ethnic diversity

57% vs. 54%

Urban and suburban residents were significantly more likely than rural Americans to affirm three beliefs, the science that says humans affect the climate of the planet

67% vs. 63%

same-sex marriage must remain legal and protected

57% vs. 51%

and that society must give more attention to accomplishing economic justice

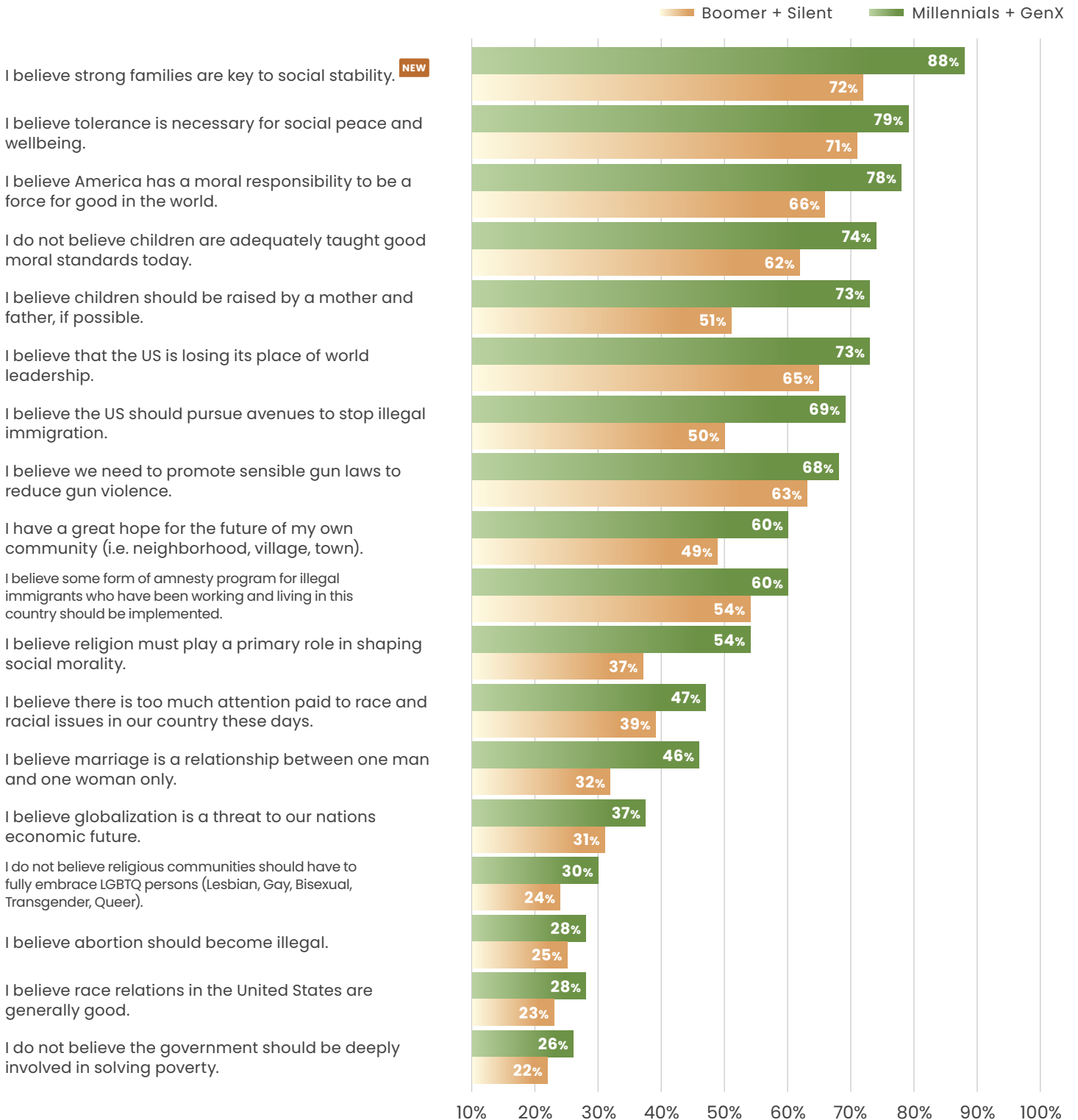
57% vs. 54%

Urban and suburban Americans agree slightly more (i.e., +2%) with two statements compared to their rural counterparts, first that Americans must put greater emphasis on embracing our ethnic diversity and that asking the rich to pay a higher tax rate is a way to establish economic justice.

— FIGURE 4.8

BELIEFS AMONG OLDER CHRISTIANS DIVERGE STRONGLY VS. YOUNGER CHRISTIANS ON MANY TOPICS

“Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement for the following statements of personal belief?”



Agreement ratings among 9,504 American Christians
American Beliefs Study, 2021

Social Beliefs Differ Greatly by Generation and Urban Density

For their part, rural residents were significantly more likely to agree with nine areas of personal belief, including the following...

Strong families are key to social stability

83% rurals agree vs. 76% for urban and suburban

America has a moral responsibility to be a force for good in the world

73% vs. 69%

Children are not adequately taught good moral standards today

69% vs. 66%

The US should pursue avenues to stop illegal immigration

63% vs. 55%

Children should be raised by a mother and father, if possible

63% vs. 57%

Religion must play a primary role in shaping social morality

49% vs. 41%

There is now too much attention paid to race and racial issues in our country

46% vs 41%

Traditional marriage as a social institution is becoming obsolete

43% vs. 40%

Marriage is a relationship between one man and one woman only

41% vs. 36%

Religious communities should be exempt from LGBTQ-based policies or regulations

30% vs. 25%

Abortion should become illegal

28% vs. 25%

The government should not be deeply involved in solving poverty

25% vs. 23%

Summary Highlights

- Practicing Christians – both young and old – exist across rural, suburban and urban areas in specific groups. They are more evident in lower and middle class households, among Americans with moderate education and those who work in service sector, blue-collar and industrial employment settings.
- Nominal Christians are far less likely than practicing Christians to have a positive view of the impact churches have in their communities.
- For whatever reason, practicing Christians tend to feel concern for a wider array of life issues than nominal Christians do.
- Younger self-identified Christians voiced a far higher rate of concern than their elders did for life issues that are unrelated to their stage of life – issues such as anger management, sexual orientation, marital issues, depression, anxiety, loneliness and guilt. Church leaders must be aware of and ready to offer solid spiritual counsel on these rising concerns.
- Younger self-identified Christians are far more likely to hold non-traditional beliefs that minimize the value of the family unit, negate the sanctity of biblical marriage and deny hope.

A Brief Methodology

The Research

This research study of American religious preferences, practices, beliefs and life concerns began in 1991. It has been fielded six times in total, with 2017 and 2021 being the latest editions. ACST is currently responsible for funding this research.

The goal of this study is to equip American Christian churches with hyper-local resources for understanding and reaching their communities. At its heart is a focus on the American religious landscape, especially across generational groups.

This online study among 14,942 American adults was conducted by Campbell Rinker for ACST from October 2020 through February 2021. Results were balanced by US region, 19 'Mosaic' demographic clusters from Experian, and weighted by age to align with known population characteristics. The study carries a maximum margin of error of $\pm 1.97\%$ at the 95% confidence level within any US Census Region. A comparative 2017 study involved the same size audience.

Note: Media outlets quoting from this paper are directed to use the summary paragraph above to describe the study in keeping with AP style.

The Questions

Several denominational partners helped design the study questionnaire and the fielding methodology. The authors are deeply indebted to them for their commitment to this project.

Developing the questionnaire is a key step in any research effort. 'Longitudinal' studies such as this require even more care for several reasons – for instance, respondents, language and social issues change over time. Changes like this force adaptations in the questions as well.

Through the years, the questionnaire has retained its focus on these core topics:

- Beliefs About God
- Beliefs About Jesus
- Beliefs About Social and Moral Issues
- Faith Involvement or Non-Involvement
- Life Concerns
- Program and Ministry Preferences
- Religious Affiliations
- Religious Preferences

The Respondents

The study obtained nearly 15,000 completed surveys from a panel of paid respondents. This panel was managed by Dynata, with fielding and analysis conducted by the research firm Campbell Rinker. ACST's partners in this effort followed a rigorous stratified sampling plan carried over from earlier studies.

This plan ensured that the respondent sample accurately represented a distribution across 76 unique groups – 19 geodemographic Mosaic clusters as defined by Experian within each of the four United States Census Bureau regions.

Of course, the nature of surveying involves some level of error. The researchers took care to minimize any bias that might occur with the sampling plan and in framing the questions themselves, including weighting the final data by age to ensure it reflects known proportions in the US population. This weighting delivers a final data set of 14,942 respondents.

THE
AMERICAN BELIEFS
STUDY
RELIGIOUS PREFERENCES & PRACTICES

About The American Beliefs Study™

The American Beliefs Study: Religious Preferences & Practices is a national research initiative conducted by ACS Technologies of nearly 15,000 people across The United States of various beliefs and demographics with the goal of being the definitive single source for the best understanding of the religious preferences and practices of Americans.

AmericanBeliefs.com

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About MissionInsite

The American Beliefs Study is best utilized within MissionInsite as a comprehensive demographic and analysis tool that helps churches and organizations understand what is most important to their congregation and community. By combining multiple top data sources it helps leaders learn what people want in a church, their ministry preferences, income levels, church impressions and what will make them keep coming back. It helps discover what people really want in their church to prioritize what will help them the most. In turn, aiding churches in attracting new people locating prime areas of outreach knowing the activities most people are interested in and will respond to. It also helps ministry leaders know the accurate demographic makeup of a church for better church planning of events, giving, new locations and new ministries. Knowing your neighbor to key to loving your neighbor and MissionInsite helps turns these insights into ministry impact.

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About ACS Technologies®

Founded in 1978, ACS Technologies is a leading, ministry development company most known for its expertise in being a comprehensive provider of church ministry software and service solutions to nearly 50,000 churches, schools, and organizational offices. With the mission to enable everyone in the Church with a personalized ministry environment to make God-honoring decisions in actionable ways, ACS Technologies desires to build the Kingdom by being a trusted ministry partner in the daily life of every church. ACS Technologies stands apart by providing a whole church approach, meeting the needs of the pastor, staff, and congregant, with ministry development tools unique in value to each role and each ministry goal serving each type of church/parish, denominational office, and diocese. ACS Technologies is a privately held independent Christian family-led company based out of Florence, SC with remote team members and offices across the U.S.

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