



**Mississippi
Business Alliance**

FOUNDATION

Fair Chance Hiring Research

October– December 2025

Introduction

WHEN:

- October 18 – December 16, 2025

PURPOSE:

- To understand business awareness, attitudes, and practices related to the hiring of formerly incarcerated individuals.

METHODOLOGY:

- This study includes two distinct respondent samples: members of the Mississippi Economic Council (MEC) and the Mississippi Manufacturers Association (MMA), herein referred to as MSBA due to merger, and an online panel sample composed primarily of HR professionals (referred to as Gen Business Data). Although identical questions were asked of both groups, the samples differ significantly in composition.
- Demographic characteristics are presented at the beginning of this report to provide context for interpretation. Results should be understood as descriptive of how each sample responded, and differences between samples should not be interpreted as definitive audience-level conclusions or generalized to broader populations.
- All participants:
 1. Live in Mississippi.
 2. Make or participate in hiring decisions for their business.

MARGIN OF ERROR:

- The statistical margin of error for the MSBA (n=73) is $\pm 11.4\%$. For the online panel sample (n=200), the margin of error is $\pm 6.8\%$.
- It is important to note that subsections of this data will have higher margins of error.

Executive Summary: Main Differences by Sample

- The main difference between samples is that the MSBA Database respondents tended to put more weight on the type of crime committed.
 - MSBA respondents rated Type of Crime as the #1 important factor in the decision to hire someone with a criminal record (96% Very or SW Important). The Gen Business sample rated it least important of the factors listed (85% Very or SW Important).
 - MSBA respondents were more willing to admit that they are not at all willing to hire those convicted of certain crimes (60% not at all willing to hire sex offenders, 59% not at all willing to hire murderers).
 - Other stark differences appear in willingness to hire violent offenders. 62% of the Gen Business sample were willing to hire those convicted of assault (8% for MSBA) and 56% were willing to hire convicted murderers (8% for MSBA).

- Time elapsed since conviction also matters more to MSBA respondents.
 - More than a third (36%) of the Gen Business sample said they would be much more likely to hire a person convicted over 1 year ago (4% less likely). Conversely, only 7% of the MSBA sample said they would be much more likely to hire someone convicted over 1 year ago, while 40% said less likely.

- Resources are more influential for the Gen Business sample.
 - All resources were rated Very or SW Influential by a minimum of 80% of the Gen Business sample. Ratings ranged from 58% to 81% across resources for the MSBA sample.

Executive Summary

- In the Gen Business group, all were familiar with reentry programs (78% very familiar), compared to only 14% from the MSBA Database.
 - Conversely, 32% of the MSBA sample said they were not at all familiar with such programs. No one from the Gen Business Data said the same.

- 73% of the Gen Business group said their business has current policies regarding the hiring of previously incarcerated individuals. Nearly as many (60%) of the MSBA Database sample said they do **not** have such policies, but 19% reported having policies in development.

- When rounded, 91% of the Gen Business sample had hired a formerly incarcerated individual, either through a reentry program (62%) or not through a program (30%).
 - Of the 182 in the Gen Business sample who had hired a formerly incarcerated individual, 96% described the experience as either very (54%) or somewhat (42%) positive, with none describing it as negative.

- 59% of the MSBA sample knew they had hired a formerly incarcerated individual, but a full quarter (25%) were unsure.
 - Of the 43 respondents who knew they had hired someone formerly incarcerated, 63% would describe the experience as positive, 33% as neutral, and 4% as negative.

Executive Summary

- 98% of the Gen Business Data sample were somewhat or very willing to consider job applicants with criminal records, while only 61% of the MSBA sample felt the same.
- When asked reasons for being very willing to consider applicants with prior criminal records:
 - 31% from each sample believed in giving people a second chance.
 - More than a quarter (26%) of the Gen Business sample said experience and skills outweigh a record.
 - 13% of each sample see formerly incarcerated individuals as hard-working, loyal, and eager to work.
 - Key difference: The overwhelming response for the MSBA sample was that “it depends on the crime” (47%). For the Gen Business sample, only 7% had the same caveat.

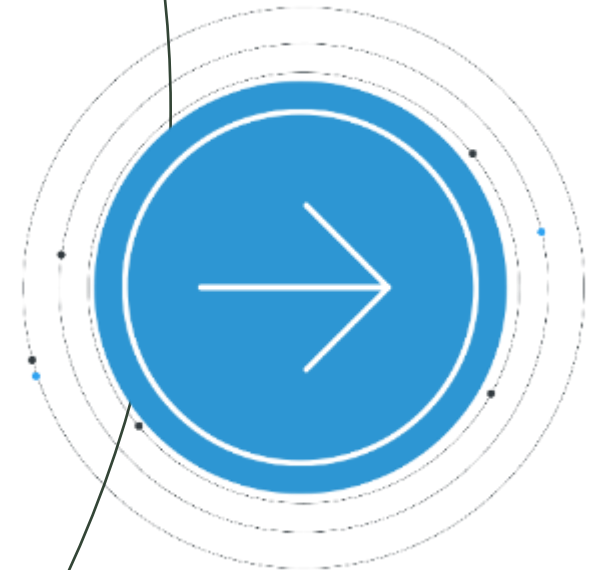
Executive Summary

- Though nearly all (98%) of the Gen Business sample were willing to hire a recently incarcerated individual, those respondents reported more significant concerns than the MSBA sample.
 - Among the Gen Business sample, all 6 potential concerns listed were of at least some concern to 79% (for legal or insurance liability), with a high 88% saying reliability and work ethic is a concern.
 - Average rating of all 6 concerns was 84% among the Gen Business sample.

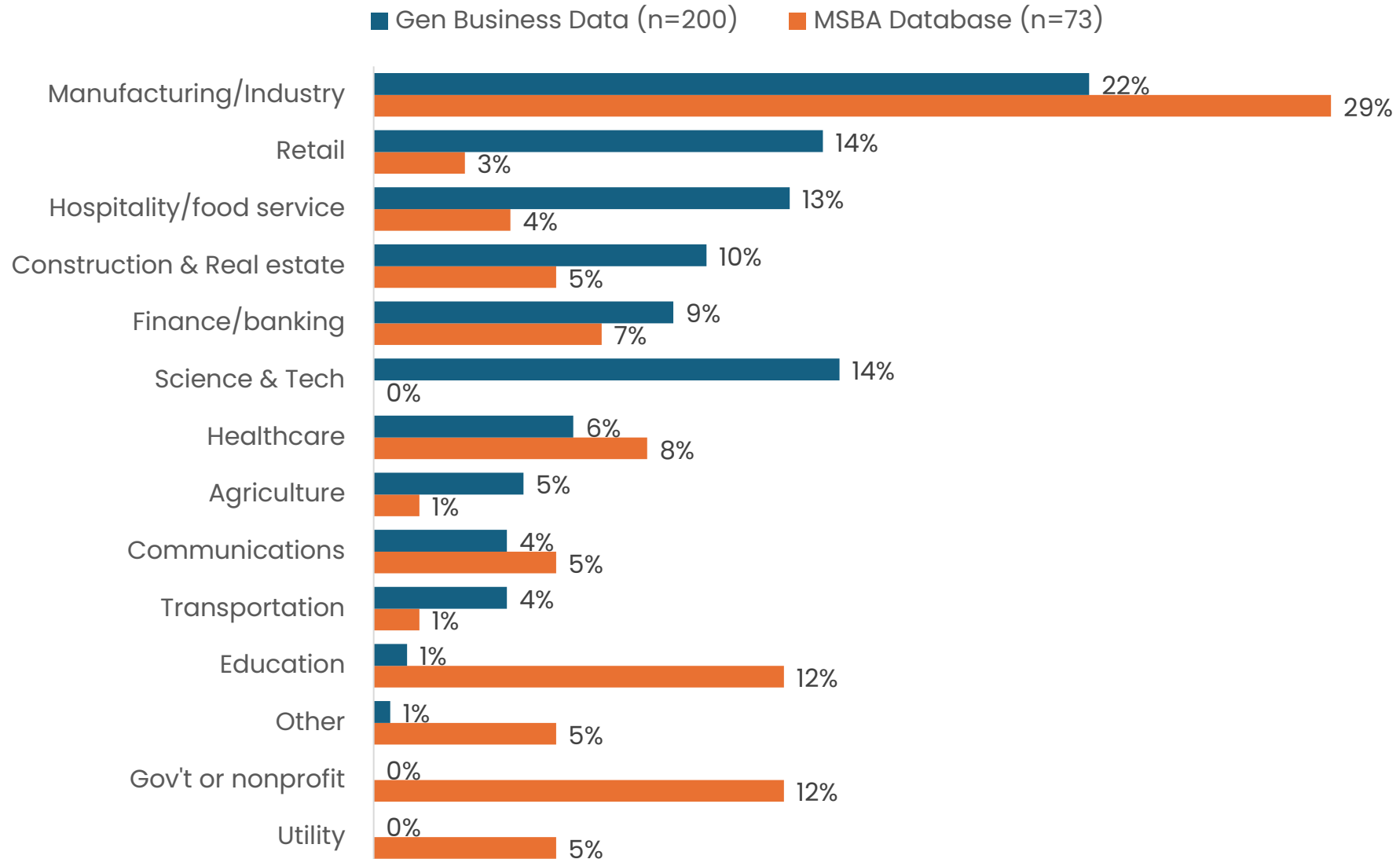
- The MSBA sample was less likely (61%) to hire applicants with criminal records but were also less concerned by the potential items listed.
 - The percentage of those with at least some concern ranged from just over half (53% for customer perceptions) to a high of 84% (workplace safety and security).
 - Average rating of all 6 concerns was 69% among the MSBA sample.

- However, nearly all in both samples were confident their business could provide the recently incarcerated an accepting and supportive workplace environment.
 - Nearly all (98%) in the Gen Business sample were very or somewhat confident their business could provide an accepting and supportive environment, as were 83% of the MSBA sample.

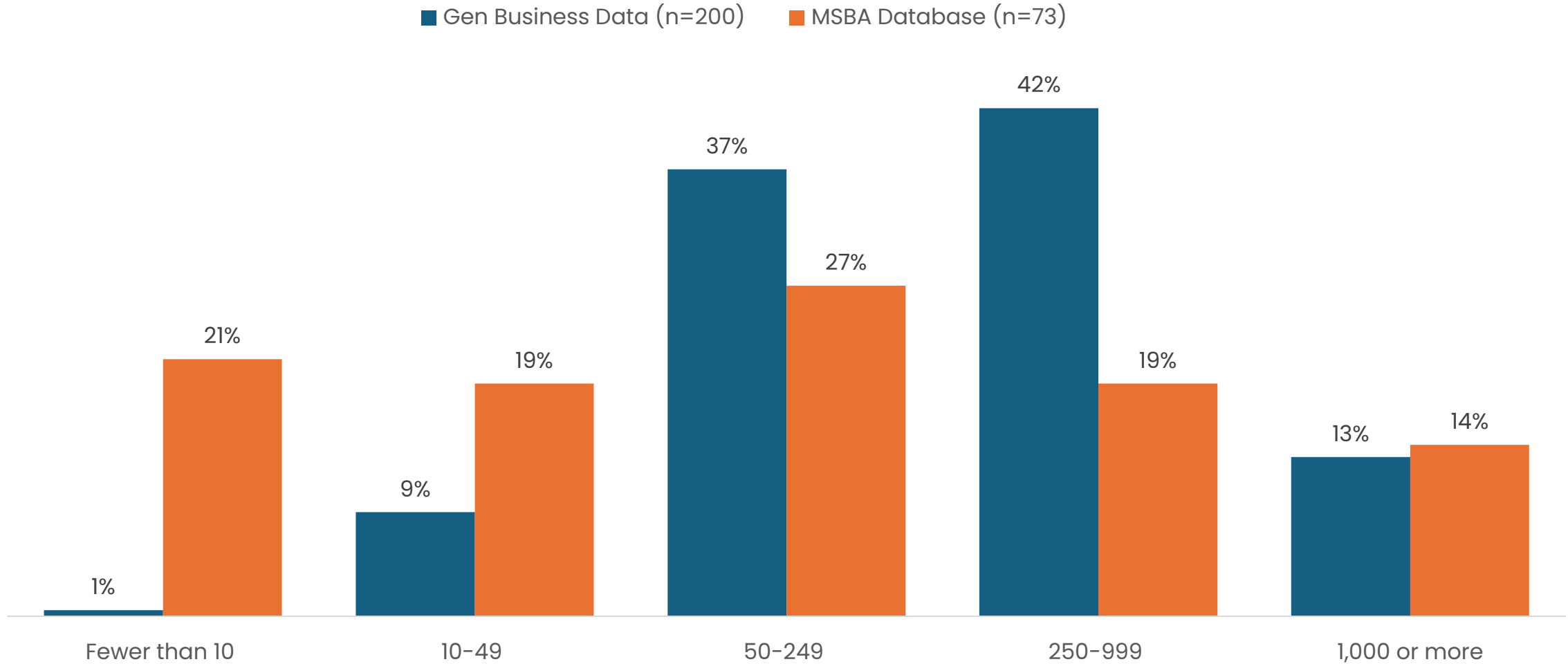
What are demographics of the samples?



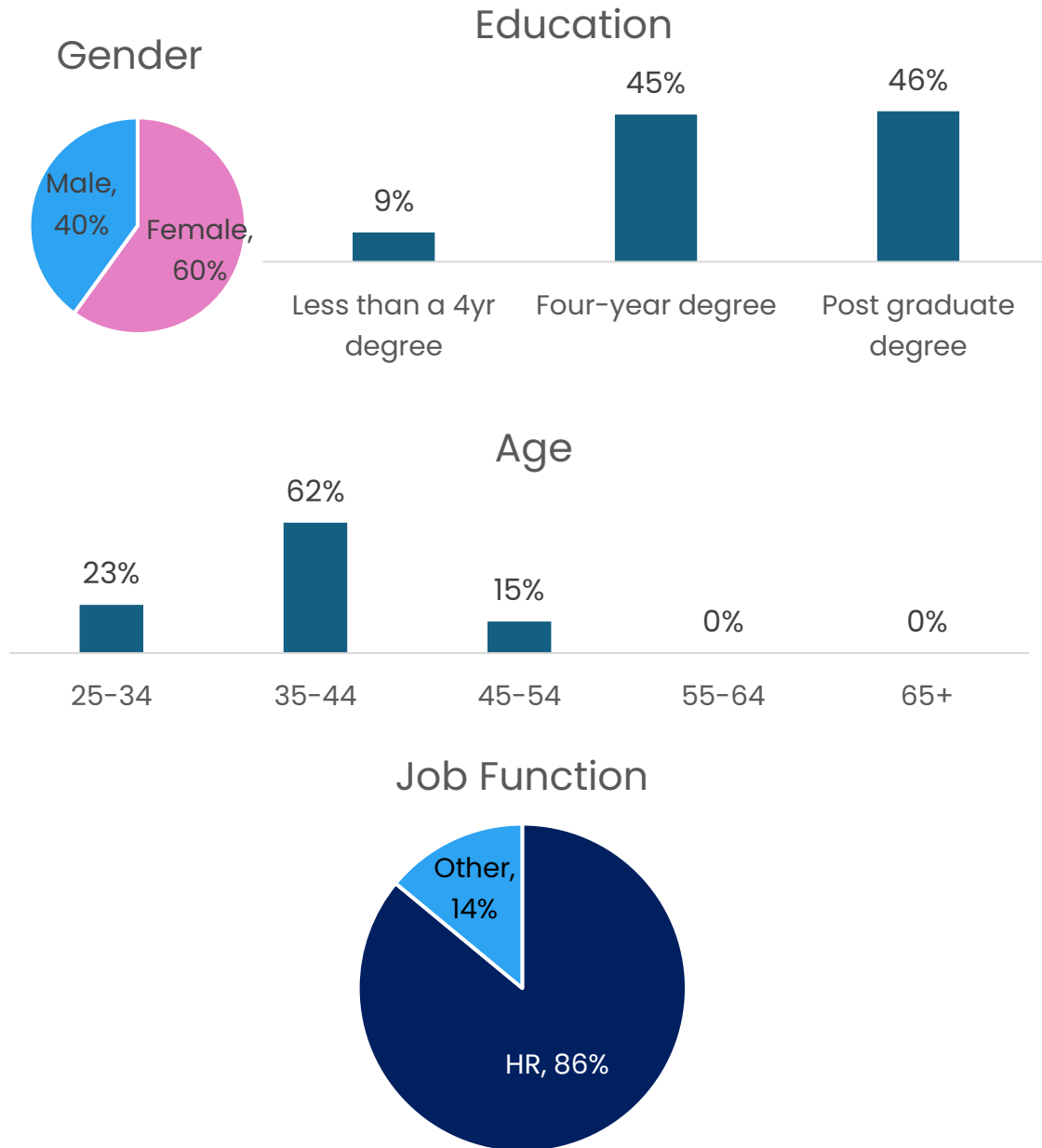
In what industry does your business operate? (Open-ended)



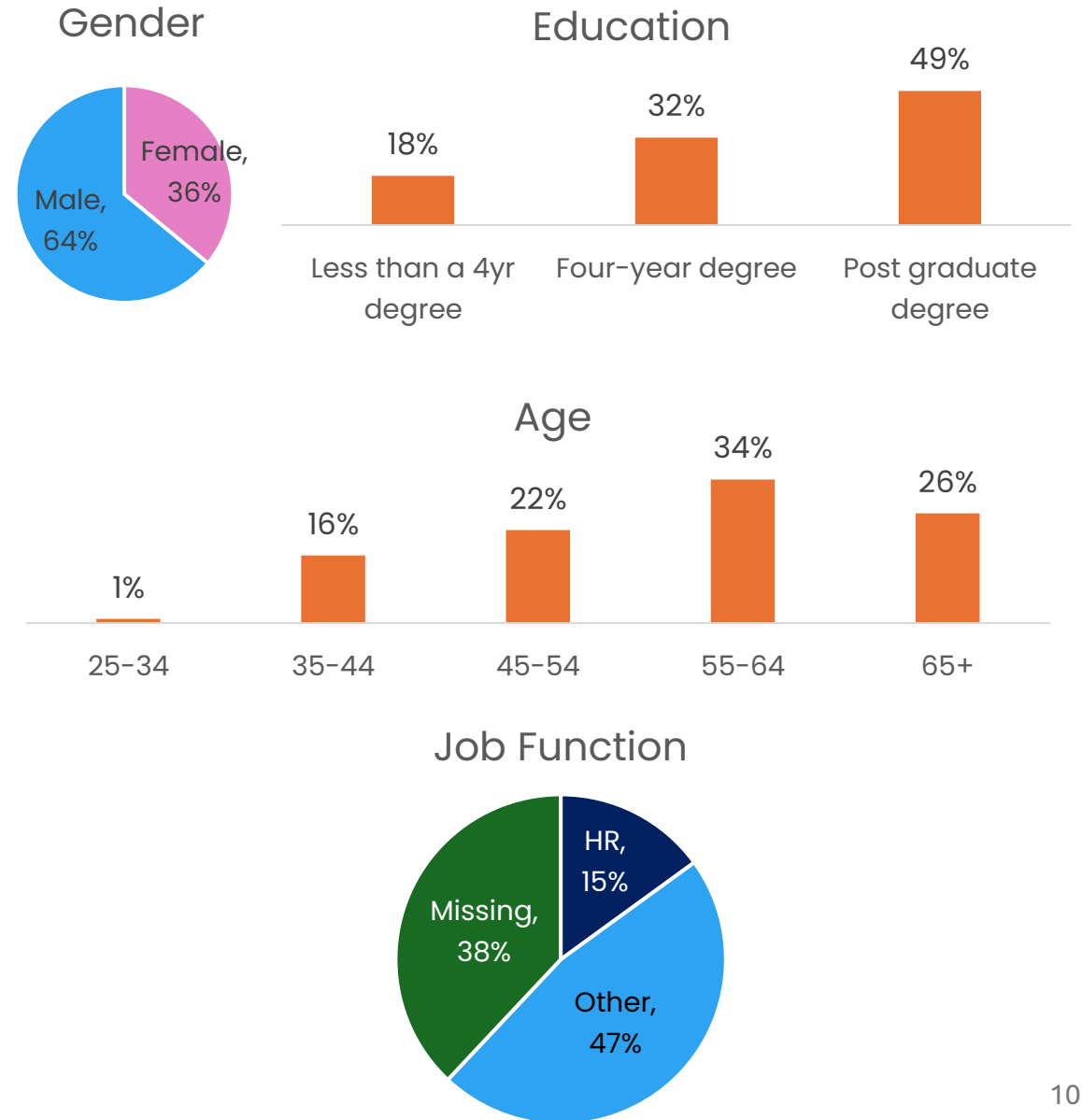
Approximately how many employees does your business have?



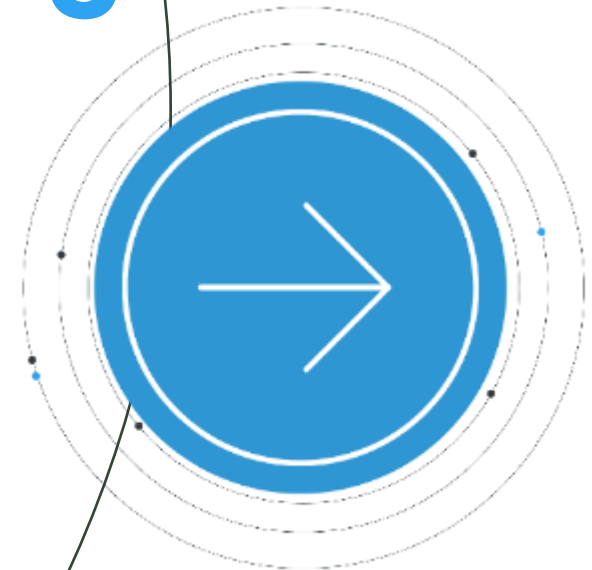
Gen Business Database (n=200)



MSBA Database (n=73)



**What are current policies
and history regarding hiring
formerly incarcerated
individuals?**

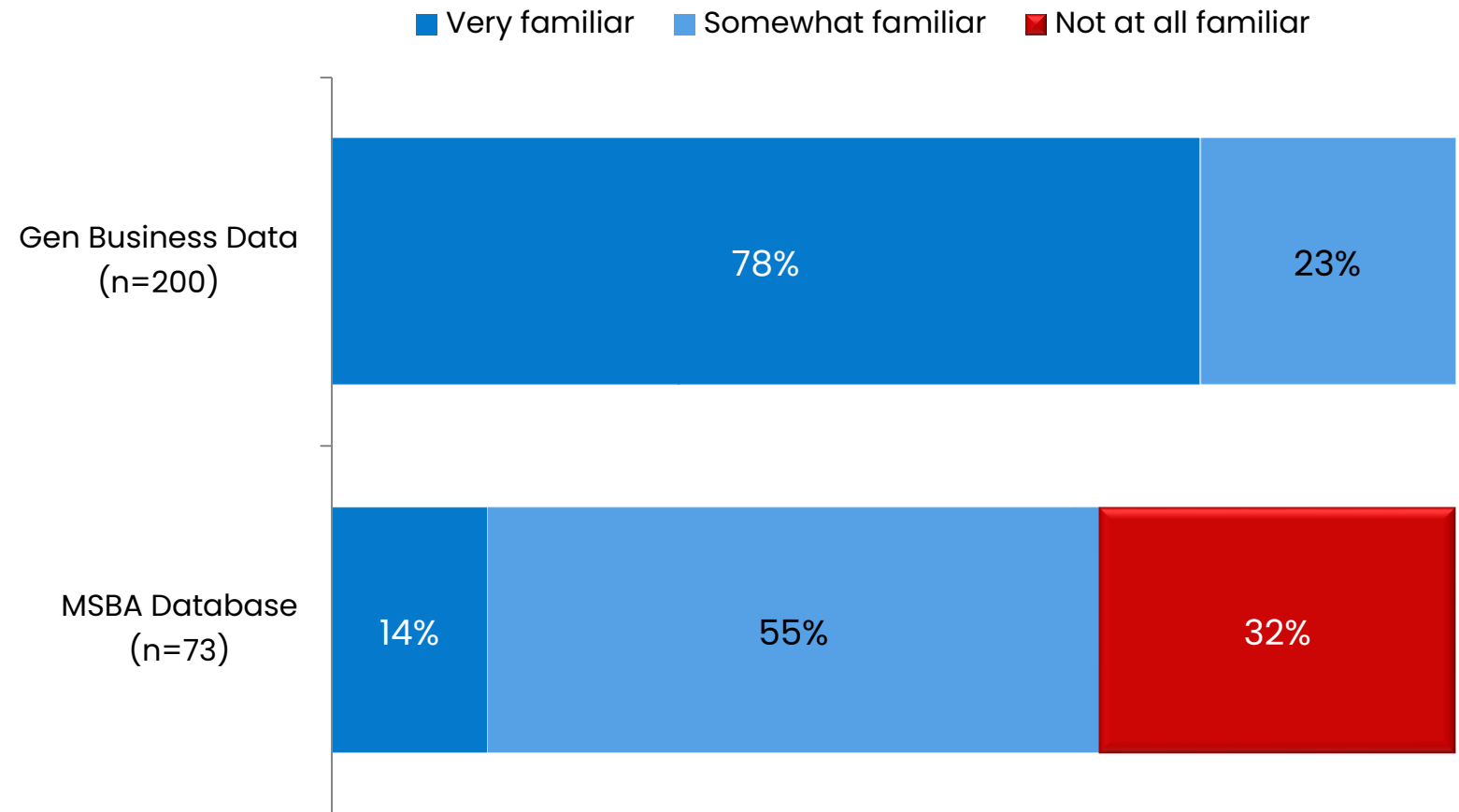




The Gen Business sample was much more familiar with programs that support formerly incarcerated individuals, with all respondents being at least somewhat familiar.

The MSBA sample was very different, with only 14% being very familiar with such programs, and nearly a third (32%) saying they were not at all familiar.

How familiar is your business with programs that support the reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals into the workforce?

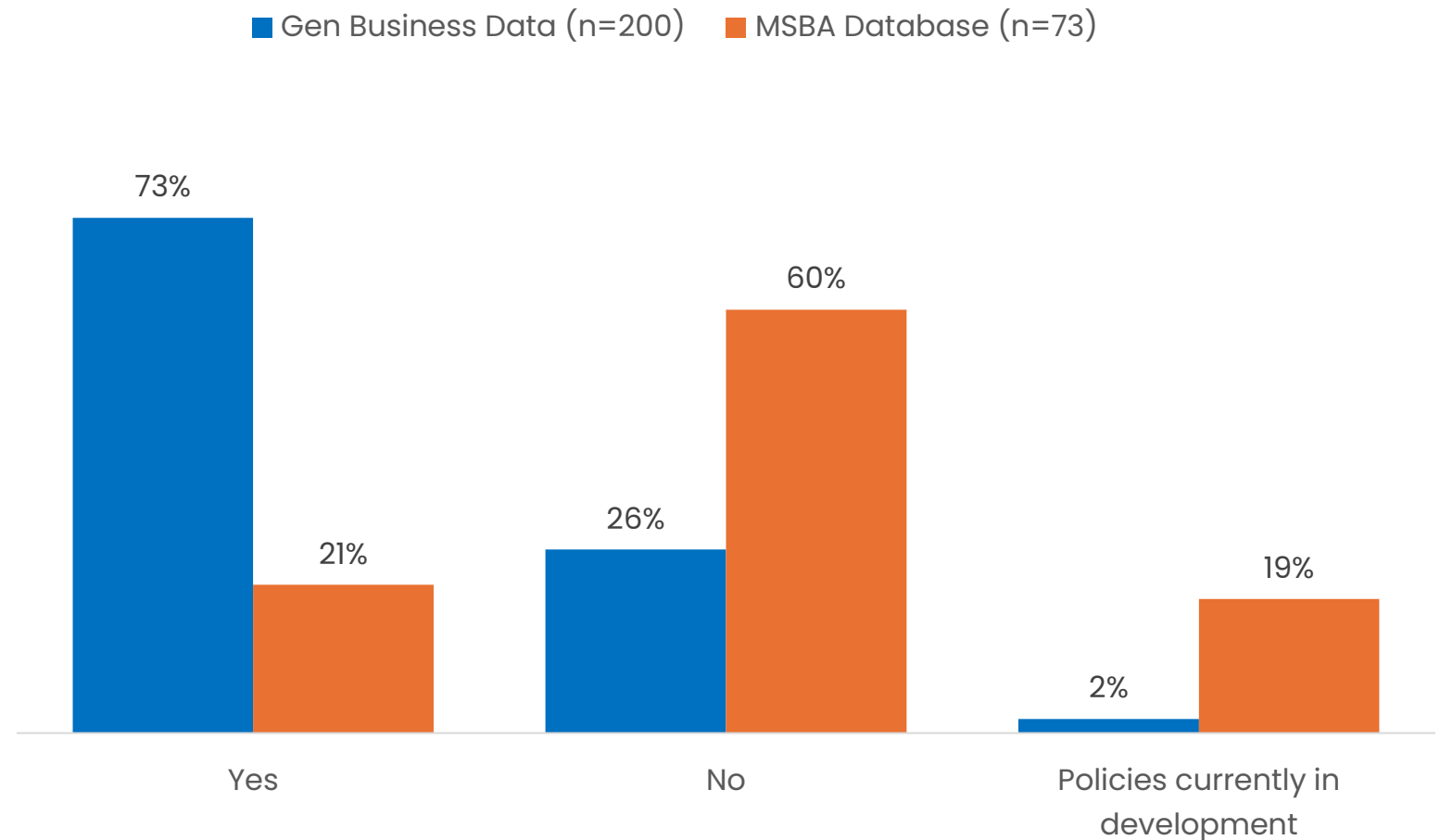




Respondents in the Gen Business sample also appear to work for businesses more likely to have policies already in place regarding the hiring of those with criminal records (73% currently have policies).

Three of every five (60%) MSBA respondents do NOT currently have policies in place at their organization, but 19% say such policies are in development.

Does your business have any current policies regarding the hiring of previously incarcerated individuals?

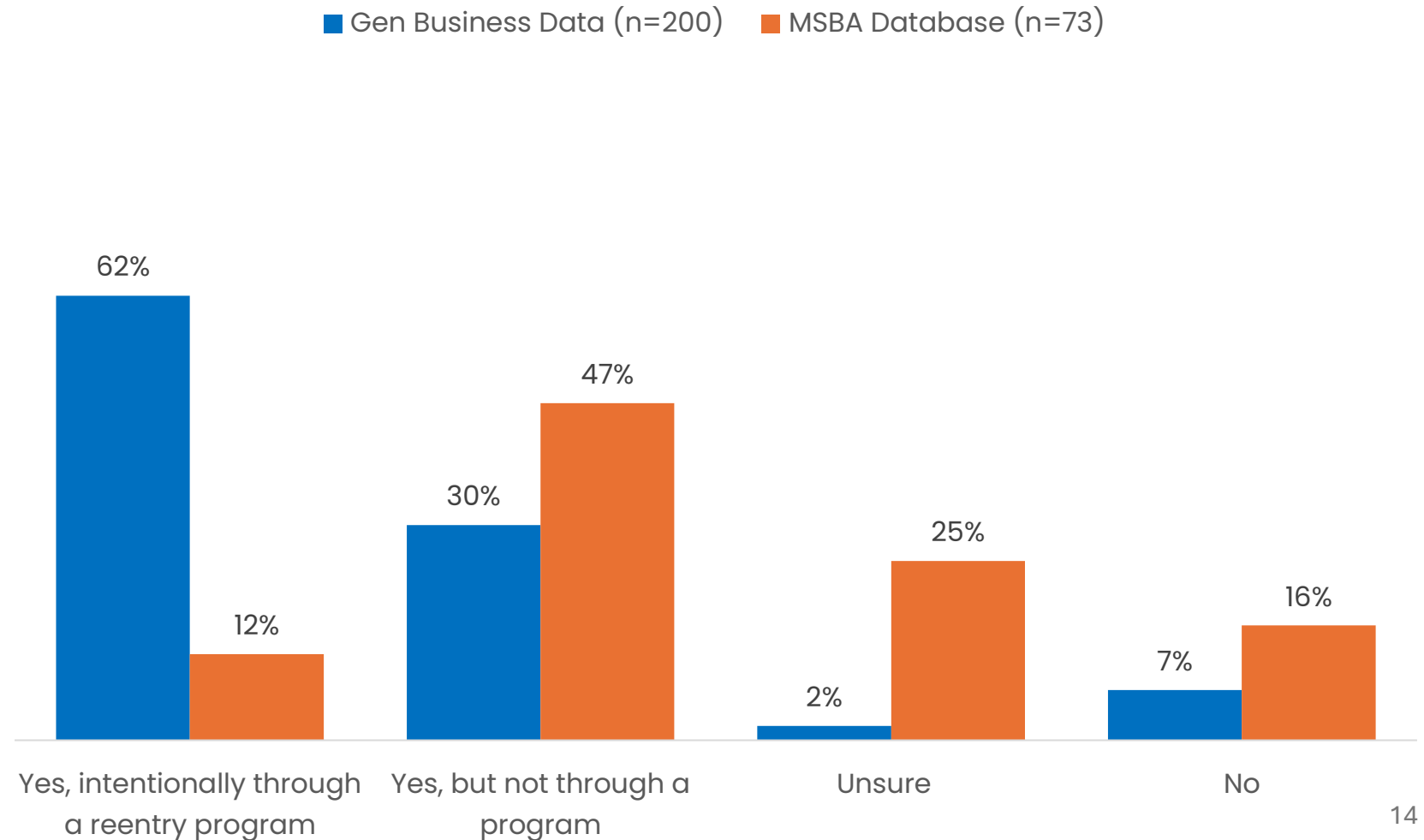




When rounded, 91% of the Gen Business sample have hired a formerly incarcerated individual, either through a reentry program (62%) or not through a program (30%).

A combined 59% of the MSBA sample know they have hired someone fitting that description, but a quarter (25%) are unsure.

Has your business ever hired a formerly incarcerated individual?

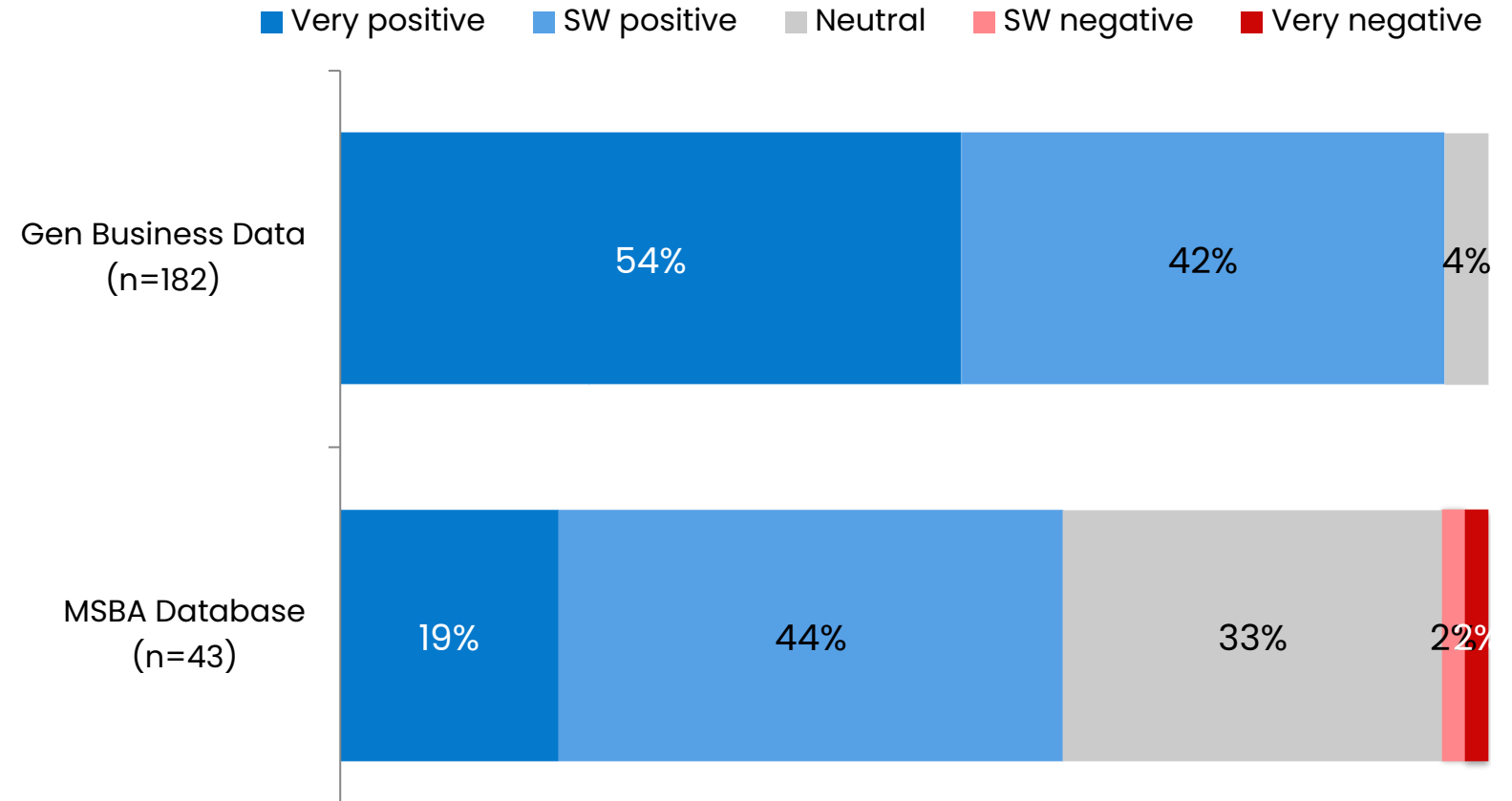




Of the 182 in the Gen Business sample who have hired a formerly incarcerated individual, 96% described the experience as either very (54%) or somewhat (42%) positive, with none describing it as negative.

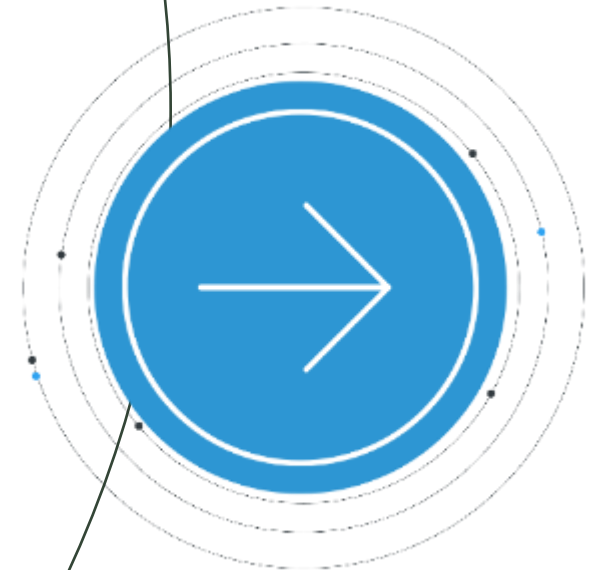
The MSBA sample respondents appear to have had different experiences, with 4% reporting negative experiences and 19% (35% fewer than the Gen Business sample) reporting very positive experiences.

[If yes] How would you describe the overall experience with these employees?



Only among businesses that hired a formerly incarcerated individual.

What is willingness to consider hiring formerly incarcerated individuals?

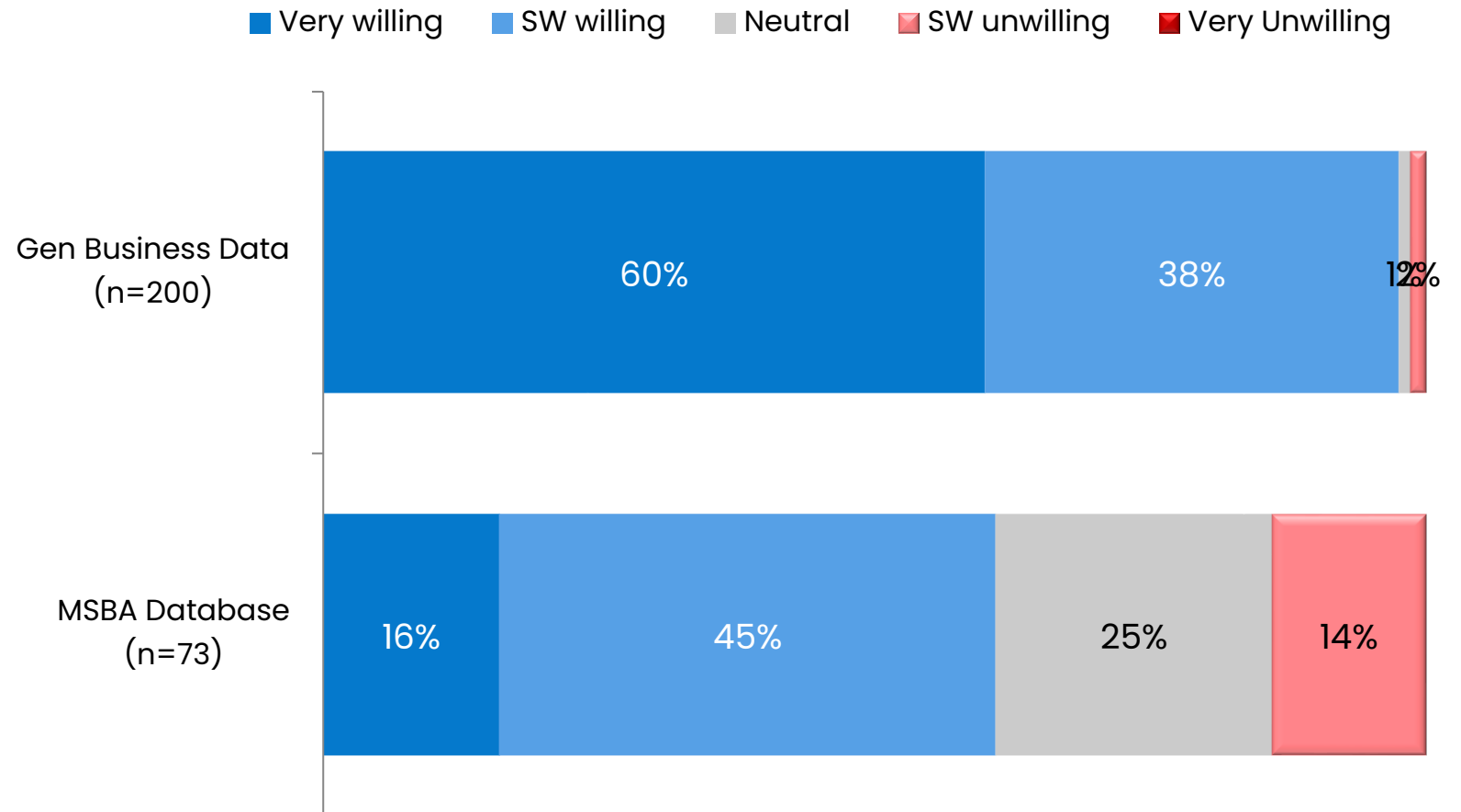




In the Gen Business sample, 98% are willing (60% very willing) to consider job applicants with criminal records.

The MSBA respondents are more hesitant, with only 16% claiming to be very willing. A full quarter (25%) is neutral.

In general, how open is your business to considering job applicants with prior criminal records?

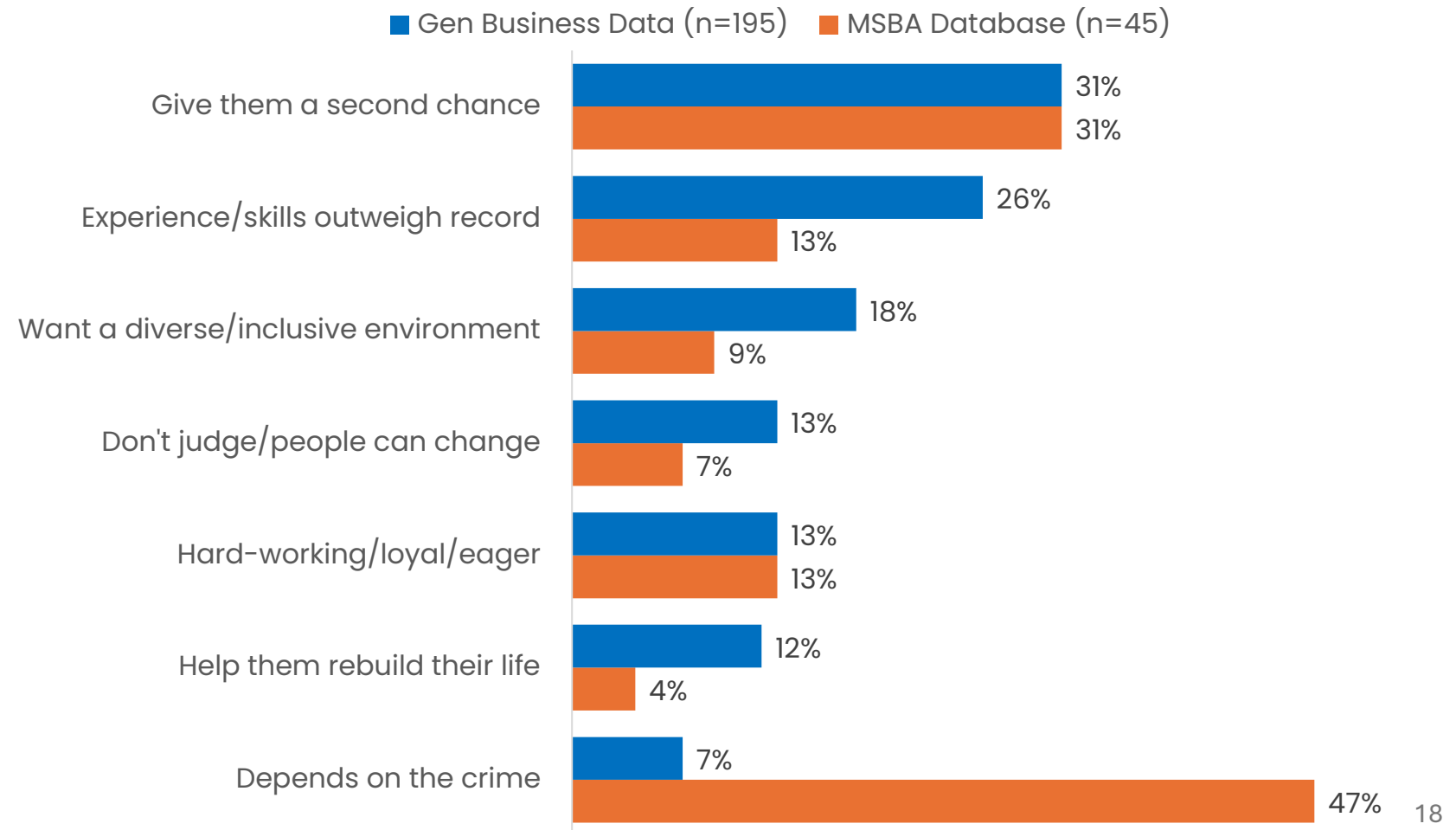




When asked reasons for considering applicants with criminal records, 31% of each sample said it is important to give people second chances.

However, the most-often cited reason in the MSBA sample was that the presence of a criminal record in general is not sufficient to disqualify an applicant; the individual crime must be considered (47%, compared to just 7% in the Gen Business sample).

Why is your business willing to consider applicants with prior criminal records? (Open-ended among those willing)





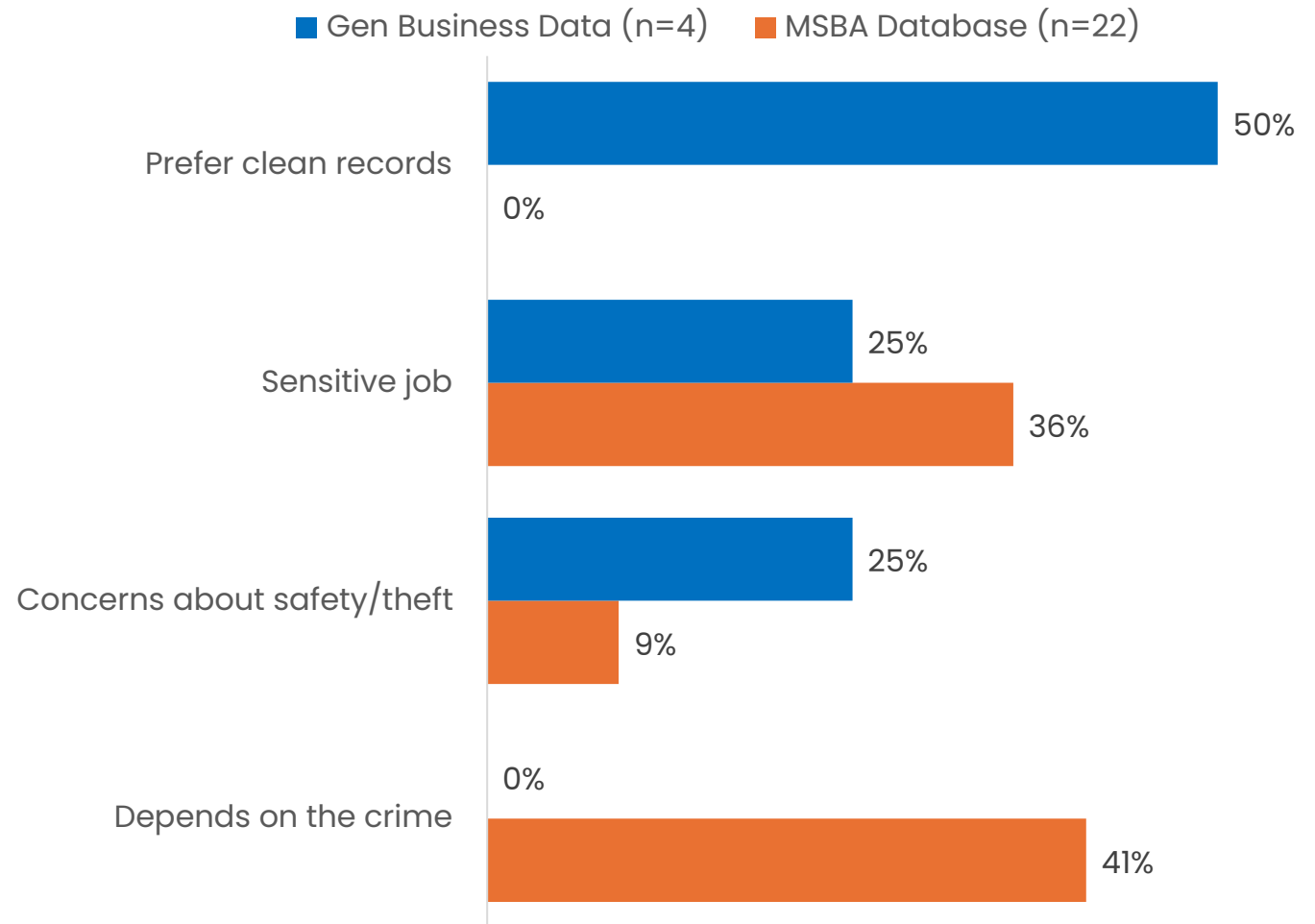
Among those less willing to consider applicants with criminal records (n=4 for Gen Business and n=22 for the MSBA Database):

Half of the Gen Business sample (50% or n=2) said they prefer applicants with a clear criminal history.

MSBA respondents who were less than willing to consider previously incarcerated applicants used the same reasoning as those who were willing, as 41% said it depends on the specific crime committed (none of the 4 in the Gen Business sample said this).

Those who responded “don’t know” were excluded.

Why is your business LESS than willing to consider applicants with prior criminal records? (Open-ended among those less than willing)

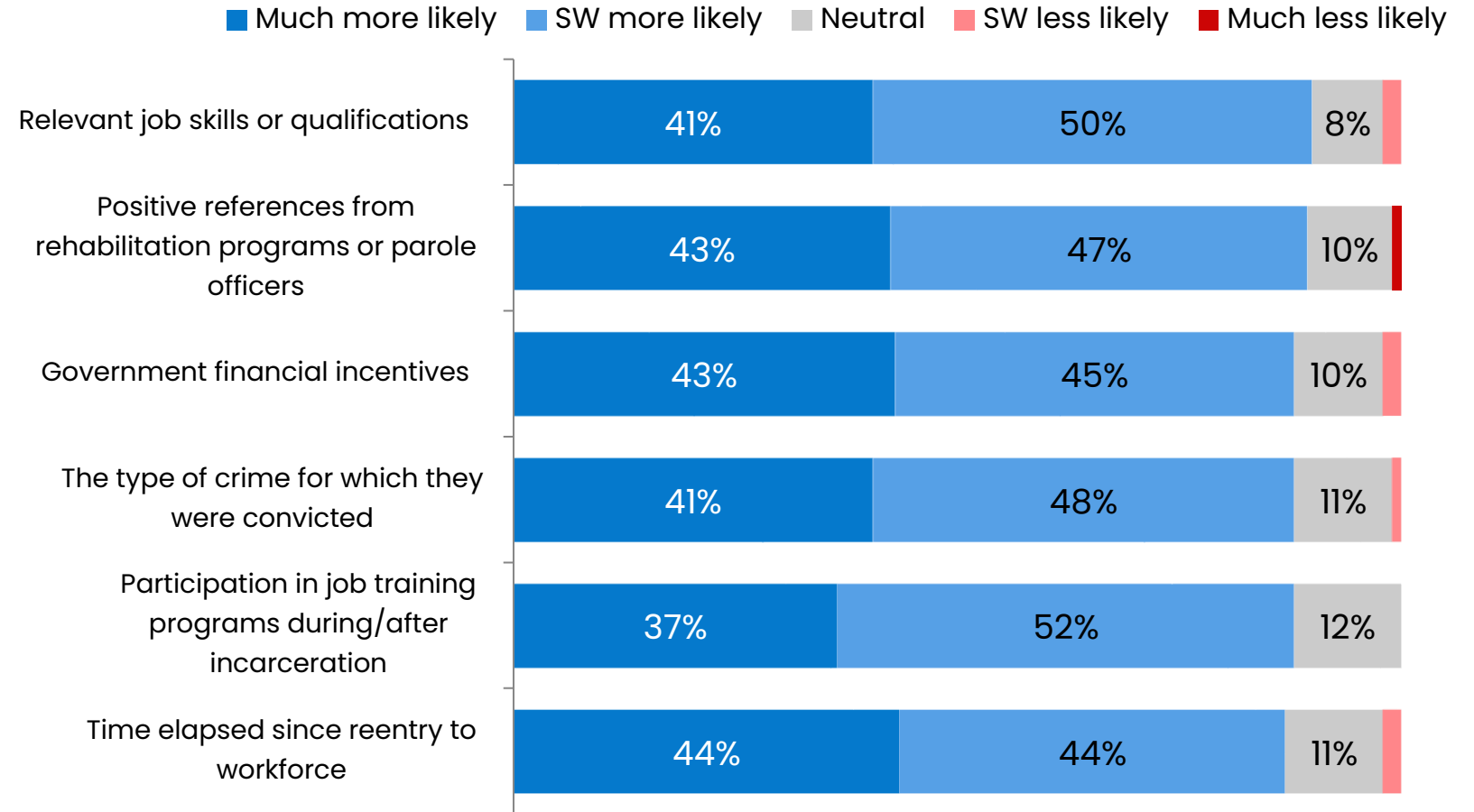




Among the Gen Business sample:

For all six factors, at least 89% said the factor makes them more likely (very or somewhat) to hire a formerly incarcerated individual.

Which of the following factors would make your business more likely to hire a formerly incarcerated individual? General Business Data (n=200)



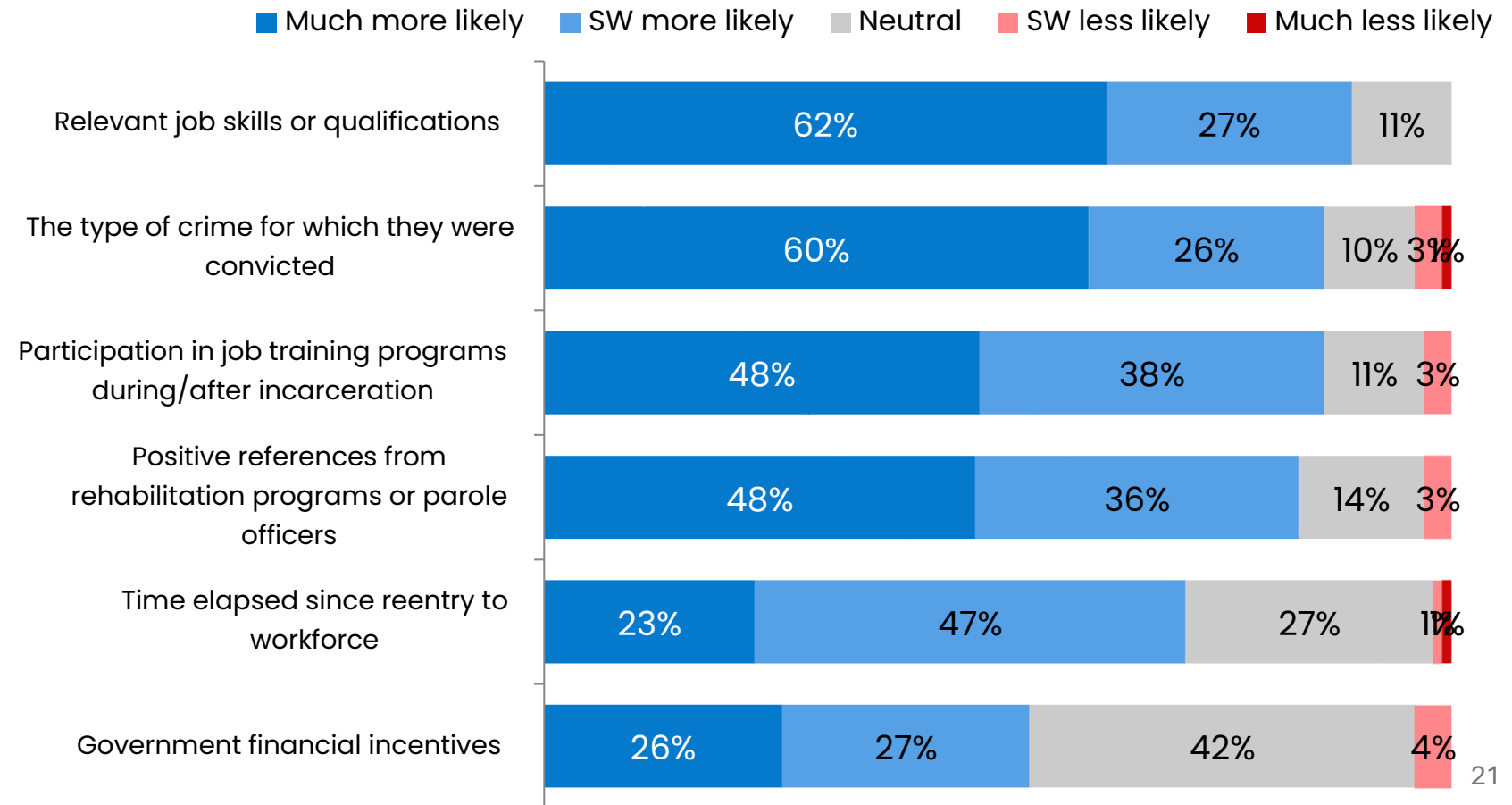


Within the MSBA sample, there was more variability:

At the low end, 53% said government financial incentives would make hiring an applicant with a criminal record more likely.

The most influential factor for this sample was the applicant possessing relevant skills or qualifications (89% said this made it more likely the business would hire the applicant).

Which of the following factors would make your business more likely to hire a formerly incarcerated individual? MSBA Database (n=73)

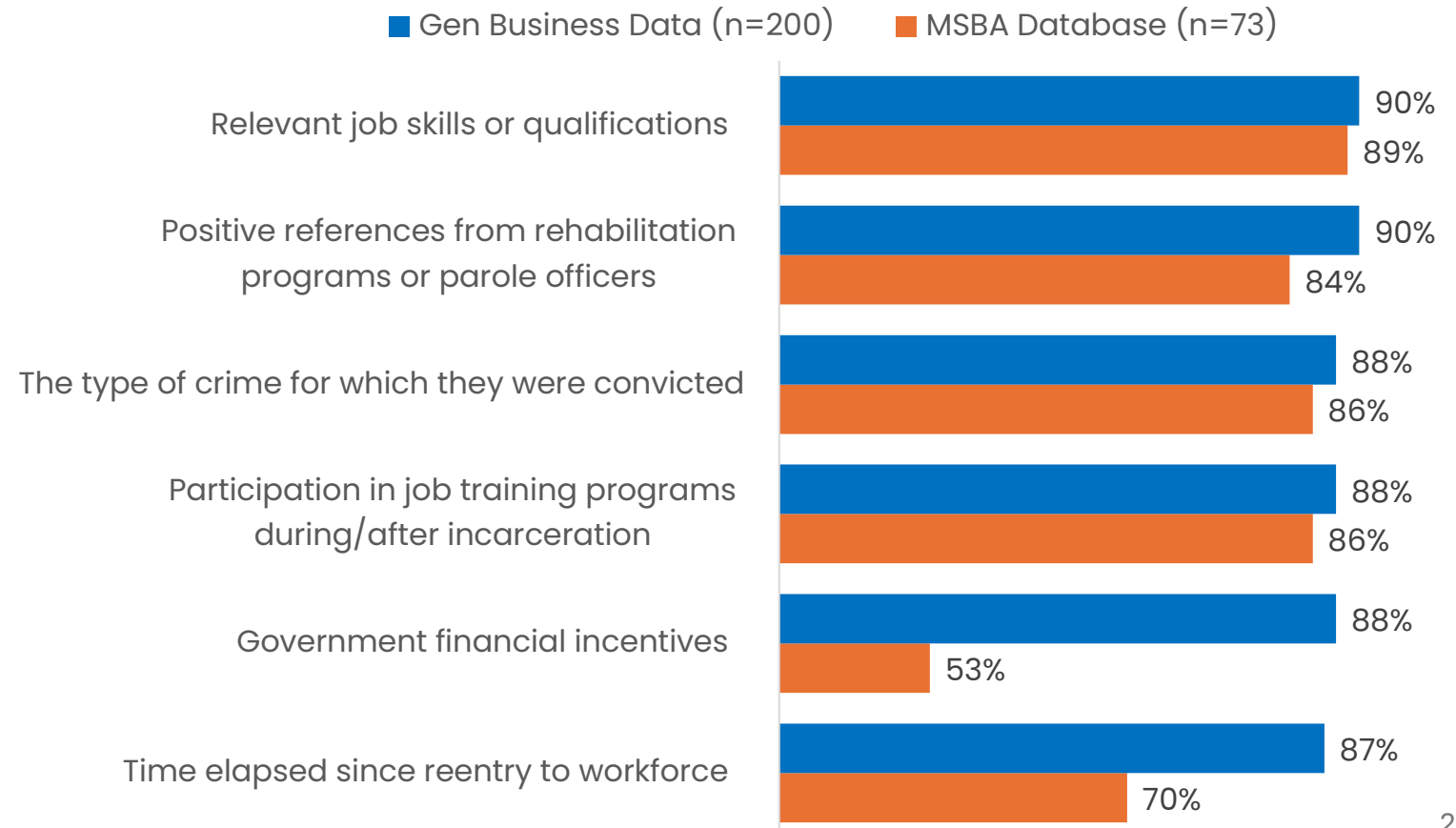




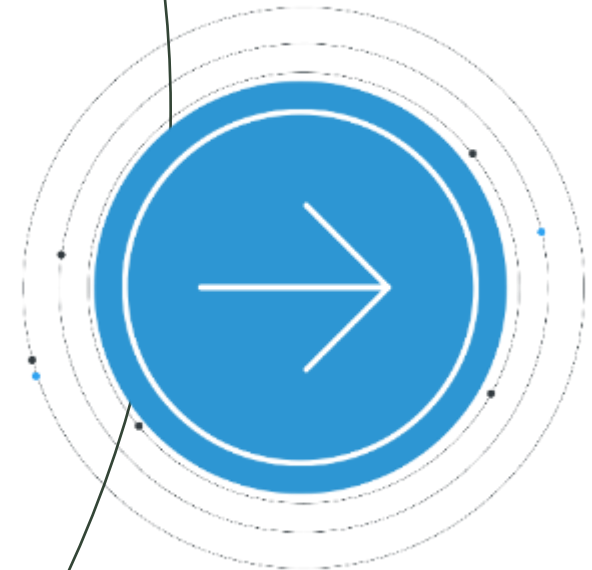
While the Gen Business sample consistently rated all 6 factors as likely to influence the hiring decision (ranging from 87%-90%), the MSBA sample was more varied (with a range of 53% to 89%).

Largest differences were with government incentives (88% for Gen Business and 53% for MSBA) and time since the applicant reentered the workforce (87% for Gen Business and 70% for MSBA).

Which of the following factors would make your business more likely to hire a formerly incarcerated individual? (% Much More AND SW More likely)



What are concerns regarding hiring formerly incarcerated individuals?

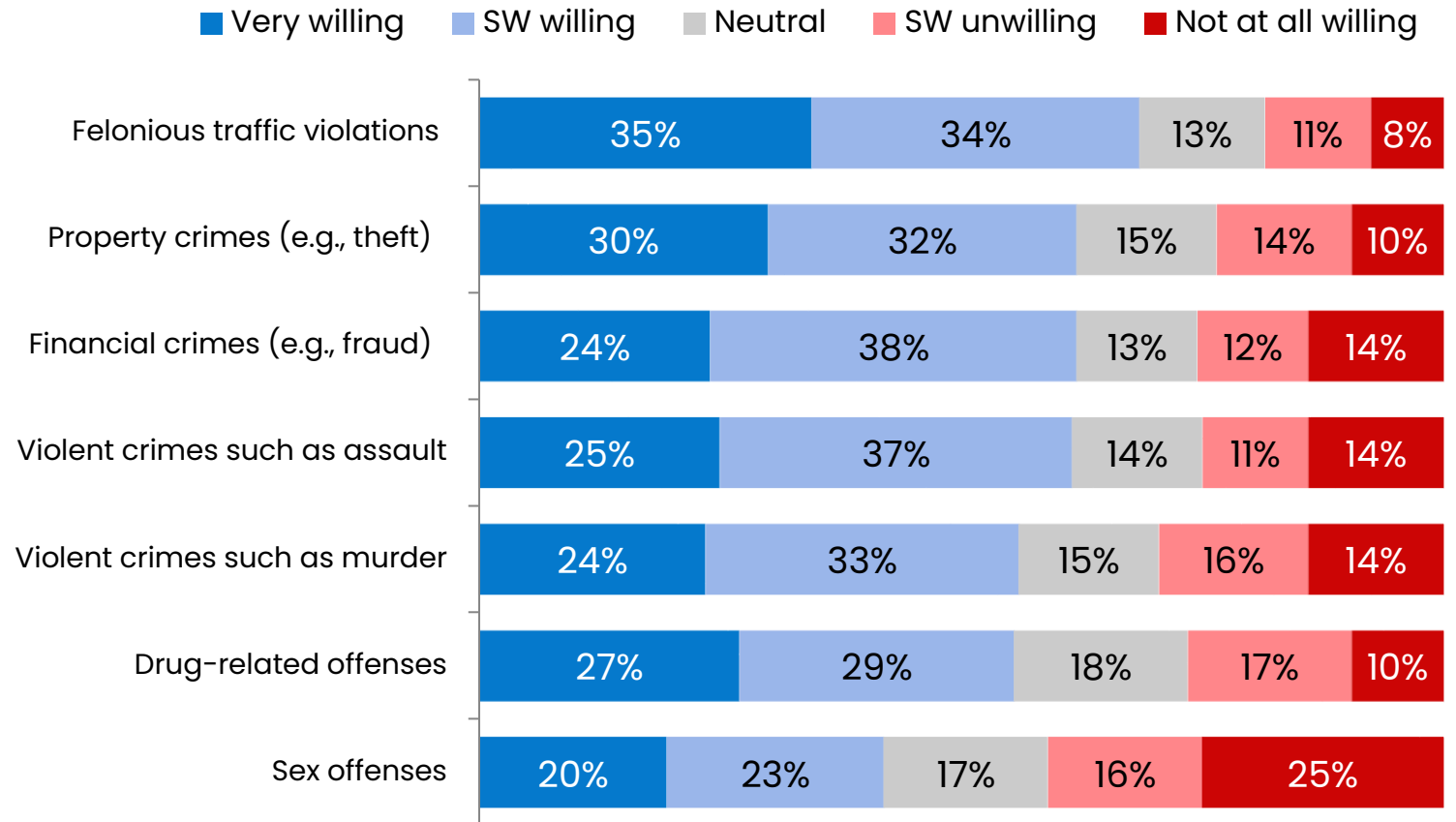


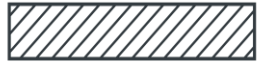


In the Gen Business sample, a combined 42% when rounded were willing to hire those formerly incarcerated for sex offenses, while 25% were not at all willing, making it the offense the most detrimental to hiring.

Conversely, 69% were willing to hire those formerly incarcerated for felonious traffic violations, while 8% were not at all willing, making it the least detrimental.

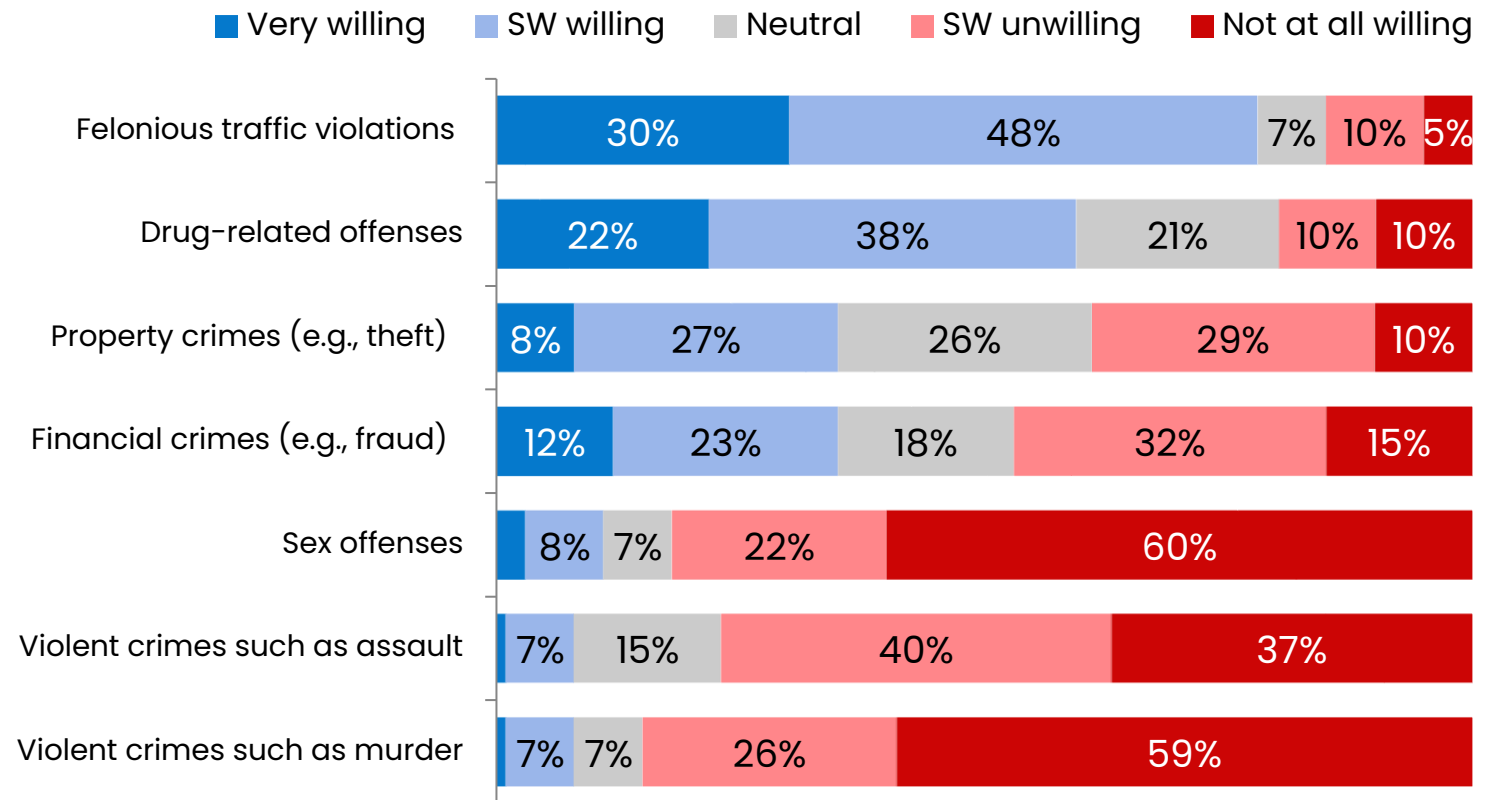
How willing would your company be to hire someone convicted in the following categories? General Business Data (n=200)





The MSBA sample was much more conservative in their consideration of past crimes. Sex offenses made 60% of the sample not at all willing to hire an applicant, while violent crimes like murder made 59% not at all willing. Those two crimes also had the lowest percentages of those willing to hire (11% willing for sex offenses, 8% willing for violent crime [both murder and assault]).

How willing would your company be to hire someone convicted in the following categories? MSBA Database (n=73)

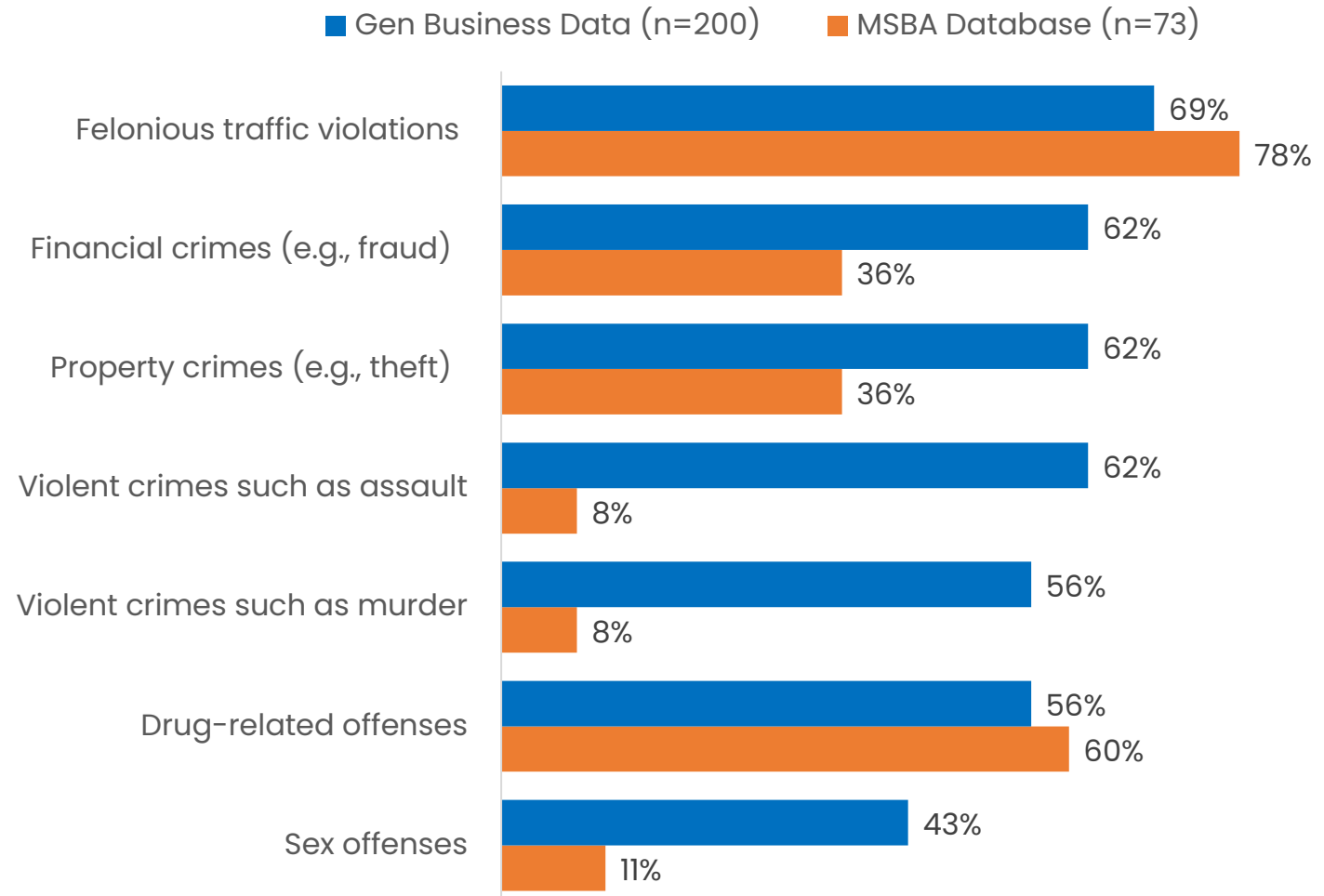




Though both samples had similar sentiments toward hiring applicants convicted of drug-related offenses (56% willing in the Gen Business sample and 60% willing in the MSBA sample), the Gen Business respondents were overall more willing to hire anyone with a criminal record.

The average willingness (excluding drug-related offenses) was 59% willing for the Gen Business sample and 21% for the MSBA sample.

How willing would your company be to hire someone convicted in the following categories? (% Very AND SW willing)

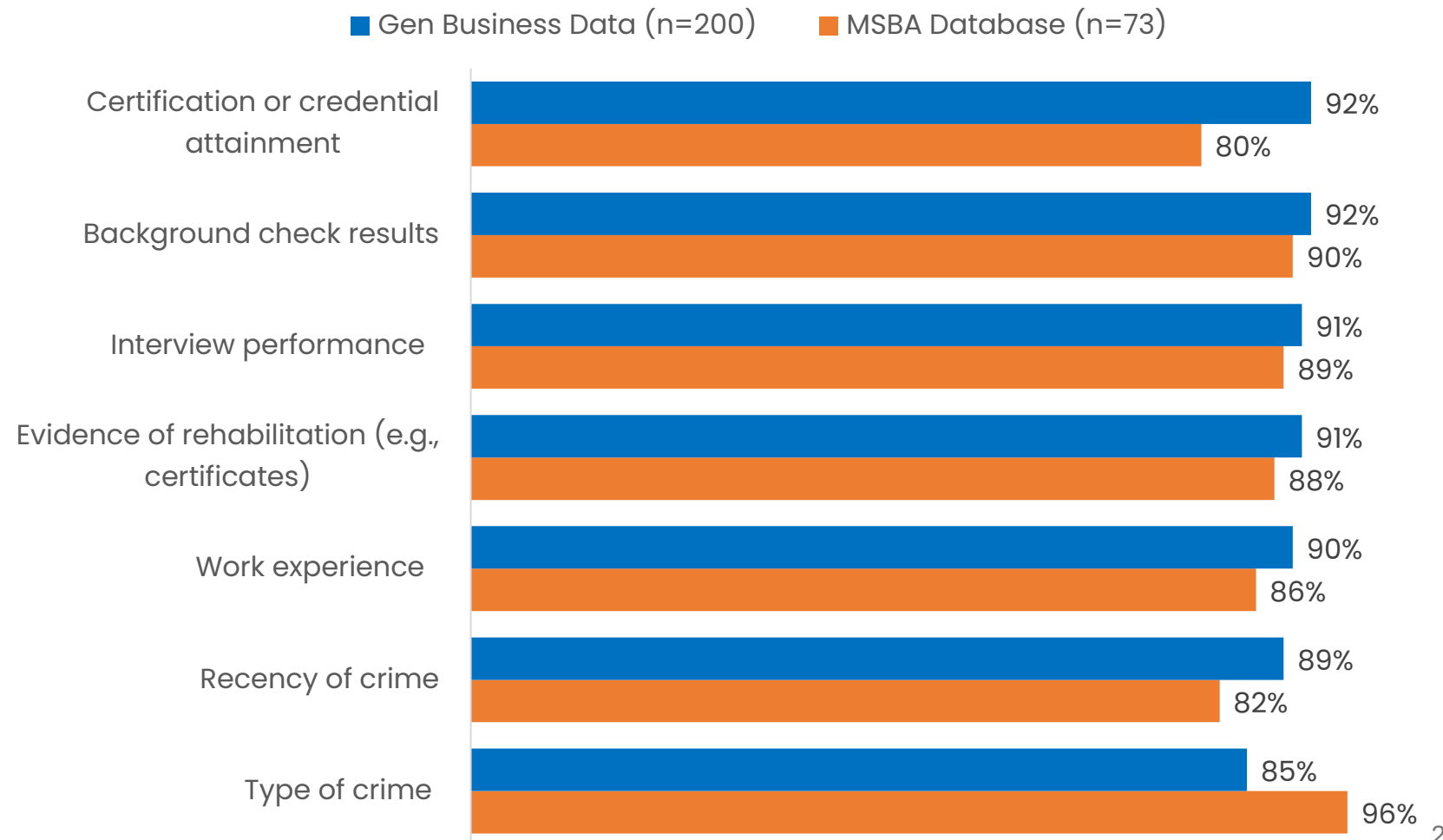




Across both samples, all factors were rated at least somewhat important by a minimum of 80% of the respondents.

However, the most important factor for the MSBA sample was the type of crime (96%), while for the Gen Business sample, it was certification or credential attainment (92%).

How important are the following in the decision to hire someone with a criminal record? (% Very AND SW important)

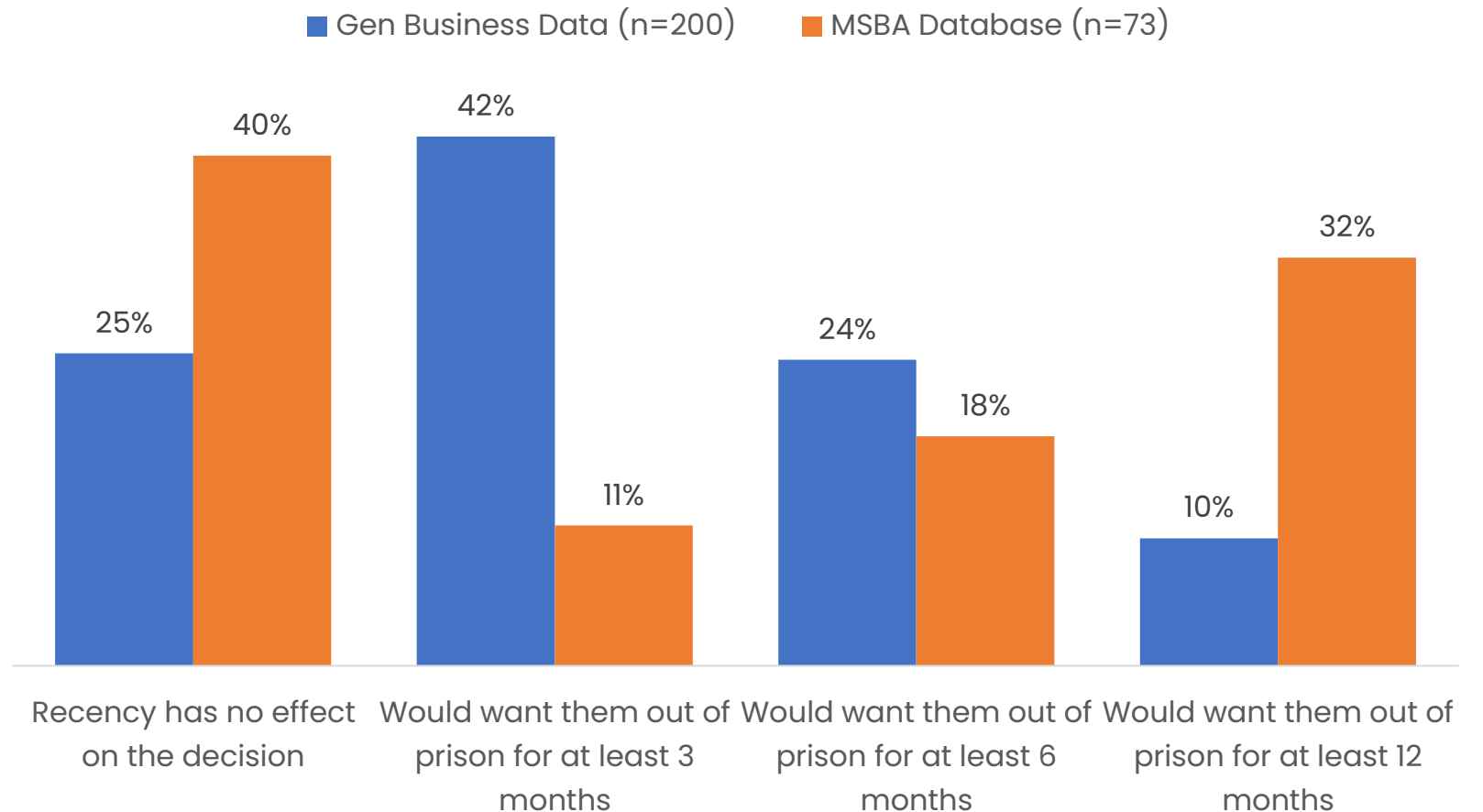




Reinforcing the theme that the type of crime matters more to the MSBA sample is that 40% reported that the recency of the offense has no effect on the hiring decision (25% among the Gen Business sample).

Conversely, the Gen Business sample would prefer the applicant to have been out of prison for at least 3 months (42%, compared to 11% for the MSBA sample).

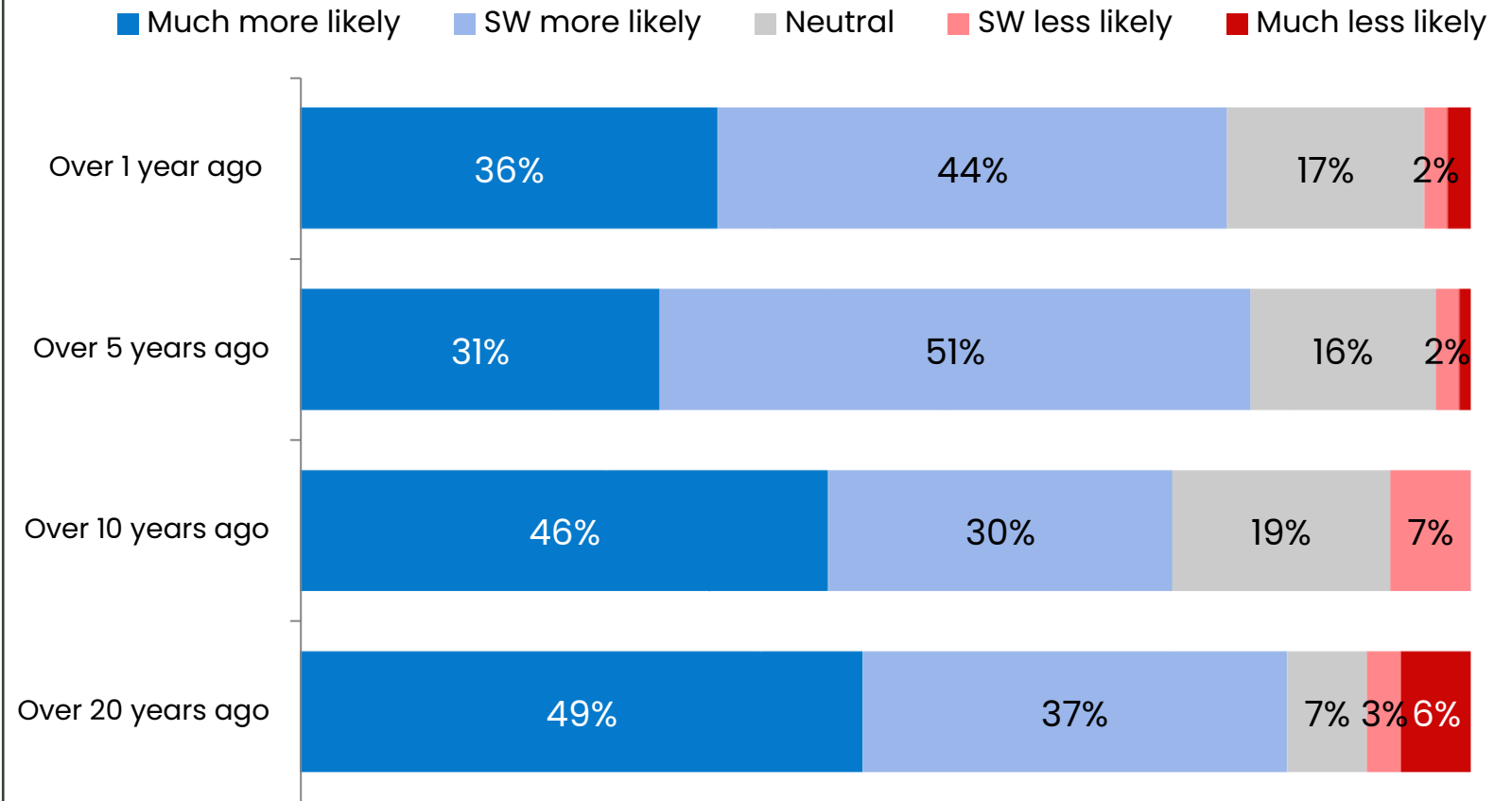
How does the recency of the incarceration affect willingness to hire someone convicted of a crime?





Nearly half in the Gen Business sample were much more likely to hire someone convicted of a crime over 20 years ago (49%) or over 10 years ago (46%), compared to 31% for over 5 years ago and 36% over a year ago.

If a person was convicted of a crime X years ago, does it make your company more or less likely to hire the person? General Business Data (n=200)

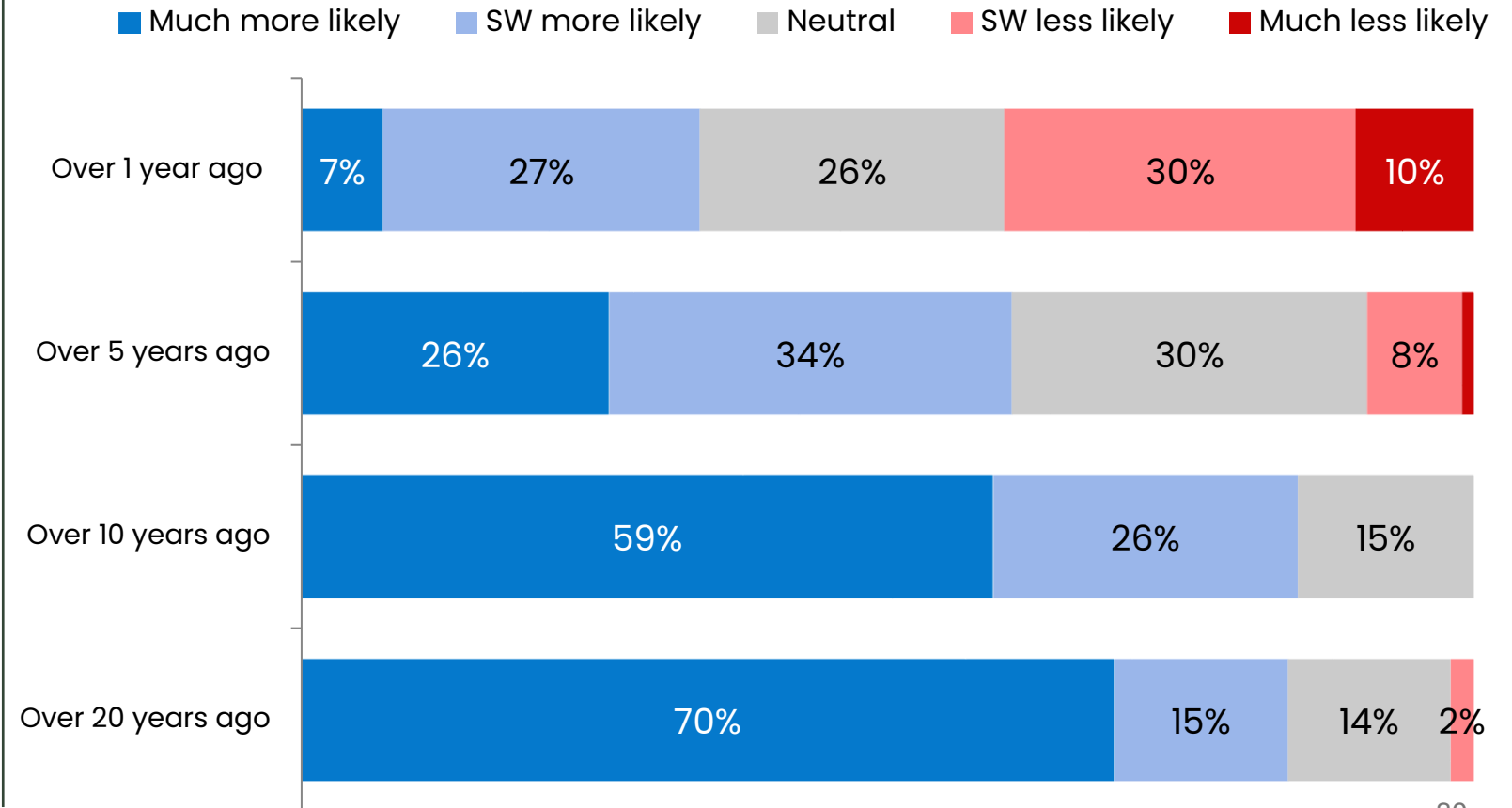




Recency of the conviction appears to be more important to the MSBA respondents than those in the Gen Business sample

70% in the MSBA sample were much more likely to hire someone convicted more than two decades ago, but that number decreases steadily as the time elapsed shortens (at one year elapsed, only 7% of the MSBA sample are much more likely to hire a person convicted of a crime).

If a person was convicted of a crime X years ago, does it make your company more or less likely to hire the person? MSBA Database (n=73)

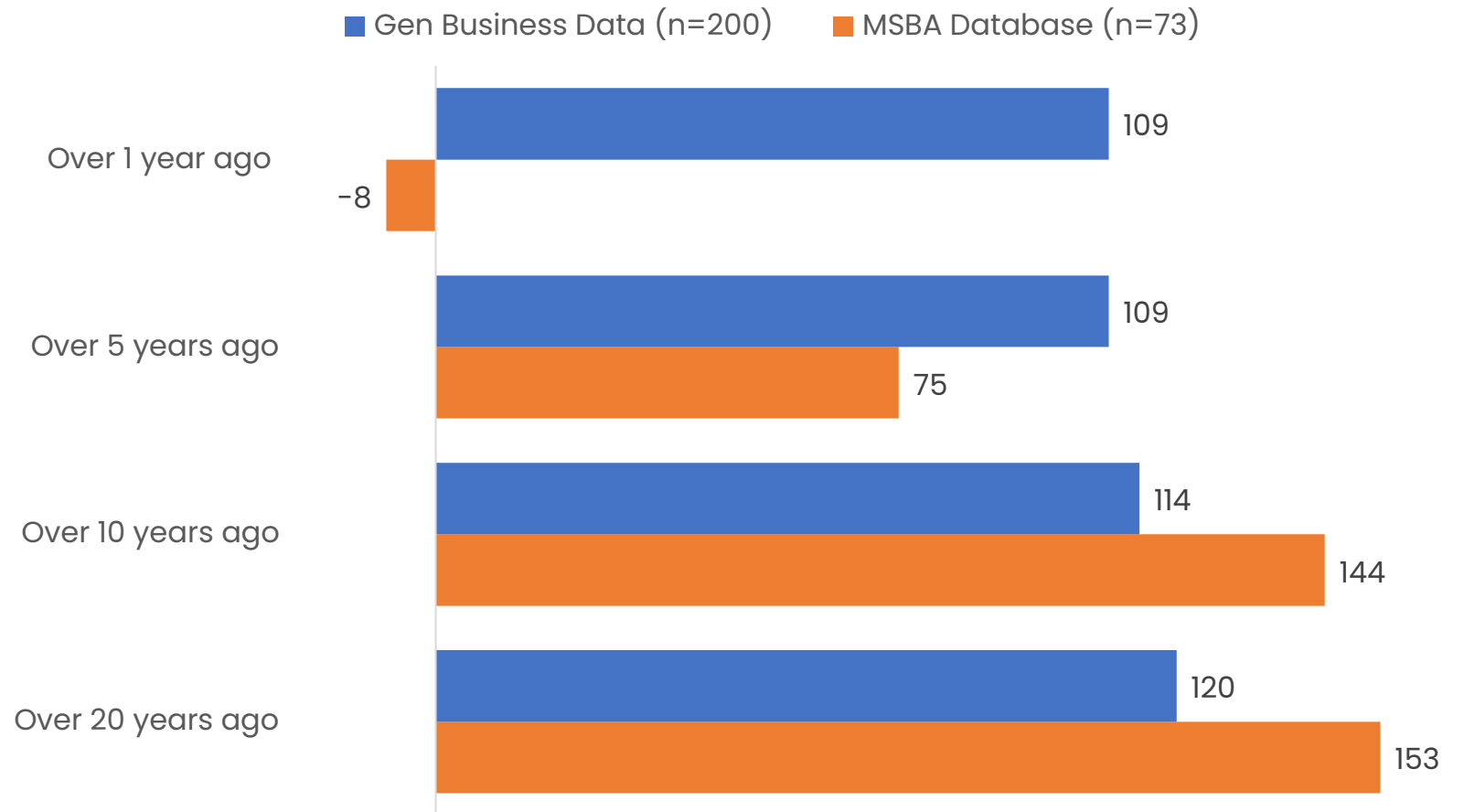




Among the Gen Business sample, willingness to hire an applicant with a record is high, regardless of time since conviction.

For the MSBA sample, the swing between 10-20 years ago and 1-5 years ago is dramatic.

If a person was convicted of a crime X years ago, does it make your company more or less likely to hire the person? (*By scale)



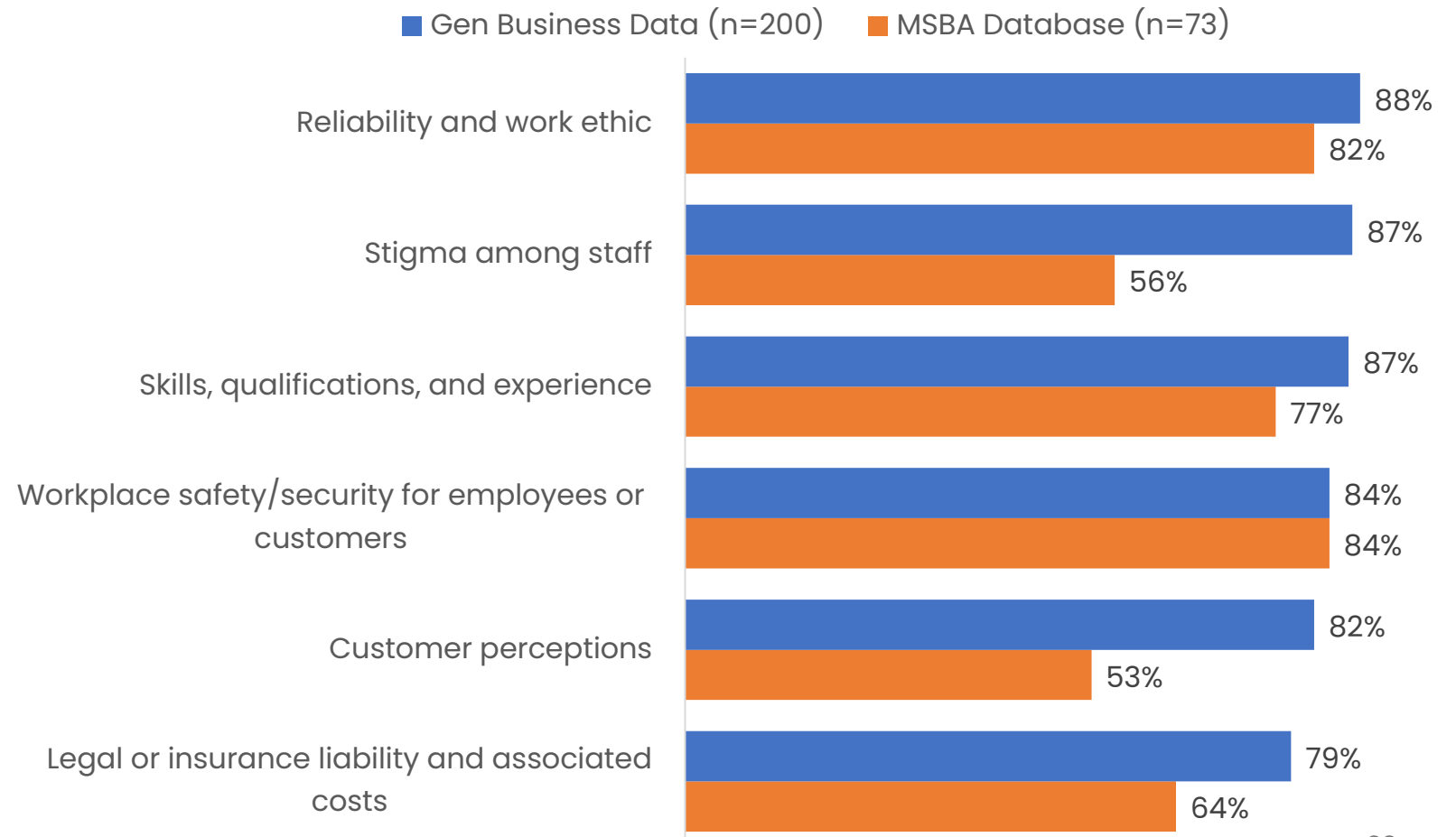
*The scale is calculated as follows: The percentage much more likely is multiplied by +2, SW more likely by +1, Neutral by 0, SW less likely by -1 and much less likely by -2. Once calculated, the numbers are added for the totals.

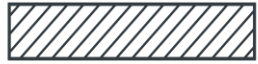


Among the Gen Business sample, all six factors listed were a concern to at least 79% (for legal or insurance liability), with a high 88% saying reliability and work ethic is a concern.

Respondents from the MSBA Database rated customer perceptions as least concerning (53%) and workplace safety as the most concerning (84%).

What concerns, if any, prevent businesses from hiring a formerly incarcerated individual? (% Significant AND Some concern)

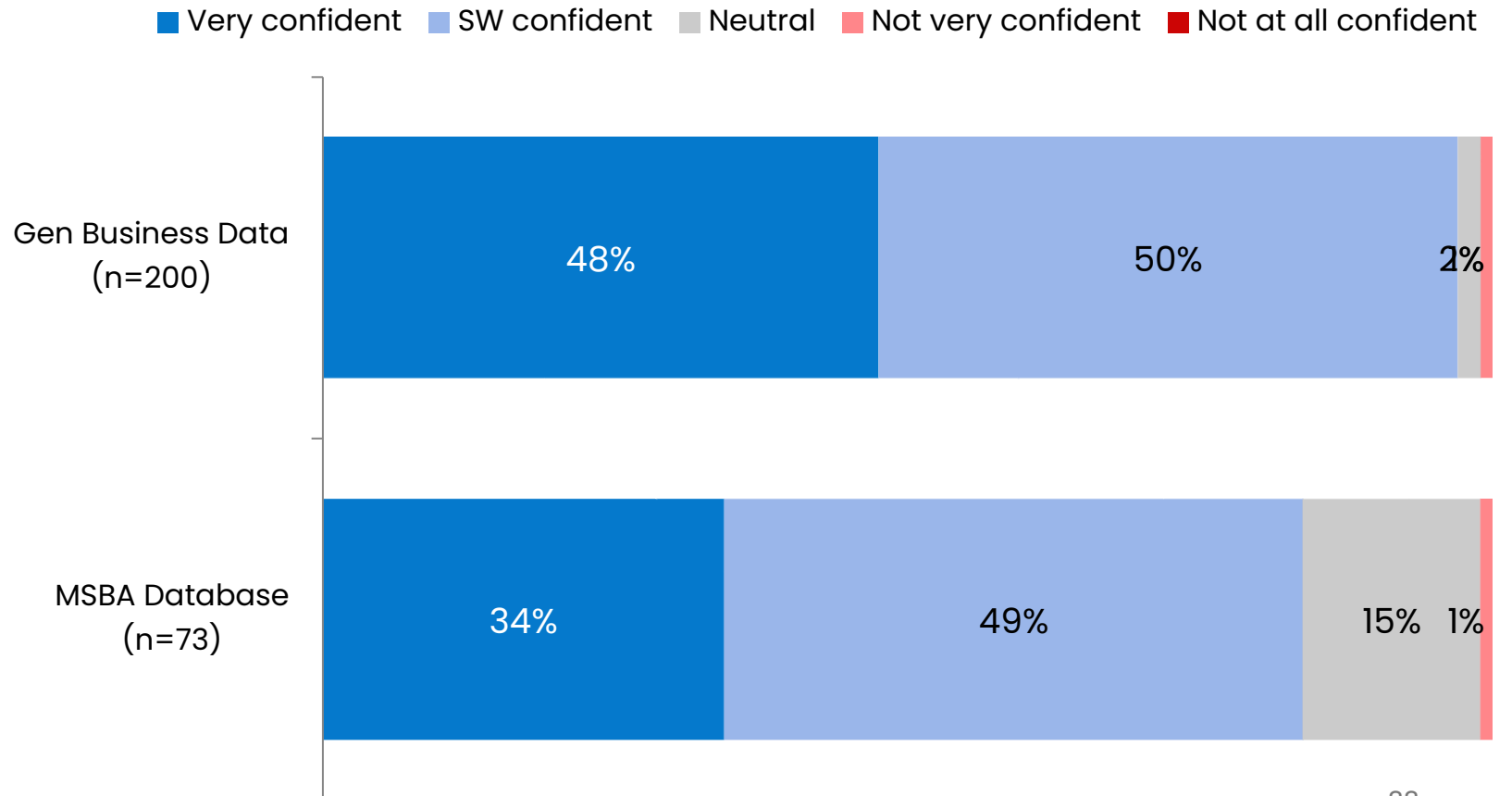




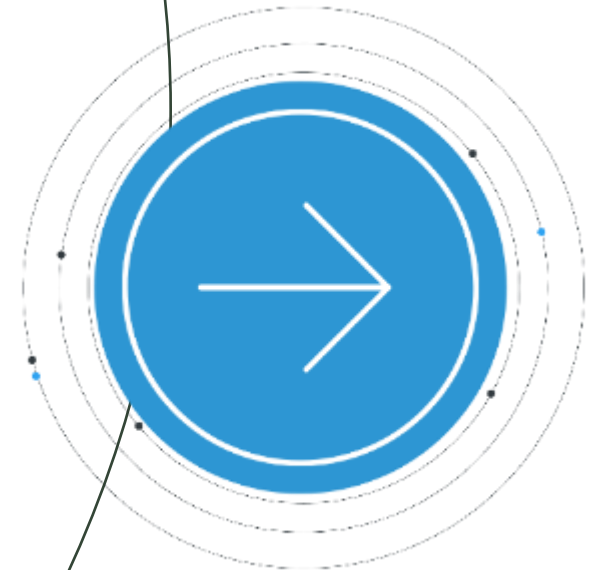
Nearly all (98%) in the Gen Business sample were very (48%) or somewhat (50%) confident their business could provide a generally accepting and supportive workplace environment.

83% of MSBA respondents were at least somewhat confident, while 15% were neutral.

How confident is your business that they could provide a generally accepting and supportive workplace environment for someone reentering society after incarceration?



Could resources or support influence the hiring of formerly incarcerated individuals?

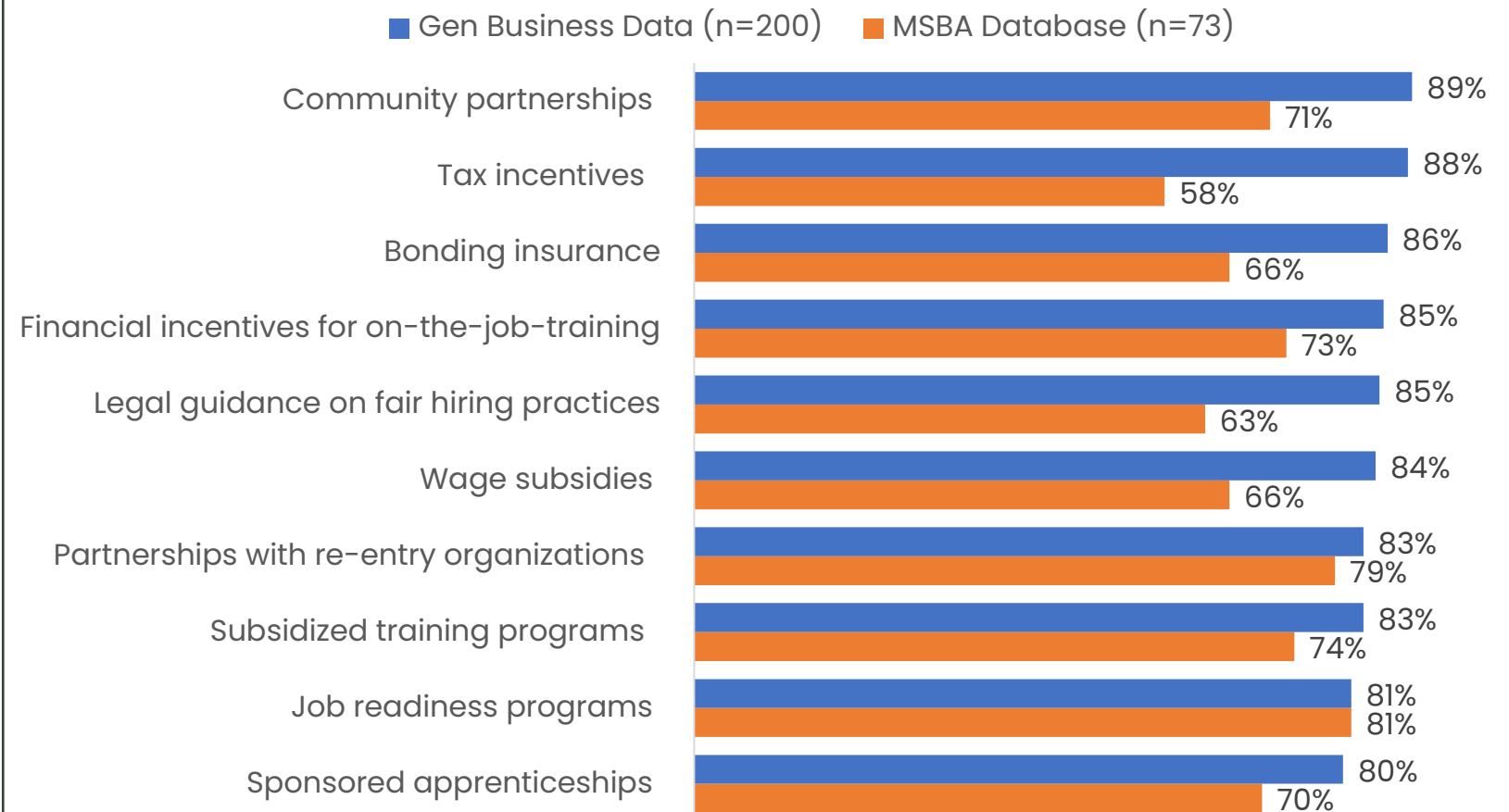




In the Gen Business sample, at least 80% said all the resources offered would influence willingness to hire formerly incarcerated individuals, with community partnerships (89%) and tax incentives (88%) being the most influential.

MSBA respondents were less influenced by resources overall, but rated job readiness programs as most influential (81%). Tax incentives were the least influential, at 58%.

Would access to the following resources increase willingness to hire formerly incarcerated individuals? (% Very AND Somewhat influential)

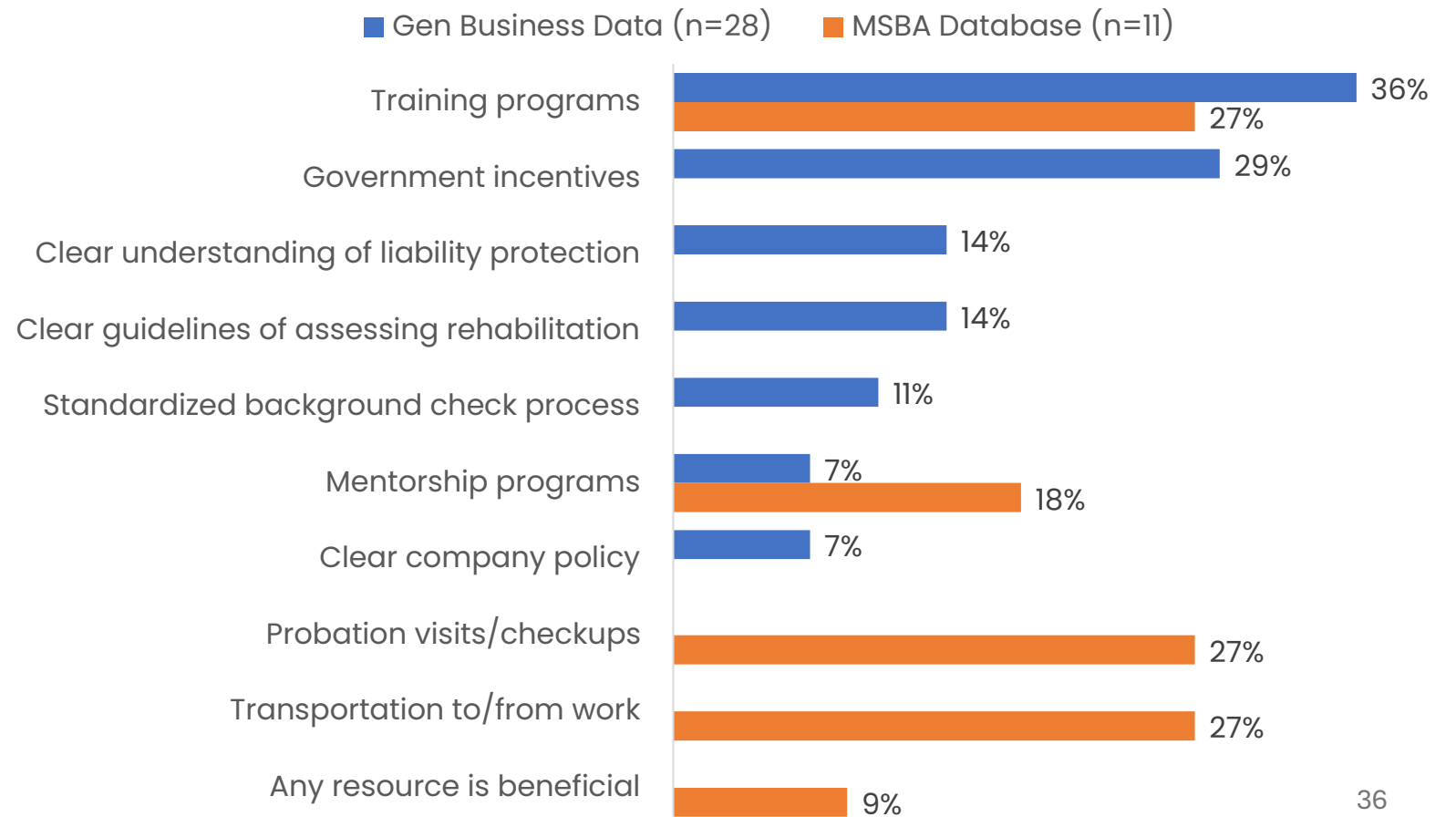




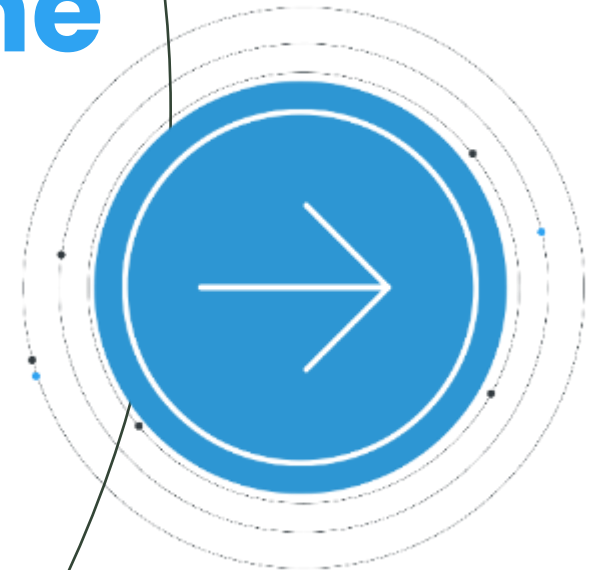
86% of the Gen Business sample (n=172) and 85% of the MSBA sample (n=62) could not offer any additional support or policy changes that would make a business more open to hiring individuals with criminal records.

Of those who did offer suggestions, training programs were most mentioned by Gen Business respondents, while training programs, probation visits, and providing transportation were the leading suggestions from the MSBA sample.

Are there any additional support or policy changes that would make a business more open to hiring individuals with criminal records? (Open-ended)



**What role should private
business play in helping the
formerly incarcerated
reenter society?**





87% of the Gen Business sample (n=174) and 70% of the MSBA sample (n=51) could not offer what role private businesses should play in helping formerly incarcerated individuals successfully reenter society.

Of those who offered a response (note small sample sizes on the graph), giving people a second chance was the most common response from both samples (38% for Gen Business and 68% for MSBA).

What role should private businesses play in helping formerly incarcerated individuals successfully reenter society? (Open-ended)

