JUSTICE FOR ALL:

A survey of the perceptions and responsibility of environmental justice



Overview

Extreme temperatures, floods, tornadoes that are occurring where they normally do not, microplastics measured in our bodies at levels we cannot deny. We are at a crisis moment with climate change, with impacts that are undeniable and images on our screens every day. But we cannot address climate change if we are not also going to address environmental justice.

Countless studies have proven the disproportionate impact of climate change and pollution on low-income and BIPOC communities. Research show Black Americans are 75 percent more likely than white people to live in areas near facilities that produce noise, odor, traffic or emissions that directly affect that population. People of color also bear disproportionate harms from fossil fuels. For example, Black people in the U.S. are more likely than white people to live near oil refineries and petrochemical plants. People who live in these neighborhoods experience higher levels of exposure to toxic chemicals than those who don't live near these industries. These communities also have higher rates of heart disease, cancer and asthma.

Environmental justice has been studied from a scientific perspective for decades, and there is indisputable evidence and data that proves its presence and negative impact in communities across America. It is not conjecture. It is a point in fact. But for all the scientific study on environmental justice, there is still a lack of awareness of this issue, and even less conversation among global corporates and C-suite leaders on the role business plays in charting solutions. To date, corporate America's commitment to environmental justice has been tepid to non-existent.

Golin Social Impact + Inclusion has commissioned the first survey that studies perceptions of this issue and probes on the responsibility business has in addressing it. We wanted to know what Americans thought of the topic of environmental justice: did they understand it? Believe in it? And how important did they feel it was for companies and brands to address this issue? Furthermore – inside of a company, who is responsible for leading on such an important topic?

We also wanted to know what C-suite executives knew about environmental justice, and if they believed their brand has a role to play in addressing environmental justice issues, and if not - why?

Environmental justice is about responsibility for addressing a systemic problem that the average American doesn't realize exists and is an issue that the typical C-suite leader doesn't want to - or know how to - acknowledge. But as America's workforce changes - getting younger and more diverse - the pressure is mounting for executives to close the say-do gap, or risk losing employee loyalty and engagement. And as we continue to experience the daily impacts of climate change, Americans are holding business accountable for being part of the solution.

For decades, business has prioritized profits over people because we as a society haven't thought about, or valued, the people hurt by poor air quality, poor water quality, weak infrastructure, lack of access to food, etc. Trust in government has eroded, and they can only do so much. As we learned, Americans want companies to be held in check—so the question is, how do we do that?

THE WASHINGTON POST MAGAZINE

How climate change and environmental justice are inextricably linked

NATURE

Racism drives environmental inequality-but most Americans don't realize

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

In extreme heat, trees can help cool neighborhoods. But a Tribune investigation found the city has planted more trees in wealthier, whiter areas

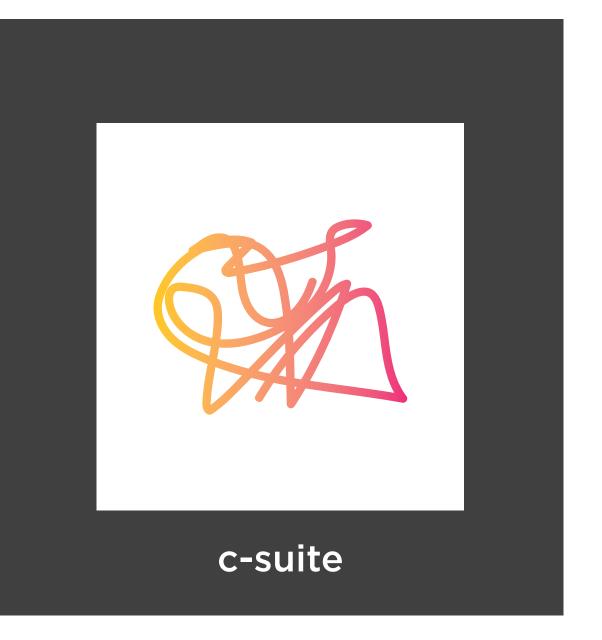
THE NEW YORK TIMES

In San Antonio, the poor live on their own islands of heat

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

People of color breathe more unhealthy air from nearly all polluting sources



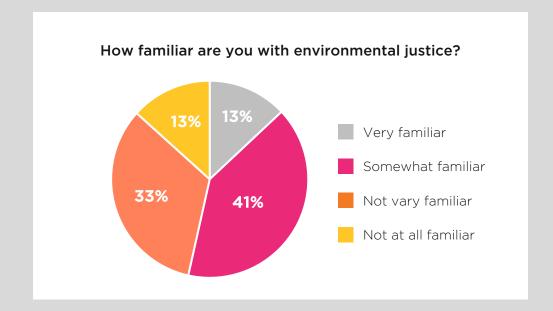


Americans and c-suite executives alike cannot really define or describe environmental justice

But c-suite leaders have significant cognitive dissonance.

When it comes to having a real understanding of environmental justice, as the adage goes: the kids will be alright. Gen Z (33%) and Millennials (31%) were most likely to believe climate change and racial justice are strongly linked. Boomers and Gen Xers are less convinced. But overall, Americans tend to select the right factors that contribute to environmental injustice.

As for C-Suite leaders: not only do they not know how to define the issue, they also don't recognize it's part of a broader systemic issue that goes far beyond their community. They also look at the issue within the parameters of risk mitigation, which challenges the ability to make impact at change.



Which of the following best describes environmental justice? Please select only one.

36%

26%

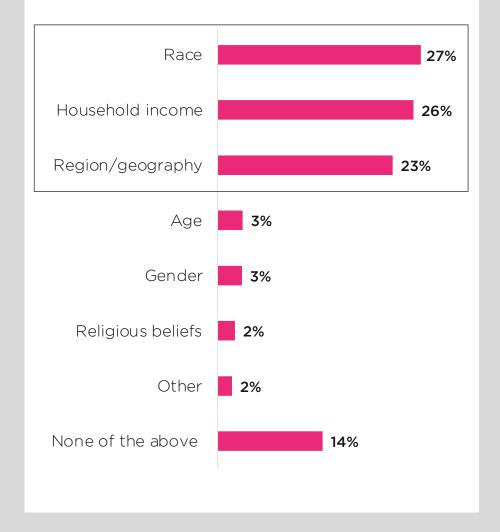
A movement to address the unfair discrimination of low-income and minority communities forced to live near environmentally hazardous environments, often resulting in contaminated air, water and more.

I'm not sure

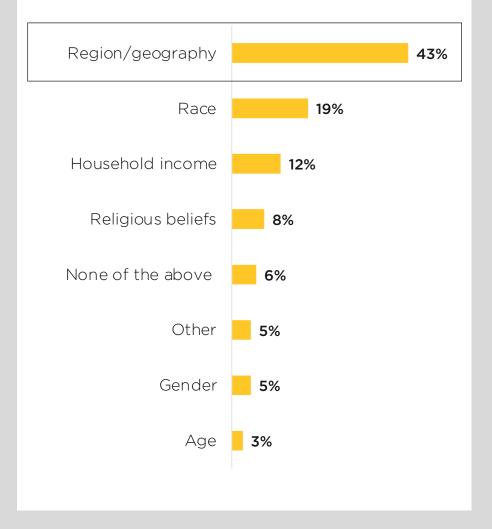
Just over one-half (54%) of Americans report familiarity with environmental justice.

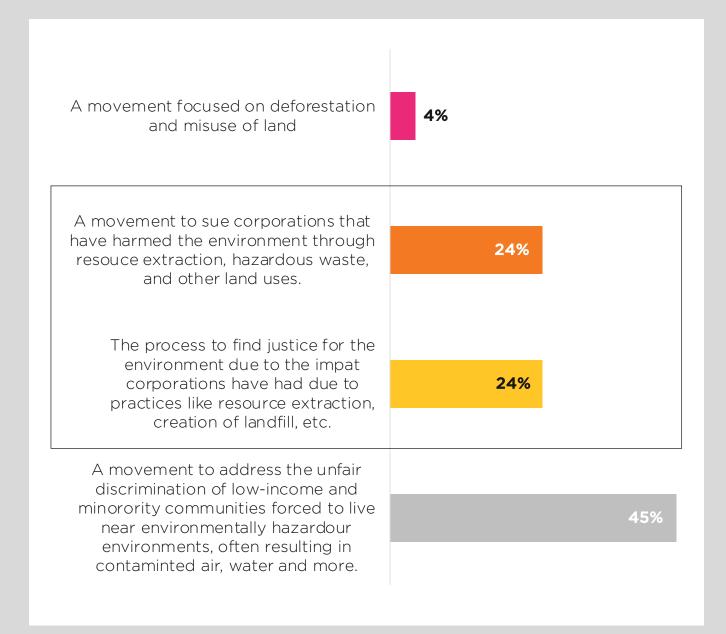
But when asked to define it, only one-third could accurately describe it, and more than 25% said they could not define it.

Americans tie race, household income, and geography to environmental inequities.



But 43% of C-suite leaders think that region/geography is the defining factor of environmental racism.





This may be because 48% of C-suite leaders think environmental justice is either about justice for the environment alone, or they think environmental justice is a movement to sue corporations that have harmed the environment.

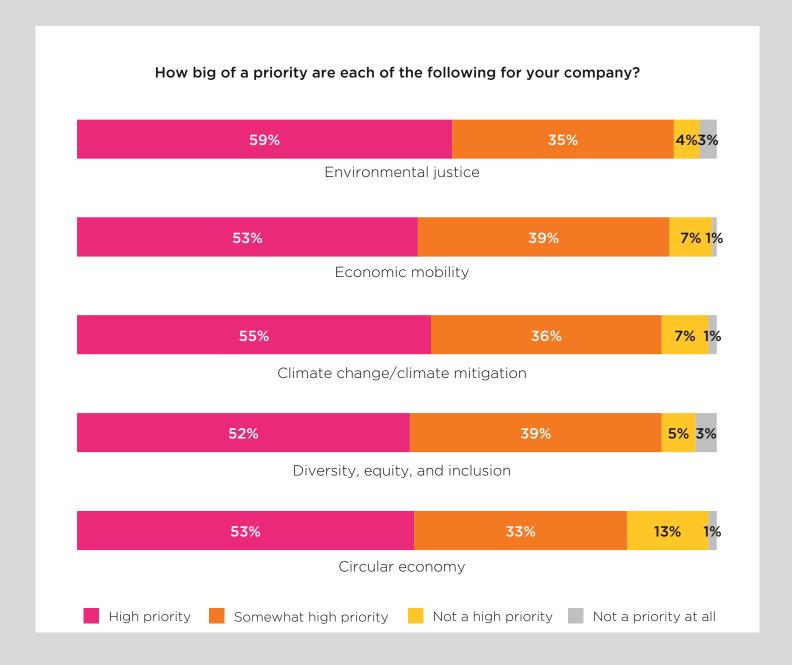




C-suite leaders say environmental justice is the most important priority for their companies.

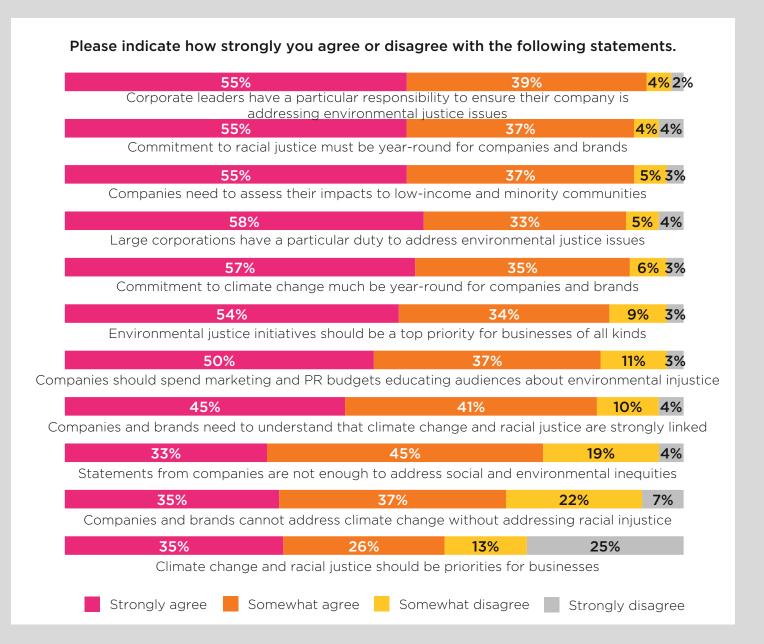
But it's also not a priority.

Despite many corporations and multi-national companies having robust ESG and DEI goals and commitments, Corporate America's commitment to environmental justice has been tepid to non-existent. Instead of looking at the issues as interdependent, C-suite leaders both say environmental justice is – and is not really – a priority. And when pressed, there is a considerable amount of whiplash in full effect: while they believe corporate leaders have a particular responsibility to ensure their company is addressing environmental justice issues, they also agree the individual issues of climate change and racial justice should not be priorities for business.



94% executives think environmental justice is seen as the most important priority for their companies.

Executives agree that corporate leaders have responsibility to address environmental justice. Yet 35% also strongly agree that it is not the priority for businesses.



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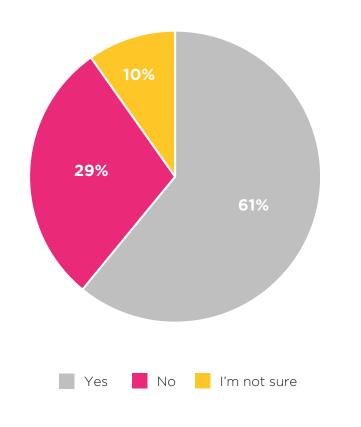
C-suite leaders think their company would take action to address environmental injustice.

But they don't think it will amount to much.

While C-Suite leaders say their company 'would' take action on environmental justice issues, it comes from a reactionary, surgical approach because today, there's no financial or reputational pressure to change behaviors. Further, while these leaders strongly believe environmental justice is important for corporations to address, almost half of them also say that they don't think it will produce tangible outcomes for minority or low-income communities.

Which leads us to wonder: if not you, then who?

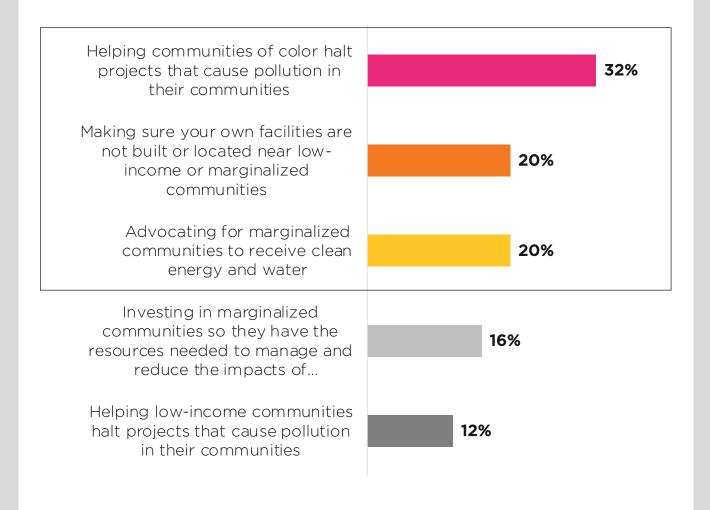
Do you think your company would take active steps to address environmental injustice?



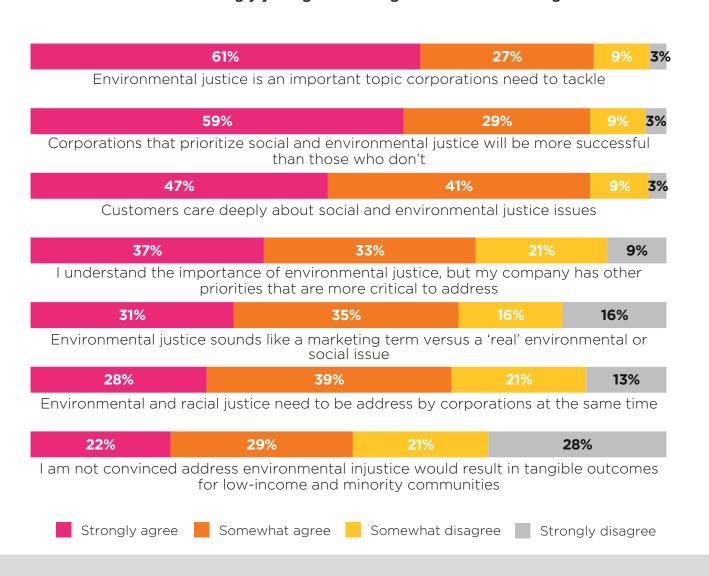
Of executives from companies not currently taking action on environmental justice, 61% said they think their company would take active steps

Of executives who think their company would act on environmental justice, they seem to choose the right things: about a third think their company would help communities of color halt polluting projects

If your company were to take steps to address environmental injustice, which would be most important to address first?



Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.



Nearly 9 in 10 executives agree environmental justice is important for corporations to address, but 49% don't think it would lead to tangible outcomes for minorities or low-income communities

Why do you believe environmental issues and racial justice are not linked?

"Because skin color does not link with environmental situation. Lack of traditional family structure and lack of active father's are main culprit. These do not have a skin color."

"Because it has nothing to do with [race].

"Because black and Hispanics tend to live in low income areas where there is more pollution."

"Because it shouldn't be a race issue and this literally makes no sense. Everything is not about race"

"All races have low income people in them."

"Because the environment is independent of racial injustice"

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There's a big belief gap in who should be responsible for addressing environmental justice issues inside of companies.

Who's in charge, and who should be in charge? Americans overwhelmingly believe environmental justice should be a CEO-led issue, and this held up across generations: Boomers (53%), Gen X (42%) and Gen Z/Millennials (72%) put the CEO squarely responsible for making environmental justice a priority. Among C-suite leaders, however, there's a different mindset. This is likely because leadership thinks environmental justice is about justice for the environment, not for people of color. And more, they see it is an issue to manage from a risk perspective versus an opportunity to do what's right, for the right reasons.

Corporations may view climate-vulnerable communities as a source of risk that should be avoided. But instead, they should be investing in ways to make those communities - and support people in those communities - to have what they need to be more resilient to climate change.

Nearly one-half of consumers believe that the CEO is responsible for making environmental justice a priority

The CEO (chief executive officer)

44%

The head of diversity, equity and inclusion

15%

The head of Sustainability

14%

The COO (chief operating officer)

11%

The head of marketing/communications

5%

The CFO (chief financial officer)

4%

The CMO (chief marketing officer)

3%

Someone else

5%

But one-third of executives think it's the responsibility of ESG and sustainability departments to handle environmental justice, followed by public affairs





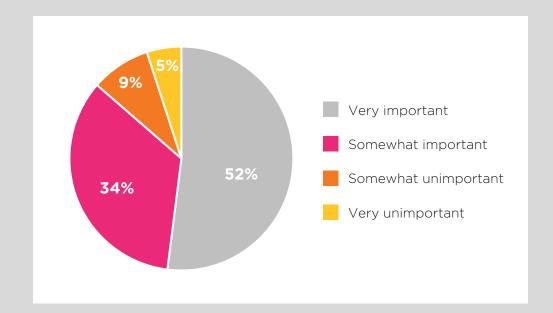
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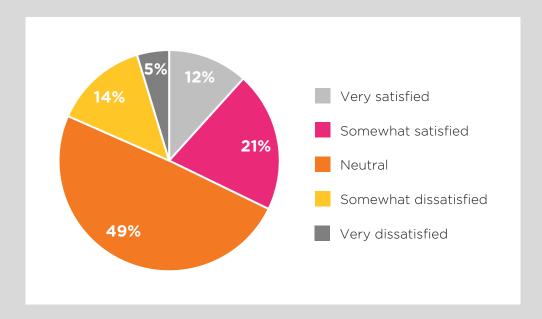
Consumers believe environmental justice is very important.

And they do not think companies are doing enough to address the issue.

Unaided, we found Americans knew a little about environmental justice. When given the definition, they were much more aware of an environmental justice issue in their community or region, but they don't recognize it's part of a broader systemic issue that goes far beyond their community.

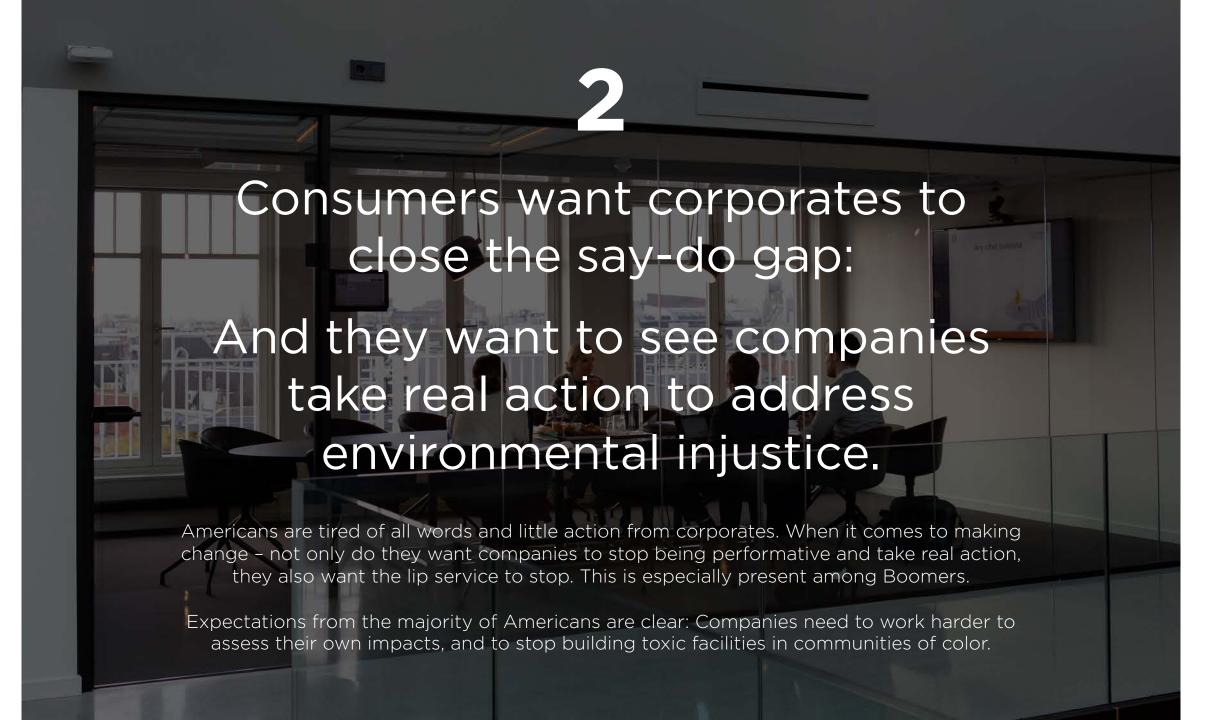
We've seen many surveys over recent years of Americans wanting companies to do more to address key social issues. Environmental justice is no different. Most Americans believe that environmental justice is important and that companies have a role to play in fixing the system. Very few think companies are living up to this expectation.

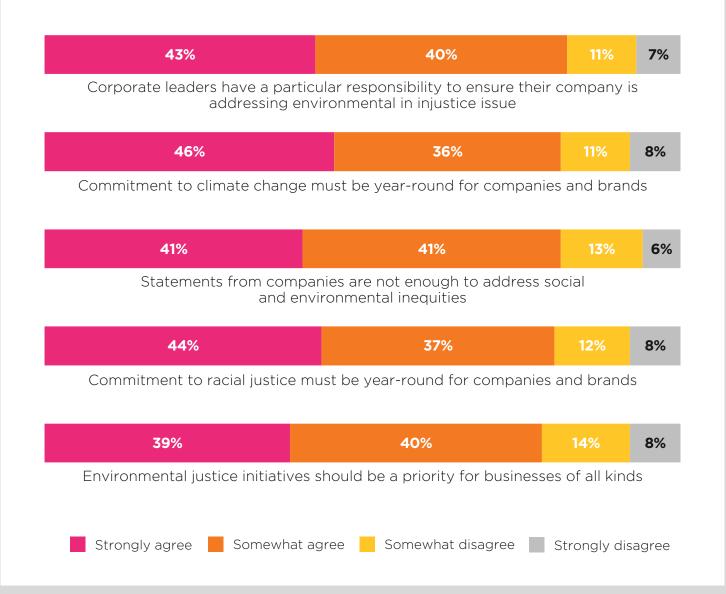




More than 85% of Americans believe that environmental injustice - a type of discrimination where people of low-income or minority communities are forced to live close to environmentally hazardous conditions - is important.

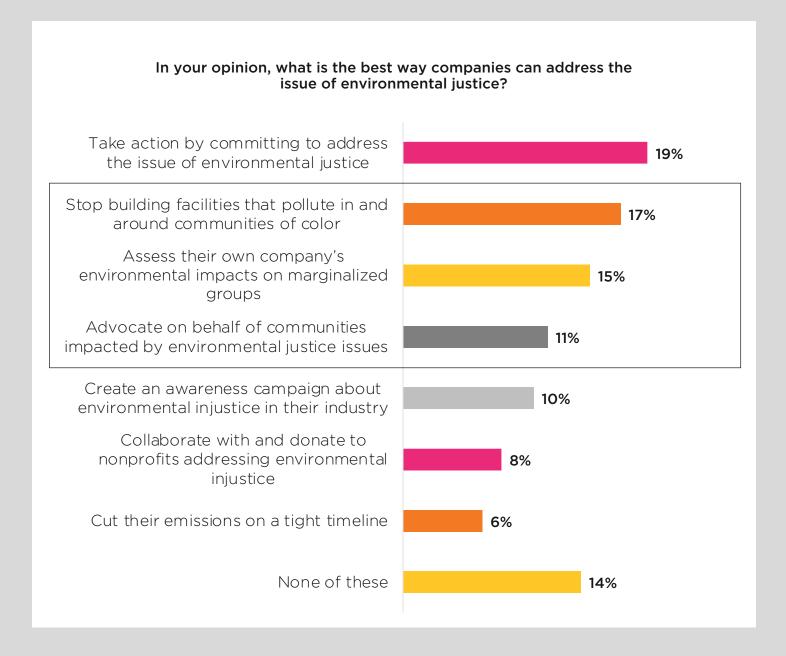
But only one-third of them are satisfied with the actions taken by companies to address this issue.





82% of consumers believe statements are not enough: 83% think corporate leaders have a responsibility to address environmental injustice. And 66% think companies cannot address climate issues without including racial justice.

43% of consumers want companies to take real action on environmental justice, and 1 in 5 consumers want to see companies commit to addressing the issue



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Most Americans believe that environmental impacts and racial injustice have some linkage.

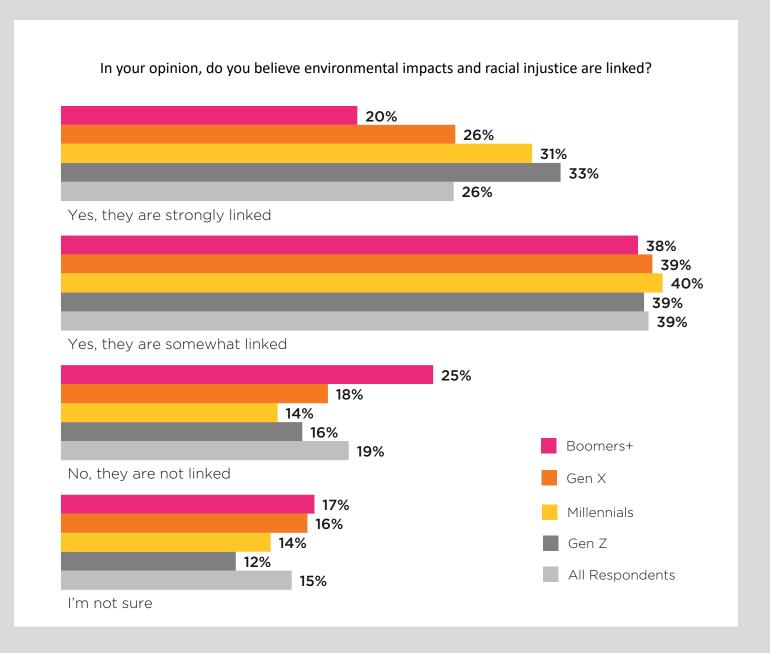
They want to hold companies accountable to take action, but they waver when it comes to taking action themselves

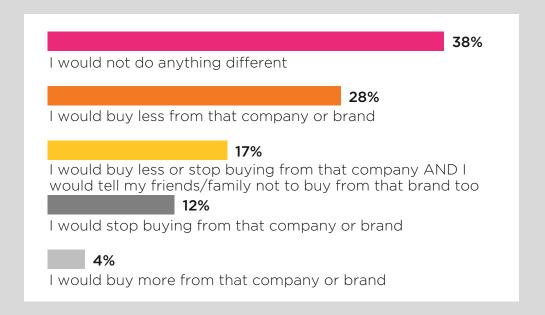
Among Millennials and Gen Z, more than 50% would stop buying from a brand and they would tell others to stop buying from that brand if it did not take meaningful action on racial justice issues.

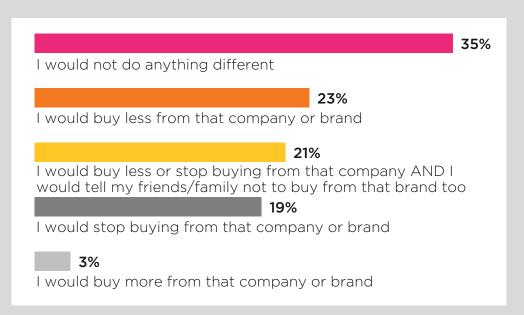
But when it comes to climate change, they are less motivated. This is an education issue - to understand the dynamics and interdependency between climate justice and racial justice.

And to recognize that an environmental justice issue in their community or region is part of a broader systemic issue that goes far beyond their community, and then embrace their power to drive change.

Two-thirds of Americans believe that environmental impacts and racial injustice have some linkage

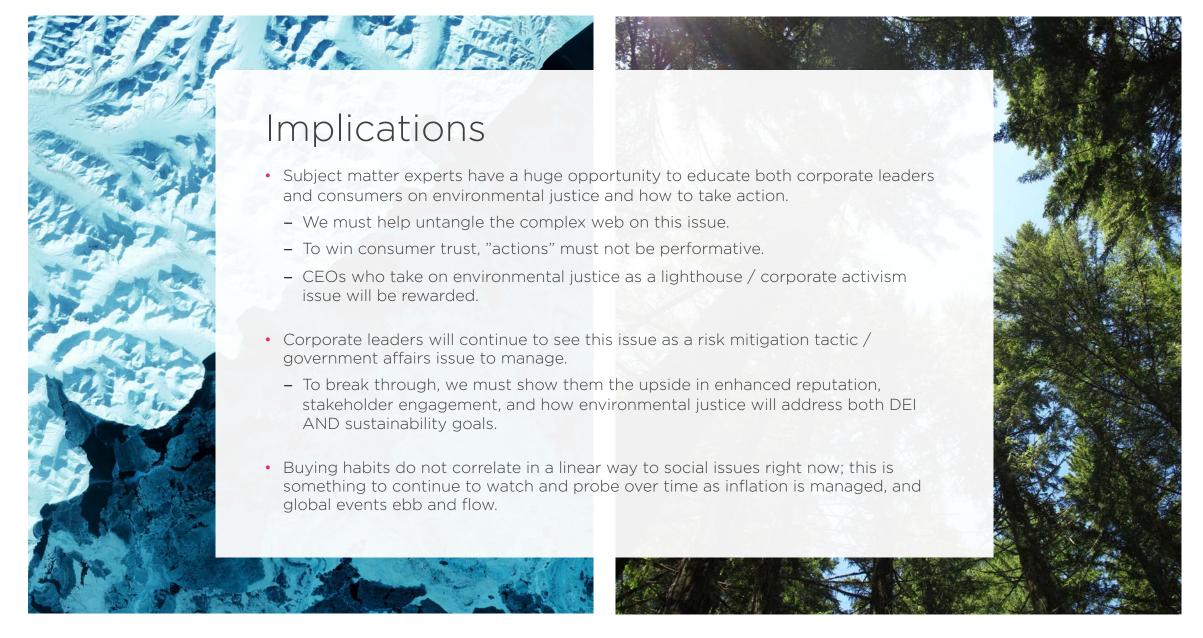




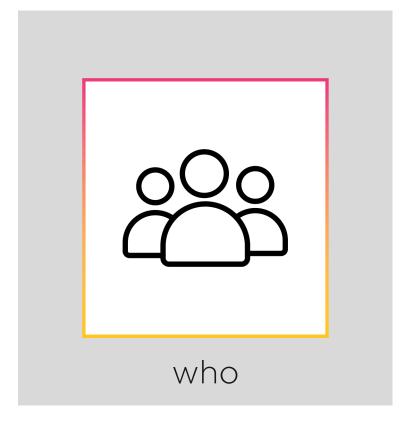


When it comes to **climate change**, over a third would not change buying habits based on inaction of a company or brand

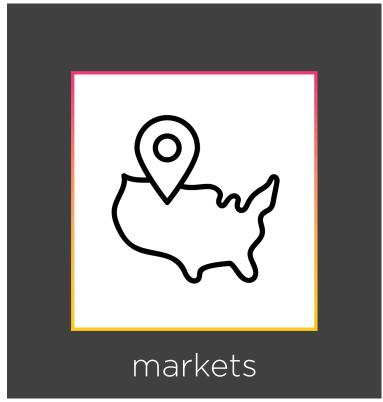
But 63% of consumers would either buy less, stop buying or advocate to others to stop buying from the brand/company if they did not act on issues of racial justice.



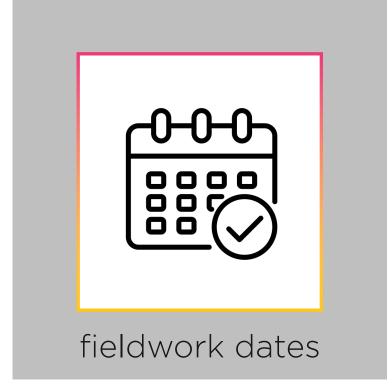
C-Suite Methodology





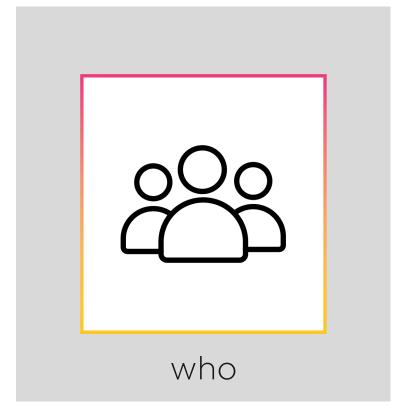


C-Suite executives across the United States

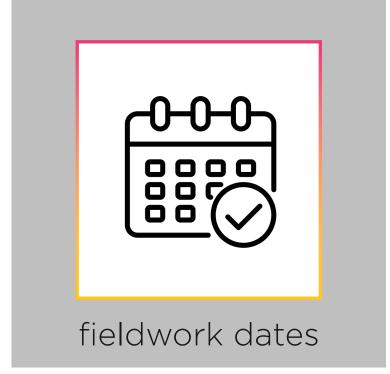


May 23 - June 10

C-Suite Methodology







N=1,53716+

American Gen Pop, Nationally Representative

May 23 - May 31

JUSTICE FOR ALL

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