CAROL CONE ON PURPOSE

Corporate Social Action Tracker 2026



Americans across party lines agree: Companies should keep their social commitments.

The 2026 midterms sent Washington a message: Americans are frustrated, financially stretched, and impatient for change. The Democratic wave reflected an electorate demanding accountability and a more affordable everyday life. But what does this political reversal mean for corporate America, particularly companies that have spent the past two years weathering political attacks on their social impact commitments?

Our new research offers an answer: Americans may change their political allegiances, but their expectations of business have held. For companies that kept their commitments but stopped talking about them, staying quiet is now the larger risk.

7 in 10

Americans (71%) want companies to maintain or expand their involvement in addressing society's challenges.

48%	want companies to do more
22%	want their role to stay the same
16%	want a smaller role
14%	say stop addressing social issues entirely

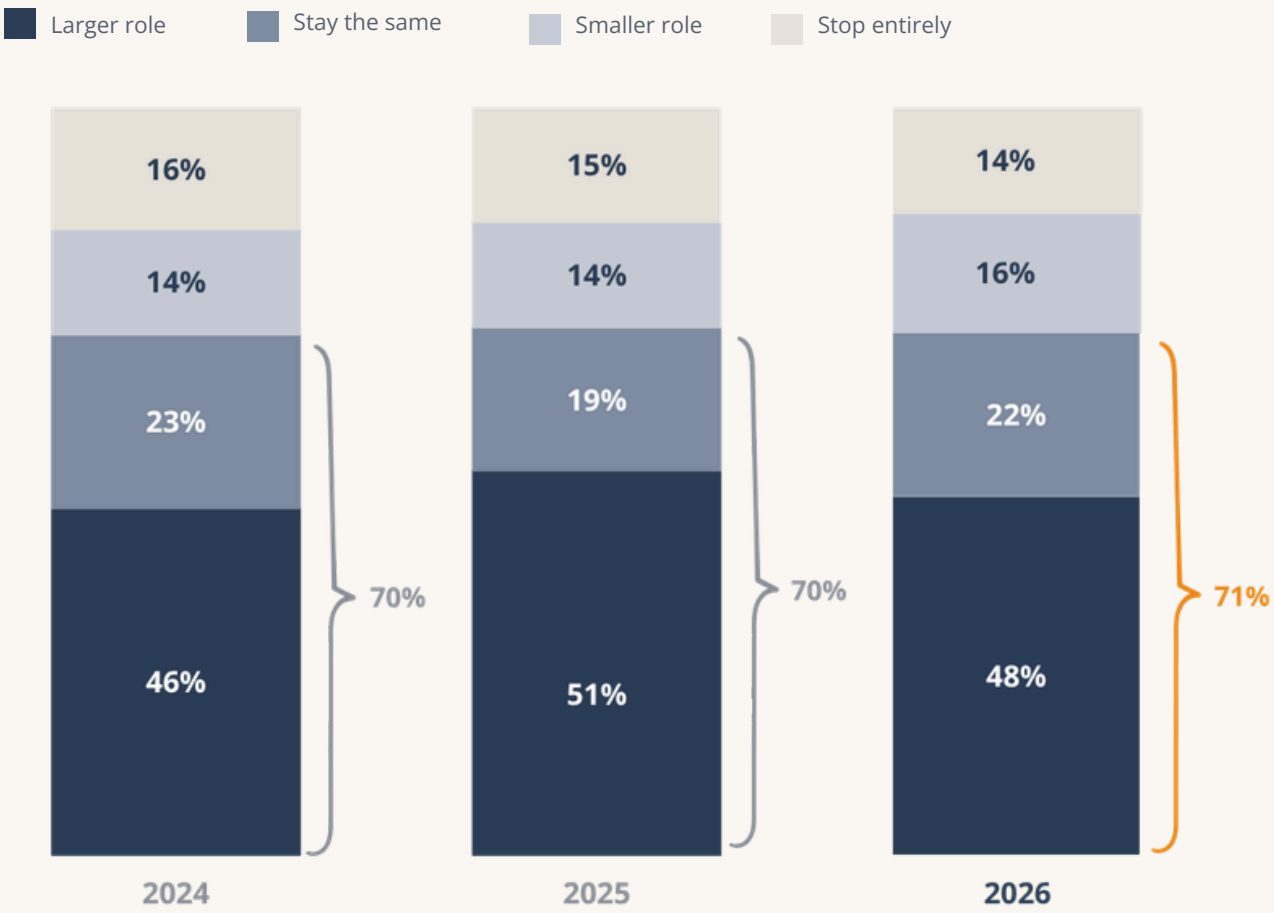
The 2026 Corporate Social Action Tracker, conducted for Carol Cone ON PURPOSE by The Harris Poll immediately following the midterms, found that seven in 10 Americans (71%) want companies to maintain or expand their involvement in addressing society's challenges. Nearly half (48%) want companies to do more, while another 22% want companies' role to stay the same. Just one in seven (14%) believes companies should stop addressing social issues entirely, and another 16% want them to play a smaller role.

The election played out against a sour national mood. According to Morning Consult, fewer than three in 10 adults say the country is on the right track, and consumer sentiment has fallen to its lowest point since March 2023. Morning Consult's data also points to a development business leaders should watch closely: voters' frustration is extending to companies. Issues related to scrutiny of business now rank high among voters' priorities heading into 2028, giving candidates and lawmakers in both parties reason to put corporations under a sharper spotlight. Pulling back will not ease that pressure, and the public is not asking for it.

Across all three years of the Corporate Social Action Tracker, support for greater corporate engagement stood at 46% following the 2024 presidential election, rose to 51% in 2025, and stands at 48% today.* The political pendulum swings. The public's expectations of business do not.

Expectations of business held over three years*

Q: Thinking about the current political environment, how should companies' roles in addressing social issues change?



**The survey question language was updated from "Thinking about the Trump Administration..." to "Thinking about the current political environment..." in the 2026 survey.*

2026's 71% is due to rounding; the unrounded figures for "larger role" and "stay the same" sum to 71%.

A surprising finding: Americans across party lines back corporate social responsibility

81%
of Republicans
agree companies should focus more on local community issues

86%
of Democrats
agree companies should focus more on local community issues

81%
of Independents
agree companies should focus more on local community issues

Sixty-two percent of Republicans believe companies should continue supporting the same social issues they supported before the 2024 presidential election, in line with 64% of Democrats and 61% of Independents. Large majorities across party lines also agree companies should focus more on local community issues (81% of Republicans and Independents, 86% of Democrats) and on the issues that matter most to employees (79% of Republicans, 80% of Independents, and 89% of Democrats).

Democrats are the most likely to want companies to play a larger role in addressing social change (59% vs. 41% of Republicans and 46% of Independents). More than two in five Republicans (41%) agree, up from 33% in 2024. While nearly two-thirds of Republicans (64%) want business to hold its ground or do more and 18% want them to do less, only 17% of Republicans say they want companies to stop addressing social issues entirely.*

Independents are increasingly influential. Exit polls show they sided with Democrats by a wide margin, and on the role of business, according to the survey data, nearly seven in 10 (69%) want companies to maintain or expand their role.

The survey data reveals that parties do differ on equity and rights. Among our broader issue brackets, which group similar issues into thematic areas, equity and rights was the only bracket to decline in importance between 2025 and 2026 (29% today, down from 33%). Among Democrats, 43% name an equity or rights issue among their top personal priorities, compared with 17% of Republicans and 29% of Independents. Companies working on equity and rights issues should consider amplifying the impacts of their initiatives on people and communities, rather than using an equity label.

The political pendulum swings. **The public's expectations of business do not.**

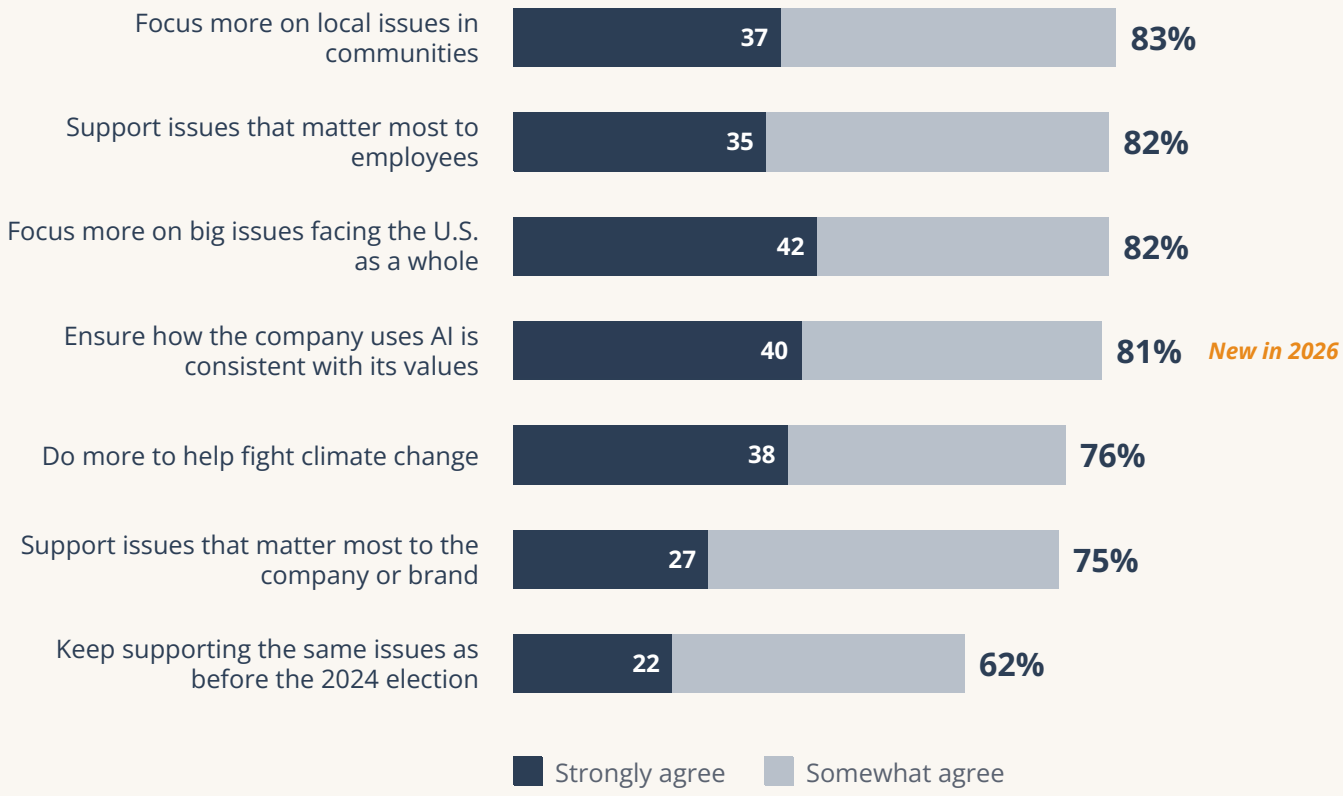
**The survey question language was updated from "Thinking about the Trump Administration..." to "Thinking about the current political environment..." in the 2026 survey.*

Beyond the vote, a deeper demand: Make life better

Our research suggests Americans expect business, as well as Washington, to make daily life better. Across all Americans, more than eight in 10 want companies focused on local issues such as affordable housing and schools (83%), issues that matter most to employees (82%), and national challenges such as health care and jobs (82%). These are practical expectations about how companies can use their resources, expertise, and influence to improve lives.

Americans want companies to help improve lives.

Q: Thinking about the current political environment and the impact on companies, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following? Companies should...



Mental health leads for a second year

35%

Mental health support
The top personal priority, up from 31% in 2024

30%

Care for seniors
The second-ranked issue overall

We also asked which issues matter most to Americans personally, setting inflation and immigration aside. Mental health leads for a second year (35%), in line with 2025 (34%) and up from 31% in 2024. Among women, the importance of mental health rises to 40% (compared to 29% among men), and is cited as personally important to nearly half (46%) of Gen X women (ages 46–61). Care for seniors follows at 30% of Americans, and rises to 53% among Boomers (ages 62–80). Hunger relief and nutrition (26%), military and veteran support (26%), and curing and treating diseases (25%) round out the top five important issues.

46%

Gen X women
name mental health support among their most important issues

53%

Boomers
name care for seniors among their most important issues

These findings show the human pressures beneath the election's economic headlines: emotional exhaustion, caregiving responsibilities, health insecurity, and families struggling to meet basic needs.

They also point toward a more relevant corporate social impact agenda. The next era of corporate purpose will be judged less by what companies say they stand for and more by what they improve. The test for any social investment is now the one voters applied to Washington: Who benefits?

The test for any social investment: Who benefits?

The issues most important to Americans in 2026

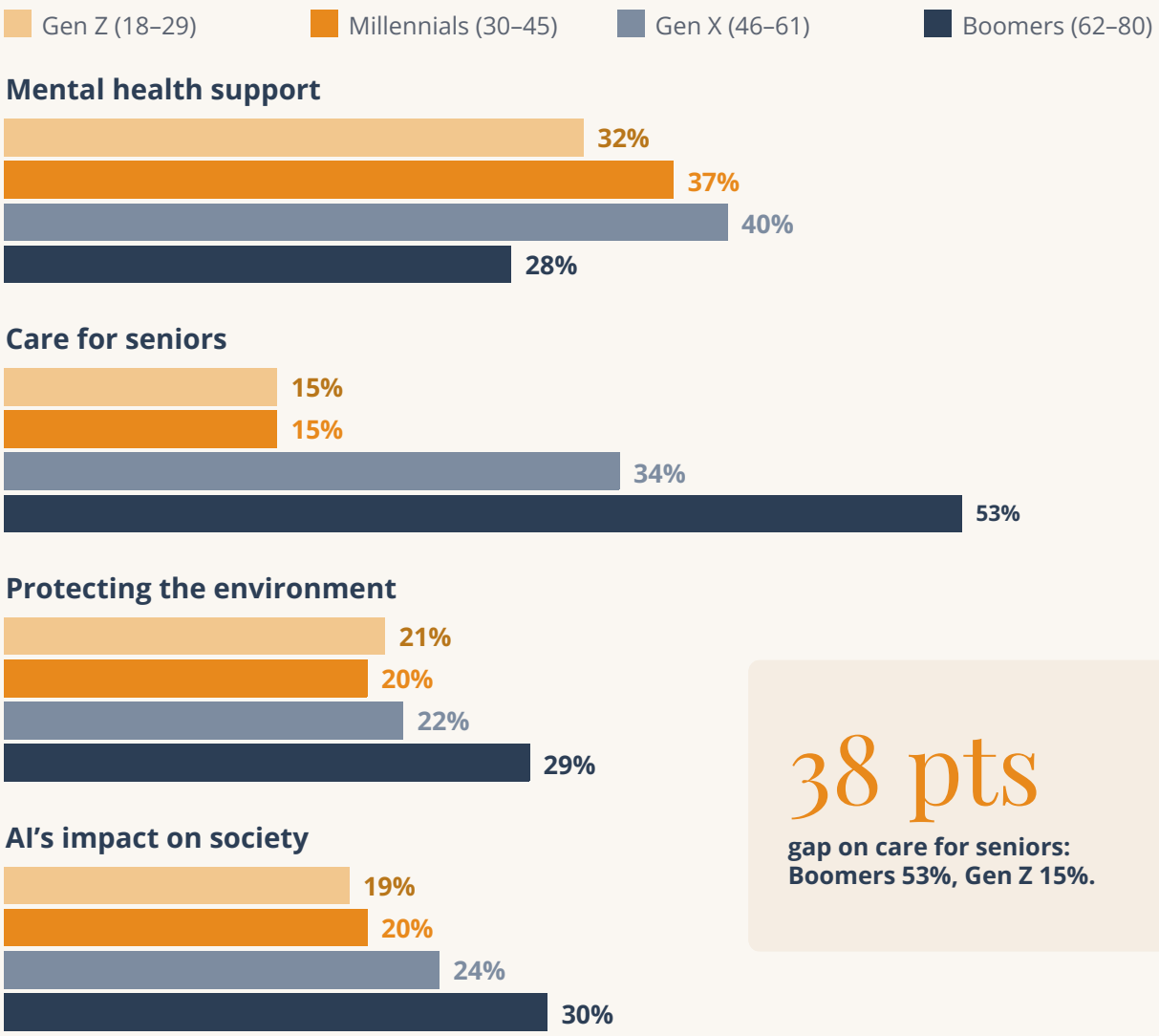
Q: There is a lot of conversation lately about the importance of inflation and immigration. Setting those aside, which of the following issues are most important to you personally?



	2024	2025	2026
Mental Health Support	31%	34%	**35%**
Care for Seniors	32%	29%	**30%**
Hunger Relief and Nutrition	24%	32%	**26%**
Military and Veteran Support	26%	27%	**26%**
Curing and Treating Diseases	24%	28%	**25%**
AI's Impact on Society †	12%	12%	**24%**
Protecting the Environment	26%	23%	**23%**
Protecting Women's Rights	30%	25%	**21%**
Freedom of Speech and Media Literacy	18%	22%	**19%**
Access to Quality Education	14%	19%	**19%**
Digital Safety for Children	15%	17%	**19%**
Access to Childcare	11%	14%	**15%**
Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief	16%	14%	**14%**
Promotion of Healthy Eating	11%	13%	**13%**
Ocean Cleanup and Plastic Reduction	16%	12%	**12%**
Inclusion and Equity	13%	12%	**12%**
American Workforce Development	11%	10%	**12%**
Support for Vulnerable Populations	8%	8%	**12%**
Support for Small Business	13%	13%	**11%**
Sustainable Energy Investments	11%	9%	**11%**
Support for Fathers and Families	8%	8%	**9%**
Green Tech Innovation	7%	5%	**6%**
Space Exploration	6%	4%	**5%**

† Item reworded in 2026: "AI's Impact on Society" was "Ethical AI and Data Privacy" in 2024 and 2025, so it is not a like-for-like trend.

Priorities vary by generation



38 pts

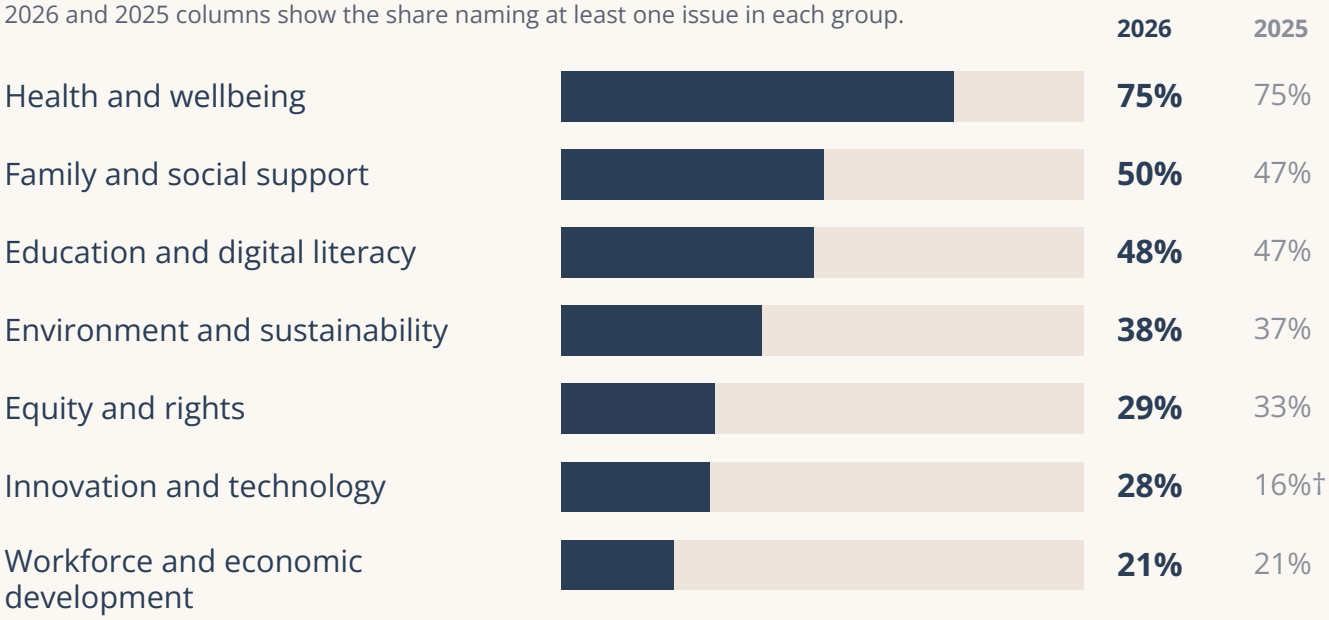
gap on care for seniors: Boomers 53%, Gen Z 15%.

Priorities shift with life stage. Care for seniors matters to 53% of Boomers but just 15% of Gen Z, and Gen X reports the highest concern for mental health (40%). For leaders, mental health can be common ground across generations; from there, tailor support to life stage, such as offering caregiving benefits.

While protecting the environment ranked seventh overall for 2026, it's worth noting where different generations stand on the issue today. Boomers (29%) are the most concerned with protecting the environment, while Millennials trail at 20%. Similarly, Boomers (30%) are most likely to prioritize AI's impact on society, while Gen Z (19%) shows the least concern among the four generations.

Health and wellbeing leads for the third year

2026 and 2025 columns show the share naming at least one issue in each group.



† The Innovation and Technology increase is driven by a reworded item: "AI's Impact on Society" in 2026 was "Ethical AI and Data Privacy" in 2025, so the change is not a like-for-like trend.

Each year, the Tracker groups individual social issues into broader thematic groups to understand the macro issues Americans are prioritizing. For the third year, health and wellbeing was the top priority area; specific issues in this grouping include mental health support, care for seniors, hunger relief and nutrition, curing and treating diseases, and promotion of healthy eating.

Notably, equity and rights is the only area to decline since 2025, falling to 29% from 33% (and from 36% in 2024). Within that issue group, protecting women's rights is the individual issue that has seen the largest decline: from 30% in 2024 to 25% in 2025 and 21% today.

Family and social support, by contrast, has grown. Half of Americans (50%) now name at least one issue in this area, up from 45% in 2024. Access to childcare has risen from 11% to 15% since 2024. Support for vulnerable populations reached 12%, up from 8% in both 2024 and 2025. Other issues in this grouping include military and veteran support and support for fathers and families.

Environment and sustainability (38%) remains below its 2024 level of 42% but gained a percentage point compared to 2025 (37%). Issues in this grouping include protecting the environment, ocean cleanup and plastic reduction, sustainable energy investments, and green tech innovation.

The political risks are still real

The Democratic victories in the midterms may signal a changing political climate, but they do not eliminate the complexity facing corporate leaders. President Trump remains in office, with considerable ability to publicly challenge individual companies, influence regulatory priorities, and mobilize political opposition. Yet the public isn't asking companies to step back. Only 14% of Americans say companies should stop addressing social issues entirely, and 41% of Republicans want companies to take a larger role, up from 33% two years ago.*

This complexity is especially acute for businesses with significant federal contracts, regulatory exposure, or highly visible consumer brands, and it helps explain why many have continued important social and environmental activities while modifying the language used to describe them and substantially reducing public communications. The data supports this kind of recalibration and also shows its limits. Support for climate action actually rose this year to 76% (up from 73% in 2025),* including 64% of Republicans, and 82% of Americans want companies to support the issues that matter most to employees.

76%
support corporate climate action, up from 73%

64%
of Republicans support corporate climate action, up from 57%

82%
want companies to support the issues that matter most to employees

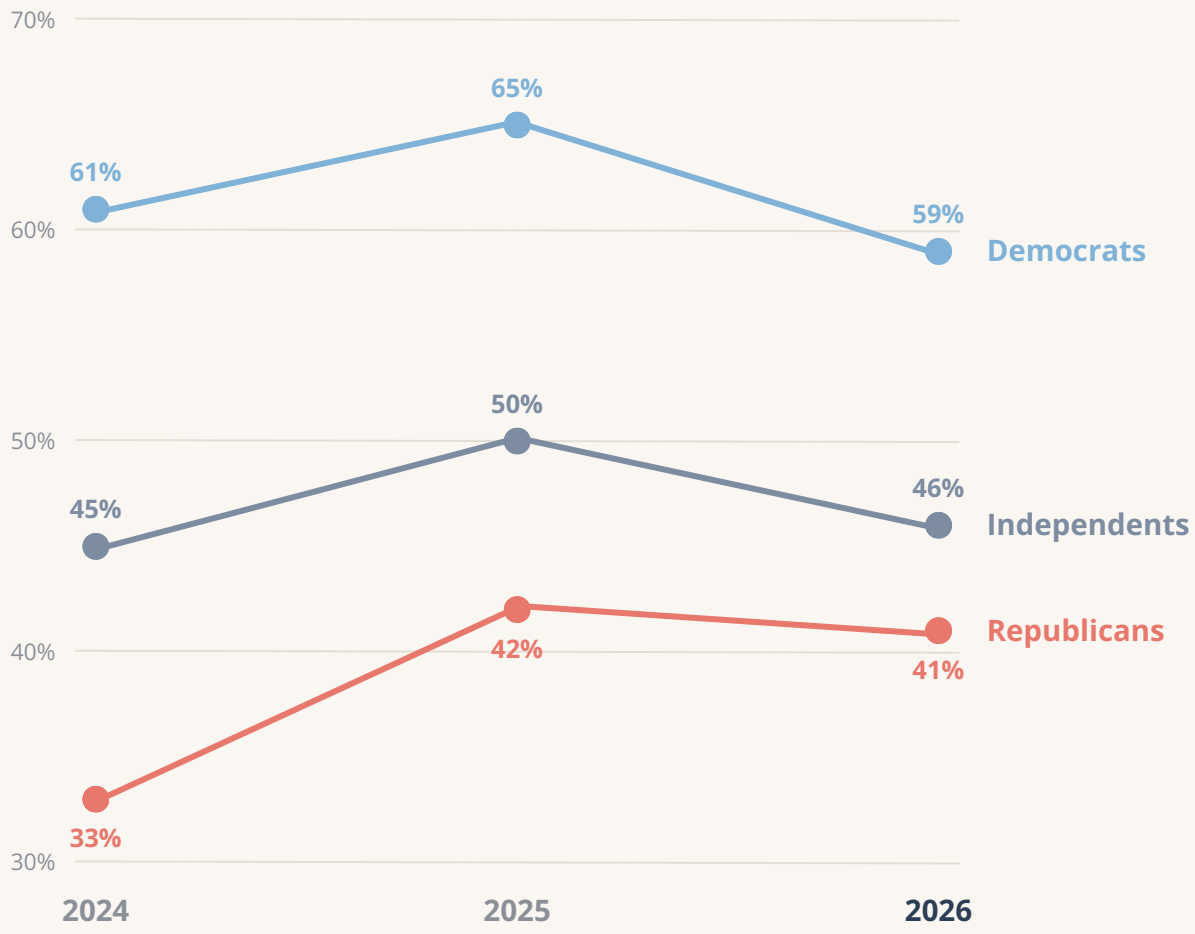
In some cases, this has been a prudent adjustment. Companies have emphasized workforce development instead of DEI, operational resilience instead of sustainability, and community investment instead of broader social advocacy. But there is a difference between thoughtful repositioning and abandoning a company's voice. Prolonged silence has its own risks. Employees may question whether commitments still matter. Community partners may lose confidence. Customers may assume that programs have disappeared. And companies that stop communicating the value of their social investments risk allowing political controversy to define those investments for them. Consistency is now a bipartisan expectation: 62% of Republicans, 64% of Democrats, and 61% of Independents say companies should keep supporting the same issues they did before the 2024 election.

Sweeping declarations on every social issue are behind us, and further retreat is no answer. The work now is to match what the company does well to a social need, deliver, and then communicate with discipline and evidence.

**The survey question language was updated from "Thinking about the Trump Administration..." to "Thinking about the current political environment..." in the 2026 survey.*

Support for corporate engagement is less partisan than in 2024*

Share saying companies should play a larger role in addressing social issues, by self-identified party.



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18 pts

between Democrats and Republicans, down from 28 points in 2024.

Republicans held their 2025 gain (41%) after a midterm their party lost.

Democrats eased to 59% from 65%. Independents stand at 46%.

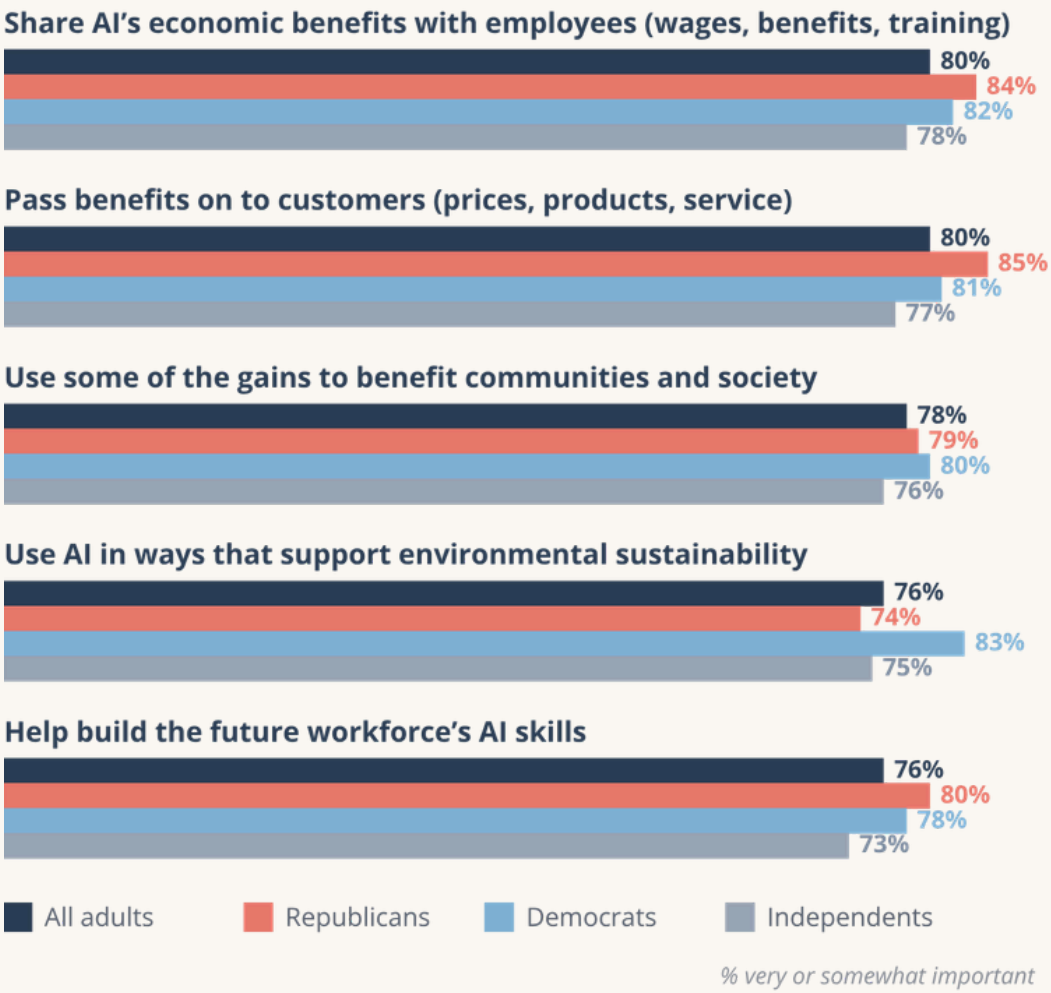
AI introduces a new social contract between business and society

Who benefits? Americans are now asking that about AI, too. For the first time, the Corporate Social Action Tracker asked what Americans expect of companies as AI reshapes jobs, customer experiences, and the economics of business.

Eighty percent (80%) of Americans say it is important that companies share some of AI's economic benefits with employees through higher wages, better benefits, or training. The same share wants some of those benefits passed to customers through lower prices or better products and services, and 78% want some of the gains from AI directed toward communities and society. Eighty-one percent (81%) agree companies should ensure their use of AI is consistent with their values—a view Republicans and Democrats share (85% and 82% respectively).

Eight in 10 want the gains from AI shared

Q: As companies increase their use of AI, how important would it be to you to see them use AI in each of the following ways to create positive impact for people, communities and the planet?



Americans will reward or penalize based on a company's use of AI

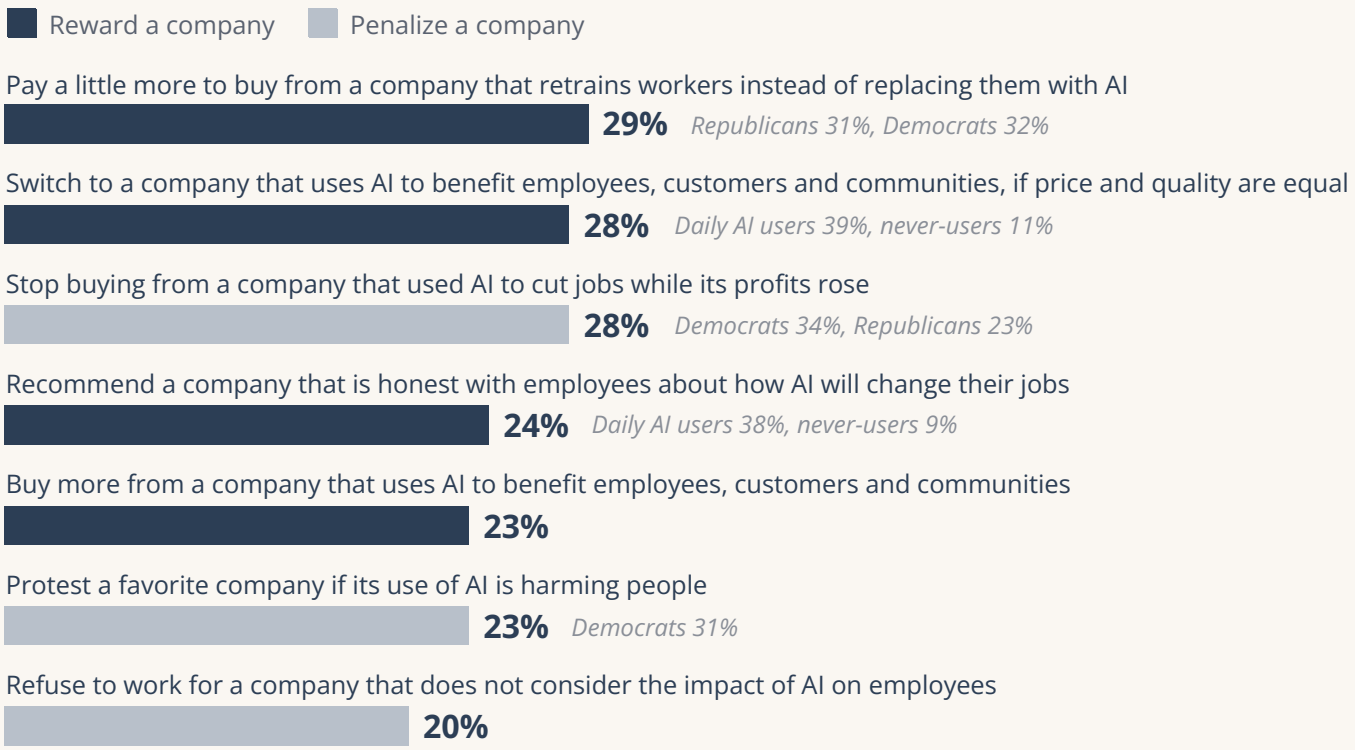
Americans are beginning to define what responsible AI leadership should look like, and they are prepared to act. Twenty-nine percent (29%) say they would be willing to pay a little more to purchase from a company that retrains workers rather than replacing them with AI. More than one in four Americans (28%) say they would be willing to stop buying from a company that used AI to cut jobs while its profits rose. These are stated intentions, not proven purchasing behaviors, but they are still an early warning that how companies deploy AI could influence reputation, employee trust, and consumer preference.

Notably, Independents are the most likely to say they are not sure if they would be willing to do any listed action (16% vs. 9% Republicans and 10% Democrats). They are the audience a company can still win over with evidence.

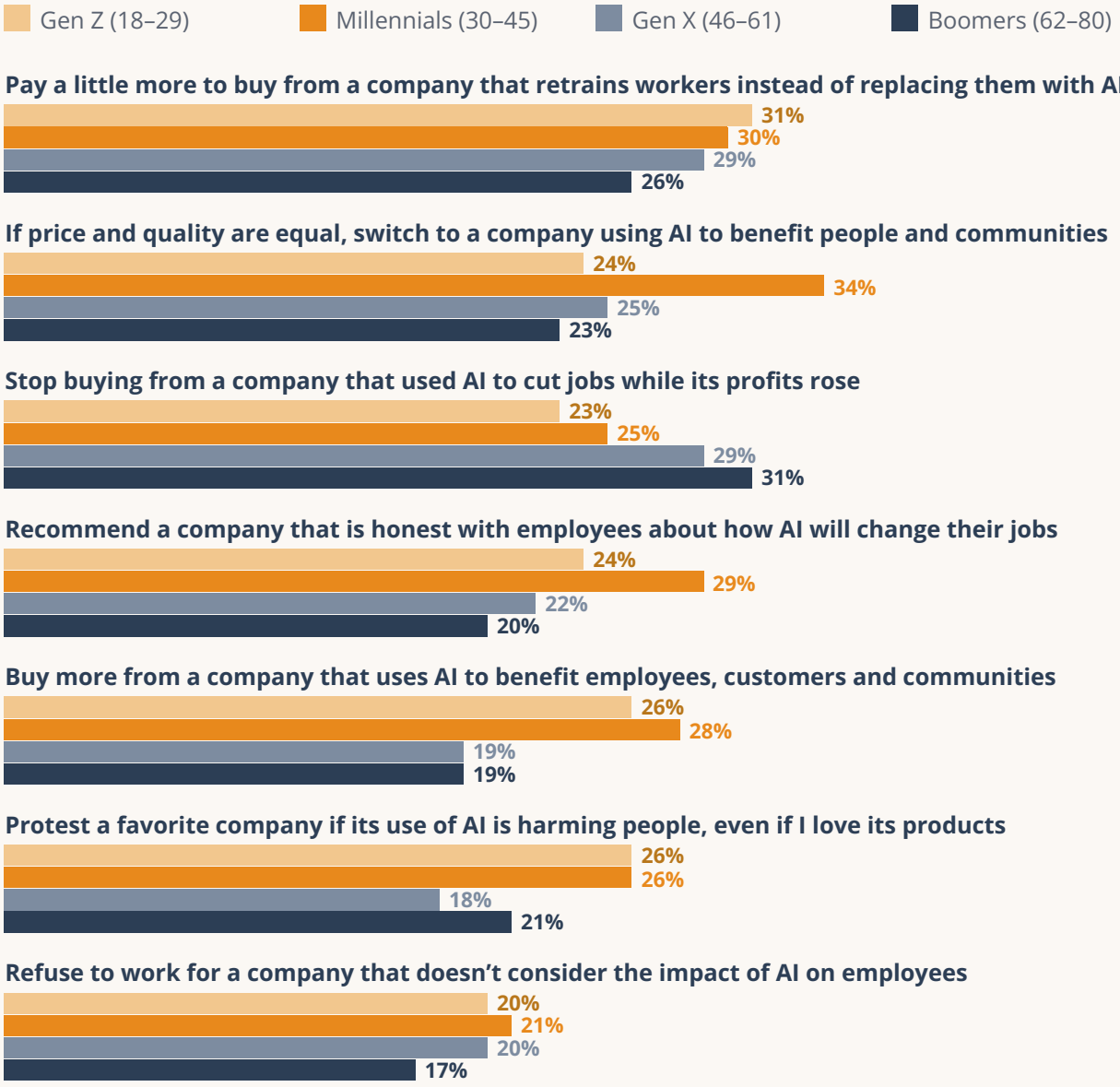
AI may become the defining test of corporate purpose: Will companies use it only to reduce costs and increase profits, or also to expand opportunity and improve lives?

Taking action based on corporate AI use

Q: If a company is using AI throughout its business operations, which of the following, if any, would you be willing to do?



A closer look at generations and AI actions



Americans' use of AI varies sharply by age: Millennials are the heaviest users, with 44% using AI tools daily, followed by Gen X (35%) and Gen Z (34%). Boomers use AI least (18% daily).

They also differ in the actions they would take based on how a company uses AI. Notably, Millennials are most likely to switch to a company, given equal price and quality, that is using AI to benefit people and communities (34%), while Gen Z, Gen X, and Boomers sit at 24%, 25%, and 23% respectively. Millennials are also the generation most likely to recommend a company that is honest with employees about how AI will change their jobs (29%) and to buy more from a company that uses AI to benefit employees, customers, and communities (28%). Boomers are the most likely generation to stop buying from a company that used AI to cut jobs while profits rose (31%), followed by Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z (29%, 25%, and 23% respectively).

Five imperatives for corporate leaders

The election results, coupled with our research, point toward a more focused approach to corporate social impact.

1 **Stay committed and say so.**
Seven in 10 Americans (71%) want companies to maintain or expand their role on social issues, and only one in seven (14%) wants them to stop entirely. Keep the social impact investments you can defend to any administration: Those that are tied to the business and backed by results. Then replace silence with evidence, communicating specifically about what improved.

2 **Deliver close to home.**
More than eight in 10 Americans (83%) want companies to focus on local community needs. Work on the issues people live with every day. Share who benefits and how.

3 **Start with your employees.**
More than eight in 10 (82%) want companies to support the issues that matter most to employees, and nearly one in four (24%) would recommend a company that is honest with its people about how AI will change their jobs. Ask employees what matters to them and act on it before announcing anything externally.

4 **Speak to shared needs.**
Republicans (62%) and Democrats (64%) agree companies should keep supporting the same issues as before the 2024 presidential election. Frame commitments around human needs, business relevance, and demonstrable results.

5 **Ensure AI benefits people.**
Eight in 10 (80%) say it is important to share some of AI's gains with employees and customers. Invest in employee skills, responsible workforce transitions, customer value, and community benefit. Measure how AI's gains are distributed, not simply how much efficiency it creates.

Purpose is more enduring than politics. The 2026 midterms revealed an electorate ready to change political leadership when its expectations are not met. Yet our three years of research show something as important: Americans continue to believe business has an ongoing responsibility to society.

Americans voted for change in Washington.
They did not vote for companies to stop supporting employees, communities, and society.

About the 2026 Corporate Social Action Tracker

Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Carol Cone ON PURPOSE from November 5-9, 2026, among 2,090 adults ages 18 and older. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within +/- 2.7 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. Prior waves were conducted November 6-10, 2025, among 2,087 U.S. adults and November 14-18, 2024, among 2,092 U.S. adults (each +/- 2.5 percentage points). The credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact hello@purposecollaborative.com.

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Carol Cone ON PURPOSE is a pioneering consultancy helping companies, brands, and organizations harness the power of social purpose to advance their business and social impact. CCOP's proven approach meets clients at any point on their purpose journey to unlock opportunities to build reputation, inspire employees, exceed financial targets, and support the greater good. The consultancy is led by Carol Cone, regarded as one of the founders of the purpose movement and has been internationally recognized for her work.

The Harris Poll

The Harris Poll is one of the longest running surveys in the U.S. tracking public opinion, motivations and social sentiment since 1963 that is now part of Harris Insights & Analytics, a global consulting and market research firm that delivers social intelligence for transformational times. We work with clients in three primary areas: building twenty-first-century corporate reputation, crafting brand strategy and performance tracking, and earning organic media through public relations research. Our mission is to provide insights and advisory to help leaders make the best decisions possible.

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