



**THE  
CORPORATE  
SOCIAL  
MIND**

**ANNUAL REVIEW**

**CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS OF COMPANIES TO ADDRESS SOCIAL ISSUES**

**UNITED STATES AND GERMANY**

## INTRODUCTION

One of the ultimate tests of social consciousness is a bad economy. Everyone must be able to meet their basic needs (and those of their family) before they can care about a social issue, especially one that doesn't affect them at the moment.

Both Germany and the United States have faced economic challenges in 2022 with few expectations of recovery before next year:

- Germany's economy is stalled under the weight of refugees and an embargo on Russian oil, both the result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warned in June that "rising inflation is reducing household purchasing power, ... investor and consumer confidence have collapsed and supply chain bottlenecks have worsened" since the COVID pandemic.
- In the US, the Associated Press reported slight economic growth in the third quarter, "snapping two straight quarters of economic contraction and overcoming punishingly high inflation and interest rates" for many months prior. Consumer spending also began to grow as exports and government spending rose for the first time in months.

When their transportation, health or employment is insecure or unstable, no amount of corporate influence can get people to respond to a company's social issue campaign, program or initiative. As this research shows, economies and social good are inextricably linked whether one is a German or an American.

### RESEARCH TEAM

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## PURPOSE

This study is an annual review of the public's expectations of business as social moments and movements occur and mature in two countries: Germany and the United States. The ongoing examination arose from the book [The Corporate Social Mind: How Companies Lead Social Change From the Inside Out](#) by Derrick Feldmann and Michael Alberg-Seberich, which defines the social mindset needed by today's companies in the face of these expectations and how to weave this mindset throughout the company.

## METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was taken with an online survey fielded October 2022 to collect data about attitudes and activities in Germany and the United States related to corporate involvement in social issues. The survey had 2,000 US and 1,000 German respondents from a nationally representative sample (Census projected), producing a 95% confidence interval with a 5% margin of error for the German data and a 2.5% margin of error for the US data. This report highlights differences between the countries of at least 5%.

## DEFINITIONS

### SOCIAL MINDSET:

A perspective that approaches decisions and actions with their impact on society in mind (e.g., police reform, hunger, discrimination, immigration).

### CORPORATE SOCIAL MIND:

Companies must develop eight traits to have a corporate social mindset: 1) Decide with society in mind, 2) live the company's values, 3) use resources for society's benefit, 4) listen before acting, 5) have a social voice, 6) lead social collectives, 7) measure social impact and 8) innovate for social good. [The Corporate Social Mind: How Companies Lead Social Change From the Inside Out. Fast Company Press](#)

# PUBLIC ACTIONS FROM CORPORATE INFLUENCE

As ordinary American and German families face record-setting increases in inflation, energy prices and, in Germany’s case, refugees, corporate influence on each public’s involvement in social issues has shifted. In 2021, researchers saw notable declines in company-inspired actions to support animals, COVID, climate change and immigration. This year, concern for human survival from lack of basic resources and the freedom from discrimination (highlighted below) seems to have taken over the German and, to a slightly lesser extent, the American consciousness (though animal welfare has for decades been at or near the top of a socially conscious public’s list).

## TOP SOCIAL ISSUES FOR WHICH ACTIONS WERE TAKEN AT A COMPANY’S REQUEST

### - US -

● 2022 ● 2021



### - GERMANY -

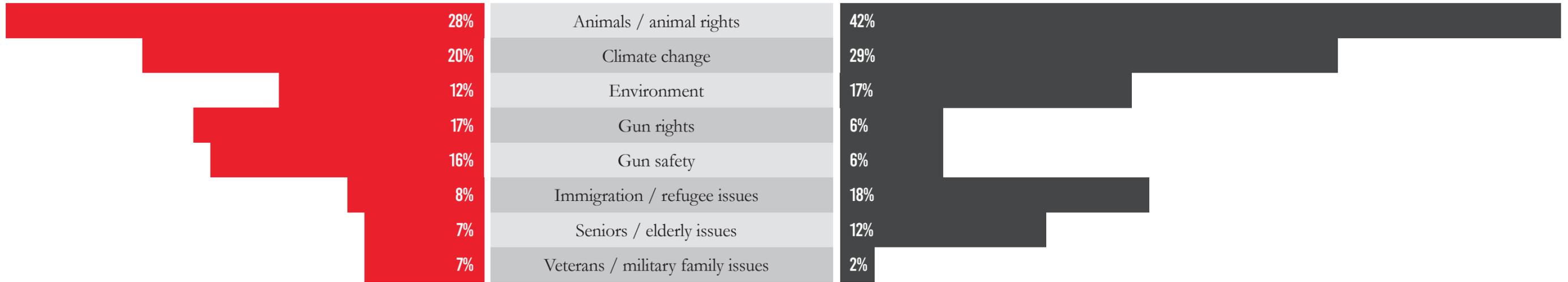
● 2022 ● 2021



German actions supporting the environment due to corporate influence outpaced those by Americans in 2021 and even more so this year. Guns are a distinctly American issue, and Germany is struggling to welcome refugees from Ukraine and on the Balkan Route.

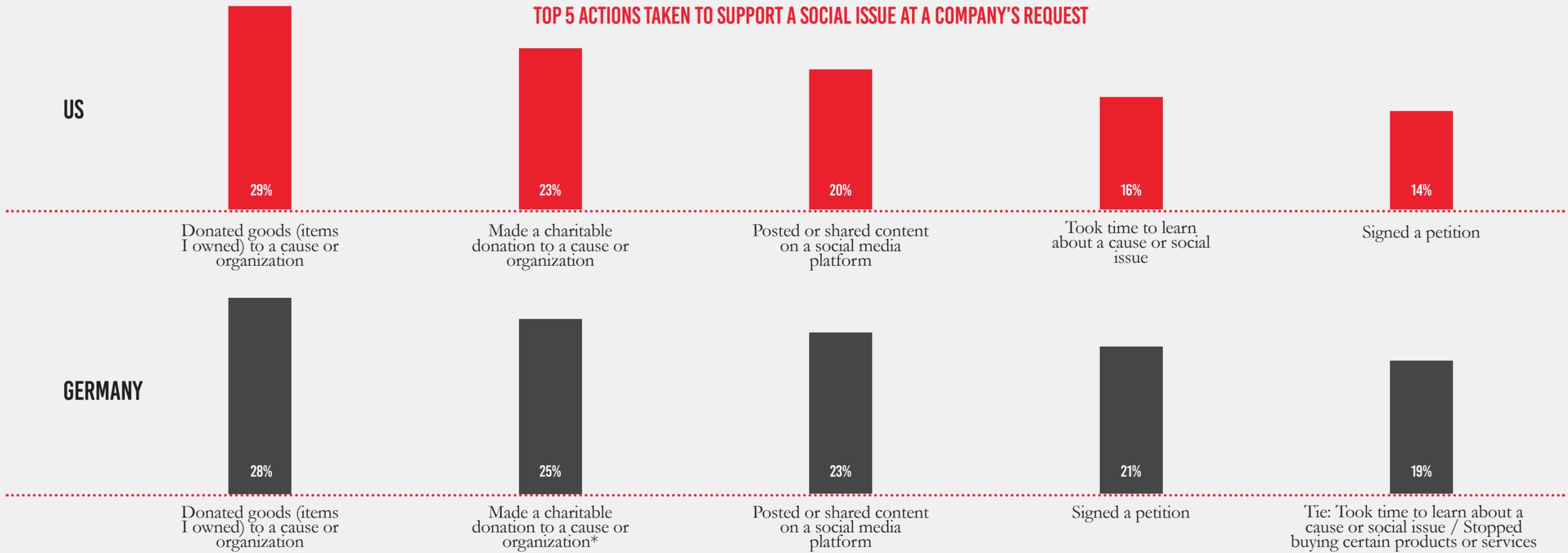
**NOTABLE DIFFERENCES**

● US ● Germany



Despite their economic woes, about a quarter of respondents in each country donated goods or funds in 2022. Germans were much more likely to increase or stop buying certain products or services to support an issue. In both countries, more than half of consumers today make financial donations at a store cash register.

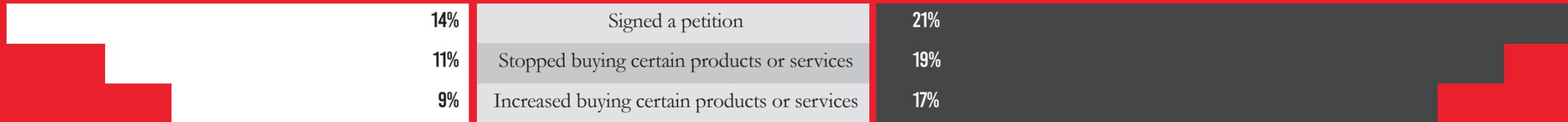
**TOP 5 ACTIONS TAKEN TO SUPPORT A SOCIAL ISSUE AT A COMPANY'S REQUEST**



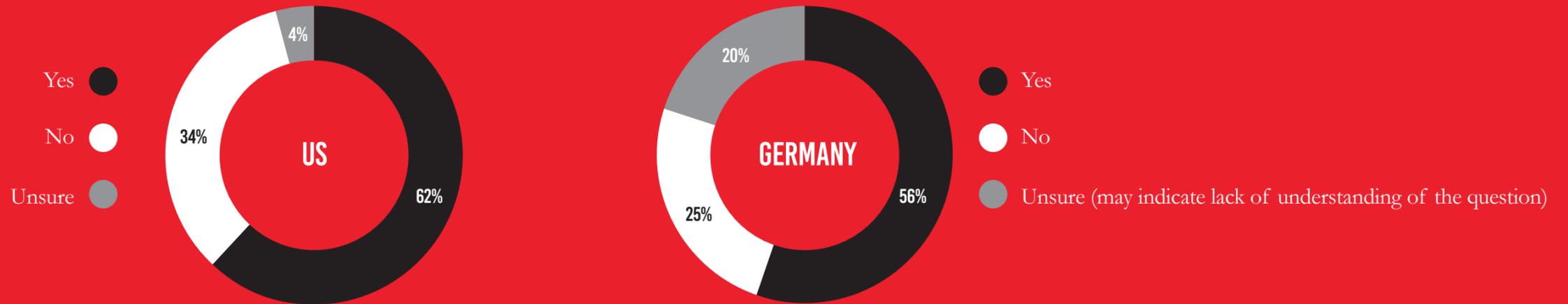
\*Question may have been misunderstood by German respondents

**NOTABLE DIFFERENCES**

● US ● Germany



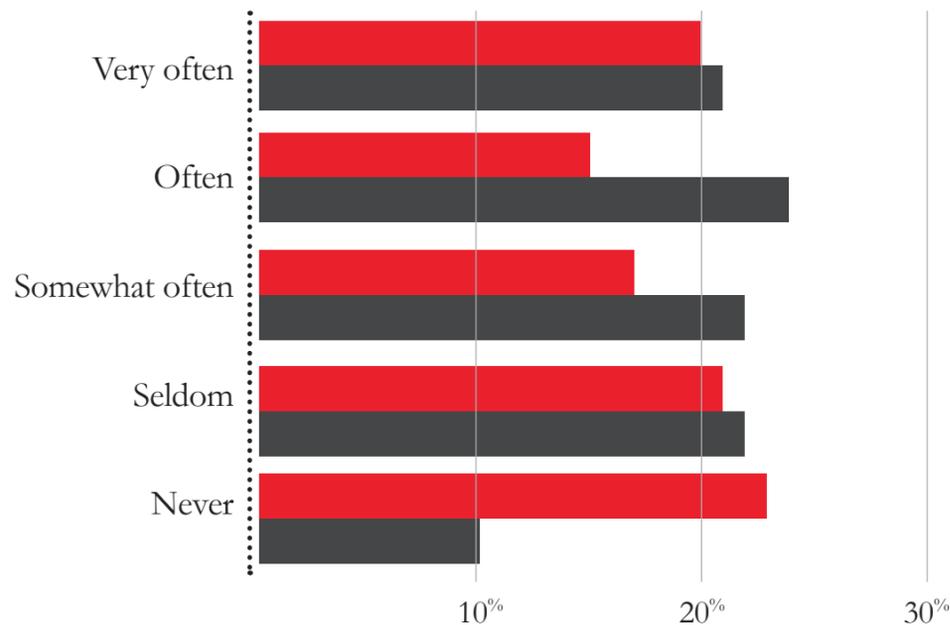
**\*DID YOU MAKE YOUR DONATION AT A CASH REGISTER OR POINT OF SALE UNCONNECTED WITH THE CAUSE OR ORGANIZATION?**



Germans are using the internet to learn about a company's social-issue support far more than Americans. Nearly a quarter of the latter said they never do so. When the issue is racial equity/social justice/anti-discrimination, 30% of Americans never use a website or search engine to explore a company's support.

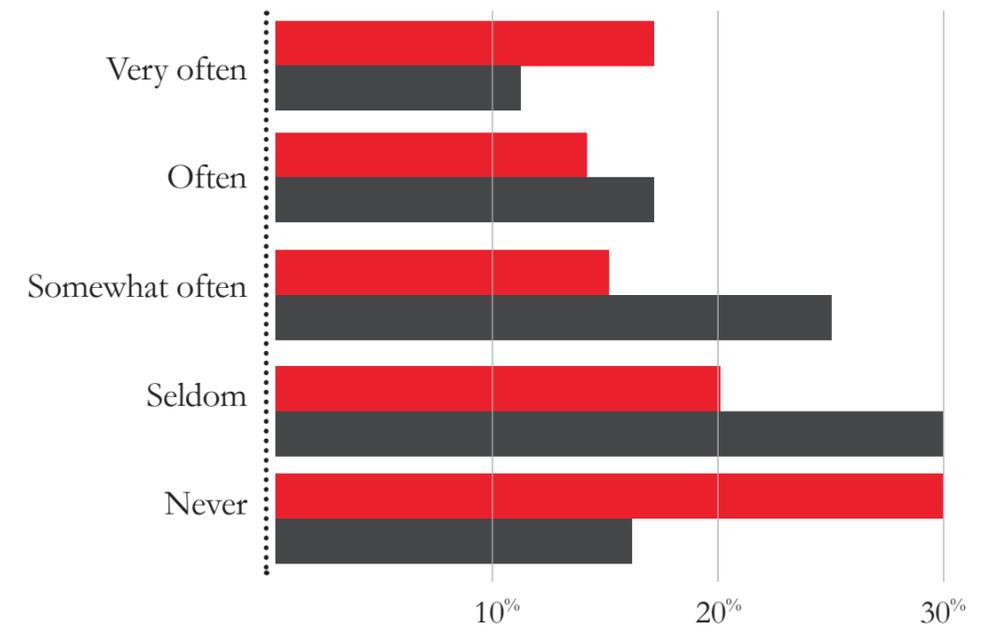
**HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT A WEBSITE OR SEARCH ENGINE TO LEARN ABOUT A COMPANY'S SUPPORT OF A SOCIAL ISSUE?**

● US ● Germany



**HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT A WEBSITE OR SEARCH ENGINE TO LEARN ABOUT A COMPANY'S SUPPORT OF RACIAL EQUITY/SOCIAL JUSTICE/ANTI-DISCRIMINATION?**

● US ● Germany

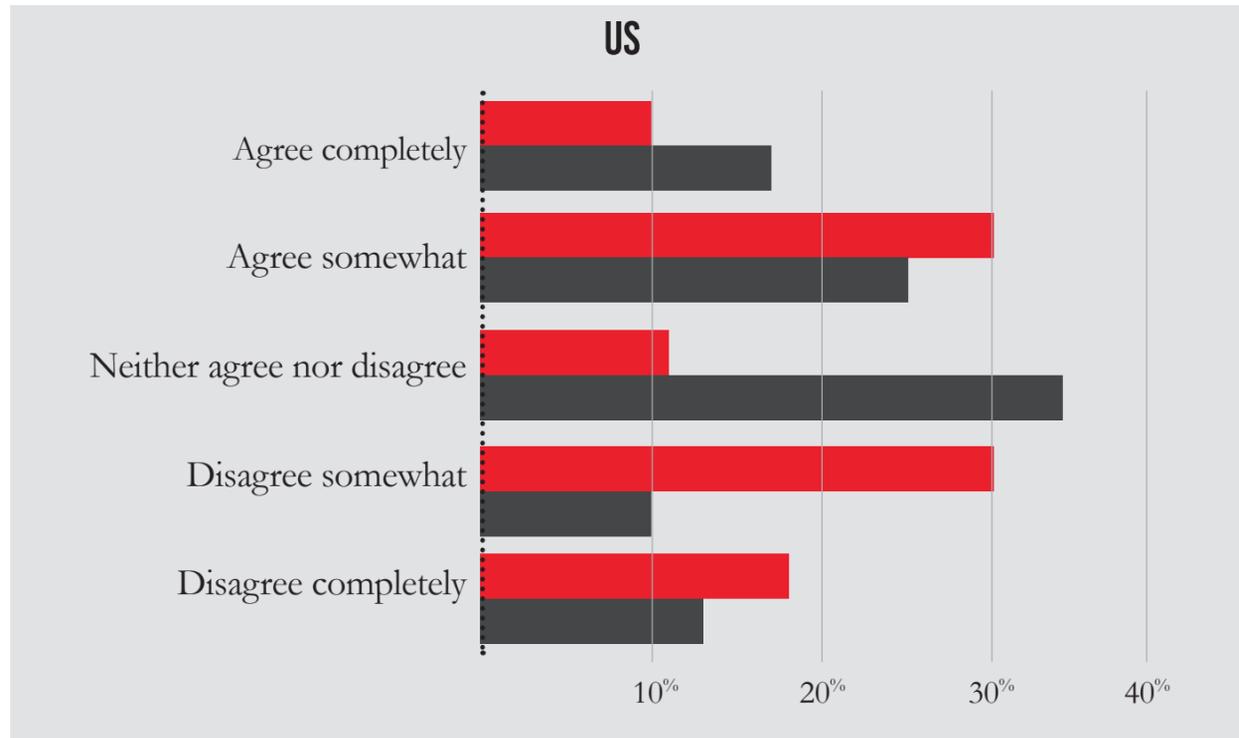


# CORPORATE ACTIONS ON SOCIAL ISSUES

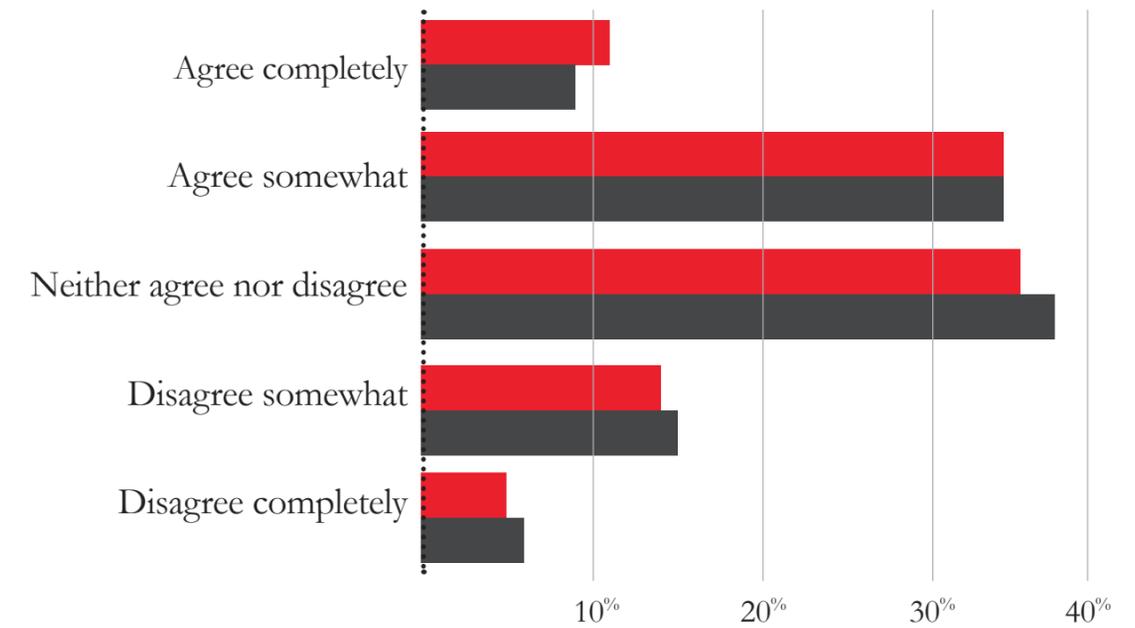
The trend of Americans believing companies should take a public stand on social issues may have gotten a boost in 2022. Those against the idea dropped from almost half of respondents in 2021 to less than a quarter today, while the moveable middle – those who said they neither agree nor disagree – tripled, coming much more in line with Germans’ slight agreement or lack of commitment.

## COMPANIES I PURCHASE FROM SHOULD TAKE A PUBLIC STAND ON SOCIAL ISSUES.

● 2021  
● 2022

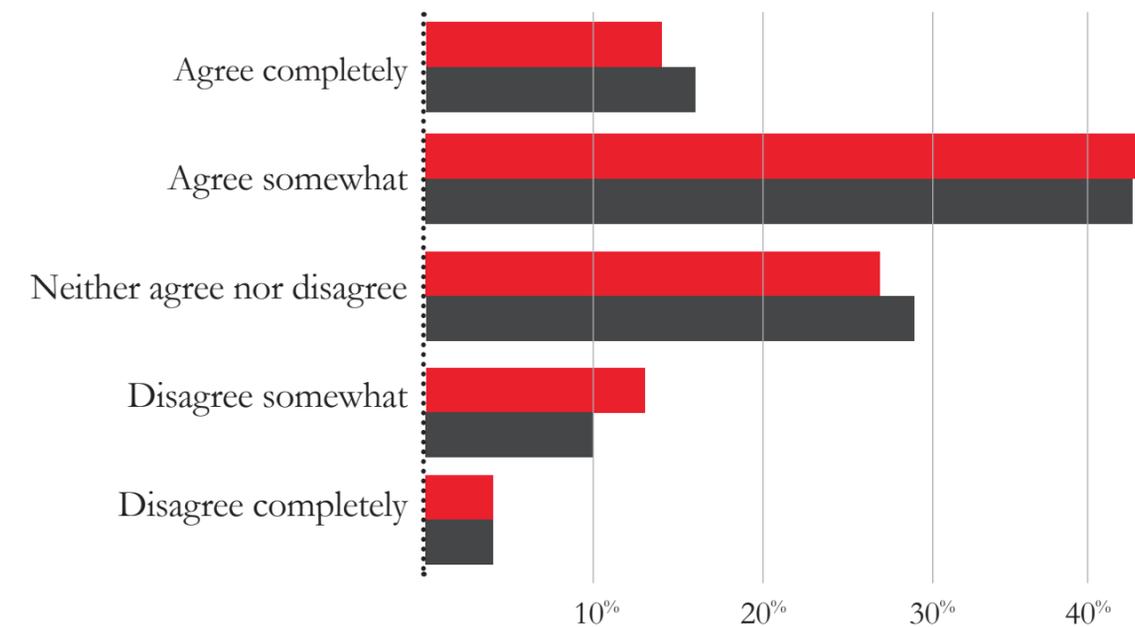
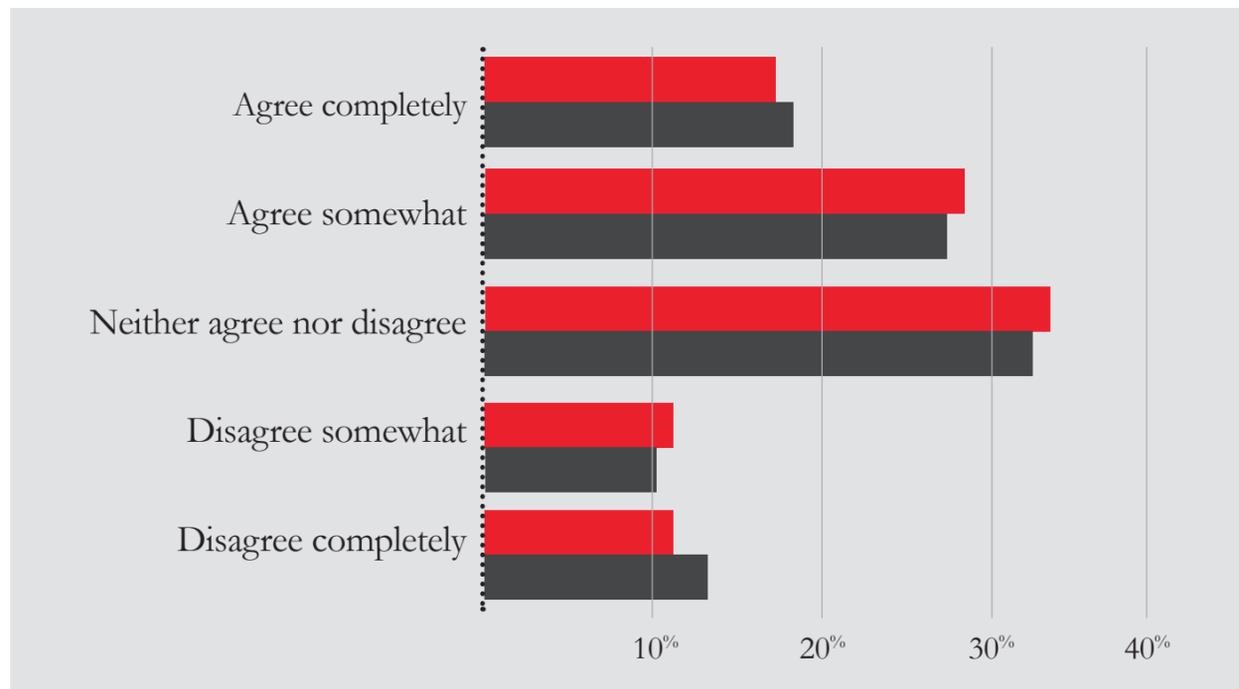


## GERMANY



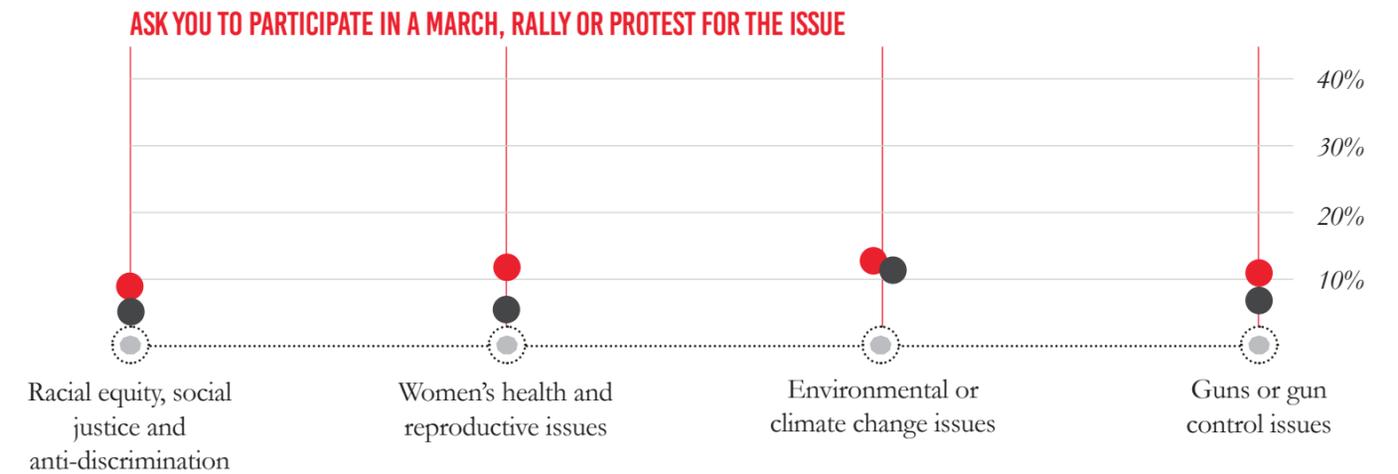
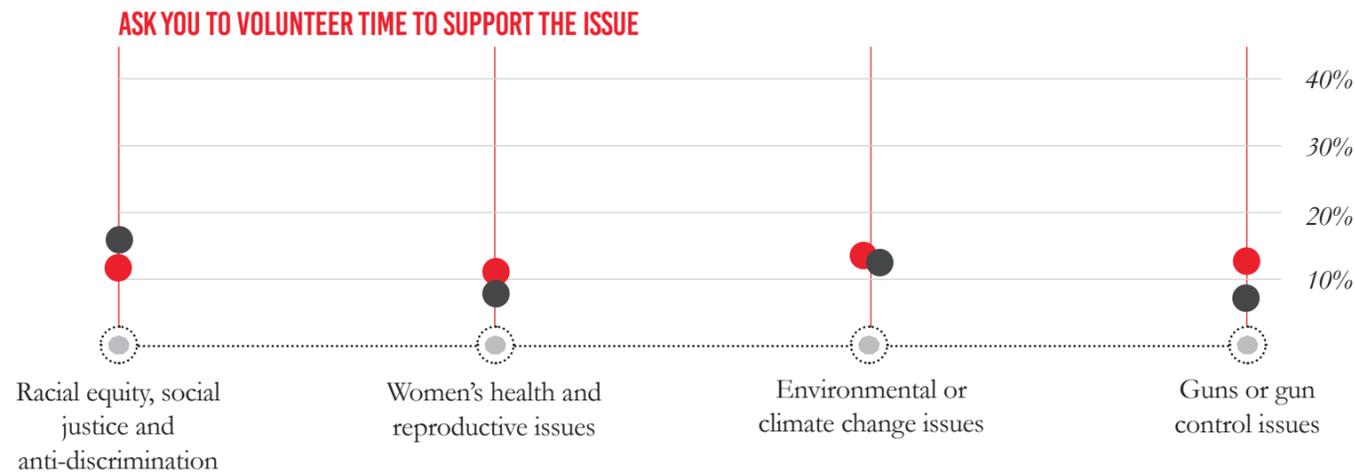
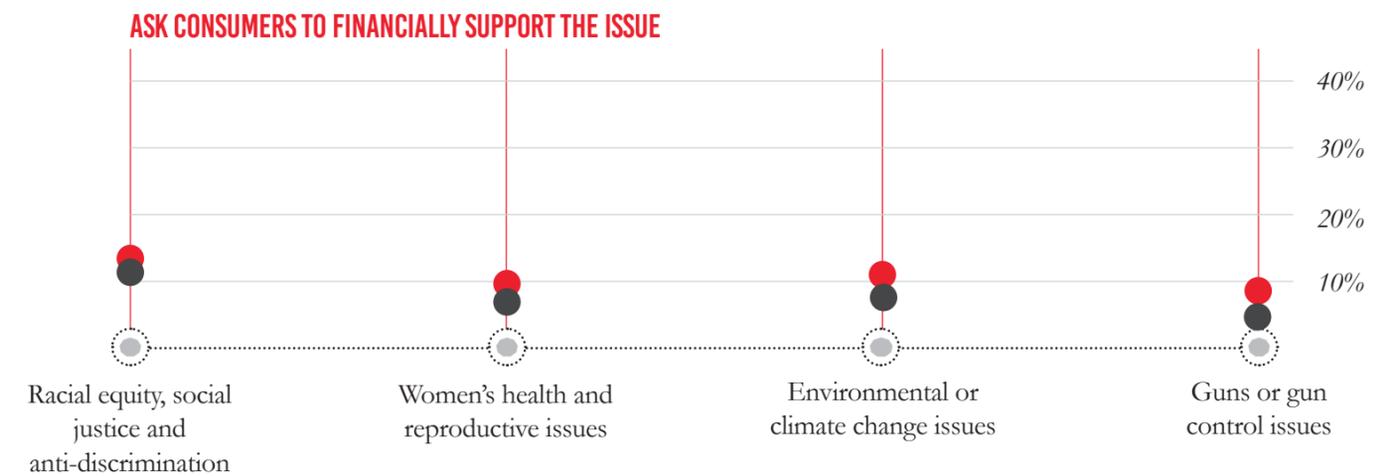
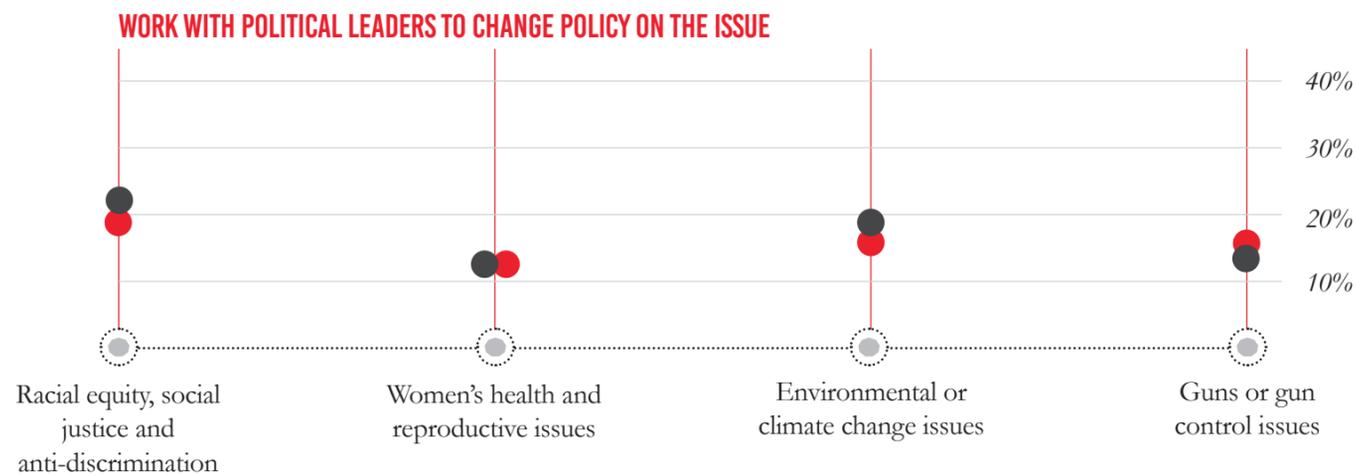
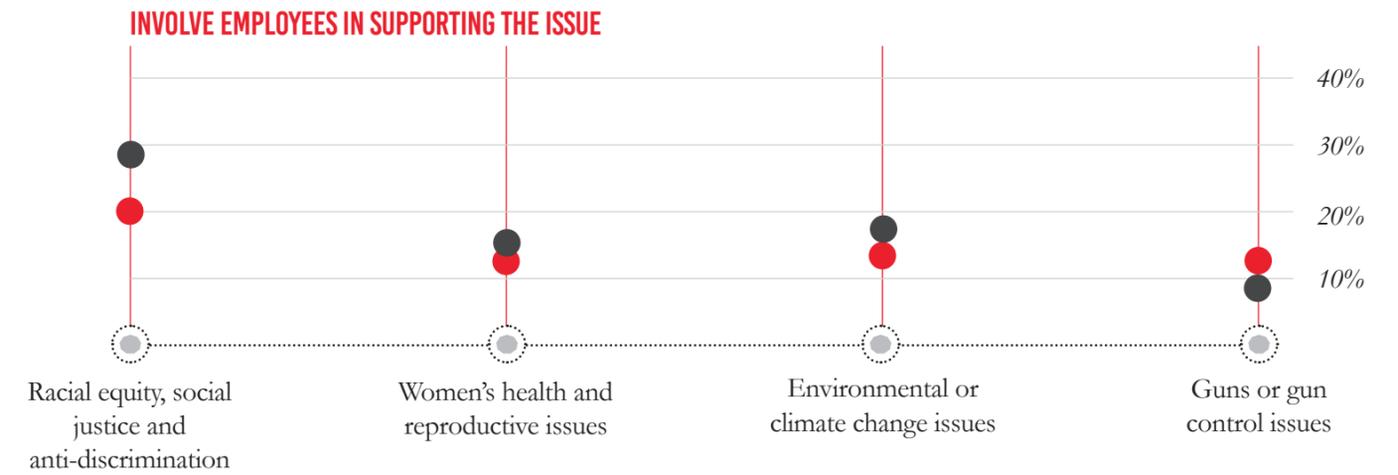
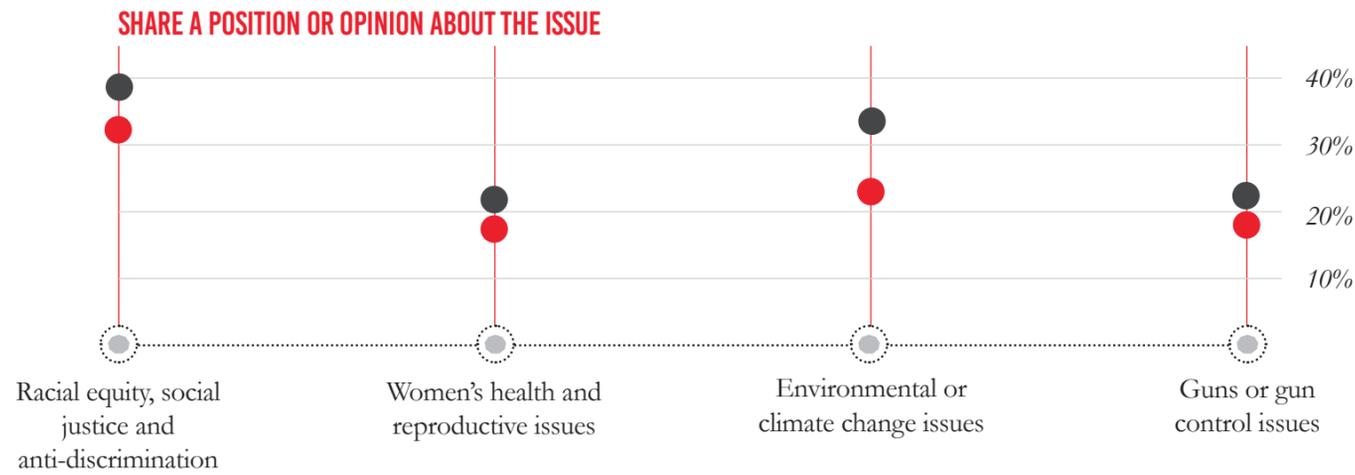
## COMPANIES FROM WHICH I BUY PRODUCTS/GOODS/SERVICES SHOULD GET INVOLVED IN (PROMOTE OR SUPPORT) SOCIAL ISSUES.

● 2021  
● 2022



When asked what actions companies should take, a substantial percentage of American respondents said companies should not voice an opinion or take action on the specific issues listed below, then consistently selected four behaviors regardless of the issue: a) promote the issue, b) share their position, c) display materials in stores and d) involve employees. Germans were far less likely to say companies should stay out of social issues, and they tended to prefer promotional actions for companies.

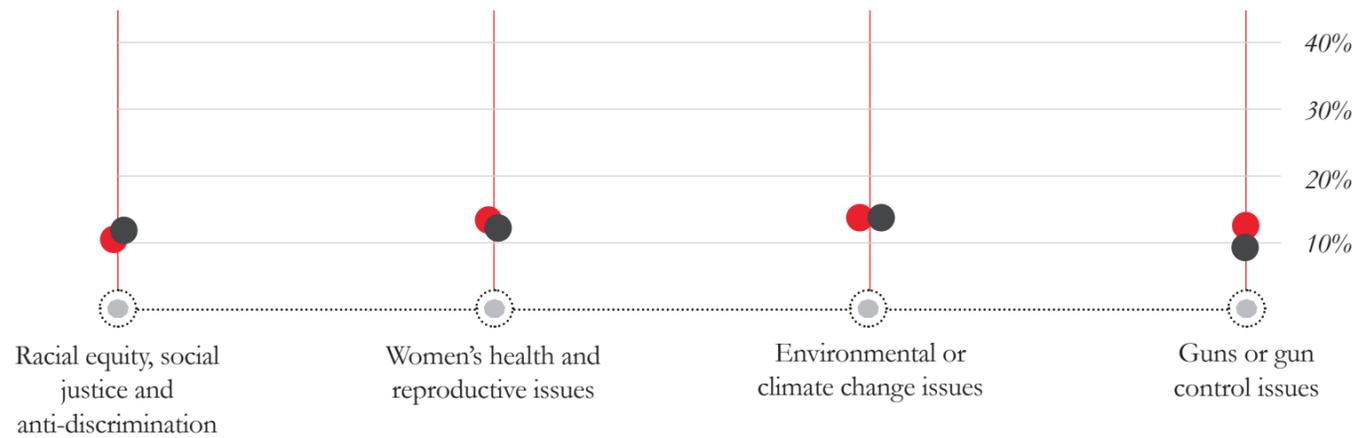
**FOR THE ISSUES BELOW, A COMPANY I BUY FROM SHOULD ...** ● US ● Germany



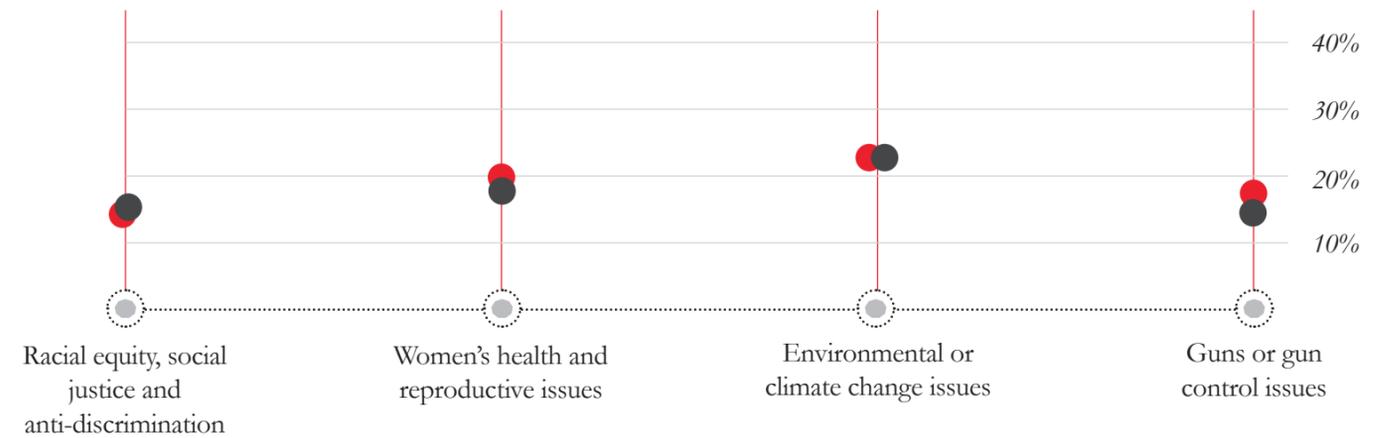
(CONT'D) FOR THE ISSUES BELOW, A COMPANY I BUY FROM SHOULD ...

● US ● Germany

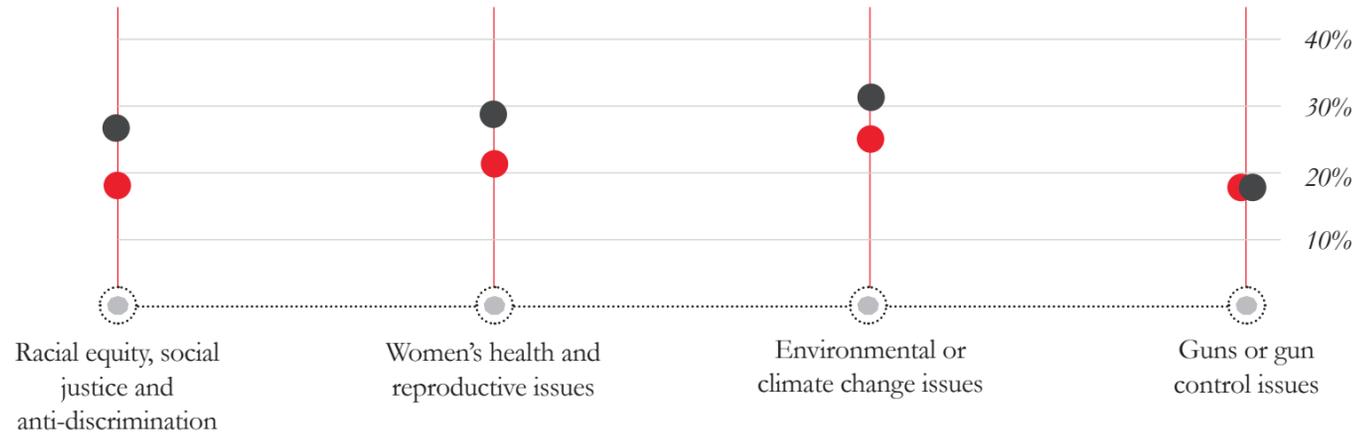
ASK YOU TO SIGN A PETITION ABOUT THE ISSUE



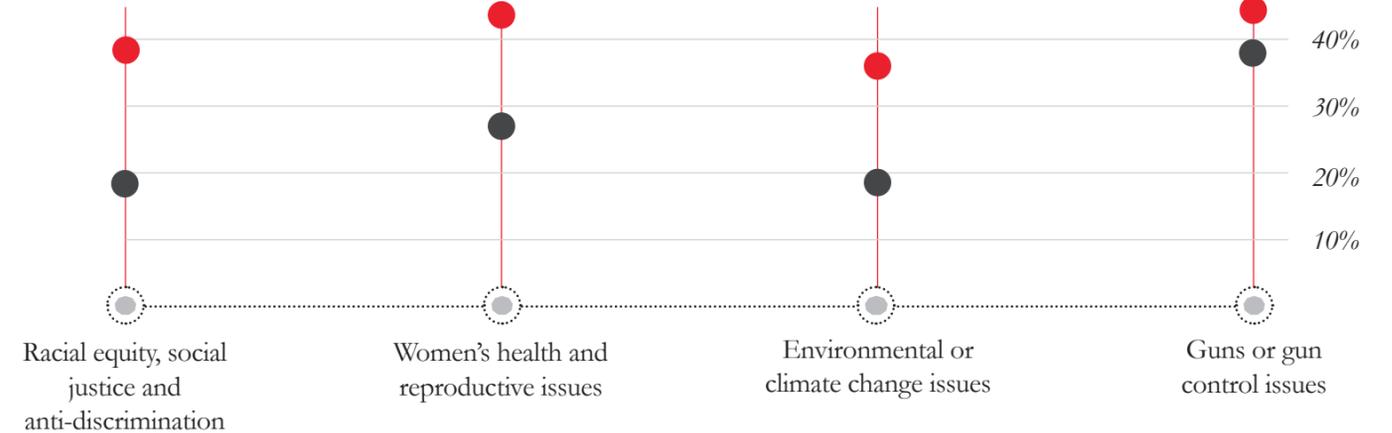
DISPLAY MATERIALS, SIGNS OR OTHER EDUCATIONAL CONTENT ABOUT THE ISSUE IN STORES OR PLACES WHERE PRODUCTS, GOODS AND SERVICES ARE SOLD



PROMOTE THE ISSUE THROUGH ADVERTISEMENTS, EVENTS OR PUBLIC PROGRAMSE



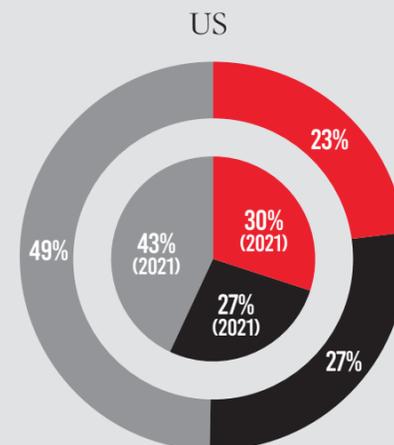
I DO NOT THINK A COMPANY SHOULD VOICE AN OPINION OR TAKE ACTION ON ISSUES



YOU WANT TO PURCHASE A SOFT DRINK. AT THE STORE, YOU FIND THREE DIFFERENT BRANDS OF YOUR FAVORITE SOFT DRINK. WHICH DO YOU CHOOSE?

INTENT VS. ACTION

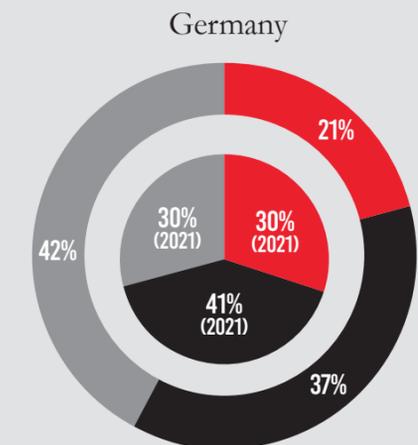
People in both countries appeared to be more concerned with price this year than with any social issue. Still, more Germans than Americans said they cared more about environmental impact than price, and more Americans than German said they buy without regard to price or social issues.



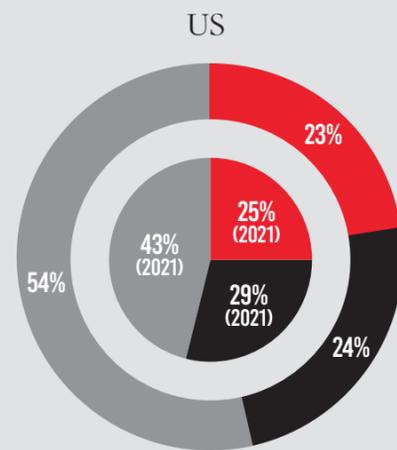
● **Soft Drink Brand 1: Price \$3**  
Label provides % employees from diverse populations, % women in management, NGOs / nonprofits the company supports.

● **Soft Drink Brand 2: Price \$2.50**  
Label provides NGOs / nonprofits the company supports.

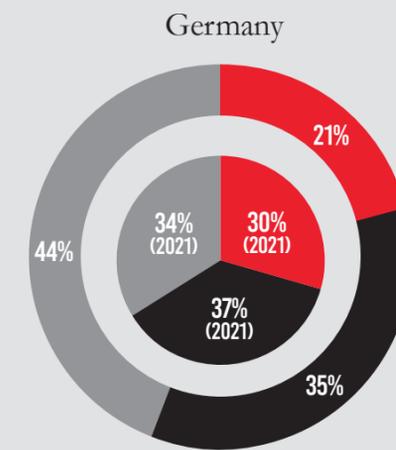
● **Soft Drink Brand 3: Price \$2.25**  
Label provides nothing but nutritional information.



**YOU WANT TO PURCHASE A NEW SWEATER. AT THE STORE, YOU FIND THREE BRANDS OF THE SAME SWEATER YOU WANT TO BUY. WHICH DO YOU CHOOSE?**



- Sweater Brand 1: Price \$50**  
*Label provides % employees from diverse populations, % women in management, NGOs/nonprofits the company supports.*
- Sweater Brand 2: Price \$42.50**  
*Label provides NGOs/nonprofits the company supports.*
- Sweater Brand 3: Price \$35**  
*Label provides nothing but price and care for the garment.*



Consumers that consider social issues when making purchase decisions can be grouped into three categories for a company's consideration:

**ACTIVIST, SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS AND SOCIAL-ISSUE INTERESTED.**

- ACTIVIST CONSUMER:** Very knowledgeable about social issues involving a company, from supply chains to human rights to employee wages. Though the most vocal consumers, they aren't necessarily a company's customer. Yet, brands often respond to their pressure because of the public attention they draw. Companies can't ignore these individuals, though, given their sphere of influence.
- SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS CONSUMER:** Make socially conscious purchasing decisions. They see if a company's practices match its stated position, measured to a large degree by how closely a brand, product or service aligns with their own view of an issue. These individuals expect to see a company's roles and responsibilities within the community shared visibly (packaging, etc.).
- SOCIAL ISSUE-INTERESTED CONSUMER:** Aware of social issues and make socially conscious decisions where possible. They usually support issues by signing petitions and posting on social media. When a brand's position on an issue aligns with theirs, they become loyal to and positive about the company.

**OF THE THREE TYPES OF SOCIALLY MINDED CONSUMERS, GERMANY HAS MORE OF ALL THREE THAN THE US.**

**SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS CONSUMER:**

*Employees.* I care more whether a company addresses fair wages and employment practices than the product's price.



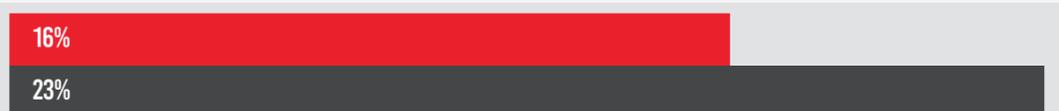
**SOCIAL ISSUE-INTERESTED:**

*Social issue engagement.* I make purchasing decisions based on a company's involvement in social issues, not on the cost to me.



**ACTIVIST CONSUMERS:**

*Environment.* I care more about the product's or company's impact on the environment than the product's price.

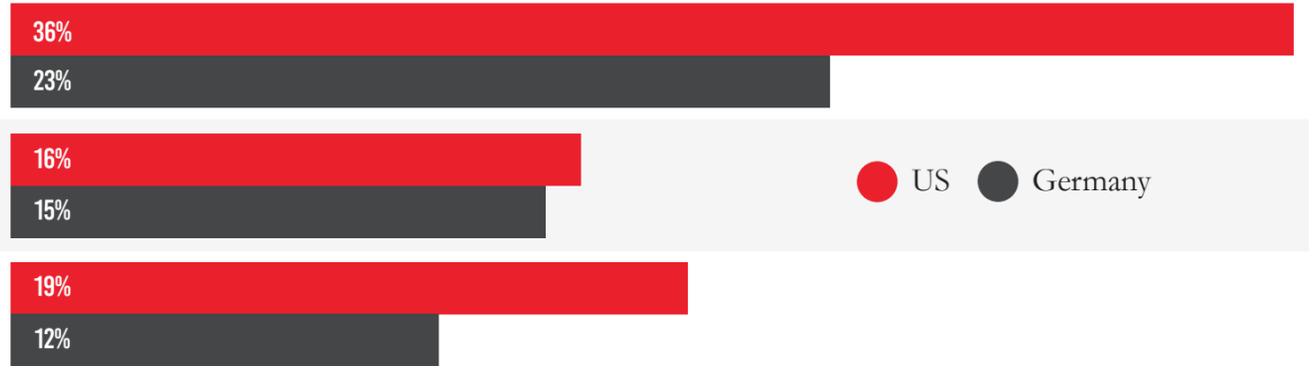


**NOT SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS:**

*Price.* I care more about the price of a product than whether the company supports a social issue.

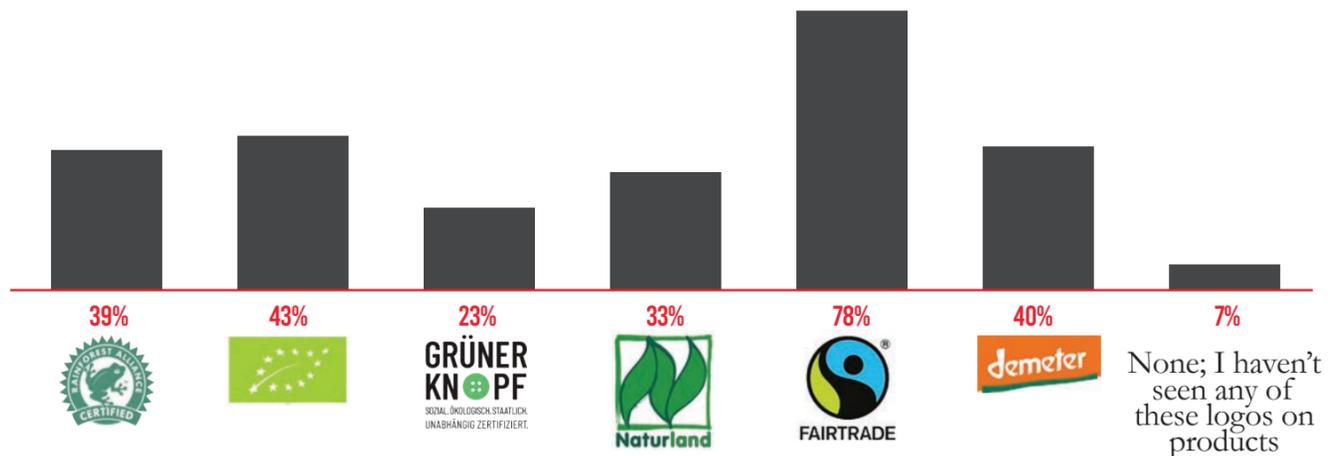
*Price.* I care more about the price of a product than how a product was developed or produced.

*Personal needs.* I make a purchase when I need or want something; I don't care about price or social issues when I spend money.

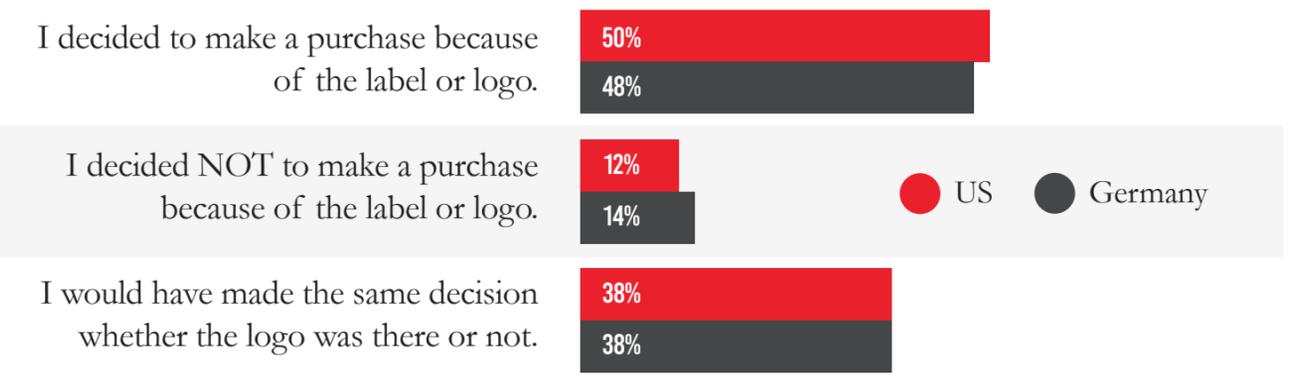


German participants were shown the following logos that are used to identify various levels of sustainability and can be found on many goods. A substantial portion of respondents could not identify them.

**- GERMANY ONLY -**  
**WHICH OF THESE LABELS HAVE YOU SEEN ON PRODUCTS FOR PURCHASE?**



**HAVE ANY OF THE LABELS OR LOGOS YOU'VE SEEN CHANGED THE WAY YOU PURCHASE ANY PRODUCTS, GOODS OR SERVICES?**

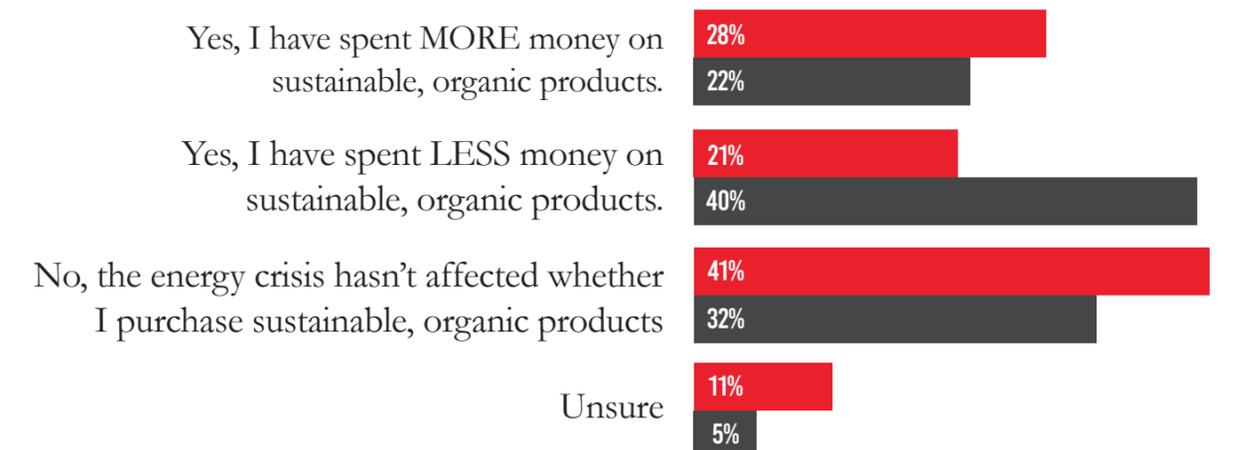


As of October 2022, high energy prices and slow economic growth in Germany were expected to extend well into 2023. Similarly, though US gas prices were dipping somewhat, the rapid increase of inflation in 2022 was not expected to level out this year. Responses indicate these conditions have dampened consumer purchasing in both countries, though more so in Germany.

**HOW HAS THE ENERGY CRISIS OR RISING ENERGY PRICES INFLUENCED YOUR BUYING BEHAVIOR GENERALLY?**



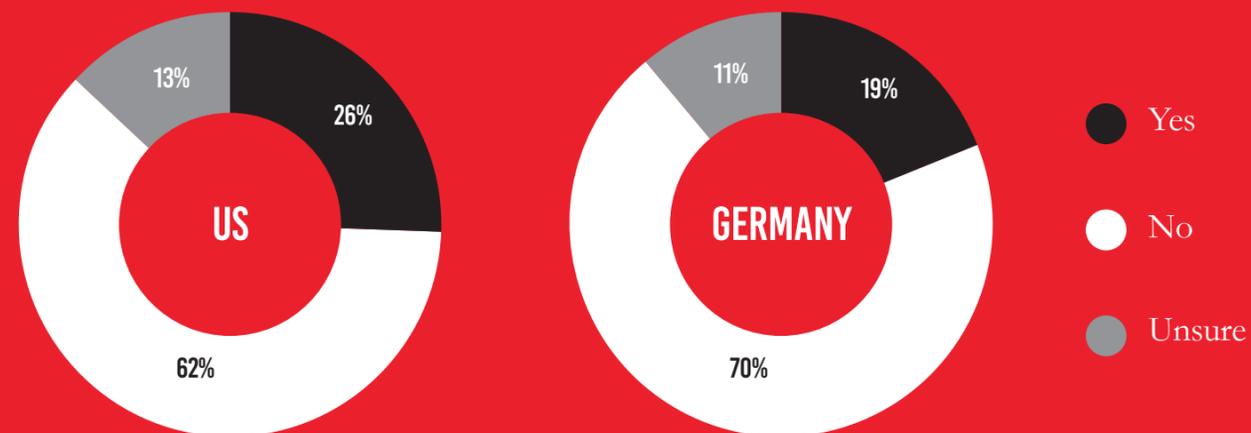
**SINCE THE ENERGY CRISIS OR RISING ENERGY PRICES, HAVE YOU CHANGED HOW YOU PURCHASE SUSTAINABLE, ORGANIC PRODUCTS?**



## ARE SDGs THE ANSWER?

The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) became official on January 1, 2016. Per the UN, “They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand in hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.” Though adopted by all UN Member States, including the US and Germany, most Germans and Americans still have never heard of them seven years later.

### HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS?



## CONCLUSION

The public’s concerns about corporate involvement in social issues shifts along with their own experience with and capacity to support those issues. Today, the economic and societal challenges that have grown from the pandemic, supply bottlenecks, skyrocketing energy prices and, particularly in Germany, an unprecedented influx of refugees are reflected in the corporate influences Germans and Americans are responding to: calls to support food banks, donate goods and services, and protect people from racial and ethnic discrimination.

This doesn’t mean every company should shift its social focus. Companies must zero in on the causes and issues that make the most strategic sense to support regardless of the public’s demands. More and more German and American companies are realizing their role in finding solutions to the social challenges facing their countries and their world, and the data supports both the altruistic and business reasons for embracing a corporate social mindset.