



**THE  
CORPORATE  
SOCIAL  
MIND**

**RESEARCH REPORT | JUNE 2020**  
THE PUBLIC'S EXPECTATIONS OF COMPANIES TO ADDRESS SOCIAL ISSUES

## INTRODUCTION

Conversations about corporate efforts to be mindful of their roles in society had been escalating for nine months. From the Business Roundtable in Washington, DC, to the World Economic Forum focus at Davos, the conversation about business' intersections with social issues and impact has been at the forefront of some promising work. Then, two historic moments shook the consciousness of companies globally: the COVID-19 pandemic changed our daily lives, and vast numbers of people took to the streets demanding police reform.

Research has long shown that consumers want companies to step up not just with words, but with actions. Here is that opportunity. And those that have visibly risen to the occasion – converting their machinery to produce ventilators and personal protective equipment, donating marketing dollars to local Black-owned businesses – may have started a new wave of responding to consumer expectations and impatience that may not ebb.

Some companies have exhibited a social mindset. Many companies, though, are still struggling to determine how to effectively match their core functions with concrete actions, practices and investments intended to address social issues in a way the public finds authentic and meaningful. Now that so many consumers have been personally touched by today's crises, how do they expect companies to respond?

## 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:

A new book, *The Corporate Social Mind: How Companies Lead Social Change From the Inside Out*, delineates eight traits companies must develop 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.

### Conjoint Analysis:

A statistical technique used to determine what combination of attributes most influences a decision.

## PURPOSE

This study examines the public's expectations of business in a new era created by the pandemic (COVID-19) and intense focus on racial equity, how companies should approach the development of goods and services in the face of these expectations, and how a social mindset should be woven throughout every company. Ongoing analysis of these trends and shifting consumer expectations will occur throughout the year and during critical moments.

## RESEARCH TEAM

Derrick Feldmann  
Lead Researcher  
Michael Alberg-Seberich  
Research Advisor  
Amy Thayer, Ph.D.  
Researcher  
Melissa Wall  
Research Associate  
Cindy Dashnaw  
Copywriter  
Tyler Hansen  
Graphic Design

## METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was taken with an online survey fielded Saturday, June 20, 2020, to collect data about attitudes and activities in the United States related to corporate involvement in social issues. The survey had 1,004 respondents from a nationally representative sample (Census projected), producing a 95% confidence interval with a +/- 3% margin of error. Note that categories may not total 100% due to non-answers, multiple-choice questions and rounding.

## 2020 TIMELINE

### MARCH

3/11: WHO officially declares a pandemic  
3/13: US declares national emergency  
3/30: States begin stay-at-home directives

### MAY

5/25: George Floyd, Minneapolis, dies in police custody  
5/26-28: Protests start in Minneapolis, spread to other US states  
5/28: President Trump threatens to use National Guard  
5/29: Arresting officer charged with the murder of George Floyd  
5/31: Protests in 75 US cities, 5 killed, curfews imposed

### JUNE

6/2: Tens of thousands worldwide participate in protests  
6/20: Survey fielded

## PUBLIC ACTIONS FROM CORPORATE INFLUENCE

Many Americans acted to support a social issue because a company asked them to. The ways companies have asked for such support are as varied as the companies themselves. For instance, a fitness training company encouraged community members to take workout classes with Black instructors, among other actions.

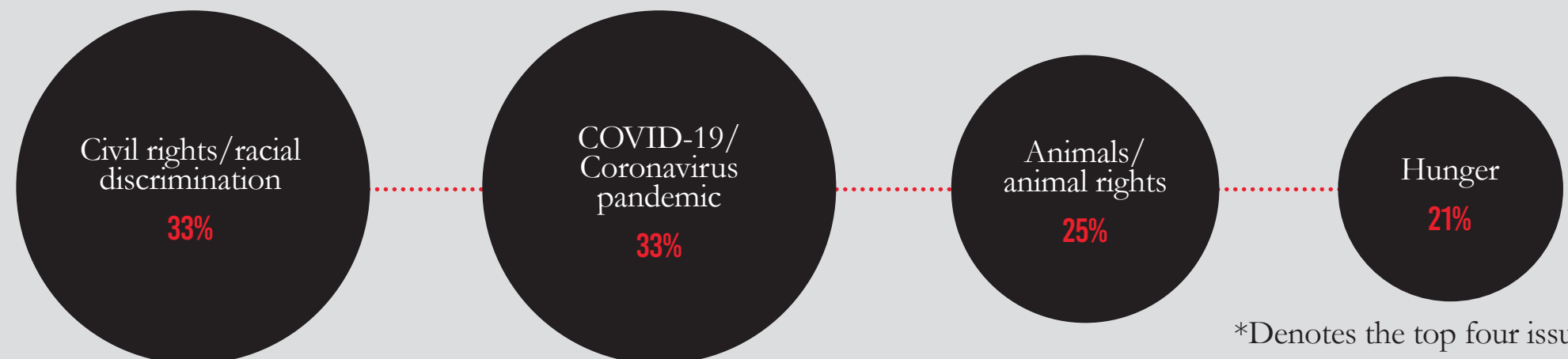
Such requests have brought powerful results online and off. In response to requests or encouragement from a business or brand, a quarter of Americans posted or shared content about an issue and a fifth signed a petition on social media. Offline, a fifth of consumers increased their local purchases and charitable donations.



**NOTE: ABOUT A THIRD OF RESPONDENTS SAID “NOTHING,” WHICH IS CONSISTENT WITH OTHER RESEARCH AND EVEN WITH PREVIOUS RESEARCH PERFORMED WITH YOUNGER CONSUMERS.**

### FOR WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SOCIAL ISSUES\* DID YOU TAKE THE ACTION BECAUSE A COMPANY ASKED YOU TO? (Select all that apply.)

Of those who took action in response to a corporate request, the top social issues they addressed were civil rights/racial discrimination and the COVID-19/ Coronavirus pandemic, at 33% of survey respondents each. These were followed by actions related to animals/animal rights (25%) and hunger (21%).



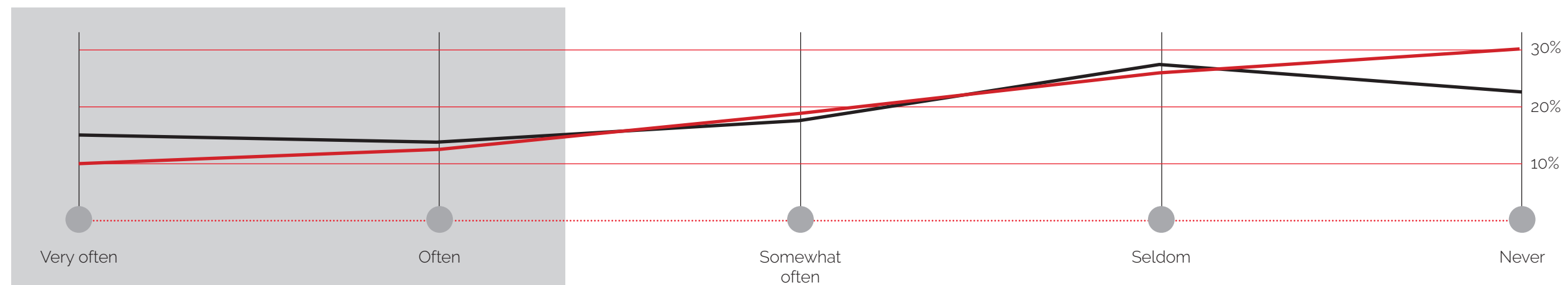
\*Denotes the top four issues

## CORPORATE ACTIONS ON SOCIAL ISSUES

Corporate websites are still an important source of information about social issue involvement. Between a quarter and a third of adults reported they have used a company's site to learn whether it supports a social issue. Slightly less said they have done the same specifically related to racial equity, social justice and/or anti-discrimination.

**HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT A COMPANY'S WEBSITE OR USE AN ONLINE SEARCH ENGINE (EXAMPLE: GOOGLE) TO LEARN ABOUT A COMPANY'S WORK TO SUPPORT:**

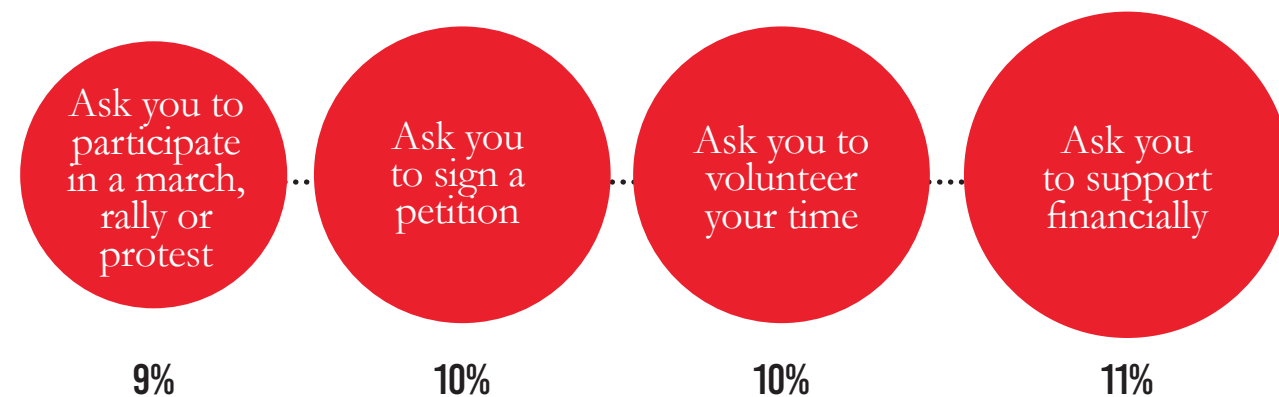
- Social Issues
- Racial Equity, Social Justice and/or Anti-Discrimination



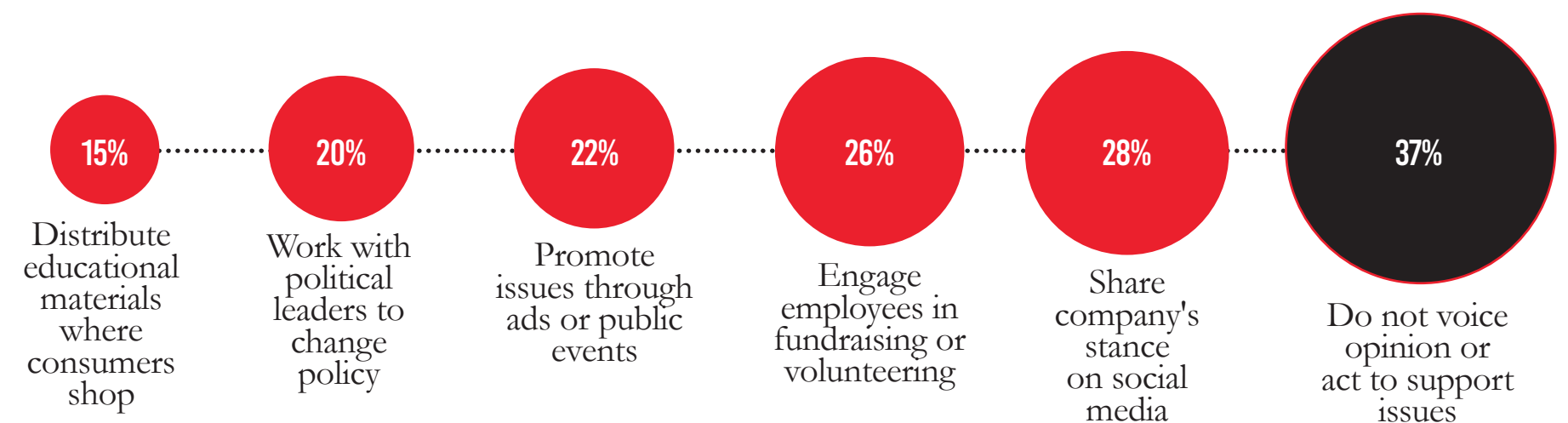
As seen in the previous section, the response to requests for action by companies has been favorable. Still, more Americans prefer the business itself to act than to request the individual consumer to act.

**DO YOU THINK A COMPANY YOU BUY FROM SHOULD DO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING RELATED TO A SOCIAL ISSUE? (Select all that apply.)**

### INDIVIDUAL REQUESTS



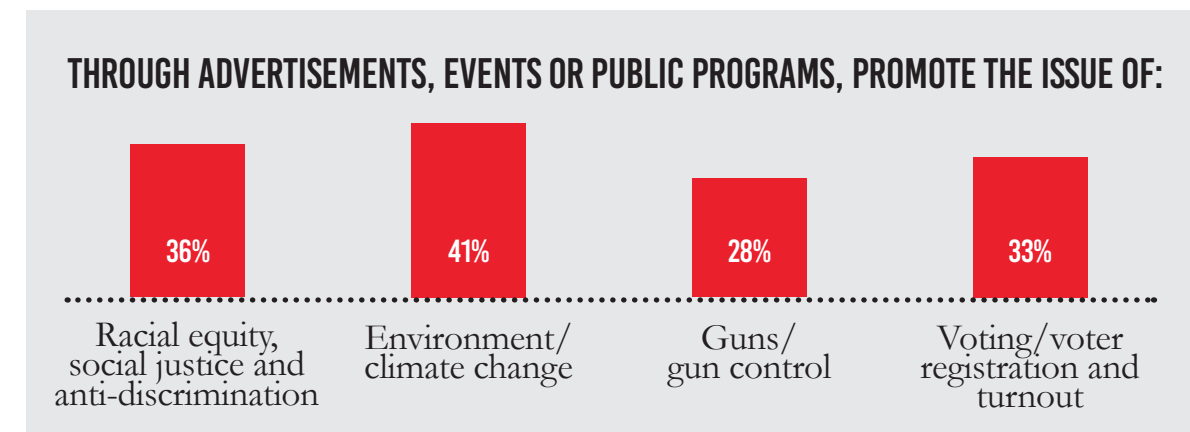
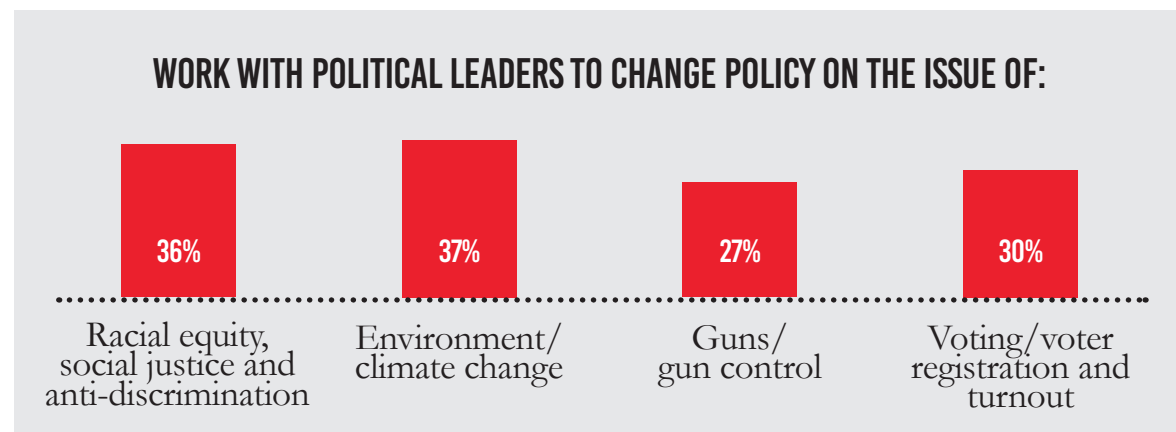
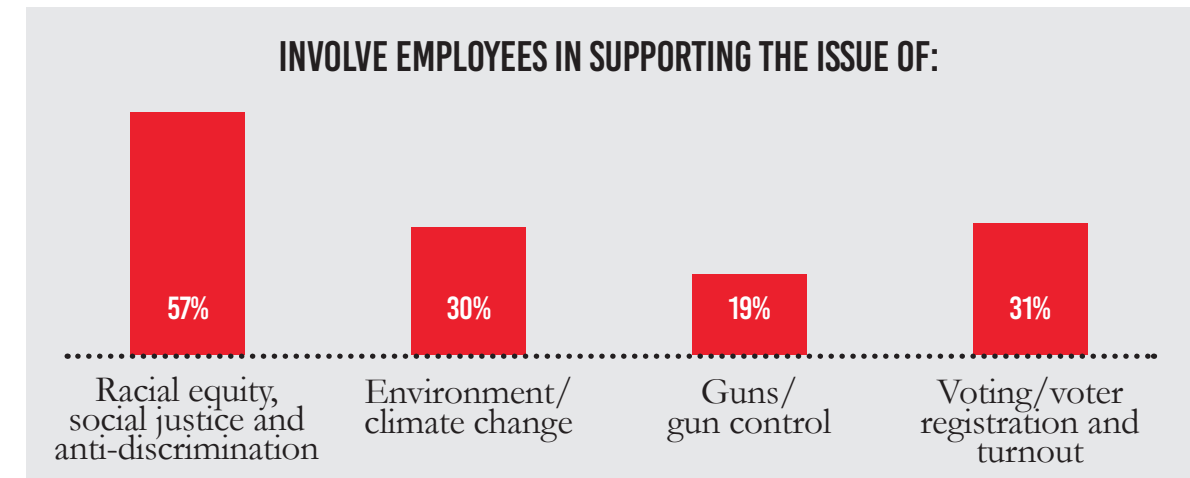
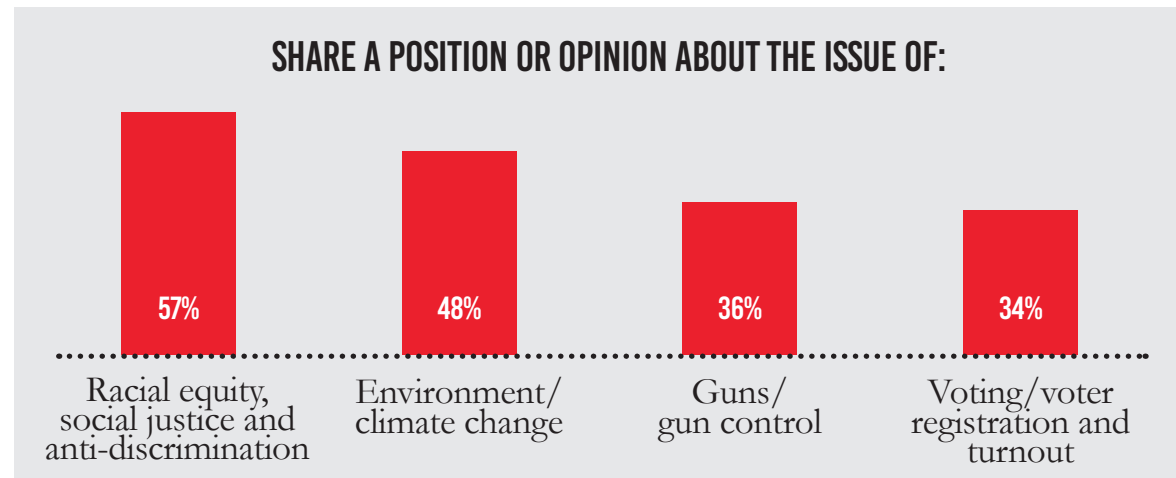
### CORPORATE ACTIONS



.....

Researchers asked questions from a customer's viewpoint about four social issues for which a company should take action. Racial equality/social justice/anti-discrimination and environment/climate change inspired the most responses, and guns/gun control and voting/voter registration/turnout the least.

**DO YOU THINK A COMPANY YOU BUY FROM SHOULD DO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING AS IT RELATES TO THE FOLLOWING SOCIAL ISSUES?** (Select all that apply.)



## A CORPORATE SOCIAL MINDSET IS NOW THE EXPECTATION

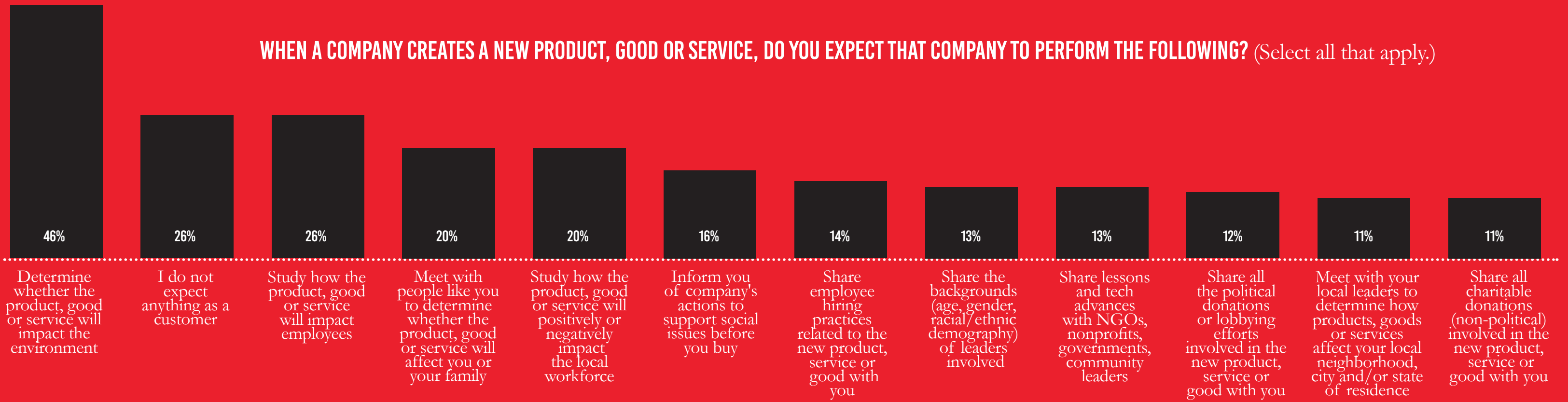
The results of this research underscore the value of a corporate social mindset and reflect expanding public expectations for businesses and corporations to meaningfully advance social issues.

Nearly half of consumers believe companies should know how their product, good or service will affect the environment. This requires making product development decisions with society and the planet in mind and predicting social impact at every step. Americans also expect companies to share the latter with the public, thus demonstrating whether the company is living its values or relying on rhetoric.

Americans want companies to demonstrate concern for workers, as well. They want employees to be part of defining a company's stance on racial equity, social justice and anti-discrimination. They expect companies to study how their decisions may affect employees and the local workforce and to include people like themselves in these explorations.



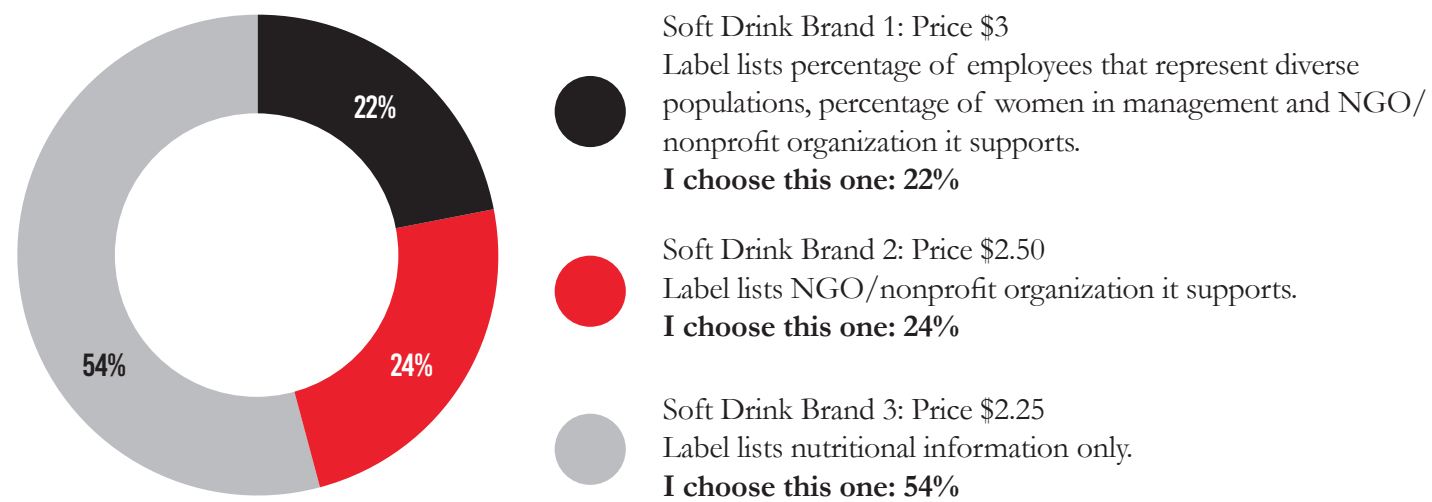
**WHEN A COMPANY CREATES A NEW PRODUCT, GOOD OR SERVICE, DO YOU EXPECT THAT COMPANY TO PERFORM THE FOLLOWING?** (Select all that apply.)



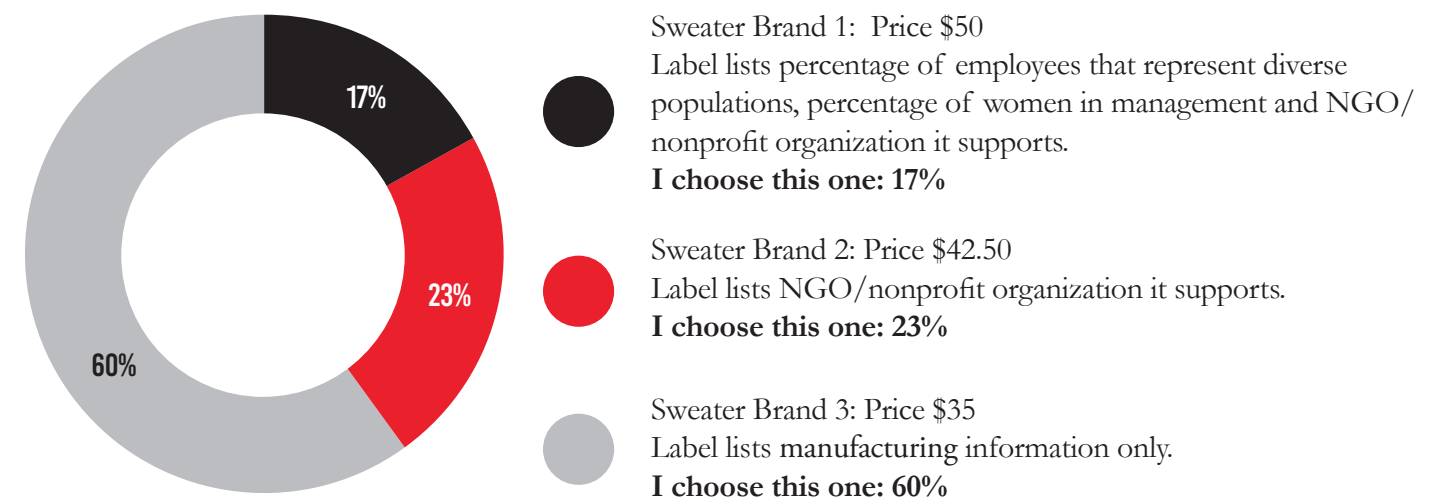
**INTENT VS. ACTION**

Consumers, then, expect companies to support causes and be transparent, but cost is still a dominant influence. In a conjoint analysis to see whether some of the actions they cited would influence a purchasing decision, researchers found that, when presented with the opportunity to pay a little more but learn about a company's stance on a social issue, consumers went with the cheaper option. Thus, public expectations are high, but individuals did not follow through with intent once faced with a purchase decision.

**YOU WANT TO PURCHASE A SOFT DRINK, AND YOU FIND THREE BRANDS OF YOUR FAVORITE. WHICH ONE DO YOU CHOOSE?**



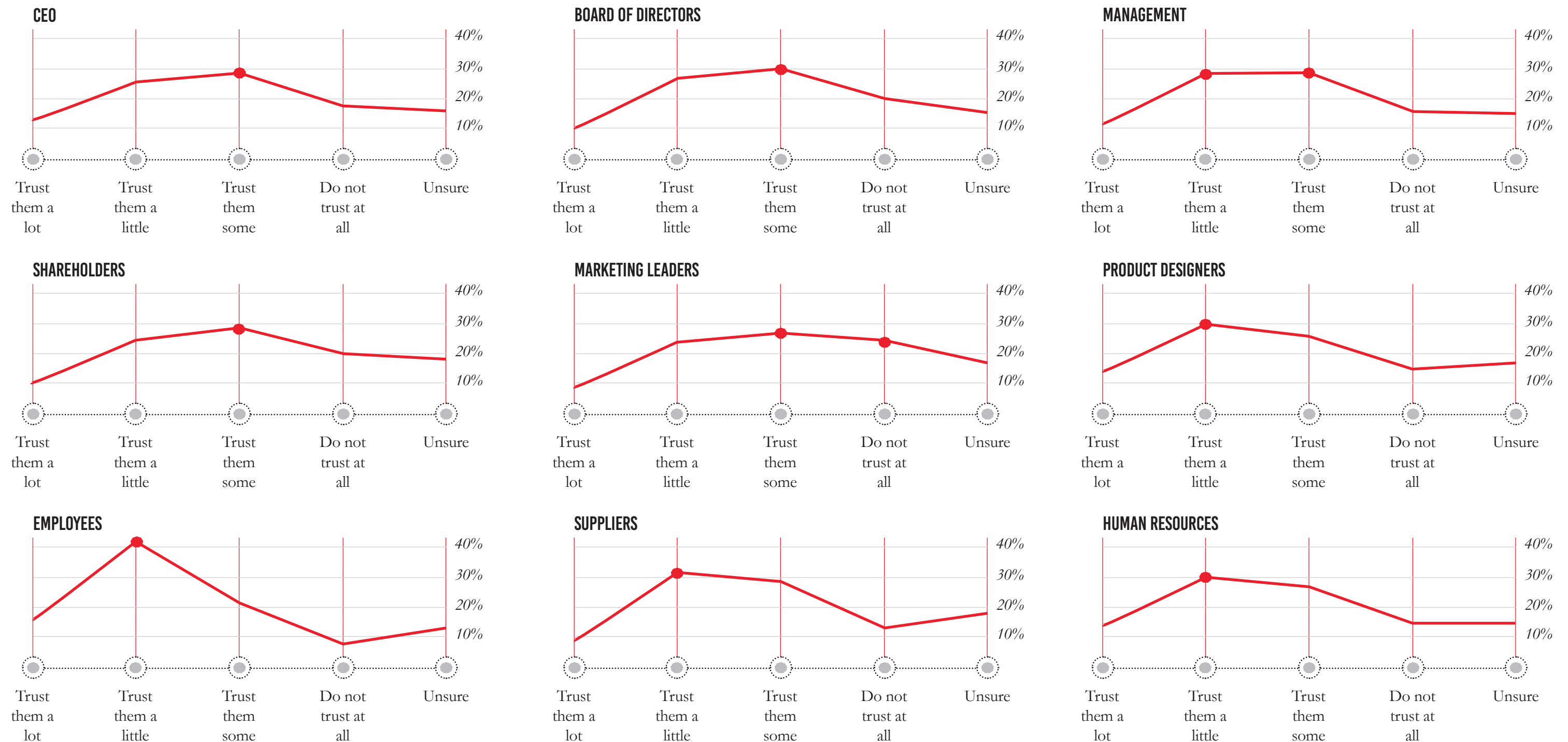
**YOU WANT TO PURCHASE A NEW SWEATER, AND YOU FIND THREE BRANDS OF THE SAME SWEATER YOU WANT TO BUY. WHICH ONE DO YOU CHOOSE?**



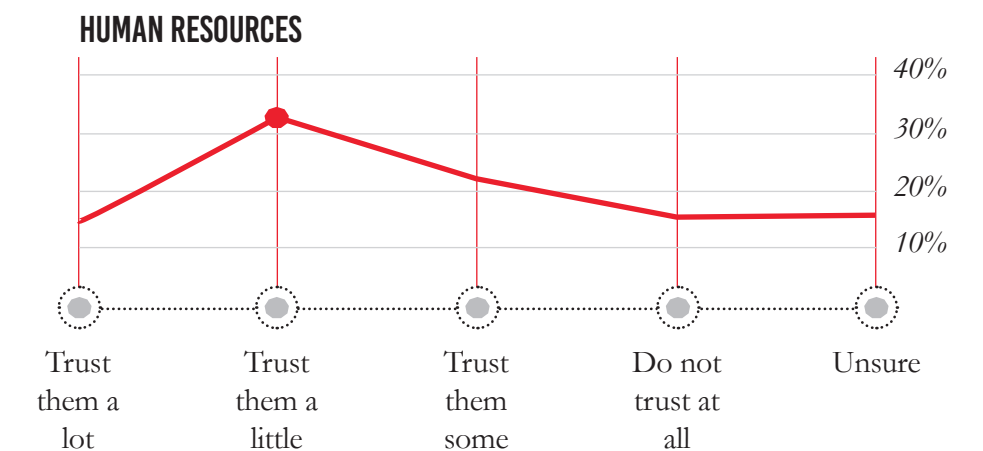
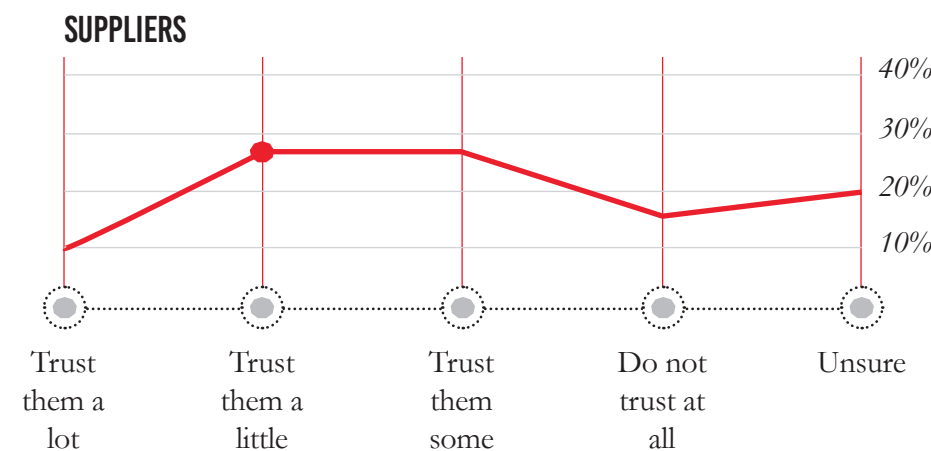
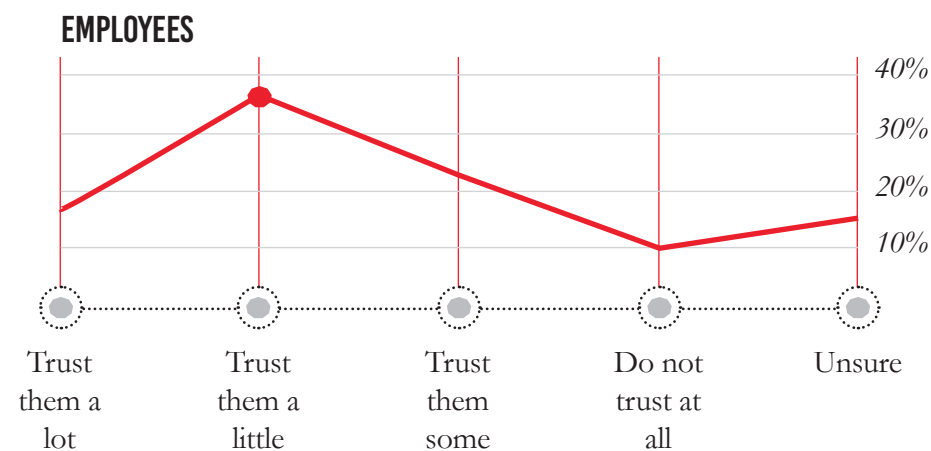
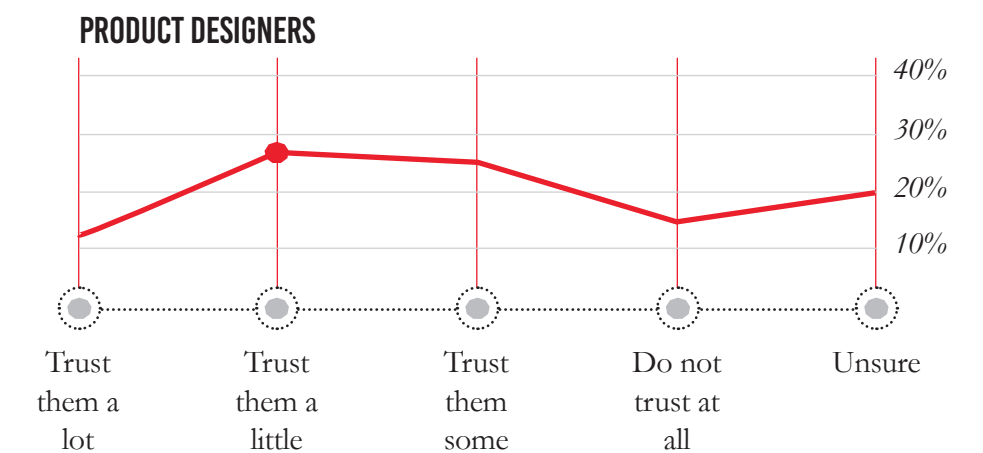
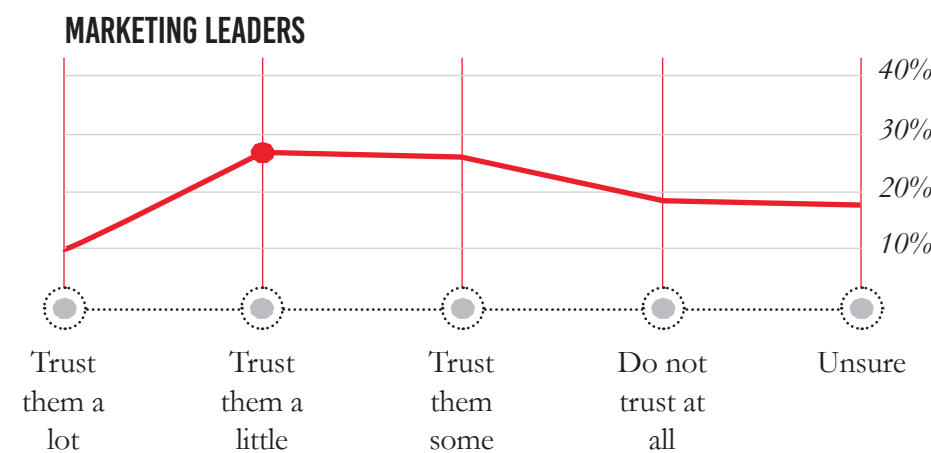
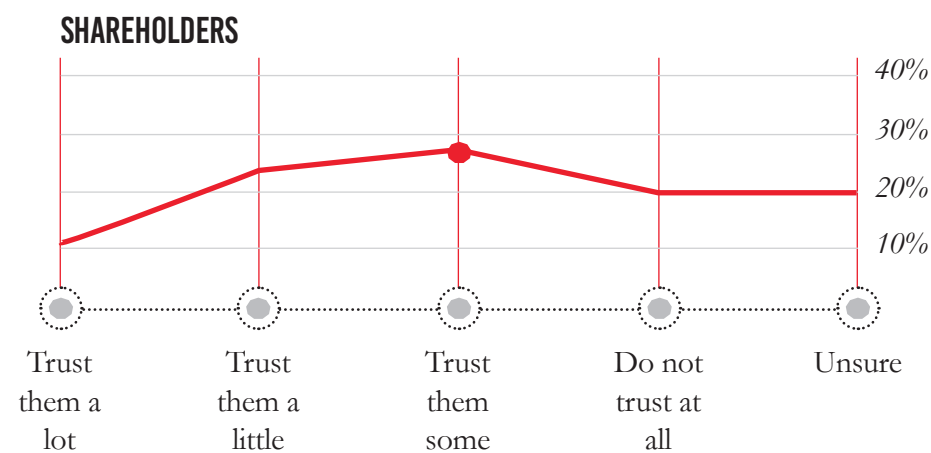
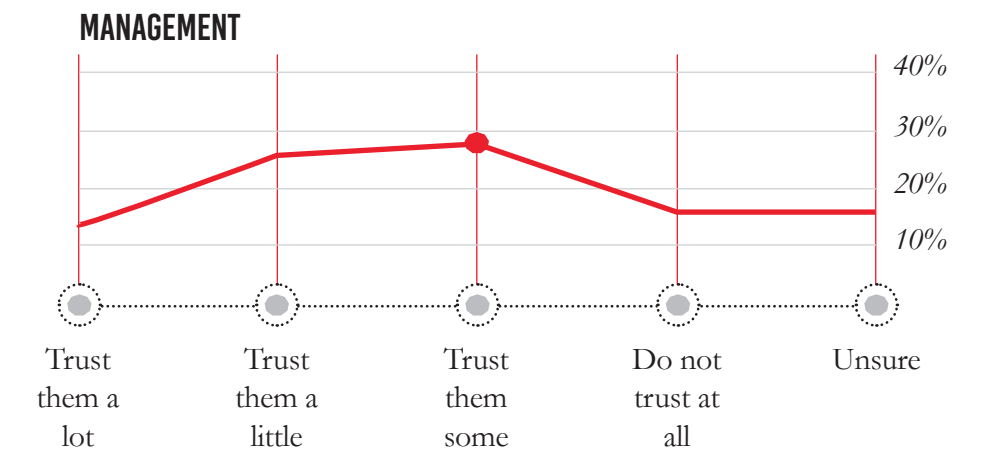
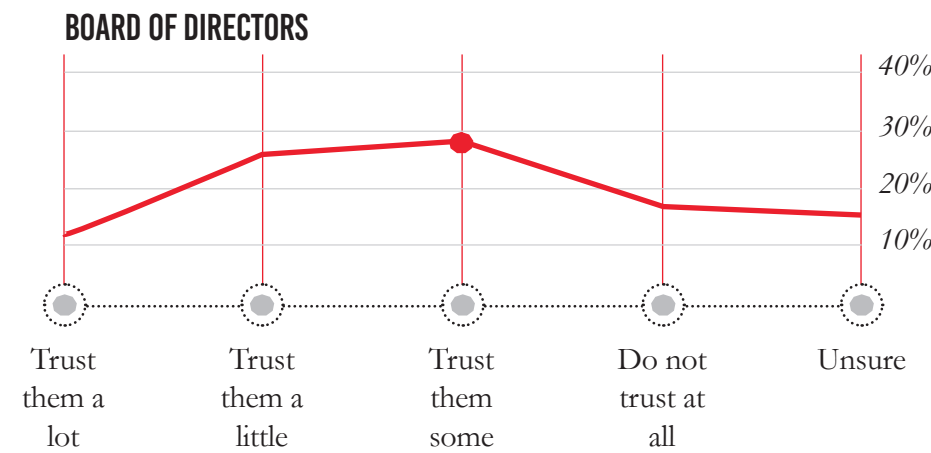
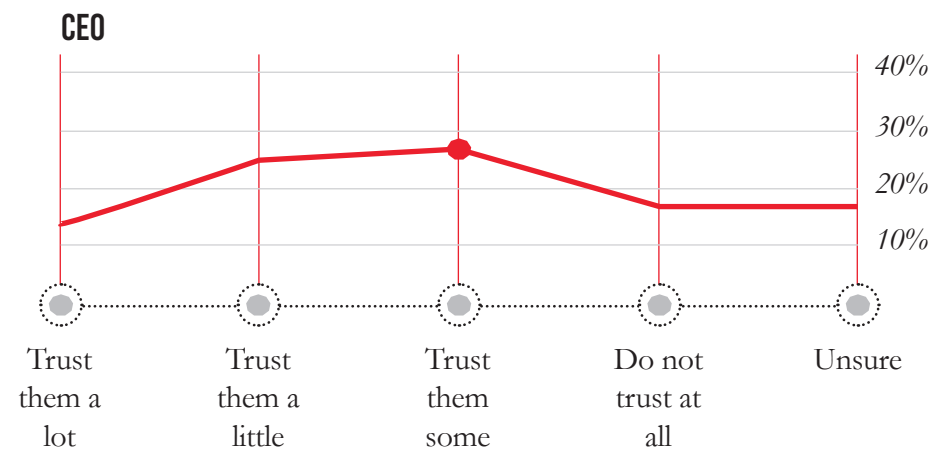
# TRUST IN ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISSUES

Americans have more trust in a company's employees than its leaders when it comes to social issues. While about half said they trust employees, only about a third said they trust in CEOs, managers, shareholders and corporate boards. Of the options listed, "marketing leaders" garnered the most distrust, with almost a quarter of Americans saying they do not trust them at all. Employees again earned the most trust for doing what is right specifically relating to racial equity, social justice and anti-discrimination.

## HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THE COMPANY TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT RELATING TO ANY SOCIAL ISSUE?



## HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THE COMPANY TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT RELATING TO RACIAL EQUITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION?



## CONCLUSION

These findings provide the basis for how companies should move toward a new social mindset, building trust along the way.

The majority of consumers expect companies to take a stance on social issues. Right now, almost 60% of the public wants companies to give an opinion specifically on racial equity, social justice and anti-discrimination; almost half want the same for the environment/climate

change. Then, the request by a company for a consumer to actively support a social issue is a highly effective motivator.

The two most visible social issues of today, COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement, are acting as strong forces in driving companies to define their role in advancing social change. Now is the time to benchmark corporate actions and consumer expectations so that companies can react as moments and movements change the public's attitudes. Analysis during critical moments each year will help companies weave a social mindset throughout their organizations.