

# Bentley-Gallup Business in Society Survey 2024 Report





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## 2024 Report

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# Foreword

We are living in a time of unprecedented change in which emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, promise to reshape personal and professional lives around the globe. Here in the U.S., we're in the midst of a presidential campaign and political climate where it seems increasingly difficult to find common ground.

Businesses are caught in the middle of it all. They are trying to navigate these disruptive cultural, social and political trends while responding to the opinions and expectations of the American public. These are the very consumers who buy their products and services, the employees who keep their companies going and the influencers who increasingly shape how we are all perceived and judged.

In turbulent times like these, how should business leaders determine a strategy to move forward? I believe the first and most important steps are to ask questions, listen and learn.

Over the last three years, the Bentley University-Gallup Business in Society Report has been doing just that, measuring the opinions of Americans about where businesses are succeeding in bringing about positive change – and where they are falling short. The data in our survey represent more than a snapshot. Through this year-over-year vantage point, a clearer picture is emerging, showing which beliefs and perceptions remain consistent and which are rising or falling over time.

This year's survey of 5,835 U.S. adults unearthed some interesting insights into Americans' views.

Notably, 63% of Americans say that business has a positive impact on people's lives, up from 55% in 2022. Despite this positive view, an overwhelming majority (77%) say they don't trust businesses to use artificial intelligence responsibly. More than half of Americans (57%) say if businesses were transparent about their use of AI, it would reduce those concerns.

And while most people would like businesses to take a leading role and speak out on policy areas such as climate change (54%), diversity, equity and inclusion (53%), and mental health (53%), in other areas the message from Americans to companies is clear: "Stick to business."

At their best, businesses are problem-solvers, identifying solutions to obstacles in society and making those solutions available to large numbers of people. When functioning well, businesses can improve the lives of their customers, employees, communities and shareholders.

I know that these are challenging times. But I'm also a big believer in the power of business and its potential as a powerful force for good. I hope that insights from this survey will help businesses better understand Americans' views so they can most effectively deliver on that vast potential.



**E. LaBrent Chrite**

*President  
Bentley University*



# Key Findings

63%  
OF AMERICANS

say that business has  
a positive impact on  
people's lives.

## Since 2022, Bentley University and Gallup have partnered to quantify Americans' attitudes toward businesses, generally, and the impact they have on their personal lives and society at large.

The 2024 *Bentley-Gallup Business in Society Report* builds upon insights released in 2022 and 2023, identifying changes in attitudes toward businesses since the first study. It also addresses new, important issues businesses are contending with, including the impact of political endorsements.

The 2024 results are based on a Gallup poll of 5,835 U.S. adults, aged 18 or older, conducted from April 29-May 6, 2024.

### Most Americans believe businesses are good for society but see them underperforming in the areas they think businesses should prioritize.

- In 2024, 63% of Americans see businesses as having a somewhat positive (41%) or extremely positive (22%) impact on people's lives. This 63% is unchanged from 2023, but is an eight-percentage-point improvement over 2022, when 55% of Americans reported the same.
- Americans attach the highest importance to businesses making money in ethical ways (79%) and providing high-quality healthcare benefits to employees (71%). Smaller majorities believe it is extremely important for businesses to prioritize employee-oriented practices, such as offering mental health benefits (56%), avoiding major pay gaps between CEOs and workers (56%) and offering flexible work arrangements (52%).
- Less than half of Americans think businesses are doing an excellent or good job in any of the areas to which Americans attach the highest importance.

### Americans believe businesses play a role in politics, but public stances on issues and candidate endorsements could carry business risks.

- Americans' support for businesses taking a public stance on current events continues to wane in 2024: 38% of Americans say businesses should take a public stance on current events, down from 41% in 2023 and 48% in 2022.
- Out of the 13 topics tested, at least half of Americans are interested in businesses taking a stance on just three: climate change (54%), mental health (53%) and diversity, equity and inclusion (53%).
- Three-quarters of Americans believe businesses have some (44%) or a lot (32%) of influence on presidential elections, but just 17% want them to take a stance on political candidates.
- Political endorsements can drive away more customers than they attract. More than six in 10 Democrats and Republicans (68% and 61%, respectively) say they would be less likely to purchase from a company that endorsed a candidate from the opposing party.

**Americans remain cynical about the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in business. Even those most knowledgeable about AI are concerned about its effects.**

- The percentage of adults who believe AI is more harmful than helpful has decreased in the past year from 40% to 31%. Most of this shift was driven by Americans over the age of 30, while views are relatively unchanged among 18- to 29-year-olds.
- For two straight years, three-quarters of Americans have said they believe AI will reduce the total number of jobs in the country over the next 10 years. Moreover, 77% of adults do not trust businesses to use AI responsibly.
- However, 57% of Americans say businesses could reduce their concerns about AI by being transparent about how they are using it.
- Americans who claim the greatest knowledge about AI are still more likely to believe AI does more harm than good than to say it does more good than harm (31% vs. 22%).

**U.S. employees would benefit from greater flexibility in their current work arrangements.**

- Three in four U.S. workers — unchanged from 2023 — say working a four-day, 40-hour workweek would positively impact their wellbeing. Meanwhile, 41% of workers say being required to return to the office five days a week would have a negative impact on them.
- Americans almost universally say high-quality health benefits (95%) and workplace culture (94%) are somewhat or extremely important factors when deciding which company to apply for.
- Almost as many (89%) say the company offering flexible work arrangements is somewhat or extremely important.





# Business and Society

Most Americans believe businesses are good for society but see them underperforming in the areas they think businesses should prioritize.

## Americans continue to view businesses as better for people than they are for the environment.

In 2024, 63% of Americans see businesses as having a somewhat positive (41%) or extremely positive (22%) impact on people's lives. This 63% is unchanged from 2023 but is an eight-percentage-point improvement over 2022, when 55% of Americans reported the same.

Americans also continue to think businesses are good at making people's lives better. A similar 62% believe businesses are effective at making a positive impact on people's lives, although only 8% believe businesses are "extremely effective" at doing so.

Americans are more skeptical about the impact businesses have on the environment. Nearly half (48%) say businesses have a somewhat or extremely negative impact on the environment. Just shy of one in four (24%) U.S. adults say businesses have a somewhat or extremely positive impact on the environment.

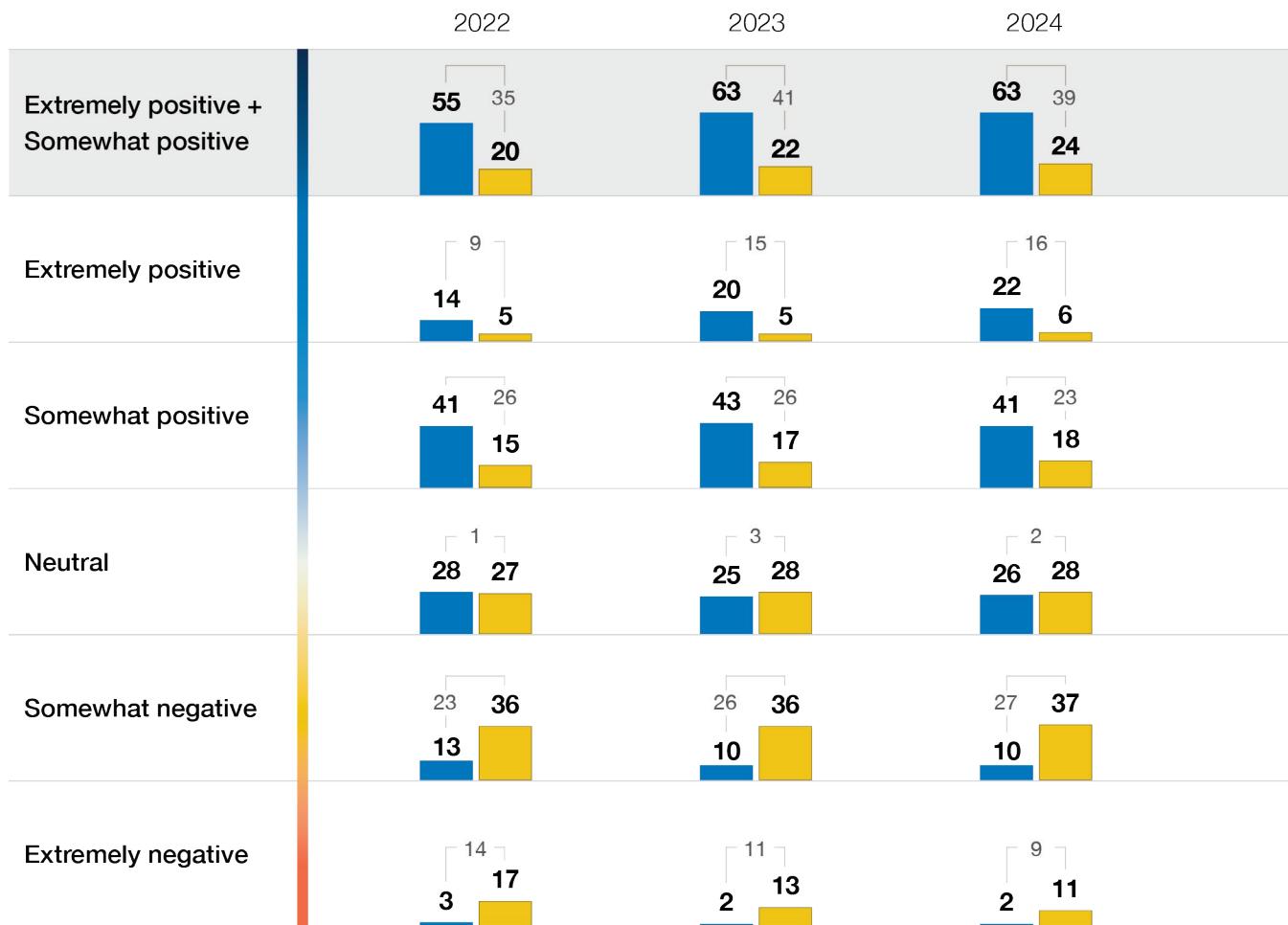
Views about the environmental impact businesses have differ by age and political affiliation. Americans under age 30 are about half as likely as those aged 60 and older to say businesses have a positive impact on the environment (16% vs. 29%). The gap is even wider between Democrats (15%) and Republicans (38%).

**FIGURE 1**

### Businesses Better for People Than the Environment

In your opinion, which of the following best describes the impact businesses have on...

■ % People's lives ■ % Planet/Environment



## Americans believe businesses should prioritize ethical profit-making and employee wellbeing.

More than seven in 10 adults consider it extremely important that businesses make money in ethical ways (79%) and provide high-quality healthcare benefits to employees (71%).

Smaller majorities believe it is extremely important for businesses to prioritize other pro-employee practices, such as offering mental health benefits (56%), avoiding major pay gaps between CEOs and workers (56%) and offering flexible work arrangements (52%).

But Americans also see priorities for businesses with implications outside the workplace, including operating in a sustainable way for the environment (61%) and improving the communities they serve (59%).

Notably, the lowest priority for Americans is promoting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Slightly less than half (49%) believe fostering DEI is extremely important for businesses to do, which is consistent with results in 2023, but a decline from the 53% who said so in 2022.

Young adults, Black Americans, women and Democrats are more likely than their peers to believe it is extremely important for businesses to do all these things. These groups are particularly eager for businesses to promote DEI, provide high-quality healthcare and offer flexible work arrangements.

**FIGURE 2**

### Priorities for Businesses

In your opinion, how important is it that businesses, in general, do the following?

% Extremely important

	Lowest	Highest	Provide high-quality healthcare benefits to employees	Operate in a way that is sustainable for the environment and planet	Improve the communities they serve	Avoid a major pay gap between CEOs and average employees	Offer mental health support services to employees	Offer flexible work arrangements to employees when possible	Promote diversity, equity and inclusion
Overall	<b>79</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>49</b>	
Female	82	78	66	63	61	67	60	58	
Male	76	64	54	53	51	45	41	38	
Asian American	68	62	61	52	48	53	44	50	
Black American	76	81	64	70	63	72	67	73	
Hispanic American	78	74	63	62	58	63	60	55	
White American	80	69	59	56	55	52	47	43	
18 to 29	80	75	69	64	58	60	62	58	
30 to 44	74	70	60	57	58	56	58	51	
45 to 59	77	69	57	57	53	56	47	45	
60 or older	84	71	59	58	55	54	43	45	
Democrat	86	84	83	72	74	73	65	75	
Independent	77	68	56	55	55	53	47	42	
Republican	71	57	35	44	32	38	37	20	
LGBTQ+	83	82	77	71	71	69	65	72	
Non-LGBTQ+	78	69	57	56	54	54	49	46	

## Americans see businesses falling short in important areas.

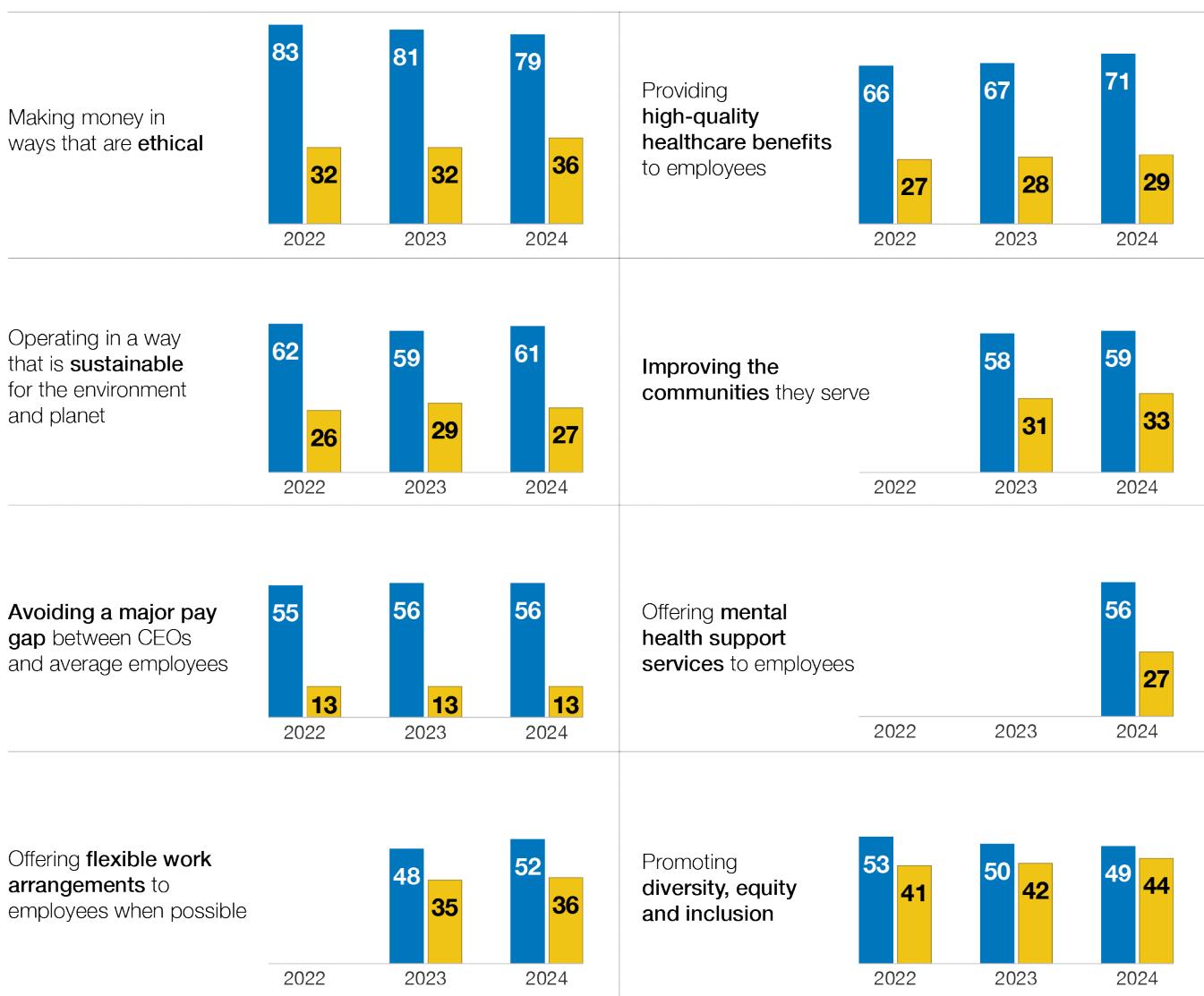
Less than half of Americans think businesses are doing an excellent or good job in any of the eight areas they were asked about.

As pay packages for CEOs balloon,<sup>1</sup> Americans are least likely to believe that businesses are successfully avoiding major pay gaps between CEOs and average workers: Just 13% of U.S. adults say businesses are doing excellent or good on this, consistent with their opinions since 2022.

**FIGURE 3**

### Business Priorities vs. Performance

- In your opinion, how **important** is it that businesses, in general, do the following? % *Extremely important*
- In your opinion, how **do you think businesses, in general, are doing** in the following areas? % *Good + Excellent*



<sup>1</sup> Andersen, M., Harloff, P., & Ortutay, B. (2024, June 3). CEOs made nearly 200 times what their workers got paid last year. apnews.com. Retrieved July 30, 2024, from <https://apnews.com/article/ceo-pay-compensation-ratio-workers-fa25db3338b68ad9eb395dfd46190383>



# Business and Politics

Americans continue to lose some of their appetite for corporate activism.

**Support for businesses taking a public stance is waning, but half of Americans are still interested in hearing from companies on climate change, mental health and DEI.**

While 95% of adults believe business has an important role to play in improving the communities in which they operate, most Americans prefer that businesses do so quietly.

Americans' support for businesses taking a public stance on current events continues to wane in 2024: 38% currently say businesses should do this, down from 41% in 2023 and 48% in 2022.

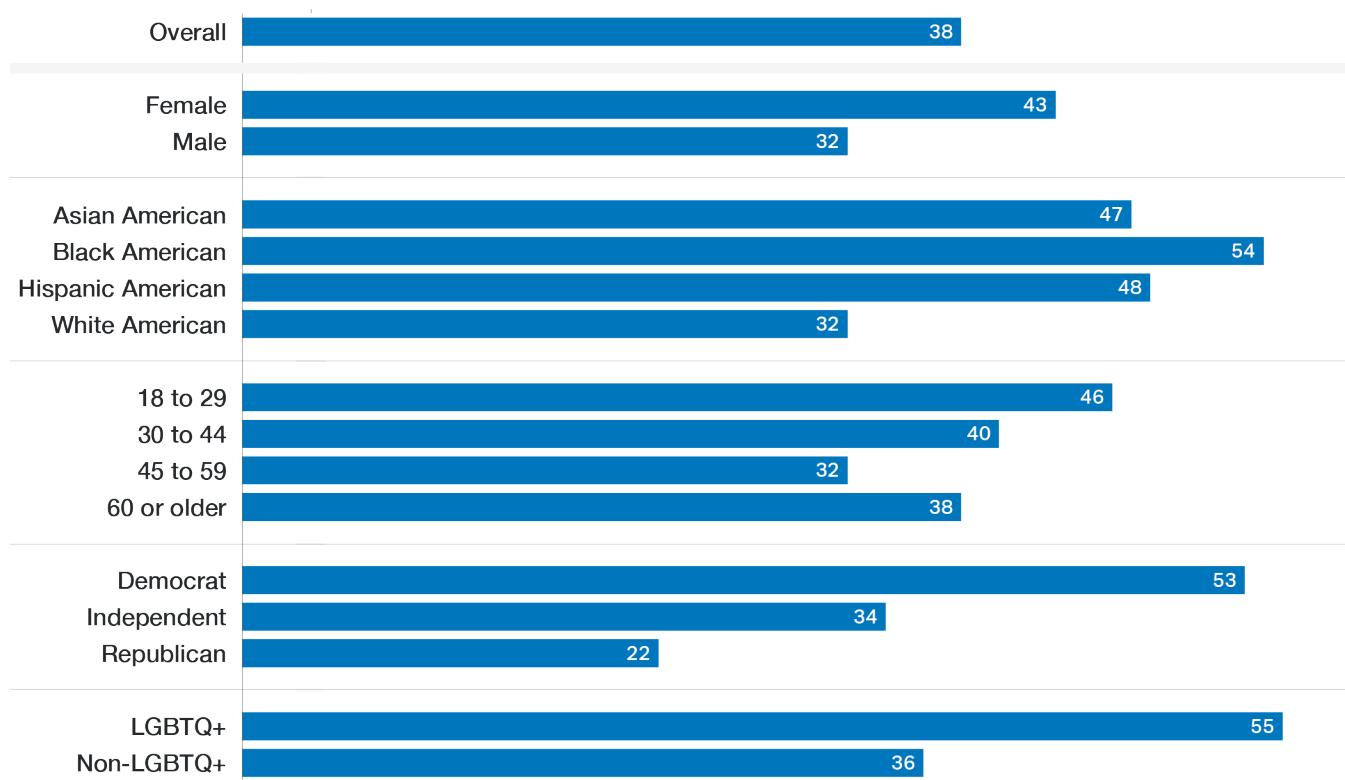
Younger adults, people of color (particularly Black Americans), women, LGBTQ+ adults and Democrats continue to be more likely than their peers to say businesses should take a stance, but desire has cooled among Asian Americans, Black Americans and Democrats.

**FIGURE 5**

### **Women, People of Color, Younger Adults, Democrats and LGBTQ+ Adults Most Likely to Say Businesses Should Take a Stance**

Do you think businesses, in general, should take a public stance on **current events**?

% Yes

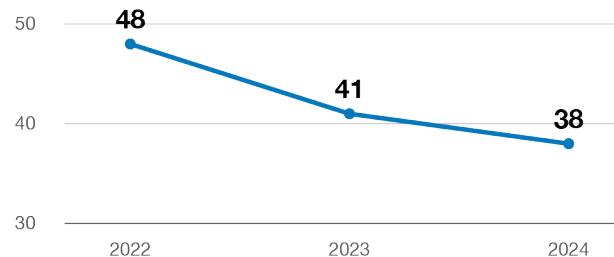


**FIGURE 4**

### **Desire for Corporate Activism Cools**

Do you think businesses, in general, should take a public stance on current events?

% Yes



Between 2023 and 2024, the percentage of Americans who say businesses should take a stance declined statistically on five of the 12 topics tested in both years' surveys. While desire for businesses to speak out on these issues was low to begin with, even fewer Americans in 2024 favor businesses taking a stance on major sociopolitical issues such as religion (13%), political candidates (17%) and abortion (20%).

By and large, most Americans do not want to hear from businesses on the 13 topics in this year's survey. The three exceptions are climate change (54%), mental health (53%) and diversity, equity and inclusion (53%), albeit by narrow margins.

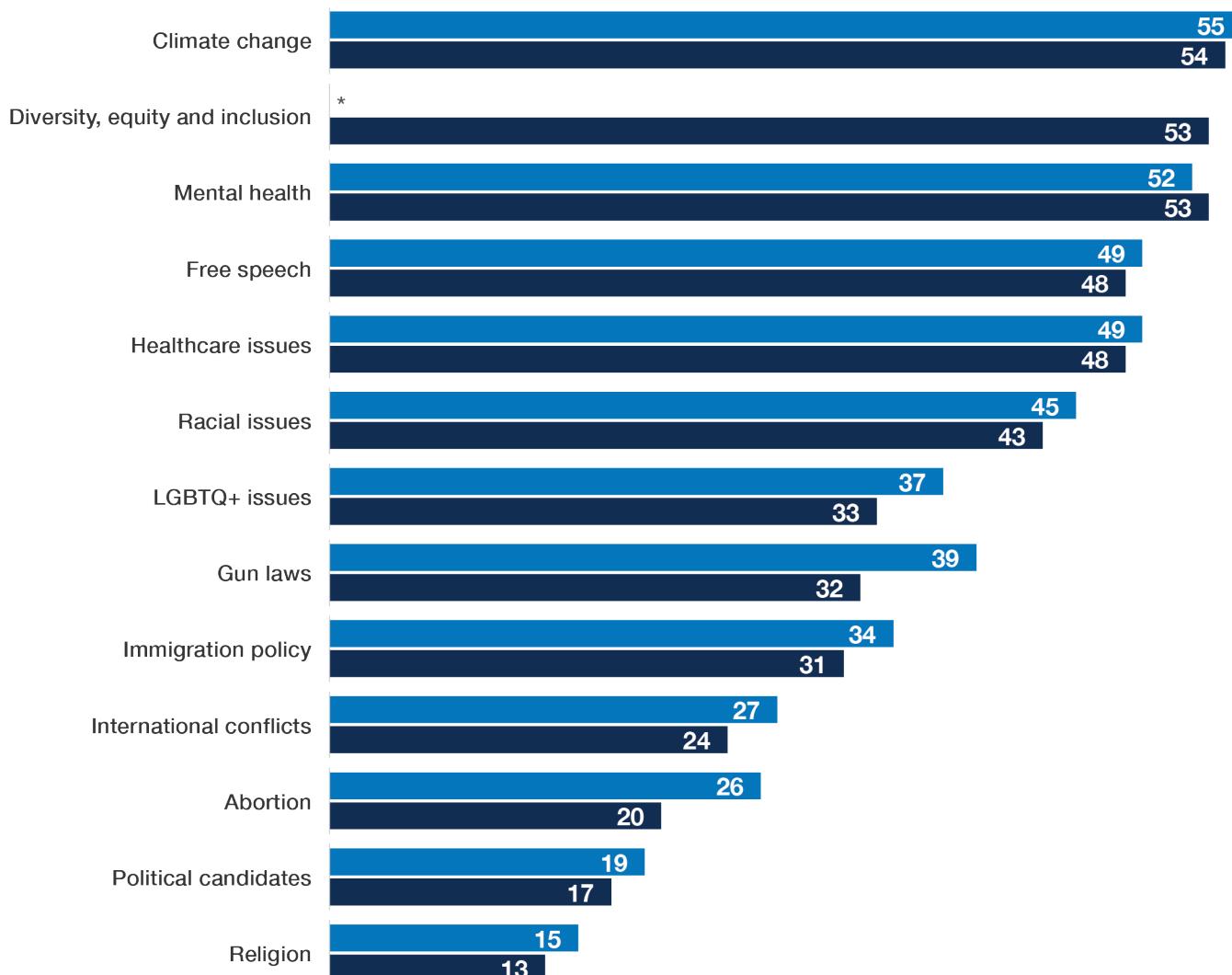
FIGURE 6

### Over Half of Americans Say Companies Should Speak Out on Climate Change, Diversity and Mental Health

Do you think that businesses, in general, should take a public stance on subjects that have to do with the following?

% Yes

■ 2023 ■ 2024



\*Not asked in 2023.

On each of these three topics, younger Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 are more likely than older Americans to say businesses should speak out: 66% of younger Americans believe companies should take a stand on DEI, 64% say the same about mental health and 63% say this about climate change.

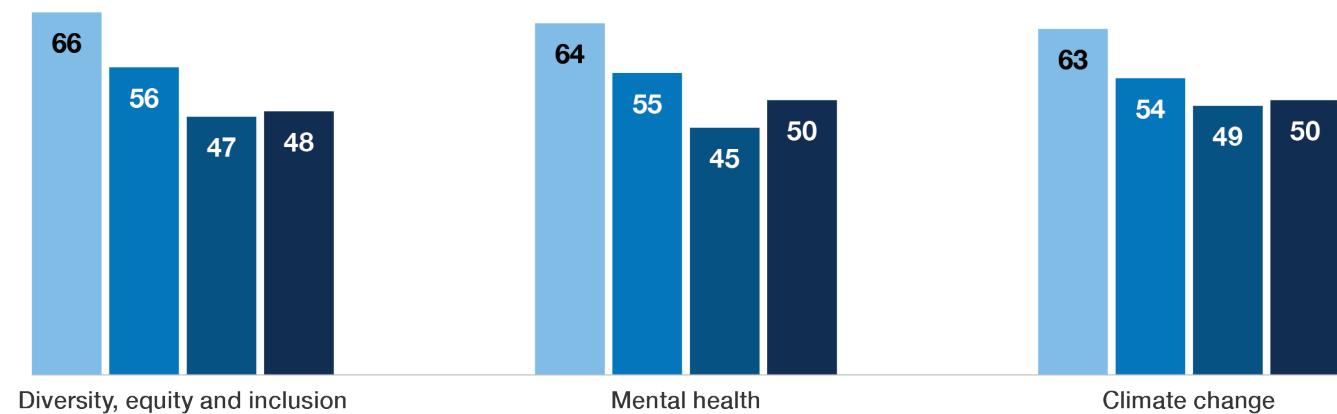
FIGURE 7

**Younger Americans Most Likely to Want to Hear From Companies on Diversity, Mental Health, Climate Change**

Do you think that businesses, in general, should take a public stance on subjects that have to do with the following?

% Yes

■ 18 to 29 ■ 30 to 44 ■ 45 to 59 ■ 60 or older



## Nearly half of Americans believe promoting diversity is extremely important, but don't see businesses as delivering.

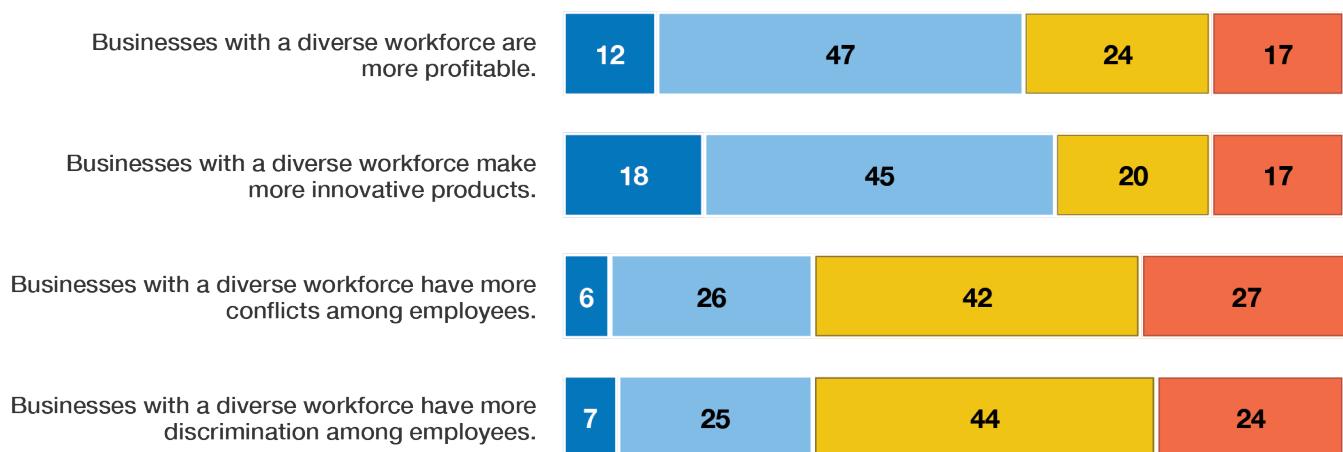
Most adults believe diversity can boost business performance. Roughly six in 10 believe diverse businesses are more profitable (59%) and innovative (63%). Just under one-third believe diversity leads to greater conflict (32%) or discrimination within the workforce (32%).

FIGURE 8

### Americans See Value in Diversity in the Workforce

Based on what you know, or have experienced, please indicate the extent to which you *feel* the following statements are true.

■ % Completely true ■ % Somewhat true ■ % Somewhat untrue ■ % Completely untrue



Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100%, +/-1.

While nearly half of adults believe it is extremely important for businesses to promote diversity (49%) and a slim majority (53%) want them to take public stances on it, fewer see businesses as doing a good or excellent job promoting diversity (44%).

For a small fraction of Americans, a company's workforce diversity factors into their purchasing decisions. Ten percent of U.S. adults indicate they recently researched the demographics of a company's employees prior to purchasing their products or services. That is far less than the 29% of Americans who report researching a company's sustainability or environmental impact prior to purchasing their products or services.

## Most Americans believe businesses have at least some influence over the presidential candidates that people vote for.

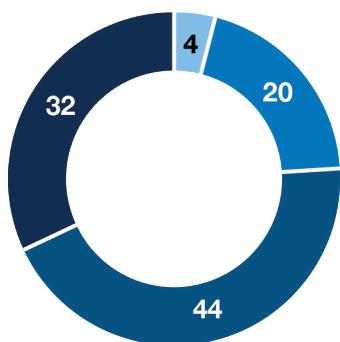
Three-quarters of Americans believe businesses have some (44%) or a lot (32%) of influence on presidential elections. Yet adults do not necessarily want to see businesses putting their thumbs on the scales of major policy debates — just 17% want them to take a stance on political candidates.

FIGURE 9

### Business Influence on Vote Choice

How much influence do you think businesses have on which presidential candidate Americans vote for?

■ % None at all ■ % Not much ■ % Some ■ % A lot



White Americans are almost three times less likely than Black Americans to say businesses should take a stance on political candidates (12% vs. 32%, respectively). The gap is similarly wide between Republicans and Democrats (9% vs. 23%, respectively).

However, there are no partisan or racial differences in Americans' belief that businesses influence presidential elections: Black Americans (77%) are as likely as White Americans (76%) to say that businesses have at least some influence, and Democrats (78%) and Republicans (76%) are equally likely to say this.

FIGURE 10

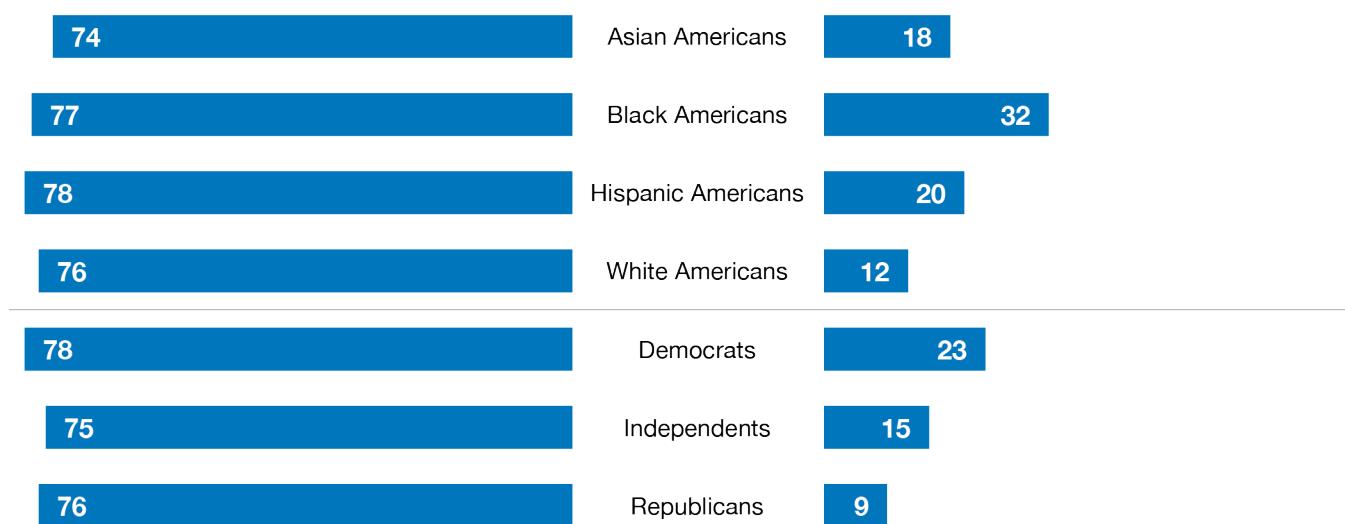
### Racial, Ethnic and Partisan Differences on the Influence That Business Wields in Politics

How much influence do you think businesses have on which presidential candidate Americans vote for?

% Some or a lot

Do you think businesses, in general,  
should take a public stance on:  
Political candidates

% Yes



### Companies' political endorsements are much more likely to hurt sales than increase them.

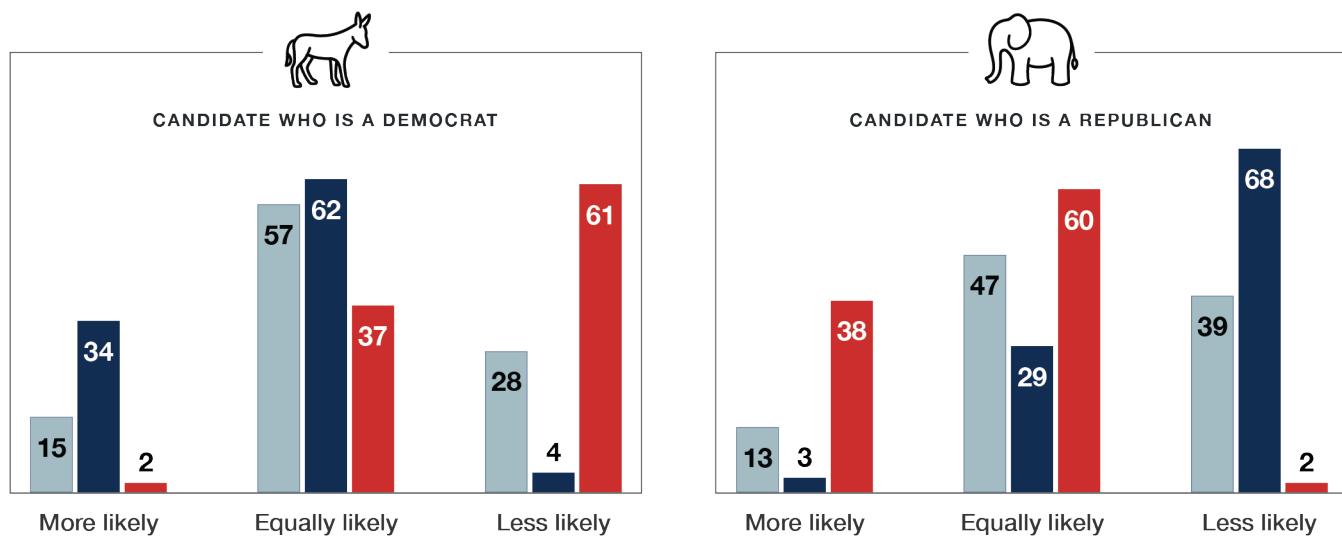
Political endorsements can drive away more customers than they attract. More than six in 10 Democrats and Republicans (68% and 61%, respectively) say they would be less likely to purchase from a company that endorsed a candidate from the opposing party. If companies endorse a candidate from a person's preferred political party, it is unlikely to hurt the business within that group.

FIGURE 11

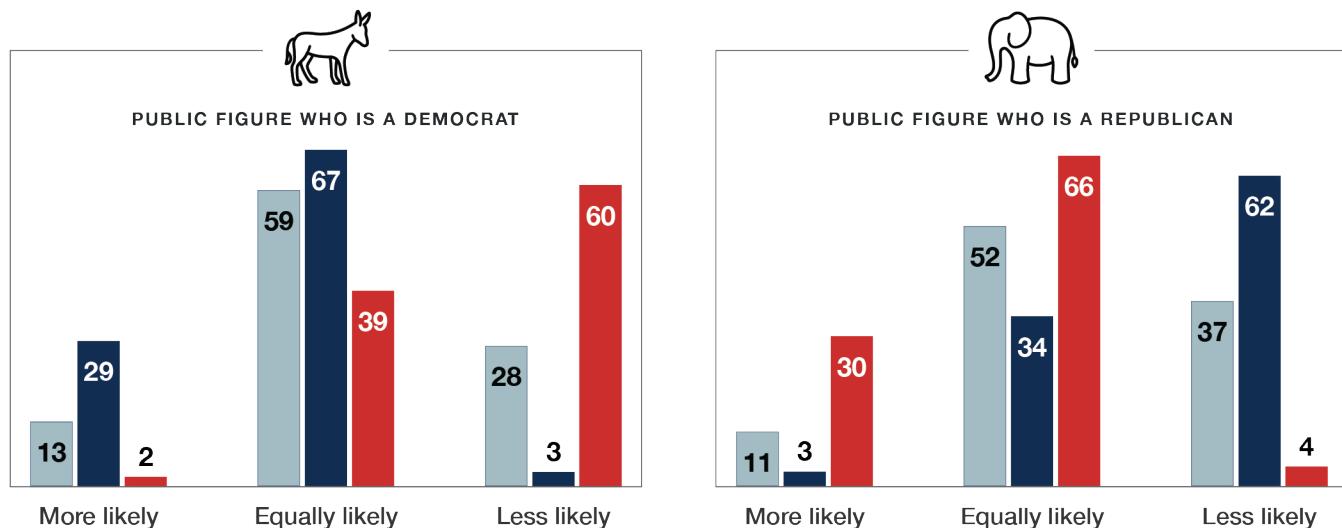
### Business Influence on Vote Choice and Purchasing Decisions Following Political Endorsements

■ % Overall ■ % Democrats ■ % Republicans

If a business that you are a loyal customer of endorsed a **political candidate** who is a \_\_\_\_\_ would you be more likely, equally likely or less likely to **purchase products or services from that business in the future?**



If a business that you are a loyal customer of sponsored a **public figure** who is a \_\_\_\_\_ would you be more likely, equally likely or less likely to **purchase products or services from that business in the future?**



About one in four Americans (26%) say they research a company's political endorsements or affiliations prior to purchasing a product or service. For the most part, these consumers are researching companies to find and actively support those that align with their values, rather than researching which companies to avoid. This is true of respondents from both parties who say they have done this research, though Democrats (35%) are more likely to look at the political affiliations of businesses than Republicans (20%) or independents (21%).

These distinctions are important because Americans are likely thinking a lot about where they are spending their money ahead of the coming U.S. election: 80% of adults say the affordability of products and services has declined in the past year. Moreover, about half say the quality and availability of those more expensive products and services have declined in the past year.





# Business and Artificial Intelligence

Americans remain cynical about the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in business. Even those most knowledgeable about AI are concerned about its effects.

**Fewer Americans consider AI detrimental than in previous years, although more still see its harm outweighing its good.**

The percentage of those who believe AI is more harmful than helpful has decreased in the past year from 40% to 31%. Most of this shift has been driven by Americans over the age of 30, with declines of at least seven points in each older age group.

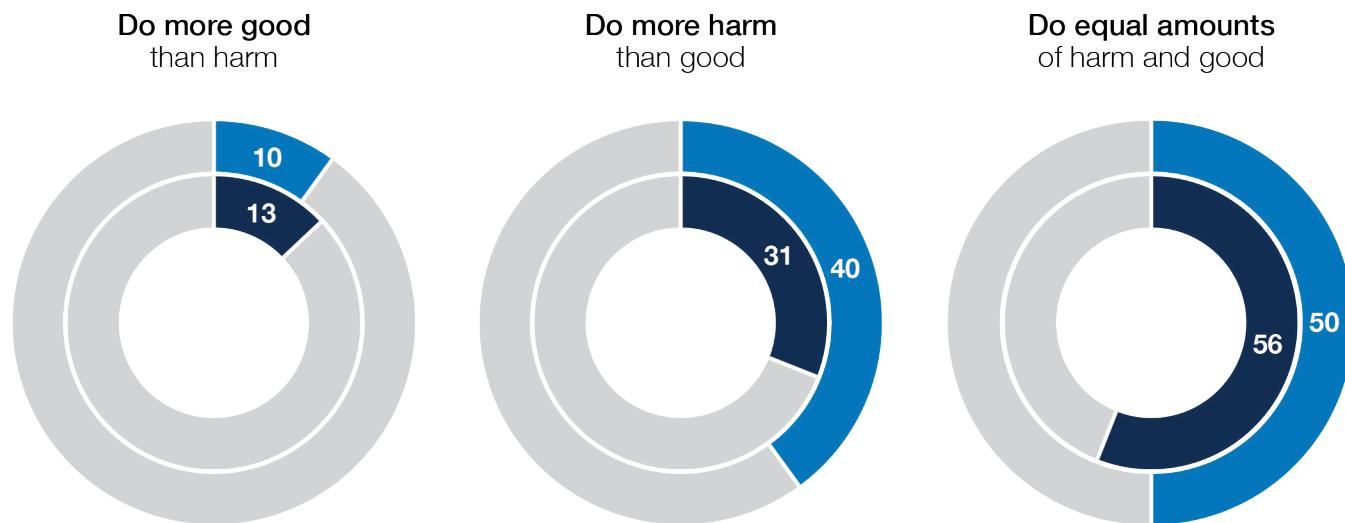
The largest drop was among those aged 45 to 59, from 47% in 2023 to 34% in 2024. Attitudes remain mostly unchanged among 18- to 29-year-olds (30% in 2023 vs. 27% in 2024).

The majority of Americans believe AI has a net neutral effect — doing equal amounts of harm and good. But they are more than twice as likely to believe it does more harm than good than they are to believe the good of AI offsets its harm (31% vs. 13%).

**FIGURE 12**

**In your opinion, does artificial intelligence...**

■ % 2023 ■ % 2024



While 64% of Americans report being at least somewhat knowledgeable of AI, just 9% say they are extremely knowledgeable. Majorities in every age group of Americans say they are at least somewhat knowledgeable about AI, but knowledge drops off sharply among those aged 60 and older. Men are more likely than women to profess being at least somewhat knowledgeable (72% vs. 57%, respectively).

Generally, those more knowledgeable about AI are less likely to express concern about its effects. However, even those who say they are extremely knowledgeable about AI are more likely to believe it does more harm than good than to say it does more good than harm (31% vs. 22%).

### Most believe AI will cost the U.S. jobs and do not trust businesses to use it responsibly.

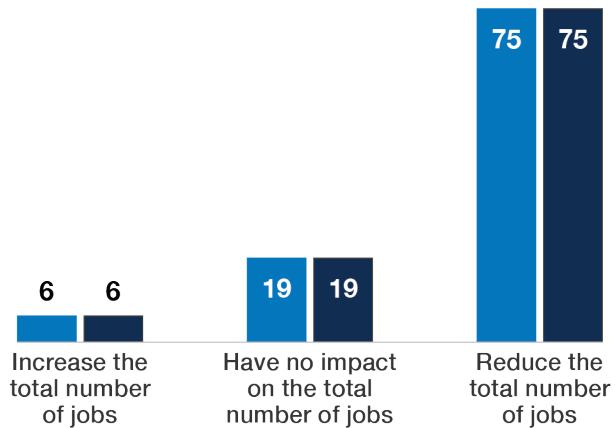
Three-quarters of Americans say AI will reduce the total number of jobs in the country over the next 10 years, the same percentage that said so last year. Also similar to last year, 77% of adults do not trust businesses much (44%) or at all (33%) to use AI responsibly. Additionally, nearly seven in 10 of those who are extremely knowledgeable about AI have little to no trust in businesses to use AI responsibly.

FIGURE 13

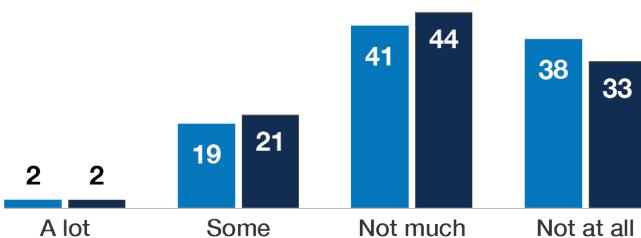
#### Americans' Views About AI's Impact on Jobs and Trust in Businesses

■ % 2023 ■ % 2024

In your opinion, what type of effect will **artificial intelligence have on the total number of jobs** in the United States over the next 10 years?



In general, how much do you **trust businesses to use artificial intelligence responsibly**?



These are especially top-of-mind considerations for those who believe AI does more harm than good (AI skeptics). Those skeptics are 29 percentage points more likely than AI promoters (who see more good than harm) to believe AI will reduce jobs in the U.S. (88% vs. 59%, respectively). Also, AI skeptics are more than three times as likely as promoters to say they do not trust businesses at all to use AI responsibly (55% vs. 16%, respectively).

### Transparency could ease Americans' worries about how AI is being used.

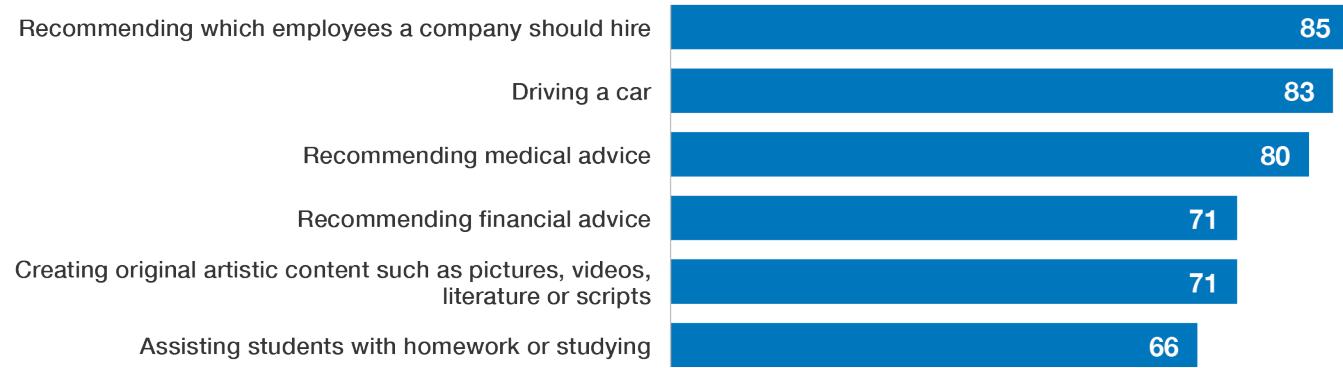
Most Americans are concerned about all six of the AI use case examples that were offered in the survey. The topic that garners the least concern — using AI to help students with homework or studying — is still at least somewhat concerning to two-thirds of adults. At least eight in 10 adults are concerned about using AI for hiring decisions (85%), driving vehicles (83%) and recommending medical advice (80%).

FIGURE 14

### Americans Concerned About Uses of AI

How concerned are you about artificial intelligence being used in the following areas?

% Extremely + Somewhat concerned



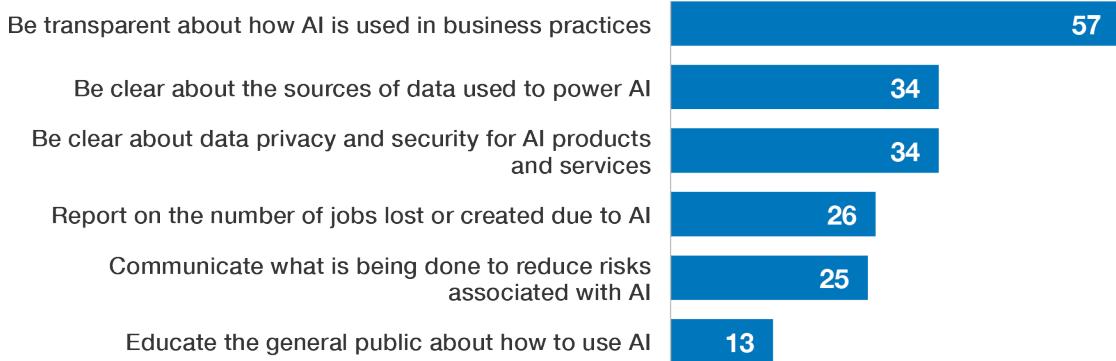
But there are steps that businesses can take to alleviate these concerns. When asked to choose from a list of actions that businesses can take to most reduce concerns about AI, Americans most frequently say companies should be transparent about how AI is being used in business practices (57%).

FIGURE 15

### Transparency Would Help Alleviate Americans' Concerns About AI

From the following list, what could businesses do to **most** reduce Americans' concerns around artificial intelligence? Select up to two options.

% Selected





# Business and Workplaces

Americans seek workplaces that prioritize employee wellbeing.

## Americans continue to place high premiums on healthcare benefits, culture and flexible work arrangements when considering prospective employers.

Many adults say the broader impact of a workplace is important when they are seeking a job — such as operating sustainably, improving the community and the lives of others and promoting diversity. But individual benefits such as healthcare and flexibility continue to reign supreme.

High-quality healthcare benefits and workplace culture remain top priorities for Americans when searching for a job, but flexible work arrangements (when possible) is not far behind.

Americans almost universally say high-quality healthcare benefits (95%) and workplace culture (94%) are somewhat or extremely important factors when deciding which company to apply for. Almost as many (89%) say the company offering flexible work arrangements is somewhat or extremely important.

Compared with these individual benefits, Americans continue to place less focus on societal benefits like promoting DEI, operating sustainably and making the world a better place. The importance of promoting DEI has slipped every year since 2022, with two-thirds (66%) saying it is somewhat or extremely important to the job search in 2024, down from 73% in 2022 and 68% in 2023.

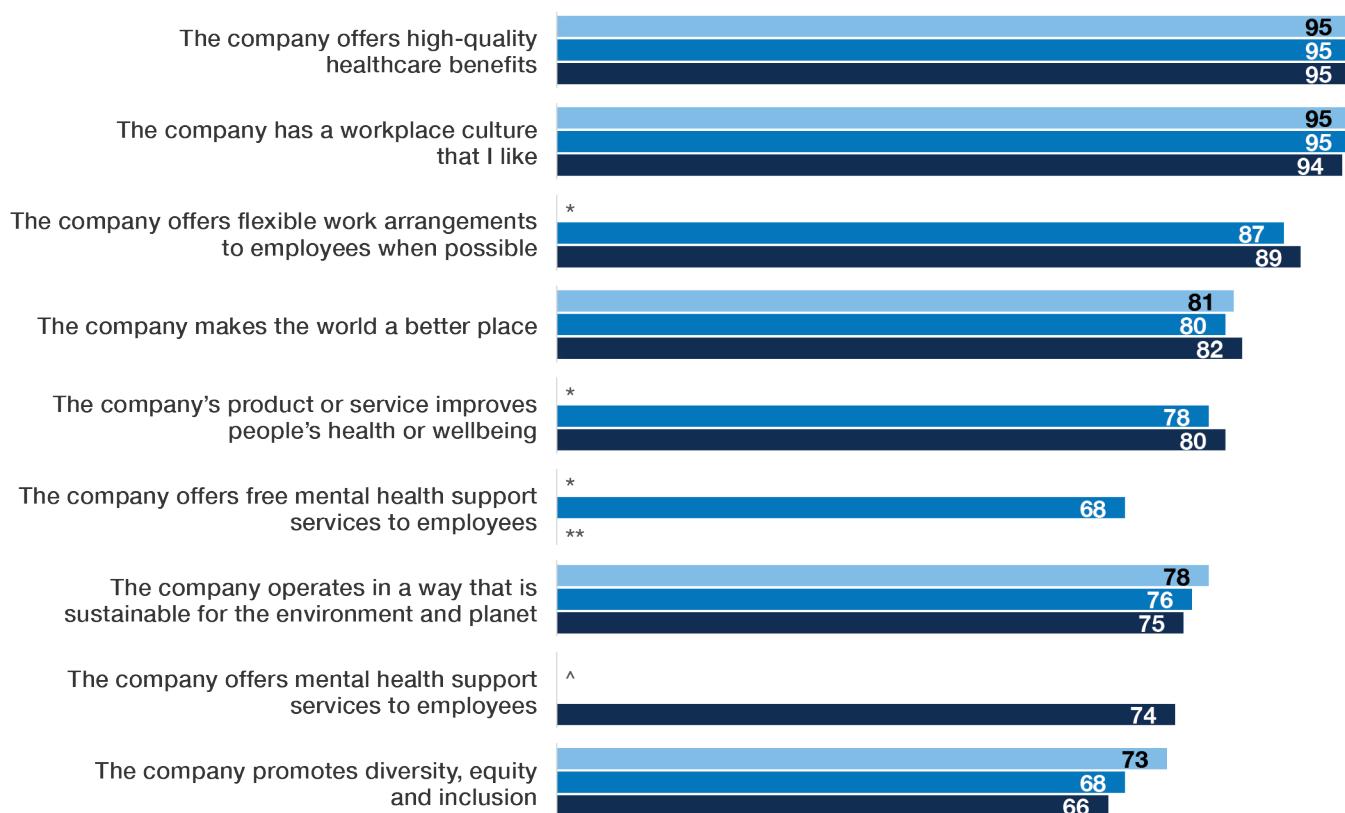
**FIGURE 16**

### Benefits, Culture and Flexibility Important to Next Job

Hypothetically, when searching for a new job, how important would each of the following factors be when deciding which company or workplace to apply for?

% Extremely + Somewhat important

■ 2022 ■ 2023 ■ 2024



\*Not asked in 2022; \*\*Not asked in 2024; ^New item in 2024

### **U.S. employees would benefit from greater flexibility in their current work arrangements.**

Other Gallup data show that on-site workers with four-day workweeks have higher rates of wellbeing, but no higher rates of engagement at work than their colleagues who work five- or six-day workweeks. Burnout is slightly higher among those working four days per week than those working five days. The best solution likely varies by organization, role, job demands and customer needs.<sup>2</sup>

In the 2024 Bentley-Gallup survey, three in four U.S. workers — unchanged from 2023 — say working a four-day, 40-hour workweek would positively impact their wellbeing. Meanwhile, 42% of workers say being required to return to the office five days a week would have a negative impact.

Workers in all major demographic categories embrace the idea that a four-day, 40-hour workweek would be good for their wellbeing, but there are deep generational divides on the effect that a mandatory, five-day return to office order would have. Nearly half of workers younger than age 45 say it would negatively affect their wellbeing, but this expectation drops sharply among the 45 to 59 group (38%) and 60 and older group (26%).

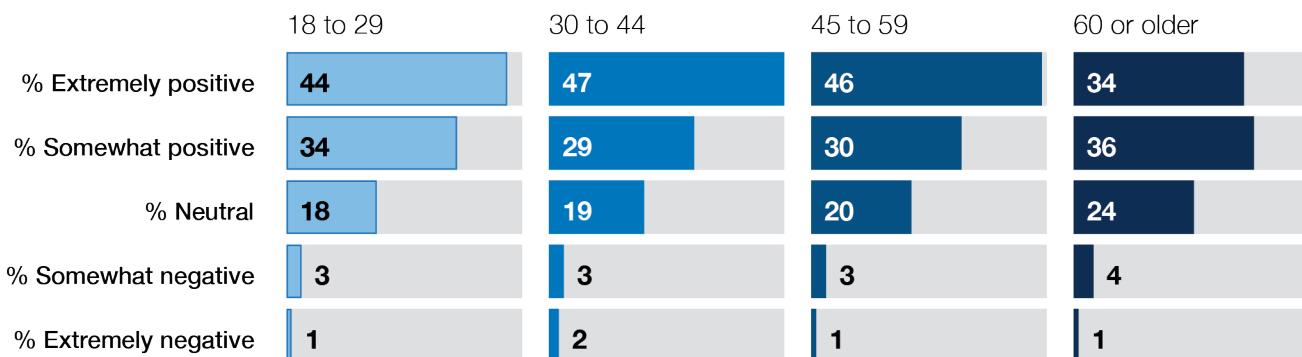
**Three in four workers say working a four-day, 40-hour workweek would positively impact their wellbeing.**

**FIGURE 17**

### **Employees of All Ages Prefer Four Days Over Five**

If your employer did the following, what type of effect would it have on your wellbeing:

**Offered a four-day 40-hour workweek option** for employees who typically work 40 hours in a 5-day workweek



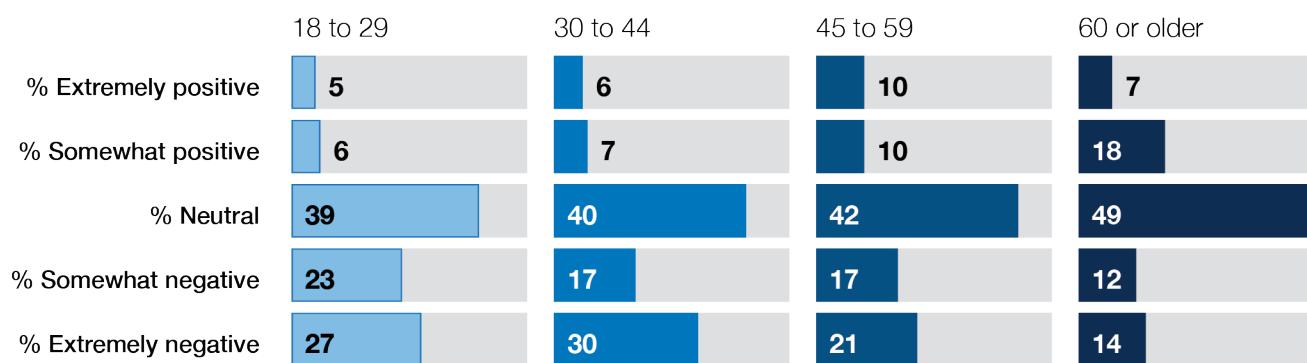
<sup>2</sup> Harter, J. (2021, September 9). Is the 4 Day Work Week a Good Idea? Gallup.com. Retrieved July 30, 2024, from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/354596/4-day-work-week-good-idea.aspx>

**FIGURE 18**

### Younger Workers View Mandated Returns to the Office Negatively

If your employer did the following, what type of effect would it have on your wellbeing:

Required employees to **return to the office five days per week**





# Methodology

The 2024 Bentley-Gallup Business in Society study is based on a Gallup Panel web survey completed by 5,835 adults in the U.S., aged 18 and older, conducted April 29-May 6, 2024. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based longitudinal panel of U.S. adults whom Gallup selects using random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones. Gallup also uses address-based sampling methods to recruit Panel members. The Gallup Panel is not an opt-in panel.

The sample for this study was weighted to be demographically representative of the U.S. adult population, using the most recent Current Population Survey figures.

For results based on this sample, the margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level is  $\pm 2.1$  percentage points for response percentages around 50% and is  $\pm 1.3$  percentage points for response percentages around 10% or 90%, design effect included. Margins of error are larger for subsamples.

2023 and 2022 results are from previous iterations of the Bentley-Gallup Business in Society study. In 2023, the survey was conducted between May 8-15, 2023. For these results, the maximum margin of sampling error is  $\pm 1.8$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. In 2022, the survey was conducted between June 8-19, 2022. For these results, the maximum margin of sampling error is  $\pm 1.9$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.



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