

Deloitte.

A call for accountability and action

THE DELOITTE GLOBAL 2021
MILLENNIAL AND GEN Z SURVEY



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Introduction

Millennials and Generation Zs came of age at the same time that online platforms and social media gave them the ability and power to share their opinions, influence distant people and institutions, and question authority in new ways. These forces have shaped their worldviews, values, and behaviors.

Digital natives' ability to connect, convene, and create disruption via their keyboards and smartphones has had global impact. From #MeToo to Black Lives Matter, from convening marches on climate change to the Arab Spring, from demanding eco-friendly products to challenging stakeholder capitalism, these generations are compelling real change in society and business.

The lockdowns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed millennials' and Gen Zs' activities but not their drive or their desire to be heard. In fact, the 2021 Deloitte Global Millennial Survey suggests that the pandemic, extreme climate events, and a charged sociopolitical atmosphere may have reinforced people's passions and given them oxygen.



Urging accountability

Last year's report¹ reflected the results of two surveys—one taken just before the pandemic and a second taken in April 2020—and highlighted the resilience of millennials and Gen Zs. With the pandemic's devastation affecting practically every aspect of life, they were able to see and take advantage of the few bright spots—dinners at home, no commutes—and see opportunity ahead. The mood has shifted since: The wear and tear of the last year—of being cooped up and isolated, living with the constant fear of getting sick or seeing loved ones get sick, and witnessing devastating events around the globe—has dramatically sapped optimism.

This year's survey, though, also makes it increasingly clear that millennials and Gen Zs aren't just resilient—they're channeling their energies into holding themselves and others accountable. They're the people most likely to call out racism and sexism, and to shun companies and employers whose actions conflict with their personal values.

Of course, that's a generality—no group of people is homogeneous. But millennials and Gen Zs, on the whole, seem more persistent, more vocal, and more apt than others to question and even upset the status quo. These generations believe in the power of individuals to create change. Even though they want institutions to do more and aren't hesitant to call for government intervention to fix what they can't, they embrace personal responsibility. It's evident in their approach to everything from the pandemic to social justice—an approach that has real ramifications for employers, retailers, and every other organization and institution.

This year's global survey followed up on topics related to the pandemic, including its effect on respondents' behaviors, stress levels, and opinions. As always, it asked about people's satisfaction with business's role in society. And it dug into the issues that matter to millennials and Gen Zs, especially the environment, social equality, and discrimination.



KEY FINDINGS



HEALTH AND EMPLOYMENT

Health and employment status have climbed the list of top concerns, but millennials and Gen Zs remain deeply concerned about climate change and the environment. More than four in 10 millennials and Gen Zs agree that we have already hit the point of no return when it comes to the environment and that it's too late to repair the damage. However, a majority are optimistic that people's commitment to take personal action to address environmental and climate issues will be greater post-pandemic. For their part, more than a quarter of millennials and Gen Zs said that certain businesses' impact on the environment has influenced their buying decisions.



MENTAL HEALTH

The stigma around mental health challenges, particularly in the workplace, remains. About a third of all respondents (millennials 31%, Gen Zs 35%) said they've taken time off work due to stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic. Among the two-thirds who didn't take time off, four in 10 deemed themselves to be stressed all of the time but chose to work through it. And approximately 40% of millennials and Gen Zs feel their employers have done a poor job of supporting their mental well-being during this period.



STRESS

Stress has returned to pre-pandemic levels, with more than 41% of millennials and 46% of Gen Zs saying they feel stressed all or most of the time. The pandemic has created much uncertainty and stress around millennials' and Gen Zs' financial futures. About two-thirds of each group agreed (to some degree) that they often worry or become stressed by their personal financial situations. Their families' welfare was also a main cause of stress for millennials; uncertainty about jobs/career prospects was top for Gen Zs.

KEY FINDINGS (CONTINUED)



BUSINESS' SOCIETAL IMPACT

Continuing a steady decline over the last few years, slightly less than half of millennials and Gen Zs think that business is having a positive impact on society. Yet views on business' ambitions are beginning to stabilize. A slightly lower percentage of respondents this year said they believe businesses are focused solely on their own agendas or that they have no motivations beyond profitability. This may indicate that they view business leaders' discourse around stakeholder capitalism as sincere, but they still want to see concrete impact to match corporate promises.



WEALTH AND INCOME

They have serious concerns and misgivings about the scale of wealth and income equality. Two-thirds of millennials and Gen Zs see wealth and income as unequally distributed in society. A majority believe that legislation and direct government intervention would significantly close the gap.



SYSTEMIC RACISM

Six in 10 Gen Zs and 56% of millennials see systemic racism as very or fairly widespread in general society. At least one in five said they feel personally discriminated against "all of the time" or frequently because of an aspect of their backgrounds. More than half see older generations as standing in the way of progress.



Although COVID-19 vaccines were beginning to emerge when this year's survey was administered, promising an end to restrictions and the resumption of normality, high numbers of millennials and Gen Zs still fear that both personal and societal situations will get worse before they get better.

Many among these groups, though, are tired of waiting. They want a better planet, a fairer system, a kinder humanity—and they're ready to help make that happen, with small steps today giving way to giant steps as more millennials and Gen Zs assume positions of influence throughout society.

Coping with the pandemic

After nearly a year of life lived during a pandemic—a period punctuated by civil strife, social division, and severe climate events—millennials and Gen Zs surveyed in January 2021 were, understandably, both frustrated and impatient. Yet an undercurrent of optimism persisted, a characteristic that these groups continue to share despite a decade of setbacks and challenges.

This year's report delves deeply into how 2020 affected these generations' day-to-day lives, their mental health, and their collective worldview.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The 2021 report solicited the views of 14,655 millennials and 8,273 Gen Zs (22,928 respondents total) from 45 countries across North America, Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia Pacific. The survey was conducted using an online, self-complete-style interview. Fieldwork was completed between 8 January and 18 February 2021.

This year's report marks the first time Deloitte Global researched millennials and Gen Zs in the same number of countries. Last year, Gen Zs were surveyed in only 20 countries. Year-to-year comparisons of Gen Z responses were influenced by the addition of 25 new geographies and should be considered accordingly.

As defined in the study, millennials were born between January 1983 and December 1994, and Generation Z respondents were born between January 1995 and December 2003.

The report represents a broad range of respondents, from those with executive positions in large organizations to others who are participating in the gig economy, doing unpaid work or are unemployed. Additionally, the Gen Z group includes students who have completed or are pursuing degrees, those who have completed or plan to complete vocational studies, and others who are in secondary school and may or may not pursue higher education.

CHAPTER 1

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on daily life

Millennials and Gen Zs indicated a strong sense of personal adherence to public health guidelines during 2020, with many feeling that they have observed pandemic rules more closely than others around them.

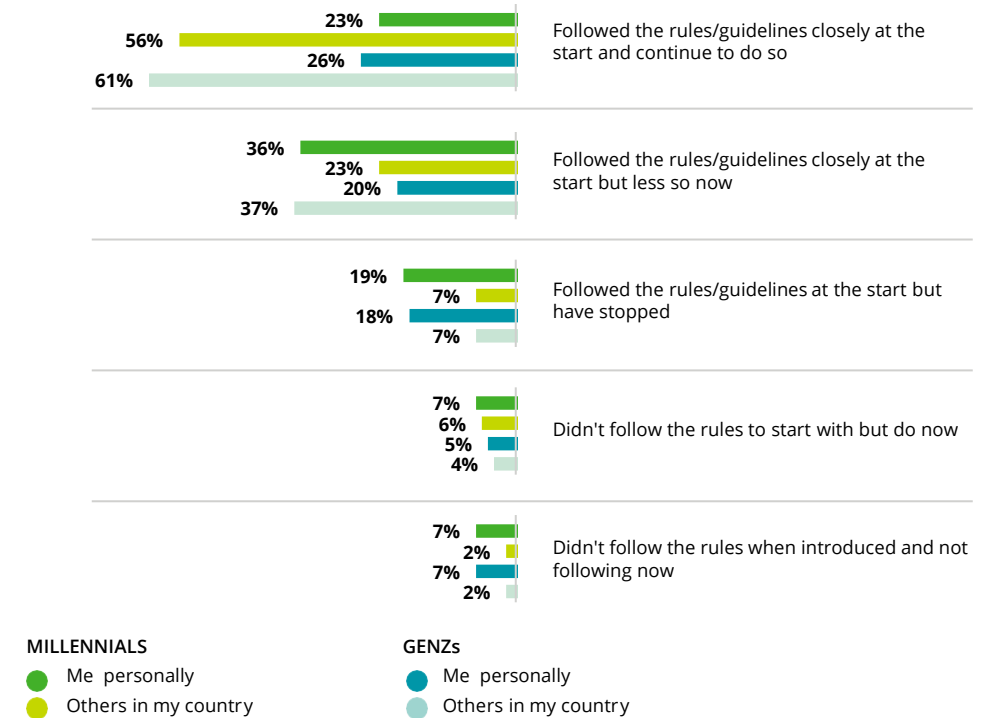
About three in four millennials and 69% of Gen Zs said they followed their government’s public health guidelines very seriously or fairly seriously. Women reported being more compliant than men, by five percentage points among millennials and eight percentage points among Gen Zs. Nearly 70% of those surveyed in January indicated they were likely to get a vaccine once one widely backed by the medical community became available.

Two-thirds of respondents revealed they had regularly avoided shops, public transport, and other crowded places; three-quarters said they’d regularly worn face masks in public. Though maybe unsurprising, it is noteworthy that 82% of millennial women said they wore face coverings versus only 68% of Gen Z men.

Both generations shared the perception that they were more conforming than others in society. Three-fifths of millennials and 56% of Gen Zs said they followed the guidelines closely at the start of the pandemic and continued to do so when surveyed. But only a quarter of millennials and even fewer Gen Zs felt that others in their countries were doing the same—and 28% of both groups weren’t bashful about regularly challenging the noncompliant.

MILLENNIALS AND GEN ZS REPORT A STRONG SENSE OF PERSONAL ADHERENCE TO COVID-19 GUIDELINES COMPARED TO OTHERS IN SOCIETY

Adherence to COVID-19 guidelines now versus start of pandemic (%)



Q50A. Compared to when they were first introduced, how closely are you now following the rules and guidelines around COVID-19? Q50B. And compared to the start, how closely do you think people in [country] are following the rules and guidelines around COVID-19? Base: All millennials 14,655, all Gen Z 8,273

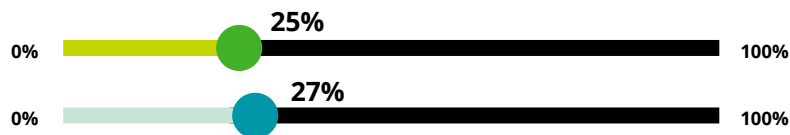
Finding silver linings

While the past months have upset most people’s normal daily routines, some millennials and Gen Zs seized opportunities for personal and professional improvement. Between a quarter and a third claimed they have exercised more often and improved their diets, decluttered their homes and sold possessions they no longer needed, and spent more time with family and connected with friends (though often via technology). The same percentage said they improved their financial positions during the pandemic, likely because there were fewer experiences available to them as consumers.

Some channeled time and energy into learning and up-skilling. A fourth of millennials and 27% of Gen Zs said they learned new work capabilities during their personal time. Millennials in senior (32%) and leadership (37%) positions were most likely to say they’d done so.

A less tangible but potentially more powerful impact of the pandemic is the sense of solidarity that has emerged. At least six in 10 respondents said the pandemic has given them a sense that we’re all in this together; they say they feel more sympathetic to those in their communities and have taken actions to help those in need. And more than a third of millennials and Gen Zs expect to see a more altruistic world emerge—one that’s more compassionate, more cooperative internationally, more able to tackle climate change. This segment also believes that business will be more socially responsible. Less than 14% of those surveyed expect post-pandemic declines in these areas.

A fourth of millennials and 27% of Gen Zs said they learned new work capabilities during their personal time.



At least six in 10 of all respondents said the pandemic has given them a sense that we’re all in this together.

They say they feel more sympathetic to those in their communities and have taken actions to help those in need.



Ready to return

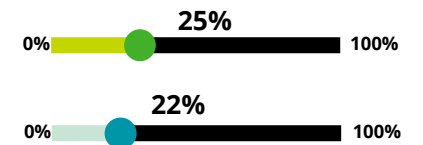
While making the best of an unprecedented situation, these generations are eager to regain the freedoms lost during the pandemic. Their responses suggest they'll try to make up for lost time by being more active than they were before COVID-19 slowed the world down, which bodes well for economic recovery.

About half of millennials and Gen Zs expect to see friends and family more often than they did pre-pandemic once restrictions are eased. There's a strong appetite for "going out" and pursuing the experiences these groups value. About 44% of those surveyed said they will eat out at restaurants more often than before the pandemic. Nearly as many expect they will attend concerts and visit theaters or other entertainment venues more often than before. There is also anticipation for travel to resume, with two-thirds expecting to maintain or increase their rate of personal or work travel after pandemic restrictions are lifted.

Both groups expect to spend more time in the office once restrictions are lifted, and many claim to be excited about getting back into a formal work environment—but not until they're confident it's safe,² and not necessarily full time. A quarter of millennials and 22% of Gen Zs said they would like to work in the office "a little to a lot less often" than they did before. They'll likely get their wish, as the future of work promises to look very different once the pandemic subsides.



44% of those surveyed said they will eat out at restaurants more often than before the pandemic.



25% of millennials and 22% of Gen Zs said they would like to work in the office "a little to a lot less often."

Embracing adaptable workplaces

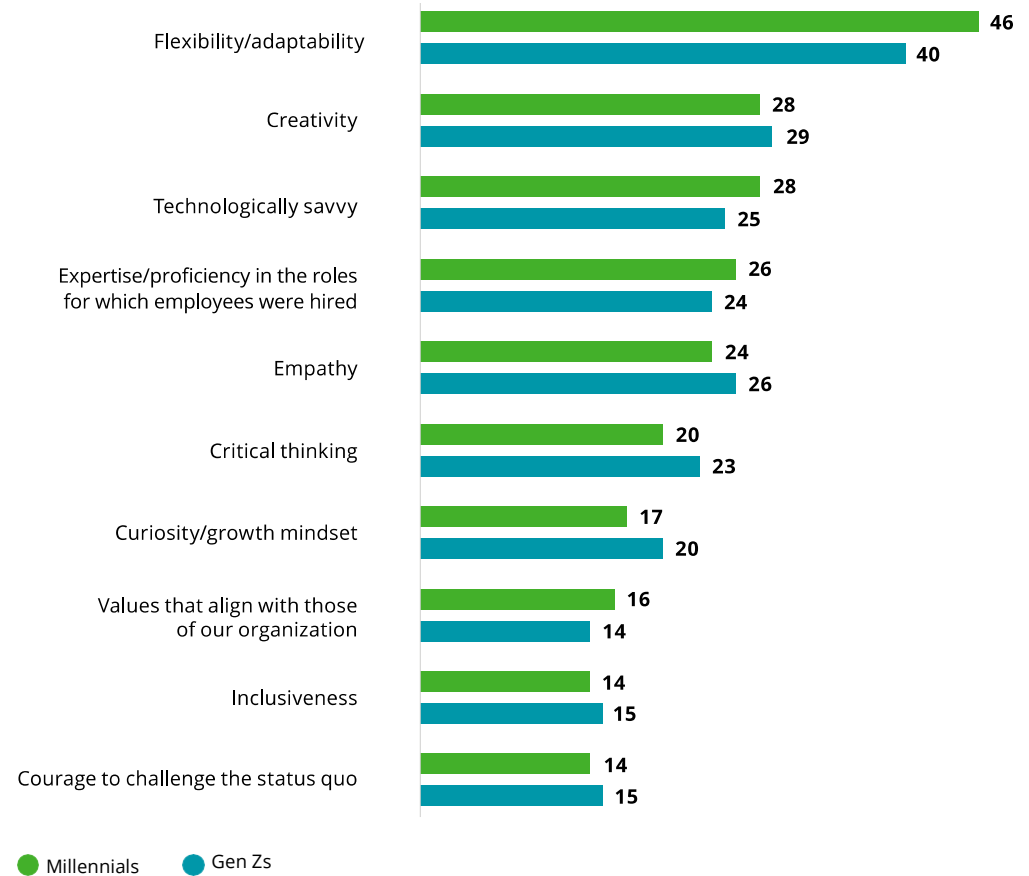
The pandemic reinforced the importance of workers being adaptable and willing and able to pivot or learn new skills as necessary as jobs were being reprioritized based on immediate needs. Indeed, when millennials and Gen Zs were asked which employee characteristics or behaviors have become most critical to the success of their organizations, flexibility and adaptability came out on top by a large margin. Global CXOs are in complete agreement: In the 2021 Deloitte Global Resilience Report, a majority of respondents selected flexibility/adaptability as one of the three most critical workforce traits—significantly more than those who identified “expertise and proficiency in the roles for which employees were hired” or having “values that align with our organization.”³

Most millennials and Gen Zs said they were pleased with the actions their employers have taken to support them and their mental health during the pandemic. More than six in 10 of those surveyed said their employers had policies in place—including flexible working hours and leave/sick leave policies—to help support them.

The acceleration of flexible workplaces could eventually affect where people choose to live. During the pandemic, nearly 10% of millennials and Gen Zs surveyed said they temporarily (5%) or permanently (4%) moved out of a city. That’s a fraction of the 56% who said in last year’s survey that, if given the opportunity to work remotely in the future, they would choose to live outside of a major city. But it represents notable movement given the short time frame and will be an interesting trend to watch in the future.

MILLENNIALS AND GEN ZS SEE FLEXIBILITY AS THE MOST CRITICAL EMPLOYEE CHARACTERISTIC FOR SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES

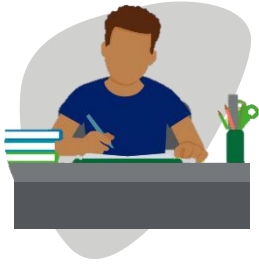
Employee behaviors most critical to successful businesses, according to millennials and Gen Zs (%)



Q24. Given the events of 2020 and planning for the future, which of these employee characteristics or behaviors have become most critical to the success of your organization? Base: All millennials in work 12,532, all Gen Zs in work 4,137

CHAPTER 2

The effect on mental health



One of the more concerning insights from last year’s millennial survey was the pre-pandemic finding that 48% of Gen Zs and 44% of millennials felt stressed all or most of the time.

That was accompanied by the most surprising finding of April’s follow-up survey: that stress levels had *dropped* eight percentage points for each group. This may have happened because life got simpler for some people. They were spending more time at home with family. Those with jobs—the vast majority of respondents—were building savings. And they were avoiding some of life’s more stressful daily activities, including commuting and negotiating large crowds.

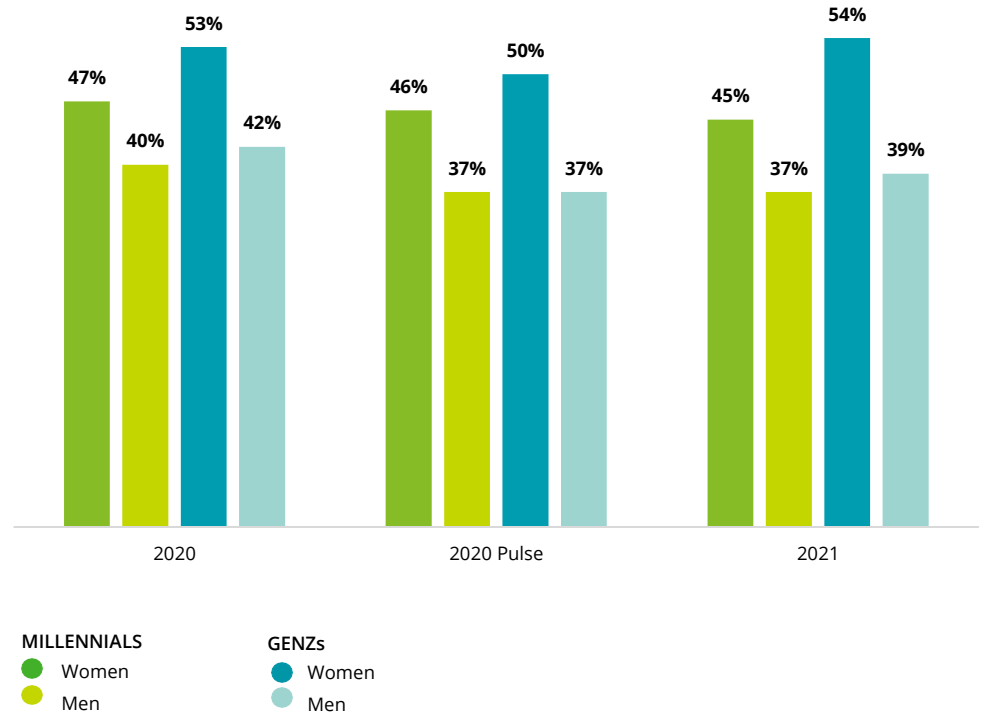
As the pandemic dragged on and these generations were surveyed again in January 2021, any sense of relief that may have resulted from “lockdown lifestyles” had evaporated: 46% of Gen Zs and 41% of millennials again said they felt stressed all or most of the time.

Predictably, stress levels were highest in countries—like South Africa, Brazil, Philippines, the United States, and the United Kingdom—that were particularly hard hit by COVID-19. Stress levels remained stable and even dropped in places where the outbreak was relatively contained, such as Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Israel.

Stress also is more prevalent among women, who have been disproportionately affected by job losses and increased family care responsibilities.⁴ Roughly half of millennial and Gen Z women said they were stressed all or most of the time.

LEVELS OF STRESS HAVE REMAINED HIGH THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC, PARTICULARLY FOR WOMEN

Proportion who say they are stressed “all” or “most” of the time (%)



Q13. How often would you say you feel anxious or stressed? Millennial base: 2021 men 7,327, women 7,327; 2020 “pulse survey” men 2,750, women 2,750; 2020 men 6,857, women 6,857; Gen Z base: 2021 men 4,136, women 4,136; 2020 “pulse survey” men 1,800, women 1,800; 2020 men 2,355, women 2,355

Sources of stress

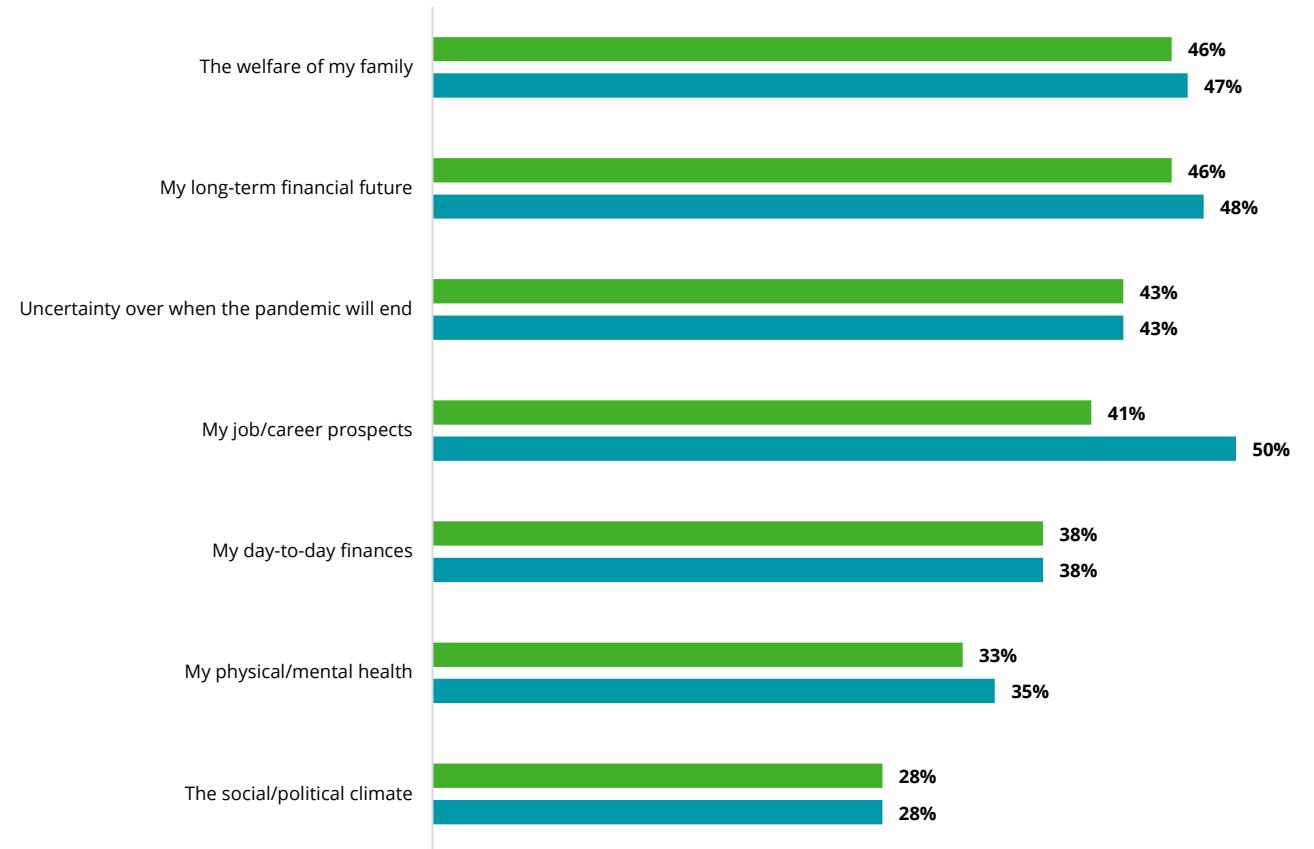
The welfare of their families and their longer-term financial futures (both 46%) tied atop the list of factors that millennials said contribute “a lot” to their feelings of anxiety or stress. Approximately the same percentage of Gen Zs agreed, but concern about their job and career prospects, at 50%, was their foremost worry.

The pandemic elevated concerns about millennials’ and Gen Zs’ personal financial situations. Two-thirds of all respondents said they strongly agree or tend to agree that they “often worry or get stressed” about their general financial situations. The same number said that as a result of the pandemic, they’ve had to reassess and change their financial goals. Consistent with several other findings in the survey, millennial women expressed the most concern while Gen Z men indicated the least.

Just 36% of millennials and 40% of Gen Zs expected their personal financial situations to improve during the following 12 months, while about one in five from each group assumed their financial situations would worsen. Growing uncertainty also is evident—among Gen Zs, for example, 13% said they’re unsure what might happen with their financial situations; that figure was only 5% in 2019.

TOP STRESS DRIVERS

% who said the following factors contribute to stress



Q14. To what extent do each of the following contribute to your feelings of anxiety or stress? Base: All who feel stressed currently, millennials 13,416, all Gen Z 7,557

● Millennials ● Gen Zs

Mental health and work

About a third of all respondents (millennials 31%, Gen Zs 35%) said they've taken time off work due to stress and anxiety since the start of the pandemic. Among the two-thirds who didn't take time off, four in 10 deemed themselves to be stressed all of the time but chose to work through it.

Numbers such as these are why many companies have made mental health a priority and expanded resources available for their employees.⁵ Millennial business leaders in our survey indicated a clear focus on well-being and mental health, listing their top-four non-financial business priorities as ensuring work/life balance (27%), supporting employees' physical and mental health (16%), and supporting people's development and helping employees be their true selves (tied at 13%).

Unfortunately, many millennials and Gen Zs see their employers' efforts as

inadequate: Nearly four in 10 respondents disagreed with the statement, "My employer has taken actions to support my mental well-being during this time." The higher their stress levels, the less supported by their employer they felt.

This perceived indifference from employers may partially explain why only 38% of millennials and 35% of Gen Zs said they've spoken openly with their supervisors about the stress they're feeling. It also could be a factor in their reluctance to tell their managers when anxiety or stress causes them to take time off work. Nearly half of respondents who took mental health days gave reasons other than stress for their absence, slightly more than those who were transparent. Parents were more upfront than those without children at home, perhaps because those without children felt as though they didn't have "as much of a reason" to be stressed.

Nearly four in 10 respondents do not believe their employers have taken actions to support their mental well-being during the pandemic.



CHAPTER 3

How the past year
influenced millennials' and
Gen Zs' world outlooks



Optimism reaches nadir

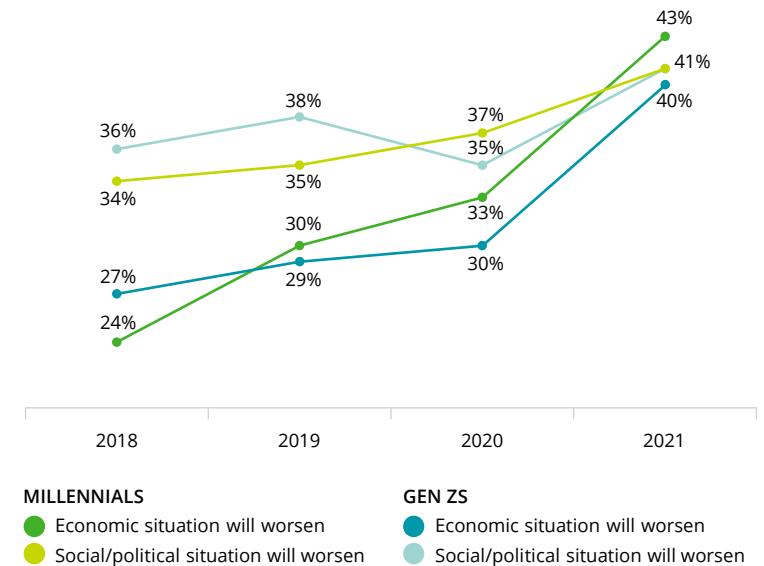
In 2018, many more millennials and Gen Zs—by about 20 percentage points—believed that the economic situations in their countries would improve during the next year than worsen. In 2021, those who believe the economy will deteriorate outnumber the optimistic by about 15 percentage points, a swing of about 35 points in just three years.

Overall, 43% of millennials and 41% of Gen Zs fear that their local economies will be worse by January 2022 than at the time they were surveyed. Those figures are about 10 percentage points higher than a year ago. These low expectations are intriguing given the promise of vaccines, the first of which was approved in Europe in late December 2020, shortly before Deloitte Global began conducting this survey. This suggests that millennials and Gen Zs expect the economic recovery to lag the anticipated return to normalcy throughout society.

Pessimism about social/political climates also reached historic levels. More than four in 10 respondents expect worsening situations, the highest number ever recorded. The four-to-five-percentage-point change, while less dramatic than the drop in economic concerns, was still the largest year-on-year decline recorded.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL/POLITICAL PESSIMISM GROWS

Proportion who believe the economic and the social/political situation will worsen



Q2. Taking everything into account, do you expect the overall economic situation in the country to improve, worsen or stay the same over the next 12 months?
 Millennial base: 2018 10,455, 2019 13,416, 2020 13,715, 2020 "pulse survey" 5,501, 2021 14,655; Gen Z base: 2018 1,844, 2019 3,009, 2020 4,711, 2020 "pulse survey" 3,601, 2021 8,273

Opinions of business stabilize

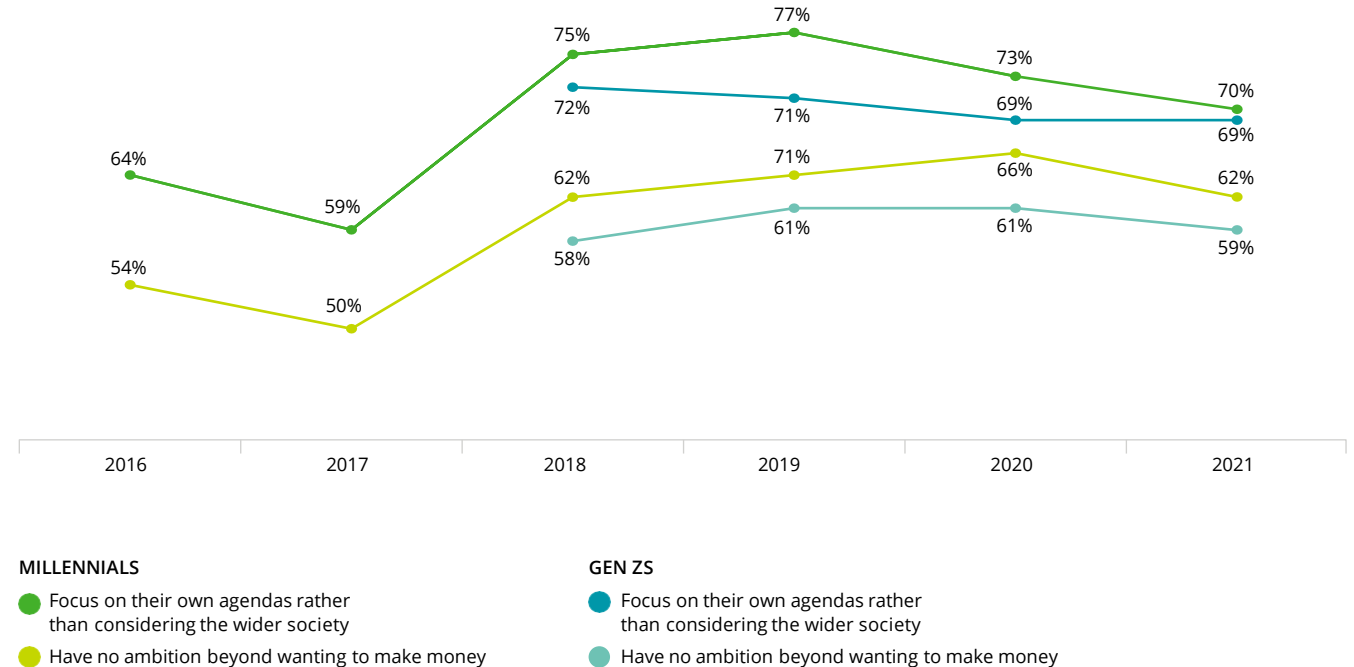
The number of millennials who believe that business has a positive impact on society was 47%, marking the first time that figure has dipped below 50%. It was 76% in 2017. Like millennials, fewer than half of Gen Zs see business as a force for good in society. Still, the underlying data suggests that negative feelings toward business may be turning a corner.

Consider the fact that seven in 10 millennials feel that businesses focus on their own agendas rather than considering the wider society. That figure was 73% last year and 77% in 2019, so the new finding actually marks a slight downward trend from previous years. Further, although 62% of millennials agreed that businesses “have no ambition beyond wanting to make money,” that figure is down four percentage points from 2020.

Fewer than half see business as a force for good in society.

EARLY SIGNS OF BUSINESSES HAVING A FOCUS BEYOND THEIR OWN AGENDA ARE STARTING TO APPEAR

% who agree with the following statements



Q11. Thinking about business in general, would you agree or disagree that, on balance, the following statements describe their current behaviors?
Base: All millennials 14,655, all Gen Zs 8,273

These findings may indicate that many businesses' shift toward stakeholder capitalism is resonating with millennials. They remain unimpressed with businesses' impact on society, but they may be starting to feel more optimistic about business leaders' intentions.

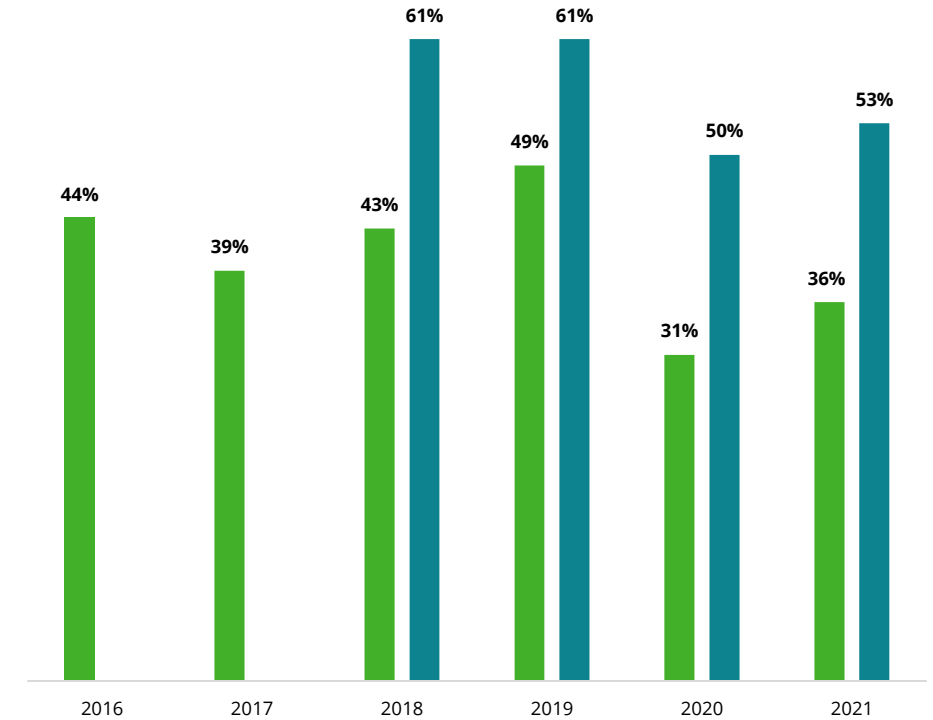
How, or if, this may affect employee loyalty in coming years is unclear. A correlation between opinions of business in general and job loyalty was apparent before 2020: As skepticism increased, loyalty decreased. The pandemic changed that—even though positive attitudes toward business hit new lows in 2020, loyalty jumped significantly. However, there are many potential reasons why people may have stayed put with their current employers during the pandemic. So it remains to be seen how loyalty trends will shift once the world fully emerges from this crisis.

In this year's report, loyalty slipped a bit from last year's record high. More millennials and Gen Zs would, if given the opportunity, welcome a change within two years (36% and 53% respectively, compared to 31% and 50% in 2020), while about the same said they'd prefer to stay at least five years (34% millennials, 21% Gen Z in 2021, compared to 35% and 21% respectively in 2020).



JOB LOYALTY PEAKED IN 2020, PRE-PANDEMIC.

% who expect to leave in the next two years



Q8. If you had a choice, how long would you stay with your current employer(s) before leaving to join a new organization or do something different?

Note: Survey data for Gen Zs begins in 2018

● Millennials ● Gen Zs

Pandemic drives personal concerns

Millennials' greatest personal concerns have changed little since last year's pre-pandemic and April follow-up surveys. Health care/disease prevention, climate change/protecting the environment, and unemployment remain the top-three concerns. What's different is the number of respondents choosing each at the expense of the remaining 17 options.

Last year, 21% of millennials named health care as a top-three concern, behind environmental concerns and barely ahead of unemployment, income inequality/distribution of wealth, and crime/personal safety. The emergence of COVID-19 propelled it to 30% and the top spot overall in the April follow-up survey. This year, it remains millennials' foremost concern—but at 28%, it's barely edging out unemployment at 27%. Gen Zs share the same top three concerns as millennials, though climate/environment sits atop their list while health care/disease prevention is third.

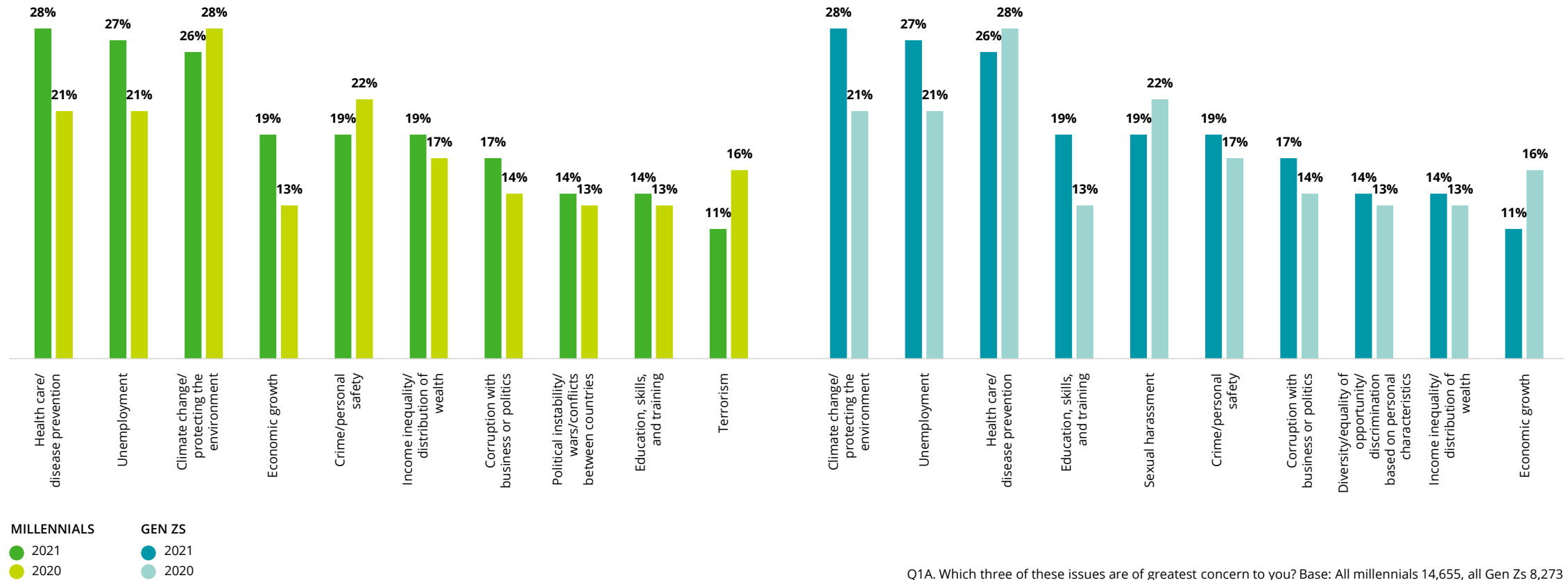
The more notable divergence among the two generations is found in their subsequent choices. Millennials' next-highest concerns were economic growth, crime/personal safety, and income/wealth inequality, while Gen Zs' choices were education, crime/personal safety, sexual harassment, and corruption within business or politics.

The choice of education isn't surprising, since 65% of Gen Zs surveyed are still enrolled in classes or vocational education programs (versus 15% of millennials) and most have experienced tremendous disruption in their schooling. The choice of sexual harassment is more interesting: 17% of Gen Zs chose it as a top-three concern compared with just 9% of millennials. Whether that's a result of younger people often being in less-structured environments, spending more time on social media, or something else is open to speculation.



HEALTH CARE/DISEASE PREVENTION TOPS MILLENNIALS' LIST OF CONCERNS AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC. THE ENVIRONMENT REMAINS THE TOP CONCERN FOR GEN Z, BUT THEIR FOCUS ON HEALTH CARE/DISEASE PREVENTION HAS ALSO GROWN

Greatest personal concerns for millennials and Gen Zs (%)



Q1A. Which three of these issues are of greatest concern to you? Base: All millennials 14,655, all Gen Zs 8,273

Environment remains a priority

Climate change/protecting the environment (28% in 2020) was easily millennials' top personal concern a year ago, by a margin of six percentage points. Though it gained one percentage point in the April survey, it slipped to number two among concerns. This year, unemployment fears leapfrogged it, dropping it to third. Still, it's somewhat remarkable that respondents' minds remained focused on environmental issues when threats to their health, family welfare, and careers are more personal and imminent.

In last year's pre-pandemic survey, half of all respondents said they feared the environment had passed the point of no return and it was too late to repair the damage caused by climate change. Those figures, though still high, fell this year to 44% for millennials and 43% for Gen Zs. Encouraging environmental signs witnessed during the pandemic lockdown may have stoked optimism. On the flip side, approximately 60% of millennials and Gen Zs fear that business' commitment to reversing climate change and improving the environment will be less of a priority as business leaders reckon with challenges presented by the pandemic and other developments.

MILLENNIALS AND GEN ZS FEAR BUSINESS LEADERS ARE NOT CURRENTLY FOCUSED ON PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT.

60% of all respondents fear business will deprioritize combatting climate change in the aftermath of the pandemic.





Troubled by wealth inequality

Income and/or wealth inequality has long been an issue among millennials and one that consistently falls just short of their top three personal concerns. It ranked fourth back in 2014 and last year and tied for fourth this year, with about one in five respondents citing it as a primary concern. Two-thirds of millennials (69%) and Gen Zs (66%) surveyed in 2021 think that wealth and income is distributed unequally throughout society. According to millennial respondents, the unequal distribution of wealth and income appears more extreme in Latin America (84%) and Central and Eastern Europe (80%).

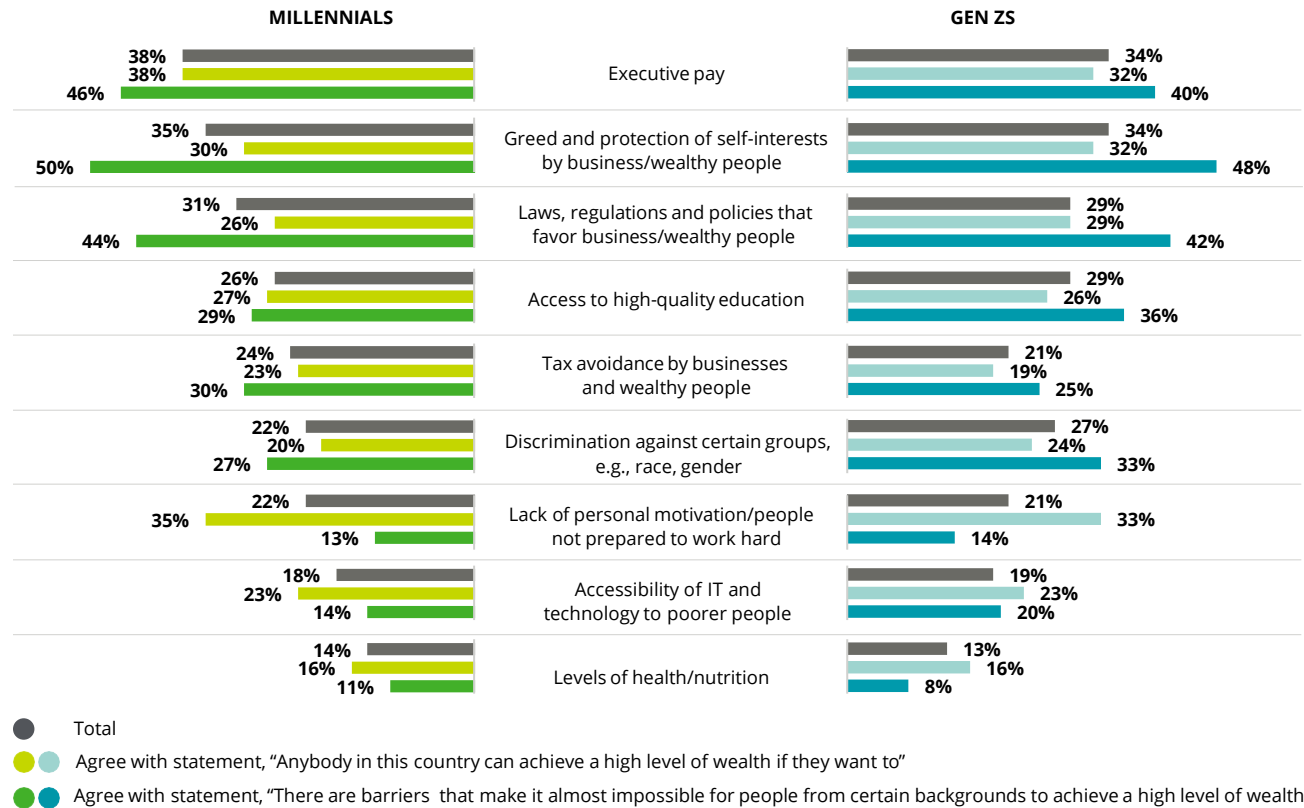
Is the cause systemic? Respondents fall almost equally on both sides of the question. Slightly less than a quarter of millennials and Gen Zs claim there are barriers and obstructions that make it almost impossible for people from certain backgrounds to achieve a high income or level of wealth in their countries. At the same time, 19% of millennials and 16% of Gen Zs believe that anybody in their country, no matter their background, can achieve a high level of wealth if they want to.

Looking at the millennial respondents, more than a third of the “anyone can succeed” group said the biggest factor behind inequality is that people lack motivation or are unprepared to work hard (versus just 22% of all millennials). Even those who scoff at the idea of inherent barriers, though, acknowledge certain hard-to-overcome factors that might cause income and wealth to be distributed unequally. For example, 30% of that group (versus 35% of all millennials) concede that general greed and protection of self-interests by business and the wealthy is an issue. Another 26% believe that laws, regulations, and policies that maintain a system to favor business and the wealthy causes inequality (versus 31% of all millennials). The same trends hold true for the Gen Z respondents.

Two-thirds of millennials and Gen Zs believe that wealth and income is distributed unequally.

EVEN THOSE WHO CLAIM ANYONE CAN ACHIEVE WEALTH SEE INHERENT BARRIERS TO OVERCOME

% who say (statement) is the single biggest factor behind income inequality



Q45B. And which would you say is the single biggest factor behind income inequality? Base: All millennials 14,655, millennials who agree (T3B) with the statement at Q44, "No matter what their background, anybody in this country can achieve a high level of wealth if they want to" 2,849, millennials who agree (T3B) with the statement, "There are barriers and obstructions that make it almost impossible for people from certain backgrounds to achieve a high income or level of wealth" 3,337; all Gen Zs 8,273, Gen Zs who agree (T3B) with the statement at Q44, "No matter what their background, anybody in this country can achieve a high level of wealth if they want to" 1,311, Gen Zs who agree (T3B) with the statement, "There are barriers and obstructions that make it almost impossible for people from certain backgrounds to achieve a high income or level of wealth" 1,738

These younger generations continue to see pay and bonuses awarded to senior business leaders—while average worker wages are kept low—as a primary cause of ongoing inequality. However, among those millennials and Gen Zs who believe wealth inequality is systemic, general greed and protection of self-interests topped their list of causes, with about half choosing it as a main factor.

Discrimination is personal

Diversity, equal opportunity, and discrimination rank in the middle of the pack among respondents' concerns—only 11% of millennials and 16% of Gen Zs chose the issue as a top-three personal concern. As noted in previous survey reports, though, just because an issue isn't at the top of the list doesn't mean people don't perceive it to be a serious problem.

Millennials and, to a slightly greater extent, Gen Zs believe discrimination is widespread and is likely enabled by systemic racism in major institutions. Six in 10 Gen Zs and 56% of millennials see systemic racism as very or fairly widespread in general society. More than half of the Gen Z group and half of all millennials said the same about the media, political systems, and police forces.

This issue is personal for many who were surveyed. At least one in five people said they feel personally discriminated against “all of the time” or frequently because of an aspect of their backgrounds.

A quarter feel they've experienced discrimination by their governments; approximately the same number feel they've been targeted on social media. Nearly as many feel they've been discriminated against by businesses (22% of millennials), in their workplaces (23% of Gen Zs), or by their educational institutions (23% of Gen Zs).

People's ethnicity or race are the most common cited causes for discrimination, but there are multiple reasons that also include socioeconomic status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, gender identification, and sex. Among those who identify as ethnic minorities, 36% of millennials and 39% of Gen Zs said they are discriminated against “all the time” or frequently in the workplace. Roughly three in 10 who identify as homosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual concur.

Thirteen percent of millennial women and 22% of Gen Z women choose discrimination and inequality of opportunity as a top-three personal concern. Gen Z women were more than twice as likely to be troubled by this issue than were millennial men (9%) or Gen Z men (10%).



At least one in five people said they feel personally discriminated against “all of the time” or frequently because of an aspect of their backgrounds.

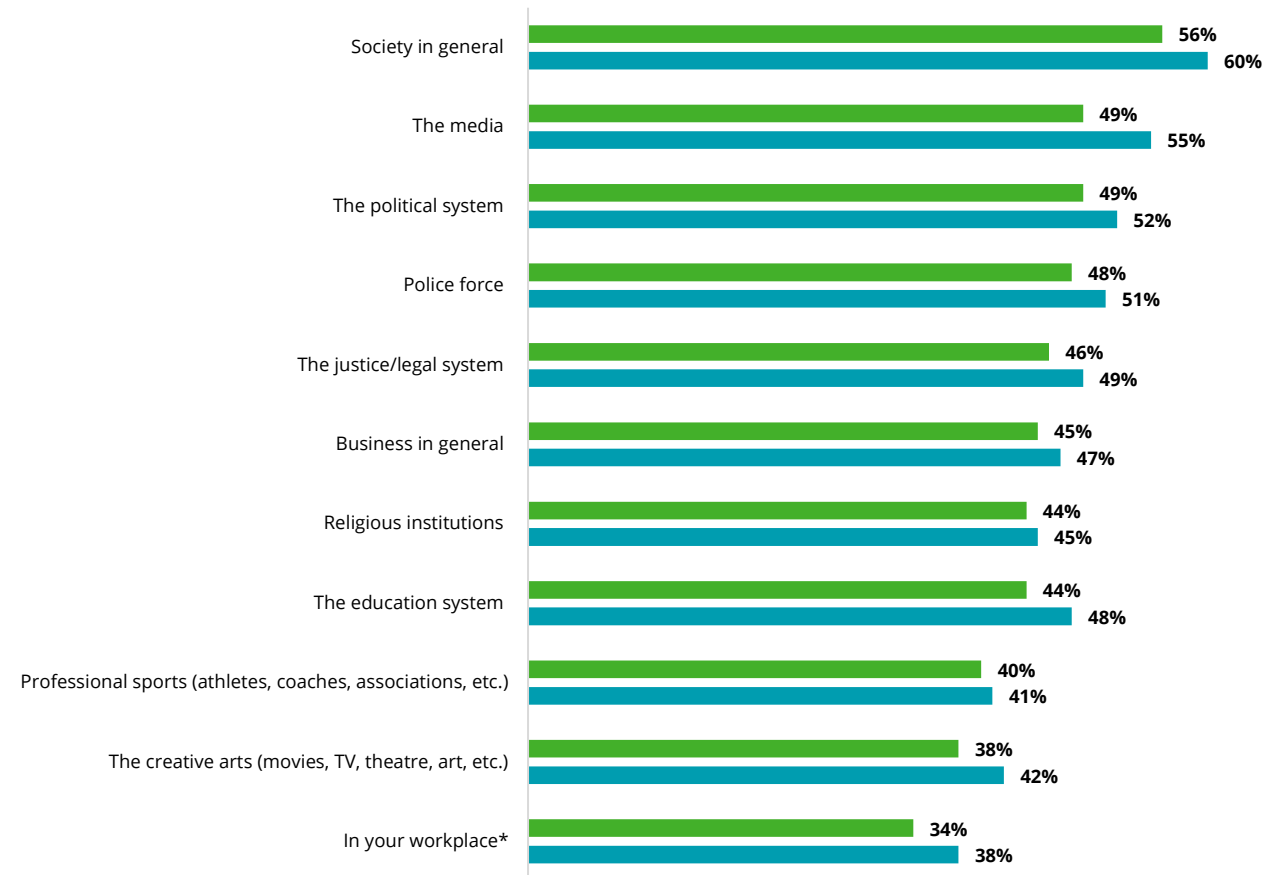
Out of 11 institutions about which they were asked, respondents chose the workplace as the least likely to routinely treat people from minority groups in an unjust or prejudicial manner. Two-thirds of those surveyed and currently working said their organization performs well in creating diverse and inclusive working environments.

Still, 34% of millennials and 38% of Gen Zs believe systemic racism is widespread in this setting, suggesting that much work remains to be done by both employers and employees to ensure that all groups, regardless of their backgrounds, are treated fairly and with respect.



SYSTEMIC RACISM SEEN AS WIDESPREAD ACROSS INSTITUTIONS

Proportion who say systemic racism is “very”/“fairly” widespread within the following institutions in their country



Q35. How widespread, if at all, do you believe systemic racism is within the following institutions in your country? That is, they routinely treat people from minority groups in an unjust or prejudicial manner. Base: All millennials 14,655, all Gen Zs 8,273. *Asked only of those in work.

● Millennials
● Gen Zs

MILLZ MOOD MONITOR

The 2019 Millennial Survey began gauging respondents' mood using an index intended to provide an annual snapshot of millennials' and Gen Zs' optimism that the world and their places in it will improve.

INDEX SCORES ARE BASED ON THE RESULTS OF FIVE QUESTIONS:



Economy

Do you expect the overall economic situation to improve, worsen, or stay the same over the next 12 months?



Social/political

Do you expect the overall social/political situation to improve, worsen, or stay the same over the next 12 months?



Personal finances

How do you expect your personal financial situation to change over the next 12 months?



Environment

Are you generally optimistic or pessimistic that efforts to protect and sustain the health of the planet will be effective?



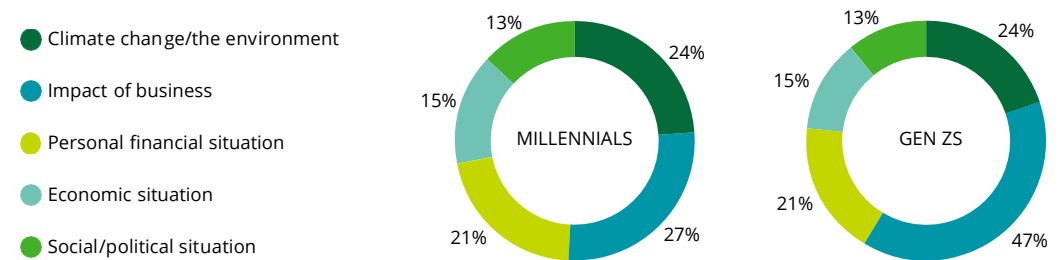
Business

What impact do you think businesses are having on the wider society in which they operate?

Composite scores are calculated and expressed on a scale ranging from zero (absolute pessimism) to 100 (complete optimism).* This method gives us the ability to compare not only periodic movement but regional and demographic groups.

The 2021 index shows a second consecutive decrease in hopefulness. In last year's pre-pandemic index, millennials globally posted a score of 37, a two-point drop from the inaugural poll; Gen Zs scored 39. This year, after months of unprecedented disruption, both groups' scores fell another three points. Decreases are particularly pronounced in countries that have been challenged most by lockdowns, emergent variants, and overall public health impact.

DRIVERS OF THE MILLZ MOOD MONITOR: OPTIMISM AROUND BUSINESS IMPACT, AS WELL AS ENVIRONMENTAL OPTIMISM, CONTRIBUTE MOST



* Results were aggregated using the percentages of respondents expressing positive outlooks regarding each of the five questions. That number was divided by the maximum possible total of 500, yielding a percentage that is stated as a whole number (i.e., 0.4 gives a composite score of 40). If respondents were equally optimistic about each of the five questions, then each would contribute equally to the composite score. Accordingly, areas of greater relative optimism account for larger segments of the composite score, as reflected in the following data visualization.

CHAPTER 4

Driven to act

We've seen in previous survey reports, and again this year, that millennials and Gen Zs aren't passive.

As consumers, they often put their wallets where their values are, stopping or initiating relationships based on how companies treat the environment, protect personal data, and position themselves on social and political issues. This year, almost a third of respondents started or deepened consumer relationships with companies based on their response to the COVID-19 crisis, while around a quarter stopped or lessened relationships for the same reason.

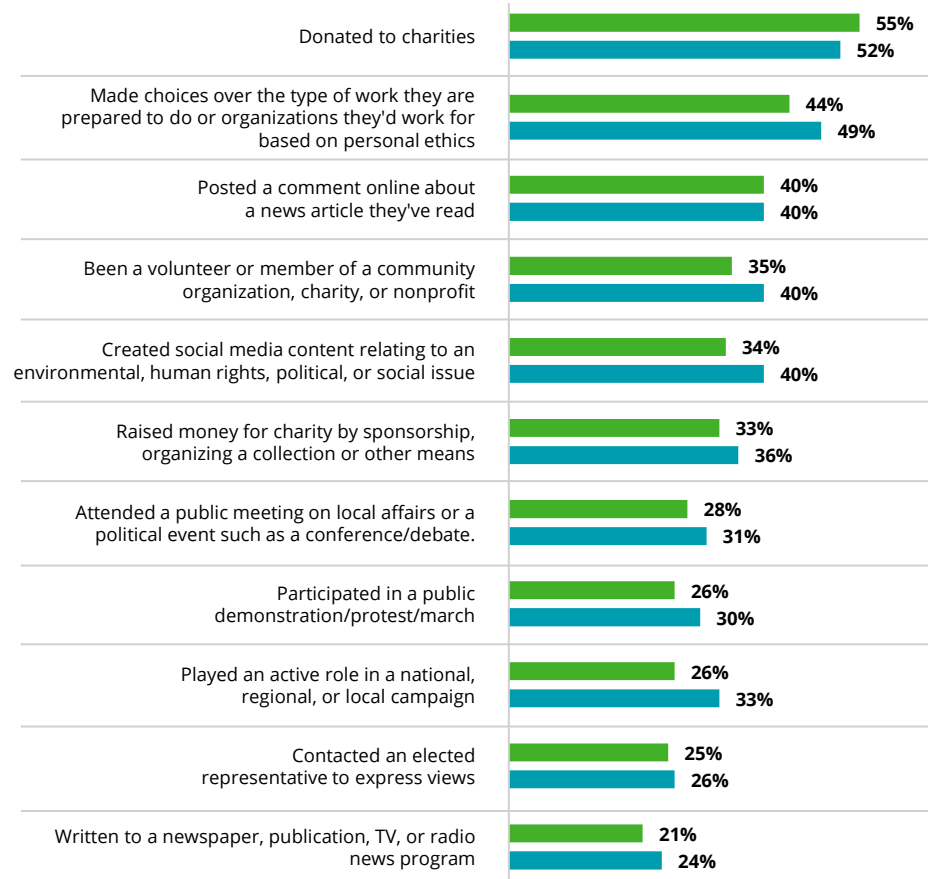
They lean on their values when making career choices. Over the past two years, 44% of millennials and 49% of Gen Zs said they have made choices over the type of work they are prepared to do and the organizations for which they are willing to work based on their personal ethics. And about 15% of those surveyed this year said—after reflecting on the pandemic and their values and aspirations—that they either left their jobs or started new careers.

They also get involved politically: About three in 10 said that, in the previous 24 months, they attended political events or meetings regarding local affairs; around a quarter contacted a public official to express their views; and slightly more said they played an active role in national, regional, or local campaigns around issues that matter to them. And a quarter (26%) of this year's surveyed millennials and a third of Gen Zs said they participated in public demonstrations, protests, or marches in the past 24 months.

It's not unexpected, then, that millennials and Gen Zs are actively seeking to influence policy and business actions on matters that are important to them, including environmental issues, inequality, and discrimination. They see each at a tipping point and seem eager to provide the necessary push to hold institutions accountable, in order to bring about change.

THEY ARE TAKING ACTION TO DRIVE THE CHANGE THEY WANT TO SEE IN THE WORLD

% who have done the following over the past two years



Q52. Over the past two years have you participated in or undertaken any of the following activities? Please select all that apply to you.

Base: All millennials 14,655, All Gen Z 8,273

● Millennials
● Gen Zs



Doing their part to help the environment

One of the few positive outcomes of the global pandemic has been the realization of how quickly individuals, organizations, and institutions can change when necessary—and, in lockdowns' temporary impact on reducing carbon emissions,⁶ showing how curtailing polluting activities could help heal the planet. It demonstrated that change is possible.

Just over two-thirds of millennials and Gen Zs agreed with the statement, "Environmental changes seen during the pandemic (less pollution, cleaner water, etc.) make me more optimistic that climate change can be reversed." About 40% also believe people's commitment to take personal action for environmental and climate issues will be greater, post-pandemic. And almost 40% believe the pandemic will create a future in which individuals are better able to act on environmental issues.

In last year's survey, millennials and Gen Zs said they were taking a variety of actions to reduce their environmental impact—from recycling more and increasing their use of public transportation to changing their eating habits and clothing purchases. About 60% even said they either have considered or plan to consider the environment when deciding how many children to have.

In this year's survey, 28% of all respondents said they've started or deepened their consumer relationships with businesses whose products and services benefit the environment. Conversely, about the same number have stopped or lessened relationships with organizations whose offerings they see as harming the planet.

THE PANDEMIC HAS HINTED AT A POTENTIALLY BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE CLIMATE

% who strongly/tend to agree with the statement, "The environmental changes seen during the pandemic make me more optimistic"



Support for legislating equality

Wealth and income inequality are more difficult to address on a personal level—unlike choosing to compost or buy an electric car to help the environment, individuals have little power to close the gap between rich and poor. Still, millennials and Gen Zs do what they're able in the quest for fairness.

Among those surveyed, about a quarter said they volunteer in ways that help people improve their literacy and numeracy or have mentored younger people. Slightly more respondents said they've donated books, IT equipment, and other educational resources to charities or schools. More still—especially those who feel they're “better off” than most in society—have donated money to charities and disadvantaged groups.

Almost one in five said they have actively boycotted or otherwise protested against companies that they see as not paying their fair share of tax. This small act of rebellion is slightly more common (by about five percentage points) among ethnic minority groups as well as those that do not identify themselves as being heterosexual/straight, suggesting that these groups may be more attuned or sensitive to the systemic barriers to wealth equality.

With many seeing government intervention as the most effective way to create significant change, nearly a third have embraced the most common act: voting for or otherwise supporting politicians working to reduce income inequality. Roughly 60% of those surveyed said they feel legislation to limit the gap in rewards between senior executives and average employees would significantly help, as would legislation that requires business to pay workers a living wage.⁷ The same percentage of millennials and Gen Zs would welcome government funding targeted to support skills training for lower income groups as an ideal method to reduce inequality.

More than half of respondents also said that the idea of universal basic income—a standard, monthly payment to every adult that provides a minimum living income—would work. This doesn't necessarily mean they support this controversial approach,⁸ but the mere acknowledgment of its potential effectiveness would be unexpected among older generations.



Nearly a third have voted for or otherwise supported politicians working to reduce income inequality.

Fighting discrimination firsthand

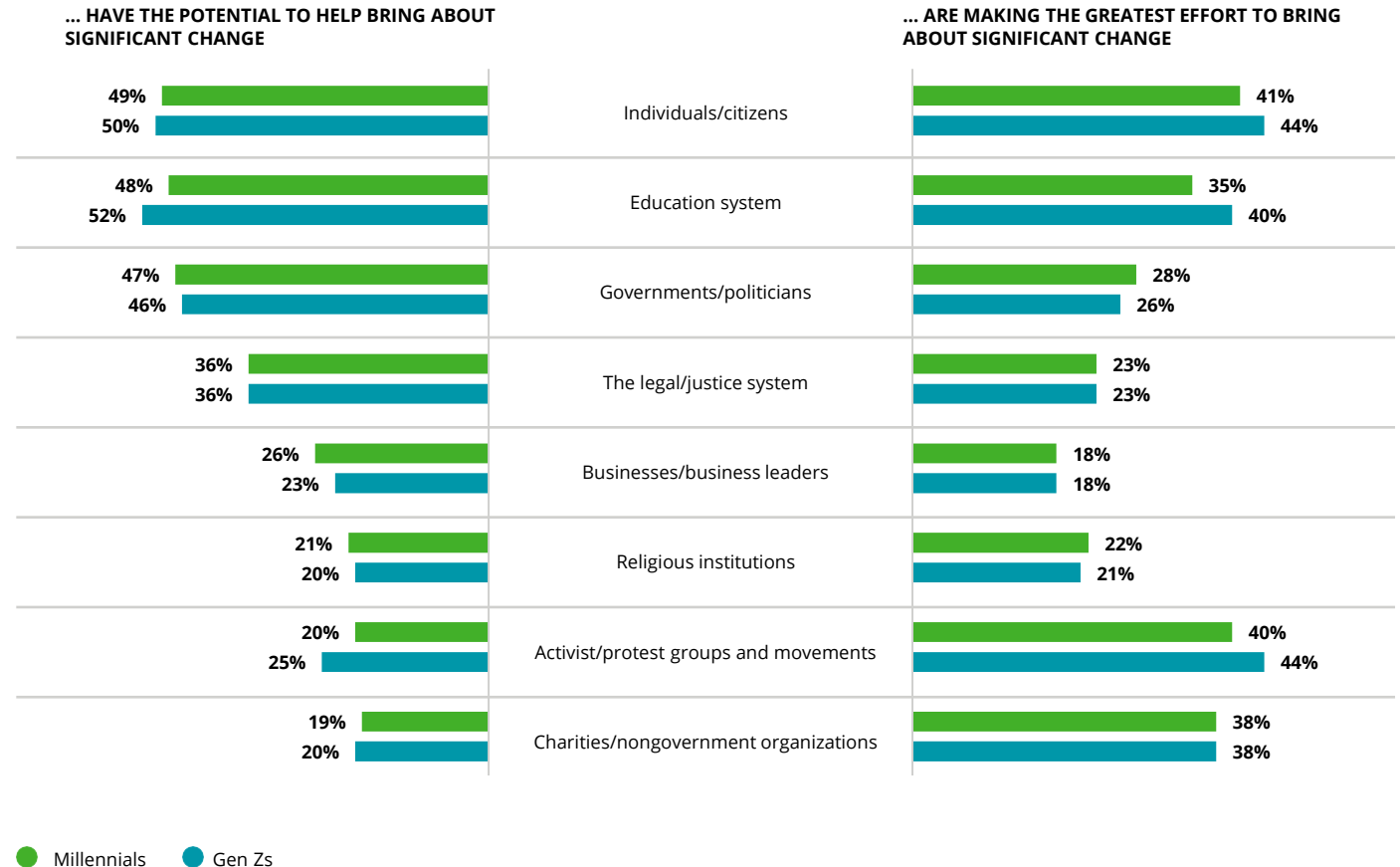
The past year has shone a spotlight on the issue of racial discrimination in such a way that 55% of all survey respondents agreed society is “at a tipping point and there will be positive change from this point forward.”

As with wealth inequality, young generations are doing what they can to address the problem while looking to government and other institutions to accelerate change.

Even though half of those surveyed said individual citizens have the greatest potential to help bring about significant change with respect to systemic racism, three in five respondents agreed that positive change will come from the top down—from a change in attitude and actions from those in power. And right now, they see institutions falling short of their potential. When asked to rank who is making the greatest effort to reduce systemic racism, individuals and activists topped the list ahead of education systems, the legal system, and governments.

THE GROUPS SEEN AS HAVING THE GREATEST POTENTIAL TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE ARE NOT THE ONES MAKING THE GREATEST EFFORT TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC RACISM

% millennials and Gen Zs who say the following groups ...



Q36A Which three of the following do you believe have the greatest potential to help bring about significant change with respect to systemic racism in (COUNTRY). Select up to three. Q36B And which three do you think are making the greatest effort to reduce systemic racism in (COUNTRY). Select up to three. Base: All millennials 14,655 and all Gen Zs 8,273

The role of business in the conversation is uncertain and is potentially downplayed by millennials and Gen Zs. Business' perceived potential to help bring about significant change is about half that of individuals, education systems, and government. And in terms of who is making the greatest effort to address systemic racism, businesses and business leaders ranked last among the eight choices offered.

To many, this is a generational issue: Approximately 60% agreed that "my generation has done more than any other to address discrimination and inequality." More than half (millennials 53%, Gen Zs 55%) see older generations standing in the way of progress.

While institutions are perceived to under-deliver on bringing about positive change, millennials and especially Gen Zs are educating themselves and others on the issue of race and discrimination; about a third said they've had strong conversations about race issues and/or tried to educate and change the views of their peers.

A smaller group said they share helpful content on social media platforms, vote for progressive politicians, and boycott businesses or brands that don't share their own values on the topic of discrimination. Only 13% of millennials and 12% of Gen Zs said they believe discrimination is a problem but have done nothing specific to tackle it.

Both groups claim to be vocal when they encounter discrimination in the workplace. Just over a quarter of those who are employed and have witnessed discrimination against others at work said the last time they witnessed it, they stepped into the situation directly to help the person being targeted. More than one in five said they raised the issue with human resources or a senior manager, while nearly that many said they used anonymous or confidential channels to report the transgression.



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Conclusion

Emerging from one of the most difficult years of their lives, millennials and Gen Zs are more downbeat than at any time during the 10 years they've been surveyed. Yet their responses to questions about the pandemic, equality, the environment, and the role of business suggest an eagerness to take the torch from those who, in their opinion, are doing too little to improve society and address the issues they care about most.

They're tired of waiting for change to happen and are taking action to hold others accountable. But they understand their actions as individuals can do only so much to reverse climate change, create pay and wealth equality, and end racism and bigotry. They want organizations to work together—governments, educational systems, and business—to drive change on a much broader scale.

In past years, the Millennial Survey has revealed that these younger generations want to work for companies with a purpose beyond profit—companies that share their values—and that they feel more empowered to make a difference as part of organizations. Knowing that, business leaders should actively help millennials and Gen Zs channel their determination and focus their efforts to create the future they seek—a future that's more responsible regarding the planet, more empathetic toward populations around the world, and more supportive of equality. As such, focusing on creating a positive impact in society and giving employees ways to get involved and give back will likely help attract and retain talent.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS FROM THIS YEAR'S REPORT

01

Acknowledge the impact on working women.

The pandemic has disproportionately affected women: They're more stressed than men, shouldering more of the burden at home, more worried about finances, and more concerned about equality and discrimination.⁹ Employers can support women during this time by offering the flexibility and resources they need and, more long-term, working to pursuing initiatives that alleviate challenges and biases unique to women in the workplace.

02

Reevaluate the ways organizations look at hiring and retention to promote diversity and inclusion.

Leaders should use systems and processes that are gender- and color-blind and think differently about the types of experiences and qualifications that might prepare people for specific roles. That may include hiring for curious mindsets instead of specific skill sets, or seeking people who have demonstrated they're agile, comfortable with ambiguity, and able to overcome adversity.

03

Examine the role business can play in supporting employees struggling with economic uncertainty and financial stress.

As noted in previous survey reports and by other sources, millennials and Gen Zs lag prior generations in building wealth, a problem compounded by the pandemic.¹⁰ Leaders who ignore income and wealth gaps, both in society and in their own organizations, risk alienating the very employees their organizations need to prosper.

04

Ensure that the environment doesn't fall down the list of priorities for too long.

It's appropriate right now for business leaders to prioritize recovery, resilience, and employee welfare. But a meaningful response to climate change is critical to protecting resources, generating long-term sustainable value, and attracting and retaining high-performing young employees.

05

Prioritize mental health support and resources, and create cultures where it's OK to acknowledge stress.

Leaders need to destigmatize the conversation around mental health in the workplace and encourage their people to be transparent about their needs. Ultimately, this will help employees to feel healthier and happier and boost productivity.

It's difficult for millennials and Gen Zs to change the world when many are worried about their own families' health and futures. That's not stopping them from trying, though.

They are both resilient and resolute, and business leaders who share their vision for a better future would do well to encourage those characteristics and enable their ambitions in every way possible.



Endnotes

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