



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

# Not It? Only 23% of Americans Believe They Can Make a Difference

COIN Team

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Americans care a lot about the state of the world, and we know things need to change. But when it comes to believing we have the power as individuals to make an impact, we have little to no confidence. We don't know how powerful we are, or can be.

The majority of Americans have a strong desire to see progress, but only 23% believe in their individual impact to create positive change. That's the key takeaway from COIN's 2019 State of the Conscious Consumer Study, which surveyed 1,003 people ages 18 and older nationwide to find out if they, as individuals, believe they have the power to make a difference.

With the survey, we also wanted to find out if people are using their time and money to take action that's in line with their values, and whether they prioritized "doing good" through spending, activism, and even their social posts.

Additionally, we asked survey takers about six social and environmental areas aligned with the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#): gender equality, equal access to prosperity, workplace quality, environmental issues or planet health, sustainable development, and public health. Which issues do they care about most? How are they making an impact in the world?

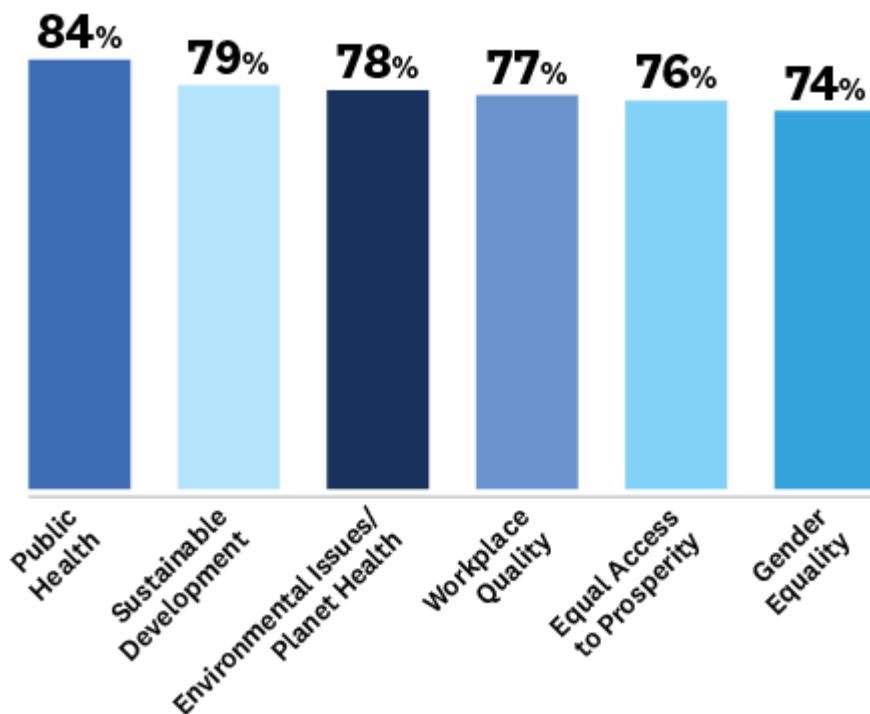
When the results came in, the data showed Americans care a lot about the state of the

world, and we know things need to change. But when it comes to believing we have the power as individuals to make an impact, we have little to no confidence.

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## We All Think Change is Important...

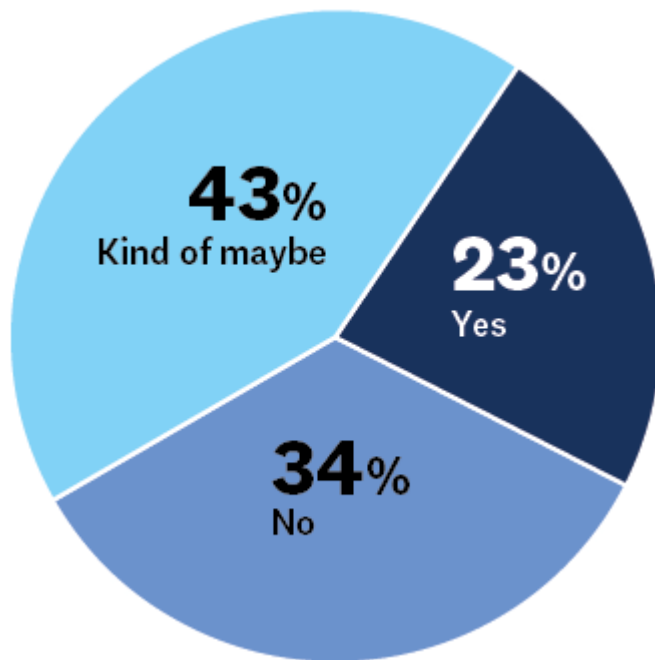
When it comes to social and environmental issues, the majority of Americans surveyed agree that we need to make change for the future, especially in the areas of:



So, most people think the status quo just won't cut it in the years to come. We also see that, across a variety of issues, opportunities for progress are there for the taking.

But who's going to take those opportunities? Who do we think will drive positive change, and who do we believe can actually make an impact? Most Americans look to ... just about anyone else.

### Do Individual Efforts Drive Real Change?

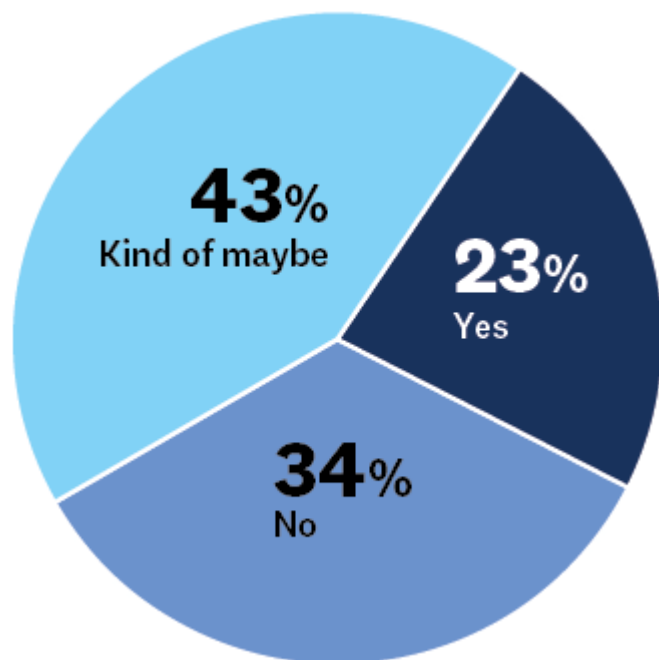


It seems we need a perception change to understand just how we, as individuals, can make a difference.

## ... But We Hope Someone Else Will Take the Lead in Making Change

Most Americans surveyed want to make a difference, and many *do* take actions to make change in the causes they care about. For example, impactful actions could include [buying sustainable products](#) and services, [volunteering](#), or participating in a protest, to name just a few activities. But only 23% think those individual actions are *actually* making an impact, and 43% aren't sure whether individual efforts can drive change *at all*.

Additionally, when we asked people whether they believed they were able to make positive change, we saw some differences across generations:



Yes	
Gen Z (18-24)	34%
Millennials (25-34)	32%
Gen X (35-54)	21%
Boomers/Silent (55+)	13%

No generation is particularly optimistic in thinking individual efforts can drive real change. But overall, more of Gen Z feel they have the power to make a difference, with Millennials not too far behind. The younger folks, it seems, are leading the way.

But it's clear we still have a lot of work to do. Those numbers are nowhere near the majority, after all.

What's the potential impact of believing our actions can't drive change? Well, this no-confidence attitude can keep people on the sidelines. We need to learn what we can do to make a difference, how to get involved and take action, and then see meaningful results and experience the positive impact for ourselves. From there, we can grow confident in our ability to create change and feel empowered to take even more action. That could break the cycle of apathy and the "always waiting for someone else" mentality.

It can all start with shifting how we think about impact, because the survey results also showed that different generations define "impact" differently. If we change our thinking –

even in seemingly small ways – we can get inspired, empowered, and move toward change.

## My Impact May Be Different From Yours

No surprise: Younger generations believe social media can make a powerful impact, compared to older groups. In fact, 60% of Gen Zers consider social sharing and commenting to be impactful actions, compared to 34% of Boomers.

<b>NET: Very Impactful/Impactful</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Gen Z (18-24)</b>	<b>Millennials (25-34)</b>	<b>Gen X (35-54)</b>	<b>Boomers/Silent (55+)</b>
Investing money in companies supporting the issues you care about	54%	66%	65%	50%	41%
Social sharing/commentary	45%	60%	55%	40%	34%

We also saw a strong connection between people who get their news via social media, like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and taking action on their own social channels. For example, we learned that people who consume news on social media are 47% more likely to share or comment in support of equal access to prosperity issues, and 43% are more likely to share or make supportive comments about public health concerns. So, if we consider social media a powerful news platform that impacts our own awareness, then we're more likely to use our own social platforms to reach our communities and engage with leaders to make an even bigger impact.

Boomers, on the other hand, are the generation most likely to connect their money with the power to make an impact: They are 42 percent more likely than Gen Z to be interested in investing their dollars in companies aligned with their values. Even more powerful, 71% of Boomers believe they have enough money to impact social or environmental change. So, if we consider money an effective tool, the way we spend and invest can be a meaningful way to influence change in the causes we care about.

When we look at all these findings, we see a potentially powerful opportunity: Broaden our definition of what can make an impact. Act like Gen Z, and believe in our ability to make change. Think like Boomers, and look to make investments in companies aligned with our values.

If we all started thinking this way and then followed up with direct action, we could see positive social and environmental change.

“Despite popular belief, you don’t need much to make an impact,” says COIN CEO and Co-Founder [Megan Schleck](#). “We believe in the compounding power of individual action and think it is time for all of us to stop assuming someone else will create change for us.”

Looking ahead, our survey shows we've got a potentially eager population that, up to now, has relied on others to take action – but it doesn't need to stay that way. When more people feel motivated and confident that they can make a difference, and they understand that working with whatever they have can make an impact, it could result in more people making the connection between their perceptions, actions, and the change they want to see.

No matter our generation or circumstances, a change in perception, understanding our power as individuals, and more knowledge may be just what’s needed to build a better world.

*\*The [2019 State of the Conscious Consumer Study](#) was commissioned by COIN by John Hancock and fielded by independent research firm Equation Research in May 2019. The responses were generated from a survey of 1,003 people ages 18+.*

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