

What's next for sustainability

# Building climate resilience



Ogilvy Consulting

# Why we should expand our sustainability focus to encompass climate resilience



The opportunity to build climate resilience, create a more positive sustainability conversation and drive greater impact

Sustainability has become strongly associated in the public's mind with tackling the long-term causes of climate change. Understandably, these feel intangible and abstract, which, combined with greenwashing and politicization, has made the sustainability conversation increasingly negative. But the definition of sustainability also encompasses "managing the needs of the current generation," that is individuals and local communities living with the impacts of climate change today. New research from Ogilvy Consulting suggests this is a much more important issue for Americans today than people realize. We believe it is a fertile area for organizations and business to focus on if they want to create a more positive conversation around their current sustainability actions and maximize their return on sustainability investment.

**RECENCY OF EXPERIENCE  
WITH WEATHER-RELATED  
NATURAL HAZARDS**



# How Americans experience climate change today

Ogilvy Consulting fielded original research in spring 2024 across the US. Our objective was to understand how ordinary Americans felt that climate change today was impacting them and their communities. The results were unambiguous.

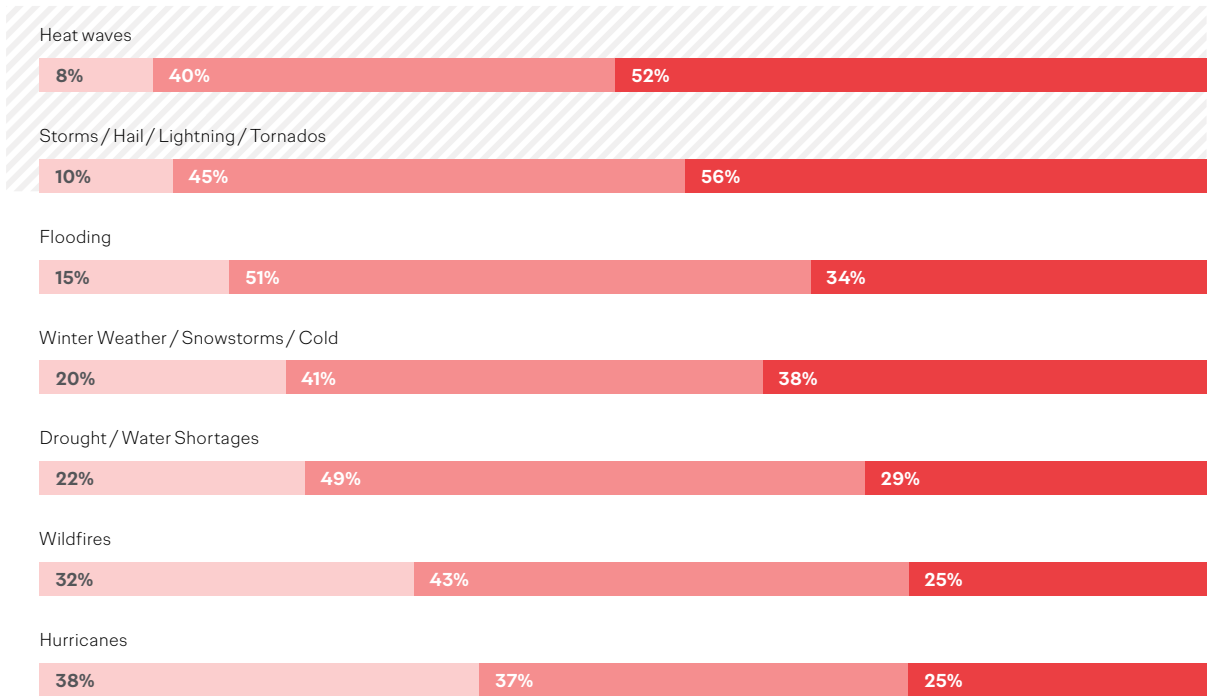
Ninety-five percent of respondents have experienced a weather-related natural hazard<sup>01</sup> (WRNH) within the last five years. Over half have endured a WRNH in the past 12 months, with younger people reporting higher rates of recent exposure to these events.



***Ninety-five percent of respondents have experienced a weather-related natural hazard***

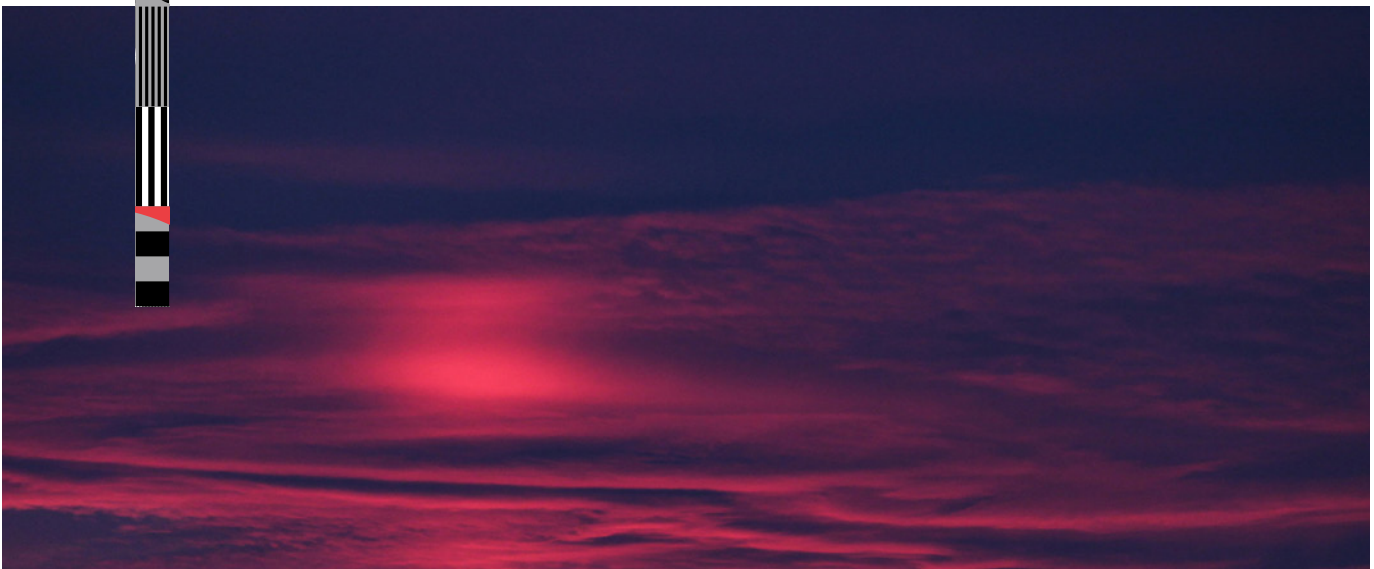
**PERCEIVED RISK OF WEATHER-RELATED NATURAL HAZARDS**

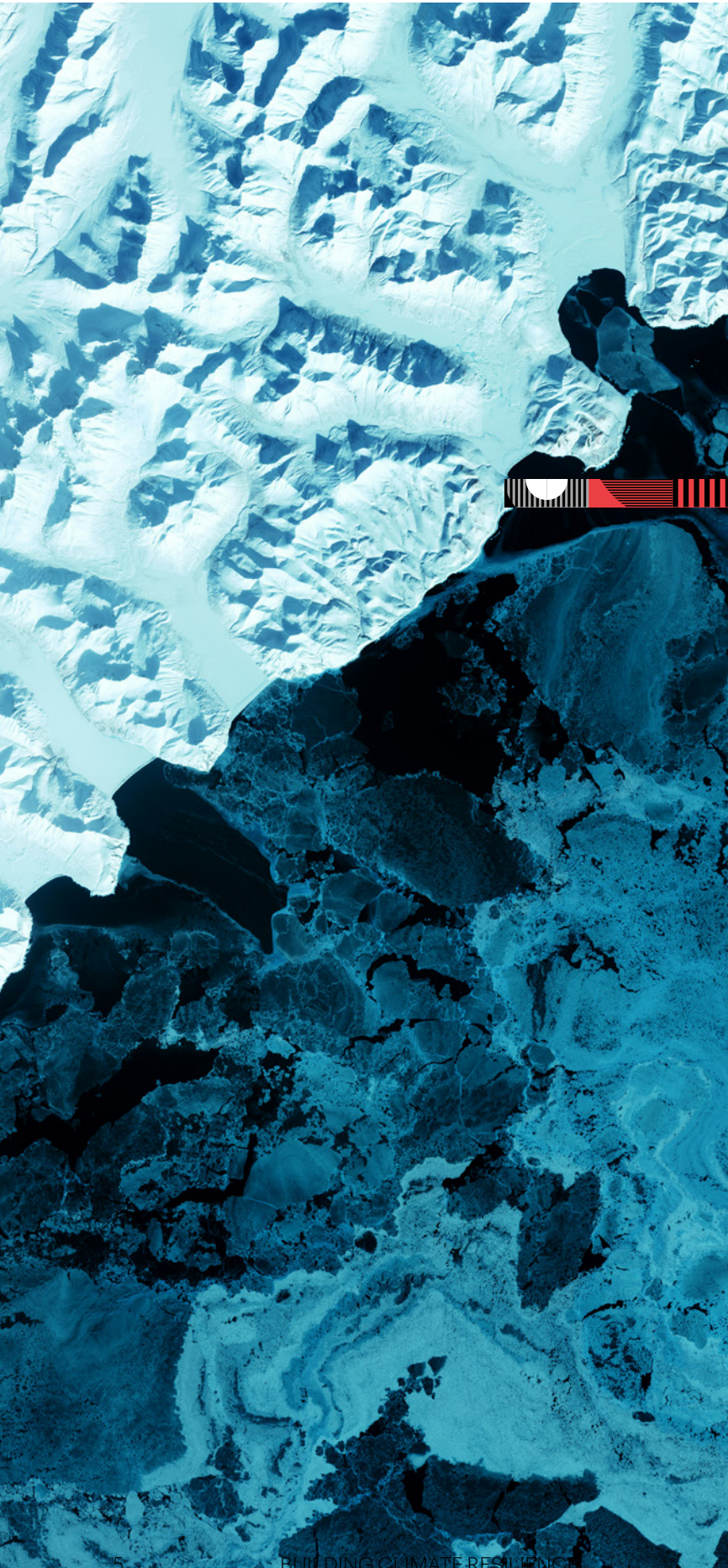
- Low Risk (1-3)
- Middle Risk (4-7)
- High Risk (8-10)



Secondly, most of the population reported middle-to-high risk to themselves, their families, neighbors and their community from heat waves, storms, hail, lightning, and/or tornados.

In summary, the vast majority of Americans have already felt the impact of climate change and perceive their future risk as middle-to-high. So what are they doing about this?





# Americans don't know how to tackle negative climate impacts

Our research showed that although 95% have experienced a WRNH, only 35% of the population have taken steps to prepare for them. Typically, these are limited to low-effort steps like stockpiling supplies.

Americans lack the resources to become more climate resilient. Finances are the biggest barrier, but another is knowledge about what is the best course of action or even what steps to take -

- There is little familiarity with the concept of climate resilience - the capacity to prevent, withstand, respond to and recover from a WRNH or climate disruption.
- There is no clear authority guiding people on how to become more resilient. The private, nonprofit, and government groups at the local, state, and federal levels are not perceived as filling this role. Even the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the best-known authority in the space, is most associated with its disaster-recovery work, despite its substantial focus on pre-disaster risk reduction.

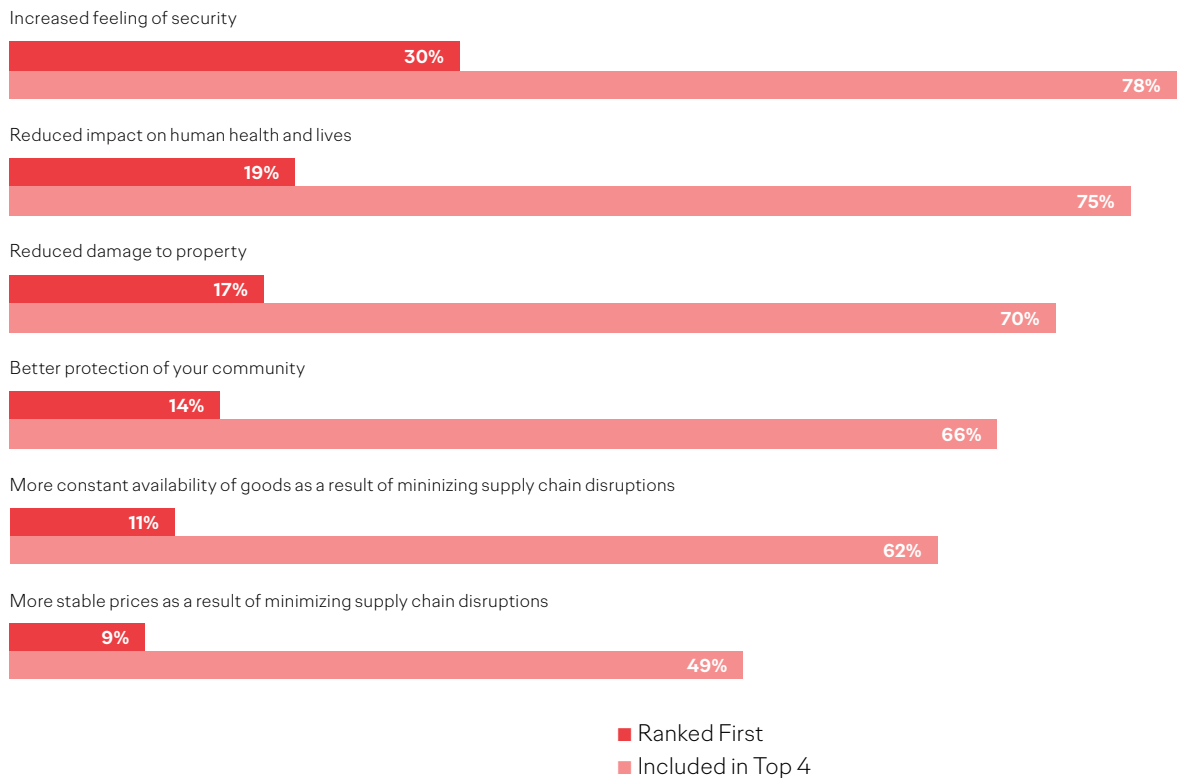
# Tackling WRNHs is important to Americans



In short, WRNHs have a significant negative effect; respondents reported that WRNHs were second only to crimes in terms of negative impact on them and their communities.

And the benefits of building climate resilience were considerable. These ranged from increased emotional security to the ability to purchase goods after WRNH events.

## RANKING OF BENEFITS OF BUILDING RESILIENCE



# Expanding our sustainability focus to encompass climate resilience



We believe that expanding the conversation about sustainability to include how we tackle the impacts of climate change today, would fundamentally improve engagement with sustainability and increase the number of climate change initiatives.

As we know, the current sustainability conversation can feel intangible and abstract, with changes a long time off and not relevant to an individual person - whereas tackling the impact of climate change today feels immediate, tangible and personally relevant.



The reasons behind this lie in three behavioral science principles:

## **Present bias**

Humans tend to discount the future in favor of what feels important today. For many, climate change feels like a distant, even abstract, threat, and at worst someone else's problem.

## **Psychological distance**

Egocentric beings that we are, humans use the self in the present as our primary reference point. While climate change seems distant, climate impact, as our research shows, does not.

## **Self-efficacy**

To strive toward a goal, people must believe they have the capacity to achieve the desired outcome. Even individuals wholly sold on the threat of climate change don't believe they can tackle it on their own.

# Opportunities for clients

So why should climate resilience matter to organizations and businesses already investing heavily in sustainability?

We believe that by expanding their focus to include climate resilience, they will create a more positive conversation about their current sustainability actions, enabling them to get the credit they deserve. Plus, this will create new climate-resilience opportunities that can further accelerate brand and business growth.

We're not disputing that investing in sustainability already has benefits. Businesses that take Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) seriously have dramatically outperformed those that ignore or disparage it. US. ESG-oriented companies reported revenue increases of \$2.1 trillion compared with just \$254 billion for those that did not engage with ESG.<sup>02</sup>

That said, we believe there are three distinct new opportunities for clients by focusing on climate resilience in addition to traditional sustainability:



## 1 TO REFRAME COMMUNICATION OF EXISTING SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES TO FOCUS ON BOTH LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM IMPACTS.

- Could food manufacturers focus on how they are lowering agricultural emissions and increasing water efficiency and drought tolerance in the long term while also speaking to how seed and crop protection technologies are reducing the cost of inputs and raising the yields for farmers today?
- Could building companies extol their use of net-zero building materials while also highlighting how their buildings are engineered to withstand local WRNH events and provide more-efficient energy and water use?

## 2 TO EXPAND EXISTING SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES TO MORE SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS LOCAL WRNH EVENTS.

- Could furniture retailers extend a buyback-and-resell scheme to furniture damaged by weather events?
- Could the shipping industry share desalination technologies, which convert vast volumes of water into clean drinking water, with WRNH affected coastal communities?

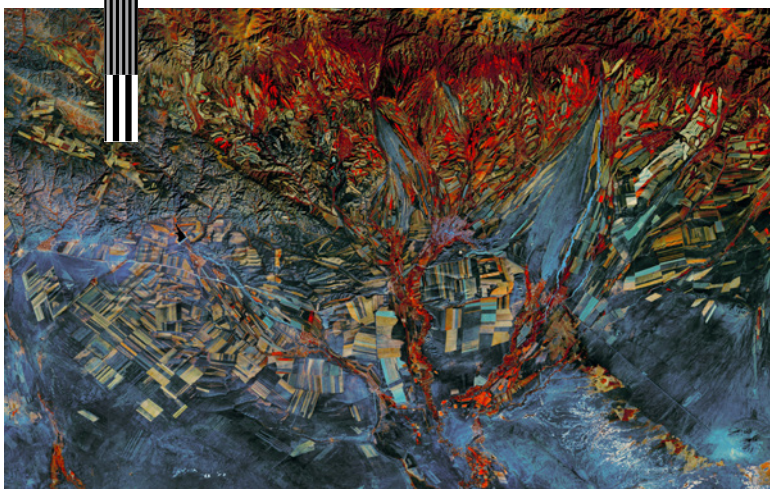
## 3 TO TAKE A LEADERSHIP STANCE ON CLIMATE RESILIENCE.

- We know that Americans are looking for an authority to turn to for education and advice. Could insurance companies (for example), currently criticized for rising premiums and geographical exceptions, provide advice on how to assess and improve your home's resilience and easy ways to share these ideas with neighbors and the wider community?
- Cities are already getting warmer and opening cooling centers on the hottest days. Could drinks companies support these or other innovations that help refresh us as the planet continues to heat up?

# SUM- MARY



## Refocusing sustainability for a more positive impact



- At Ogilvy Consulting, we believe that expanding the focus on sustainability would be a good thing - good for ordinary Americans, but good for organizations and businesses already investing in sustainability. Focusing on building climate resilience, in addition to addressing the causes of climate change, will create a more positive conversation about sustainability and will increase society's willingness to tackle both the short-term and long-term impacts of climate change.
- By changing the discourse about sustainability, we can accelerate our sustainability efforts and produce even more positive outcomes - a 'win-win' for today's and future generations, and our planet.

OGILVY CONSULTING

We drive business, brand and marketing transformation through a combination of rigor and creativity.

SUSTAINABILITY & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE

We are expert in unlocking sustainability for business, brand and marketing growth and using Behavioral Science to understand human behavior and drive positive change.

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RESILIENCE STUDY  
METHODOLOGY

Quantitative online survey fielded by Kantar, May 13 – 16, 2024

General U.S. Population, weighted to US Census for race, age, gender and geography n=2,000

ENDNOTES

- 01 The survey defined "weather-related natural hazard" as a threat caused by the weather or climate including, but, not limited to, hurricanes, floods and wildfires. Ogilvy Consulting chose this language to keep political connotations from skewing the data.
- 02 <https://www.capitalmonitor.ai/analysis/link-between-esg-investment-exists-new-research/?cf-view>; [https://www.moore-global.com/intelligence/articles/september-2022/\\$4trillion-esg-dividend](https://www.moore-global.com/intelligence/articles/september-2022/$4trillion-esg-dividend)



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