

State of Work Holiday Parties

How American Workforce Celebrates Holidays

December 2024 • The Harris Poll Thought Leadership Practice





Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the U.S. by The Harris Poll from November 21st to November 23rd among a nationally representative sample of 1,238 U.S. employed adults.

This research includes 222 Gen Z (ages 18-27), 447 Millennials (ages 28-43), 391 Gen X (ages 44-59), and 178 Boomers (ages 60 and older).





Top Highlights

Holiday parties aren't what they used to be, and Gen Z is leading the change.

- Despite the return-to-office (RTO) push, less than half of workplaces now hold regular in-person holiday events. While 74% of workers look forward to holiday parties, Gen Z is less engaged—only 37% are very likely to attend, and many prefer more interactive, modern formats.

For Millennials, it's all about networking and connection.

- Millennials see holiday parties as prime opportunities to network and connect with senior executives. However, they also feel a lot of pressure to attend (53%) and wish for a relaxed atmosphere—66% would embrace executive 'roasts' and 65% would ban work talk.

Holiday anxieties loom large for younger workers.

- Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to feel anxious about holiday parties, citing awkward conversations, alcohol concerns, and feeling out of place. Notably, 42% of Gen Z prefer alcohol to be served in moderation or not at all, reflecting a shift in expectations for professional gatherings.

Interactive and inclusive celebrations are the future.

- Gen Z wants to reimagine holiday parties with engaging, themed activities like escape rooms or creative workshops. Millennials also favor ditching traditional formats for experiences that prioritize fun and inclusivity.

Cash and time off over cocktails and cake.

- Holiday parties might soon take a backseat as 79% of employees would rather receive a monetary bonus, and 71% would prefer additional time off.

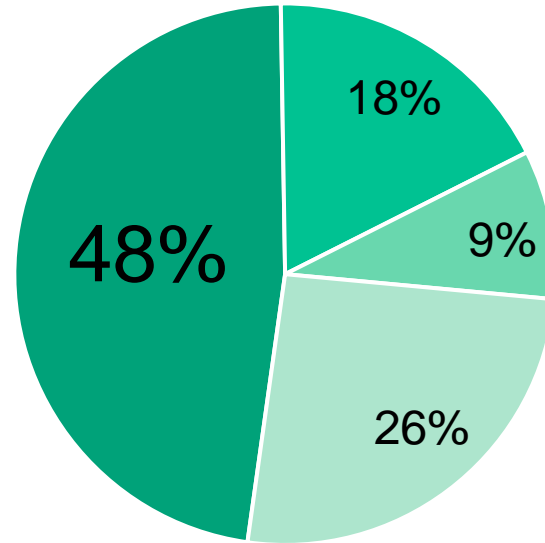
The New Rules of Workplace Holiday Parties



Despite the RTO mandates, less than half of workplaces continue to have a regular in-person holiday event

Does your workplace organize a holiday party or event for employees each year?

- Yes, it's a regular annual event held in person
- Yes, it's a regular annual event held in person or virtually, depending on the year
- Yes, it's a regular annual event held virtually
- No, we do not have a holiday party, either in-person or virtually





Millennials leverage holiday parties as a time to network and rub shoulders with senior executives

72%
American Workers

“I believe that attending a work holiday party has a positive effect on my **career progression.**”

79% Millennials

How important are the following aspects of a holiday party to you?

Top 2 = Very/Somewhat important





For the most part, holiday parties boost employee morale

85%

American Workers

“Holiday work parties are a great opportunity to **bond with colleagues.**”

85%

American Workers

“I believe that holiday parties contribute positively to **workplace culture.**”

74%

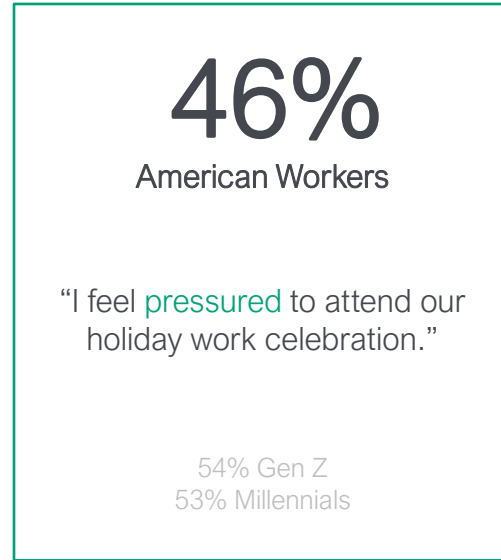
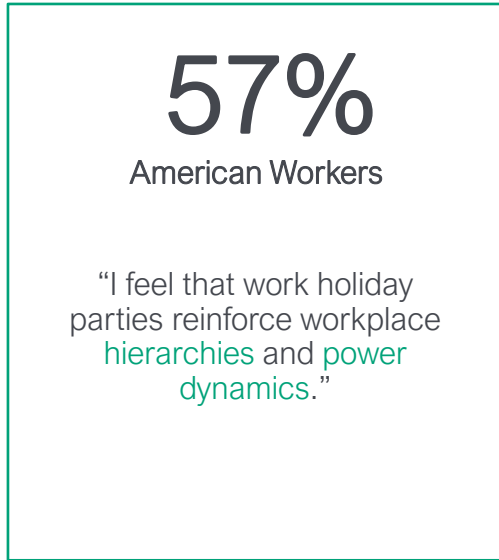
American Workers

“I **look forward** to a work holiday party every year.”

79% Millennials



However, holiday parties leave half of employees conflicted, with over half of Gen Z and Millennials feeling the most pressure to partake

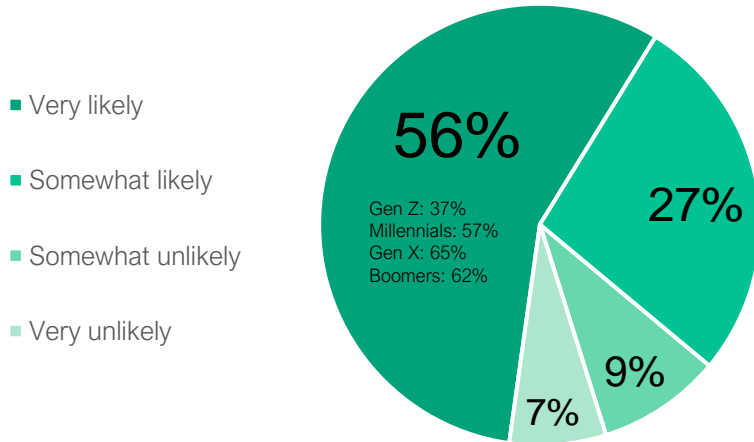




The youngest cohort, Gen Z, isn't as likely to attend or be excited about this tradition

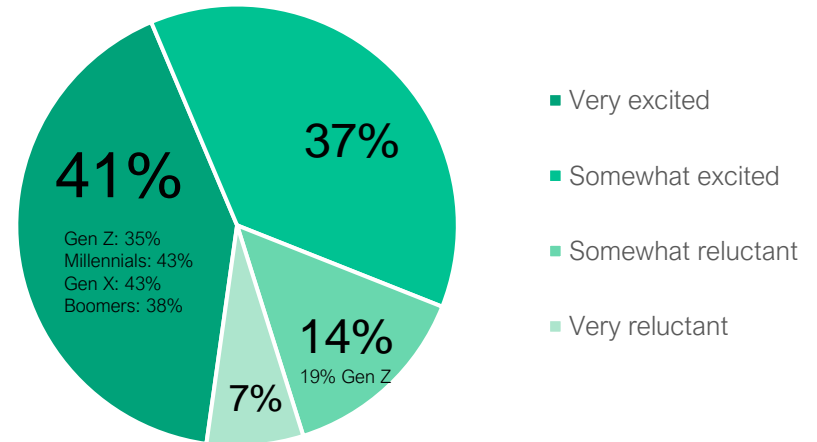
Likelihood to attend

Likely (NET): 83%



Sentiment around attending

Excited (NET): 78%





For young people the holiday party anxieties center on awkward conversations, booze, and feeling uncomfortable

Which of the following are your concerns about attending a work holiday party?
Gen Z / Millennials



72%

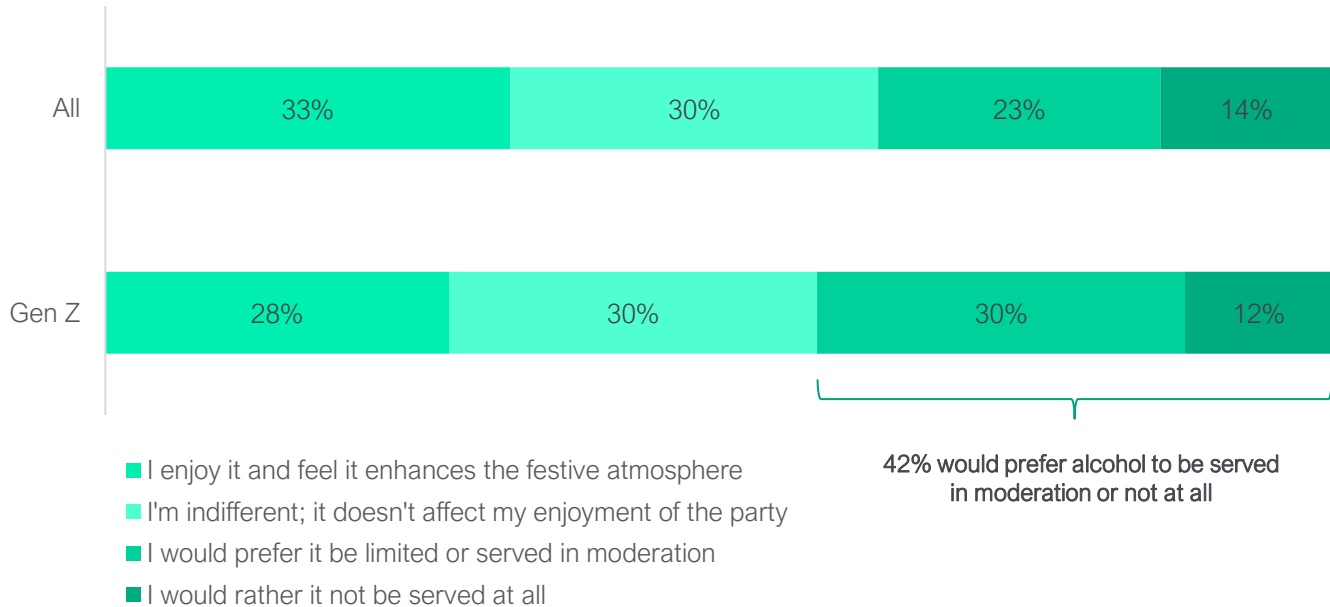
Of American Workers **have concerns** (NET)

Gen Z: 88%
Millennials: 81%
Gen X: 69%
Boomers: 55%



42% of Gen Z would prefer alcohol to be served in moderation or not at all, meanwhile over a third of Millennials have regretted their behavior

How do you feel about alcohol being served at your or a company's holiday party?



31%
American Workers

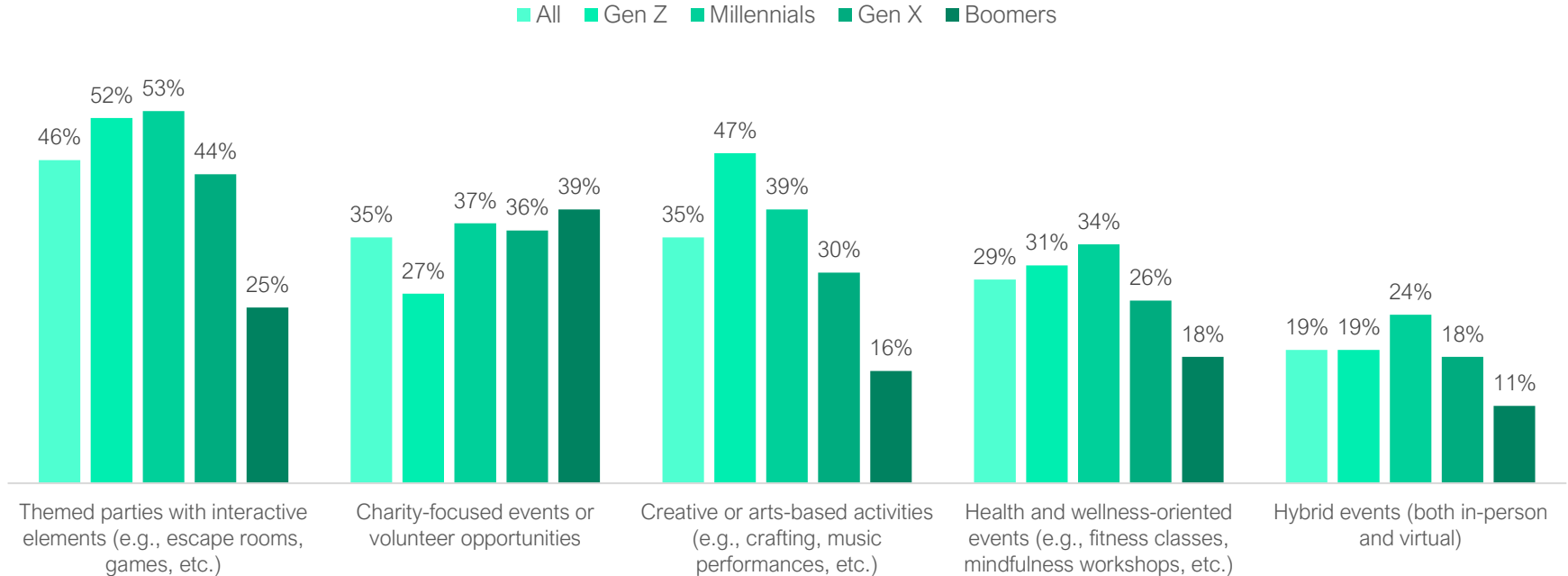
“I have **regretted** my behavior at a company holiday party.”

Gen Z: 33%
Millennials: 42%
Gen X: 22%
Boomers: 9%



Gen Z would reimagine holiday parties to be more themed and interactive

What new types of holiday celebrations would you like to see at your workplace?





While Millennials would add executive roasting and ban office-talk

66%

Millennial American Workers

“I would be more likely to attend a work holiday party if it included a ‘roast’ of company executives.”

57% Gen Z
53% All American Workers

65%

Millennial American Workers

“I wish that my company banned all work-related conversations at the work holiday party.”

56% All American Workers



Ultimately, the holiday traditions might continue to disappear as employees would trade the holiday party for more cash in their pocket or time off

79%

American Workers

“I would prefer a **monetary bonus** rather than a company holiday party.”

74% Gen Z
78% Millennials
81% Gen X
82% Boomers

71%

American Workers

“I would prefer **additional time off** rather than a company holiday party.”

73% Gen Z
72% Millennials
71% Gen X
67% Boomers

64%

American Workers

“I would prefer my company to **invest in improving work-life balance initiatives** instead of hosting a holiday party.”

65% Gen Z
73% Millennials
59% Gen X
49% Boomers

Appendix



The no. 1 request for holiday parties is a relaxed, low-pressure vibe

What would it be if you could change one thing about your company's holiday party?

Provide a more relaxed and informal setting



20%

Better food and drink options



19%

More interactive or engaging activities



15%

Time of day of holiday party



13%

18% Women

Greater focus on team-building or charitable efforts



10%

Less emphasis on alcohol



8%

13% Gen Z

Improved inclusivity and representation



8%

Different formats (e.g., virtual, hybrid, etc.)

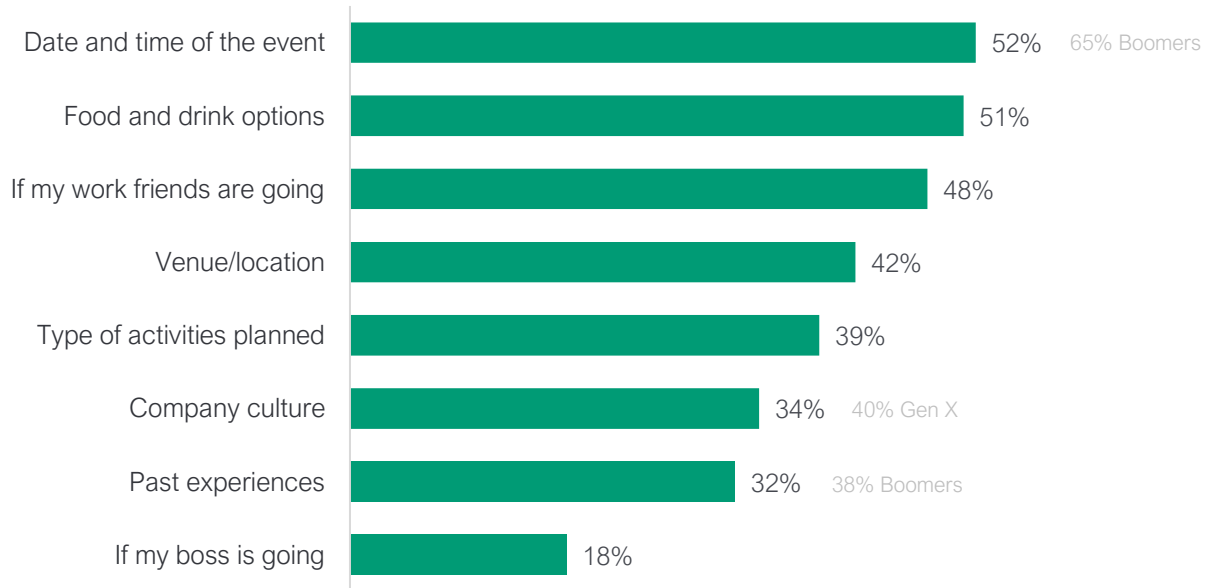


5%



Employees say the timing, food, and whether their friends are attending are the biggest factors in deciding to go to the holiday party

What factors would influence your decision to attend the holiday work party?



To learn more about this research, please reach out to...



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