



# 2026 Public Affairs Pulse Survey Report

Corporate  
Engagement  
in a New  
Policy Era



## Executive Summary

A new Public Affairs Pulse Survey on Corporate Engagement in a New Policy Era – conducted March 26–28, 2026, by Morning Consult – provides an in-depth look at American public opinion on corporate engagement across policy issues.

This year’s survey focuses on policy shifts under the first year of the second Trump administration and how businesses have responded. The results show that engagement itself is generally not the risk. While the public is often skeptical of corporate America, they consider engagement appropriate and good for democracy, and they expect businesses to respond to major policy changes.



The bigger risk is the limited public awareness of how businesses have responded to federal policy changes—**just 39% of Americans say they are aware of corporate reactions**—highlighting a clear opportunity to improve communication.



**Speaking out against the Trump administration is not as risky as businesses may think.** Few adults believe businesses should align with the administration on all policy changes. A plurality (43%) view speaking out as appropriate civic engagement, compared to 30% who see it as overreach. The question is not whether to engage, but how.



**Public support varies by issue, however, and framing is decisive.** Positioning engagement around economic impact attracts broader, bipartisan support.



On **climate**, 56% say businesses should maintain prior commitments.



On **tariffs** and **foreign conflicts**, the public wants more explanation of economic impacts. **Social/workplace policy** and **immigration** are riskier—but skepticism declines when framed economically.

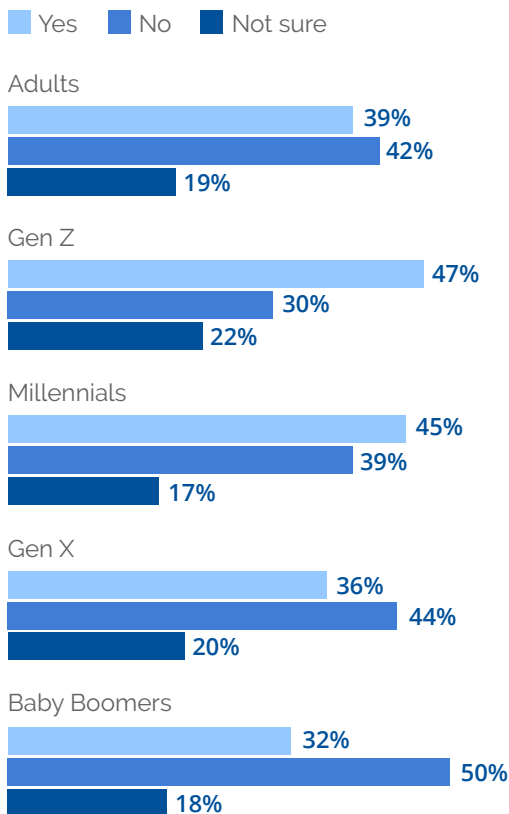
**BOTTOM LINE:** Businesses should engage—but do so strategically, grounding their engagement in economic impact rather than political positioning.

## The Visibility Gap Is the Real Risk

Many adults say they have not seen how businesses are responding to policy issues, while two-in-five (42%) have not heard anything, and 19% are unsure. Awareness of corporate engagement varies by generation and education. Forty-seven percent of Gen Z and 45% of Millennials report higher exposure, in contrast to 36% of Gen X and 32% of Baby Boomers. This could reflect businesses meeting these groups across the media platforms they frequent.

Education is also a factor, as 46% of college graduates and 60% of postgraduates report awareness of business response, compared to 33% without a college education.

### Seen or Heard Public Business Response to Policy Changes



This limited overall awareness extends to how adults rate response rates. Only 35% say businesses are responding at the right pace, while 33% are unsure. Just 13% say businesses are responding too quickly, indicating minimal downside risk to earlier engagement.

#### TAKEAWAY

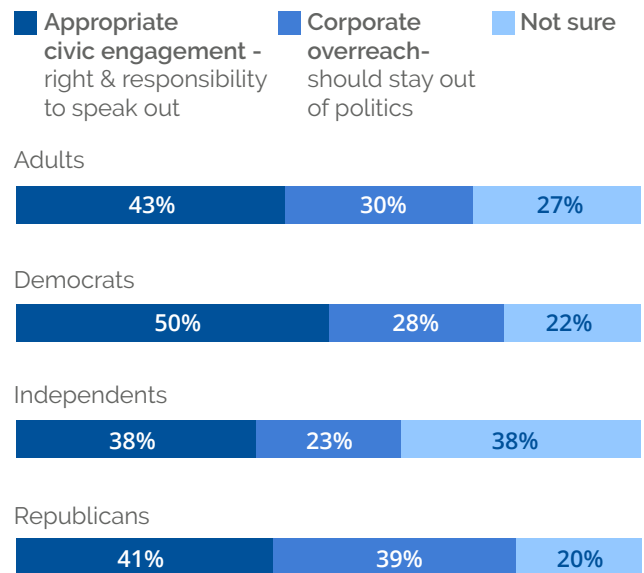
Awareness—not opposition—is the primary barrier. Engagement is viewed more positively than negatively, but visibility is low, especially among older Americans and non-college adults. Communication strategy matters as much as action.

## The Public Is Skeptical—but Expects Engagement

Trust remains limited: 38% of adults trust businesses to act in the public's interest during major policy changes, while 46% do not. Even among groups that trust businesses more – Republicans and post-grads – pluralities remain skeptical. Yet expectations for engagement remain strong:

- 43% view corporate disagreement with policy as appropriate vs. 30% who say it is corporate overreach
- 46% of adults say engagement is good for democracy vs. 27% who say it is harmful
- Baby Boomers (+27) and Gen X (+19), Democrats (+30), Republicans (+14) and college-educated adults (bachelor's degree +31; post-grad +32) are all more likely to view corporate engagement as good for democracy

### Speaking Out on Federal Policy Carries Less Risk Than You Think



#### TAKEAWAY

Low trust does not reduce expectations. Americans want businesses engaged and view it as beneficial to democracy. Credibility is built through transparent, impact-driven engagement—not silence.

## Opposing the Trump Administration Is Not Too Risky

Businesses have more room to engage than they may think. While 40% of adults believe businesses have a responsibility to speak out against major policy shifts for ethical reasons, few (16%) believe businesses should provide blanket support for the administration's policies they disagree with.

Democrats (54%) embrace the idea that businesses have a responsibility to speak out against policy shifts for ethical reasons and view engagement positively. Among Republicans, views are split:

- 31% support businesses speaking out
- 34% prefer neutrality
- 22% prefer alignment

### Business Engagement with Policy Changes

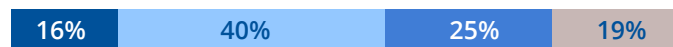
■ **Businesses should actively support the administration** during major policy shifts, even if they disagree with the policy for ethical reasons.

■ **Businesses have a responsibility to speak out** against major policy shifts they disagree with for ethical reasons.

■ **Businesses should remain politically neutral.**

■ **Not sure**

Adults



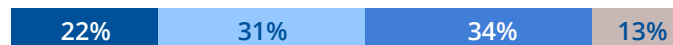
Democrats



Independents



Republicans



#### TAKEAWAY

Businesses have permission to engage—even in opposition. While Democrats are supportive, Republicans are divided rather than opposed. **Engagement can work across parties when framed around impact, not politics.**

## Corporate Engagement by Issue Area

The question becomes not whether businesses should engage, but on which issues. The public is divided over how much influence businesses have over policy (26% say too much, 29% say the right amount, 21% say not enough, and 24% are unsure). The table below summarizes how the public perceives corporate responses and whether they want more or less engagement across the five policy areas tested.

Issue Area	Business Responses: Critical NET Critical (Total Critical - Total Supportive)	Level of Business Response		
		Too much	Right amount	Too little
Tariffs & Trade Policy	+34	16%	32%	32%
Foreign Conflicts	+20	15%	32%	30%
Immigration Enforcement	+15	18%	30%	32%
Climate Policies	+8	12%	31%	33%
Social / Cultural Workplace Policies	+7	13%	34%	30%

**Perception of Business Responses:** Overall, would you say businesses have been supportive or critical of each of the following? The higher the NET Critical score indicates that businesses have been more critical of that policy area.

**Level of Business Response:** Do you believe businesses have spoken out too much, too little, or the right amount on each of the following?

#### TAKEAWAY

Where businesses engage matters as much as how.

- Climate: maintain + communicate
- Tariffs & foreign conflicts: expand engagement
- Social & immigration: engage selectively

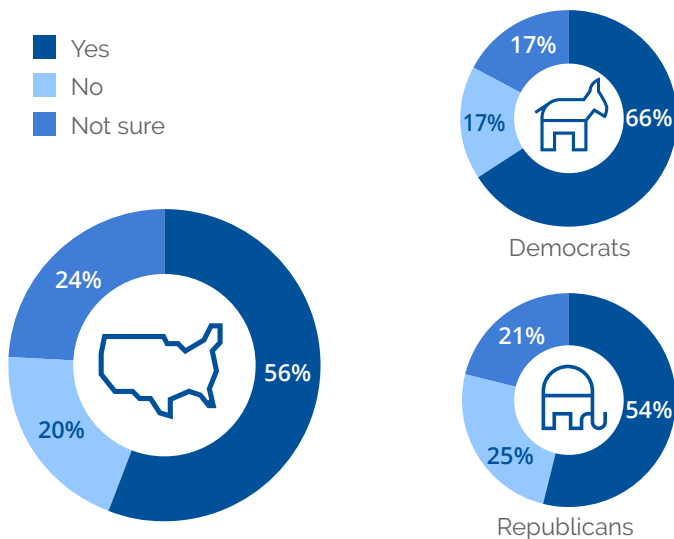
**Prioritize issues where demand is high and risk is manageable.**

## Where Engagement is Working: Climate

The public is unclear on how businesses have reacted to Trump administration climate policies. Roughly equal shares say businesses have responded supportively (24%), neutrally (26%), or critically (30%). Across most subgroups, about half either perceive businesses as taking a neutral stance or are not sure.

However, the public is clear that it wants businesses to speak out and maintain their prior climate commitments despite federal policy changes, with more than half (56%) saying that businesses should maintain their climate commitments. There is support from both Republicans (54%) and Democrats (66%).

### Businesses Should Maintain Climate Commitments



### TAKEAWAY

The path forward is clear: maintain commitments and improve communication. Broad, bipartisan support exists, but awareness gaps remain. **The opportunity is to clarify—not recalibrate—your position.**

## Where to Deepen Engagement

Tariffs and foreign policy and conflicts are areas where corporate engagement could expand. Many adults do not believe corporate communication on the impact of tariffs is clear, leaving room for businesses to link tariffs to economic impacts.

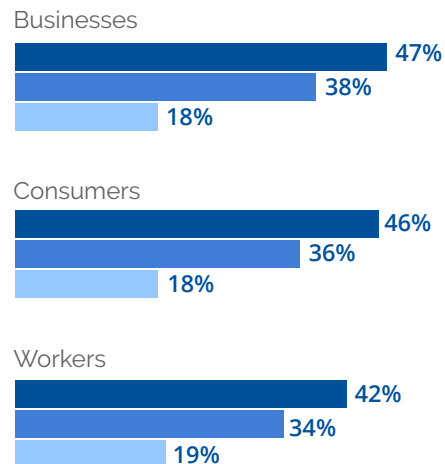
The public wants clarity on the economic impacts of foreign policy and conflicts. Businesses should translate geopolitical disruptions into what they mean for prices and jobs. Engagement on economic impacts may resonate with younger generations who do not link foreign conflicts to economic impacts as strongly as older generations.

### TARIFFS

- 23% of Americans list trade and tariffs as the top priority for businesses to respond to across seven priority areas
- 32% want more **communication** from businesses on tariffs, although nearly half (47%) believe they have clearly communicated the impact of tariffs
- Clarity gaps remain—especially on workers (see chart below)

### Clarity of Business Communication on Tariff Impact

- Clear (% Very + % Somewhat)
- Not Clear (% Not Very + % Not at all)
- Don't know

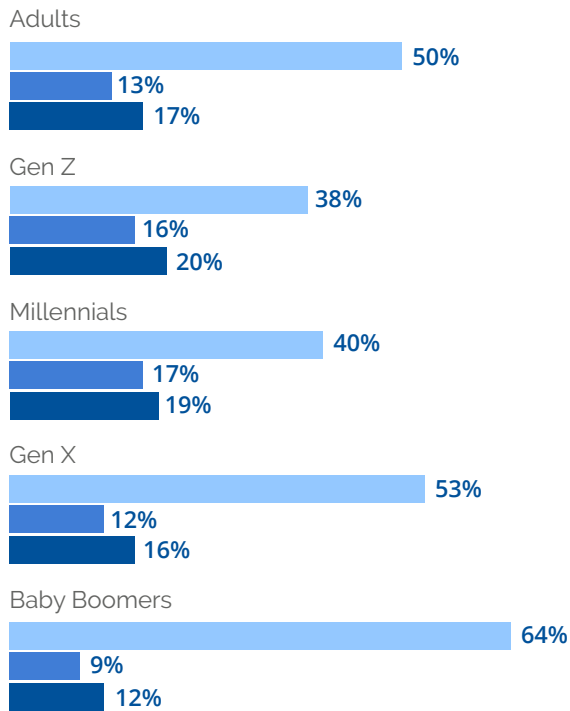


## FOREIGN POLICY AND CONFLICTS

- 50% of adults say recent U.S. foreign policy shifts are making global business conditions harder vs. 13% who say easier
- Older Americans are more likely to connect policy to economic impact: 64% of Baby Boomers say foreign policy makes business harder vs. 38% of Gen Z

### Outlook for Global Business Due to Recent U.S. Foreign Policy

- Harder (Much + Somewhat)
- Easier (Much + Somewhat)
- Don't know



#### TAKEAWAY

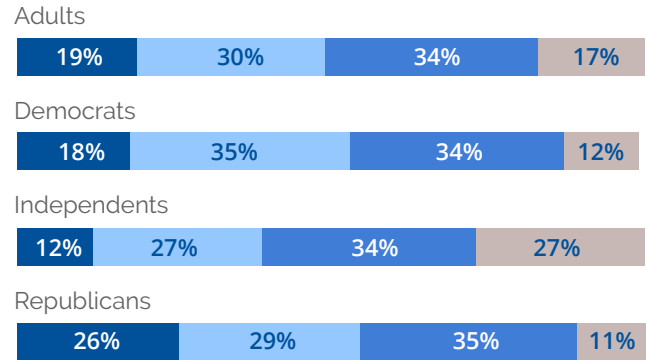
There is demand for more corporate voice on economic issues. Tariffs and foreign policy and conflicts present the clearest opening. **Winning engagement translates policy into jobs, wages and prices.**

## Riskier Areas: Social Policy & Immigration

Social and workplace policy and immigration carry higher engagement risk, but the public is not uniformly opposed. Regarding social and workplace policies and who should set them, the plurality response is “it depends on the policy,” suggesting Americans are evaluating corporate engagement on these issues case by case rather than rejecting it outright.

## Views on Setting Social & Workplace Policies

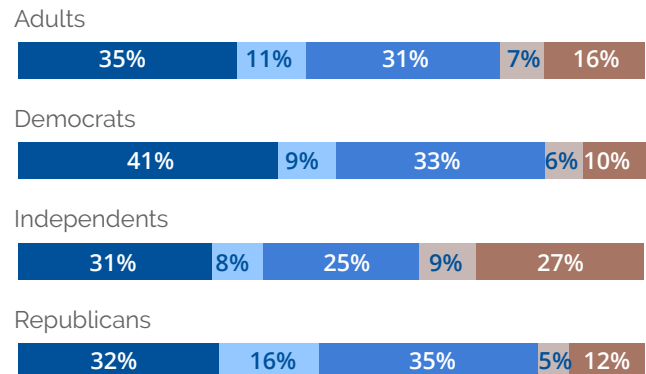
- Yes, the government should set the standards businesses follow
- No, businesses should be free to set their own workplace policies
- It depends on the policy
- Not sure



On immigration, the public reads corporate engagement as economically motivated, which provides cover: businesses that link their position to workforce and economic impacts are less likely to be seen as taking a political side.

### Corporate Motivations for Response to Immigration Enforcement

- Mostly economic interests
- Mostly social values
- Both equally
- Neither
- Not sure



#### TAKEAWAY

Risk is driven by framing, not the issue itself. Public opinion is conditional, with many evaluating engagement case by case. **Economic framing expands permission to engage—even on polarized issues.**



## Conclusion

The 2026 Pulse Survey makes clear that the public is open to corporate engagement. Americans want corporate voices in the policy conversation, and many see such engagement as beneficial to democracy. The public does not punish businesses for speaking out against the Trump administration, but they notice when businesses remain silent. The biggest threat is poor framing, not engagement itself.

**Success depends on being visible, economically grounded, and strategically selective.**

### WHERE TO ENGAGE:

- Safest: tariffs, foreign conflicts
- Maintain: climate
- Selective: social policy, immigration

### WHAT WORKS:

- Economic framing
- Clear communication
- Visible engagement

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Both nonpartisan and nonpolitical, the Public Affairs Council is the leading association for public affairs professionals worldwide. The Council's mission is to advance the field of public affairs and to provide its more than 750 member companies and associations with the executive education and expertise they need to succeed while maintaining the highest ethical standards. Learn more about the Council at [pac.org](https://pac.org).

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**Methodology:** This poll was conducted between March 26–28, 2026, among a sample of 2,202 adults. The interviews were conducted online, and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of adults based on gender, age, race, educational attainment, region, gender by age, and race by educational attainment. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.