



## Marketing & Communications Watch

Speaking Out or Remaining Silent on Social Issues, What Companies Need to Know  
February 25, 2021



## Today's Presenters



**Chiqui Cartagena**  
**(Moderator)**  
Chief Marketing Officer &  
Center Leader, Marketing &  
Communications  
***The Conference Board***



**Craig Carroll**  
Communications Institute Leader  
***The Conference Board***

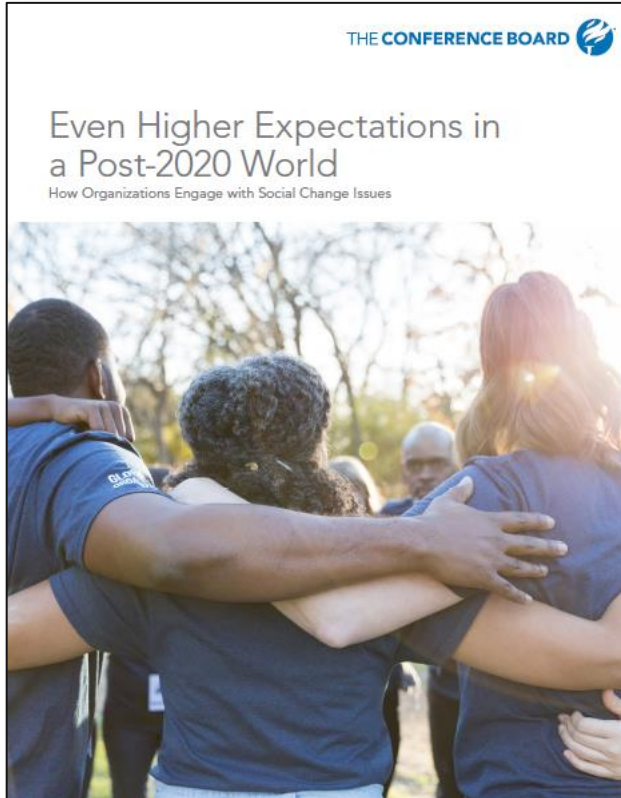


**Rebecca L. Ray, Ph.D.**  
Executive Vice President,  
Human Capital  
***The Conference Board***



**Karen Kirkwood**  
VP, Corporate  
Communications (Retiring)  
***Thermo Fisher Scientific***





## *Even Higher Expectations in a Post-2020 World: How Organizations Engage with Social Change*

*Sequel to Higher Expectations: How Organizations Engage With Social Change Issues*

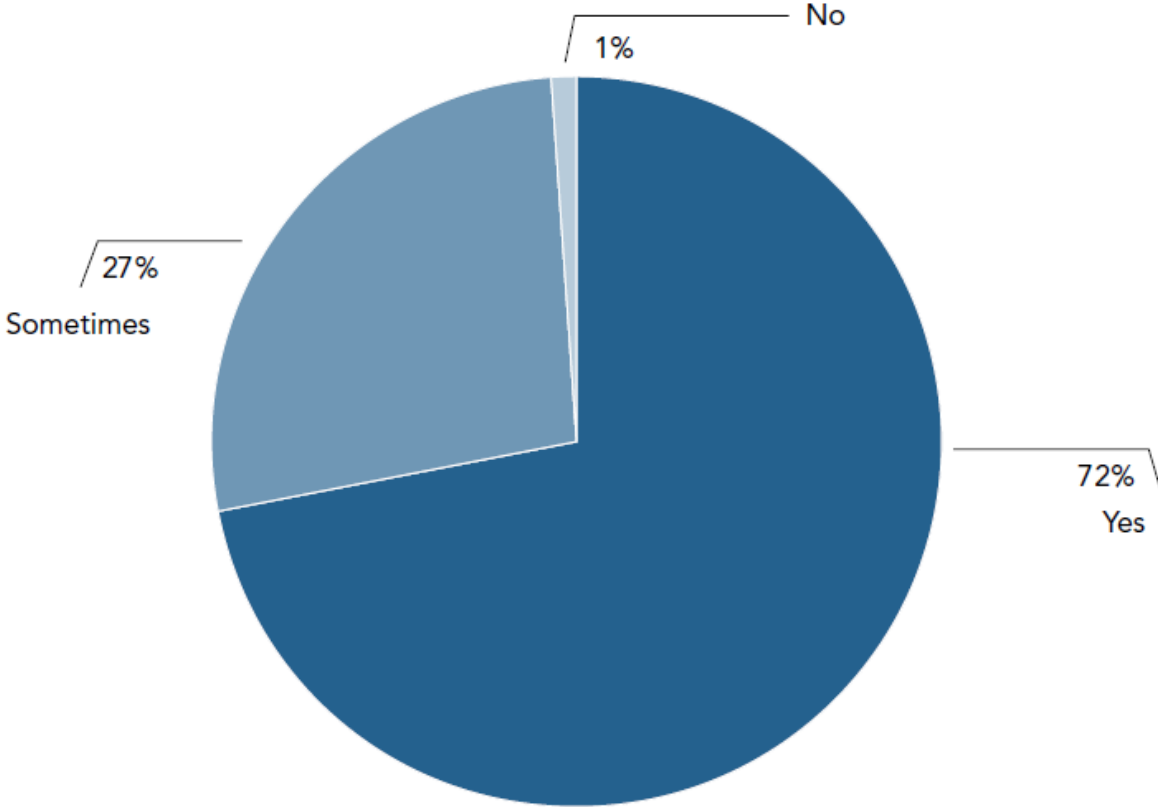
Global online survey (N=853)

- North America (57%), Asia-Pacific (17%), Europe (11%), Latin America (9%), and the Middle East/Africa (5%)
- Baby Boomers (37%), Gen-Xers (51%), and Millennials (10%)
- Individual contributors/front-line supervisors (16%), mid-level managers (15%), director level (29%), senior executive level leaders (21%), and C-suite leaders (19%)
- Most represented industries include human resources (31%), research and development (11%), and operations (8%)

# Why Respond to Social Change Issues?

**Organizations should respond to social change issues at least some of the time according to 99 percent of survey respondents**

Do you think organizations should respond to social change issues?



n = 844

Source: Amanda Popiela, Robin Erickson, & Rebecca Ray, [Even Higher Expectations in a Post-2020 World: How Organizations Engage with Social Change](#), The Conference Board, 2020.



# Racism & Gender Inequity are the Most Important Social Change Issues for Employees Across All Regions

Which of these social change issues are most important to you personally? (Select your top three.)

Social Change Issues	Overall (n=853)	Asia-Pacific (n=146)	Europe (n=92)	Latin America (n=79)	Middle East/ Africa (n=45)	North America (n=485)
Racism (e.g., institutional bias, racial protests, violence, race/ethnic representation)	1	2	1	2	1	1
Gender inequity (e.g., sexism, pay gap, representation)	2	3	2	1	2	2
Unemployment (e.g., joblessness, underemployment)	3	1	4	3	3	T5
Nationalism (e.g., xenophobia, immigration policy, refugee crisis)	4	4	3	T10	T10	4
Unequal access to health care and well-being (e.g., COVID-19 testing, substance abuse, mental health)	5	5	T6	5	6	3

Source: Amanda Popiela, Robin Erickson, & Rebecca Ray, [Even Higher Expectations in a Post-2020 World: How Organizations Engage with Social Change](#), The Conference Board, 2020.



# Corporate Responses to Racism and Gender Inequity



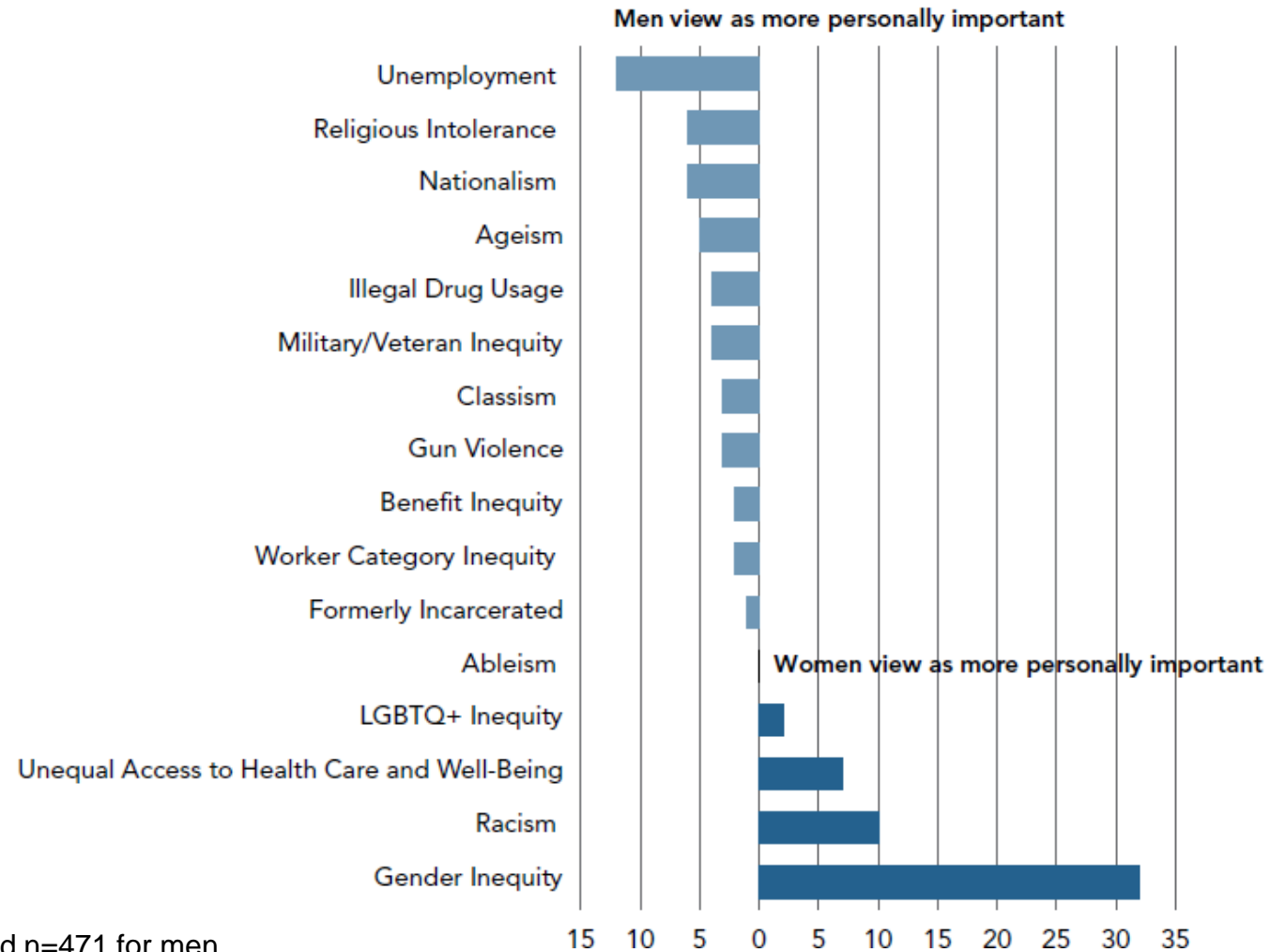
Source: Amanda Popiela, Robin Erickson, & Rebecca Ray, [Even Higher Expectations in a Post-2020 World: How Organizations Engage with Social Change](#), The Conference Board, 2020.



# Gender Differences in Ranking Importance of Social Change Issues

Difference in Importance of Social Change Issues for Women and Men

Which of these social change issues are most important to you personally? (Select your top three.)



Women place significantly more importance on gender inequity than men, while men are more likely to consider unemployment as one of the most important issues

Note: n=371 for women and n=471 for men

Source: Amanda Popiela, Robin Erickson, & Rebecca Ray, [Even Higher Expectations in a Post-2020 World: How Organizations Engage with Social Change](#), The Conference Board, 2020.



# Generational Differences in Ranking Importance of Social Change Issues

**Across generations, racism and gender inequity are the top two issues—but other issues vary in importance**

Which of these social change issues are most important to you personally?  
(Select your top three.)

Social Change Issues	Baby boomers, aged 56-74 (n=317)	Generation X, aged 39-55 (n=429)	Millennials, aged 20-38 (n=86)
Racism	1	1	1
Gender inequity	2	2	2
Unemployment	3	4	T5
Nationalism	4	3	9
Unequal access to health care and well-being	5	5	3

Source: Amanda Popiela, Robin Erickson, & Rebecca Ray, [Even Higher Expectations in a Post-2020 World: How Organizations Engage with Social Change](#), The Conference Board, 2020.





# Social Change Issues Organizations are Responding to by Region

Across most regions, racism and gender inequity are the social change issues that organizations are responding to most frequently

Over the past year, which of the following social change issues has your organization responded to? (Select all that apply.)

Social Change Issues	Overall (n=853)	Asia-Pacific (n=146)	Europe (n=92)	Latin America (n=79)	Middle East/Africa (n=45)	North America (n=485)
Racism	1	T2	2	2	3	1
Gender inequity	2	1	1	1	1	2
LGBTQ+ inequity	3	T2	3	5	T9	3
Ableism	4	4	4	3	T5	6
Unequal access to health care and well-being	5	T7	6	7	T5	5

Source: Amanda Popiela, Robin Erickson, & Rebecca Ray, [Even Higher Expectations in a Post-2020 World: How Organizations Engage with Social Change](#), The Conference Board, 2020.



# Employees' Thoughts on How Organizations are Responding to Social Change Issues

Often reactionary

Virtue signaling

Too vague

One-time commitments



Many employees want their organizations to interact with social change issues to an even greater extent than they do currently

Almost 15 percent of respondents noted at least one instance when the organization did not respond to a social change of importance, such as racism or gender inequity

Over 10 percent of our respondents reported feeling uncomfortable with some organizational responses

Source: Amanda Popiela, Robin Erickson, & Rebecca Ray, [Even Higher Expectations in a Post-2020 World: How Organizations Engage with Social Change](#), The Conference Board, 2020.

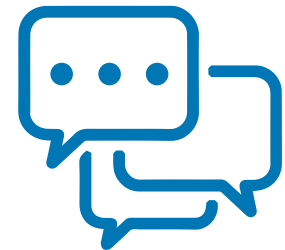


## Organizations Should Respond by Taking Action Internally



While the employees we surveyed appreciated public and internal statements that help them understand and rally around the views of the organization, **taking internal action on social change issues was most critical for many respondents.**

- Form working groups or business resource groups to provide support and awareness of discrimination
- Allocate funding to social change organizations and community groups
- Write elected officials to enact change at the government level
- Share pay equity analyses publicly
- Provide guidelines for how employees should respond to social change issues at work



# CEOs are Often Main Drivers Responding to Social Change Issues in Organizations

In your organization, who are the main drivers responding to social change? (Select top two.)

Driver	Percentage
Chief Executive Officer or equivalent	70%
Chief Human Resources Office or equivalent	48%
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer or equivalent	27%
Chief Communications Officer or equivalent	23%
Other	15%
Employee Resource Group (ERG) head or equivalent	10%
Chief Sustainability Officer or equivalent	5%

Note: "Other" includes senior leaders, board of directors, chief operating officers, and chief marketing officers, among others

Source: Amanda Popiela, Robin Erickson, & Rebecca Ray, [\*Even Higher Expectations in a Post-2020 World: How Organizations Engage with Social Change\*](#), The Conference Board, 2020.

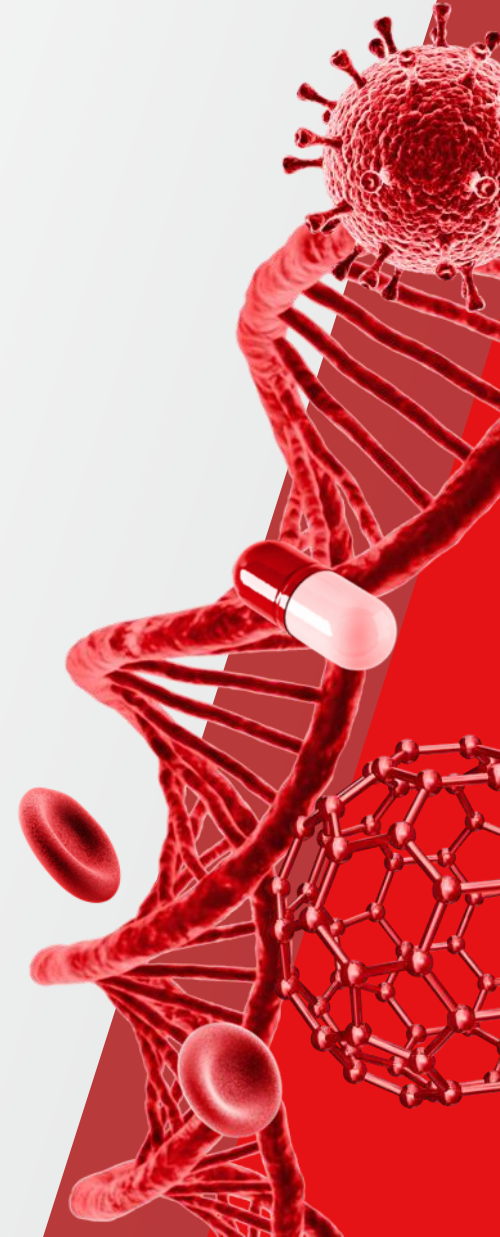


# Speaking Out on Social Issues

Karen Kirkwood  
VP, Corporate Communications

February 25, 2021

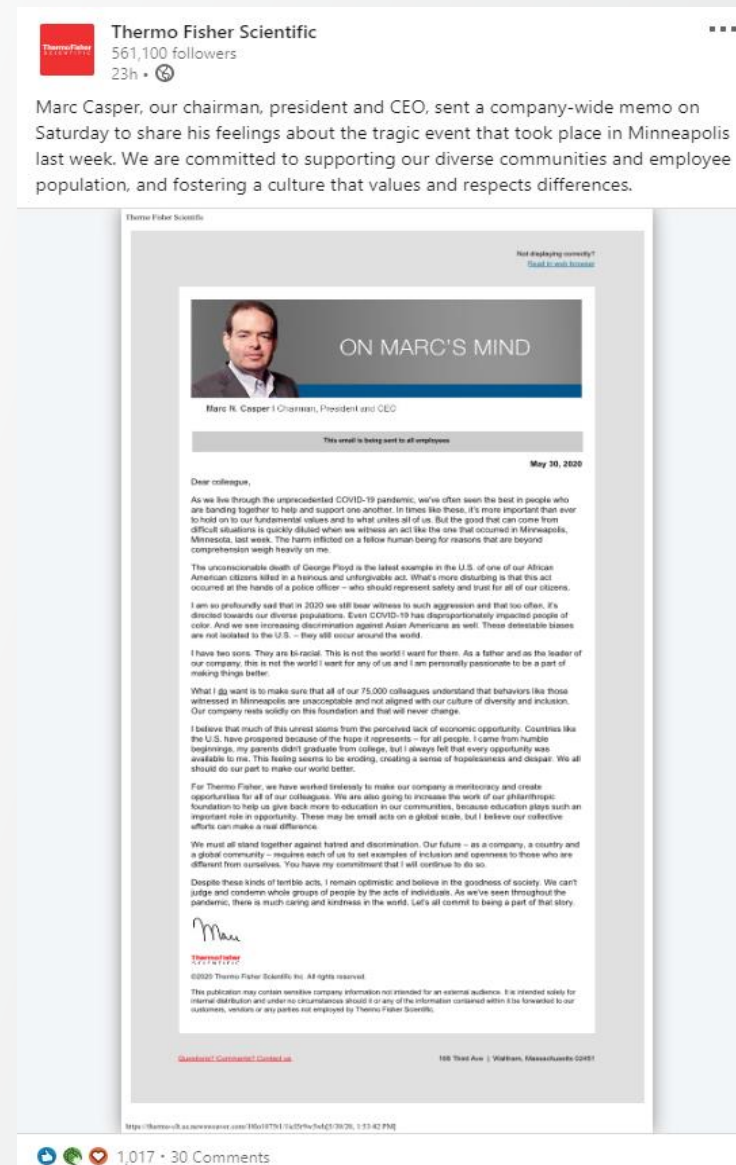
 The world leader in serving science



# Why we decided to speak out this time

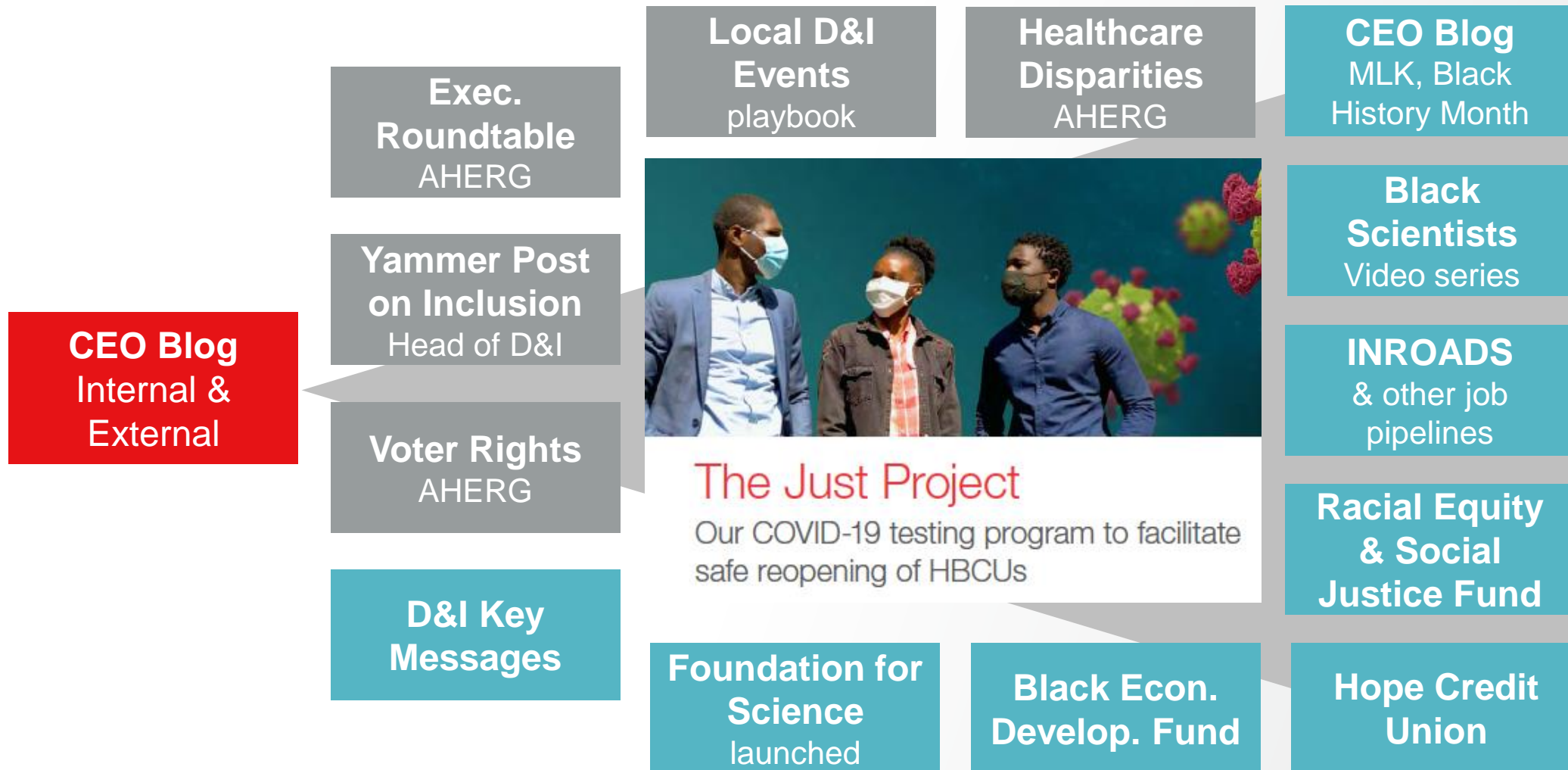
Typically, we address social issues internally, but hadn't spoken externally much in the past. The George Floyd incident was a turning point for our company.

- First and foremost, our CEO was passionate about the topic, which affected him personally. He also felt that this situation was much more clear-cut than others we've dealt with – very little risk.
- We quickly wrote the internal blog and suggested he post externally to his LinkedIn page.
- The majority of employees applauded this move; there were also a number of comments that the company should stick to business and refrain from public statements like these.
- Very positive customer feedback and suggestions that, as the industry leader, we should do more to speak out.



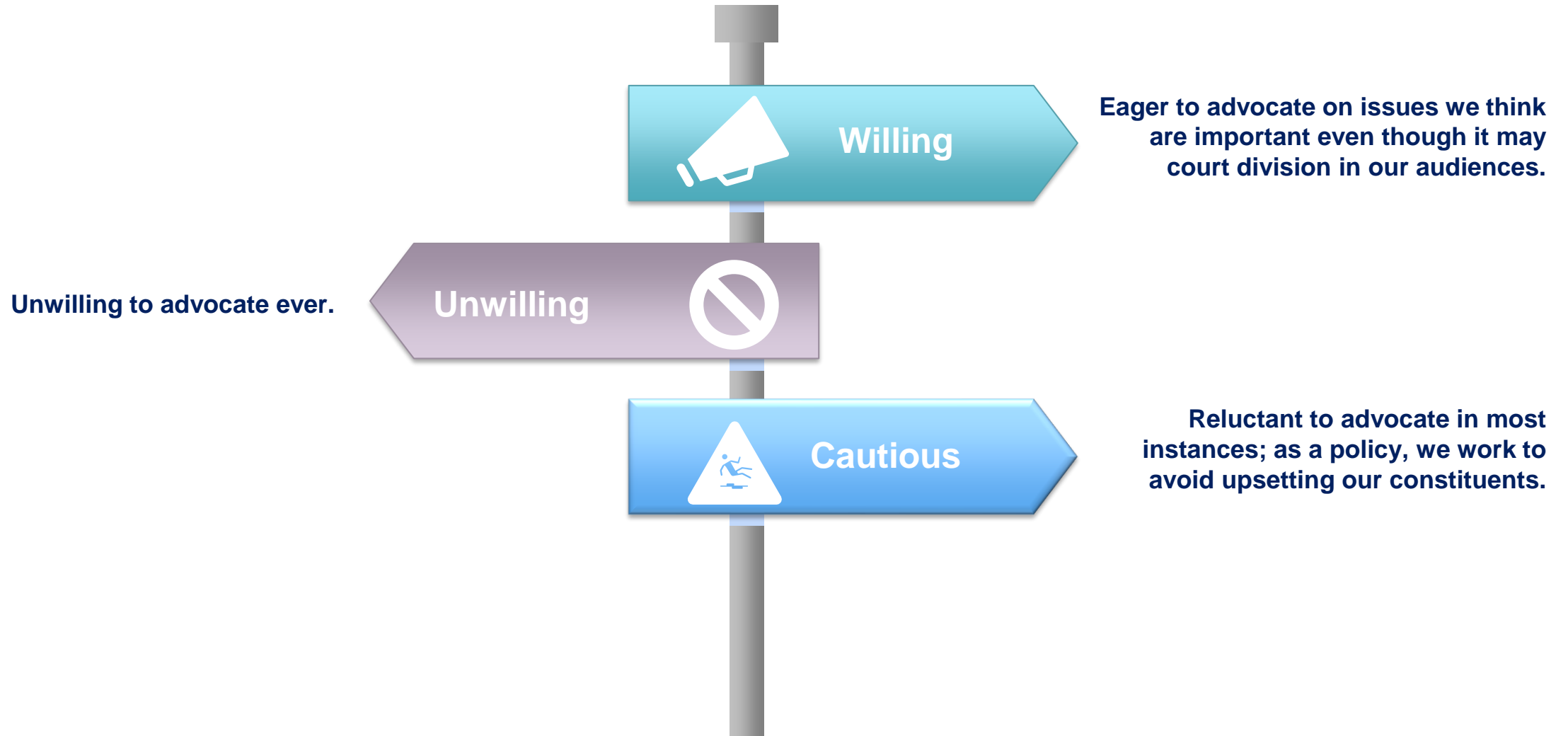
# Most important, we backed our words with actions

The George Floyd response kicked off multiple programs across our company



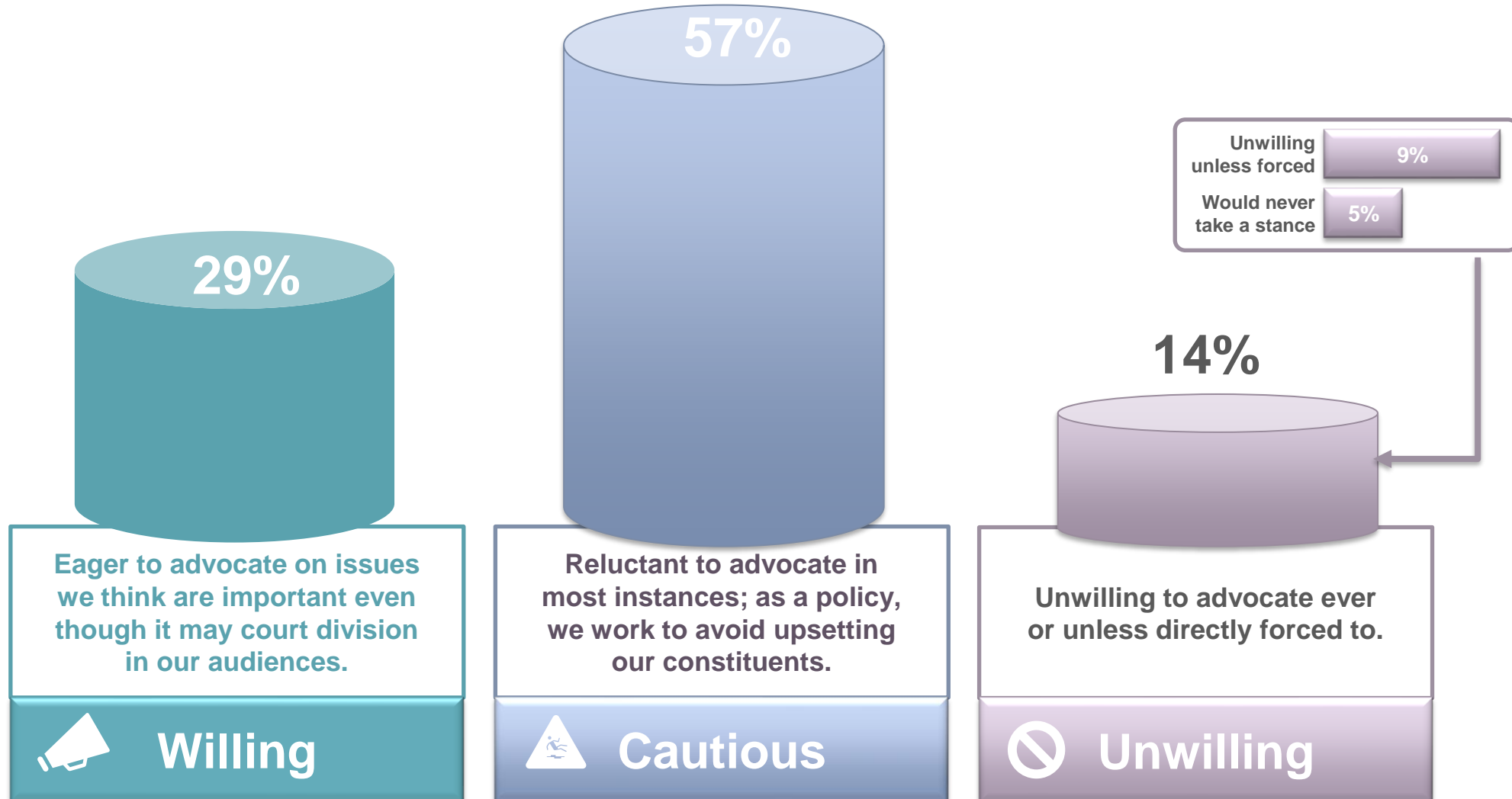
# Three corporate profiles for speaking out on social political issues

*When your company considers taking  
a public stance, is your leadership generally...?*





# Overall, companies remain cautious on taking a public stance



# What did you hope to achieve by taking a stance?



**Align/ reiterate  
our corporate  
values**



**Filling a need not filled by government**



**Affects our employees/  
deals with their concerns**



**Hold people accountable,  
Change the societal culture**



**Affects our clients/customers**



**Increase awareness**



**In support of our global business**



**Decrease awareness**



**Pressure from shareholders**



**Outrage of the CEO**

# Issues companies have spoken out on internally or externally

## Diversity and inclusion



## Natural catastrophes



## Sexism and/or sexual harassment in the workplace



## LGBTQ+ issues



## Environmental issues



## Immigration issues



## Pre-George Floyd's death

### Corporate taxes



### Executive compensation



### Healthcare



### Race



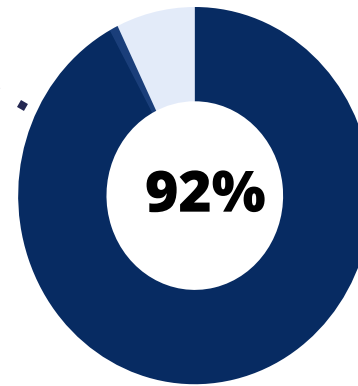
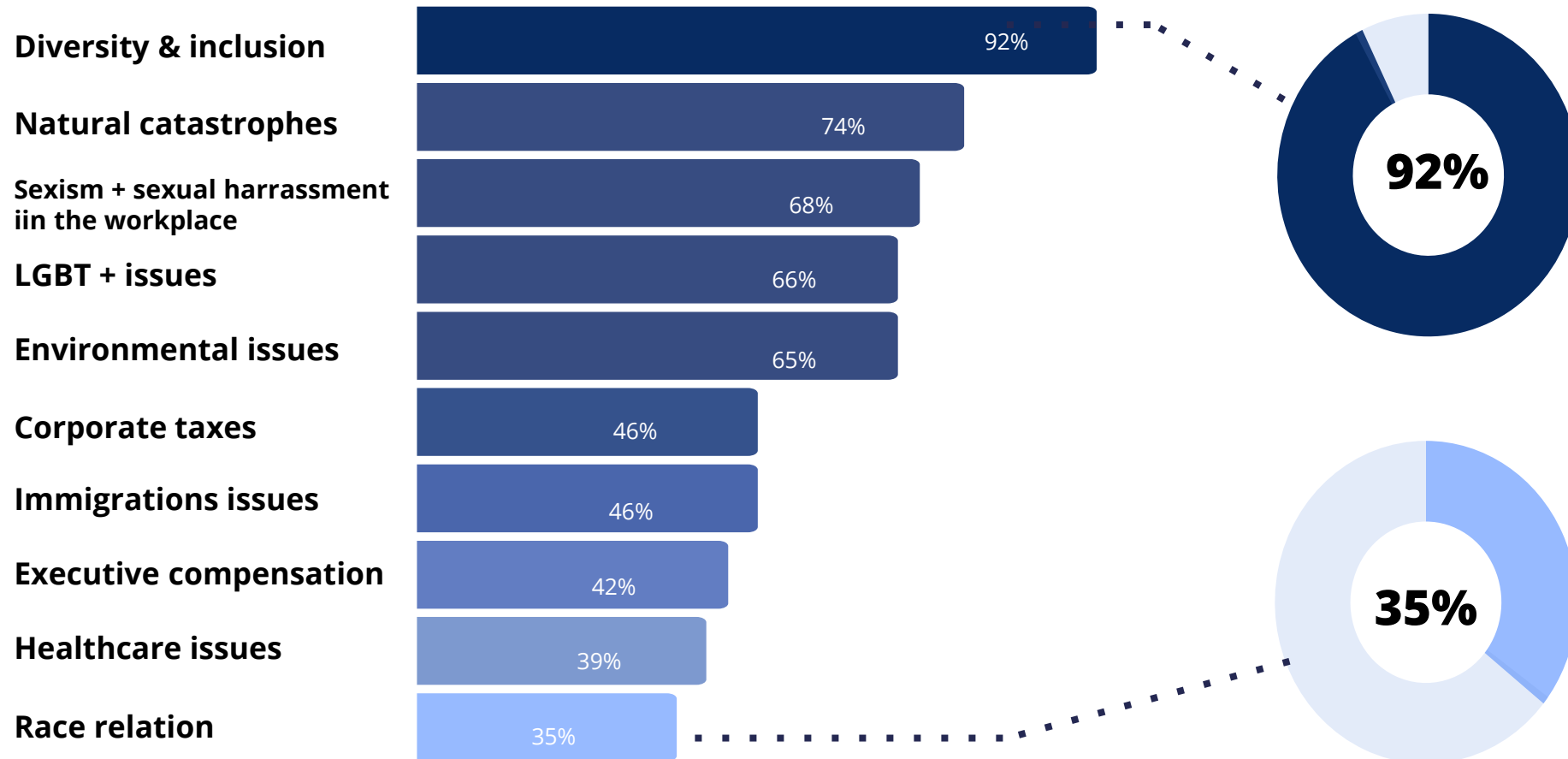
### Criticism of administration policy



### Elections, votes

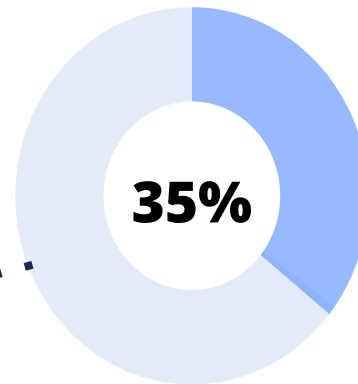


# Diversity and inclusion is distinct from race



## Diversity & inclusion

Diversity & Inclusion was at the top of the list of issues that companies spoke out about.

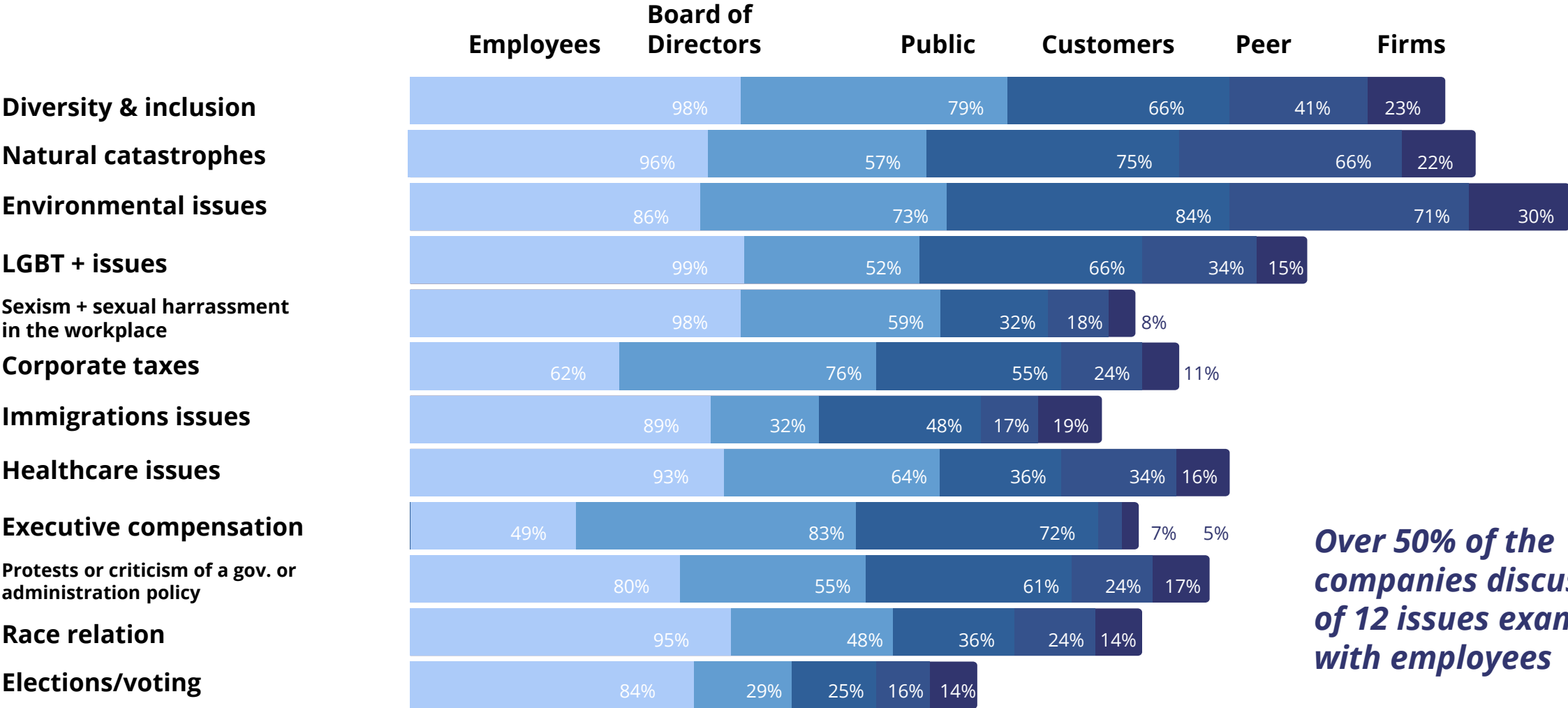


## Race relations

Race relations was at the bottom among the least addressed.

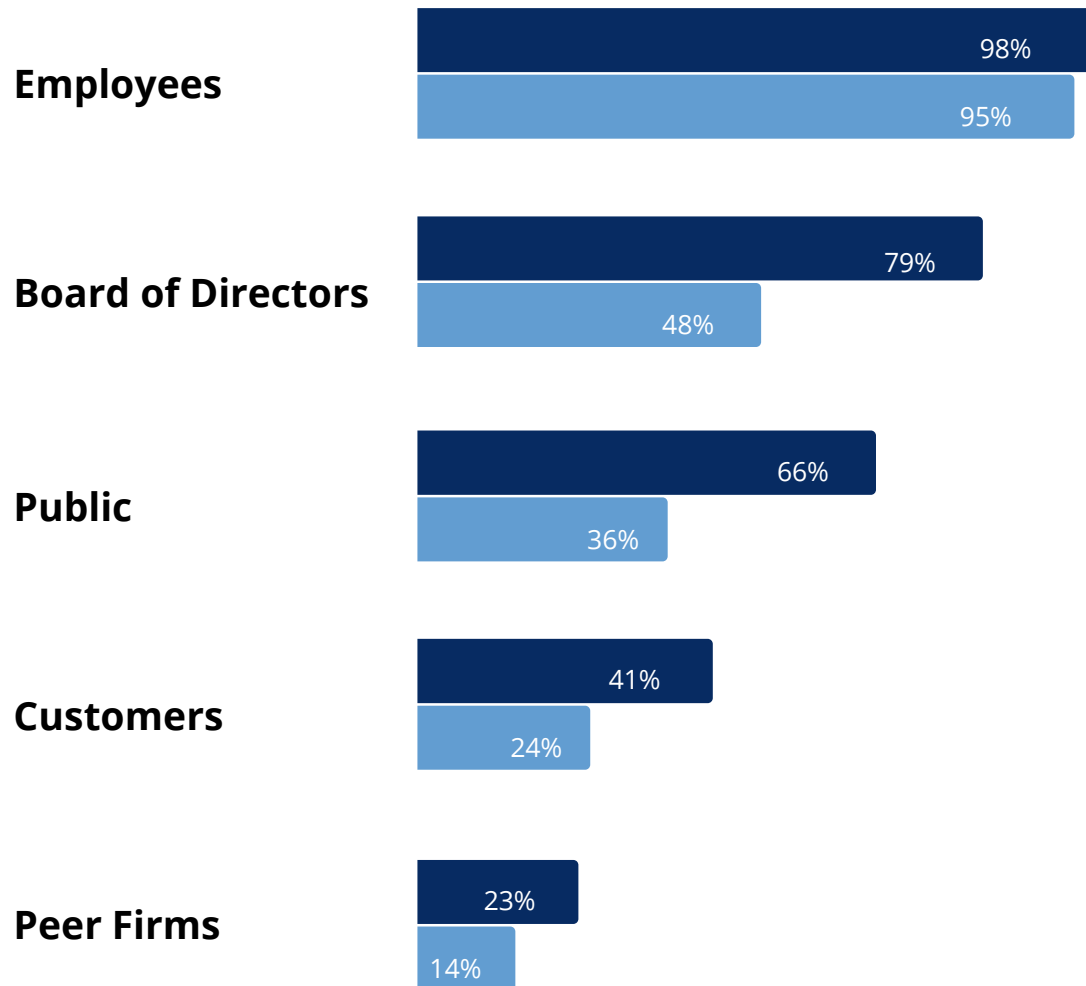
Only 35% of companies surveyed spoke out about race relations

# By far, companies discussed sociopolitical issues with employees more than any other group



*Over 50% of the companies discussed 11 of 12 issues examined with employees*

# For the 35% of companies addressing race, 95% addressed employees

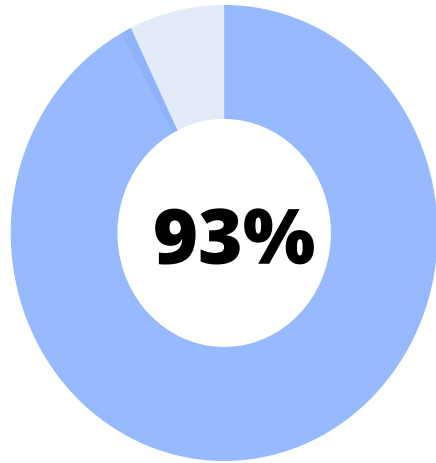


**For the companies speaking about race, it was more frequently with employees and the board**

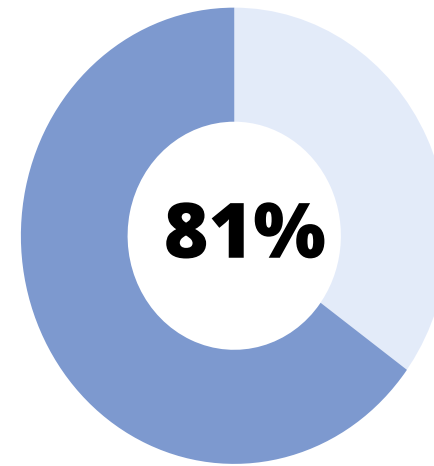
**More with the public than with customers**

**And least frequently with each other**

# Two top issues that senior leaders agree they own...



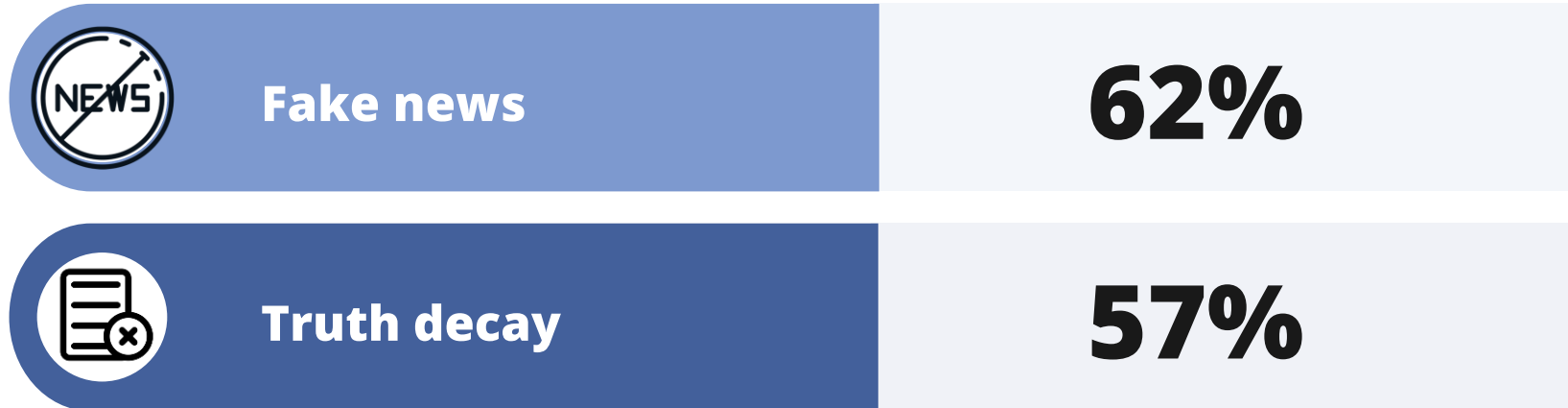
**Speaking out /intentional  
silence on sociopolitical issues**



**Changing societal  
expectations**

# Ownership does not necessarily mean leaders are taking action...

**It's a concern but not taking action or it's not a concern**





# Companies converge on the issues where they speak and remain intentionally silent

## Top Five Corporate Stances

1. Diversity & inclusion practices
2. Corporate social responsibility
3. LGBTQ Rights
4. Data privacy and security
5. Environmental issues

## Top Five for Intentional Silence

1. Protests or criticism of a government or administration policy
2. Abortion or women's reproductive rights
3. \*Gun violence
4. Immigration issues
5. Religious expression

*\*Gun violence was the most frequent example in write-in responses*





### **Corporate Policies**

- Reinforced company policies
- Internal actions
- Company memo
- Changed policy and publicly announced



### **Employee Engagement**

- Addressed employees about the issues
- Employee-Driven Action



### **Philanthropic**

- Created philanthropic fund
- Donated to a cause



### **Legal & Public Advocacy**

- Stood up against the legislature and or government regulations
- Support in legal cases
- BRT signatory
- Amicus brief
- Op-Ed
- Worked to elect chosen official to shape policy



### **Breaking Ties**

- Resigned from President's manufacturing council
- Pulled out of controversial event
- Sopped selling controversial product

# **Top Five Ways Companies Spoke Out**



# And a different set of risks emerged to the top

## Risks of Speaking Out

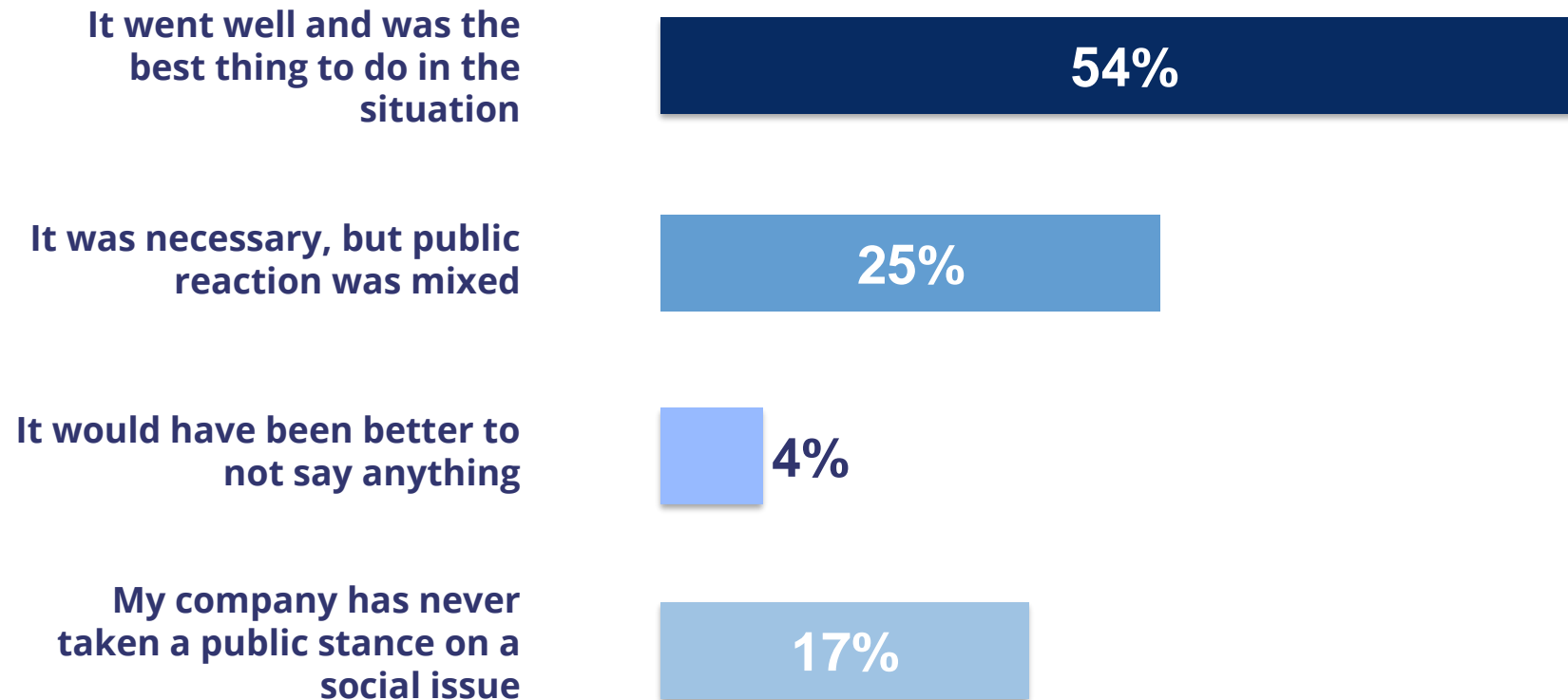
- 1.** Alienates relationships on one side of the issue or another **88%**
- 2.** We may be setting ourselves up as a political target **88%**
- 3.** It complicates relationships with policy makers **86%**

## Top Risks of Remaining Silent

- 1.** Being called out for being silent by employees **90%**
- 2.** Not walking our talk or values **86%**
- 3.** Being perceived as less attractive to prospective employees **82%**

# The majority of CCOs and CCAs said taking a stance “worked”

*Looking back on a time your company took a public stance on a social issue, does your organization believe...*



# A small number of leaders identified key learnings for “next time”

- 1. Showcase third parties/ partnerships**
- 2. Move faster**
- 3. More internal communication**
- 4. Inform fewer media outlets**
- 5. Connect goals to measures**
- 6. Shorten process for messaging**
- 7. Devote more resources**

# Building a More Civil & Just Society Conference

Organization Impact on Social Change Issues

VIRTUAL EVENT | March 2 - 4, 2021

This event is complimentary. To register, visit:  
[www.conferenceboard.org/civilsociety](http://www.conferenceboard.org/civilsociety)





Countries				
United Kingdom	GBP		0.1154	0.0881
Australia	AUD		0.2277	0.1738
Thailand	THB		4.8962	3.6503
Singapore	SGD		0.2102	0.1604
Taiwan	TWD		4.8188	3.485
Canada	CAD		0.1995	0.1523
United Arab Emirates	AED		0.5819	0.45
Switzerland	CHF		0.1465	0.11
Indonesia	IDR		2551.0204	15
India			12.084	
Korea (South)	KRW		18	
Macau	MO			9196
Malaysia	MYR			4862
New Zealand	NZD			816
Philippines	PHP			548
Thailand	THB			
Viet Nam	VND			

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### Consumer Dynamics Webcast Series: US Consumer Trends

Join us on **March 9 at 11am ET** for the first in our quarterly webcast series revealing insights from our latest consumer dynamics research. Chiqui Cartagena, our Chief Marketing Officer & Marketing & Communications Center Leader, will sit down with our Senior Researcher and report author **Denise Dahlhoff, Ph.D.** and **Heather Yamada**, Director of Consumer Insights at Shaw Industries, to discuss how people spend - and save - their money and what concerns they have.

Learn more or register at:

[conference-board.org/webcast/consumer-dynamics](https://www.conference-board.org/webcast/consumer-dynamics)





# Change Communications Forum

Change Is the Only Constant. Are You Ready?

Virtual Event | March 15-16, 2021

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