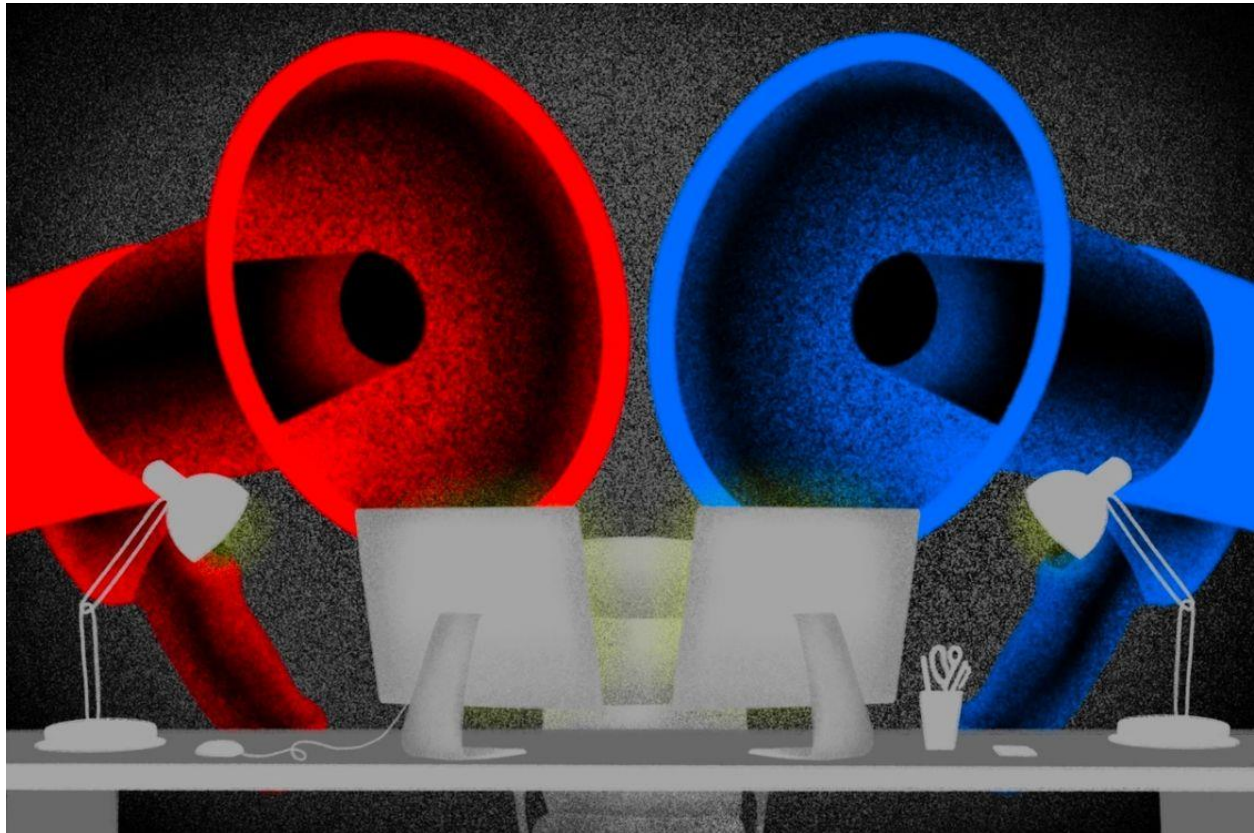


One In Four Companies Will Comment on Sociopolitical Issues Less Frequently Going Forward, Survey Finds

HR Brew | Kristen Parisi | February 13, 2024



Hannah Minn

CHROs and CEOs should have political statements processes, but most don't, one expert points out.

Many companies have, in recent years, taken stances both internally and publicly on sociopolitical events, from the 2020 police murder of George Floyd to the Supreme Court ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade*. And they're not about to stop, according to a University of South Carolina survey of 171 CHROs in the US between May and June 2023.

Most CHROs (70%) surveyed plan to continue making statements as much as they do now, the report found. However, 26% said they'll reduce their frequency.

The CHROs surveyed said pressure to make a statement on a particular issue comes largely from employees, followed by professional associations and customers. Previous research has found that employees who are female, Black, Hispanic, and Gen Z or millennial are more likely to feel supported at work when their employer speaks publicly on a political issue that impacts them, a 2023 Glassdoor survey found.

"There was certainly a long belief that companies should or better not to say anything...Their role has historically been to serve shareholders," Anthony Nyberg, a management professor at the University of South Carolina and coauthor of the report, said. "Now we're seeing that employees are a little more restless and want a little more action, at least in opinion from their senior leaders."

The CEO, CHRO, general counsel, and communications head are the executives most likely to be involved in determining the issues a company will take stances on. While 26% of respondents said they don't have criteria to guide this decision-making process, 42% said they have formal criteria. Mainly, they look at the impact the issue would have on the company's relationships with stakeholders, as well as whether it aligns with its values and strategy.

The report points out that without formal criteria, decisions could be left to emotions or personal preferences, which could leave companies open to criticism from employees and stakeholders.

"One of the problems about not having something in place, where then you have to improvise everything," Nyberg said on the importance of having clear criteria for commenting on sociopolitical issues. Policies can help companies get their message out more quickly, which can be important because waiting to make a statement can result in a negative reaction, he said. The study found that 57% of respondents said they released an external statement on the Dobbs decision on abortion within 24 hours.