

Public Support for DEI as a Business Priority Falls, But the Majority of Americans Still Support It, Survey Finds

HR Brew | Kristen Parisi | October 28, 2025

People in the US also want businesses to take a public stance on free speech, healthcare, and climate change, according to Bentley University and Gallup.



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Most Americans (56%) believe that businesses should take a stance on DEI issues, but fewer believe they should promote DEI, according to a new survey by Bentley University and Gallup.

Some 69% of Americans believe it's at least somewhat important for businesses to promote DEI, a nine-point decrease since 2022 and a five-point decrease since 2024, the survey found. Meanwhile, just 35% believe that companies are doing a good job promoting their DEI efforts, a nine-point drop since 2024.

Cynthia Clark, a management professor at Bentley University, told HR Brew there are strong signs that most Americans still largely support DEI efforts.

"Companies are reframing their commitments. They're not abandoning them," she said. "Some prefer to talk about resilience. Some are preferring to talk about inclusion, but also some companies are, in effect, becoming more clear and precise about why it matters."

Rebecca Perrault, global VP of culture, diversity, and sustainability at Magnit, an HR consultancy with roughly 3,000 employees, believes that DEI work doesn't inherently have to include promotion or even the "DEI" acronym.

"I really think it's the performative piece that there's this reaction to," she told HR Brew. She said over the last year and a half she's seen "a fear towards the acronym itself...I might still use the words that are in the acronym, but it's easy to have a backlash to letters...The ideas behind them are much more challenging to push back on."

Despite the decline in support for DEI promotion, 56% of respondents believe businesses should take a public stance on DEI, up three percentage points from 2024. Most people in the US also want companies to speak out about free speech (58%), healthcare (55%), and climate change (58%), and 41% said the same about immigration policy, a 10-point increase from 2024.

Clark believes there's an opportunity for businesses to set the record straight, pointing to anti-DEI campaigns' insinuation that DEI isn't about merit—a notion that many scholars have debunked—as an example. "I think everybody would prefer to have merit-based hires, but those are not opposite diversity hires," she said. "This is a great opportunity for companies to speak out on the fact that those are connected."

Most businesses are largely sticking with their DEI initiatives, even if they're calling them something else, HR Brew previously reported. Companies where DEI is a core value may have an easier time holding onto their programs. "I haven't had that pushback [on DEI] within our organization," Perrault said. "I've been very pragmatic about it, even from the beginning. We weren't making big statements. What we were doing is integrating into our processes things that created more fairness, that were good for everyone."

Employers should be consistent with their DEI policies, and changing tactics could impact a brand's reputation, internally and externally, according to Clark.

"If you change your tact on this, you risk being perceived as lacking integrity anytime that you're not consistent with your policies," she said, noting that this is why companies like Coke and Costco have remained committed to DEI. "You potentially take a hit to your trustworthiness, transparency, integrity, etc., because those rely on consistency."