

APCO Pulse Check

Corporate Action in the Survival Economy

June 2026



APCO's most recent Pulse Check, *Corporate Action in the Survival Economy*, reveals a public that has not disengaged but has reframed what it expects from corporations. Americans are demanding immediate, practical action in response to mounting economic pressures with fewer looking for companies to advocate on social issues. The public is scrutinizing what companies do, interpreting what companies don't do, and forming judgments about who companies are choosing to serve.

In today's polarized environment, when every corporate action invites punishment from one direction or another, the data reveals something both sobering and clarifying: **There is no path that satisfies everyone, but there is ground that holds under pressure.** Companies that earn the most durable respect are those that define their values, deliver on economic fundamentals, and refuse to be moved by the political weather.

The findings paint a clear picture of what Americans expect from companies in 2026. These results provide a high-level snapshot and actionable guidance for corporate strategy within this elevated risk environment. Please contact us for access to the full report.

1. Silence is interpreted.

Whether companies speak or stay silent on major issues, their audience is watching. Silence must be a deliberate, audience-informed choice, as it can erode trust if mishandled.

2. Corporate reputation is centered around what you deliver.

Trust comes when companies back tangible, customer-facing actions with transparent communications. Topics such as affordability, jobs, wages, and data security especially resonant at this time.

3. Consistency is rewarded. Once broken, trust is hard to restore.

The companies best positioned when pressures ease are those that held steady to their practices and commitments, were honest about costs, deliberate in their voice, and focused on long-term trust over short-term politics.

The Pocketbook Lens: Economic Anxiety Drives Expectations

The national mood is dominated by anxiety, driven primarily by the rising cost of daily life. Ninety-one percent of Americans say they are concerned about price increases on necessities like groceries, gas, and utilities, outpacing other concerns on the list. Rising healthcare costs follow at 88%, and the risk of recession at 82%.

What Americans want from companies flows directly from this pressure. Figure 1 displays the top of the list of expected corporate priorities: keeping prices affordable (71% say this is "very important"), protecting data privacy (70%), providing fair wages and benefits (69%), protecting employee health and safety (68%), and maintaining U.S. jobs (65%).

Top 5 Expected Corporate Priorities

Figure 1: Percent stating this corporate priority is 'very important.'



While priorities like renewable energy and workplace inclusivity remain important to roughly four in ten Americans, they are secondary to these economic demands. Notably, strong progressives report significantly higher economic anxiety – often outpacing Republicans and MAGA supporters by nearly 40 points. The same pattern holds across corporate expectations, with strong progressives having higher expectations across the board, from affordability to fair wages to data privacy. The economic pressure is universal in direction but sharply unequal in urgency.

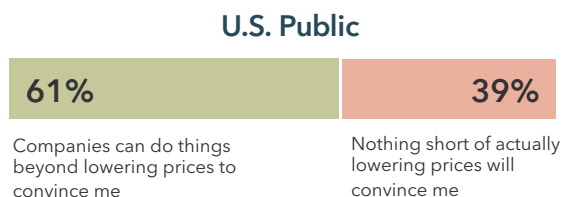
Key Insight: What Americans are asking companies to deliver is not transformation, but stability. Fair wages, data protection, worker safety, affordability, and job security define what Americans want from companies today. The expectations are practical and personal. The urgency behind them is not.

The Credibility Gap: Being Believed on Affordability

Credibility is the real test when companies take action on affordability. As shown in Figure 2, a majority of Americans (61%) say they are open to being convinced that a company is genuinely managing affordability without literally lowering prices. That is the good news. The bad news is that openness to persuasion is not the same as being persuaded. The two approaches that perform best, offering flexible pricing tiers and being transparent about what is driving costs higher, each convince only about a quarter of the public. And for a hardened 39%, no communication of any kind will suffice - only lower prices will. The gap between willingness to listen and actual persuasion is where most corporate affordability messaging fails.

How Americans Want Companies to Respond to Rising Costs

Figure 2: Percent stating either statement best describes their overall view.



Which of the following would be the MOST effective way for a company to show that it is genuinely managing affordability?

- 26% Offer different pricing tiers or product options
- 25% Be transparent about what's driving prices higher
- 19% Demonstrate how they are keeping customer costs down
- 16% Explain other business actions to absorb costs instead of raising prices
- 14% Add more value to products & services as prices increase

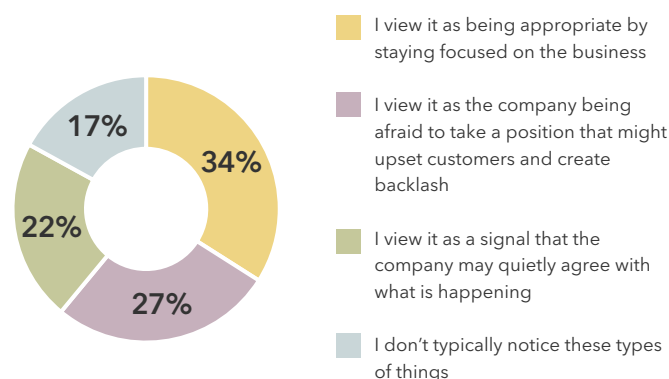
Key Insight: Transparency without tangible action feels like an excuse; action without transparency often goes unnoticed. Companies that pair visible, customer-centric actions with transparent communication have, and will continue to earn trust in a skeptical marketplace.

There Is No Such Thing as Neutral Silence

If companies hoped that pulling back from public positioning would buy them invisibility, the data delivers an uncomfortable correction. Americans notice when a company stays quiet, and they interpret the silence in strikingly different directions: a third view silence as appropriate, roughly a quarter read it as fear of backlash, and just over one in five take it as a signal that the company quietly agrees with what is happening. Only 17% say they don't typically notice these types of things.

Initial Reaction to Companies That Stay Silent During Current Events

Figure 3: Percent selecting which option best describes their initial reaction.



The partisan divide makes this worse. The same silence sends a fundamentally different signal depending on who is watching. Among Republicans, 45% view a quiet company as appropriate, while only 24% of Democrats agree. This means roughly six in ten (61%) of Democratic consumers land somewhere between reading silence as fear of backlash (35%) and reading it as quiet agreement with what is happening (26%). For strong progressives, the interpretation skews even more sharply: nearly half (46%) view corporate silence as a signal that the company quietly agrees. In other words, **this divide means that the same silence can be seen as professional restraint by one audience and moral failure to another.**

The commercial consequences are real but difficult to predict. More than four in ten Americans (43%) say they are likely to stop purchasing from a company that stayed silent on an issue they felt strongly required a response. At the same time, 45% of Americans say that they are not sure they would change their habits, and 13% say they are unlikely to stop purchasing.

The most common form of consumer pressure is also the least visible: nearly a third (31%) would encourage friends and family to stop buying, quietly shaping behavior through trusted networks rather than public protest. Unlike highly visible boycotts or viral social media moments, this negative word-of-mouth is harder to detect and measure, steadily accumulating reputational debt in conversations that happen beyond any company's line of sight.

These are not satisfied customers choosing to stay – they are staying out of economic necessity rather than trust. And in that holding pattern, silence still carries meaning. When companies say nothing, audiences fill the vacuum with narratives that reinforce their assumptions.

Key Insight: *The decision to stay silent must be as deliberate and audience-informed as the decision to speak. Silence carries meaning, and there is no such thing as neutral silence.*

What Holds: Consistency in the Era of Political Weather

Beyond affordability, Americans are closely following how companies respond to changes in federal policy since President Trump was re-elected, and the attention is bipartisan: Democrats and Republicans are watching at nearly identical rates (67% and 65%, respectively). What they reward is not alignment with any particular administration, it's consistency.

72% of Americans respect companies that maintained their existing practices and commitments despite political pressure.

Nearly three in four Americans respect companies that maintained their existing practices and commitments despite political pressure. This finding is bipartisan, even among self-identified MAGA supporters, roughly 63% respect companies that held steady. In a country that agrees on almost nothing, this is as close to consensus as the data offers.

The inverse is equally telling. When companies changed their business practices to align more closely with the Trump Administration, a plurality of Americans view it negatively, with unfavorable views outpacing positive ones (44% vs. 28%, respectively). Financial contributions to projects personally associated with the president, such as building the White House ballroom, deepen the risk, with nearly half of Americans (47%) saying such contributions make them less likely to support those companies, while barely one in five say more likely (22%). High-visibility gestures toward the administration energize a minority while creating disproportionate downside with everyone else.

Reversals – when companies roll back commitments due to political pressure and later attempt to restore them – are not helpful. Only about a quarter of Americans (26%) say this backtracking increases their trust, while the rest either remain indifferent (39%) or lose trust entirely (35%).

Key Insight: *Companies that shift their commitments based on the current political climate make themselves vulnerable to reputational risk. Perceptions of companies that bent do not simply spring back. The clearest path is to set commitments that hold across political cycles, not adjust to them.*

Let's talk about what this means for you.



For the full detailed survey findings, please contact:

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