

Penta Policy Insiders

State spotlight: Florida

National attention on corporate
engagement on social issues

policyinsiders.pentagroup.co

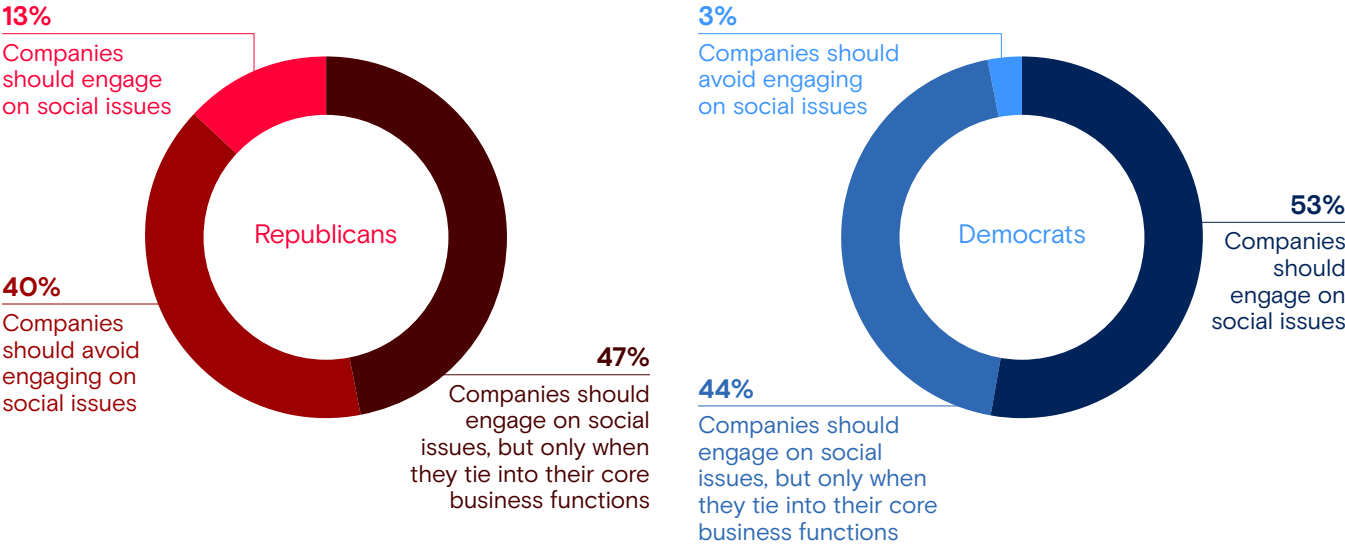


Executive summary

This was a particularly noteworthy year for the state of Florida, which was at the center of national discourse when its business community and political leadership found themselves misaligned over issues relating to corporate engagement on social issues, highlighted by the Parental Rights in Education legislation. Our research in Florida indicates that policymaker perceptions of corporate engagement on social issues vary significantly by party, with Republicans more critical of corporate engagement on these issues. In fact, 40% of Republican policymakers believe that companies should avoid engaging on social issues, altogether. Those Republican policymakers that welcome private sector engagement tend to suggest that such engagement should be directly related to business functions and avoid overstepping into political issues.

This report is part of our State Spotlight series, where we examine current events at a state level.

Policymakers opinion on corporate’s engagement on social issues:



This report focuses on corporate engagement on social issues, which has generated controversy in the past twelve months.

Florida in 2022

In March 2022, Florida policymakers signed into law the “Parental Rights in Education” bill, placing limitations on how and when teachers and other school staff members can discuss gender and sexual orientation in the classroom.¹ The “Don’t Say Gay” bill – as it was dubbed by many opponents – aims, among other things, to have gender and sexuality taught at an appropriate age, thus prohibiting any instruction on such issues between kindergarten and third grade. Proponents believe such restrictions will allow parents to have more of a say in what their children learn.^{2,3} Critics believe the law will harm and further marginalize LGBTQIA+ students and faculty.^{4,5,6} Policymaker perceptions of the legislation are generally divided across party lines.



It’s a solution looking for a problem... As a parent of three children, I do want to be aware of what’s going on with my children. But **that’s my job as a parent, to be in touch with it, not necessarily having spies out there that are coming to me to tell**, and unfortunately, disinformation can cause these children to be physically, mentally abused, and sometimes disowned.

Director, Executive, D



The polling on that indicates that even Democratic primary voters, which are among the most progressive – 68% – supported and still support the Parental Bill of Rights in Florida. So, that’s really telling me that **there’s a wide swath of the American electorate that supports this once they learn what the bill is.**

Representative, Legislative, R



I think what’s even more important right now is leaving teachers alone and not meddling in what they’re allowed to teach, what they’re allowed to say, and what they’re allowed to put out there. That would be the biggest gift of all. **We should let teachers teach and not be dictating things because you’re trying to pursue a particular ideology.**

Legislative Analyst, Legislative, D



I think the teacher should keep their political desires to themselves and not be allowed to discuss that [in reference to the Parental Rights in Education Bill] in schools.

Supervisor, Executive, R

Corporate engagement on the law, and the subsequent reaction from state policymakers, drew national focus, after a major corporation in the state spoke out against the law shortly after it was passed.⁷ The company, which has made diversity and inclusion a major part of both its corporate policies and storytelling vehicles, proceeded to halt all political donations in the state due to the law and pledged donations to organizations working to protect LGBTQIA+ rights, with company leaders apologizing for their initial silence on the issue prior to the legislation being passed and after protests from employees.⁸ Florida politicians reacted negatively to the companies' political involvement.⁹ Then, in April, two bills were signed into law that revoked certain special privileges the company maintained,¹⁰ with Florida's political leadership stating that the laws were signed in retribution for the company's public statements against the "Parental Rights in Education" bill.¹¹

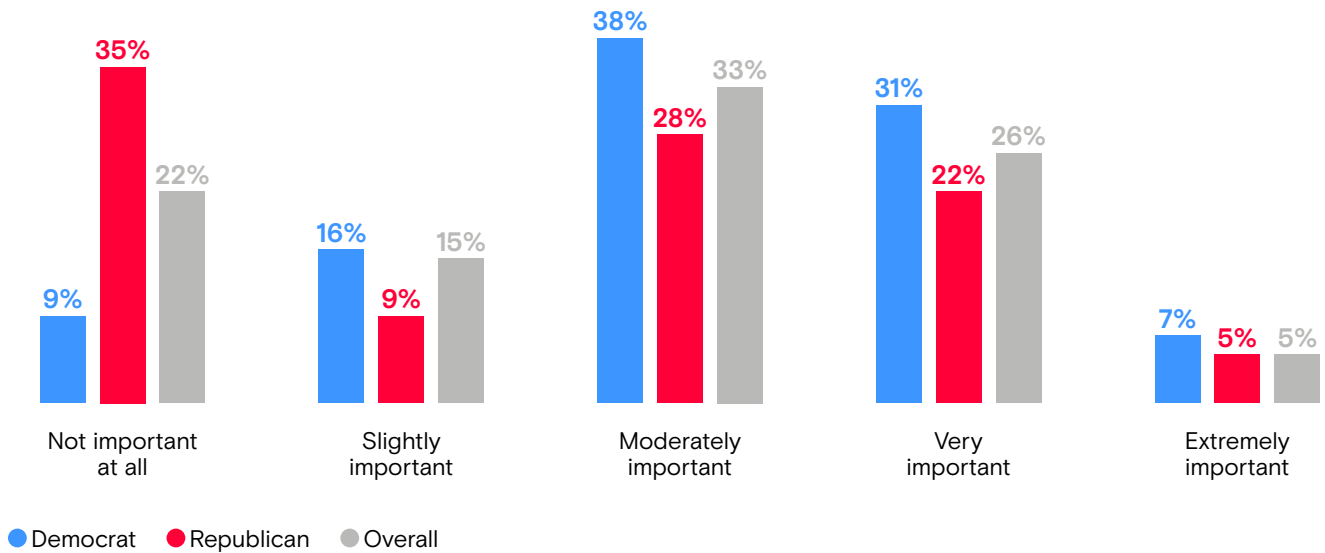
The tension between the state's policy leaders and this private organization has been highly publicized, putting into focus corporate engagement on social and political issues in Florida. Perceptions of corporate engagement vary significantly across parties, with Democrats generally welcoming corporate engagement on social issues and Republicans wary of companies overstepping into political matters.

Corporate social engagement

Policymakers on both sides of the aisle welcome engagement on social issues...

Importance of company engagement on social issues

How important is it for companies to engage with your office on social issues?

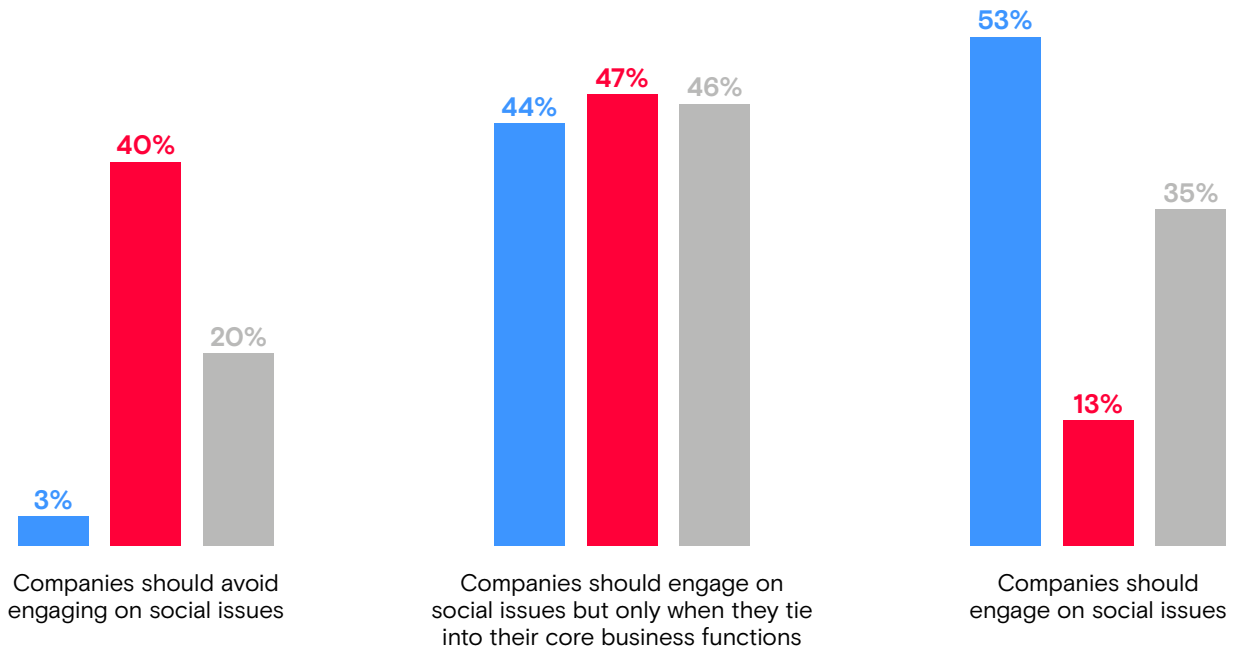


A majority of policymakers, including Republicans, report that it is important for companies to continue to engage with their offices on social issues. However, a substantial percentage of Republicans, 35 percent, also indicate that it is not important at all.

...When those issues are directly related to core business functions or issues.

Policymaker opinions on corporate engagement on social issues

What is your opinion on corporates' engagement on social issues?



● Democrat ● Republican ● Overall

Republicans (and many Democrats) who welcome engagement on social issues tend to qualify that such engagement should be related to core business issues or functions.

Policymaker perspectives on corporate engagement vary substantially across parties



My viewpoint is that [private corporations] should be allowed to take their views public. And they shouldn't be punished for it. The corporations are private entities... if you're a private entity, you still have freedom of speech in this country. I mean, Citizens United - said that corporations were people. So if corporations are people, then by extension they should be able to voice their opinions.

Legislative Assistant, Legislative, D



It just makes no sense for you to be involved in [social issues] one way or the other. You should just not be involved in that type of thing. If the state of Florida was actively doing something that was dangerous, hurtful, I have no problem with people voicing those opinions.

District Director, Legislative, R



We don't live in a dictatorship. As much as I think the state of Florida's Executive Branch would like to think that we live in one. It's this vindictive tit-for-tat behavior. I think it's the wrong path to be going down. It doesn't set a good example for the future.

Legislative Policy Advisor, Municipal, D



Take all the political [stuff] out of it. Who's your target market? You're a company that caters and deals specifically with families and children...to get vocally behind a bill that you clearly don't understand...everybody in this scenario, they overstepped way too much.

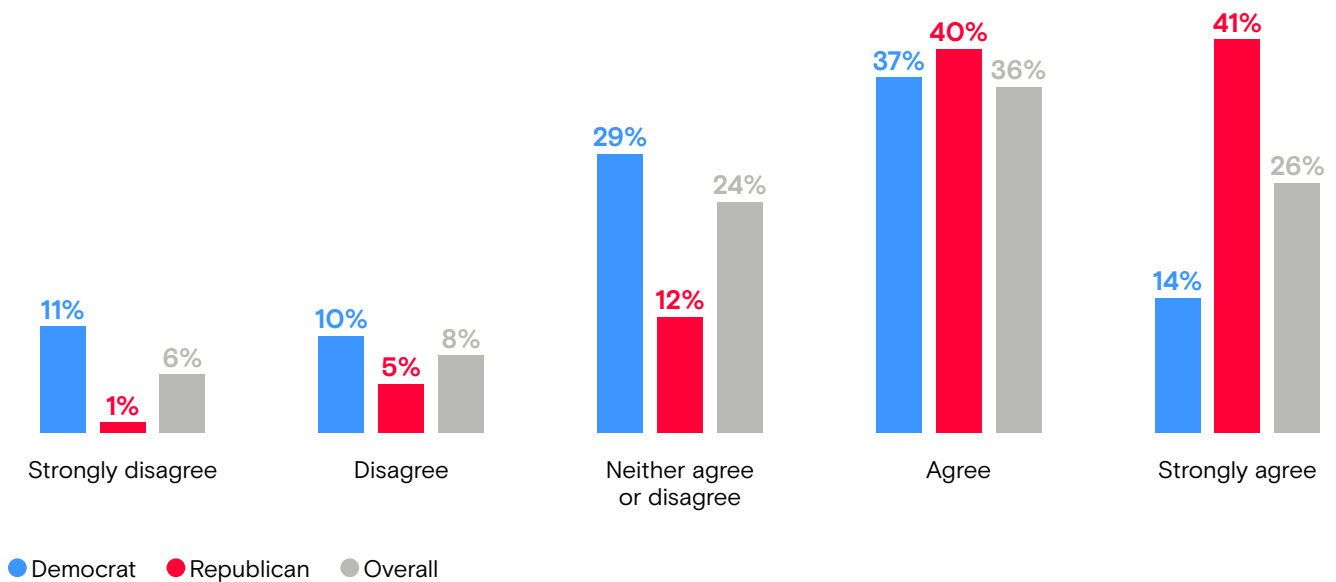
District Director, Legislative, R

Is Florida inviting for business?

In light of the controversy related to corporate engagement, we spoke to policymakers in the state to determine their current stance on corporate investment in Florida and their opinions on business's engagement on social issues. We found that a majority of policymakers on both sides of the aisle believe that Florida's political environment is still inviting for corporate investment.

Florida's political landscape and business development

Florida's political environment is inviting for corporate investment



While over half of all respondents, and over 80 percent of Republican respondents, report that they believe Florida's political environment is inviting for corporate investment, policymakers express varied perceptions of the impact of the political landscape on new business growth and development in the state.



I think [the political environment is] detrimental to continued growth, yes. **It doesn't encourage businesses to grow and it certainly doesn't attract new businesses to come here.**

Manager, Executive, R



I do think long term, **if the political climate in Florida continues to be what it is**, I think it will become a haven for like-minded political people and like-minded political corporations... **people aren't going to want to come here.**

Legislative Analyst, Legislative, D



For certain people, yes I think the political environment makes it inviting to move into the state. **I get the idea for economic incentives to the end of building a business-friendly environment but... there is a level of diminishing returns** when you start giving away everything to try and become the most business-friendly.

Director of Communications, Legislative, D



I know of people who are leaving this state because **of the decisions that have been made** through legislators and through the governor **because they aren't feeling welcome anymore...** And some of the signals that go out for businesses—because of what's going on with [the entertainment company] – that doesn't look super inviting. Those **local municipalities are doing what they're supposed to be doing and the businesses are coming because of them, not because of the state.**

Commissioner, Municipal, I

Conclusion

As companies continue to engage on new social and political issues, they should be aware of the differing perceptions of policymakers in Florida. While policymaker' views on corporate social engagement are divided by party, a bipartisan plurality agrees that companies should tie their engagement directly to business issues and goals.

About Penta Policy Insiders

Penta provides direct feedback from policymakers to government relations professionals, improving advocates' ability to understand, validate, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their engagement.

Credits

Senior Research Strategist

Pambi Nzunga

Content Associate

Maddie Markenson

Senior Content Associate

Kinda Ahmed

Associate Director, Government Insights & Research Products

Natalie Bahmanyar

Director, Research

Sehare Hemani

Associate Director, Quantitative Research

Mackai Tapleshay

Chief Research Officer

Michael Griffin

President

Michael Gottlieb

Citations

1. <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/24/1082969036/florida-house-passes-controversial-measure-dubbed-the-dont-say-gay-bill-by-criti>
2. [Ibid.](#)
3. <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/09/1079541236/florida-dont-say-gay-bill>
4. [Ibid.](#)
5. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/28/1089221657/dont-say-gay-florida-desantis>
6. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/dont-say-gay-law-brings-worry-confusion-to-florida-schools>
7. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/disney-faces-backlash-in-florida-amid-dont-say-gay-controversy-11650027780>
8. <https://www.cNBC.com/2022/03/11/disney-pauses-political-donations-in-florida-over-dont-say-gay-bill-backlash.html>
9. [Ibid.](#)
10. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/20/disney-world-florida-dont-say-gay-bill>
11. <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/04/22/desantis-disney-special-status-dont-say-gay-00027302>

Qualitative n: 30 | Quantitative n: 228

A Note on Use of These Materials

This document has been prepared by, and comprises valuable proprietary information belonging to Penta. It is intended for educational purposes only.

Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database retrieval system without the prior written permission of Penta. The use of copyrighted materials and/or images belonging to unrelated parties and reproduced herein is permitted pursuant to license and/or 17 USC § 107.

Legal Caveat

Penta has worked to ensure the accuracy of the information it provides in this report. This report relies upon data obtained from many sources, however, and Penta is not able to guarantee the accuracy of the information or analysis contained in these materials. Furthermore, Penta is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or any other professional services. Penta specifically disclaims liability for any damages, claims or losses that may arise from a) any errors or omissions in these materials, whether caused by Penta or its sources, or b) reliance upon any recommendation made by Penta.

Confidentiality: All participation in our research is confidential and not for attribution.
