

Oxford-GlobeScan
**Global Corporate
Affairs Survey**
2026 Survey Report



Contents

1. About the Oxford-GlobeScan Corporate Affairs initiative	3
2. Executive summary	4
3. Geoeconomics and the new global reality	6
3.1 The risks	6
3.2 The opportunities	8
4. The rise of governance as reputational risk	11
4.1 ESG is still an important lens	11
4.2 Advocacy remains important	13
4.3 Purpose under pressure, but expectations remain	15
5. Corporate Affairs functional status quo is no longer tenable	17
5.1 Is the function still providing value?	17
5.2 Urgency to reshape the Corporate Affairs function	21
5.3 Corporate Affairs function into the future	23
6. Respondents and methodology	25
7. Research partners	27

1. About the Oxford-GlobeScan Corporate Affairs Initiative

This is the seventh annual Oxford-GlobeScan Global Corporate Affairs Survey Report which provides the latest overview of opinions, trends, and challenges through the lens of Corporate Affairs practitioners. This report captures the views and insights of 294 senior professionals who were surveyed between February and March 2026 on issues and themes of relevance to the function.

The University of Oxford and GlobeScan formalised a partnership in 2019 to deliver enhanced insight into the roles, responsibilities, challenges, opportunities, and themes facing leading global Corporate Affairs professionals around the world. The primary purpose of the partnership is to generate valuable research findings for organisations, senior executives, and Corporate Affairs leaders through a regular ‘pulse’ of novel, timely, and data-driven insights about the evolution of the Corporate Affairs agenda.

Oxford University’s Saïd Business School is home to the Corporate Affairs Academy (‘the Academy’). Each year, the Academy invites leaders from the Corporate Affairs, Corporate Responsibility, Corporate Communications, Community Engagement, and Investor Relations functions of major corporations around the world to discuss critical trends, themes, and insights of relevance to organisational stakeholder engagement. By way of example, over the last six years, discussion threads have emerged around organisational purpose, stakeholder engagement, corporate activism, and advocacy. Since its founding in 2011, the Academy has hosted over 250 leading professionals from Asia-Pacific, China, Russia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Scandinavia, and the Americas. Each year, the Academy publishes a summary of its discussions in a white paper which is available through the Corporate Affairs Academy website.

GlobeScan, an insights and advisory firm specialising in trust, reputation, sustainability, and engagement. GlobeScan equips companies, NGOs, and governmental organisations with insights to navigate shifting societal and stakeholder expectations, crafting evidence-based strategies that reduce risks and create value for their organisations and society. Established in 1987, GlobeScan has offices in Cape Town, Dubai, Hong Kong, Hyderabad, London, Paris, San Francisco, São Paulo, Singapore, Tokyo, and Toronto.

The survey was kindly translated and promoted in Spanish by Corporate Excellence. We thank them for their support in widening access to this very important research. The Oxford-GlobeScan team not only values and appreciates the collaboration with Corporate Excellence but also recognises Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) and other organisations that partner with us in an effort to promote the survey.

Rupert Younger

Director, Oxford University Centre for Corporate Reputation, Programme Director, Corporate Affairs Academy

Stewart Prosser

Programme Co-Director, Corporate Affairs Academy and Associate Fellow, Saïd Business School

Chris Coulter

CEO, GlobeScan

Anneke Greyling

Director, GlobeScan

July 2026

2. Executive summary

Among Corporate Affairs practitioners, not only is geopolitics a top concern but it is being augmented by growing focus on risks associated with geoeconomics.

Geopolitics has sat atop the list of perceived short-term risks to global businesses for the last seven years, and in 2026, it continued its dominance in every region around the world, being cited by 76 percent of respondents as the most significant risk. While this has historically been a broad and unclear category, the findings now show that more specific, close-to-home factors are driving its impact.

From macroeconomic risks such as supply chain disruptions, affordability, and economic uncertainty to protectionism through tariffs and energy costs, these concerns suggest that geopolitical aims are increasingly pursued through economic means. Geoeconomics driven by national interests in the face of new and continuing wars and deeper East-West tensions is shifting the ways in which businesses, policymakers, and consumers view and plan for their future.

The perceived risk from AI has risen sharply, but innovation brings opportunity.

The impact of AI and technology is perceived to be an increasing risk to global business, ranking second this year at 44 percent, up from 17 percent in 2025, overtaking macro-economy and climate change concerns. The latter two risks are, however, felt more keenly than those relating to AI in sectors such as consumer products, food, agriculture, and beverage. Data privacy and cyber risk remain consistent global concerns, while preparedness for AI-driven misinformation among companies is reported as low – only 18 percent of companies surveyed say they are fully prepared for AI misinformation.

On the flip side, Corporate Affairs professionals continue to believe that innovation,

digitalisation, and AI (71%) is the greatest short-term opportunity for global companies. The research suggests that the Corporate Affairs function still faces challenges in moving beyond basic applications to fully leverage these technologies for business intelligence, innovation, and efficiency.

Engaging stakeholders and managing reputation are key, but remain areas of challenge.

A counterpoint to the risks and opportunities landscape is that Corporate Affairs professionals are increasingly seeing a need for direct engagement with stakeholders. For instance, the second most important opportunity facing global business is stakeholder engagement and building trust (23%, up 12 points from 2025.)

While protecting and promoting reputation is seen as one of the top priorities of Corporate Affairs, it was surprising to see that only 49 percent of the Corporate Affairs function employ formal impact or success measures. A strong reliance on media monitoring tops the list of impact measurement with formal reputation assessments sitting in second place.

An ongoing shifting ESG landscape

While climate change mitigation and adaptation remain the category of greatest perceived ESG risk this year, it does so at a much-reduced level, falling to 40 percent (down 11 points from 2025). In contrast, governance and ethics has risen by 14 points to second place, largely driven by trends in South America, Europe, and Africa.

Last year, DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) commitments were considered the second-most important issue for businesses, despite already being under pressure from populist movements. This year, DEI is no longer ranked among the top issues, as companies adjust to shifting

governance and ethics priorities and refocus on shorter-term pressures such as regulation and policy uncertainty, which now rank third, with 16 percent of respondents citing their importance.

When asked specifically about which of the ESG pillars – environment, social, or governance – poses the most serious reputation risk for companies, this year's survey shows a surge in governance as the most critical of the three (10 points increase from 2025 to 45% in 2026). Corporate Affairs teams have a vital role to play in supporting these shifting priorities in companies as the ESG agenda continues to evolve.

Most believe Corporate Affairs needs revision.

Set against this significantly changed landscape of concerns and drivers, it is no surprise that respondents clearly state that the function must move away from its historic *status quo*, with 74 percent believing that Corporate Affairs requires some form of revision, and 17 percent indicating that this revision should be radical, particularly in Europe, South America, and North America.

Those calling for change highlight clearer strategy, focus, and prioritisation as key areas for development, alongside improvements in operating models, internal alignment, and global-local consistency. Baseline skill sets, including reputation management and stakeholder engagement, will remain essential. However, respondents already recognise that an evolution in how the function delivers value and protects the business is required.

Corporate Affairs is continuing its evolution into a central, strategically embedded capability that navigates geopolitical complexity, drives alignment across the business, and translates external risks and opportunities into actionable insight for leadership.

Its future depends on its ability to integrate advanced technologies like AI, build new skills such as expertise in international trade policy and forecasting, and demonstrate measurable impact in shaping reputation, trust, and long-term business value.



3. Geoeconomics and the new global reality

3.1 The risks

Over the last seven years, since the inception of our survey, the historically rules-based international consensus has come under increasing pressure as the interconnected and strengthening forces of regional and local wars, more strident populism, nationalistic and social isolation, and the fracturing of economic relationships have combined to drive global volatility and an atmosphere of uncertainty. The Corporate Affairs function sits at the nexus of these dynamics, so geopolitical risk and uncertainty is unsurprisingly viewed by 76 percent of respondents as the area of greatest concern over the next two years.

But the definition of this risk has evolved. What was once described as a general unease about the world has increasingly come to focus on more specific, tangible pressures, with countries scrambling to understand and adapt to pressures driven in large part by US policy and behaviour under the Trump administration. In this context, perceived risks captured under the broad macroeconomic heading, although falling to third place this year at 34 percent, point to the way in which countries, and therefore businesses, are having to consider and adapt to new realities around competitive advantage and regional alliances. Taken together, the first- and third-placed risks can be seen as reflecting a return to *geoeconomics* and the expression of political aims through economic means.

This year, and for the first time, AI and technology risks have risen to second place at 44 percent, a significant increase of 27 percentage points, as concerns over the speed and scale of AI's impact on operational practices and wider societal consequences proliferate.

Climate change remains a high risk, albeit much reduced from earlier years as companies prioritise more immediate pressures. This does

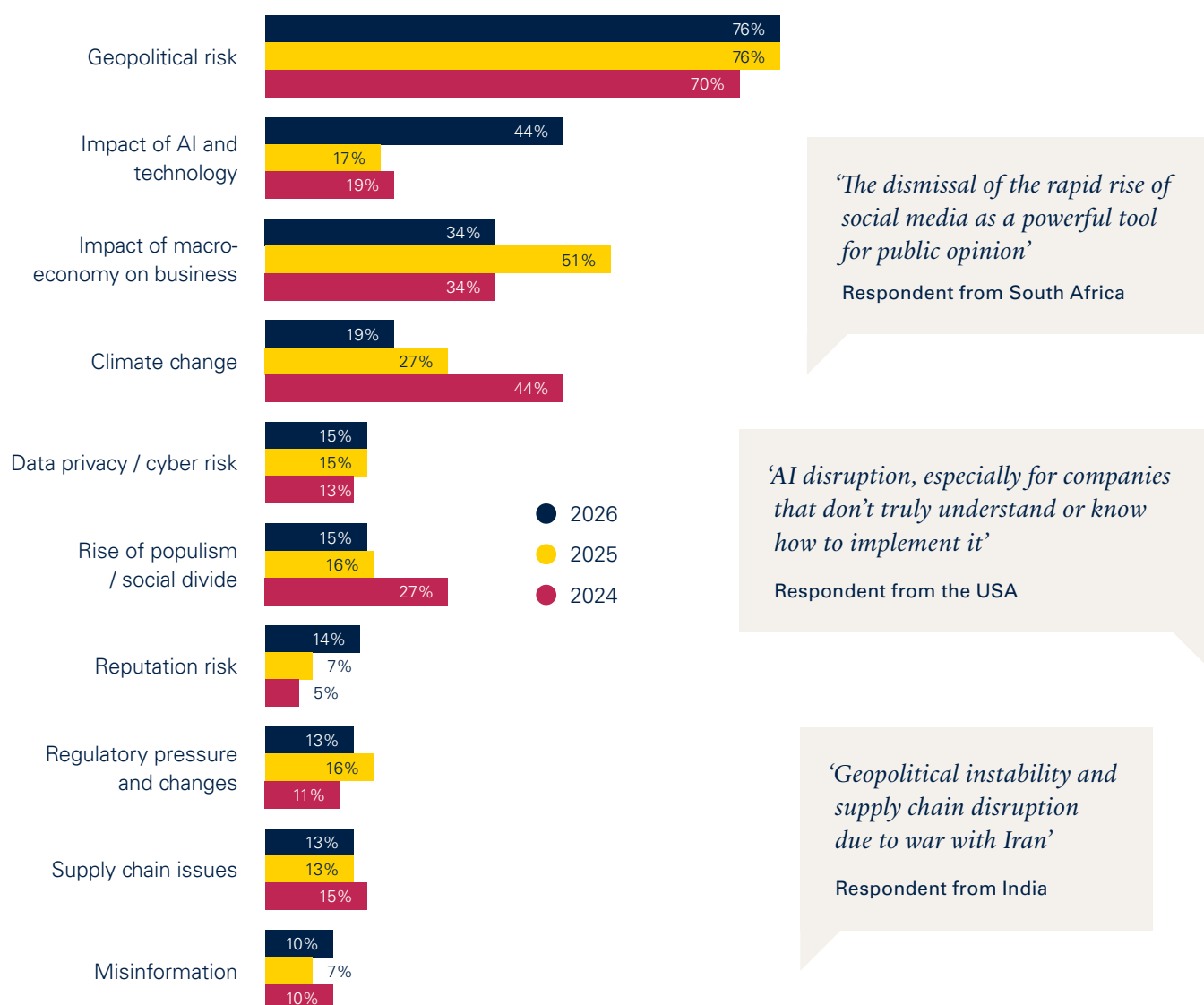
not suggest climate has disappeared; rather, it indicates that many organisations are triaging amid short-term volatility, with climate impacts more often described through immediate operational disruption (e.g., value chain strain, extreme weather exposure, transition delivery risk).

Data privacy and cyber risk enters the top five for the first time alongside broader AI worries. This reflects growing concern about data sovereignty, cyber resilience, and the governance of emerging technologies, particularly as AI adoption accelerates faster than organisational controls and regulatory frameworks can keep pace.

Reputation risk is seen as a far more significant threat this year than ever before. In an environment characterised by geopolitical tension, heightened scrutiny, and fast-moving information flows, practitioners describe reputation as increasingly fragile, shaped not only by corporate behaviour but also by political positioning, regulatory compliance, supply chain exposure, and the organisation's response to external shocks. As a result, reputation is viewed as a material business risk with direct implications for trust, licence to operate, and market access. (See Figure 1.)

Geopolitical risk is the top short-term risk across all regions, with AI and technology ranking second, except in Africa and North America, where macroeconomic risks are cited. In these two regions, tariffs are cited as the dominant reason behind the weighting by 12 percent and 26 percent of practitioners, respectively.

In South America, reputation risk is seen as significant (26%), while 17 percent of European respondents see regulatory pressure and changes as a top concern and 19 percent of respondents in Africa consider data privacy and cyber risk as high risk.

Figure 1**Short-term risks to global business as identified by Corporate Affairs professionals***Open-ended, total mentions, 2024–2026*

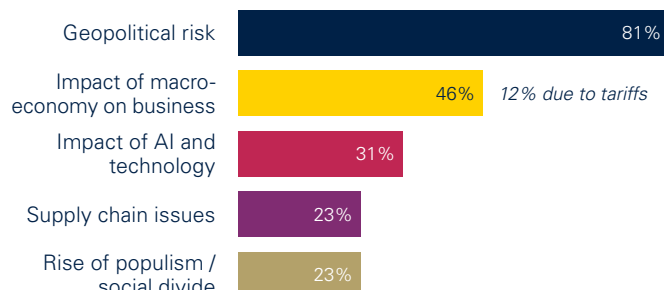
Q40. What are the biggest risks for global businesses over the next two years? (2024 n=227; 2025 n=245; 2026 n=294)

Geopolitical risks lead, according to Corporate Affairs practitioners, in a wide range of sectors. Impact of AI, including technology, is second across all sectors apart from consumer products and energy, extractives, and manufacturing (where macroeconomics prevail and tariffs are specified) and in food and agriculture, where climate change is considered a higher risk.

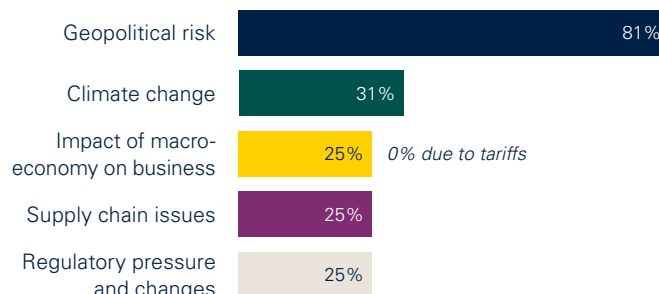
Supply chain issues are deemed high risk by those working in consumer products (23%), energy, extractives, and manufacturing (25%), and food/agriculture (25%). Professionals in ICT and media entertainment and financial and professional services report strong concerns over data privacy and cyber risk at 26 percent and 18 percent, respectively, with those in the latter sector similarly concerned over reputation risk (18%). (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2
Short-term risks for Corporate Affairs vary across sectors
Open-ended, total mentions, by sector, 2026

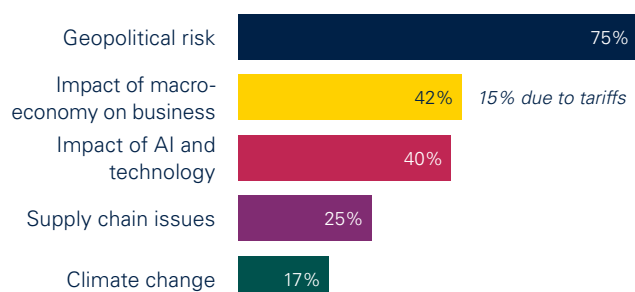
Consumer products/retail



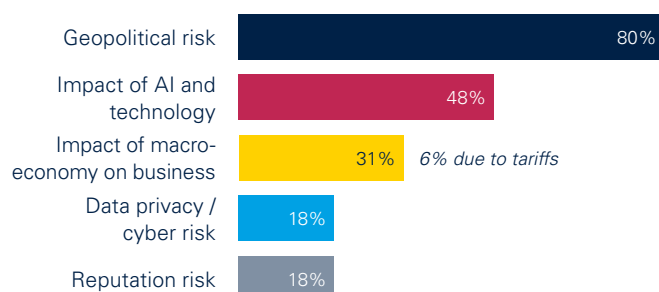
Food, agriculture, and beverage



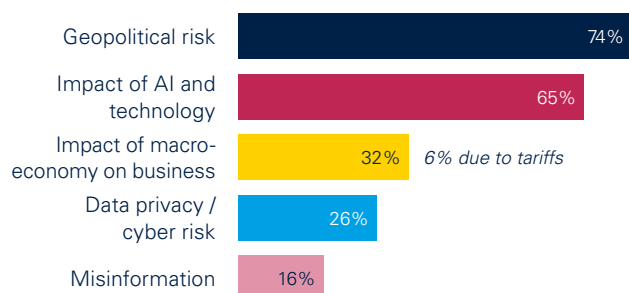
Energy, extractives, manufacturing



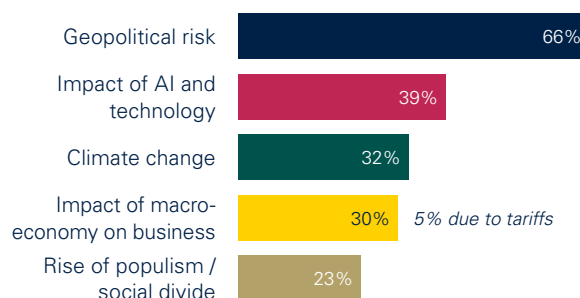
Financial and professional services



ICT and media entertainment



NGO, IGO, and foundations



Q40. What are the biggest risks for global businesses over the next two years? (n=294)

3.2 The opportunities

When it comes to the greatest opportunities for business over the next two years, Corporate Affairs practitioners point to leveraging innovation and AI, stakeholder engagement and trust building, and advancing sustainable growth strategies. Contributing to economic growth and upliftment (defined here as creating inclusive growth and improving livelihoods) was fourth. Innovation, digitalisation, and AI saw a 7-point increase in total mentions, widening the gap with all other areas.

This strong focus on innovation and AI mirrors the sharp rise in perceived technology risk, suggesting that practitioners see the same forces that create disruption also creating opportunity. In this sense, opportunity and risk are two sides of the same technological shift.

Upskilling and attracting talent also grew by 7 points, placing it among the top ten opportunities for 2026. This emphasis reflects growing recognition that realising the benefits of innovation, AI, and

digitalisation depends as much on human capability as on technology itself. Practitioners consistently link opportunity to the availability of skills, leadership capacity, and organisational readiness, rather than to technology adoption alone. (See Figure 3.)

Optimism is reflected, perhaps counterintuitively, by continued opportunities seen in the case of a stable global economy and politics (13%) and also in collaboration (11%). Even amid widespread uncertainty, Corporate Affairs leaders continue to value stability and cooperation as enablers of long-term growth. Rather than signalling confidence in a return to global equilibrium, this optimism appears to reflect a desire to identify pockets of predictability and partnership within an otherwise volatile environment.

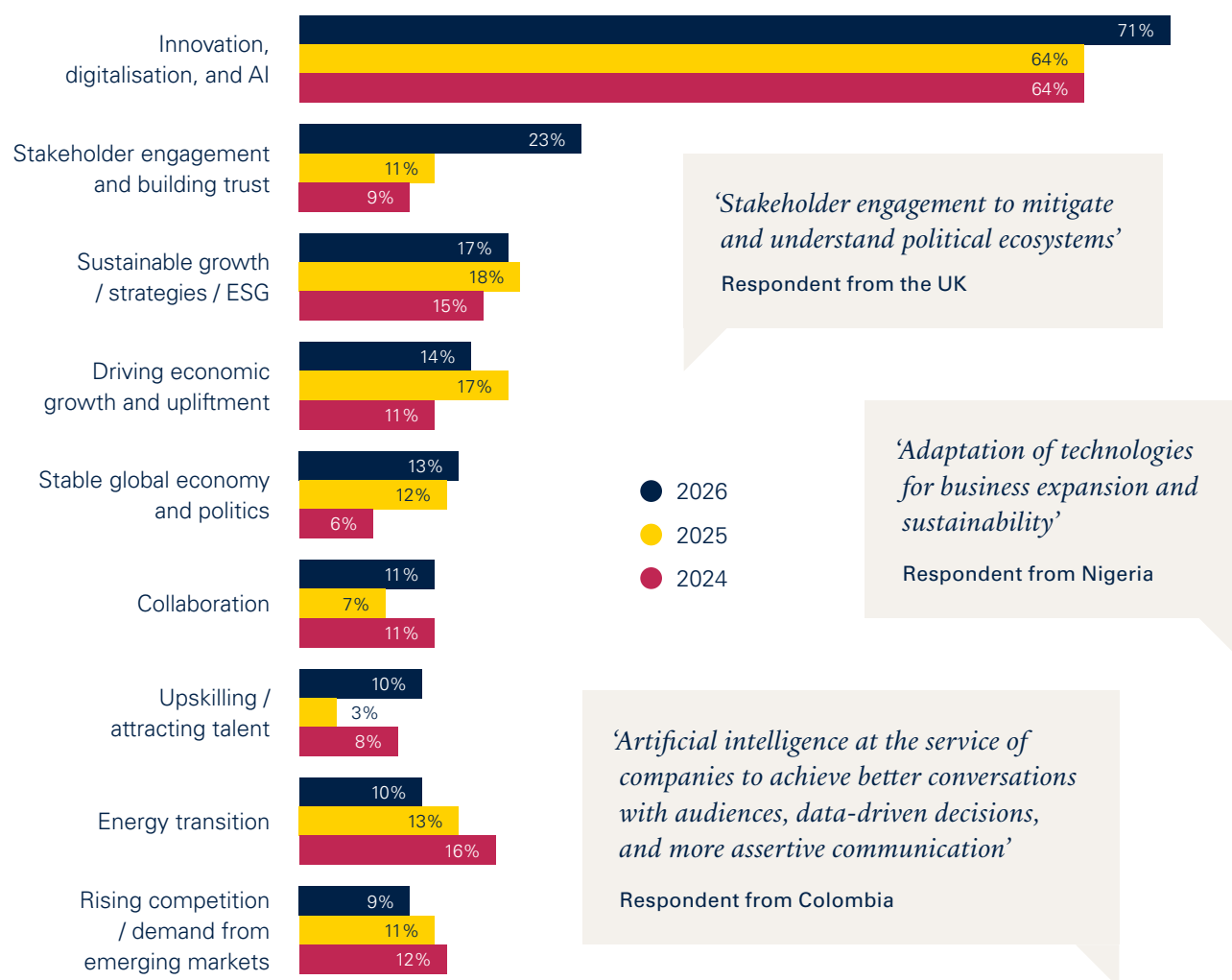
Regionally, innovation, digitalisation, and AI are the top opportunities across the board, with sustainable and growth strategies second everywhere apart from Europe, where stakeholder engagement and building trust features, and in North America, where a stable economy and politics ranks second. Collaboration is seen as an opportunity, particularly in Africa (19%), Asia-Pacific (16%) and North America (11%). Upskilling and talent attraction is especially important in Europe and South America.

These regional differences underline how opportunity is shaped by local context: in some markets by the need to build trust and legitimacy, in others by the availability of skills, partnerships, or economic stability. Together, they reinforce that

Figure 3

Short-term opportunities for global business as identified by Corporate Affairs professionals

Open-ended, total mentions, 2024–2026



there is no single global opportunity agenda, but rather a set of regionally nuanced pathways to growth. (See Figure 4.)

Similarly, innovation, digitalisation, and AI is the top opportunity for all sectors. Although seen as somewhat lower than this top category, stakeholder engagement and building trust is seen as an opportunity especially in consumer products (31%), financial and professional services (21%) and ICT and media entertainment (26%). Driving economic growth and upliftment is especially important in

financial and professional services (18%), as is upskilling and talent attraction to the NGO, IGO, and foundations sector (18%).

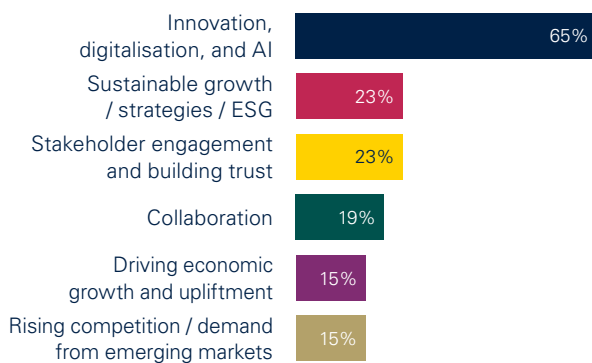
The results highlight a consistent theme: opportunity is increasingly tied not just to what organisations do, but to how they engage with employees, regulators, communities, and other stakeholders. For Corporate Affairs, this positions the function not simply as a supporter of growth, but as an active contributor to enabling innovation, trust, and long-term value creation.

Figure 4

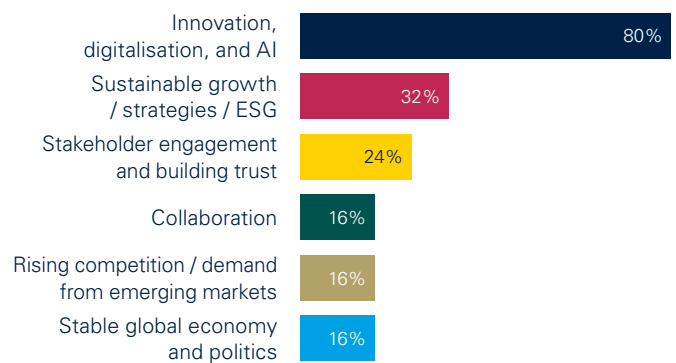
Short-term opportunities for Corporate Affairs vary across regions

Open-ended, total mentions, by region, 2026

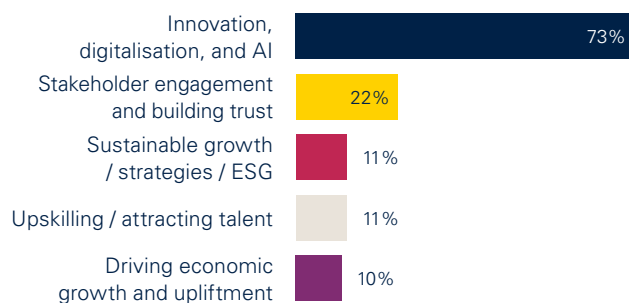
Africa



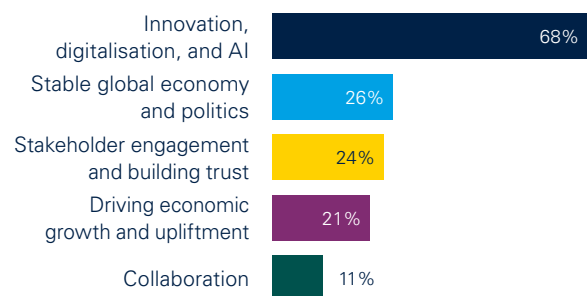
Asia-Pacific



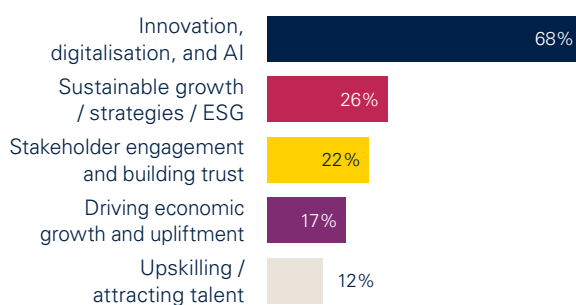
Europe



North America



South America



4. The rise of governance as reputational risk

4.1 ESG is still an important lens

Quantifying the effects that an increasingly politicised global economy is having on business is not always obvious beyond the media headlines of supply chain disruptions and cost-of-living pressures. But Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) can act as a proxy to track the way in which businesses operate and develop strategies and behaviours. In this sense, ESG provides a useful lens for understanding how external political, economic, and societal pressures translate into internal decision-making, risk exposure, and organisational priorities.

In response this year, climate change continues to top the list of ESG issues for businesses at 40 percent, but at a much-reduced level from last time. Rising to second place at 34 percent is governance, which captures ethics, accountability, and board oversight. Regulation and policy uncertainty has continued to rise in importance, moving up from fourth place in 2025 at 14 percent to third in 2026 at 16 percent.

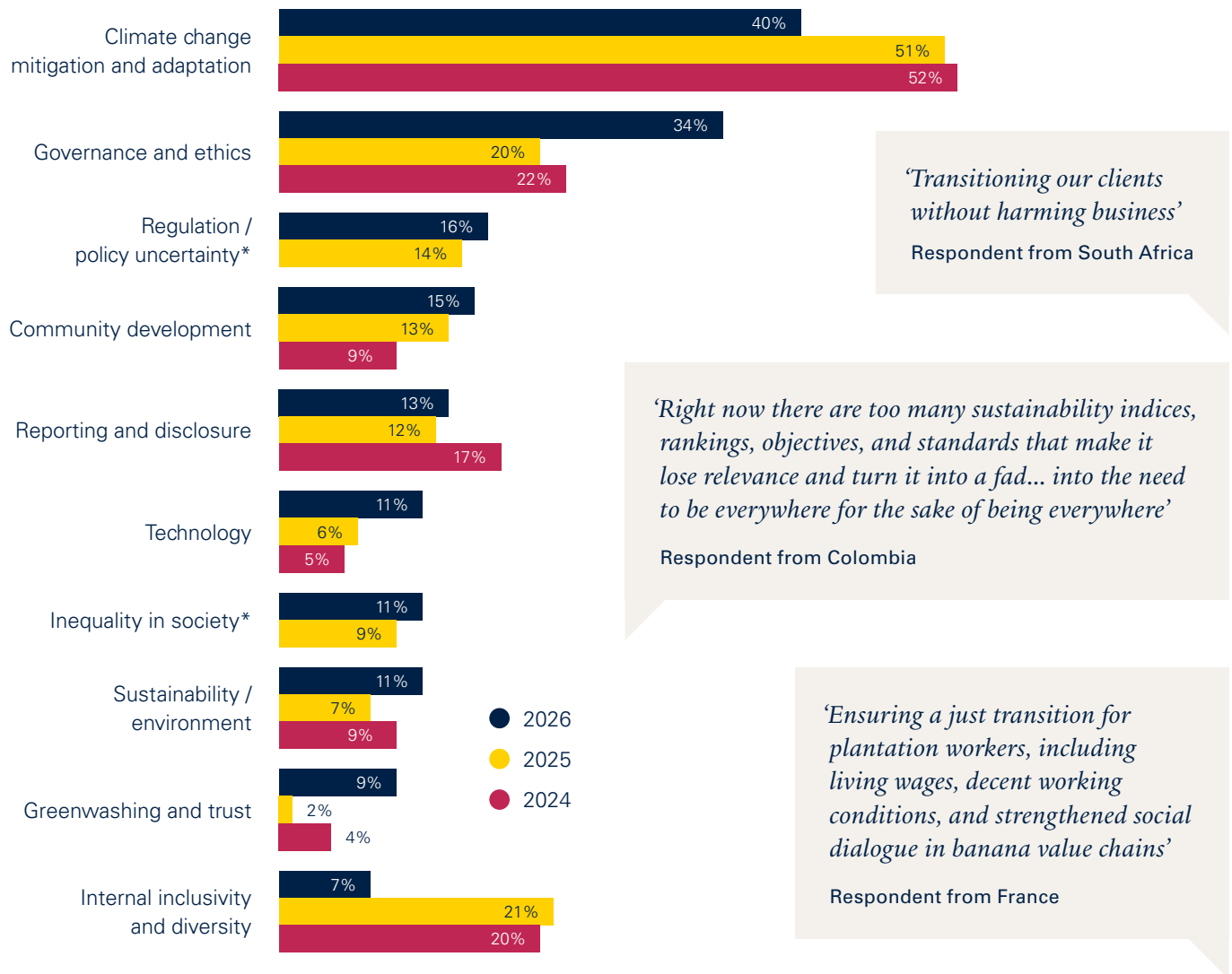
Taken together, these shifts suggest a recalibration rather than a rejection of ESG concerns. Climate remains important, but governance-related issues, particularly those linked to compliance, oversight, and regulatory exposure, are becoming more pressing as organisations operate in more contested and fast-moving political and economic environments.

One glaring omission in the top ten issues this year is any mention of inclusivity and diversity (7%), which was the second most important issue (21%) cited by Corporate Affairs practitioners in 2025 and one that had been present in the upper reaches of the ranking for some time. This sharp decline reflects the way DEI has become a focal point for political and cultural pushback in several markets and is no longer seen as an overt priority for business. Rather than signalling that social issues have lost relevance, this change appears

to reflect a more cautious corporate response to politicisation and backlash, with organisations focusing on areas of governance and compliance where expectations are clearer and the risks of inaction more immediate. (See Figure 5.)

Tightening the focus further on ESG, practitioners were asked to rank environment, social, and governance elements from highest to lowest in terms of reputational risk to their business. Of these, governance has become the greatest reputation risk at 45 percent globally, rising from last place in 2024; far outstripping environmental risk at 27 percent and social risk at 26 percent.



Figure 5**Top ESG issues for your organisation***Open-ended, total mentions, 2024–2026*

*Not assessed in 2024

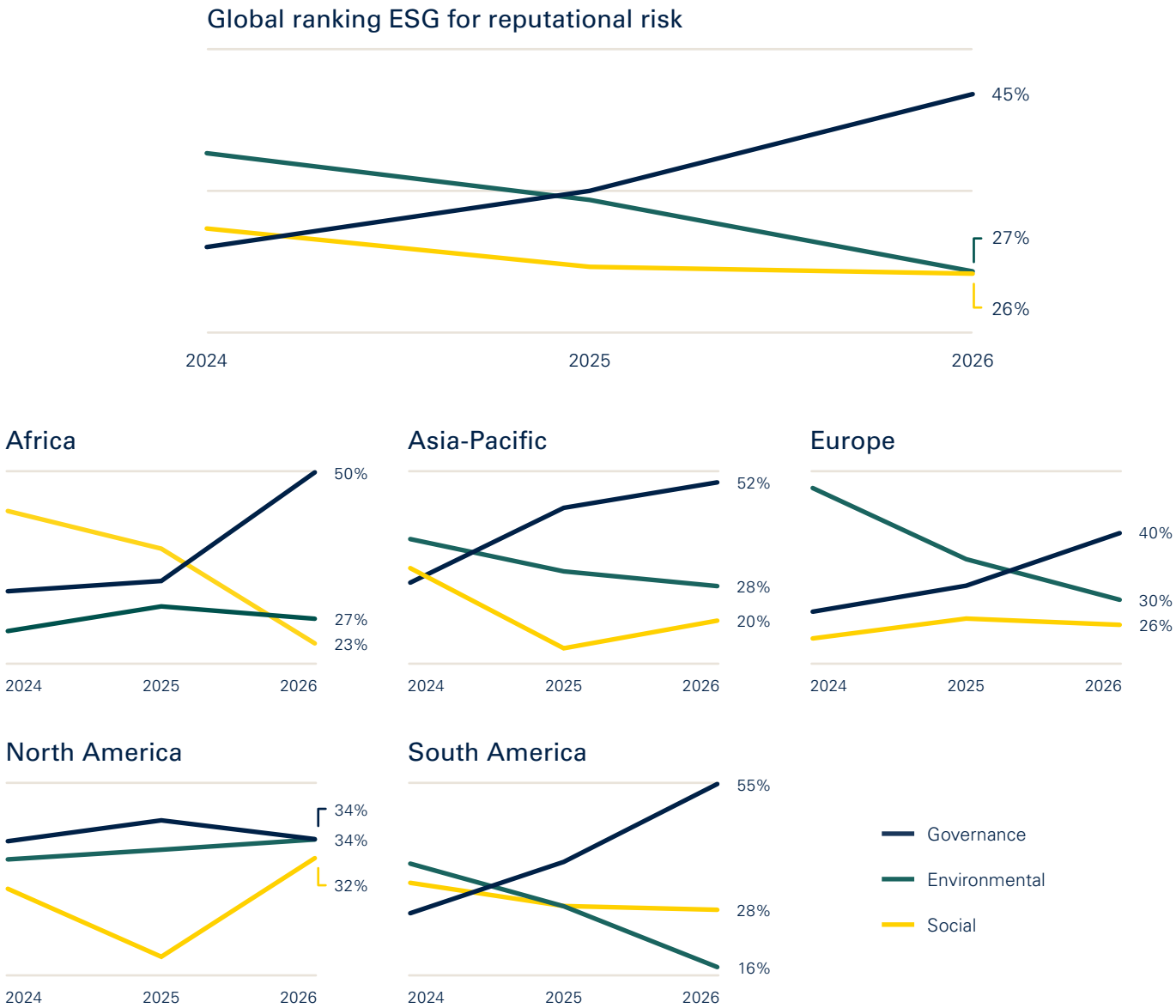
Q1.3 There is ongoing discussion on ESG (environment, social, and governance) issues for business. What are the top ESG issues for your organisation? Please list up to three ESG issues. (2024 $n=227$; 2025 $n=245$; 2026 $n=294$)

This represents a significant shift in how reputational exposure is understood. Governance is increasingly seen as the primary source of reputational vulnerability, encompassing not only ethics and accountability, but also transparency, disclosure, regulatory compliance and the organisation’s ability to demonstrate effective oversight in volatile conditions.

Environmental risks to reputation, including climate change mitigation and adaptation and water issues, have been falling steadily since

2024. These changes are driven largely by shifts in South America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific. (See Figure 6.) This decline does not necessarily suggest that environmental performance is no longer important, but rather that it is being perceived as a more established, and in some cases, a more closely managed area of risk relative to governance-related challenges.

Figure 6
Perceptions of environmental, social, and governance in terms of reputational risks
Highest reputational risk, given top ranking, by region, 2024–2026

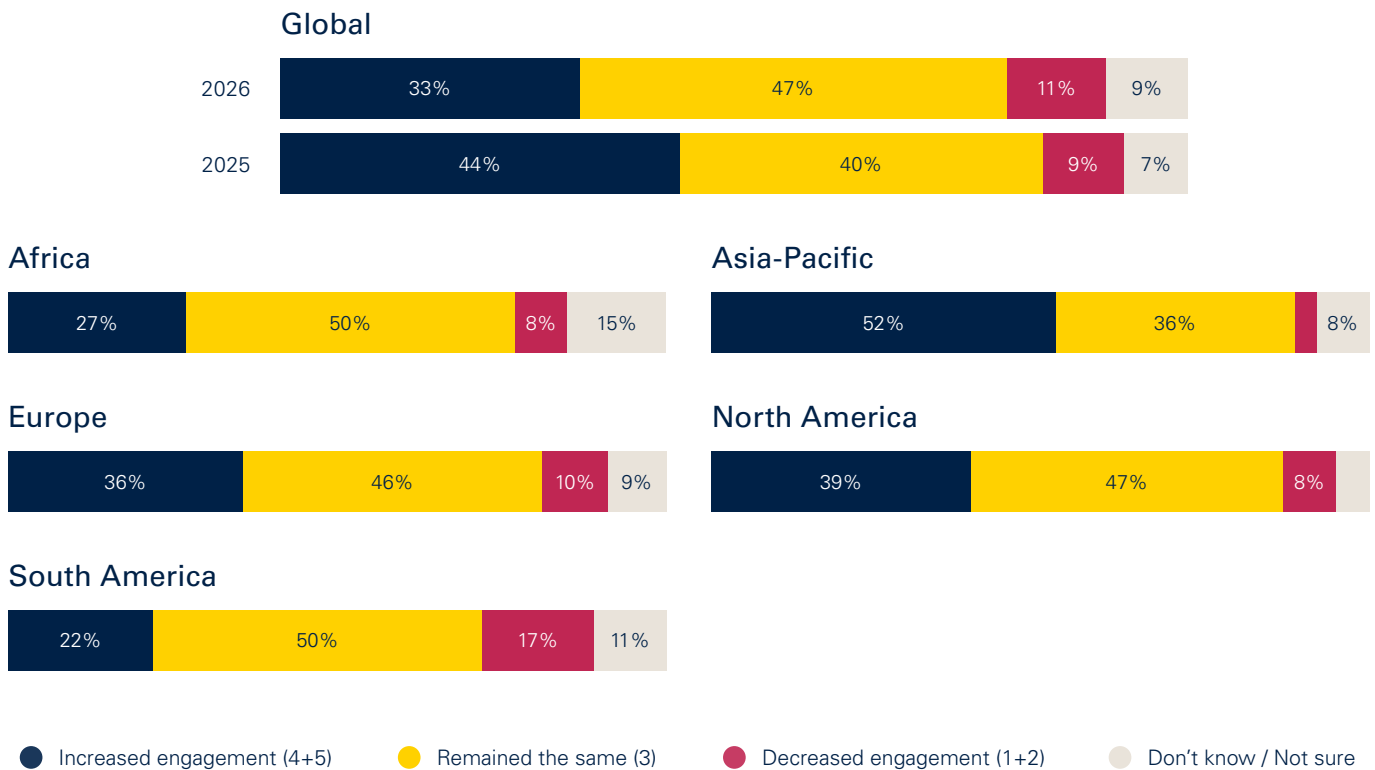


Q1.4. Please rank Environment, Social, and Governance from highest to lowest in terms of reputational risk to your business. (2024 *n*=227; 2025 *n*=233; 2026 *n*=294)

4.2 Advocacy remains important

With the reporting, disclosure, and oversight components of governance driving reputation risk, it is perhaps less counterintuitive than it may first appear that businesses continue to engage in political advocacy, seeking to remain aligned with or even influence the policy agendas impacting them most. Although down from last year, 33 percent of practitioners say that their organisation has increased their level of engagement in political advocacy in the past year.

The trend of increasing political advocacy is seen most clearly in Asia-Pacific (52%), North America (39%), and Europe (36%). (See Figure 7.) This sustained level of engagement reflects the growing importance of governance, regulation, and policy certainty as core business issues rather than peripheral concerns.

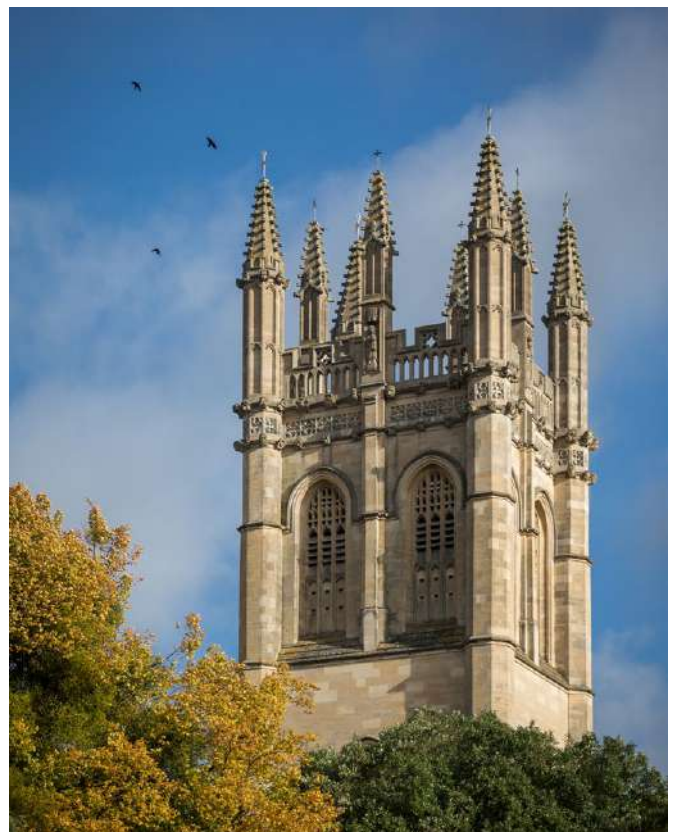
Figure 7**Change in level of engagement in political advocacy***5-point scale, by region, 2025–2026*

Q2.10 Has your organisation's level of engagement in political advocacy changed in the past 12 months? (2026 n=294)

Analysing the perceptions of companies that reported increased levels of political advocacy alongside those whose activity has demonstrably lessened, many of the underlying drivers turn out to be the same. The difference lies not in the external pressures themselves, but in how organisations assess the risk and choose to respond.

Similar geopolitical, regulatory, and societal forces can prompt either more proactive advocacy or greater caution, depending on leadership appetite, strategy, and capability. For some, advocacy is viewed as a necessary tool to shape outcomes and manage uncertainty; for others, restraint reflects concerns about exposure, politicisation, or reputational backlash.

In both cases, Corporate Affairs plays a central enabling role: supporting leadership judgement, assessing external risk, shaping engagement strategies, and ensuring that advocacy activity is coherent, credible, and aligned with corporate values and governance frameworks.



4.3 Purpose under pressure, but expectations remain

Despite the spotlight having drifted away from the heights of stated corporate purpose ambitions in 2023, perhaps understandably given new political and economic realities, the vast majority of businesses continue to report having a formal purpose statement to guide their corporate principles, with 82 percent of respondents responding affirmatively. (See Figure 8.)

However, this apparent commitment is not matched by the same level of internal momentum. Only 32 percent indicated increased discussions with their executive committee about corporate purpose in the past year, down from 45 percent in 2025. This suggests a cooling of senior-level focus, even as purpose remains formally embedded within organisations.

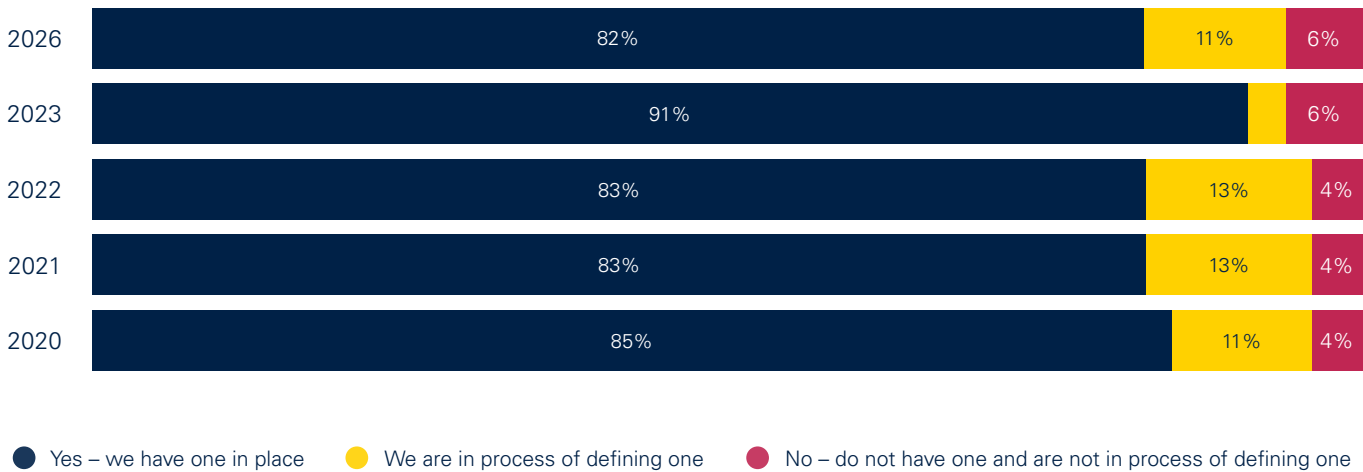
This cooling is especially evident in North America (29%) and Europe (24%). Businesses in Africa and South America, however, are more engaged, with 42 percent reporting increased discussion of the topic in the C-suite. These regional differences point to how political,

economic, and societal contexts shape the space that organisations feel they have to engage openly with purpose-led agendas. In some markets, heightened politicisation appears to be dampening internal discussion, while in others, purpose remains closely linked to development, legitimacy, and long-term growth.

When asked about the biggest challenges in delivering purpose and corporate commitments to society, respondents most frequently cite the political context, a lack of an integrated plan to embed purpose, and organisational complexity as the primary hurdles. The challenges of the political backdrop were most keenly felt in North America, South America, and Europe.

Beyond politics, practitioners also point to more practical constraints. Other cited challenges include a lack of clear measurement and a weak or inconsistent connection between purpose statements and day-to-day business activities. Together, this insight suggests that the issue is less about defining purpose, and more about operationalising it in a way that is credible, measurable, and aligned with business decision-making.

Figure 8
Stated corporate purpose
All respondents, 2020–2026



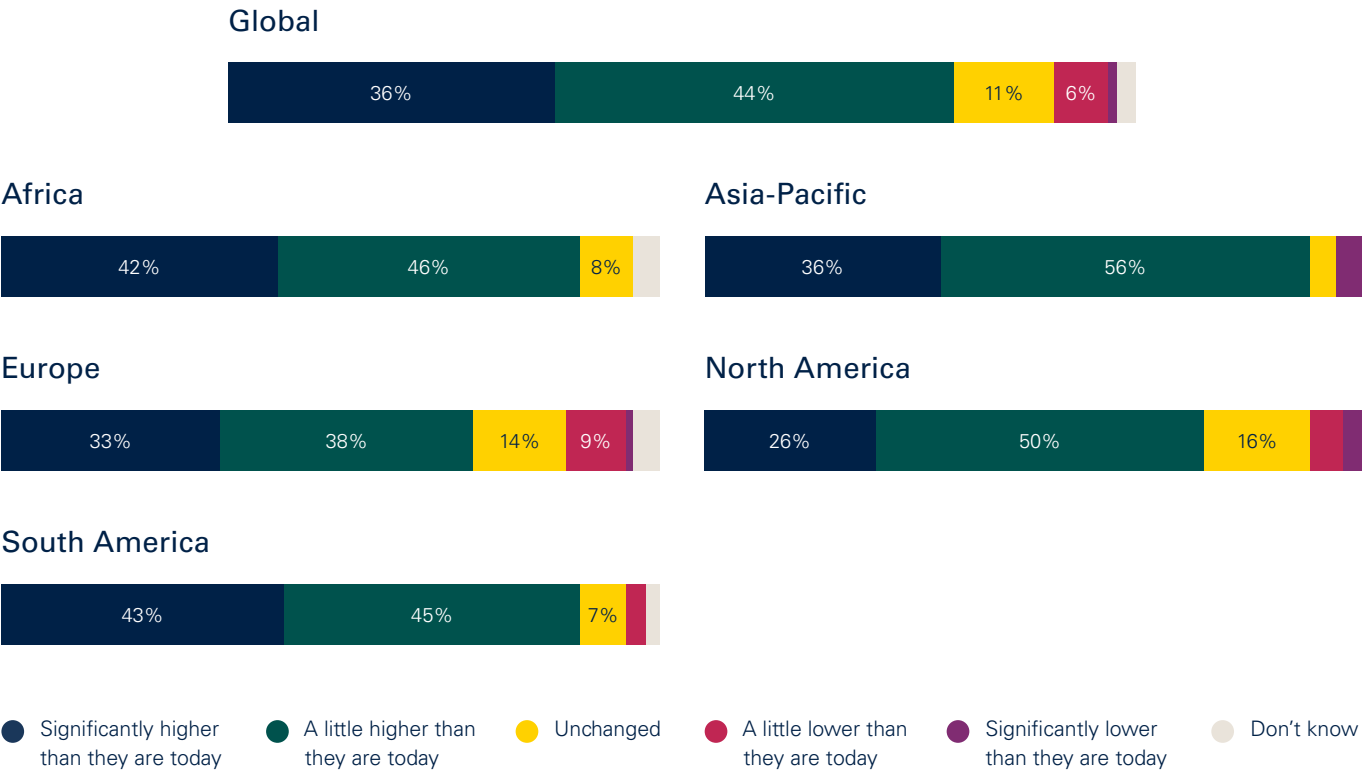
Q7.1 Does your company have a stated corporate purpose in place or are you in the process of defining one? Or do you not have one at present? (2020 n=202, 2021 n=228, 2022 n=221, 2023 n=108, 2026 n=294)

When asked how societal expectations for purposeful organisational leadership might be seen in three years’ time, the picture becomes more optimistic. More than a third (36%) believe expectations will be significantly higher, indicating that external pressure on business to demonstrate purpose is expected to intensify rather than fade.

This view is particularly prevalent in South America (43%) and Africa (42%) (see Figure 9.), and is also evident across several sectors, including food, agriculture, and beverages (44%), NGOs, research, inter-governmental organisations, and foundations (43%) and financial and professional services (41%).

This contrast of declining internal discussion alongside rising external expectations for purposeful leadership highlights a growing tension for organisations. While purpose may be harder to champion openly in the current environment, stakeholders are not lowering their expectations. For Corporate Affairs, this reinforces the importance of helping organisations navigate purpose in ways that are grounded, credible, and resilient to political and reputational risk.

Figure 9
Anticipated evolution of societal expectations for purposeful leadership
5-point scale, by region, expectation in three years, 2026



Q7.5 In three years from now, how do you think societal expectations for purposeful organisational leadership will change? (2026 n=294)

5. Corporate affairs functional status quo is no longer tenable

The survey tracks the evolution of the Corporate Affairs function in terms of how the function is perceived to protect and add value to the business. A new line of inquiry this year is focused on whether the function is fit for purpose, and if not, what is required to continue the impactful delivery on its mandate.

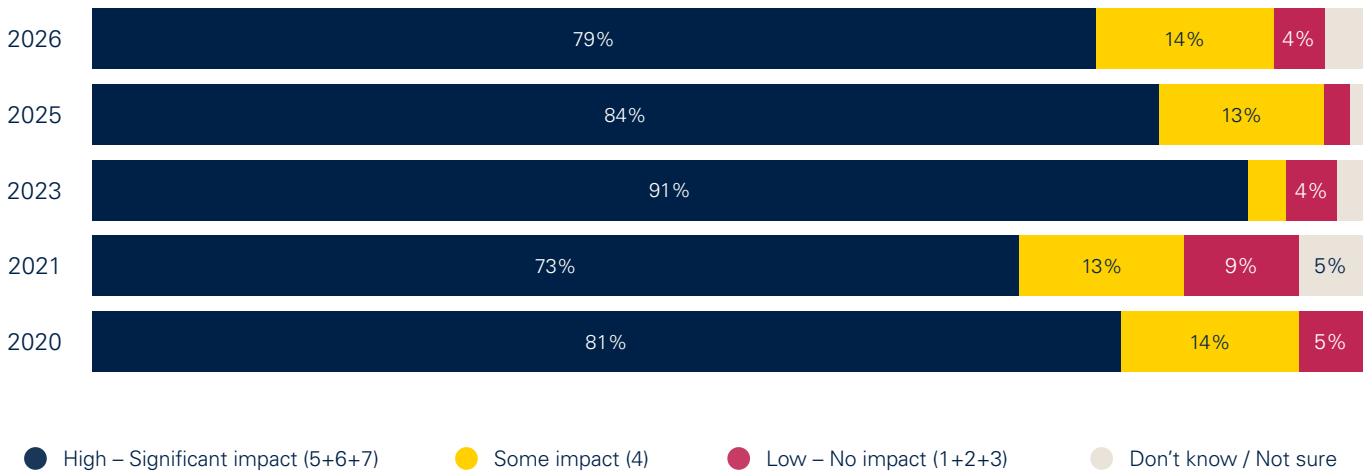
5.1 Is the function still providing value?

The risks and challenges facing Corporate Affairs teams are vast as outlined in previous sections. How is the Corporate Affairs function measuring up against this backdrop of evolving challenges, all of which are developing at speed? Almost 80 percent of Corporate Affairs practitioners reported that the function remains impactful in terms of the creation and protection of business value. The trend, however, has softened over the last two years. (See Figure 10.)

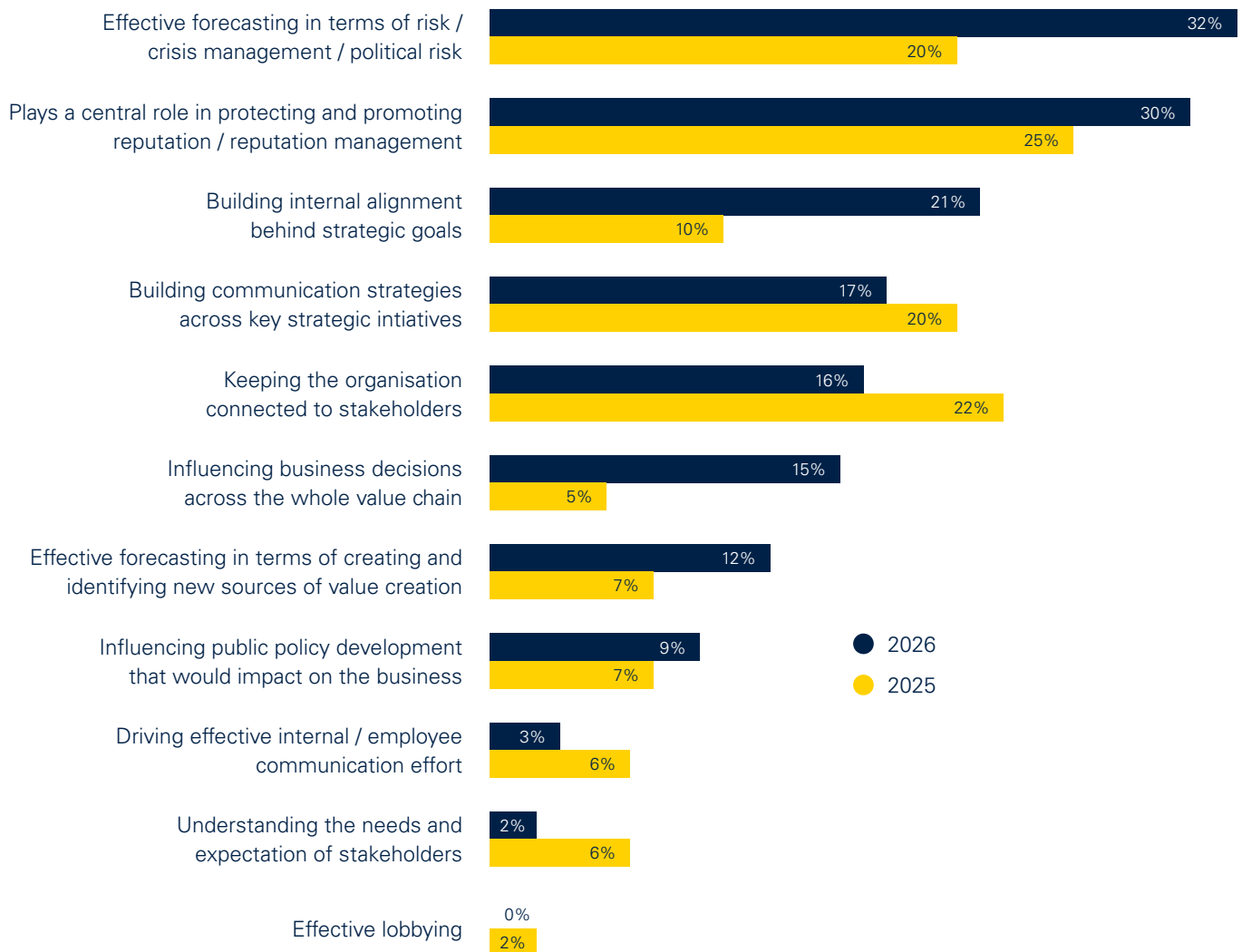
The softening of the perceived impact of Corporate Affairs on business value, in all probability, is a reaction to the drastically changing geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges and the ability of the function to adapt to these changes. We touch upon this aspect in more detail in a section to follow.

The top three areas in which the Corporate Affairs function is perceived to be effectively creating business value are its ability to deliver effective forecasting in times of crisis and political risk (32%), followed by the central role it plays in protecting and promoting the reputation of the company (30%), and building alignment behind internal strategic goals (21%). The latter is an area that has developed significantly over the past year. Compared to 2025, less emphasis is placed on keeping the organisation connected to stakeholders at 16 percent down from 22 percent, and in building communications strategies across key strategic initiatives at 17 percent down from 20 percent. (See Figure 11.)

Figure 10
Impact of Corporate Affairs function on creating and protecting business value
7-point scale, 2020–2026



Q12.2 And thinking about your organisation, how would you rate the impact that Corporate Affairs has on creating and protecting business value? (2026 n=294)

Figure 11**How the Corporate Affairs function effectively creates business value***Open-ended, total mentions, 2025–2026*

Q10.4 You feel that Corporate Affairs has some or significant impact on creating and protecting business value. What do you believe Corporate Affairs is getting right in creating and protecting business value? (2025 n=245; 2026 n=294)

‘Strategic orientation of the organisation; eyes on horizon risks - enabling long-term thinking; keeping overall corporate perspective in the face of challenging political and economic dynamics and enabling organisational adaptation in the face of shifting political and economic dynamics.’

Respondent from Canada

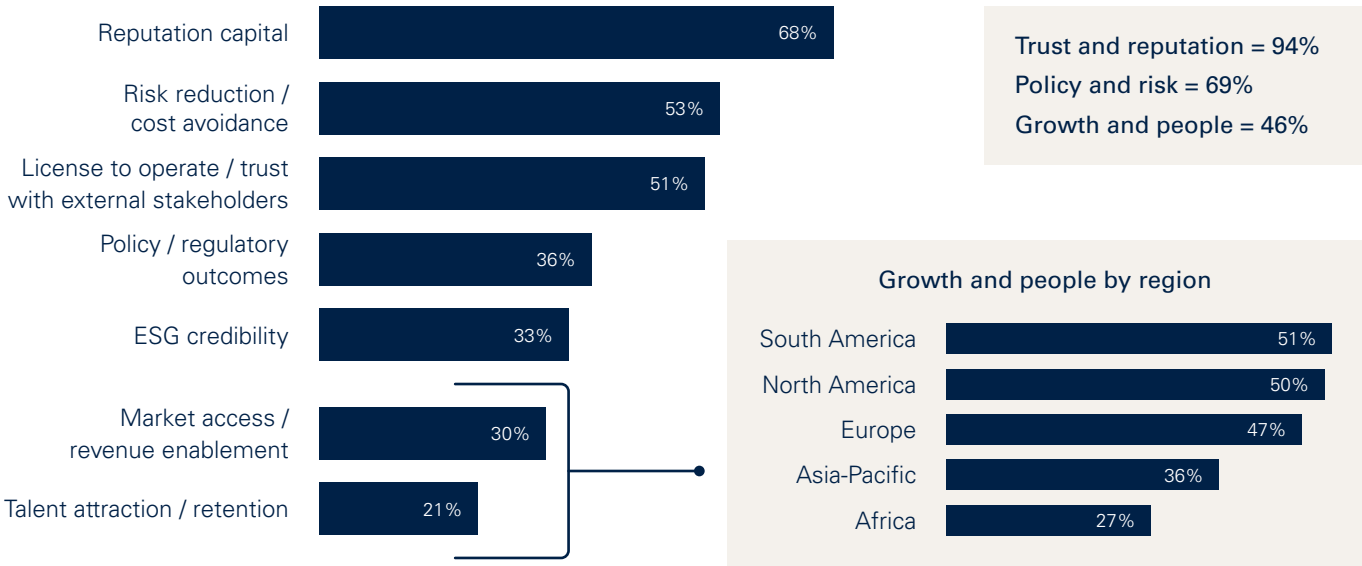
‘It has evolved from a reactive function to an integrated strategic capability, able to anticipate regulatory, social, and reputational risks before they impact the business. It is particularly improving on three fronts: actively listening to the environment (stakeholders and geopolitics), proactive reputation management based on facts rather than just narratives, and alignment with business strategy, with increasing participation in decision-making...’

Respondent from Spain

When assessing the areas to which the function feels it has most contributed, protecting trust and reputation is a universal top mention (94%), followed by risk reduction and positively influencing policy and regulatory outcomes (69%) and assisting market access, revenue

enablement, and talent attraction (46%. Accessing markets and people is particularly strongly referenced in South America at 51 percent, North America at 50 percent, and Europe at 47 percent. (See Figure 12.)

Figure 12
Areas Corporate Affairs contributes to the most
Total and by region, 2026



Q61. Thinking about the past 12 months, what are the three areas that your Corporate Affairs function has contributed most to? (2026 n=294)



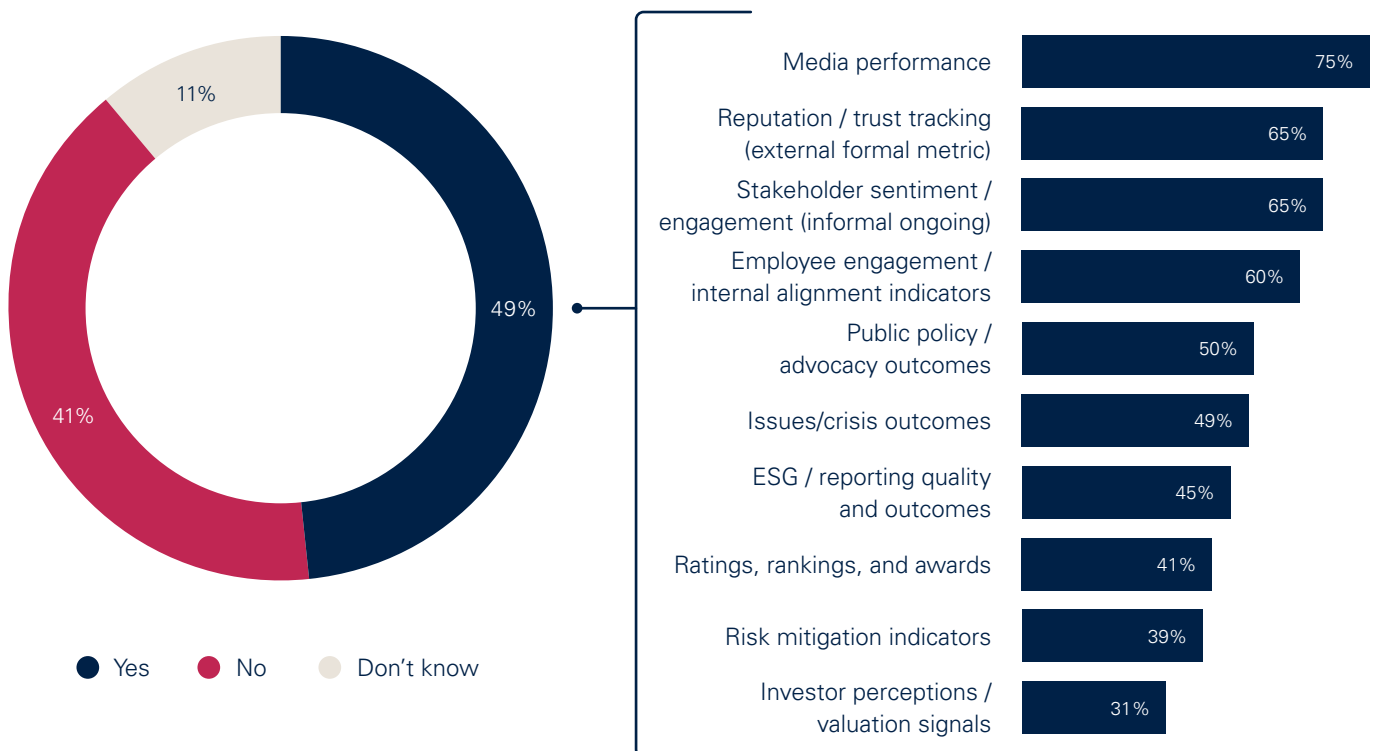
In the business value versus resource allocation analysis, managing external relations remains the primary Corporate Affairs focus, with perceived value creation broadly aligning with current resource allocation.

Just under 49 percent of Corporate Affairs practitioners indicate that they formally measure their functions' impact. Where metrics are used, they rely heavily on media performance (75%), formal external reputation and trust tracking (65%), and informal ongoing stakeholder sentiment and engagement (65%). Investor perceptions and valuation signals only garnered 31 percent of mentions. (See Figure 13.)

One area of self-professed weakness is the preparedness for AI-driven misinformation. Only 18 percent felt fully prepared. Significant gaps are seen across all regions, notably in South America, and across all sectors, particularly consumer products/retail. ICT and media entertainment reported the highest preparedness at 35 percent. (See Figure 14.)

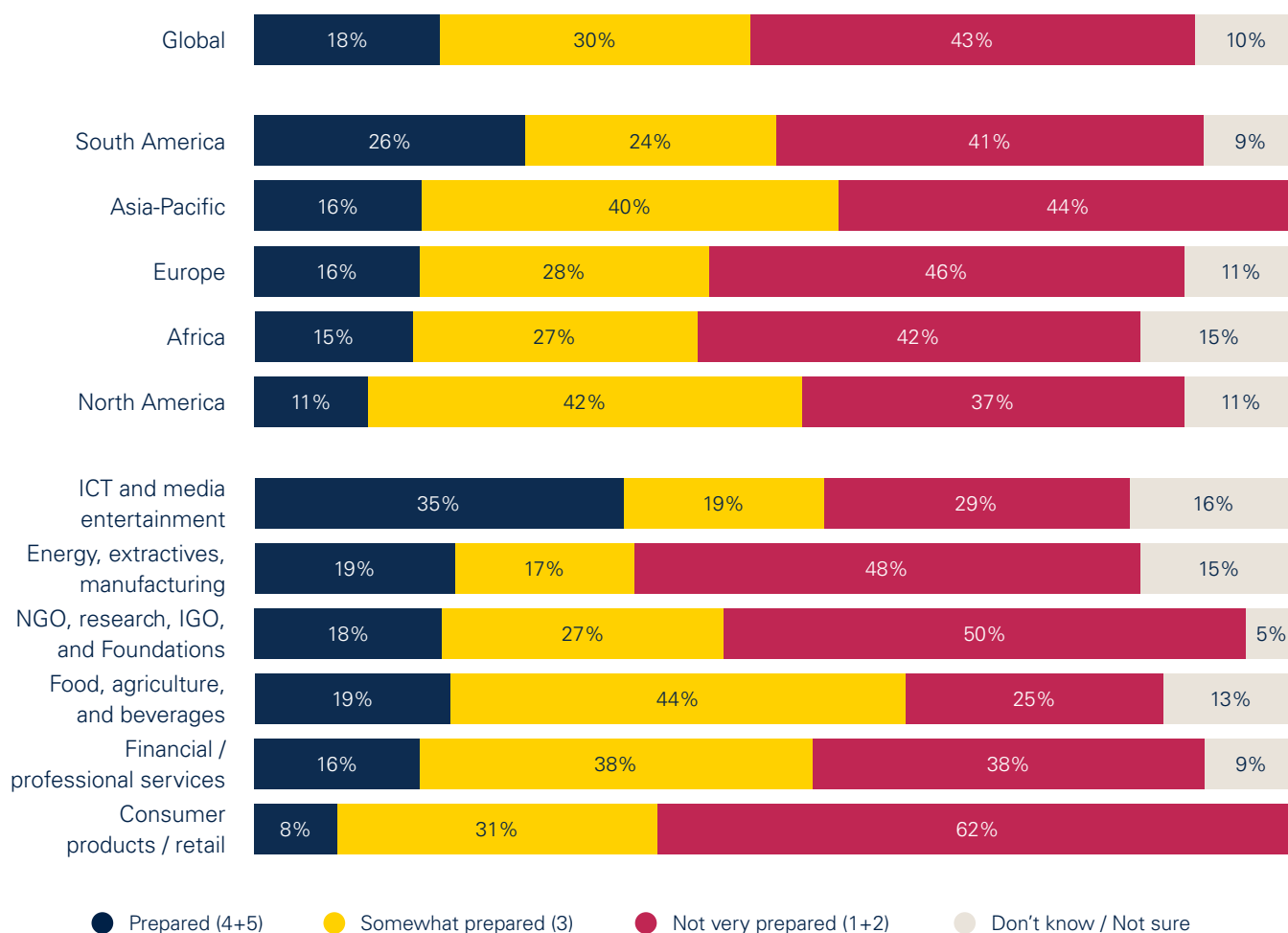


Figure 13
Measuring success and metrics used
2026



Q57. Do you formally measure the impact or success of Corporate Affairs? (2026 n=294)

Q58. Which of the following metrics do you use to assess Corporate Affairs impact or success? (2026 n=143)

Figure 14**Your Corporate Affairs function's preparedness to manage AI-driven misinformation***Preparedness to manage AI-driven misinformation, by region and sector, 2026*

Q54. Deepfakes and AI-generated misinformation are increasingly seen as a risk for organisations. How prepared do you believe your Corporate Affairs function is to manage a deepfake or AI-driven misinformation incident? (2026 $n=294$)

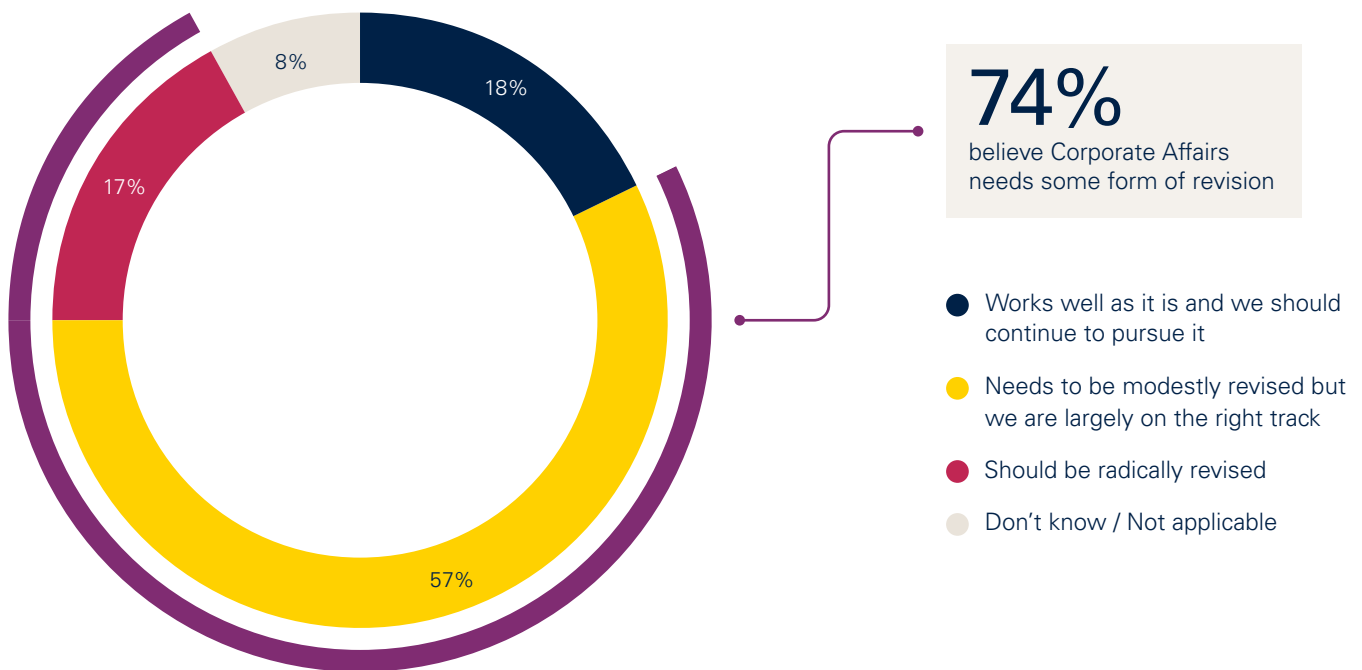
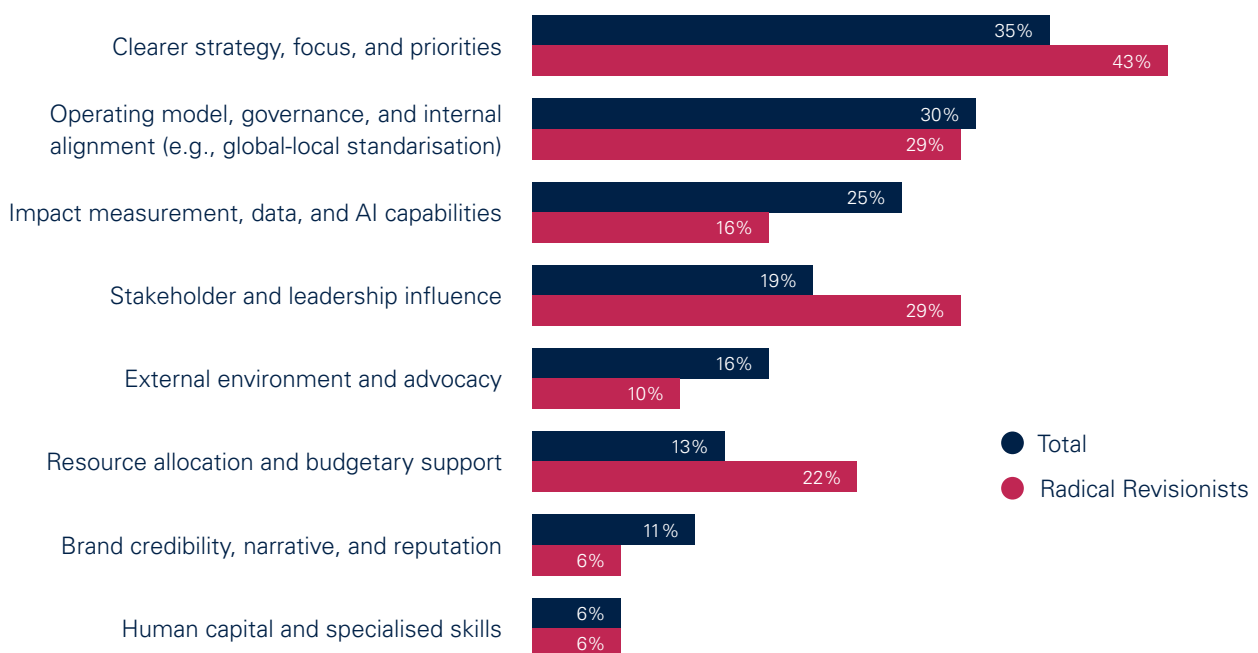
5.2 Urgency to reshape the Corporate Affairs function

From the 2026 findings, it is clear that there is a perceived urgency to redesign and revise the Corporate Affairs function. The key driving forces behind this urgency are a need to adapt to better respond to the current geopolitical volatility (33%) and to better manage and/or leverage AI/communications technology (23%).

There is a strong feeling that real energy needs to be spent on evolving the way Corporate Affairs thinks, organises, and behaves. There is a sizable dissatisfaction with the *status quo*. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents believe Corporate Affairs needs some form of revision,

which is powerful enough, but considering that 17 percent believe that it needs a radical overhaul, it is clear that change is imminent. The greatest advocates of a modest approach are in Asia-Pacific, North America, and Africa, with those looking to more radical action based in Europe and South America. (Figure 15.)

For those calling for some kind of revision, the most important areas of adaptation relate to clearer strategy, including more focus and clearer priorities (35%), adaption to the operating model to ensure greater internal alignment and governance (30%), improved impact measurement, including better data and AI capabilities (25%), and greater influence on stakeholders and leadership (19%). (Figure 16.)

Figure 15**Current state of the Corporate Affairs practice***Current state of the Corporate Affairs practice, 2026*Q62. How do you feel about the current state of your own Corporate Affairs practice? (2026 $n=294$)**Figure 16****Aspects that need revision in Corporate Affairs***Open-ended, total mentions, 2026*Q65. What aspects of your approach to Corporate Affairs need revision? (2026 $n=218$)

‘Several aspects of our Corporate Affairs approach would benefit from refinement. [...] First, deeper integration with enterprise risk and strategy processes, embedding Corporate Affairs more systematically into planning, capital allocation, and long-term scenario analysis. [...] Second, more structured impact measurement, strengthening the link between activities and quantifiable business outcomes, particularly in risk reduction and value protection. [...] Third, enhanced forward-looking capability through stronger horizon scanning and foresight on ESG regulation, trade dynamics, and stakeholder expectations. [...] Finally, clearer internal articulation of Corporate Affairs’ strategic value, reinforcing its role as a strategic navigation function rather than a support function.’

Respondent from Spain

‘We need to be more deliberate about prioritisation and resourcing—focusing on the few issues and stakeholder relationships where we can have the highest leverage. We also need stronger systematisation of our intelligence and engagement (clearer processes, repeatable workflows, and better measurement of outcomes), and tighter integration between communications, policy engagement and member value delivery so that our narrative, advocacy and programs reinforce each other consistently.’

Respondent from Australia

5.3 Corporate Affairs function into the future

Core to the future efficacy of the Corporate Affairs function are three foundational components: more proactive, insights-led strategic planning and direction, the adoption

and integration of AI and technology as an enabling tool, and ensuring that Corporate Affairs acquires the required talent to manage new, fast-evolving challenges. (See Figure 17.)

Figure 17
Making Corporate Affairs future-fit
Open-ended, total mentions, 2026



Q3.1 What is the single most impactful thing that you could do to ensure that your function is future fit? (2026 n=294)

The continued volatile geopolitical landscape and associated geoeconomic uncertainty combined with the rising risks and opportunities posed by AI, are defining the current landscape of Corporate Affairs. From our research, it becomes clear what is expected of Corporate Affairs in terms of future-proofing itself. The following success factors have been identified:

1. Driving forward a Corporate Affairs strategy that is embedded in the business strategy

Governance was identified as the top ESG priority, and this translates into Corporate Affairs functions ensuring that the function is embedded at the heart of business strategy. As a key driver of strategy, the function must be closely aligned with the Board and CEO. Access to the Board and C-suite is critical to the successful execution of the mandate of Corporate Affairs. In a fast-changing world, it is also key that Corporate Affairs, as the main conduit and interpreter of external issues, should sit at the top table and in close proximity to the CEO and the Board.

2. An operating model that ensures internal alignment and coordinated execution of strategy

Increasing geopolitical volatility and its impact on supply chain disruptions, tariff wars, and fast-changing trade policies across regions have highlighted the need to have a Corporate Affairs structure or operating model with supporting processes to ensure that regional operations and the head office are aligned and function in a synchronised fashion. Managing diverse, regional challenges and expectations has become a focal point for Corporate Affairs practitioners. Leveraging technology and AI is essential to integrate Corporate Affairs strategies into everyday business strategies across all business units. Achieving success in this area is necessary, both from a strategy implementation point of view and a threat containment dimension.

3. Leveraging AI by up-skilling talent and onboarding new expertise and skills

With the rise of AI and the uncertainties in the geoeconomic and geopolitical domains, Corporate Affairs teams are required to solve new challenges that require new expertise and skills. In terms of AI, successful Corporate Affairs teams need the skills to both leverage AI as an enabling tool and be prepared to deal with the risk of AI threats such as misinformation. It is, however, key that these activities prioritise the character traits of ethics and human intelligence.

4. Measuring the impact of Corporate Affairs

The ability to measure the impact of Corporate Affairs in terms of delivering business value is a key success factor. This is a self-professed underdeveloped area within the function and was a top area that Corporate Affairs practitioners identified as improvement. Assessing corporate reputation and levels of stakeholder trust are critical activities; hence, successful Corporate Affairs teams will need to broaden their scope of intelligence beyond media monitoring and informal stakeholder conversations to include more structured assessments of reputation and trust.

Corporate Affairs is continuing its evolution into a central, strategically embedded capability that navigates geopolitical complexity, drives alignment across the business, and translates external risks and opportunities into actionable insight for leadership.

Its future depends on its ability to integrate advanced technologies like AI, build new skills such as expertise in international trade policy and forecasting, and demonstrate measurable impact in shaping reputation, trust, and long-term business value.

6. Respondents and methodology

This survey is conducted annually during the first quarter of the year. In 2026, the online survey was fielded between 4 February and 27 March. Invitations to participate were emailed directly to over 2,000 qualifying individuals by the Oxford-GlobeScan team. The Oxford-GlobeScan team also leverages their LinkedIn networks and industry associations to reach out to contacts in

Corporate Affairs, Corporate Communications, and all related disciplines. The survey was also promoted by Corporate Excellence in their Spanish-speaking regions and by PRCA across Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Europe.

Below is an overview of the most salient features of the sample.

Figure 18
Voices of 294 Corporate Affairs leaders

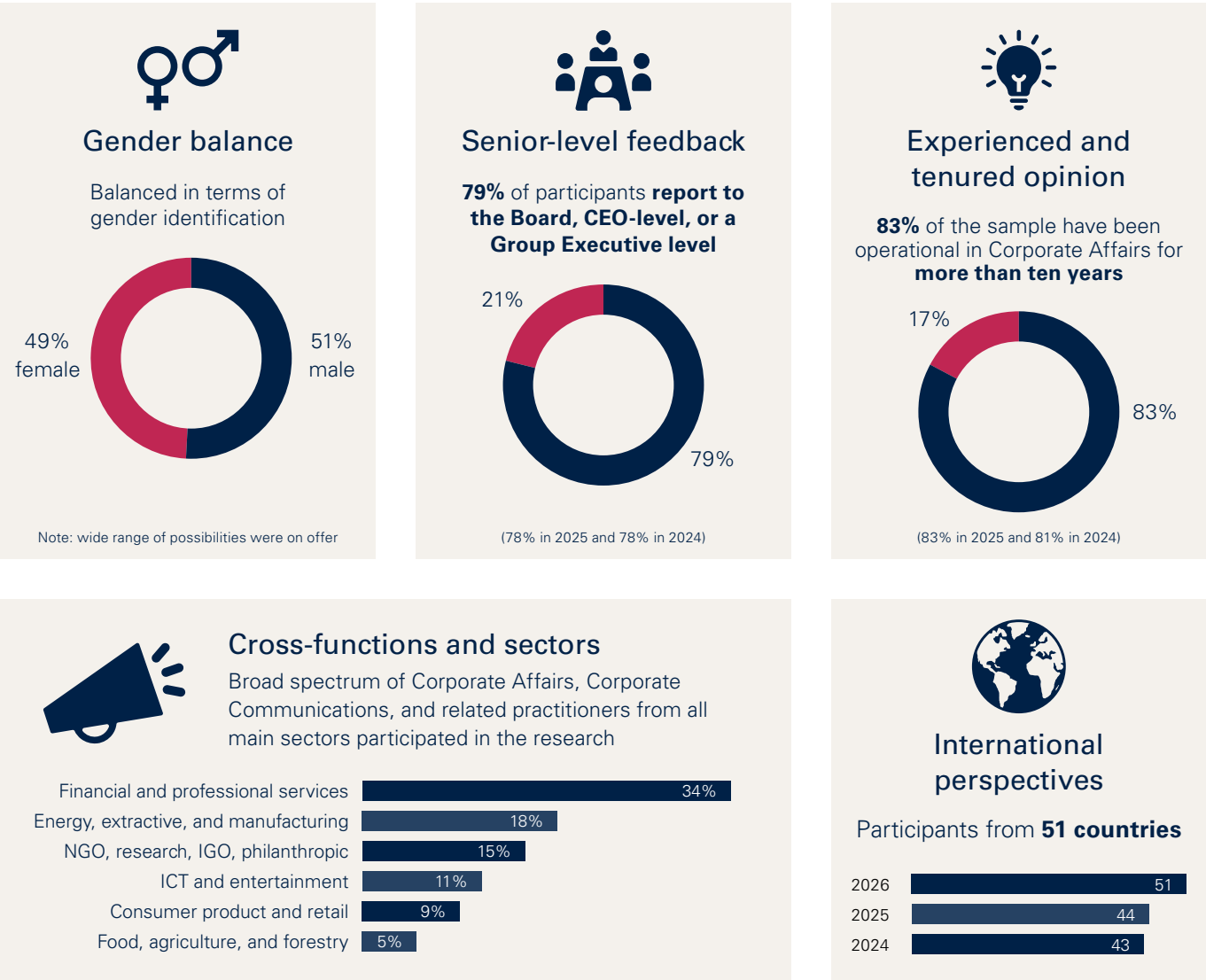
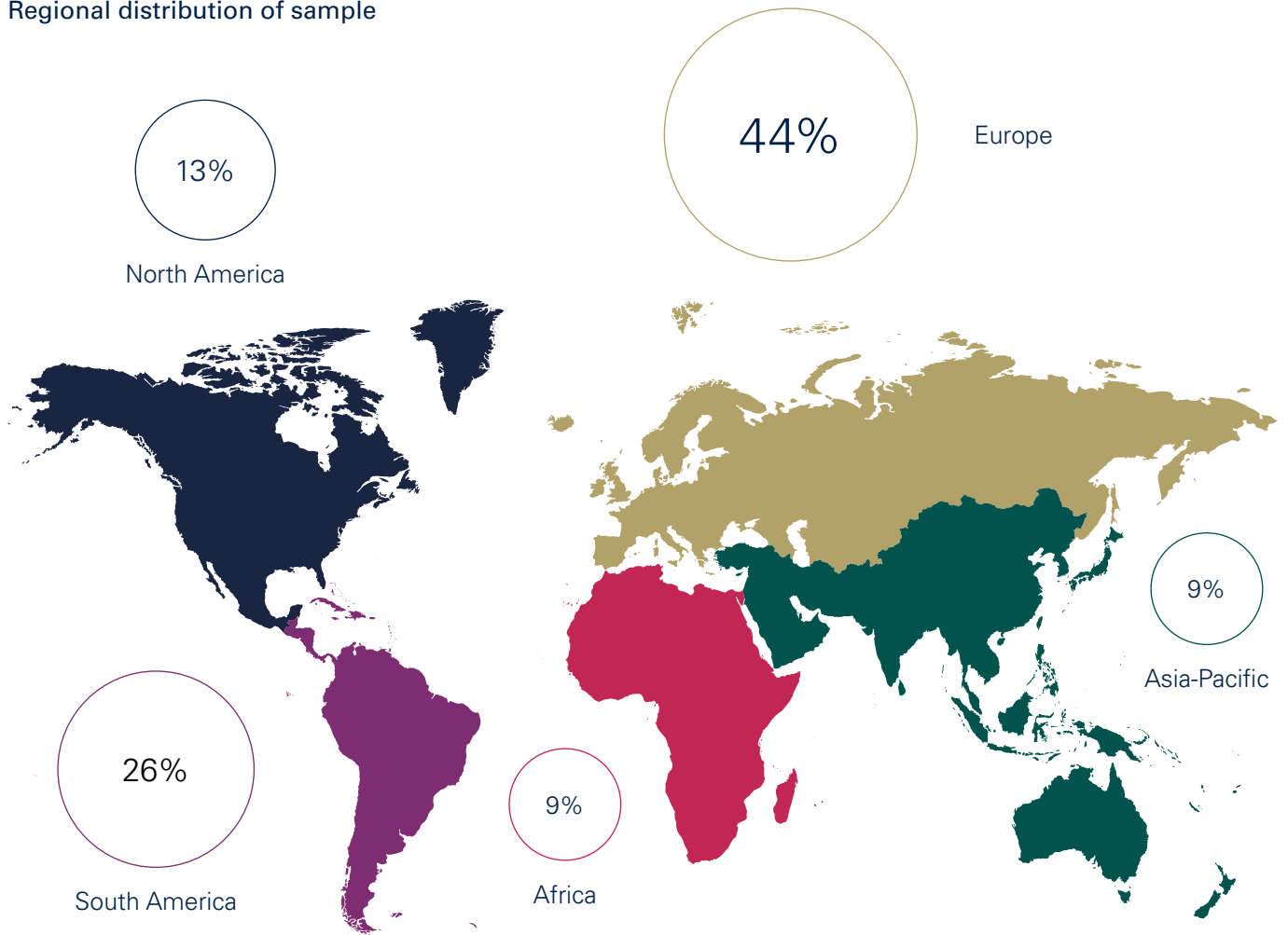


Figure 19
Regional distribution of sample



7. Research partners

The Corporate Affairs Academy, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford

Connecting reputation with strategy and business performance

Informed and strategic Corporate Affairs activity helps create significant business value and prepares organisations to best recover from downside risks and crises. Organisations operating in fast-paced, information-overload environments are counting on Corporate Affairs professionals to make the judgements that are required to build long-term success.

The Corporate Affairs Academy focuses on three core, interrelated themes:

- Reputation research, theory, and thinking
- Reputation engagement, trends, and practices
- Professional development as reputation experts; high-value purpose, practices, and resources

The Corporate Affairs Academy is delivered over several virtual sessions in the lead-up to a week of on-campus interactive presentations, seminars, and workshops. Attendees benefit from a balance of leading academic research and functional best practices.

www.sbs.oxford.edu/caa

Contributors from the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford are:

Rupert Younger,

Director, Oxford University Centre for Corporate Reputation, Academic Director, Corporate Affairs Academy

Stewart Prosser,

Programme Co-Director, Corporate Affairs Academy and Associate Fellow, Saïd Business School

GlobeScan

GlobeScan is an insights and advisory firm specialising in trust, reputation, sustainability, and engagement. We equip clients with insights to navigate shifting societal and stakeholder expectations, crafting evidence-based strategies that reduce risks and create value for their organisations and society. Established in 1987, we have offices in Cape Town, Dubai, Hong Kong, Hyderabad, London, Paris, San Francisco, São Paulo, Singapore, Tokyo, and Toronto. GlobeScan is a participant of the UN Global Compact and a Certified B Corporation.

GlobeScan offers a raft of services in support of the Corporate Affairs function. Our insights and advisory work support business to understand their stakeholders, societal expectations, how these impact on the trust and reputation building process. GlobeScan works closely with leading organisations to identify their stakeholders, design engagement strategies and support advocacy activities. Our foresight and trends team enables Corporate Affairs team to see below the horizon and act pro-actively.

For more information, visit our website:

www.globescan.com

For further information, contact Anneke Greyling, Director at **anneke.greyling@globescan.com**

GlobeScan contributors include:

Chris Coulter,

CEO, Toronto

Anneke Greyling,

Director, Africa, Cape Town

Leeam Goss-Layani,

Senior Manager, Singapore

Curran Cunningham,

Senior Manager, London



If you would like to discuss anything you have read in this paper, we would love to talk:

Cari Read

cari.read@sbs.ox.ac.uk

www.sbs.oxford.edu/caa

Anneke Greyling

anneke.greyling@globescan.com

insight@globescan.com

www.globescan.com/contact

Saïd Business School
University of Oxford
Park End Street
Oxford, OX1 1HP
United Kingdom

www.sbs.oxford.edu

GlobeScan
250 The Esplanade
Suite 116, Toronto, ON,
Canada
M5A 1J2

www.globescan.com

All information is correct at the time of going to press. Please check our website for the most up-to-date information.

© 2026 Saïd Business School