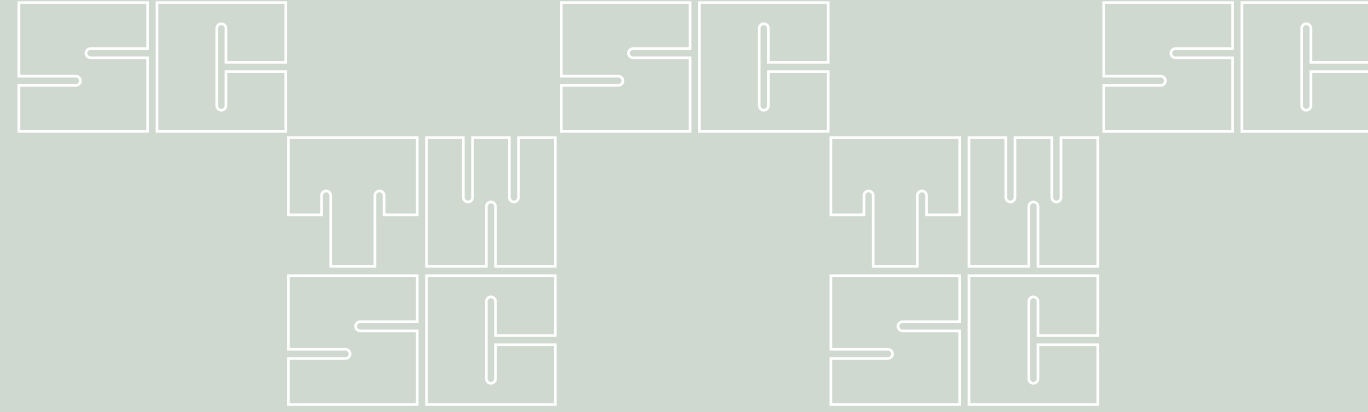


UN/ PREDICTIONS 2024

Insights Into Policy, Business,
Media, Tech and Climate

Dear Friends,



I am very pleased to share the 2024 edition of the Weber Shandwick Collective's UN/PREDICTIONS Report. This year's report examines how business decisions and corporate communications will be influenced and impacted by massive forces of change including generative AI, geopolitics, ESG & climate, mis & disinformation and increased societal polarization.

We know that these heady topics are – rightfully – the subject of much “predicting.” But we feel strongly they require more. More data, more experience, more expertise.

That's the idea behind “UN/PREDICTIONS.”

We've collected and gathered data, brought together subject matter experts and layered in regional perspectives from dozens of global colleagues across TWSC's corporate advisory businesses in corporate & public affairs, management consulting, crisis & issues and research, as well as our external collective Senior Advisors who are leaders in business, government & politics, academia, technology and civil society.

We commissioned original research, probing CEOs, Chief Communications Officers and other C-Suite Executives about their 2024 business priorities and plans for advocacy and communications.

The result is a report that is compelling, provocative and important.

As I go through the report's insights, three things come to mind for me:

Leaders don't know everything...and they know it. One of the insights that emerged from KRC's C-Suite research is that the majority of CEOs and other senior leaders do not feel “very equipped” to lead their companies around AI, ESG & Climate or Geopolitics. This executive frankness and humility is refreshing. But it must also be coupled with a willingness to consume and analyze a range of data sources along with seeking a diversity of perspectives, in particular those that challenge existing assumptions. Today's critical business decisions must be underpinned by a combination of perpetual learning and listening, subject matter expertise and a fluency in the expectations of multiple stakeholders.

Understanding AI through the learnings from the Y2K scare. Two decades ago, society was fixated on a technology with the potential to wreak havoc on every aspect of business and society. The Y2K scare presumed that a programming glitch would cause every computer processor on earth to instantaneously and simultaneously fail. This supposed flaw in technology, which had underpinned

decades of modernization, was expected to cause planes to fall out of the sky, financial markets to collapse, and society to unravel. Of course the Y2K premise turned out to be factually false; and the actual impact of AI will likely be even larger than imagined. But as we contemplate – and communicate about – AI entering more parts of our lives, the lesson from Y2K is to avoid being captivated by a herd-generated ‘one truth’ for either a future hellscape or nirvana.

All global geopolitics are local. Technology and modern media means that billions of people around the world comprise a collective global audience for Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, the Israel Hamas War and the growing conflict in the Red Sea. But these megaevents will not evoke a monolithic response and therein lies the challenge for global companies. The majority of CEOs and senior executives we surveyed believed that companies have a responsibility to speak up on complex societal issues and events, but it's very clear there is not a one-size fits all response to these geopolitical events.

Once again, **Jim Meszaros**, Executive Vice President, International, provided editorial leadership for this year's UN/PREDICTIONS. In addition, **Steph Bailey**, Executive Vice President, Corporate Growth, worked closely with Jim to pull out the themes and insights that are most relevant to Chief Communications

Officers, heads of Corporate Affairs and other senior executives. I want to thank Jim, Steph and the dozens of colleagues and advisors listed on page 4 for making this year's UN/PREDICTIONS report a valuable resource for all our clients along with our own colleagues.

I hope you find UN/PREDICTIONS helpful as you navigate these complex times.

Chris Deri

President, TWSC Corporate Advisory Businesses



Unpredictions?

When we came up with the concept of Unpredictions for last year's inaugural report, we included these quotes from Zhou En Lai, the former Premier of China and Niels Bohr, the Noble Prize-winning Danish physicist. A year later, avoiding the folly of trying to make iron clad predictions remains our ethos for this 2nd Annual Unpredictions report. Staying away from forecasts is especially wise with the topics we cover: generative AI, geopolitics, climate and mis & disinformation.

But that doesn't mean there isn't new data, wider sets of knowledge and diverse and challenging perspectives that can inform business decisions

and communications strategies for all of a company's stakeholders. So instead of desperately trying to foretell what's to come about business, politics, culture and the media, we hope this report simply helps business and communications leaders better navigate the trends and events that will shape our world in 2024 and beyond.

"Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future."

– Niels Bohr



"... it's too early to tell."

– Zhou En Lai's response in 1972 about the impact of the French Revolution in 1799

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c-Suite

Priorities

**2024 Actions
and Attitudes**

c-Suite

Priorities



Business action in 2024

KRC Research, part of the Weber Shandwick Collective, conducted a survey of 104 senior executives from global companies from January 22-29, 2024, to assess 2024 priorities for business action across the headline topics that emerged at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Respondents included 104 top global business executives who are leading large multinational corporations (MNCs) with revenue ranging from \$500 million to over \$10 billion and global operations across the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe and UK, and the Middle East and Africa. All surveyed MNCs deliver products (23%), services (30%), or both (47%). Nearly 90% of survey respondents are in C-suite positions, a quarter are CEOs and nearly half are chief officers across major business functions.

We wanted to know if the themes showcased in Davos this year are really what senior executives are acting on across their own enterprises.

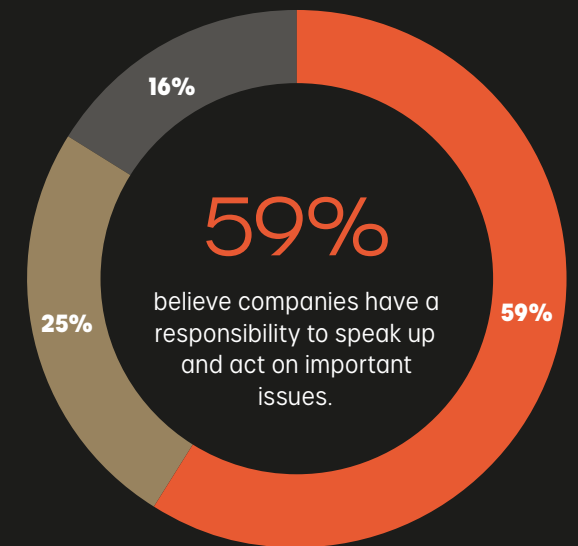
Our top-line findings include:

In recent years, we've seen increased pressure on CEOs and companies to look beyond their own operations and performance to address global concerns and societal challenges - from climate change and conflict to equality and inclusion. We asked executives how important this is, and how they are doing.

Two-thirds of business leaders believe companies have a responsibility to speak up and act on societal issues even if sensitive or controversial.

Do companies have a responsibility to speak up and act on societal issues if sensitive or controversial?

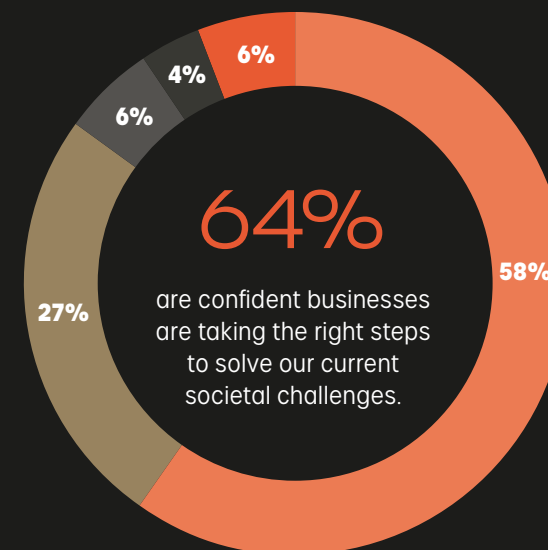
Yes No Not Sure



Two-thirds of business leaders are confident that businesses are taking the right steps to solve societal challenges. However, only 6% are very confident.

Are businesses taking the right steps to help solve current societal challenges?

Very Confident
Somewhat Confident
Not Very Confident
Not Confident at all
Not Sure



Artificial Intelligence

Gen AI is the top priority among business executives (51%) with potential for the greatest impact on business operations and performance over the next few years. Exploration of AI tech vendors is the top action companies are taking or will take this year when it comes to AI, closely followed by exploring new methods for delivering insight and business intelligence to navigate social and technological change (70%).

| only

13%

of executives feel equipped to transform their business with AI or to effectively reskill employees (24%).

71%

of executives say they are exploring AI offerings in the next 6-12 months.

Geopolitics

Navigating geopolitical conflict falls low on the priority list for CEOs (18%) and other C-suite leaders (21%) for C-Suite. Amongst all the megatrends, the smallest number of companies plan to increase their engagement around policy and regulatory issues or make adjustments to their internal organizations or governance structures.

“Geopolitics is bigger than any of us. We’re watching all the big elections around the world this year, and how it can impact our business. There’s rarely value in communicating around politics, but there is always value in understanding politics.”

– Senior executive at a global consumer company



| only

38%

| of executives plan to change how they manage their supply chains based on geopolitics

We're living in a heightened era of

Mis- and Disinformation

where a company's reputation can be impacted in minutes by online activists, customers, shareholders, employees, or even nation states – all ready to either praise or plunder via social platforms.

Here is an interesting contrast:

While mis- and disinformation was ranked the **number one** threat facing leaders today, according to WEF's Global Risk Report, C-Suite leaders surveyed are far more prepared to address extreme weather and pandemic threats than they are mis- and disinformation, even though the former may happen once every century and the latter is being spread every day.



ESG & Climate

Despite anti-wokeism, over half of CEOs believe ESG is a priority for their company in 2024. In what may represent disagreement within the C-Suite, only 28% of all other executives prioritized ESG. However, taking action around climate and energy transition was only cited by 15% of all executives as being a top priority in 2024.



Among companies
prioritizing climate
in 2024,

67%

plan to bring new
products and
services to market

Companies are linking their sustainability and climate actions to their overall business performance.

“I don’t wake up every day to destroy the world. I wake up because I think I can have a positive impact. But you won’t have a positive impact if your business is unsuccessful. The more successful the business, the more positive impact I can have. That’s not greenwashing. It’s not woke washing.”

– Senior executive at a global consumer company

2

Geopolitics

**The Year of Many Elections,
Near and Far**

Geopolitics



Trends to watch

Countries with a combined population of more than 4 billion people, and making up over 50 percent of global GDP, will hold national elections.

The scale and scope of these elections will collectively surpass any previous year. Their outcomes will both reflect and impact an increasingly precarious geopolitical environment.

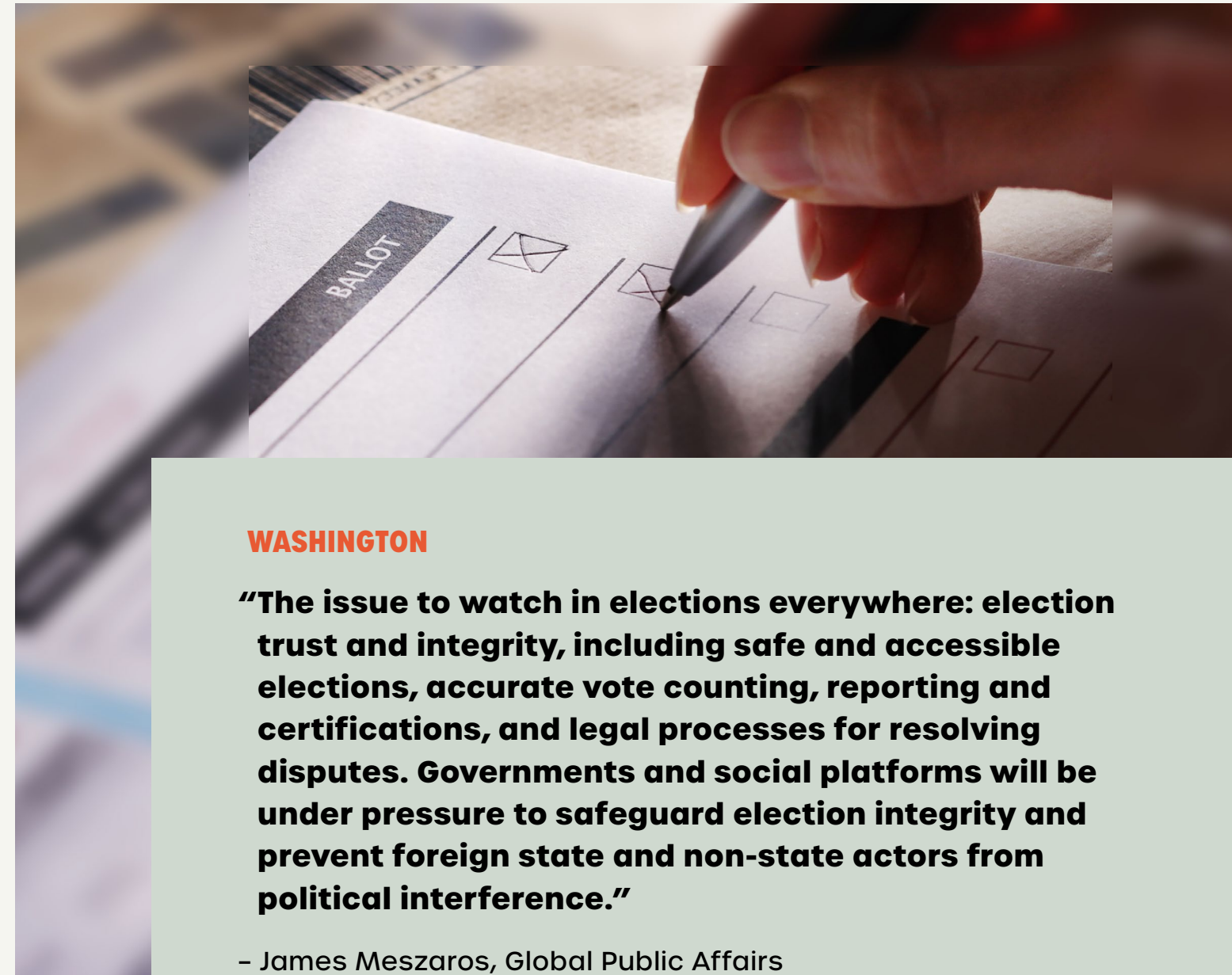
National elections will take place in the United States, United Kingdom and for the European Parliament. The election in the United States is increasingly being portrayed by both sides as a fight for the fate of American democracy and the liberal international order. In Europe, the ongoing debates about how to respond to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and challenges like migration are sparking intense debates over the future of the European project.

In Asia's largest democracies – India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh – opposition parties face steep challenges to gaining power. In many of these countries, democracy is fragile or challenged, setting these elections up to be potential flashpoints for political

violence or civil unrest. China's reaction to the outcome of Taiwan's election in January will be watched closely in political capitals and boardrooms for the future of regional security.

Heightened geopolitical rivalries are driving global economic and security trends.

76 countries are scheduled to hold elections in 2024, with 40 countries holding national elections. Not all the elections will be free or fair. But the year will be a collective test of the state of democracy around the world. The elections could shape the geopolitical landscape for the remainder of the decade and either advance or diminish polarization, deglobalization, protectionism and nationalism and drive cross-border policies in areas such as trade, migration, climate, technology competition, energy and security.



WASHINGTON

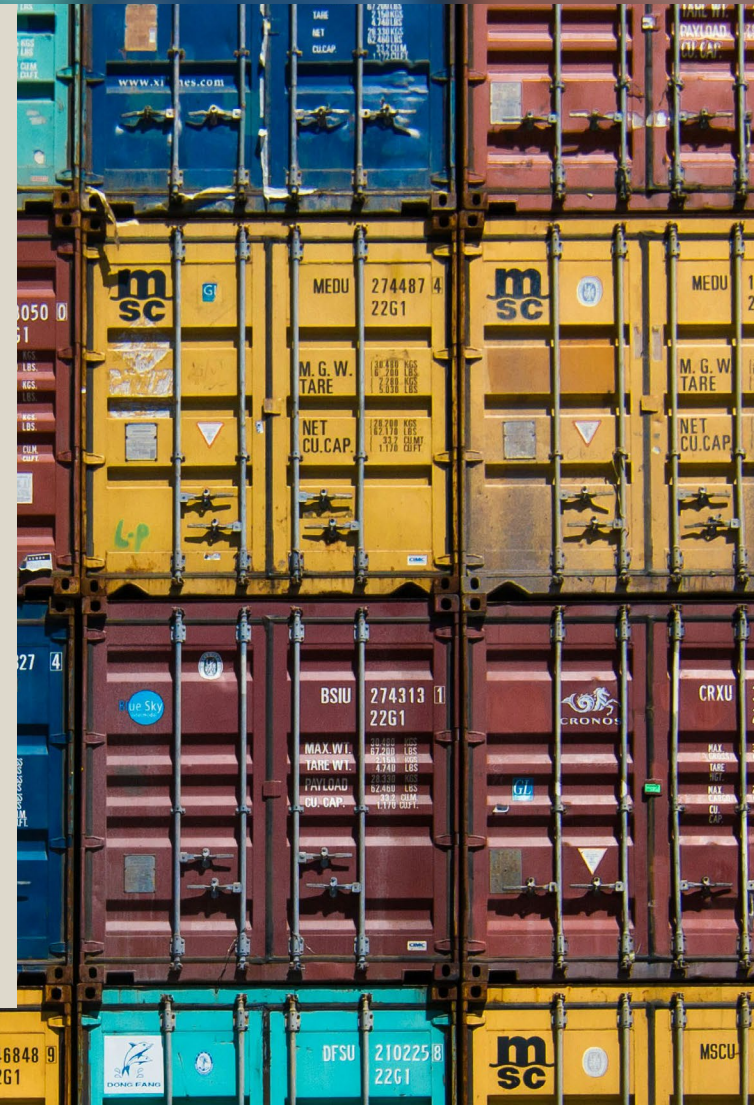
“The issue to watch in elections everywhere: election trust and integrity, including safe and accessible elections, accurate vote counting, reporting and certifications, and legal processes for resolving disputes. Governments and social platforms will be under pressure to safeguard election integrity and prevent foreign state and non-state actors from political interference.”

– James Meszaros, Global Public Affairs

MEXICO CITY

“Mexico is immersed in a narrative of the great advantages offered by nearshoring to reduce U.S. dependence on geopolitical rivals such as China. To maximize nearshoring, Mexico’s next president will need to focus on investments in industrial buildings, warehouses and clean energy, and improve the energy distribution network.”

– Jorge Camargo, Public Affairs Director, and Adrian Vallejo, Public Affairs



Geopolitics will be driven in large part by competition between Russia and China versus Western democracies, with much posturing by non-aligned countries. Wars are raging in Ukraine, Gaza and Africa. There are difficult decisions ahead: EU enlargement, a two-state solution in the Middle East, more cross-border migration driven by politics and climate impacts, and more countries developing nuclear weapons. There is also the rise of large emerging markets, such as India, Indonesia and Brazil, across the Global South. Emerging as a geopolitical counterweight to the G7, the BRICS alliance welcomes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE as new members in 2024.

The ongoing war between Israel and Hamas will continue to inflame tensions in countries around the world, influencing domestic politics from the U.S. to the Middle East and beyond. Iran-backed attacks by proxy groups on Israel and western civilian and military targets – from the Red Sea to the Israel-Lebanon border – threaten to instigate a wider regional conflict and disrupt supply chains if Suez Canal transit is impacted.

The U.S.-China rivalry will continue to shape global politics. In particular, technological de-coupling between the two countries will have large impacts on businesses across the world and will ensnare other countries as they try to navigate these shoals.

In democratic elections, a weak or uncertain economy is invariably a top factor in determining outcomes.

While social tensions and political polarization may consume the headlines, the economy matters most to voters. Argentina's electorate, angry and frustrated with decades of high inflation and taxes, recently elected Javier Melei as president, who has promised to reform decades of misguided policies and usher in economic stability.



SINGAPORE

“Asian countries do not want to have to choose between China and America. South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore and Australia are all close U.S. defense allies, but also economically dependent on China. The region welcomes recent efforts by both sides to cool tensions but the situation will remain tense.”

– Nachum Kaplan, Financial & Capital Markets

Implications for business

- Companies should be planning for contingencies to safeguard assets, employees, and reputation in key markets where there are elections with a high risk of civil unrest or the potential for sweeping policy change, including the U.S., India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, South Africa and Indonesia.
- Companies should be assessing reputational risks associated with business operations beyond Israel and across the Middle East. They should also prepare for a spike in oil prices and disruptions in supply chains arising from the growing conflict in the Red Sea.

WASHINGTON

“Today, everything is political and everything is public. In the U.S. and around the world, CEO support, policy stands, and internal and external political statements or actions will be shared, scrutinized and criticized. Plan ahead to mitigate risk and manage emerging reputational issues.”

– Pam Jenkins, Chief Public Affairs Officer



Implications for business

- For global brands to get – and stay – ahead, it’s not enough to monitor foreign markets, elections and regulations. They must also track culture, media and social platforms, and fast evolving shifts in public opinion. The head and tailwinds generated by these forces – both internationally and domestically – can be consequential to a company’s reputation and success.
- Changes in government will see upheaval of existing relationships and governance processes which will take time to settle. Companies should prepare by building relationships now across the political spectrum and expect that their engagement with central government and institutions may slow down or even pause while the process plays out.
- Companies should establish cross-functional teams that meet regularly to analyze geopolitical risks and scenario plan against them before they become hot topics. Watching trends is important, but this group needs to come together for discussion and dialogue. Senior leaders from legal, government affairs, DEI, communications and philanthropy functions should participate. With so many global elections throughout 2024, it will be critical to have a pulse on geopolitics and proactively scenario plan against events.
- Look over the horizon and begin to prepare for the policy agenda in 2025. Elections have consequences for business. This is a time to plan and prepare for different policy outcomes post-election in 2025 in areas such as corporate taxes, labor and environmental regulations, trade and investment policies and more. Government relations and public affairs teams can begin to map out scenarios that may impact the business. Investor relations teams should identify business risks and determine how they will communicate these to analysts, media and investors.



Regional perspectives

BRUSSELS

“Europeans are feeling more estranged in their own countries as illegal migration is reaching peak levels. Migrants are blamed for taking away affordable housing, school overcrowding, and abusing healthcare and social security systems. Rightist parties are gaining ground, blaming ‘political elites’ for illegal immigration they believe undermines the values and fabric of European societies.”

– **Oliver Drewes, Senior Public Affairs Director**

BRASILIA

“Brazil begins a two-year period as chair of the G20 in 2024 and the presidency of the UN climate negotiations (COP30) in 2025. As a leader in the Global South, President Lula de Silva will focus collective attention on the social dimensions of sustainable development such as combating poverty and reducing inequalities.”

– **Luciana Barbeta, Public Affairs Director**

LONDON

“A change in government in the UK may see the country start to enjoy an improvement in relations with EU and tightening of the trading and regulatory relationship between the UK and EU member states, which benefit multinationals operating across Europe.”

– **Ella Fallows, Public Affairs Head**

SEOUL

“South Korea’s economic ties with the United States are vital and any changes in trade policies resulting from the U.S. election would impact exports and investments. But Korea also needs to manage relations with China, balancing economic ties with China and strategic alliances with the United States and regional partners.”

- Elizabeth Bae, Corporate Managing Director

SINGAPORE

“Watch for China’s big slow down. Economic indicators point to a deeply uncertain year for the world’s second largest economy. High youth unemployment, debt-trapped households and broken municipal finances characterize China’s economy and may give rise to unease among the population, especially those affected by the property market crash.”

- Carolyn Devanayagam, Corporate Affairs, and Hin-Yan Wong, Research & Insights



Geopolitical conflicts will impact how
38%
of C-suite leaders manage their supply chains in 2024.

47%

of C-suites plan to conduct a global geopolitical assessment in 2024 to assess how geopolitical developments will impact their businesses.

3

Capital Markets

Search for a
Soft Landing

Capital Markets

Trends to watch

The global economy defied expectations of a recession in 2023, led by stronger than expected U.S. growth and a year-end rally in equity markets catapulting the S&P500 to near all-time highs. Tailwinds for investors have been pegged to modest but continued GDP growth, labor growth and consumer spending. Core inflation has decreased markedly and the Federal Reserve has signaled the end of the rate hike cycle. Other central banks could follow.

| Debt is rising everywhere.

Net interest costs to the U.S. Government have increased significantly. Excess consumer savings after the pandemic have been nearly evaporated. Auto loan and credit card delinquencies are close to all-time highs. Student loans have just started to be repaid.



Implications for business

- A key question for 2024: has the velocity of rate hikes been completely absorbed across all areas of the U.S. economy or are there consequences still to play out? Most of the valuation lift in the S&P500 can be traced to seven large tech companies, while 79 percent of S&P500 companies underperformed the index.
- Contagion of the regional banking crisis that posed headwinds in the first half of 2023 was averted, but banks are holding 50 percent of commercial real estate (CRE) debt on their books – the vast majority of total CRE debt.
- 2024 could see greater investor confidence, which leaders of global companies have been lacking, and spur investments through M&As, IPOs, start-ups, VC fundraising and capital investments – all of which should be a net-positive for the global economy in 2024.
- If M&A picks up in 2024, leaders will need to lead their people through the change. Often M&As fail from the lack of an aligned vision for the new business, so combined leadership teams need to come together, build trust, and create a unified story. Managing employee resistance will then be critical as employees question what they may lose from the merger, and their status in the new organization. The most successful integrations have in common leaders who communicate transparently and often, displaying empathy and giving people a ‘what’s in it for me.’
- There may be a disconnect in market expectations on interest rate cuts and economic conditions. While the Federal Reserve expects three quarter-point rate cuts in 2024, market participants are expecting twice the number of cuts at the beginning of the year. The disconnect may resolve itself as macroeconomic data and corporate earnings are reported in the first half of the year.
- The slowing down of China and the reshuffling of supply chains from mainland China to India and Southeast Asia provides a backdrop of “caution and worry”. Japan’s recent natural disaster has added to regional impact creating some level of caution. Investors in Asia will be watching U.S. monetary policy carefully as many of the region’s central bankers and policymakers follow U.S. rates.



Regional perspectives

NEW YORK

“For the first time since the financial crisis in 2008, the Federal Reserve has optionality on interest rates – a tool that has not been available for more than a decade. Optionality should not be used at the first sign of distress. It’s a tool worth preserving so when used it can tilt the balance of economic uncertainty to a more positive direction.”

– **Marc Drechsler, Senior Principal, Capital Markets**

LONDON

“If more people are worse off in 2024, there will be increased scrutiny on how companies make their money, particularly those in financial services, but also those producing products or providing services that are regarded as essential. It will be even more important to demonstrate reasonableness and fairness, and not to seem disconnected from the reality of most people’s lives.”

– **Rod Clayton, Crisis and Issues**



49%

of C-suites say interest rates and inflation are the greatest near-term impact on their business.

4

Artificial

Intelligence

From Experimentation
to Adoption (and
Maybe Regulation)



Artificial Intelligence

Trends to watch

We have never seen a technology on a faster adoption curve than generative AI.

Some companies will be first users, while others will be more cautious to see how the technology evolves and if it creates more efficiencies, or disruptions, across their businesses. Companies outside the technology sector will move from experimenting to adopting AI tools with the goal to cut costs, increase productivity, speed up research and innovation, provide better customer service, crunch massive amounts of data, forecast trends, and more.

The AI opportunity versus threat narrative underscores the need for business and society to understand and integrate AI safely into the day-to-day work of our institutions. Practical application will breed familiarity and internal expertise, allowing institutions to think about the challenges in more concrete terms, and take action that mitigates risk, enhances safety, and begins to reap the benefits of the technology.



NEW YORK

“AI experts are loudly advising governments to get ready for labor market disruptions and be ready to counter these with mechanisms like universal basic income and social safety nets. AI will impact swaths of the global economy that have been so far untouched by globalization over the last 50 years.”

– Ethan Bailey, Risk Management and Media Intelligence

AI is creating critical ethical considerations and calls for regulation.

Numerous governments are exploring ways to do so. The European Union is taking the lead with its AI Act, currently in an advanced drafting and approval stage. U.S. firms are largely taking voluntary measures, while Washington seeks to understand how to regulate a technology with so many unknowns and without jeopardizing American competitiveness. Congress will focus on addressing bias and discrimination in AI systems, requiring companies to conduct risk and impact assessments with their models and manage how AI disruption in labor markets. China and other countries are also putting in place rules and mandates, creating a myriad of different standards for global companies to navigate.



The widespread adoption of AI in politics and elections will raise the risk of mis- and disinformation campaigns through text, imagery, audio and video.

Deep-fakes and cheap-fakes are being created both by domestic campaigns and foreign actors. AI-generated content will percolate in niche communities, largely hidden from media, where it will be used to rally believers and drive fundraising and activism. In a close contest, even a small amount of disinformation can influence a race. Fake AI-generated content will fuel skepticism among citizens and weaken public trust in political institutions.

Implications for business

- Leaders need to set a vision for AI for their business and communicate this transparently to employees, alleviating any unfounded anxiety that it may replace jobs, and showing how it can boost productivity, engagement and career growth.
- CEO's and C-Suite executives will need to accelerate AI adoption or risk ceding reputational and financial advantages to competitors. If they don't, their most ambitious employees will find workarounds. This will be a double-edged sword, as employees with naturally gained fluency can advance business transformation, but also open up the company to risks, such as data leaks. This will be especially true for global companies with employees and business units across multiple geographies with varying norms and risk tolerances. It will be a wake-up call for corporate teams to implement a structured approach - with standards and guardrails - to integrating AI across their business.
- C-suite executives will also need to think deeply about how their AI actions and words will balance the different needs and expectations of stakeholders, with likely conflicts among employees, customers and investors.
- As AI becomes more accessible, versatile, and cost-effective in 2024, and companies showcase the benefits to consumers and society at large, AI's heightened spotlight in the public square will also concentrate more attention on the dark sides of the technology: energy consumption, a malicious tool for crime, fraud and cyber attacks, and the consequences of AI errors or "hallucinations" in sensitive areas like healthcare.
- As countries look to regulate AI, multinationals may face different regulation across jurisdictions where they operate. Whilst the EU's AI Act and the UK's moves to create international consensus on regulation may mitigate this, companies looking to deploy AI on a global scale may face increased compliance challenges which, coupled with the nascence of the technology and the regulation to control it, could have widespread impact.
- A majority of investors say an AI strategy can have a moderate to extremely high impact on a company's investment attractiveness. The expectation from most investors is that AI will have the biggest impact on employee productivity and process efficiencies.



Regional perspectives

WASHINGTON

"Industries sitting on large and unique data sets that can be integrated with generative AI technology – law, healthcare, finance, consulting – could see the starkest change, both in how their people work and the outcomes they deliver to clients, consumers and patients."

- **Michael Connery, Integrated Media Strategy**

BRUSSELS

"In 2024, the European Union will serve as the litmus test to judge the balance between regulation and innovation. Should the AI Act be quickly rendered obsolete by technological developments, few jurisdictions will choose to follow the EU model."

- **Robert Langmuir, EU Tech Policy**

NEW YORK

"As more organizations witness the negative impacts and implications of misinformation on brand reputation and shareholder value, leaders must be prepared to put AI education and training into motion – and quickly. The AI misinformation arms race has already begun – and our findings clearly illuminate a disconnect when it comes to organizational preparedness."

- **Chris Perry, Chief Innovation Officer, Weber Shandwick, and Chair, Weber Shandwick Futures**



What our external collective senior advisors are watching

NEW YORK

“The weaponization of generative AI creates a precarious reality where discerning truth from falsehood is crucial, yet ever more challenging. Leaders need to deploy sophisticated technology and tools to help them quickly detect and understand the prevalence and severity of online content that can cause massive financial, reputational and societal harm.”



– **Wasim Khaled, CEO & Co-Founder, Blackbird.AI**

NEW YORK

“Populism has the potential to profoundly disrupt constitutional frameworks and norms that we mistakenly thought provided a rational and durable framework for governance. But we possess all the skills and resources required to confront and overcome the challenges we face. All that is needed is a new clear-eyed approach to citizenship infused with a healthy dose of optimism and urgency.”



– **Paul van Zyl, Co-Founder, International Center for Transitional Justice**



52%

of business executives who said employee reskilling is a priority said they are not effectively delivering on their reskilling goals.

Exploring new methods for delivering insight and business intelligence is a top action

70%

of businesses are taking or will take in the coming year when it comes to AI.

The majority of buy-side investors do not currently implement any form of AI within their investment processes but more than half of respondents expect that AI will play a larger role within their investment processes over the next 12 months.

- S&P Global Markets Intelligence IMI Survey Finding



“While there is an understandable focus on deepfake videos, we also must recognize the harm of fake audio content. Audio manipulation powered by Generative AI can pollute the information environment, such as hyper-targeted, personalized robocalls using the ‘voice’ of a trusted leader. Time is now for businesses and community leaders to provide training to encourage reporting incidents, or we risk the spread of dangerous campaigns.”



- **Claire Wardle, Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Information Futures Lab, and Professor of the Practice, Brown School of Public Health**

5

The Attack on Trust
Will Accelerate

Media and Misinformation

Media and

Trends to watch

The amount of mis- and disinformation influencing the 2024 elections around the world will be above and beyond what we experienced in past cycles.

Tensions among political leaders, parties and citizens will be higher and expectations for brands to weigh-in on critical issues like the economy, migration and safeguarding democracy will only increase. The media environment will be louder, more cluttered, and the stakes will be higher, increasing reputational risks for brands, whether they are willing to champion a point of view, or instead seek to stay out of the spotlight.

Social platforms have built up their trust and safety teams over years to protect speech, moderate content fairly and limit the spread of hate speech and mis-

and disinformation. 2024 presents a different landscape. Platforms have been downsizing their trust and safety teams, a step change in the acceptability of mis- and disinformation on social platforms, and one that will fundamentally alter their character in 2024.

Activities that were once confined to fringe sites will now find a home on the largest platforms, migrating into TikTok and the Meta family of apps, or find their way into digital news outlets on a more frequent basis.



In 2024, the distance between the political fringe and the mainstream will narrow.

The black box of algorithmic media, which is precisely personalized and utterly impossible to study through social listening tools, will prevent either side from proving its case, increasing feelings of polarization and distrust that are already pervasive in civil society. Too many issues – from climate change to migration to progressive education – are being presented as binary left or right wing issues through their respective echo chambers.

Journalists who use social platforms for digital news gathering will find that all platforms virtually have the same problems – polarizing politics, rampant disinformation, and oversimplified hot takes. Where Twitter was the dominant source for newsrooms over the last ten years, expect to see more stories citing people and events on Discord, Substack, Telegram, TikTok, Reddit, and beyond.



GENEVA

“In the age of the polycrisis, no one company or organization has all the answers. When participating in global events, communicators should engage with stakeholders, build coalitions, and convene others – including those traditionally underrepresented – to offer their views, not just seek the center stage for themselves.”

– Katherine Docampo, Leadership & Impact Communications

Implications for business

- Populist rhetoric continues to grow across the West and is stoking anti-elite, anti-corporate sentiment. Citizens increasingly expect large businesses and their leaders to take responsibility and use their capital and influence to help improve society in the face the failures of other major institutions. Exacerbating the issue for executives, major news outlets have lost not only the trust but also the reach necessary to be the primary conduit for managing corporate reputation.
- Across the globe, more people are getting their news and information first contextualized by social media. Corporate teams need to invest more time and resources to build relationships, understand trends and insights, and create more “direct to public” content.
- In 2024, threat actors will use media and information to manipulate investor sentiment, corporate reputations, and executive personal

brands in surprising and effective ways. C-Suite executives urgently need to prepare now through vigorous scenario planning exercises and audits that takes these risks seriously, incorporate an understanding of what is possible using new tradecraft. They will need plans in place to address them across all corporate functions and reimagine their media and data monitoring regimes to ensure they see emerging narrative risks before they gain traction.

- A culture of preparedness remains critical for companies needing to stay smart, alert and prepared to deal with mis-information. Ensuring employees are well treated and communicated to with truth at its core will help build an internal culture of advocacy which can be used as leverage in the external battle for truth.
- We have entered a post-trust era, with tectonic shifts in society’s awareness of global issues and expectations that companies take some responsibility to address

them. This is creating new rules for “tentpole” moments like Davos and the COP summits, which are increasingly criticized as marketing “circuses” filled with private jets and empty corporate commitments.

WASHINGTON

“Brands will need to be alert and watch for rolling challenges. Problems in one country may be a harbinger of what to expect in other markets. Any brand that has a broad, global consumer base and has been outspoken on social issues in the past can expect to have a target on their backs.”

– Michael Connery, Integrated Media Strategy

- As greenwashing becomes commonplace, media and consumers alike are on high alert for corporate spin. Avoiding this backlash will require companies to both deliver results and be more strategic on how and when to communicate their impact.

Regional perspectives

NEW YORK

“Generative AI will further poison the well of the Internet as a source of trusted news and information. This will be exploited not through fake content, but by people casting doubt as to whether something that is real actually is real. Generative AI provides a convenient excuse for anyone to disbelieve something that conflicts with their preconceptions.”

- **Ethan Bauley, Risk Management and Media Intelligence**

LONDON

“Navigating politics will be an issue for every brand in 2024. For business leaders, this means more uncertain business environments and distracted workforces. Leaders will need to make decisions that can be implemented quickly, whether in product evolutions, supply chain management or redeployment of employees.”

- **Laura Tapper, Managing Director**

LONDON

“Unreliable social media, where facts go unchecked as we skim through hot takes, and the steady decline of mainstream legacy media, means every issue will have at least two opposing ‘truths.’ Anxiety-fueled tribalism will seek to send us one way or the other. We may not be thoroughly informed enough to pick a side.”

- **James Clothier, Head of News and Katie Hill, Head of Media**

BRUSSELS

“2024 will be the first AI tests for democracy, with elections in the EU, U.S. and UK all taking place. AI’s perceived influence on the election outcomes will lead to louder calls for stricter rules and closer scrutiny of the safety mechanisms tech companies have in place.”

- **Robert Langmuir, EU Tech Policy**



What our external collective advisors are watching

“Local news is a key antidote to mis- and disinformation, enjoying higher levels of trust than media overall. Yet news deserts have been proliferating for years, allowing pink slime sites and other purveyors of falsehoods to fill the void. If we’re to have a trustworthy media, we must support initiatives such as Press Forward, the American Journalism Project and Report for America, and non-profit programs like URL Media and Documenters that serve black and brown communities which have been underrepresented.”



- Vivian Schiller,
Executive Director,
Aspen Institute Digital

84%

of U.S. employees in companies with leaders that speak about societal issues and events report overall satisfaction with their job, vs only

57%

of employees reporting job satisfaction when their leaders don’t speak on these issues.

- KRC Research for The Weber Shandwick Collective, July 2023 Pulse Poll



| Only
18%

of global leaders say misinformation about their company is a top threat they are most prepared for.

6

climate

Time to Step Up, Spend Up and Scale Up

and ESG



climate and ESG

Trends to watch

With countries and companies falling behind on their climate targets, the world in 2024 could experience another record-breaking warm year.

Rising carbon emissions and the impact of the El Niño weather phenomenon will push up global mean temperatures, according to leading scientists. Global average temperature could temporarily cross a 1.5-degree Celsius threshold next year – a milestone in climate history that will demonstrate how far behind the world is in meeting the climate commitments of the Paris Agreement. To stay within the 1.5°C warming target, global emissions need to be cut by 42% below 2010 levels by 2030 – and current national commitments put the world on track for only a 14% reduction.



Climate will become more widely recognized as an omni-disruptor with the potential to transform societies, industrial sectors and the global economy with unprecedented speed and scale.

There is a greater recognition, as expressed at the recent UN-led COP28 conference, of the intersections of climate and public health, food and water systems, and health of the oceans, forests, and other natural systems. Leaders will need to develop greater fluency across this nexus of climate issues and create new opportunities for collective action.

COP29: The planet's transition to net zero will be turbulent, and expensive.

The annual UN-led COP meetings are now as much about finance – who will pay, who can tap into funds – as they are about climate. How the world is financing the climate crisis is insufficient and inequitable. But finance, once a niche climate topic, is now part of the mainstream policy narrative. Climate-focused capital flows to the Global South will be a main agenda item at COP29, presided by Azerbaijan.



NEW YORK

“Unless governments and business leaders shed the opulence we saw in Dubai, COP29 will remain a platform for the powerful to flaunt commitments, dilute the urgency, and keep us on track toward calamitous outcomes. End the pageantry, recommit to UNFCCC’s original goals, and empower leaders with the guts and grit so urgently needed.”

– Kasia Reterska, Social Impact & Sustainability

Implications for business

- Business has a crucial role to play in a complex multi-stakeholder landscape. Policymakers want to see business turn their sustainability policies into action. Consumers expect the big polluters and waste producers to tackle their challenges at their source. Sustainable brands continue to make headway with consumers who want affordable, eco-friendly choices that make them feel good. Companies and brands will ignore communicating on sustainability at their peril.
- In 2025, countries must update their National Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. That means in 2024 governments will be pushing companies to ramp up and deliver on climate and ESG commitments – not in 2050 or even by 2030, but over the next two years. Companies must bring clarity on their values and purpose with credible action plans and active stakeholder engagement.
- Companies will also need to prepare for greater climate emission and risk disclosures. The European Union already has strong reporting requirements in place and the U.S. Security & Exchange Commission (SEC) will release its final climate reporting rule in April. Other countries around the world are also putting in place reporting mandates, creating a complex patchwork of laws and regulations for global companies.

TORONTO

“‘Eat the rich’ will come for climate. Unprecedented fires and heat have forced Western households to experience the impacts of climate change. Politicians may dampen net zero commitments to appeal to voters but expect influential voices to de-politicize climate by mobilizing the public to hold the wealthiest 1 percent to account.”

– Alicia Aleksandrowicz, Global Sustainability Storyteller

BRUSSELS

“Europeans care about the climate. But support is weakening and climate deniers are gaining ground. This can partly be explained by a slowing economy, but not entirely. If climate becomes a wedge issue between left- and right-wing movements, Europe will lose its strategic advantage and businesses will have to rethink their sustainable strategies.”

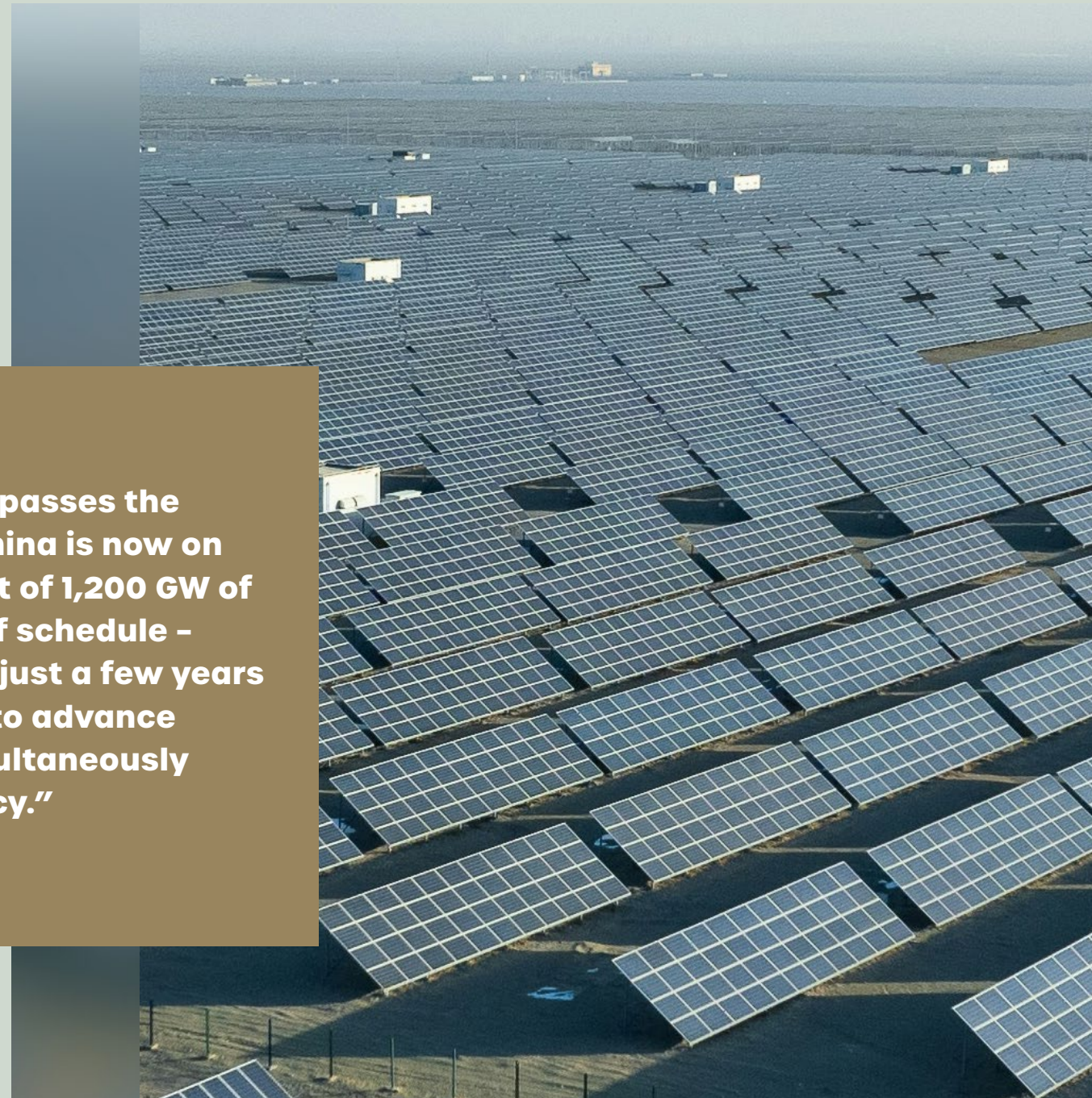
– Oliver Drewes, Senior Public Affairs Director

- ESG will return to its roots as an investor tool, not a shorthand for corporate purpose and responsibility writ large. In Asia, companies taking ESG seriously, not merely as a compliance exercise, but as an opportunity to fundamentally redesign business models from the ground up and engage with a rising population of green consumers.

SINGAPORE

“China’s solar capacity now surpasses the rest of the world, combined. China is now on track to achieve its 2030 target of 1,200 GW of renewables five years ahead of schedule – an achievement unimaginable just a few years ago. China’s challenge will be to advance its clean technology while simultaneously phasing out its coal dependency.”

– Marta Bigio, Sustainability Lead



- Leaders need to operationalize their ESG strategies internally by first building awareness with their employees about what ESG means for the business, and then engaging and empowering front-line workers to be part of executing on the strategy through specific actions and initiatives. This needs to be supported by a culture of accountability and empowerment that enables employees to take and own action.
- ESG will likely remain a polarizing issue, especially during elections. Despite a drop in the U.S., ESG-related financial assets continue to grow in the rest of the world. Disclosure will continue to remain relevant as investors react to new regulatory requirements. In addition, a significant number of clean energy stocks were hammered during the rapid rate hike cycle. As interest rates moderate, some companies may find relief.

Regional perspectives

WASHINGTON

“Climate change and energy security will be key issues in the U.S. election with a debate about the viability of policy solutions and incentives to transition to more renewable energy sources and the efficacy of voluntary commitments versus mandates to push forward the transition to net zero.”

– **Paul Massey, President, Powell Tate and Kate Olsen, Purpose Strategist**

LONDON

“Expect to see civil unrest across the globe as fear, anger and frustration from the people and communities who are suffering the most from climate impacts manifests itself in violent upsurges against the elite. The C-suite should be prepared for anything and everything, with disruption and heightened scrutiny the new normal.”

– **Steph Bailey, EVP, Corporate Growth**

LONDON

“COP28 showed that patience has run out for any high emitting industry or business to make an argument for fossil fuel longevity. The question will be whether regulators and public opinion can drive new momentum for climate action amid a cost of living crisis and geopolitical instability.”

– **Graham Reid, Head of Sustainability**

LONDON

“Leaders offering a holistic view of sustainability will fare best in the long-term. From cotton to coffee, lithium to cobalt, creating positive impacts that tie together people and the planet will reap commercial and reputational gains. They will future-proof their business and manage the commodities and natural resources essential to the global economy.”

– **Sarita Shah, Strategic Communications**

LONDON

“Business and economic actors need to respond with urgency to protect and restore nature and mitigate nature-related risks. There is a growing risk of litigation where company directors may be held personally liable for not considering nature-related risks.”

– **Jonathan Smith, Head of Financial Services**

BRUSSELS

“The European Union will explore new technological pathways to climate neutrality. And new corporate sustainability legislation will come into force for all companies – European or not – doing business in the EU, with more complex transparency and reporting requirements on the impacts of supply chains on the environment, societies and human rights.”

– **Luis Cervilla, VP, Public Affairs**

MÜNCHEN

“Global events such as the Paris Olympics and UEFA’s European football Championship in Germany will be under scrutiny to manage environmental and social impacts. Reducing, reusing and recycling will be the task for event managers, as well reporting their impact with reliable data. Likewise, smaller events will push sustainability through local sourcing, material recycling and using renewable resources.”

– **Anja Eckert, Client Experience Sustainability, and Jan Dirk Kemming, Head of Sustainability**

DUBAI

“With the abundance of sunlight across the MENA region, the focus will be expanding investments in solar energy. From floating solar farms to solar-powered desalination, the MENA region will be a hub of experimentation to innovate new ways to maximize solar energy capacity.”

– **Salim Rachid, Head of Social Impact**

DELHI

“India has set a decarbonization target of 500 GW of renewable energy by 2030. This ambitious goal signals a substantial transition towards clean energy adoption, making India a pivotal player in global climate. India is green-skilling its workforce to increase domestic expertise in renewable energy, green technology, agribusiness and environmental health.”

– **Rageshri Ganguly, Public Affairs Director**



What our external collective advisors are watching

“The UAE Consensus Agreement highlights the imperative to reverse global deforestation by 2030. It supports full implementation of Paris Agreement Article 5.2 on forests within UNFCCC REDD+, utilizing Article 6 carbon markets for climate finance. For corporations, this signals the urgency to become Paris compliant and help save rainforests at national levels through sovereign governments.”



- Kevin Conrad, Executive Director, Coalition for Rainforest Nations

While CEOs plan to prioritize ESG-related communications to their stakeholders,

44%

do not feel as if their organization is reducing its carbon footprint.

Bringing new products and services to market is the top action that

71%

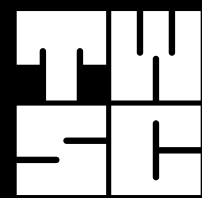
of C-suite leaders are either taking right now or plan to within the next year to address climate change.



43%

of U.S. adults expect employers to take a public position on the issue of environmental sustainability and climate change.

- KRC Research for The Weber Shandwick Collective, August 2023 Pulse Poll



The Weber
Shandwick
Collective

INDIVIDUAL TALENT. COLLECTIVE STRENGTH.

We are the strategic communications and consulting network built for the convergence of society, media, policy and technology. Together, our range of specialist capabilities help shape successful organizations.

GENERAL INQUIRIES

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