



**MONDAY, NOV. 29, 2021  
For Immediate Release**

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**Amid Political Turmoil, Continued Attacks on  
Democracy, 2021 CPA-Zicklin Index Finds Companies  
Tightening Oversight of Political Spending**

**First Index Since 2020 Election Reveals The  
Number of Top Scoring Companies Nearing 90**

In a two-year period marked by political polarization, the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack on the U.S. Capitol and civil unrest, more U.S. companies have adapted by expanding board oversight of potentially controversial political spending.

This increased engagement by boards of publicly held companies was revealed in the 2021 [CPA-Wharton Zicklin Index of Corporate Political Disclosure and Accountability](#), a nonpartisan benchmarking of S&P 500 companies released today.

The heightened board involvement came as the annual Index also showed continuing increases for other corporate measures of political spending sunlight and accountability over recent years.

“We believe companies are moving in a turbulent political climate to better manage the risks of spending to sway elections,” said CPA President Bruce Freed. “In the months both before and after January 6<sup>th</sup>, this has accelerated at the board level, with more directors, through board committees, paying closer attention to company political activity.”

“With the looming possibility of a Securities and Exchange Commission rulemaking over corporate political disclosure, corporations can cross the threshold of accountability before being required to do so as a matter of law,” according to Prof. William S. Laufer of The Wharton School and Director of the Zicklin Center for Business Ethics Research. “And embracing accountability should not only be a matter of legal risk mitigation and even code compliance. Ultimately, corporate political accountability is a reflection of a firm’s integrity, culture, and leadership. This, I believe, explains the significant progress made by S&P 500 companies on the 2021 Index.”

Here are major findings from the 2021 Index:

**MORE BOARD AND COMMITTEE INVOLVEMENT:** 295 companies have policies for general board oversight of political spending, up 13.9 percent from 259 companies in 2020. Board committee review of direct political contributions and expenditures rose to 255 companies from 227 in 2020, an increase of 12.3 percent; board committee review of payments to trade associations and other tax-exempt groups, spending types known as “dark money,” rose to 228 from 199 in 2020, an increase of 14.6 percent.

**AVERAGE COMPANY SCORES RISE:** The average Index score for political disclosure and accountability rose to 54.1 percent this year (from 50.1 percent a year ago).

**TOP-SCORING, TRENDSETTER COMPANIES** (with scores of 90 percent or higher), rose to 87 from 79 last year. Among 15 new Trendsetter companies are Cigna, Comcast, Ford Motor Co. (the first automaker to achieve this status), FirstEnergy Corp., Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc., Marriott International Inc., PayPal Holdings Inc. and Yum! Brands.

**FIRST-TIER COMPANIES UP:** 171 companies are in the top Index tier (scoring from 80 percent to 100 percent), up from 156 last year. For the first time, there are more first-tier companies than bottom-tier dwellers (getting scores in the lowest 20 percent). The latter number is now 128.

**ALIGNING COMPANY VALUES, ACTION:** Intel made itself a model for others by detailing a policy for avoiding conflict between its core values and its political donations. In the aftermath of the January 6<sup>th</sup> events, Intel pledged, “*In cases of significant misalignment across our multiple key public policy issues, we take action to realign future funding decisions.*” Intel also stated in its political spending policy that it would not contribute to members of Congress who refused to certify the 2020 presidential election.

**INCREASED DISCLOSURE:** The number of companies that disclosed some or all of their political spending was 293, increased from 260 in 2020.

The 2021 Index is published at a time that companies have come [“Under a Microscope.”](#) according to a report in March by The Conference Board, the nation’s preeminent business research organization. “Political activity can pose increasingly significant risks for companies, including the perception that political contributions—and other forms of activity—are at odds with core company values,” TCB warned.

And the trends identified in the 2021 Index take on heightened relevance because fundraising for the 2022 midterm congressional elections already has eclipsed prior records, and many companies that paused their political spending to reassess it after January 6<sup>th</sup> have resumed giving.

Companies also are facing scrutiny over political spending that ultimately supported passage of such extreme state laws as vote suppression and an abortion ban in Texas. You can learn more about these patterns of company spending from CPA’s [“Corporate Enablers”](#) and [“Conflicted Consequences”](#) reports.

This marks the start of the second decade for the Index, which has become a standard resource and reference for companies, investors, activists, academics and journalists. CPA’s Freed said the newest Index findings open the door for boards of directors to consider adopting the [Model Code of Conduct for Corporate Political Spending](#).

The Model Code, Freed said, “offers a framework for responsible political spending at a time of seismic change. The experience of FirstEnergy in Ohio, working to recover from a dark money and public corruption scandal, shows easily corporate political payments can blow up.”

**Here are companies at the top of the Index, earning Trendsetter status:**

AT&T (100.0 percent); Becton, Dickinson and Co. (100.0 percent); Consolidated Edison Inc. (100.0 percent); Edwards Lifesciences Corp. (100.0 percent); HP Inc. (100.0 percent); Visa Inc. (100.0 percent); Ameren Corp. (97.1 percent); American International Group Inc. (97.1 percent); Capital One Financial Corp. (97.1 percent); Conagra Brands Inc. (97.1 percent); Edison International (97.1 percent); Estée Lauder Companies Inc. (97.1 percent); General Electric Co. (97.1 percent); International Paper Co. (97.1 percent); JPMorgan Chase & Co. (97.1 percent); McKesson Corp. (97.1 percent); United Parcel Service Inc. (97.1 percent); WestRock Co. (97.1 percent); Alphabet Inc. (95.7 percent); Honeywell International Inc. (95.7 percent); Host Hotels & Resorts Inc. (95.7 percent); Phillips 66 (95.7 percent); Sempra Energy (95.7 percent); Activision Blizzard Inc. (94.3 percent); Altria Group Inc. (94.3 percent); Cisco Systems Inc. (94.3 percent); Comcast Corp. (94.3 percent); CVS Health Corp. (94.3 percent); Dominion Energy Inc. (94.3 percent); Gilead Sciences Inc. (94.3 percent); Hartford Financial Services Group Inc. (94.3 percent); Intel Corp. (94.3 percent); Kellogg Co. (94.3 percent); Mastercard Inc. (94.3 percent); Microsoft Corp. (94.3 percent); State Street Corp. (94.3 percent); Union Pacific Corp. (94.3 percent); Aflac Incorporated (92.9 percent); Biogen Inc. (92.9

percent); Clorox Co. (92.9 percent); Coca-Cola Co. (92.9 percent); Corteva, Inc. (92.9 percent); CSX Corp. (92.9 percent); Exelon Corp. (92.9 percent); Fortive Corp. (92.9 percent); General Mills Inc. (92.9 percent); Intuit Inc. (92.9 percent); KeyCorp (92.9 percent); Norfolk Southern Corp. (92.9 percent); U.S. Bancorp (92.9 percent); Unum Group (92.9 percent); AmerisourceBergen Corp. (91.4 percent); Boeing Co. (91.4 percent); Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. (91.4 percent); Darden Restaurants Inc. (91.4 percent); FirstEnergy Corp. (91.4 percent); Ford Motor Co. (91.4 percent); Marriott International Inc. (91.4 percent); Mondelez International Inc. (91.4 percent); PPL Corp. (91.4 percent); UnitedHealth Group Inc. (91.4 percent); The Williams Companies Inc. (91.4 percent); AbbVie Inc. (90.0 percent); American Express Co. (90.0 percent); APA Corporation (90.0 percent); Archer Daniels Midland Co. (90.0 percent); Bank of America Corp. (90.0 percent); Cigna Corp. (90.0 percent); Cognizant Technology Solutions Corp. (90.0 percent); ConocoPhillips (90.0 percent); Electronic Arts Inc. (90.0 percent); Entergy Corp. (90.0 percent); Evergy (90.0 percent); Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc. (90.0 percent); Humana Inc. (90.0 percent); Johnson & Johnson (90.0 percent); Lincoln National Corp. (90.0 percent); McDonald's Corp. (90.0 percent); Merck & Co. Inc. (90.0 percent); PayPal Holdings Inc. (90.0 percent); Prudential Financial Inc. (90.0 percent); Qualcomm Inc. (90.0 percent); Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc. (90.0 percent); Salesforce.com Inc. (90.0 percent); Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc. (90.0 percent); Wells Fargo & Co. (90.0 percent); and, Yum Brands Inc. (90.0 percent).

**Consistent bottom-tier companies are outliers:** Among bottom-tier companies (with scores of zero to 20 percent), a number are large or well known and have consistently scored in the bottom tier since 2016. These include: Berkshire Hathaway Inc. (0.0 percent); Netflix Inc. (0.0 percent); Tyson Foods Inc. (8.6 percent); M&T Bank Corp. (0.0 percent); Hanes Brands Inc. (7.1 percent) and Dollar General (10 percent).

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