Penta Policy Insiders

The Tech Takeover

Policymaker discussions on the 2023 digital landscape

January 2024

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A brief note of thanks

As we start the new year with the publication of this report, we wanted to say "thank you" to the hundreds of policy leaders who participated in our research over the past year. Our work would not be possible without your generous contribution of time.

This year's research centers on the impact of cyberspace – for policymakers, for advocates, and for the world. In an era of rapid digital advancements, our report provides insights and context for evolving tech priorities and highlights best practices for improving advocacy in an increasingly digital world.

Our mission at Penta Policy Insiders has always been to improve policy conversations. Your candid, anonymized feedback about both policy issues and productive advocacy strategies allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of policy discussions. We continue to provide data–driven insights from senior policymakers to those who work closely with the government in order to improve engagement and bring you constructive resources. We appreciate your ongoing support of our research, and hope you will continue to be a part of the Penta Policy Insiders community!

Michael Gottlieb

Michael Gottlieb
Managing Partner of Research, Washington DC
January 2024

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Executive summary

The digital landscape has never been as complex as it is now. Technological advancements around communications, financial security, artificial intelligence, interconnectedness of markets and supply chains, and access to information have cemented digital security and reliability as essential pillars of modern life.

This holds particularly true for policymakers in the United States who are working to bolster national interests and foster international cooperation in an increasingly digital world. Technology is top of mind for policy leaders this year, both when it comes to policy priorities and reflections on effective advocacy. Based on hundreds of conversations with D.C. policymakers, this proprietary research identifies and tracks tech policy's shifting prioritization and highlights best practices for improving advocacy directed towards policymakers and staff – who are increasingly reliant on and adept with technology in their personal and professional lives.

Penta Policy Insiders

Penta interviews and surveys thousands of policymakers across all levels of government in Washington, D.C., state capitals, and around the world each year. We use this feedback to provide policymakers with cutting-edge, custom research and content tailored to the pressing issues faced by those in public service. Stay up-to-date by joining Penta Policy Insiders today and following us on Twitter @pentapolicy!

This study also draws on similar research that Penta conducts annually on advocacy in Washington, D.C. as well as findings from the Penta Insights Platform.

Section One

In the time of tech

> **A global technology revolution is now underway. The world's leading powers are racing to develop and deploy new technologies like artificial intelligence and quantum computing that could shape everything about our lives – from where we get energy to how we do our jobs to how wars are fought. We want America to maintain our scientific and technological edge, because it's critical to us thriving in the 21st century economy.**
>
> **Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken**

From the ubiquitous and established influence of the internet to constant advancements with both software and hardware, technology has become fundamental to day-to-day life in the modern world.

The development of technology to support industries like communications, banking, energy, and manufacturing has created an interconnected, international landscape that benefits innovation and collaboration.

But these advancements also present challenges that have not been previously considered.[1] This year alone, for example, we saw an increase in the capabilities and adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) as part of everyday life. While these developments have been met with intrigue, if not excitement, by some, the ever-changing landscape of AI platforms has also caused apprehension and has resulted in questions around national security, safety, and privacy.[2,3]
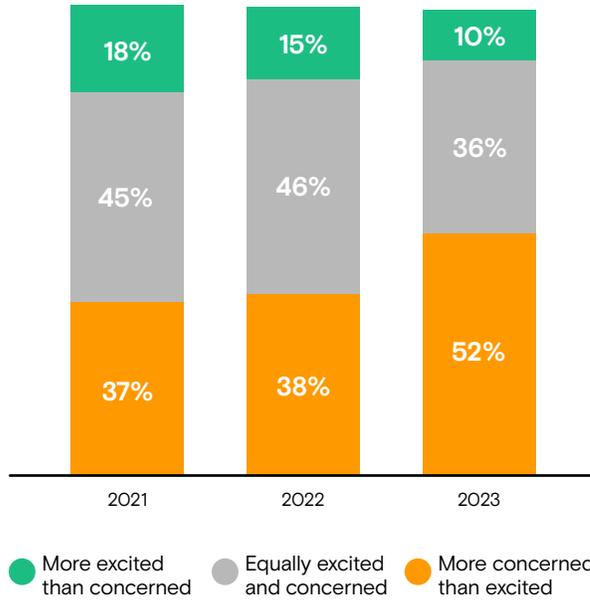
The technology is far [more] advanced than the political class understands it... It's such a fast-moving dynamic... **I just hope that there are enough people that look at the importance of the issue and how it can impact every segment of life** and not just simply rush forward... I think **AI has urgency.** I just don't think anybody understands it enough to regulate it, but I would suggest they start very diligently [trying to understand it], to put some guardrails around it, to put some real meat on the bones if somebody violates it... Same kind of rules for misrepresenting issues or people, or using it maliciously. Those things are urgent because **it's far exceeded what anybody anticipated a few years back when we were talking about robotics and artificial intelligence. It's taken on a whole new life in the last year.**
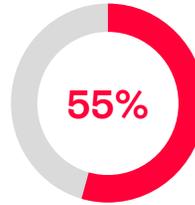
CEO, Private (R)

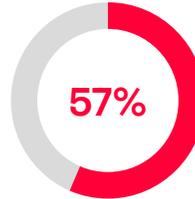**Concerns about artificial intelligence in daily life far outweighs excitement**

Percent of U.S. adults who say the increased use of artificial intelligence in daily life makes them feel...
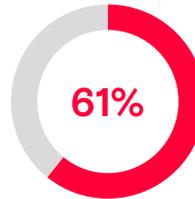

	2021	2022	2023
More excited than concerned	18%	15%	10%
Equally excited and concerned	45%	46%	36%
More concerned than excited	37%	38%	52%

● More excited than concerned ● Equally excited and concerned ● More concerned than excited

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown
Source: Survey conducted July 31–Aug. 6, 2023
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

55% don't feel confident that AI will be developed responsibly.[4]

57% think AI development should stop until a global ethical framework is in place.[5]

61% of respondents believe AI poses a risk to humanity.[6]

Source: Northeastern and Reuters

In a time where the pace of advancement is the name of the game, the current and future capabilities of artificial intelligence are at the forefront of discussions for both the general public and policy leaders – who both recognize its potential and express trepidation about its rapid evolution.

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AI is going to change the world as we know it, such as the internet did. **The technology is developing faster than Congress is able to move.** A big part of it is recognizing that **we can't be too restrictive, but we can't be too loose** with regulations that we come up with in terms of AI, that we put handcuffs on the industry as they try and better our lives.

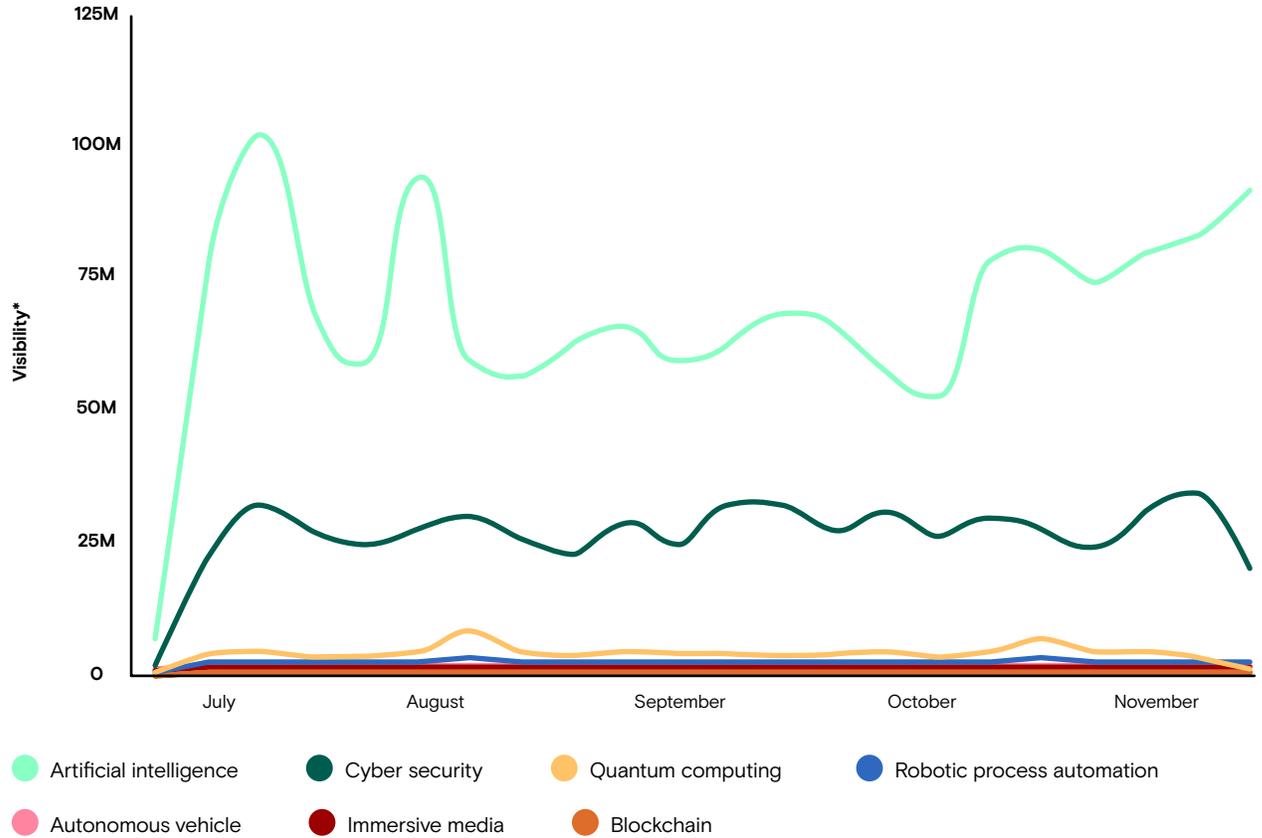**Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives (R)**

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I think there are **a lot of potential benefits and a lot of potential concerns.** And I think that the **Hill policymakers really don't do a great job understanding technology,** emerging technology, or regulatory necessities... I think that's a big problem.

Former Legislative Director, U.S. House of Representatives (D)

Decoding artificial intelligence

Out of all the emerging technologies that have been making headlines recently, none have sparked discussion for the public and policy leaders the way AI has.[7]

Visibility* over time

- Artificial intelligence
- Cyber security
- Quantum computing
- Robotic process automation
- Autonomous vehicle
- Immersive media
- Blockchain

Policymakers in particular are interested in gaining a better understanding of AI from leaders in the space, given its rapid progression and the impact the technology could have on both daily life and policy decisions.

Among policymakers, the predominant conversation around AI is, ultimately, simple: "What is it?" – an uncertainty that is broadly shared and that has generated a spike in recent headlines.

> The impact of AI technology is immense... **How do you get [expertise on a] technology that is advancing rapidly, has tremendous implications, and yet the policymakers really don't understand it?**... How do you get the sufficient understanding, sufficient wisdom, about it into the hands of policymakers and congressional types?
>
> **Senior Executive, Department of Defense (R)**

> The Senate majority leaders put together a bunch of briefings for members just to make sure that they understand artificial intelligence because it's so new... But **I confess that I don't know that I fully understand all the potential harmful effects. And I think I'm in good company there with people in the United States Senate and the United States Congress.** And we need to figure out what those potential harms are and then figure out where there's a role for government to sort of draw some lines.
>
> **Legislative Assistant, U.S. Senate (D)**

AI 101

So, what is artificial intelligence?

Well, it depends on who you ask. There are evolving discussions about the definition of AI – not just between policymakers but also between tech experts, researchers, and industry leaders. Consequently, a standardized definition is hard to pin down but there are some common, core principles that seem to unite most stakeholders.[8, 9, 10, 11] These include:

- Artificial intelligence is the ability of a machine-based system to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings.
- AI systems are capable of displaying intellectual processes such as reasoning, learning from previous actions, adapting behavior, predicting outcomes, recommending decisions, and even innovating.

Getting smart on artificial intelligence

This lack of clarity has made it harder to understand such rapid advancements, and to implement the infrastructure to moderate the space.[12, 13] Moreover, because policymakers are less familiar with the foundational elements of AI, they rely more heavily on industry players for information, which has implications of its own.[14]

I'll tell you what I worry the most about – **our policymakers, our political leaders, haven't got a clue what this technology is all about.** And so **it's all being driven by industry.** It's being driven by the... intentions of those who are producing this. And that's what worries me more than anything else.

Senior Executive, Department of Defense (R)

You have to have a number of industries represented at the table to discuss the various implications of AI and specifically how they function in those various capacities like [distributors], financial services, banks. All those have maybe different uses for AI. All of them may be helpful. Some of them can be nefarious. And I think **you've got to get policy people that understand it. It's always been the challenge in Washington – getting information you can fully rely on that's not biased.**

CEO, Private (R)

Policymakers, much like the rest of us, are nevertheless looking to industry experts for clarity. They highlight the need for technologists and technology companies to help close the knowledge gap. In so doing, and aligning around a common definition of AI, regulatory standards around the world could support and positively direct these emerging technologies.

AI is so dynamic – and progress allegedly happened so quickly – that writing regulations to stem it will be very difficult. And I think we see elected leaders struggling with that all the time... **I think to do any of the regulations or new laws or anything, [they] kind of first need to define AI.**

Senior Advisor, U.S. Senate (D)

I think proactively, **there could be more knowledge sharing, more briefings, more sharing of straight data – more of an educational effort for policy staff on the Hill.** That's primarily where I think an association would be a really good vehicle.... associations could really help.

Communications Director, U.S. House Committee (D)

While noting the potential benefits of AI technology, policymakers in the U.S. more often express concerns about its use, influence, and regulation. Particularly, policy leaders want to address:

Speed

I think it's so new and expanding so quickly. It didn't come out of nowhere, people were talking about it before. But just seeing it now... It's crazy to see it develop in front of the public eye and so quickly, becoming something that any age group can use.

Former Press Secretary, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

Privacy and security

If what experts in the media, in the industry, in business, and in government say is true, and if it does have all these amazing and broad capabilities, I would also view it skeptically because **I see a lot of threats and danger and risk for our country... Disinformation, market manipulation, elections... AI is just going to make that worse...**

Senior Advisor, U.S. Senate (D)

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Companies need to be responsible about making sure that the technology is safe and reliable. I am also a bit concerned that you can take too heavy-handed an approach from government regulation and start getting into really dicey First Amendment issues on so-called misinformation. Of course, we all want access to reliable and relevant information, but I think it's a dicey issue when you start telling AI companies what kind of content they should be regulating as far as speech goes.

Legislative Assistant, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

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On the one hand, it's democratization but I think on the other hand, you worry about malicious actors and fakes. In general, I think putting more information and data out there is good. But, I also think – what happens if folks in China get a hold of it and then manipulate it... What I would say is, "Doing something is better than doing nothing." And **we seem to have been doing nothing recently.**

Chief of Staff, U.S. Senate (D)

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I don't know enough to understand what the necessity is moving forward. But obviously, **there's a lot of data privacy concerns, a lot of labor concerns. So there needs to be some regulation.**

Former Communications Director, U.S. House of Representatives (D)
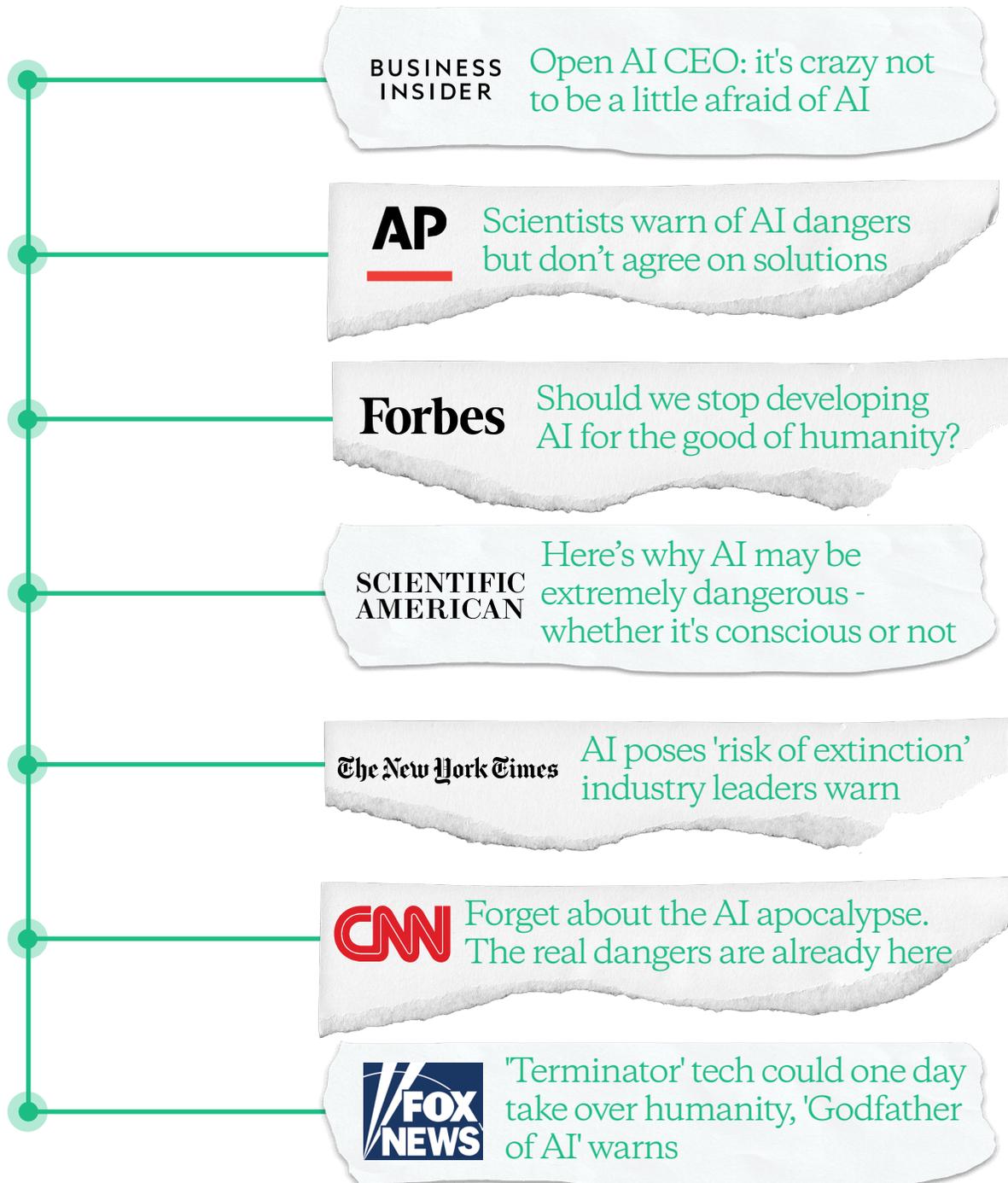
Transparency

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The first thing I think is very important about artificial intelligence is regulating it. I know that's very broad, but for me, it's very important to have certain knowledge about what generative AI is using to create the content – just **addressing that black box and having more transparency.**

Legislative Assistant, U.S. House of Representatives (D)

Implications of AI integration

Policy leaders aren't the only ones with questions about the implications of more widespread AI integration. Leading technology experts, scientists, and public figures are also cautioning against the potential dangers of developing AI too quickly. In fact, in May 2023, over 350 executives, researchers, and engineers who work in the AI space signed an open letter urging the global community to step up its efforts to mitigate the risks posed by AI.[15, 16]

BUSINESS INSIDER — Open AI CEO: it's crazy not to be a little afraid of AI

AP — Scientists warn of AI dangers but don't agree on solutions

Forbes — Should we stop developing AI for the good of humanity?

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN — Here's why AI may be extremely dangerous - whether it's conscious or not

The New York Times — AI poses 'risk of extinction' industry leaders warn

CNN — Forget about the AI apocalypse. The real dangers are already here

FOX NEWS — 'Terminator' tech could one day take over humanity, 'Godfather of AI' warns
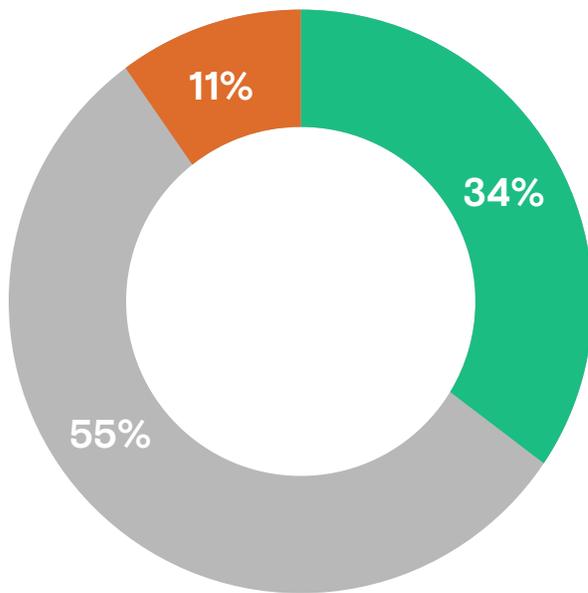
And these calls for action have not gone unnoticed. In October 2023, the Biden Administration enacted the "Executive Order on the Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence." The most significant U.S. action on AI to date, the Executive Order is intended to help the U.S. "[manage] the risks of artificial intelligence."[17] while also allowing room for continued innovation.[18, 19]

The Order places focus on concrete issues – security, privacy, and discrimination – as well as emphasizes the importance of developing critical infrastructure standards for the digital domain, in alignment with the National Cybersecurity Strategy established in March 2023.[20, 21] Furthermore, given that open source software is the foundation of "most of today's internet," the declaration places particular focus on what role open source AI should play moving forward.[22] The administration's actions indicate an understanding of how significant the impact of AI has been, and will be, on both the U.S. and international communities.

The effects of this Executive Order can already be seen. According to proprietary Penta metrics, from January 2023 to September 2023, artificial intelligence was positively mentioned across media sources over one–third of the time. However, after October 31, 2023 – when the Order was signed – there has been a spike in positive mentions.
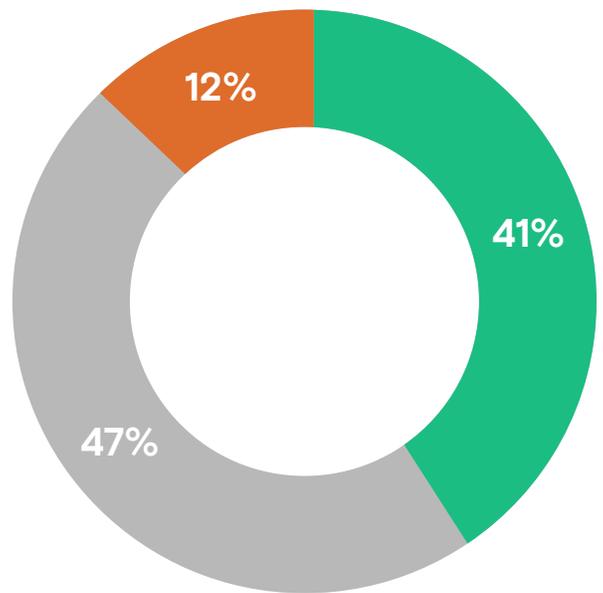
Volume* by tone

January 1, 2023–September 30, 2023

11%

34%

55%

Volume* by tone

October 1, 2023–December 13, 2023

12%

41%

47%

● Positive   ● Neutral   ● Negative

Source: Penta Group Media Analysis

💡 The future of AI

The capabilities and risks of artificial intelligence have drawn increased global attention over the last year, resulting in a flurry of discussions and regulatory developments around the world. The evolution of AI is top of mind for policy leaders everywhere, so much so that international governments, research experts, AI companies, and independent civil organizations came together in November 2023 for the first-ever Global AI Safety Summit.[23]

Twenty-eight countries, including the U.S., participated in this first-of-its-kind global conversation on the AI frontier, where leaders were asked to engage with the risks of AI and how they may "be mitigated through internationally coordinated action."[24] The Summit reinforces the need to "ensure AI is developed and deployed in a safe, responsible way for the benefit of the global community."[25] The Summit reflects technology's disregard for borders, as innovation and regulation require international coordination.

U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris was in attendance and spoke on the first day of the Summit, announcing a series of new initiatives building on President Biden's recent Executive Order. These initiatives include "establishing a set of rules and norms for AI… that reflect democratic values and interests, including transparency, privacy, accountability, and consumer protections."[26]

Similarly, in December 2023, the European Parliament and the Council on the Artificial Intelligence Act reached an agreement in their efforts to regulate the emerging technology. The proposal addresses topics such as "predictive policing, facial recognition and the use of AI" by government and law enforcement officials and agencies.[27, 28] While refinement of the deal is expected, Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton says "Europe has positioned itself as a pioneer, understanding the importance of its role as [a] global standard setter."[29]
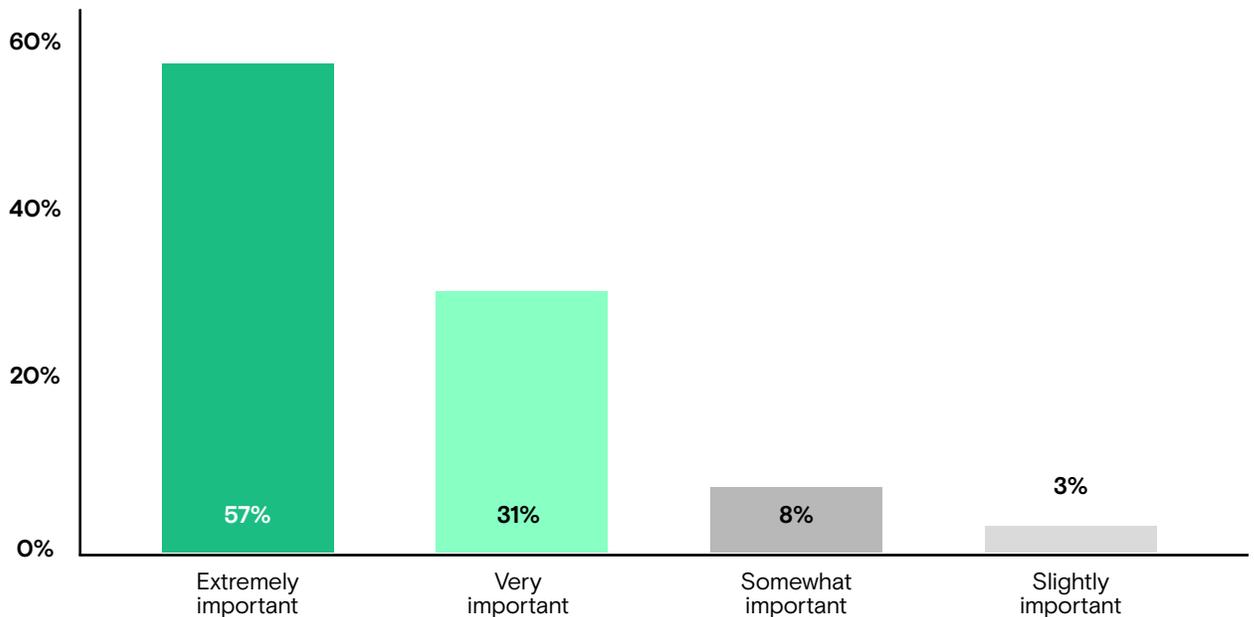
Such efforts by the U.S. and governments around the world indicate that conversations around the use of AI will continue.

Safeguarding cyberspace

Policy leader concerns about the safety of the digital domain don't end with AI. In fact, the rapid advancement of AI has fueled larger conversations – particularly in regard to cybersecurity and the consequences of swift technological development. And in an age where almost everything relies on computers and the internet, the need for cybersecurity has become even more critical. In fact, almost two-thirds of policymakers name cybersecurity policy issues as "extremely important" this year.

Importance of cybersecurity policy issues

Percent of respondents who selected each answer

60%	
40%	
20%	
0%	

Extremely important	Very important	Somewhat important	Slightly important
57%	31%	8%	3%

National security is the top cyber concern

These same developments have also created a space for bad actors to evolve. This shift has given them the opportunity to carry out more sophisticated and destructive attacks.[30,31]

For policymakers, who are at the frontlines of these discussions, the overarching consideration is national security.

International interference

Though Democrats and Republicans don't always agree, policymakers on both sides of the aisle are deeply concerned with digital infringement by foreign actors – specifically China and Russia – on American data and infrastructures.

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I think it's publicly known that China and Russia are big players in the cyberspace, and certainly following the war in Ukraine that has become an even greater concern. So **there's definitely geopolitical tensions in terms of the U.S. needing to have more cyber capabilities.**

Analyst, Department of Justice (D)

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I think the cyber component... has to do with how reliable our products are, how reliable our systems are. **There seems to be a lot of distrust in China. And then with Russia and the hacking component... I think that's pushing a lot of members to act** and to convey to their constituents that they take it seriously. I think cyber is always going to be there.

Former Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

Domestic defense

But it's not just international players that have policy leaders pushing for increased cybersecurity actions; policymakers also acknowledge that there are potential risks right here at home. Institutional breaches in sectors such as healthcare, critical infrastructure, and e-commerce are top of mind.

The increase in domestic threats is widely recognized. Policymakers are unsure that the mechanisms are in place to allow the U.S. to defend itself, should the need arise, and discuss the need for proactive measures to ensure national security. Given that national security is a top five federal policy priority for policymakers this year, these efforts are consistent with the focus on safeguarding the nation.[32]

I think **hacking is a huge concern...** Whether it's malware, whether it's [bad actors] just getting in and having a breach and whether or not [that breach] compromises any information... I think **in a domestic sense that's a huge threat** we're going through right now.

Former Senior Advisor, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

My main [priorities] are cybercrime and cybersecurity, two separate sides of the cyber coin... I think the main trends are that **there's a lot more attacks on government agencies and on private sector companies, a lot more awareness of those nation-state actors and criminal actors.** And there's in general not enough cyber personnel to go around. That's one of the big issues...

Analyst, Department of Justice (D)

Cybersecurity is obviously a huge issue... our civilian infrastructure - all that critical infrastructure, power systems, water systems, all of that. And ensuring that they have proper security is a little tougher because it involves regulating businesses and enforcing standards. It's been tough legislatively because business pushes back hard on being regulated and being told what to do. So **[the civilian sector] is an area of concern [when it comes to] cybersecurity, understanding the threat, and being able to protect itself so that our country isn't vulnerable to an attack** on a water system or a power system or something like that.

Legislative Assistant, U.S. Senate (D)

Show me the money

Under the banner of cybersecurity, the safety of financial technology surfaces as a particular concern for policymakers on both sides of the aisle. Policy staff discuss the implications of the increased use of digital banking, cryptocurrency, and e-commerce in the context of both individual and national security.

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Everyone uses personal banking online now. It makes transactions a lot easier... E-commerce is great, but also provides vulnerability as far as economic issues...[and] security breaches are always going to be an issue with banking. **There's always a breach that's going to happen. And it's important for banks to keep up with the security of the banking industry.**

Legislative Advisor, Department of Defense (D)

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People don't really understand tech. People don't understand how to regulate it... **I think that the ultimate goal is to prevent illicit finance** and to make sure that we are collecting the true tax burden from individuals who participate in the space... I think **we're just at the first stages of building the regulatory guardrails** and tax treatment [with the] use of AI.

Policy Associate, U.S. Senate (R)

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Online banks might cause people to have a little bit of concern about the safety and security of their money. But I think that as we become more and more accustomed to a digital world, that digital banks are going to grow and be a positive thing for the economy.

Former Committee Staff, U.S. Senate (R)

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I think **I've seen improvements in safety and just secure transactions**, which I think is a good thing.

Legislative Assistant, U.S. House of Representatives (D)

Section Two

Beyond borders: Advancing in a global economy

At a time where the digital sphere is so internationally integrated, **the ability of U.S. companies to securely improve their manufacturing and supply chain practices, either at home or abroad,** is top of mind for policymakers.

Conversations on reshoring and de-risking U.S. supply chains from international markets have recently taken a front seat, with the current Administration even including provisions in the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act aimed at reducing U.S. dependence on foreign countries.[33] And while most policy staff agree that there are benefits to such efforts, some also acknowledge that it may not be realistic to fully domesticate supply chains. Policymakers on either side of the issue indicate that this will remain a priority moving into 2024.

> I'm not one to say, 'We need to bring every supply chain home.' Because that's, number one, impossible in our interconnected global world. And number two, [it raises costs for everyone across the board]… that is something that I think… can sometimes be lost in the political sphere.

Communications Director, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

> I think that **the pandemic created a real opportunity for us to take a close and careful look at where our supply chains are,** particularly for critical goods. And I think that there is a general desire by those in the Republican Party to either nearshore or restore a lot of that manufacturing.

Legislative Director, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

> I think that **individual companies need to think about how they can continue to diversify where they're getting supplies so that we don't have the supply chain issues that we've had in the past,** and obviously love it when they can insource a lot more than outsource. But I think our economy is normalizing a bit more and people and companies are going to continue to grow and expand and use labor and companies outside of the United States.

Deputy Chief of Staff, U.S. Senate (D)

> Often it does make sense for companies to have very global supply chains and supply chains that spread across multiple countries. So depending on the sector and depending on the business case, I think there's a number of different ways to approach it that would make sense… **I trust generally that businesses tend to know best** when it comes to how to manage their supply chains and what countries to engage in.

Program Advisor, Department of State (D)

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It's a market need. **I don't think it's practical or feasible for everything we as Americans consume to be manufactured in America.** So I don't blame companies individually for deciding to manufacture offshore. **But there are definitely certain risks.** Now, obviously, with China, there's this national security concern or even human rights concerns that international offshore manufacturing can hide, I think. So those are the kind of things that [there should be] scrutiny for. I think, otherwise, about **having more domestic manufacturing – that's up to the government to incentivize and promote.**

Legislative Assistant, U.S. Senate (D)

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I'm pretty pro-globalization, pro-international trade. But **I do think that there is something to be said about the nearshoring side, being closer to market, and making sure that you don't have the potential for disruption** if something were to happen across the ocean, like the COVID-19 pandemic. [For] anyone with supply chains halfway across the world – it was a lot harder for them to bring products to market. So it reduces risk. But a big barrier to that is just the cost of moving supply chains that are so integrated and an investment.

Former Committee Staff, U.S. Senate (R)

The discussion on domestic production

The focus on domestic production options has been gaining increased bipartisan support over the last few years. The particular strain the COVID-19 pandemic placed on supply chains demonstrated limits to the current system,[34] and resulted in both Democrats and Republicans acknowledging the need for a shift in processes. In fact, in the last six months alone, two separate initiatives were introduced in the House and Senate, respectively, aimed at securing American supply chains and bolstering domestic production.[35,36]

Policymakers clearly have opinions on whether offshoring is ultimately good for the country as a whole. Some argue that while offshoring may be beneficial for businesses, it may also be detrimental to economic development in the U.S. Policy leaders are focused on issues of employment, costs, privacy, and resources as some of the main factors when it comes to offshoring, nearshoring, or reshoring.

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We should be getting away from manufacturing in China, and going to allies... **Pro-democracy states are where people need to be focused on [manufacturing].**

Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

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The rest of the world is offering far better manufacturing or tax rates on manufacturers than the United States is. And if it's an easy product to manufacture and there's the opportunity to move something offshore, there are plenty of examples of companies doing that, and that's unfortunate. So I think that a favorable business climate is the number one most important thing... **if it is not possible to turn a profit domestically, you'll have to look at other options. And that's a sad reality but it's what it is.**

Former Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

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Supply chain and labor having access to the workers that they need is key for the industry... it seems like there's a big push to get more manufacturing on U.S. soil with things like computer chips, microchips, and realizing that **the economy's sort of dependent on a lot of those facilities in China and other parts of the world.** From that side of the economy, **there's probably a lot of need to look at more domestic production.**

Senior VP, Private (D)

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> **Companies that have managed to stay in the U.S. and keep their U.S. operations open** – I know they pay a cost for that. I think that definitely makes me think of those companies in a more favorable light. They **just seem to have some commitment to the greater good that's worth rewarding.**
>
> **Former Chief of Staff, U.S. Senate (D)**

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> I know that manufacturers have struggled for a long time. And obviously, a lot of jobs are being shipped overseas. I have to assume that's probably because **some of the regulations that are in place make it difficult for corporations to be able to compete on a global scale,** [because] regulations are very costly.
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> **Former Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives (R)**

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> Do you have the workers, and the workforce trained for what you happen to be, whatever sector it is? [Do you have] resources, energy costs, labor costs? **Companies need to make a serious decision about looking at the larger picture of manufacturing.** So many took things offshore because of looking at straight labor costs.
>
> **Chief of Staff, U.S. Senate (D)**

With the economy being the top priority for policymakers this year,[37] the advantages of bringing more companies back to U.S. shores are at the forefront of staff discussions. While some acknowledge that such transitions may require too many resources to accomplish, others express that these changes would be in the country's best interests despite the costs. Policymakers prioritize the United States' standing as a competitive frontrunner in global markets. U.S. policymakers are focused on American companies strengthening their position among international counterparts, particularly when it comes to production and safety in the current technologically driven global economy.

Section Three

A new era of advocacy

In an era where the breadth and availability of information is continuously increasing, it can be easy to forget that not all resources are created equal. The amount of information we are exposed to creates a need to ensure the reliability of the content we see. And this is most important for those individuals in charge of making decisions based on that content – policymakers.

With steady concerns about disinformation, the balkanization of media, and the impact of AI, policymakers are increasingly cautious when it comes to the input they receive.[38,39,40] As such, policy staff are placing a premium on reliable data, and the best advocates are taking advantage of that. Policymakers highlight multi-faceted, data-driven engagement with expert involvement as the new standard for effective advocacy in D.C.

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I think the problem is that with the Internet we generally default to doing an Internet search on issues. But we really have to be mindful of what sources those are. And we have to be able to check those sources. So, **I would turn to the Internet, but you do have to know what the source is that you're using.**

State Director, U.S. Senate (R)

Trusted sources

From least to most trusted

| General internet searches | Podcasts | Company and association websites | Academic journals | News media | Think tanks | Government agencies |

Rather than focus solely on traditional strategies, policymakers want to see advocates embrace credible sources and measurable outcomes, and incorporate in-person experiences (like site visits and testimonials) as part of their approach.

The art of data-driven advocacy

Our interviews with policymakers this year indicate interest from staff in receiving contextualized informational materials that are bolstered by research and data, and tailored to specific needs. As demonstrated in last year's research, policymakers want to see unbiased perspectives but this year they also highlight their preference for measurable evidence to back up the viewpoints presented by advocates.[41]

"

Research is obviously key to any kind of argument you're trying to make. It helps supplement that. In terms of the kinds of research, quantitative is really helpful if we're able to see year-over-year or whatever the time frame trajectory might be – what the impact [of a program or the work that they're doing] has been. That's certainly helpful and definitely helps make a better case for whatever it is you're trying to communicate.

Special Assistant, Executive Office of the President (D)

"

I've noticed a shift towards more targeted and data-driven advocacy. Companies seem to be increasingly leveraging analytics, such as providing a one-pager on the number of jobs and money and sales volume that comes into our district in particular, and just using that [evidence] to really inform us… **It seems like they're using analytics on their end to understand legislative trends** and identify key decision-makers on the Hill. And I think companies have used that to allow them to **tailor their messaging** more effectively and align their efforts with specific policy goals.

Legislative Assistant, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

"

I would say **what's most effective for me is just data.** I don't need a fancy PowerPoint deck. I don't need a split angiographic. I need a clear-eyed assessment, and return on investment, and the risk to my product if I don't make the investment. That's it. I don't need a discussion on culture. I don't need a discussion on values. I think those things are important, but ultimately, that is not how I will be incentivized… **What are the measurable outcomes, and then how do we drive towards that?**

Staff Director, U.S. House of Representatives (D)

"

When I'm engaging in advocacy, **both data about what constituents think and academic studies to back them up have been the most valuable.**

Senior VP, Private (R)

"

It's often **most helpful to have concrete data** and district-specific or state-specific data points and examples.

Legislative Director, U.S. House of Representatives (D)

Active advocacy: Starting your best players

Policymakers want to see more involvement from C-Suite stakeholders and experts, noting the benefits of such engagement to effective advocacy. First-hand accounts from those actually engaged in business operations can provide helpful, practical insights to policymakers about the needs of companies.

"

Having a cup of coffee with the executive director of a prominent nonprofit or the chief operating officer of a prominent business or a school board president – those **individual meetings are quite valuable.**

Regional Director, U.S. House of Representatives (D)

"

The [industry] will set a fundraising event and they'll bring in the president or senior vice president of X, Y, Z, company. And they'll invite 50 members. And each member will come by and they'll get to talk to that person. **It's incredibly helpful because you get to go right to the source.**

Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives (D)

"

If they're coming here and they're **speaking as a practitioner rather than somebody speaking theoretically** about how their business operates, then it's quite helpful.

Former Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

"

It never hurts to have CEOs or someone in high corporate areas putting their input in. And then if they receive input from the other teams, that's just more knowledge that they receive as well.

Staff, Department of Homeland Security (I)

"

It's helpful to hear from executives, particularly because for our office, my boss is a small business owner, so I think he gets where they're coming from and [it makes] those conversations better.

Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

An immersive experience is ideal

Policy staff value a more hands-on approach that allows them to participate in comprehensive events or activities, and hear from multiple voices while doing so. Policymakers highlight the virtue of site visits, testimonials, and ride-alongs as particularly engaging opportunities that help them better understand issue areas.

"

We did a ride along with [a delivery company] and the teamsters and [my member] put on the [uniform] and helped deliver packages to the small businesses in our community. It was great. We were able to talk about the positive impact of both [the company] and the workers. So **I think that when there are opportunities for the member… to go behind the scenes, go on a site visit, actually do whatever the job is, or learn from or talk to the workers, get beyond just the executive suite, I think is always positive.**

Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives (D)

"

I'm an adamant believer in lecture-style events where there's perhaps a small reception after or beforehand, but **the meat of the event is information based** rather than a full-on happy hour where you're left to network and meet people... I appreciate events **where professors or leaders in various fields come together or come individually to speak about a topic that should be on everyone's mind.**

Staff Assistant, U.S. Senate (R)

"

I have asked [for roundtables to be put together for me] so that I can talk to industry directly. And I get multiple perspectives from multiple companies - so that we can understand some of the issues and improve our own processes and make it easier for industry to do business with us. **Understanding their experience in working with us is really important to us.**

Senior Staff, Government Services Administration (D)

"

Roundtables have been very helpful... it gives the member just a chance to hear from the audience.... **the local engagement is so important because you get to see how [things] impact your constituents.** So a bill that has a price tag as big as the Farm Bill, you start off in an intimate setting with the roundtable to see how it impacts them directly. I think that's a big plus of the roundtable setting.

Senior Legislative Assistant, U.S. House of Representatives (R)

Conclusion

This report is a synthesis of the federal policy conversations that took place between February and November 2023. At Penta Policy Insiders, our one-of-a-kind, proprietary research centers the priorities of policymakers, allowing them to directly inform policy discussions and advocacy best practices.

To all our 2023 respondents, we appreciate your participation and welcome your engagement in next year's research cycle.

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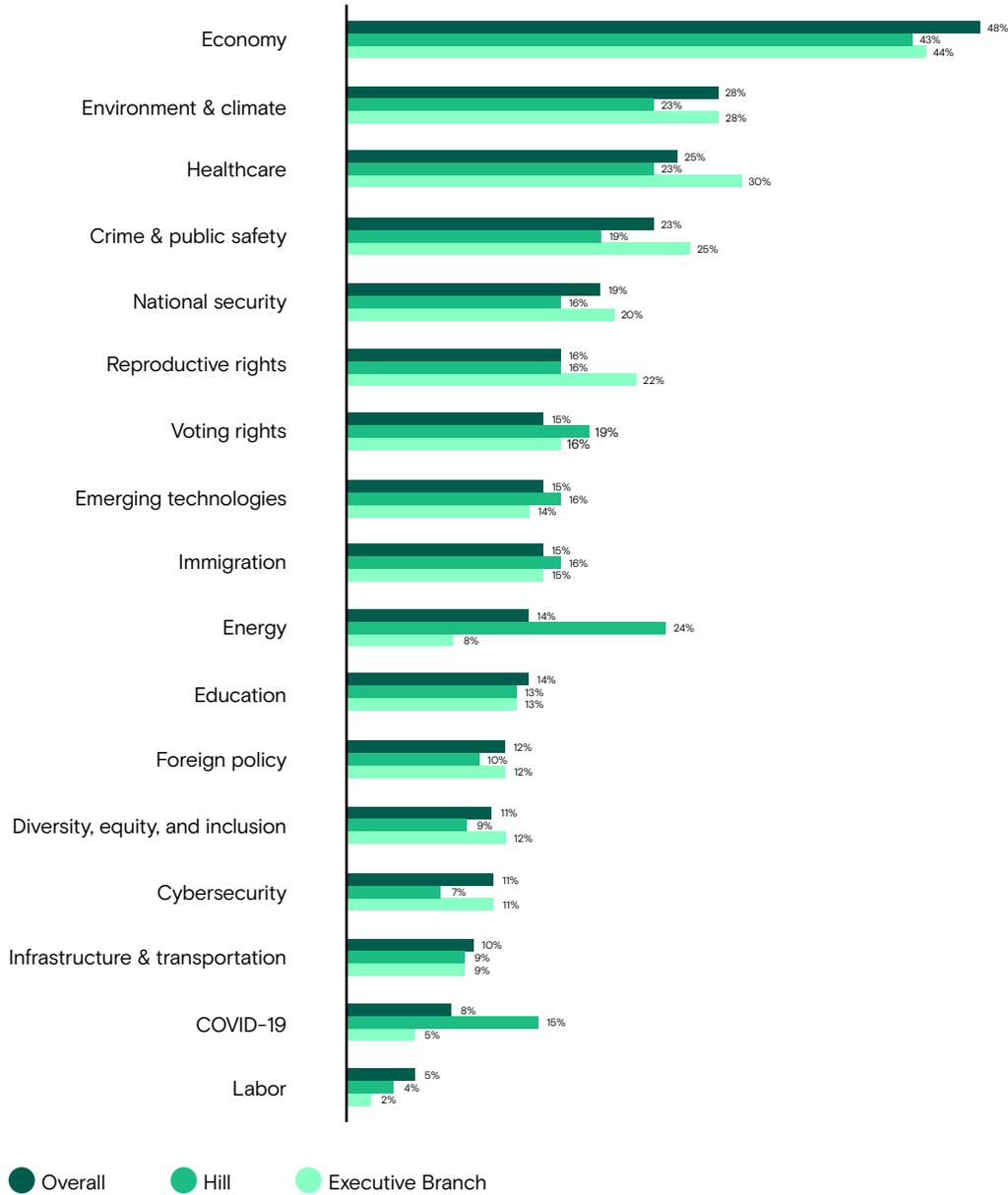Sehare Hemani

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Appendix

Most pressing issues facing the nation

Percent of respondents who selected each answer by work place

Issue	Overall	Hill	Executive Branch
Economy	48%	43%	44%
Environment & climate	28%	23%	28%
Healthcare	25%	23%	30%
Crime & public safety	23%	19%	25%
National security	19%	16%	20%
Reproductive rights	16%	16%	22%
Voting rights	15%	19%	16%
Emerging technologies	15%	16%	14%
Immigration	15%	16%	15%
Energy	14%	24%	8%
Education	14%	13%	13%
Foreign policy	12%	10%	12%
Diversity, equity, and inclusion	11%	9%	12%
Cybersecurity	11%	7%	11%
Infrastructure & transportation	10%	9%	9%
COVID-19	8%	15%	5%
Labor	5%	4%	2%

● Overall   ● Hill   ● Executive Branch

As part of our annual flagship study on advocacy in D.C., conducted between February and May 2023, we asked federal policymakers – including staff from the Legislative and Executive branches – about the policy issues they are prioritizing.

Economic issues continue to be the leading priority for policymakers both in Congress and Executive Agencies. As mentioned earlier in this report, national security is also a primary concern for policymakers this year. To find out more about what's top of mind for policymakers in 2023, check out the full report.[42]

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Graph definitions

Visibility is a metric combining total volume, influence, prominence, and reach of mentions of each tag by day.

Volume is the number of content pieces for each tag broken down by the tone of the mentions.

Graph questions

P. 17 - Regardless of how much you've heard on the topic, how important are cybersecurity policy issues in your opinion?

Penta Policy Insiders

"

[You have] a good reputation, especially from the D.C. perspective. But also I feel like having access to resources and being able to give feedback that moves conversation is valuable... when you come to our office with a reasonable ask and understanding what we're dealing with, it's more likely that we're able to get things done... it ends up in a better place for all of us, and more actionable, which is kind of the name of the game here, to actually get things done.

Director, Executive Branch