



Response to Geopolitical and Social Issues

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1 Introduction

In the wake of global events such as the Hamas terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, more and more organizations are coming under pressure to respond publicly to high-profile geopolitical and social issues.

Addressing these issues, however, is becoming more complex in an era of increased scrutiny and stakeholder pressure as well as views on both sides of the spectrum with social media fueling more extreme divisions. If not handled sensitively, taking any stance can be polarizing and quickly cause a chain reaction that can undermine the reputation of an organization and jeopardize the trust and credibility that their members, staff, and others have in the organization.

2 Purpose

This policy outlines the principles and procedures for the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons' response to geopolitical and social issues that are relevant to the mission, vision, and values of the organization. The purpose is to ensure a consistent, thoughtful, and principled approach for leadership and staff.

3 Scope

This policy applies to all members, staff, volunteers, and official representatives of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons.

4 Definitions

Geopolitical events: Geopolitical events occur at the intersection of geographical factors (natural resource access, proximity to countries in turmoil, etc.) and policy decisions (limits to foreign direct investment, tolerance of corrupt elites, etc.). Some examples of geopolitical events are cross-border or international conflicts, hybrid warfare and cyberattacks, shifting trade relations, sovereign debt exposures, and critical mineral competition.

Social issues: Social issues are topics or subjects that impact many people. They often reflect current events but may also represent longstanding problems or disagreements that are difficult to solve. Beliefs, opinions, and viewpoints can be strong, and debate on these topics is a natural outcome of public discourse. Globally, social issues include climate change, immigration, and women's rights impact people around the world.

Decision Framework: A decision making tool that follows a stepwise approach to determine a course of action. It includes recognition of an issue, identification of a problem and who is involved, a consideration of relevant facts, analysis and determination of possible outcomes, and a recommendation(s) for a solution or action.

5. Policy

AAOS recognizes and acknowledges the importance and impact of geopolitical events and social issues on the world and is making a conscious decision not to publicly respond to matters that fall outside the scope of its mission. (See Section 10). AAOS' primary commitment is to the organization's mission and to deliver value to its members.

6 Principles

The following principles should be applied when addressing or considering any response to geopolitical and social issues.

Focus on Mission

The AAOS mission is to serve the orthopaedic profession to provide the highest quality musculoskeletal care for patients. AAOS believes that remaining focused on this mission is the most effective way to serve its members in the communities in which they operate. This enables the organization to allocate resources and expertise toward creating quality products and services that align with its mission, goals, and objectives.

Diverse Stakeholders

AAOS serves a diverse membership with a wide range of backgrounds, perspectives, and beliefs. Taking public stances on many geopolitical and social issues could potentially alienate some of the organization's members or partners, leading to division rather than unity. AAOS aims to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for everyone, regardless of their individual beliefs.

Non-Partisan Approach

AAOS is committed to maintaining a non-partisan stance. In a world where political and social opinions vary widely, it is challenging to adopt a point of view that resonates with everyone. AAOS respects the diversity of views held by our many stakeholders and believes in their right to make their own informed decisions concerning the world around them.

Expertise and Impact

As an organization, it is recognized that its expertise and impact are most significant when directed toward the organization's mission. AAOS believes that meaningful change and contributions to the profession can be made by leveraging its core competencies rather than spreading resources across a multitude of causes.

Avoiding Distraction

Publicly taking a stance on geopolitical and social issues can sometimes lead to controversy and distractions that detract from the Academy's mission and threaten the organization's financial

viability. By remaining focused on AAOS' objectives and its mission to serve its members, it can channel its resources more efficiently.

Members & Staff Expression

AAOS respects its members' and staff's right to express their personal beliefs and get involved in geopolitical or social issues that are important to them as individuals. It encourages open dialogue and the pursuit of individual passions outside of the organization.

7 Approach & Philosophy

The AAOS' primary commitment is to its mission and to deliver value to its members. AAOS recognizes and acknowledges the importance and impact of geopolitical events and social issues on the world and is making a conscious decision not to publicly respond to matters that fall outside the scope of the mission.

While AAOS does not intend to take public stances on geopolitical events or social matters, it is important to emphasize that the organization is dedicated to conducting the profession with integrity, compassion, ethics, and in compliance with the law. It remains available to the media as a trusted source of information on musculoskeletal health issues and conditions and believes in two-way communication and dialogue with its membership.

AAOS is committed to fostering a positive environment that is focused on patient care first and foremost, supporting its local communities, and being responsible corporate citizens who live out the AAOS core values of leading to serve, shaping our future and excellence together.

8 Procedure

8.1 Issue Escalation

The Chief Marketing & Membership Officer will proactively monitor social media and news sources for issues or events that may require a response and escalate to the Chief Executive Officer for consideration. In practice, any member of the Board may request an evaluation of a potential issue by Academy staff.

Once notified, the Chief Membership and Marketing Officer will evaluate the issue against the response decision framework and provide an analysis to the Chief Executive Officer, Academy President, and review workgroup.

8.2 Response Decision Framework

The following questions should be asked and considered when evaluating if a response by the Academy is warranted. The following is adopted from the Harvard Business Review article entitled "When Should Your Company Speak Up About a Social Issue?"

Does the issue align with the Academy’s strategic plan?	The Academy’s strategic plan is based in part on the organization’s mission and values. If there is a misalignment with the issue the Academy is speaking out on, the statements will be viewed by the Academy’s constituents and the public as inauthentic.
Can the Academy meaningfully influence the issue?	If the Academy cannot meaningfully influence the issue, the organization risks being seen as hypocritical or as “woke-washing.”
Will the Academy’s members agree with speaking out?	The Academy reduces its risk of disrupting future membership engagement if there is agreement with the proposed stance. If there is disagreement, the Academy must discuss and carefully weigh the impact to the membership.

With thoughtful review, if the Academy can respond “yes” to the above questions, then the Academy has an opportunity to speak out on the issue, influence, and lead. If answers spark both “yes” and ‘no’ answers, the Academy may want to continue to wait and monitor. As details and context surrounding issues and events evolve, the process can be repeated.

8.3 Review Workgroup

Once escalated, the Academy staff will schedule an ad-hoc meeting with the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors will review the issue, the analysis from the Chief Marketing and Membership Officer and determine if a response is necessary and identify key points to address in the response statement.

If a response is requested by the Board of Directors, the Communications team will draft a public statement based on the key considerations discussed by the Board of Directors.

9 Right to Modify Policy

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons reserves the right to modify this Policy -- Response to Geopolitical and Social Issues at any time. Changes and modifications will be effective when approved and posted.

10 Appendix

10.1 AAOS Mission, Vision & Core Values

Mission: Serving our profession to provide the highest quality musculoskeletal care.

Vision: The trusted leaders in advancing musculoskeletal health

Core Values:

- Leading to serve
- Shaping our future
- Excellence together