

With Chick-fil-A, Consumers Separate Food From Social Issues

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By [Joanna Piacenza](#) November 20, 2017

Chick-fil-A Inc. appears relatively unscathed five years after the fast-food chicken company faced public scrutiny over its conservative views, according to [Morning Consult's Community Impact Rankings](#).

Forty-nine percent of U.S. adults said Chick-fil-A has a positive influence on their community, while 7 percent said the chain has a negative one, putting it above restaurants such as Arby's Restaurant Group Inc. and Yum! Brands Inc.'s KFC — despite the controversy surrounding Chick-fil-A just a few years ago.

Chick-fil-A's public image was hit in 2012 after CEO Dan Cathy said he was opposed to same-sex marriage and as reports surfaced that the company donated to anti-gay charities, sparking protests. Cathy is a conservative Christian, as was his father, Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy.

Nearly half of the public (48 percent) supported same-sex marriage at the time, including 64 percent of millennials, according to [polling](#) from the Pew Research Center.

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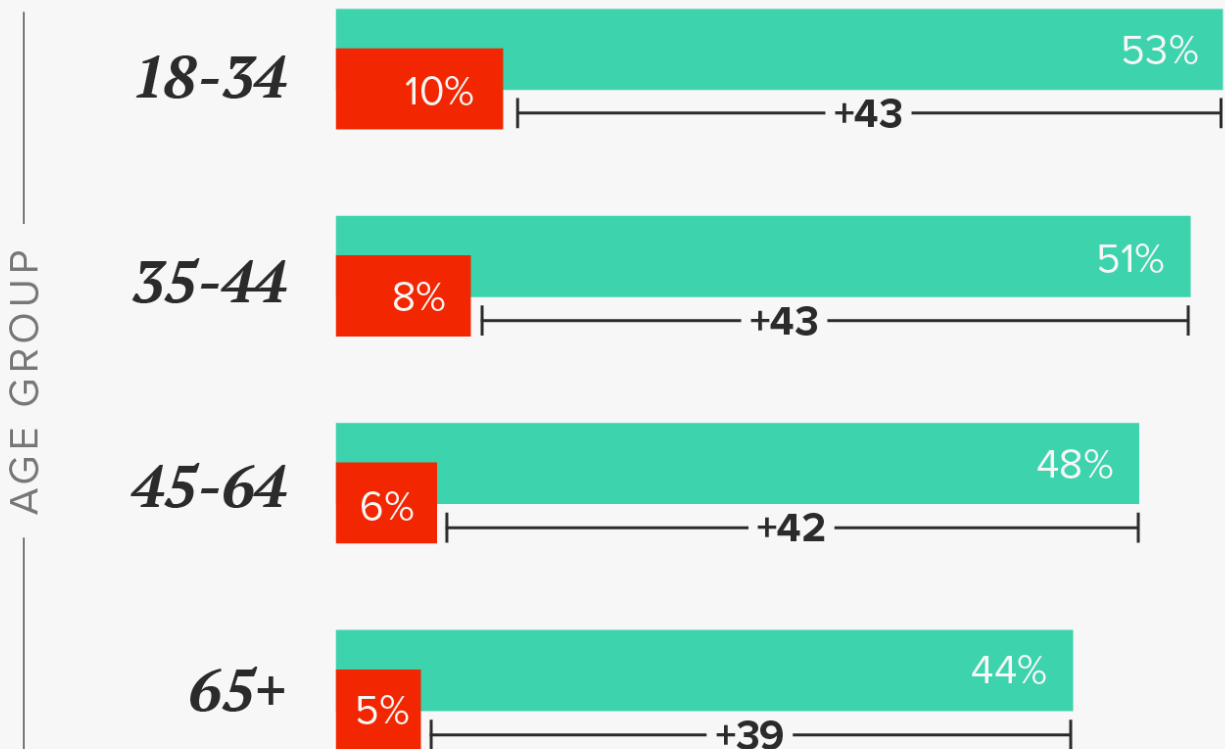
And yet millennials are less likely to view Chick-fil-A's community influence negatively compared to [McDonald's](#) and other fast-food chains.

Ten percent of millennials say Chick-fil-A has a negative impact on their community, while 53 percent say it has a positive one. That's compared to the 26 percent who say McDonald's has a negative influence on their community — along with 16 percent who say Burger King has a negative impact and 12 percent who say the same of Taco Bell.

Chick-fil-A also ranks particularly high in the South, where the share of Americans supporting gay marriage is lower, though a majority still support it. Fifty-eight percent of Southern residents favor legalized same-sex marriage, according to an August survey from research organization PRRI, compared to 66 percent of U.S. adults overall.

Chick-Fil-A Community Impact Highest Among Millennials

- Share that say Chick-Fil-A has negative impact on community
- Share that say Chick-Fil-A has positive impact on community



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This poll was conducted 07/15-10/15, 2017 among a national sample of 330,488 adults. The results have an MoE between 0.3 and 1%.

“What’s interesting about the paradox of Chick-fil-A is that, in many ways, it’s probably one of the most socially advanced companies in terms of treatment of employees and its role in the community,” Thomas Ordahl, chief strategy officer of the brand consulting firm Landor, said in an interview Nov. 13. “And yet its founder has a position that is quite dissonant with most people in the U.S.”

Ordahl believes Chick-fil-A consumers are able to separate their sentiments on social issues from where they spend their money. And beyond the 2012 controversy, Chick-fil-A is an organization with an extremely good reputation, Ordahl said — much of that tied to its internal policies.

“The strongest part of their brand is how they treat employees,” he said. This includes providing opportunities for education scholarships for the roughly 120,000 people employed at individually owned restaurants.

Chick-fil-A has been providing scholarships to its employees for 40 years, and this year nearly doubled its projected giving from \$4.9 million to \$8.8 million, the company said.

Perceptions of community impact could also be credited to Chick-fil-A's external charitable giving, which has shifted since the 2012 same-sex marriage controversy. That year, the chain started the Chick-fil-A Foundation, which has the broad focus of helping children succeed.

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Rodney Bullard, executive director of the Chick-fil-A Foundation, spoke at a conference at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation last week about one program: [The Westside Future Fund](#), a nonprofit aimed at revitalizing Atlanta's Westside neighborhood.

When asked about Cathy's remarks in a Nov. 15 interview, Bullard said Chick-fil-A has never had a policy against the LGBT community.

Sarah Marion, senior manager of syndicated research at The Hartman Group, said consumers view Chick-fil-A as having higher-quality food, better customer service and happier employees than similar fast-food restaurants, elevating positive perceptions of its community impact.

“In our research, we've seen that these attributes often matter more to millennials than to older consumers, especially compared to other benefits like low prices or familiar flavors,” Marion said in an interview on Nov. 9. The Hartman Group researches the food and beverage industry.

The community impact rankings of Chick-fil-A, which operates more than [2,200 restaurants](#), stand out in six states in particular. Residents in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia rank its community impact more positively than the national average.

The Standout Brand in Each State



Combined, the locations in those six states make up [nearly half of](#) Chick-fil-A's restaurants nationwide. The restaurant's net community impact is higher among Southern residents (59 percent) than among residents in the Northeast (29 percent), West (31 percent), and Midwest (34 percent).

And such positive sentiment feeds into the company's bottom line: A [2017 report from QSR](#), a business-to-business magazine for the quick-service restaurant industry, shows the company generates the most sales revenue per restaurant, beating out fast-food competitors like McDonald's and fast-casual restaurants such as Chipotle.