



## Attitudes of the British Public to Business Ethics 2021



For the last 19 years the IBE has commissioned an annual survey of the British public's attitude towards business.

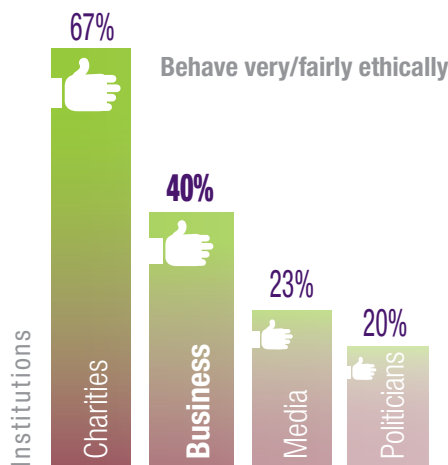
This year, we asked the market research firm Yonder to survey the public's views on: (a) how ethically business behaves compared to politicians, media and charities, and (b) what are the ethical issues that business most needs to address.

**This infographic provides a summary of the key findings.**

### Key Findings

**Business is the second-most ethical institution, according to the British public**

40% of the British public believe that businesses behave ethically, as opposed to 20% and 23% who believe that politicians and the media do, respectively.



#### Headline findings

**Tax avoidance, bribery and corruption are increasingly the most important ethical issues to the British public**



Corporate tax avoidance is the most important ethical issue for the 9th consecutive year, jumping up 12 percentage points (pp) to 47%. Meanwhile, bribery and corruption enters the top 3 for the first time after jumping up 17pp, the biggest move of the year.

#### The gender gap narrows

The difference between the issues that men and women believe most need addressing has narrowed this year, with women becoming less concerned with interpersonal issues like diversity and inclusion, harassment and bullying, and employees' ability to speak up about wrongdoing.



#### The age gap broadens

The disparity between the issues that younger and older people believe most need addressing has broadened this year, as the younger generation highlights issues that reflect newer ethical values.



### 2021 top 5 issues that need addressing

**Corporate tax avoidance**



**Environmental responsibility including climate change**



**Bribery and corruption**



**Executive pay**



**Work-life balance for employees**





# Demographic Differences

**Q** *In your view of company behaviour, which of these issues most need addressing?*

## A narrowing gender gap

Last year we noticed that female respondents tended to highlight 'interpersonal' issues like diversity and inclusion, harassment and bullying, and employees' ability to speak up about wrongdoing at work, while male respondents tended to prioritise broader organisational issues such as executive pay and corporate tax avoidance. This year, however, the gender gap between the number of male and female respondents who selected each issue has narrowed. In particular, significantly fewer women selected harassment and bullying, work-life balance, and employees' ability to speak up, such that men and women are now almost perfectly agreed on these issues. This could suggest that changes made to working conditions following COVID restrictions have been favourable to women, or that hybrid working simply reduces opportunities for discrimination, bullying, or wrongdoing in general.

Issue	Gender Gap	
	2020	2021
Employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing	7%	5%
Harassment and bullying at work	8%	2%
Corporate tax avoidance	7%	2%
Equality, diversity and inclusion	9%	1%
Work-life balance	6%	1%
Worker exploitation	3%	1%

## A broadening age gap

The results of the 2020 survey showed that different age groups tended to highlight different issues. The largest 'age gap' between the number of the youngest and oldest people who selected each issue, was the 18pp difference in relation to corporate tax avoidance. That, and other similar age gaps across the board, have broadened by an average of 10pp in 2021, suggesting a growing disparity in the issues, and underlying values, that younger and older people hold as important. Our data suggest that issues such as corporate tax avoidance, executive pay, employees' ability to speak out about wrongdoing, and customer data privacy are more important to older people; while diversity and inclusion and work-life balance are less important.

Encouragingly, one of the smallest age gaps now belongs to the issue of environmental responsibility, down 4pp to just 1% this year, powered by a 9pp increase in the number of 55+ year olds who selected it. This likely reflects the increased urgency with which all generations now regard climate change.

Issue	Age Group			Age Gap	
	18-34	35-54	55+	2020	2021
Corporate tax avoidance	37%	44%	57%	18%	20%
Executive pay	14%	21%	31%	11%	17%
Equality, diversity and inclusion	20%	14%	8%	12%	12%
Work-life balance	22%	21%	11%	3%	11%
Protection of customer data/data privacy	7%	9%	17%	5%	10%
Harassment and bullying at work	8%	12%	13%	2%	5%
Employees speaking out about company wrongdoing	14%	15%	18%	6%	4%
Environmental responsibility, including climate change	31%	24%	32%	5%	1%

For an explanation of the research methodology and respondent profile see page 5

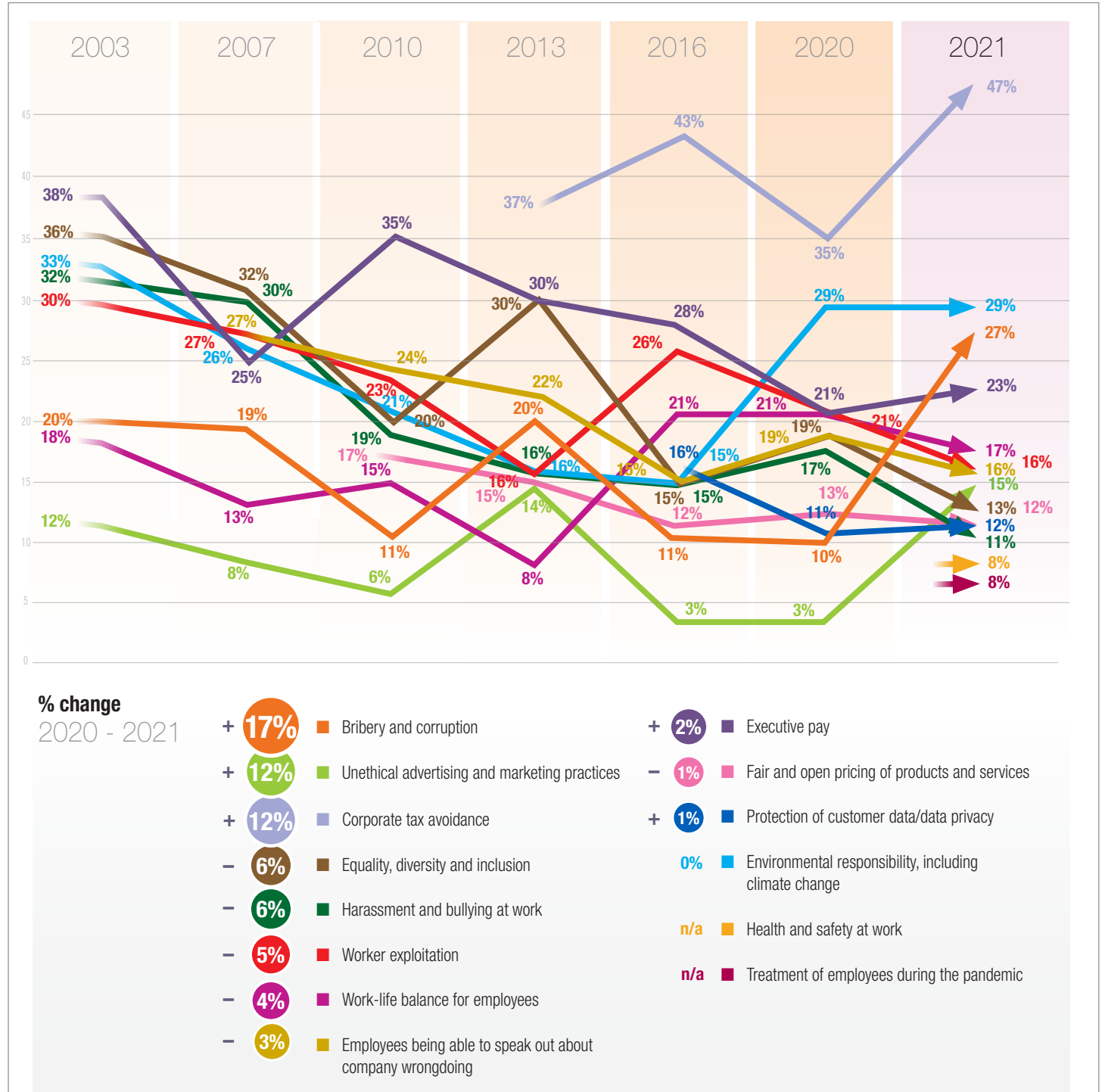




# What has changed?

**Q** In your view of company behaviour, which of these issues most need addressing?

## Trends since 2003



**% change 2020 - 2021**

+ 17%	Bribery and corruption	+ 2%	Executive pay
+ 12%	Unethical advertising and marketing practices	- 1%	Fair and open pricing of products and services
+ 12%	Corporate tax avoidance	+ 1%	Protection of customer data/data privacy
- 6%	Equality, diversity and inclusion	0%	Environmental responsibility, including climate change
- 6%	Harassment and bullying at work	n/a	Health and safety at work
- 5%	Worker exploitation	n/a	Treatment of employees during the pandemic
- 4%	Work-life balance for employees		
- 3%	Employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing		

**Note** The following changes were made to the way in which some of the options were presented in the survey: **equality, diversity and inclusion** was previously discrimination; **unethical advertising marketing practices** was previously advertising and marketing practices; **harassment and bullying at work** was previously harassment and bullying in the workplace; **worker exploitation** was previously exploitation of workers; **environmental responsibility including climate change** was previously just environmental responsibility; **work-life balance for employees** was previously work-home balance for employees.

For an explanation of the research methodology and respondent profile see page 5



## What has changed?

**Q** *In your view of company behaviour, which of these issues most need addressing?*

### This year's biggest movers

17%

#### • Bribery and corruption

Bribery and corruption enters the top 3 most selected issues this year for the first time since 2014 after seeing a massive 17pp increase on 2020 when it was the 13th most selected issue. The 27% of respondents who identified it as in need of addressing tops its all-time high of 21% in 2012. We think that this trend could reflect a response to the lobbying and government procurement scandals that have come to light in recent months.

12%

#### • Unethical advertising and marketing practices

Advertising and marketing practices also see a trend-defying 12pp increase this year. This issue had become decreasingly important to the public since reaching its all-time high of 14% in 2013, but this year's 15% sets a new record. This jump could reflect worries about the increasing prominence of highly-targeted online ads or public policy issues such as government plans to ban fast-food advertising from the end of 2022.

12%

#### • Corporate tax avoidance

This has been a top 3 issue since it was first offered as an option in the 2012 survey, but this year's record 12pp increase takes it to an all-time high of 47% - more than any other issue that has ever been selected. This could reflect the increased attention paid to this issue following this year's G20 summit and agreement by leaders to set a global minimum corporation tax.

6%

#### • Equality, diversity and inclusion

2020 saw a 5pp increase in the selection rate of this issue, following the protests and public discourse around racism sparked by the killing of George Floyd in the USA. Equality, diversity and inclusion is again one of the largest movers in 2021 but in the opposite direction. The 6pp decrease to 13% reflects a return to the normal levels found in past surveys pre-2020.

6%

#### • Harassment and bullying at work

The sustained move to remote and hybrid working could be responsible for the 6pp decrease in the number of respondents who selected this issue. With interactions being restricted to messages and zoom calls there is likely less opportunity for harassment or

# Current business behaviour

**Q** How ethically do you think each of the following [charities, businesses, politicians and media] generally behave?

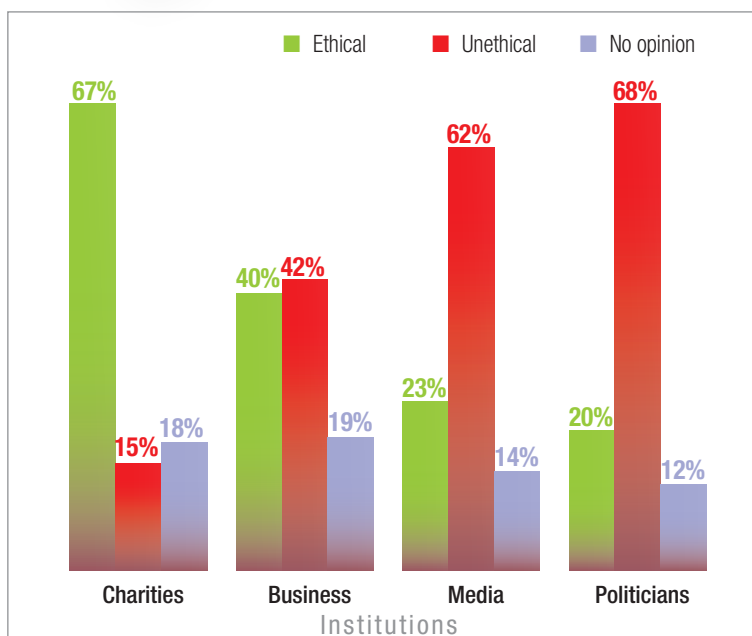
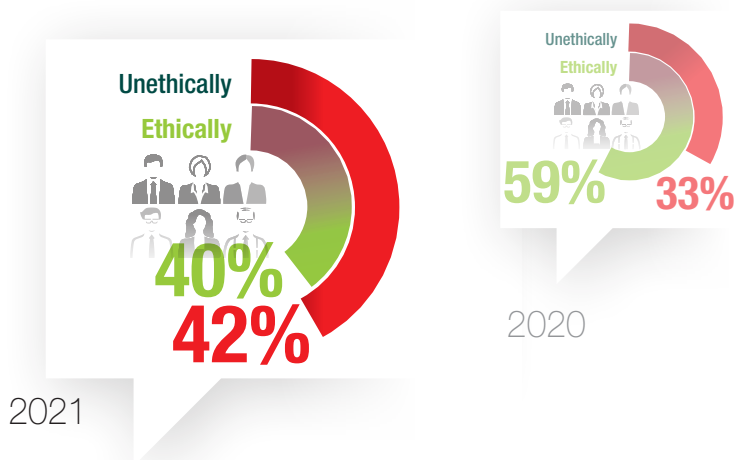
## The British public's view of how business behaves has worsened significantly since last year.

This result represents a significant decline on last year and takes the public's opinion of business to an all-time low. However, this is the first time that we have posed this question about the behaviour of business compared to other institutions, so this finding should be interpreted with caution. We plan to test public attitudes again in mid-2022, which should give us a better fix on this statistic.

For now, it is therefore more meaningful to compare the public's view of business alongside the other three institutions now included in the survey: politicians, media and charities. Given recent controversial political events, and a well-recognised general public dissatisfaction with the media, these results are not surprising. However, it is notable that charities seem to have come out of the pandemic well, whilst business far less so.

Further, the result for business appears at odds with recent evidence of growing trust in business since the start of the pandemic, namely, from our own **Ethics at Work 2021** survey and the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer. It should be noted however that our Ethics at Work survey is a survey of the views of employees about their own employers, not the view of the general public about business as a whole.

It seems, therefore, that business must redouble its efforts to take the opportunity of improved employee trust following the pandemic to secure the trust of the British public as a whole.



**Q** There is a lot of discussion these days about how ethically business and other institutions in society are behaving - that is, the extent to which their behaviour and decisions follow good principles. How ethically do you think each of the following [charities, businesses, politicians and media] generally behave?

## Research Methodology

The research was conducted on behalf of the IBE by Yonder. This year, 2046 UK adults aged 18+ completed an online survey between November 19th and 21st 2021. Data have been weighted to reflect the adult population (18+) in the UK in terms of age, gender, region, class, ethnicity and occupational status. In 2016, the survey moved from being in-person to online. Up until 2020, the survey was conducted by IPSOS Mori.

Respondent Profile	TOTAL	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE
	2046	1000	1046	573	682	791	1129	917