



Attitudes of the British Public to Business Ethics 2022

For the last 20 years, the IBE has commissioned an annual survey of the British public's attitudes towards business. Previously, the survey was run towards the end of the calendar year, but in 2022 we've switched to mid-year. This provides an early opportunity to compare with the 2021 results, when the questions underwent significant revision. Market research firm Yonder was engaged to survey the public's views on: (a) how ethically business behaves compared to politicians, media and charities (b) what are the ethical issues that business most needs to address.

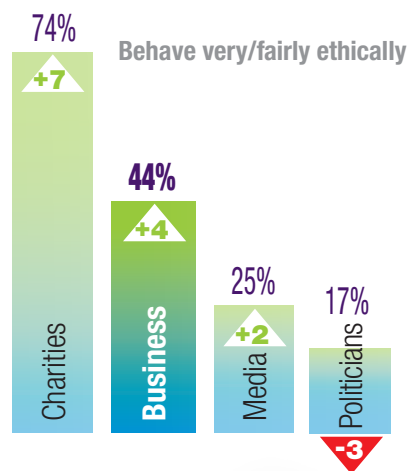


Key Findings

The British public's view of how ethically business behaves has improved

44% of the British public believes that business behaves ethically, compared to 40% in 2021. In percentage terms (10%), this is similar to the improvements seen for charities and media.

However, with fewer respondents neutral on the question of whether business behaves ethically or unethically, the percentage of the public that believes business behaves unethically has remained unchanged at 42%.



- Public opinion has improved for all institutions – except politicians, whose stock has fallen even further, reinforcing their bottom ranking.



- Tax avoidance and bribery and corruption remain the top two most important ethical issues to the British public. This is the 10th consecutive year that tax avoidance has been the top ethical concern.



- Surprisingly, concern about environmental responsibility has fallen for the first time in eight years. Only 24% of the public now has it in their top three ethical concerns, compared to 29% last year.



2022 top 6 ethical concerns

Corporate tax avoidance



47%

Bribery and corruption



27%

Executive pay



25%

Environmental responsibility including climate change



24%

Work-life balance for employees



18%

Worker exploitation



18%

For an explanation of the research methodology, the ethical issues covered and the respondent profile, please see final page.



How Ethical is Business Behaviour?

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?*

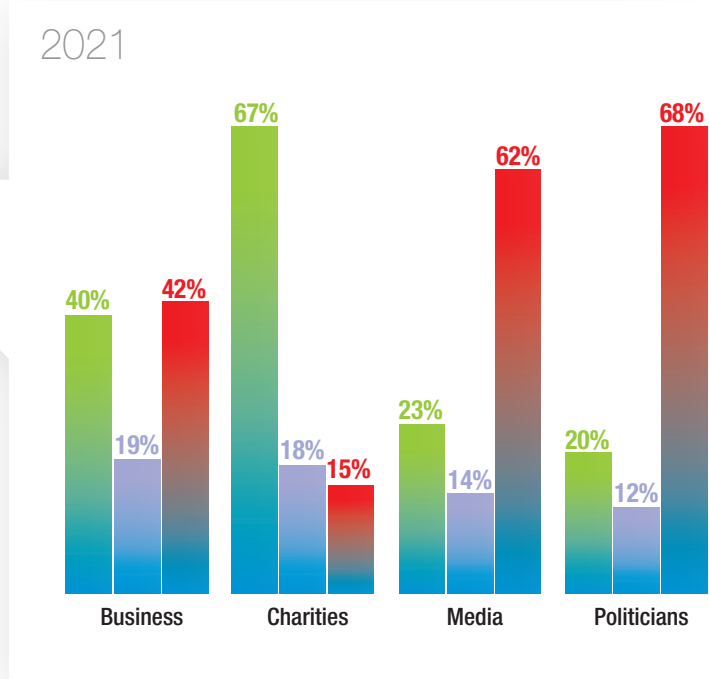
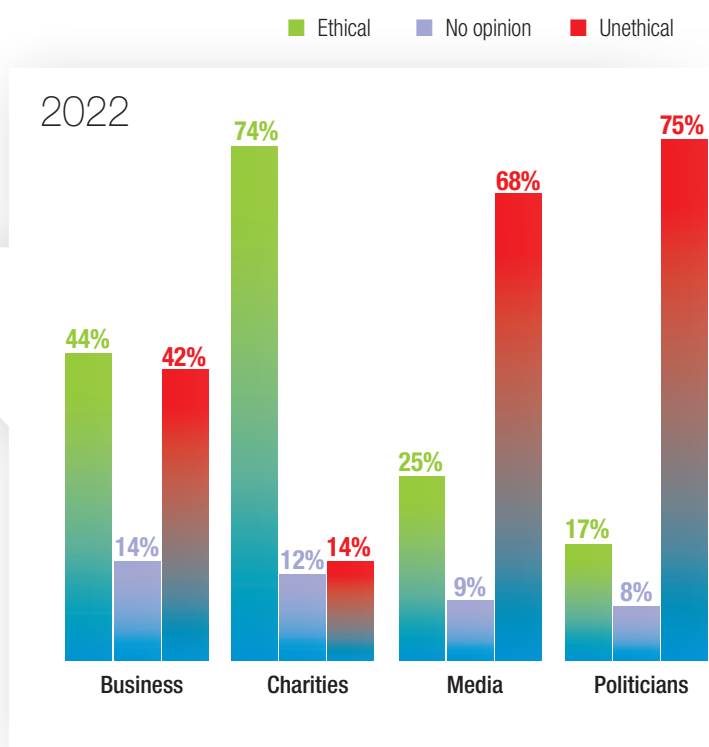
A polarisation of attitudes?

When the results of the Attitudes of the British Public to Business Ethics survey are reported, we usually focus on what proportion of the public thinks that business behaves ethically. To discuss the percentage of the public that thinks that business acts unethically would just be to make the same comments in their reverse form (e.g. ethical % up would generally imply unethical % down).

However, this year, for each institution the percentage of 'no opinion' has dropped by between 4 and 6 percentage points (pp), which in each case is high in proportional terms. In a world where opinions seem to be increasingly polarised, this is a striking change and perhaps part of that broader phenomenon.

It also means that we should re-examine the headline changes in attitudes towards institutions – particularly business, which is our primary interest.

As noted earlier, the percentage of respondents saying that business behaves ethically has increased from 40% to 44%, an increase of 4pp. However, the percentage of 'no opinion' regarding business has fallen 5pp, from 19% to 14%. This is why, although attitudes towards business' ethics have become generally more positive, at the same time there has been no corresponding fall in the proportion of respondents who view business as behaving unethically, which has stayed at 42%. The public is increasingly split down the middle.²



For an explanation of the research methodology, the ethical issues covered and the respondent profile, please see final page.



Ethical Concerns: This Year's Biggest Movers

Q In your view of company behaviour, which of these issues most need addressing? (Select up to 3.)

-5%



• Environmental responsibility

The biggest change relates to environmental responsibility. Surprisingly, it has fallen for the first time in eight years – down from 29% to 24%. However, it is still an important concern, ranked 4th this year. One explanation for the fall in the score could simply be increased concern about other issues on the list. On the other hand, the environment is still a major political issue, so one interesting possibility is that some respondents think that at least some businesses are now reacting more convincingly to the sustainability agenda.

-4%



• Treatment of employees during the pandemic

The treatment of employees during the pandemic has seen a 4% decrease from last year, falling from 7% to 3%. This is unsurprising, as Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted. However, its legacy in terms of the divisions between employees who have to attend their workplace and those who can work from home when they wish or at least operate in hybrid mode, is likely to be with us for some time.

+4%



• Harassment and bullying at work

Although harassment and bullying saw a sharp decrease from 17% to 11% in last year's results, the improvement has been reversed, with the score jumping back to 15%. This could be another Covid-19 effect, as more employees are back in the physical workplace, where there is probably greater risk of harassment and bullying than in a virtual working environment. As we see later in the report, this concern has increased amongst women.

+3%



• Fair and open pricing of products and services

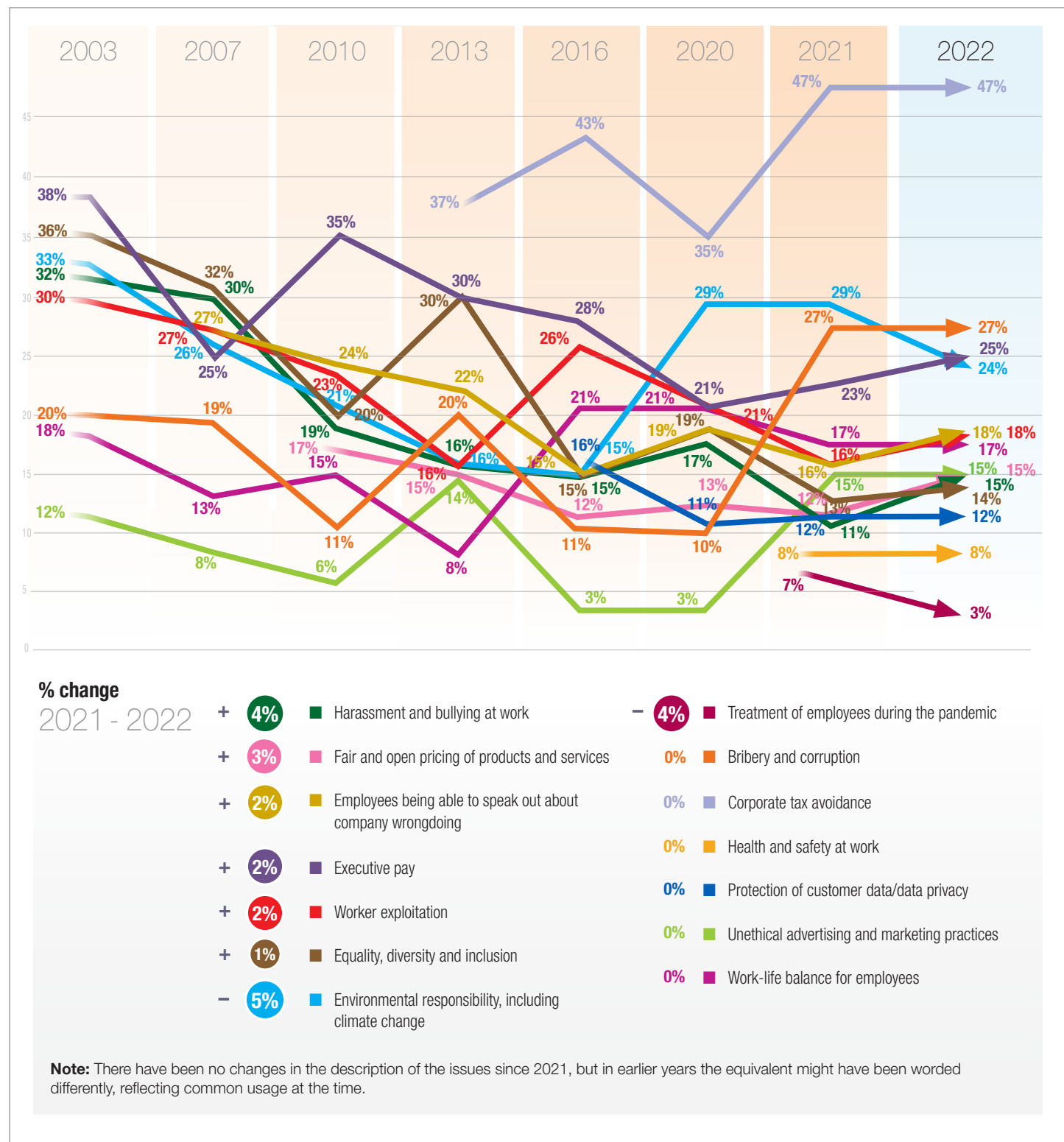
As we experience the highest inflation rates in 40 years and hit record prices for fuel and energy costs, the public has become more concerned with the cost of products and services. This might have had an impact on attitudes towards fair and open pricing. Given the likelihood of inflation being with us for some time, it would not be surprising if this issue saw a further increase next year.



Ethical Concerns: The Long View

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

Trends since 2003



For an explanation of the research methodology, the ethical issues covered and the respondent profile, please see final page.



Demographic Differences



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

As many employees return to the workplace, the gender gap narrows for issues such as work-life balance but broadens for harassment and bullying at work

This year's results again show some disparity between men and women in how important different issues are perceived to be. However, the gender gap for work-life balance has disappeared for the first time in the survey's history, as both genders view it as an equally important concern. Furthermore, the gender gap for equality, diversity and inclusion has remained at a record low of 1%.

However, the gender gap for harassment and bullying has opened up again and is now at 6%, as only 12% of men voted for it as a top priority compared to 18% of women. Men's concern did rise, from 10%, but women's rose more, from a 2021 figure of 12%.

The rise in concern regarding harassment and bullying might be explained by many workers having returned to the workplace once Covid restrictions were lifted. While online harassment and bullying are far from unknown, perhaps it is in the physical work environment that they are more common or more severe. It appears that business still has more to do to provide a workplace in which women, in particular, are protected from harassment and bullying.

Issue					Gender Gap 2021	Gender Gap 2022
	Men 2022	Women 2022	Men 2022	Women 2022		
Harassment and bullying at work	12%	18%	2%	6%	2% ♀	6% ♀
Employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing	15%	20%	5%	5%	5% ♀	5% ♀
Executive pay	27%	23%	4%	3%	4% ♂	3% ♂
Corporate tax avoidance	50%	46%	2%	4%	2% ♂	4% ♂
Worker exploitation	20%	17%	1%	3%	1% ♂	3% ♂
Bribery and corruption	28%	27%	4%	1%	4% ♂	1% ♂
Equality, diversity and inclusion	13%	14%	1%	1%	1% ♀	1% ♀
Environmental responsibility	25%	24%	6%	1%	6% ♀	1% ♂
Work-life balance	17%	17%	1%	0%	1% ♀	0%



Demographic Differences

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

A narrowing generational gap for the top ethical issue

The survey classifies respondents into three age groups. As in previous years, the attitudes of the middle group (35-54) nearly all lie between those of the younger age group (18-34) and the older age group (55+), so when we consider age differences, we focus on the differences between the younger and older generations.

The results for the survey usually throw up several significant generational differences. This year, for example, the younger generation is noticeably more concerned about equality, diversity and inclusion and work-life balance, while the older generation expresses greater concern about executive pay and employees speaking out about company wrongdoing – albeit with some reduction in the size of the gap this time.

Other issues have also seen changes in the size of the gap between the generations, but what is particularly striking this time is the dramatic narrowing of the gap for corporate tax avoidance. In previous years, the generation gap for this issue has tended to be around 20%, but this year it has decreased to just 4%.

With the younger generation now aligning with older respondents, it seems that corporate tax avoidance is likely to be an issue of great concern, and perhaps the top issue, for some time to come.

Issue	Age Gap			Age Gap	
	18-34 years	35-54 years	55+ years	2021	2022
Executive pay	17%	27%	30%	17%	13%
Employees speaking out about company wrongdoing	12%	15%	24%	4%	12%
Equality, diversity and inclusion	20%	13%	10%	12%	10%
Protection of customer data/data privacy	8%	11%	16%	10%	8%
Protection of customer data/data privacy	8%	11%	16%	10%	8%
Harassment and bullying at work	12%	14%	19%	5%	7%
Work-life balance	20%	19%	13%	11%	7%
Bribery and corruption	31%	26%	26%	1%	5%
Corporate tax avoidance	47%	44%	51%	20%	4%
Environmental responsibility, including climate change	26%	25%	23%	1%	3%

Note: Age gap is the difference between 18-34 years and 55 years



Research Methodology

The research was conducted on behalf of the IBE by Yonder. This year, 2091 UK adults aged 18+ completed an online survey between 16th and 17th May 2022. 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
	2091	1019	1067	586	697	808	1154	937

The complete list of issues from which respondents were asked to select their top three concerns was as follows:

- corporate tax avoidance
- environmental responsibility, including climate change
- bribery and corruption
- executive pay
- work-life balance for employees
- worker exploitation
- employees being able to speak out about wrongdoing
- unethical advertising and marketing practices
- equality, diversity and inclusion
- protection of customer data/data privacy
- fair and open pricing of products and services
- harassment and bullying at work.

We hope you found this report interesting and useful.

For further information about the research that underpins the report, please email us at info@ibe.org.uk

If you would like to discuss how we can help you with your ethics agenda, please contact engagement@ibe.org.uk

For further information about the IBE, its services or becoming a Supporter, please visit www.ibe.org.uk or email us at info@ibe.org.uk

¹ We usually report the top 5 issues, but this year 2 issues are tied for 5th place.

² Some totals are subject to rounding errors.