



Attitudes of the British Public to Business Ethics 2024

For the last 21 years, the IBE has commissioned an annual survey of the British public's attitudes towards business.

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
 (c) how important it is for a chief executive's pay to reflect the ethical performance of their company.

This infographic provides an overview of the results.



Key Findings

The British public's view of how ethically business, charities, politicians and the media behave have all worsened by 3 percentage points (pp) in 2024, a sustained trend

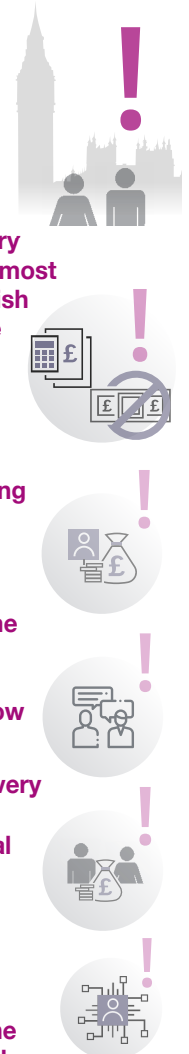
35% of the British public believe that business behaves ethically, compared to 38% in 2023.



2024 top 5 issues that need addressing



- Public opinion has declined again for businesses, charities, politicians and the media. Public opinion for politicians has dropped to a record low of 14% - leaving them ranked bottom for the 4th consecutive year.
- Corporate tax avoidance and bribery and corruption remain the top two most important ethical issues to the British public. This is the 12th consecutive year that tax avoidance has been the top ethical concern.
- All of the top three issues continue to relate to financial issues. As we live through a sustained cost of living crisis, business must do more to demonstrate ethical use of resources.
- The top four issues remain the same as in the last two years. However, employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing has now entered the top 5 issues.
- 61% of the public believe that it is very important/important for a chief executive's pay to reflect the ethical performance of their company – a decrease of 7 percentage points from 2023.
- It is surprising that, as last year, artificial intelligence remains the lowest-ranking ethical issue that the public feels companies need to address. High profile debates on this issue have not led our respondents to see this issue as a high priority.





How Ethical is Business Behaviour?

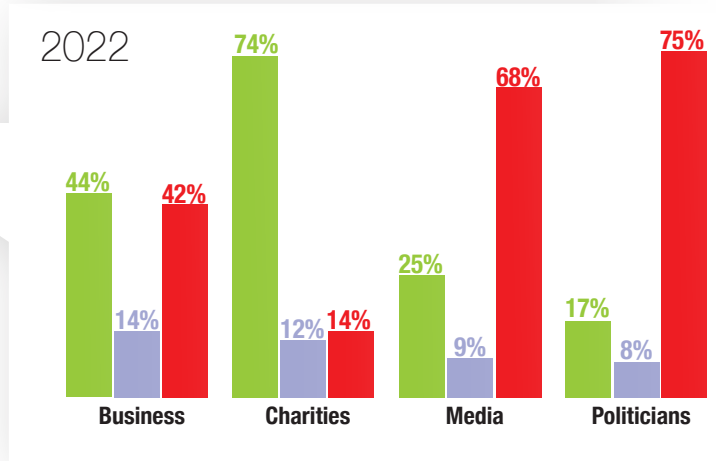
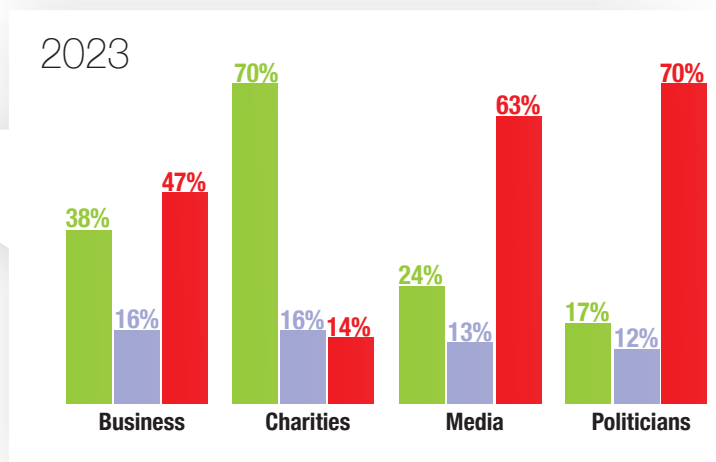
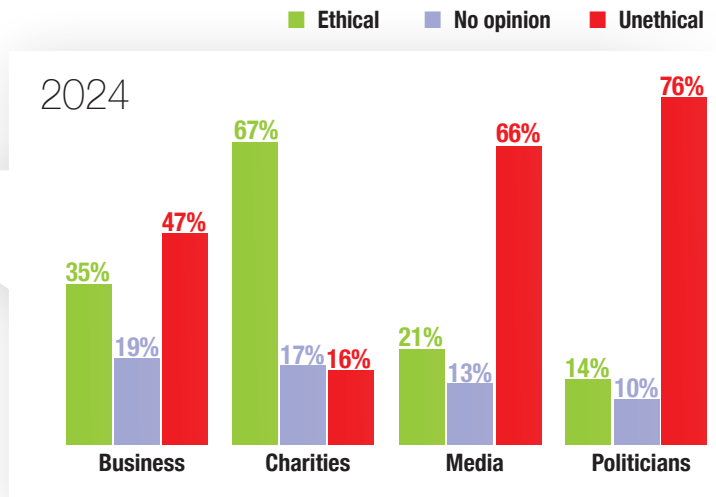
Q There is a lot of discussion these days about how ethically business and other institutions in society are behaving – that is, the extent to which their behaviour and decisions follow good principles. How ethically do you think each of the following [charities, businesses, politicians and media] generally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

The British public’s view of how institutions behave has worsened again since last year

This year’s results show a continued decline in the public’s perception of the ethical behaviour of institutions. The British public’s opinion of businesses, charities, politicians and the media all declined by 3pp. Public opinion of politicians has dropped from a record low of 17% last year to a new record - just 14% of the public believe that politicians behave ethically.

The issues that the public is concerned about remain similar to previous years, with the addition of employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing to the top five. Three of the five concerns are about how businesses manage money, in terms of tax, bribery and corruption and executive pay. The current cost of living crisis and ongoing price inflation are likely to have continued to drive the decline in the public’s perception of ethical business behaviour. Executive pay has continued to rise, outpacing overall pay for employees.

The inclusion in the top 5 issues of concern of employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing highlights that the British public is concerned by the topical issue of Speak Up. The survey results represent a call for action for businesses to ensure that they encourage Speak Up and are clear about non-retaliation – alongside addressing the ongoing public concerns about tax, bribery and corruption and executive pay.





How Ethical is Business Behaviour?

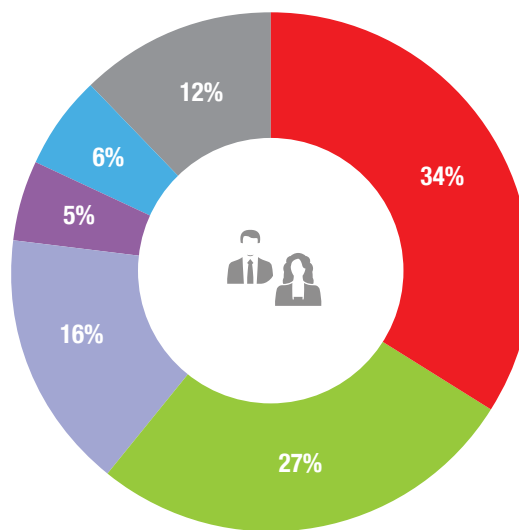
Q How important do you think it is for a chief executive's pay to reflect the ethical performance of their company?

Introduced in 2023, the question of whether the public believes that a chief executive's pay should reflect the ethical performance of their company was also asked in this year's survey.

The results show that 61% of the public, compared to 68% in 2023, believes it is very important/important that executive pay should reflect their company's ethical performance. A decline of 7pp compared to last year suggests that the British public's concern about this issue has decreased. However, it is crucial to note that 12% of participants in this year's survey did not have an opinion on this issue compared to 0% in 2023.

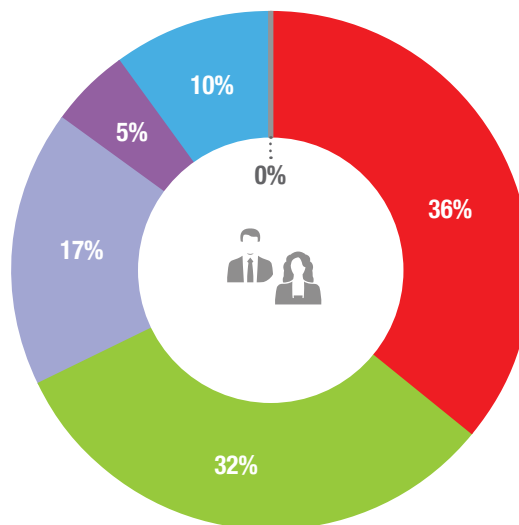
2024

- Very important
- Important
- Fairly important
- Slightly important
- Not important
- No opinion



2023

- Very important
- Important
- Fairly important
- Slightly important
- Not important
- No opinion





This Year's Biggest Movers

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

Overall, the shifts in scoring are small, with the British public's views of the most important ethical issues business needs to address remaining consistent.

-3pp • **Environmental responsibility, including climate change (22%)**

Environmental responsibility, including climate change, decreased by 3pp but maintains its spot in the British public's top 5 issues that need addressing.

-3pp • **Fair and open pricing of products and services (15%)**

Fair and open pricing of products and services entered the top 5 ethical concerns of the British public in 2023 but dropped out of it in 2024 following a decrease of 3pp. This may reflect the normalisation of the cost of living crisis and inflation and prioritisation of other, emerging, issues.

-3pp • **Harassment and bullying at work (10%)**

Concern about harassment and bullying at work has decreased by 3pp this year. This change may reflect the British public's awareness of the steps being taken at organisational and legislative levels to address this issue given its widespread media coverage in recent times.

+2pp • **Bribery and corruption (30%)**

Bribery and corruption maintained its number 2 spot in the British public's top 5 issues that need addressing, with overall concern increasing by 2pp. This issue is consistently one of the top priority issues for the British public.

+1pp • **Employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing (17%)**

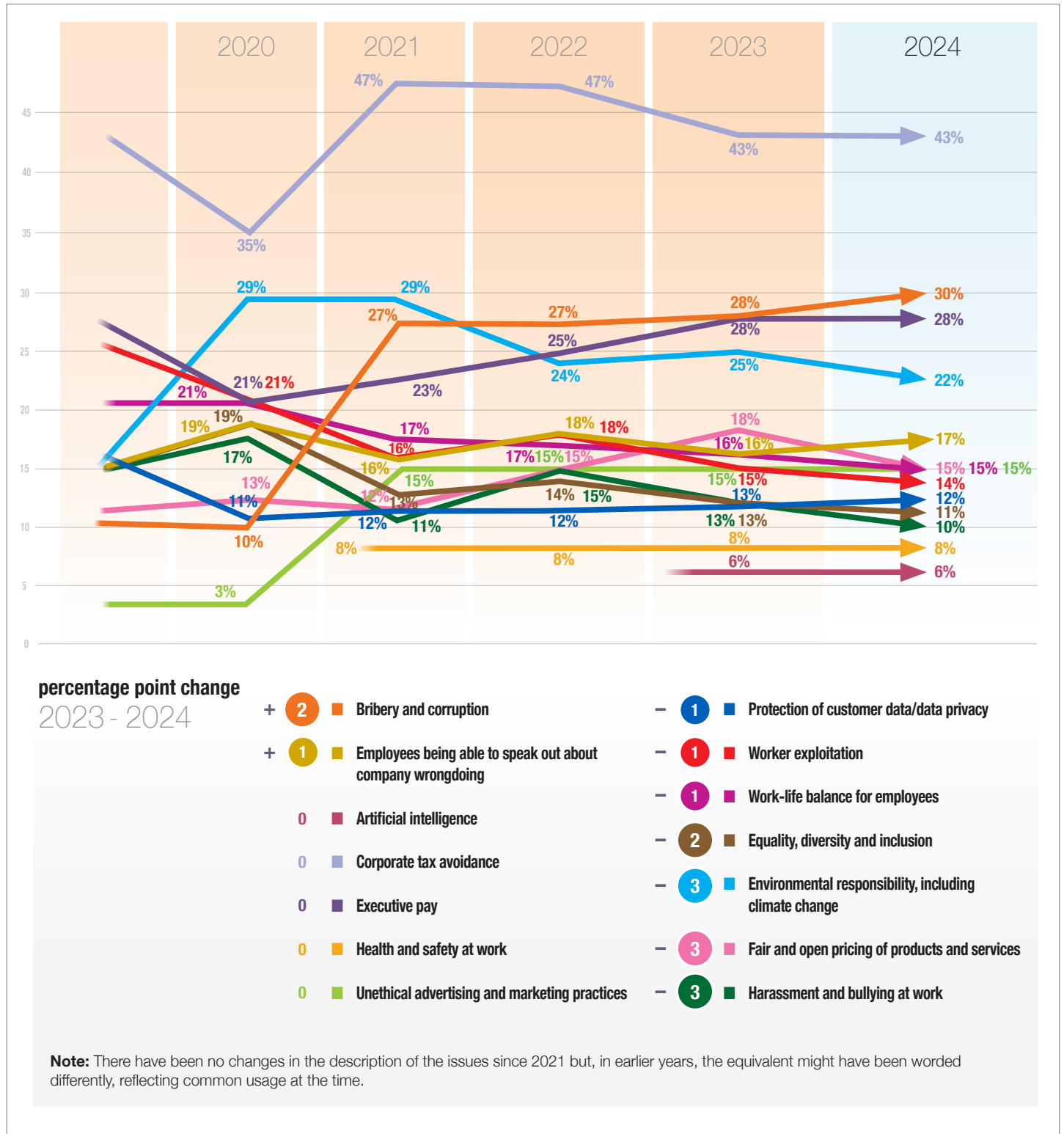
Concern about employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing has increased by 1pp to move into the top 5 ethical concerns of the British public in 2024. This issue has dominated public discourse recently following numerous reports of attempts at cover-ups of company wrongdoings across different sectors.



What Has Changed? The Long View

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

Trends



Demographic Differences

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

Differing priorities across gender

Women and men are relatively aligned on the top ethical issues with the top four issues the same for each gender. 45% of men voted for corporate tax avoidance as the top issue compared to 42% of women. Organisational issues including executive pay, bribery and corruption, worker exploitation and artificial intelligence have been highlighted more by men. Many concerns relating to interpersonal issues within organisations like equality, diversity and inclusion, harassment and bullying at work, being able to speak out about employee wrong-doing and work-life balance have been prioritised more by women.

While the overall percentage of respondents who highlighted environmental responsibility as a top concern reduced by 3pp, 23% of women cited it as a top concern compared to just 19% of men.

Concern remains high for women over issues such as work-life balance and diversity and inclusion. These are ongoing workplace concerns for women.

In 2023, for the first time in our survey's history, the gender gap for harassment and bullying narrowed with 13% of both men and women highlighting it as a priority. In 2024, the gap widened again with 11% of women citing it as a top concern compared to 9% of men.

Issue	Men 2024		Women 2024		Gender Gap 2023 (pp)	Gender Gap 2024 (pp)
	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage		
Bribery and corruption	34%	27%	5♂	7♂		
Work-life balance	12%	17%	2♀	5♀		
Environmental responsibility, including climate change	19%	23%	6♀	4♀		
Equality, diversity and inclusion	9%	13%	4♀	4♀		
Unethical advertising and marketing practices	17%	13%	2♂	4♂		
Corporate tax avoidance	45%	42%	6♂	3♂		
Employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing	16%	18%	3♀	2♀		
Executive pay	29%	27%	4♂	2♂		
Harassment and bullying at work	9%	11%	0	2♀		
Worker exploitation	15%	13%	3♂	2♂		
Artificial intelligence	6%	5%	3♂	1♂		
Fair and open pricing of products and services	15%	16%	3♀	1♀		
Health and safety at work	8%	9%	1♀	1♀		
Protection of customer data/ data privacy	12%	11%	0	1♂		

Demographic Differences

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

Varying shift in generational gap

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.

This year, for most issues, the generational gap has stayed the same or marginally increased, showing continued alignment between how different age groups prioritise many ethical business issues. Scoring is close on environmental responsibility, which runs counter to stereotype.

While the age gap has generally maintained similar trends to findings from 2023 for many issues this year, it has significantly increased for one of the top 5 ethical concerns, executive pay. Executive pay has a 24pp difference with just 16% of younger respondents highlighting it as a top concern compared with 40% of older respondents.

Work-life balance is a top concern for younger respondents compared to older respondents, with 19% of younger respondents highlighting it as a top concern compared with 11% of older respondents, an 8pp difference. The issue of equality, diversity and inclusion has a 10pp difference with 17% of younger respondents highlighting it as a top concern compared with 7% of older respondents.

Issue	Age Group			Age Gap (pp)	
	18-34 years	35-54 years	55+ years	2023	2024
Executive pay	16%	25%	40%	18	24
Corporate tax avoidance	35%	47%	45%	10	10
Equality, diversity and inclusion	17%	12%	7%	11	10
Protection of customer data/data privacy	7%	11%	16%	8	9
Work-life balance	19%	16%	11%	7	8
Employees being able to speak out about company wrongdoing	15%	13%	22%	7	7
Worker exploitation	18%	12%	12%	1	6
Fair and open pricing of products and services	12%	17%	16%	10	4
Artificial intelligence	4%	6%	6%	2	2
Bribery and corruption	33%	28%	31%	0	2
Environmental responsibility, including climate change	22%	19%	23%	0	1
Harassment and bullying at work	10%	9%	11%	4	1
Health and safety at work	9%	5%	10%	3	1
Unethical advertising and marketing practices	16%	14%	15%	5	1

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



Research Method

The research was conducted on behalf of the IBE by Yonder. This year, 2067 UK adults aged 18+ completed an online survey between 19 and 21 April 2024. The data has 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.

The complete list of issues is as follows:

- Artificial intelligence
- Bribery and corruption
- Corporate tax avoidance
- Employees being able to speak out about wrongdoing
- Environmental responsibility, including climate change
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Executive pay
- Fair and open pricing of products and services
- Harassment and bullying at work
- Health and safety at work
- Protection of customer data/data privacy
- Unethical advertising and marketing practices
- Work-life balance for employees
- Worker exploitation.

Respondent Profile

TOTAL	Men	Women	Other	Prefer not to say	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE
2067	1006	1056	3	2	579	689	799	1141	926

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

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