

# Causes That Count: 2021

The 50 issues that matter most to people this year.

# THE CAUSES THAT COUNT: 2021

“We want to stand for something that really matters to people”

It's a sentiment we've heard brand owners express many times, and one which has driven a surge in purpose marketing and brand activism over recent years. But how often do we take the time to understand just what really does matter?

What challenges do the world truly care about? Do some issues matter more? And after a year like 2020, where do we even begin?

Thanks to the opinions of 1600 people across four different markets, CAUSES THAT COUNT has the answers. It's a practical guide that directs you towards the issues normal people want to see action against.

The insights are often as fascinating as they are valuable:

Following a landmark year for diversity and inclusion, do people still care?

Which issues rank highly despite a lack of media coverage last year?

Has climate change been superseded by more immediate concerns?

We hope you feel inspired to pick up the gauntlet and address your audiences' very real concerns. And if you would like guidance for how your brand can take action on these issues, we'd love to help you on that journey.

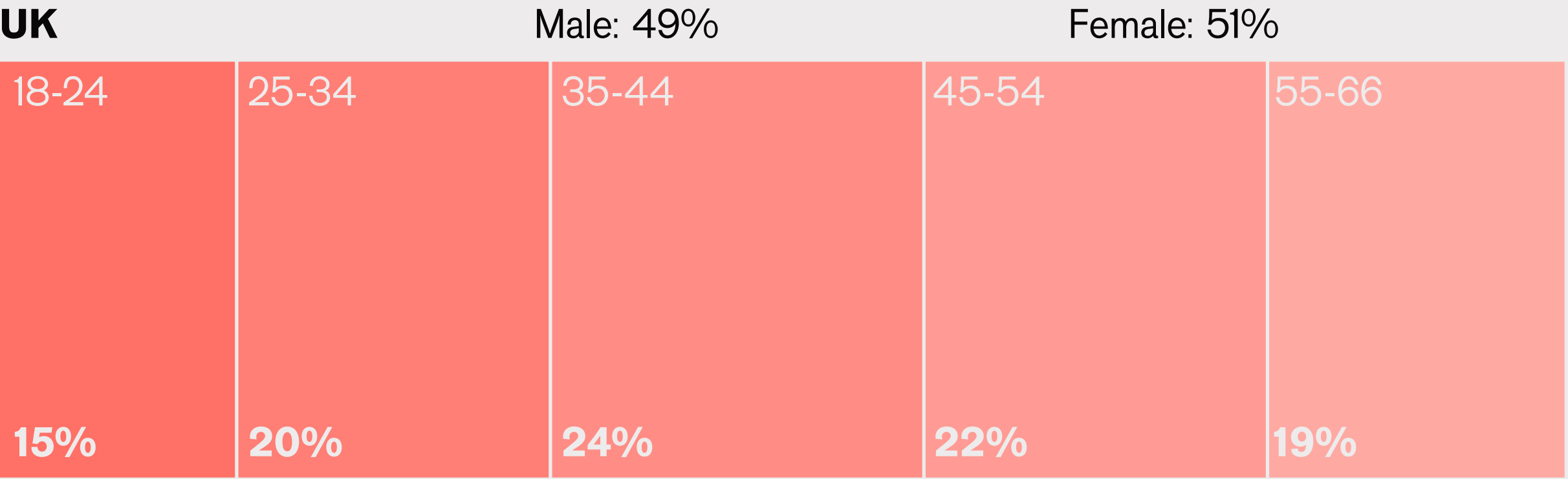
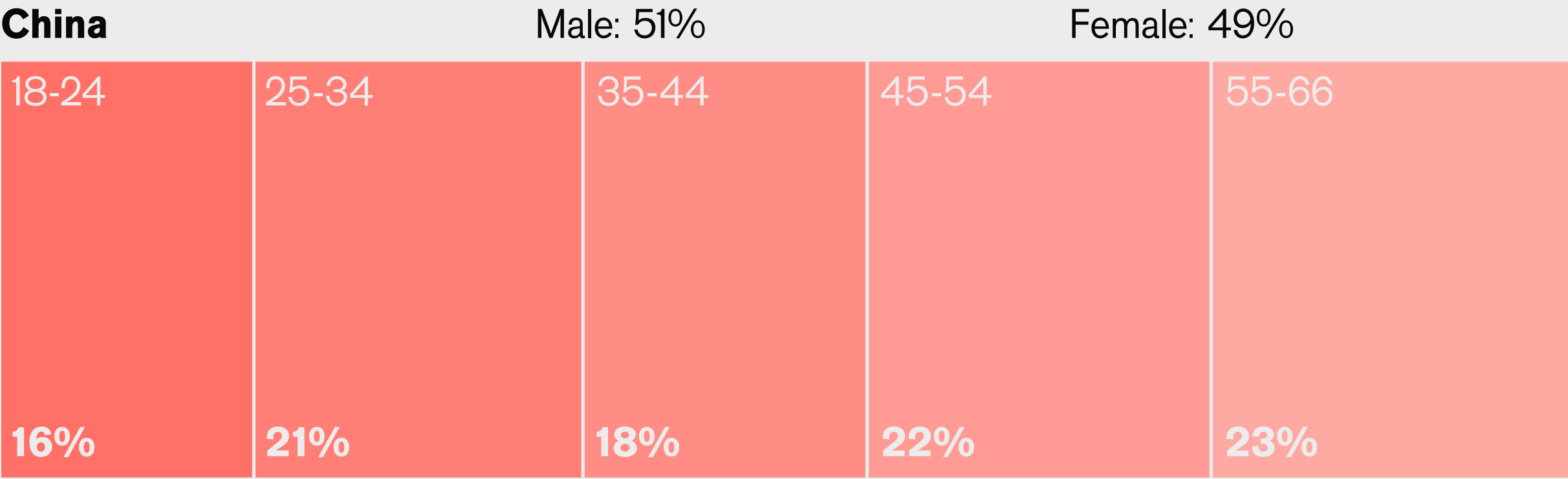
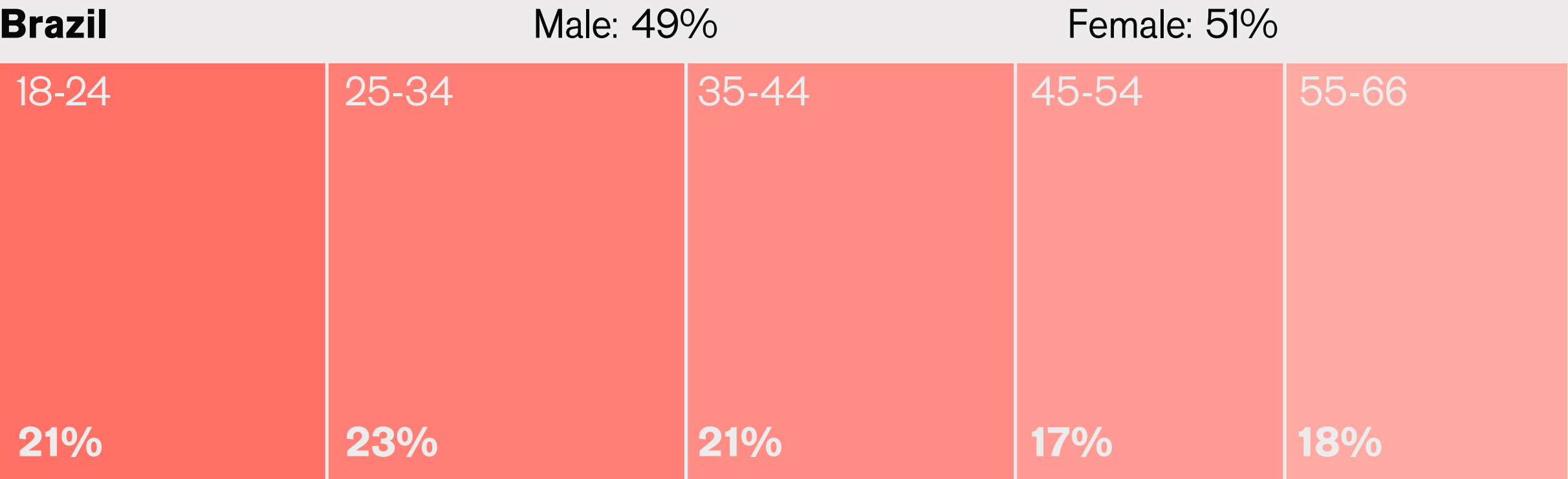
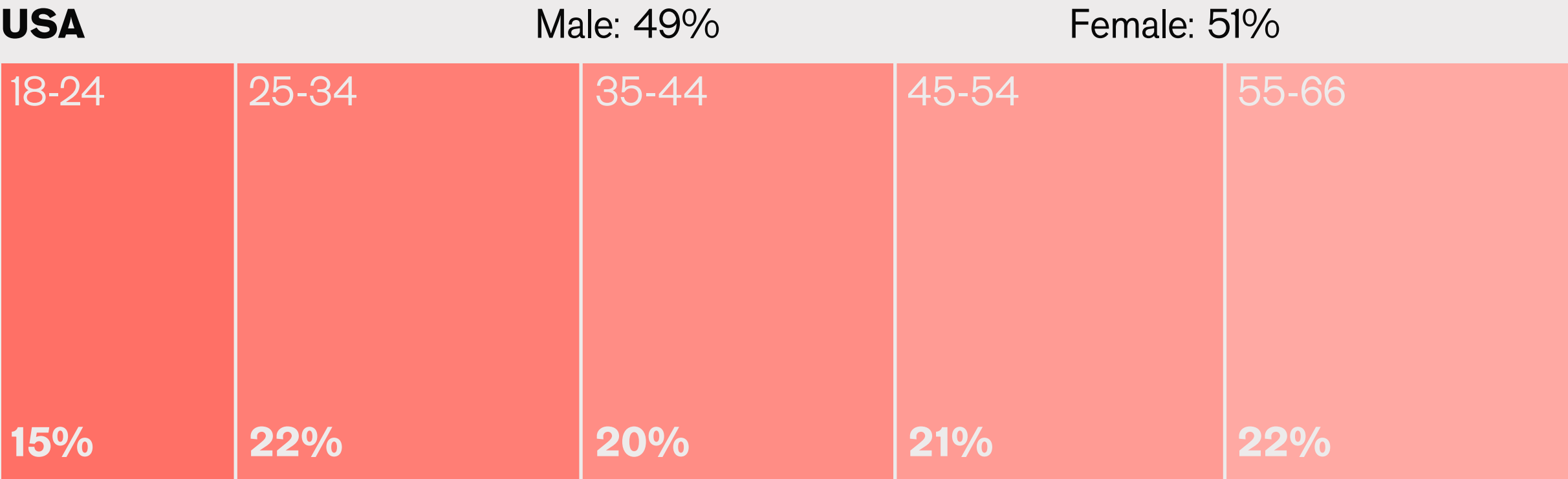
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# EXPLAINING OUR METHODOLOGY

Our index combines unprompted and prompted responses from 1600 people surveyed by Attest during January 2021. The final scoring recognises the strength of feeling across four markets, weighting each country equally.



# The top 50

1. Unemployment and job security	●	26. Income inequality	●
2. Climate change	●	27. Paying taxes fairly	●
3. Access to healthcare	●	28. Biodiversity and species extinction	●
4. Famine and food security	●	29. Responsible spending and debt	●
5. Access to quality education	●	30. Child labour	●
6. Extreme poverty around the world	●	31. Addiction (drugs, alcohol and gambling)	●
7. Mental health issues	●	32. Support for public services	●
8. Government transparency and threats to democracy	●	33. Work-life balance	●
9. Access to water and sanitation around the world	●	34. The plastic crisis	●
10. Crime, violence, gun control	●	35. Ethical business practices	●
11. Global public health issues	●	36. Obesity, access to healthy food and exercise	●
12. Poverty, hunger and homelessness in my country	●	37. Decline of family relationships	●
13. Large scale conflict and wars	●	38. Universal access to technology and the internet	●
14. Pollution of my local environment	●	39. Protecting vulnerable people online	●
15. Care for the elderly	●	40. Animal rights	●
16. The health of our oceans	●	41. Automation's impact on human employment	●
17. Fair wages	●	42. Loneliness	●
18. Recycling and waste	●	43. Gender inequality	●
19. Cyber and data security	●	44. The refugee crisis	●
20. Natural disaster prevention and relief	●	45. Negative impact of technology	●
21. Unifying our country and communities	●	46. Self esteem and body image	●
22. Support for people with disabilities	●	47. Fake news	●
23. Deforestation	●	48. Issues with our media	●
24. Race relations and racism	●	49. Religious tolerance	●
25. Equal opportunities in the workplace	●	50. LGBTQ+ rights	●

## Key

Economic	●
Environment	●
Political	●
Social	●
Technology	●

50

LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

⬆

Inclusion in the top 50 shows that there is still a long way to go for LGBTQ+ rights before it ceases to be a concern to many millions of people.

Trans and non-binary inclusion remains a particularly significant challenge. Last year was the most violent year for American transgender people in five years. Whilst in the UK, trans people experience higher rates of hate crimes, suicide attempts and sexual abuse.

This state of affairs is being fuelled by relentless dog-whistle transphobia in the media - normalising the ridicule and mistrust of trans and gender non-conforming people. Stonewall CEO, Nancy Keller, was summarising the UK public's position when she said: "we don't hate you, but we don't really want you teaching our children."

How to build consensus around the idea that trans women are women, trans men are men and non-binary people are valid - and therefore deserve the same rights and respect as everyone else - is likely to remain a salient topic throughout 2021.

Achieving inclusion for trans and non binary people rests on exposing the hate and faulty evidence at the heart of the counter argument. Expect to see brands stand up more often for some of the most vilified among us.

Total Score: 1024

USA: #50

BR: #50

Market Rankings

UK: #50

CN: #49

49

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

⬇

Despite an ever increasing majority valuing religious tolerance as part of a diverse society, over 18% of all hate crimes in the U.S. are related to religious bias. In a year when the persecution of religious groups in China continued to make headlines and the Labour Party in the UK sought to draw a line under its issues with anti-Semitism, religious tolerance remains a concern for many.

JEWISH PEOPLE MAKE UP LESS THAN 1% OF THE POPULATION, YET EXPERIENCE THE 3RD MOST HATE CRIME OF ANY RELIGIOUS GROUP.

Total Score: 1477

USA: #37

BR: #40

Market Rankings

UK: #48

CN: #50

47

FAKE NEWS

⬆

2017's Collins Dictionary word of the year feels just as relevant to today's news agenda. With threats to democracy rising sharply this year, many are struggling to separate the spread of misinformation online. Rebecca Solnit has called for changing the curriculum to teach kids the capacity to factcheck information. There's also a need to focus on the eldest among us who are almost four times more likely to share fake news on Facebook than the younger generation.

Total Score: 1606

USA: #49

BR: #39

Market Rankings

UK: #46

CN: #42

48

ISSUES WITH OUR MEDIA

⬆

From filter bubbles to clickbait to bias, the media has come under intense scrutiny in recent years with analysts, politicians, and even journalists themselves accusing it of having failed us. The majority of people (60%) still prefer media that has no particular point of view with less than a third of people preferring news that shares or reinforces their views.

"AS INCREASING NUMBERS OF PEOPLE TURN TO INSTAGRAM FOR THEIR NEWS, THE QUESTION REMAINS: IS THIS THE NEWS THEY NEED, OR SIMPLY THE NEWS THEY WANT TO SEE?" Dr Laura Glitsos

Total Score: 1518

USA: #38

BR: #49

Market Rankings

UK: #49

CN: #45

45% of the British public believe they encounter fake news online every single day.

Portugal and Finland have the most respect for their media, with 56% trusting it most of the time. South Korea (21%) and France (23%) has the least trust.

22% of all COVID-19 reporting in China between January and July 2020 was misinformation.



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## SELF ESTEEM AND BODY IMAGE



As social media imagery weaves its way ever deeper into our lives, it's hardly surprising that its negative effects are being so keenly felt. Whilst the concern is still more prevalent amongst women, it is the body image struggles of men which are rising most steeply, with 16% seeing it as a significant issue. In the UK, 23% of people have been body shamed online on dating apps or social media - with Bumble taking the unprecedented step of banning users who body shame their matches.

Total Score: 1625	USA: #45	BR: #48
Market Rankings	UK: #44	CN: #37



ANALYSIS SURVIVAL MODE

Against the backdrop of the pandemic, body image wasn't the only cause to see a decline in 2021. Looking through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we can see that those higher order needs of love and belonging, esteem and self actualisation have moved down our priorities. Unsurprisingly, it seems that many of us are more concerned with survival mode.

This has opened up opportunities for brands with a credible role to play in our more foundational physiological and safety needs. But we expect to see greater significance for family relationships, gender inequality and body image as the imperative of those immediate needs subside.

45

## NEGATIVE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY



The negative consequences of technology's ever tighter grip on our lives made its presence felt this year. Smartphone addiction went truly mainstream with the release of Netflix's The Social Dilemma. The average person spends 3 hours and 15 minutes on their phone - and over COVID-19 we've seen screen time spike. With so much more of our work and social life being conducted digitally it was hardly surprising that in 2021 these extended to many physical concerns - sleep deprivation, impact on posture and sedentary lifestyles.

Total Score: 1626	USA: #48	BR: #44
Market Rankings	UK: #47	CN: #41

44

## THE REFUGEE CRISIS



Although sidelined this year, the crisis carries on in the Mediterranean with an estimated 979 migrants dying whilst trying to cross. There are still 2.6m refugees living in camps worldwide. A French NGO, L'Auberge des Migrants, found an inventive way to help by hacking Amazon product comments to ask for donations. We see this issue steadily rising in the future as the climate displaces warfare as the main driver; with one person every 1.3 seconds forced to leave their homes due to the crisis.

Total Score: 1704	USA: #47	BR: #37
Market Rankings	UK: #42	CN: #46

43

## GENDER INEQUALITY



Even before the crisis, we were 257 years away from gender parity according to the World Economic Forum. But when the dust settles, that number will likely have increased due to Covid's disproportionate impact on women. This December in the U.S., women lost a total of 156,000 jobs, while staggeringly men gained 16,000. But it wasn't all bad news this year. The United Nations' World's Women 2020 report found women's representation in parliament has more than doubled globally, reaching 25% of parliamentary seats in 2020. And there are now 20 countries with a woman head of state or government, up from 12 in 1995.

Total Score: 1734	USA: #43	BR: #46
Market Rankings	UK: #41	CN: #43



ANALYSIS ON THE CUSP

Having risen steadily as a concern in step with its integration into every facet of our lives, it's no surprise that the negative impact of technology made our top 50 this year. However there were many noteworthy issues that just missed out:

- Immigration (US)
- Over population (UK, China)
- Corruption (US, UK, Brazil)
- Lack of culture (US, UK)
- Human trafficking (US)
- Power of Big Tech (US, China)
- Lack of belief in science (US)
- Domestic abuse (UK)

Parents of 17 year old sons  
cared about gender inequality  
28% more than those with  
17 year old daughters.

– CTC, 2021





42

LONELINESS

↑

Although it appeared low down, we expect loneliness to steadily rise in 2021 as Covid-19 continues to enforce social isolation worldwide. Loneliness has been likened to the effects of smoking 15 cigarettes a day, causing problems such as dementia, depression and heart condition. This isn't just a silent epidemic sweeping older generations. In fact, studies suggest it is more likely to be experienced by young people. We're seeing novel solutions spring up however, like Mon Ami which pairs the two loneliest generations together, and Let's Be Authentic which aims to make digital communication more meaningful.



Total Score: 1746	USA: #46	BR: #45
Market Rankings	UK: #21	CN: #48

41

AUTOMATION'S IMPACT ON HUMAN EMPLOYMENT

↑

Whilst automation's tangible effect on people's lives remains for most in the abstract, the direction of travel is clear. By 2030, it's set to take over 20 million manufacturing jobs around the world and will supplant 85 million total jobs by 2025. China is at the vanguard of this transition, with 14 million robots set to be put to work and Foxconn Technology Group announcing 60,000 factors workers will be replaced by robots.

Total Score: 1879	USA: #41	BR: #33
Market Rankings	UK: #45	CN: #33

39

PROTECTING VULNERABLE PEOPLE ONLINE

↑

The online world remains our age's unregulated wild wild west; where sexism and abuse toward women is rife, especially in the gaming community, and where older people continue to be susceptible to scams and almost four times more likely to share fake news. Although one positive consequence of lockdown is seniors becoming more digitally literate, with a record share owning smartphones, and two-thirds of over 65s going online.

It's good seeing initiatives to help bridge the generational divide like in New Mexico where a company dispatched teenagers to help 3,000 seniors figure out how to use their tablets and smartphones.

Total Score: 1989	USA: #35	BR: #43
Market Rankings	UK: #32	CN: #44

40

ANIMAL RIGHTS

↑

Interest in veganism hit an all-time high in 2020 according to search data, and UK supermarket Asda even trialed a vegan butcher concept. Whilst in Singapore, 'no-kill' lab-grown meat went on sale for the first time, widely touted as the remedy to our slaughtering of 80bn animals a year. Covid-19 may even spark a rethink of our relationship with animals, as the next once-a-decade lethal pathogen is likely to come from our consumption of them.

Total Score: 1954	USA: #40	BR: #32
Market Rankings	UK: #25	CN: #47

38

UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY & THE INTERNET

↑

Only half of the world's population has access to the internet. With high-speed broadband access - which correlates with a nation's GDP - lagging much farther behind, especially in rural areas. But with better data and new technology it's possible to bring high speed internet to 90% of the global population by 2030. Elon Musk's Starlink is sending 42,000 satellites into space which would bring high-speed internet to every corner of the planet. Whilst in the developed world, Coronavirus has revealed the scale of the digital divide - with 1.78 million children across the UK unable to access a laptop.

Total Score: 2039	USA: #42	BR: #41
Market Rankings	UK: #39	CN: #18



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DECLINE OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

⬇

There's a debate to be had as to whether COVID-19, on aggregate, is tearing families apart or bringing them closer together. One thing is for sure: it's certainly changing our relationships. Some research suggests it has deepened the quality of our connections. Whilst at the same time, we see global divorce rates spiking, domestic abuse rising and both adults and kids experiencing the stresses of home schooling. Despite that, our instinct is that one positive consequence of COVID-19 will be tighter family bonds.

Total Score: 2106

Market Rankings

USA: #32

UK: #43

BR: #26

CN: #35

36

OBESITY, ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD & EXERCISE

⬆

Worldwide obesity has nearly tripled since 1975 and is second only to smoking as the most preventable cause of US deaths. Studies found COVID-19 to be more deadly in people with obesity - mattering more than heart or lung disease, or smoking. And a U.K. survey found twice as many people putting on weight as losing it during the initial lockdown. Last year, the UK government began the Better Health campaign to target obesity, with almost two-thirds of adults and 1 in 3 children leaving primary school as overweight or obese. A notable step taken was banning TV ads for food high in fat, sugar and salt before 9pm.

Total Score: 2126

Market Rankings

USA: #34

UK: #37

BR: #34

CN: #34

35

ETHICAL BUSINESS PRACTICES

⬆

We predict COVID-19 will act as an accelerant of the turn to more ethical practices with consumers now seeing businesses as more competent and trustworthy than their governments. Last year companies with a combined revenue of over \$11.4 trillion - equivalent to half the US's GDP - are now pursuing net-zero emissions by the end of the century, according to the UNFCCC. And in response to COVID-19, we saw some businesses step up like French luxury perfume makers Givenchy and Dior who reconfigured their equipment to churn out hand sanitises to hospitals, serving eight million patients annually.

Total Score: 2152

Market Rankings

USA: #28

UK: #38

BR: #38

CN: #28

34

THE PLASTIC CRISIS

⬆

The US and UK are the world's largest producers of plastic waste, which continue to devastate marine life in our oceans, and create unknown effects in our unborn babies - micro-plastics are now showing up in human placenta. The global recycling system is still at a stalemate with developing countries shipping back plastic waste. But we're starting to see the public's turn against plastic lead to change with UK supermarkets making commitments, although they're still not doing enough.

Total Score: 2173

Market Rankings

USA: #44

UK: #18

BR: #35

CN: #22

33

WORK LIFE BALANCE

⬆

In a year when job security has fallen through the floor, we don't doubt this issue had to take a backseat for those at work. In fact, signs of burnout rose by 33% in 2020, as workers managed working from home, school disruptions and layoffs. Moving forward we see this issue continuing its longer term rise as sustainable working becomes more of a want, but even more of a need.

Total Score: 2246

Market Rankings

USA: #30

UK: #35

BR: #31

CN: #27





The highest new entry, in a year when many people have reappraised the value of the state and heaped gratitude upon key workers. Americans rated the ethics of nurses and grade-school teachers higher than ever before, and their confidence in the medical system and in public schools also showed rare double-digit increases this year. Expect to see the emphasis move from our doctors, nurses and health care systems to our schools and beyond as health needs give way to social and economic concerns.

Total Score: 2249

USA: #33

BR: #42

Market Rankings

UK: #16

CN: #32



## BIG IN 2021

Gazing into our crystal ball, which causes might make an appearance in next year's survey?

### WEALTH GAPS

The Black Lives Matter movement reenergised the issue of the racial wealth gap in the U.S. this year. African Americans own just 4% of the nation's wealth and need \$10tn to have a proportionate share. But simply by closing the racial wealth gap, the US GDP could be 4-6% higher by 2028.

Brands are starting to step up to address the gap with financial outlays to minority communities. By June last year Corporate America had pledged \$1.7 billion with JPMorgan Chase & Co alone committing \$30 billion toward mortgages, housing and business loans.

Initiatives like 15 Percent Pledge and Black Girl Finance are likely to raise awareness further.

### THREATS TO CULTURE

The pandemic has hit the creative industries particularly hard with governments offering support with varying degrees of success. Particularly at risk are the local institutions, festivals and touring musicians. Culture as an industry accounts for more than 4.5% of America's GDP - so beyond the value it provides in its own right - there's also an economic imperative to fight for its survival.

Meanwhile there are signs that the pandemic has made us collectively more creative. We've seen streaming giants step up with generous relief funds and Bandcamp's much-lauded Fridays initiative - which saw the platform waive its revenue share on sales to help artists - raised \$40m for artists and labels.

### AIR POLLUTION

We're waking up to one in four deaths worldwide and 7 million premature deaths each year caused by this silent killer.

Until recently, air pollution has been seen as a global public health disaster that does not get the attention it deserves because most of the people who die are poor or otherwise vulnerable. But expect to see air pollution become increasingly politicised after the recent landmark ruling to grant asylum to a Bangladeshi man with asthma.

As Sailesh Mehta, a barrister specialising in environmental cases, said: "The link between migration and environmental degradation is clear. As global warming makes parts of our planet uninhabitable, mass migration will become the norm. Air pollution does not respect national boundaries."



31

ADDICTION

⬇

Despite being low on our Index, it will have been a priority for many addicts and the increasing numbers of those on the brink. 2020 was a year full of temptation - distractions were rare, stress was high and vices were easy to access. And it's not just a problem for the anonymous masses - world famous musicians, finding themselves devoid of their normal highs, returned to addictions they thought they'd left behind. That being said, those seeking help found greater support as they battled alcohol, drug, gambling, porn and work addictions - online therapy sessions, virtual communities and families all helped to break routines.

Total Score: 2252

USA: #31

BR: #27

Market Rankings

UK: #40

CN: #24

30

CHILD LABOUR

⬇

Child labour is still ranking fairly low despite the move businesses are taking toward communicating product provenance. We've already seen chocolate brands step up to address the issue in their industries' supply chains, but some are suggesting the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour (2021) should be focusing on improving wellbeing instead. Interestingly, child labour ranked lowest for our Chinese respondents (#40), despite the fact that almost 8% of children in China between the ages of 10-15 are labourers.

Total Score: 2258

USA: #29

BR: #29

Market Rankings

UK: #22

CN: #40

29

RESPONSIBLE SPENDING AND DEBT

⬆

2020 has not been kind to many bank accounts. Worldwide, household debt has increased at varying levels. For 22% of UK adults, the year started with £100 or less in savings. Income losses were then experienced by 33% of households, and over 7 million people were behind on their bills at the end of 2020. Almost all nations are calling for government responsibility to support these groups, but the answer goes beyond that, to economic growth. Despite the vaccines bringing hope to many, 2021 still looks to be a difficult year for a lot of people as jobs return slowly and government support reduces.

Total Score: 2264

USA: #24

BR: #36

Market Rankings

UK: #34

CN: #31

28

BIODIVERSITY AND SPECIES EXTINCTION

⬆

We were delighted to hear that 2021 is the start of the UN's Decade of Restoration. It's about time. We've already seen more top down efforts being made, with pledges committed toward large-scale sustainable change. However, there's still a lot of work to do, not least in impressing the importance on certain markets. Where it ranks highest in China at #15, American respondents put it at #39. The gap suggests the issue's significance needs to be understood at a deeper level - on just how much biodiversity will impact our future.

Total Score: 2342

USA: #39

BR: #23

Market Rankings

UK: #26

CN: #15

27

PAYING TAXES FAIRLY

⬆

Tax has been a relatively quiet issue in the media, but it was interesting to see where this sat in our respondents' views. With tax becoming a method for government to regain some of their pandemic debt, it's likely businesses will be hit with a bigger bill in 2021 and beyond. Certain global companies have become very good at minimising tax payments through offshore tax havens, but complicated financial arrangements will undoubtedly be held to account. Fair taxation is also due an overhaul following years of discussion around taxing tech giants properly - The five largest Silicon Valley giants paid \$220bn in cash taxes over the past decade, or just 16% of their cumulative pre-tax profits. Many are hoping a conclusion is reached this coming year.

Total Score: 2355

USA: #20

BR: #28

Market Rankings

UK: #33

CN: #36

26

INCOME INEQUALITY

⬆

Before the lockdown, the wealth gap was already widening for more than 70% of the global population. But then 3 in 4 households suffered declining income over the pandemic with 82% of poorer households affected. But we also saw the top 5 billionaires increase their wealth by 26%, totalling more wealth than all African countries combined. This isn't a new issue and lots can be said about demographic divides, but topline, the pandemic highlighted the winners and losers a lot more starkly than it has before. It also highlighted which industries and skill sets are now set to soar over the next few years - those in tech & ecomm, logistics, food and pharma will thrive. All global, all flexible, all growing.

Total Score: 2387

USA: #26

BR: #21

Market Rankings

UK: #31

CN: #30



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Bird owners were 20% more likely to care about animal rights than dog or cat owners.

– CTC, 2021



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## EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WORKPLACE



This issue has been at the heart of many global companies' diversity and inclusion efforts of late, but it's still an area that needs a lot of work. Despite the clear business case for diverse representation, equal access to opportunities across colour, gender, sexual orientation and/or disability will be a long term fight for many - every intersection is fighting its own battle in discrimination. Unfortunately, the pandemic may have reversed positive trends, but with Biden's presidency starting with a focus on an equal society (including economic mobility), we're hoping for a better 2021.

Total Score: 2422

USA: #21

BR: #24

Market Rankings

UK: #27

CN: #29

23

## DEFORESTATION



According to the UN, deforestation accounts for 10 million hectares of loss per year. Whilst this number has been decreasing since the 1990s, its legacy is creating massive issues for biodiversity and species extinction (#28). The Amazon rainforest suffering from fires in 2019 and a 12 year deforesting high in 2020 thanks to their president meant it was a particularly pertinent issue for Brazilians, who ranked it as #11 most important. For many, the solution lies in tree planting. But it won't beat the value in keeping trees we already have - talking and acting to prevent further mass deforestation is a must. One novel solution came from a scheme in Indonesia - originally designed to reduce poverty, it had the surprising side-effect of also substantially reducing deforestation.

Total Score: 2503

USA: #36

BR: #11

Market Rankings

UK: #19

CN: #21

24

## RACE RELATIONS AND RACISM



With George Floyd's death prompting an enormous global reaction, the movement couldn't be called a one-off. This time, the black community and its allies said: Enough, No More. 'Anti-racist' became a significant expression - it's no longer enough to not be racist. You have to take action against individual and systemic racism in all its forms. Brands are stepping up to the plate, acknowledging their role in history, now changing the status quo. Mostly spread through the boundless power of digital, we saw virtual protests, social media slideshows, open source reading lists. Active learning, active listening. Whilst we saw a bumper of activity in the summer, this movement is going to continue work on changing systematic racism for years to come.

Total Score: 2503

USA: #13

BR: #25

Market Rankings

UK: #29

CN: #39

22

## SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



Supporting people with disabilities remains a high ranking concern for millions. This year has also seen a shift towards a more inclusive approach to neurodiversity, referring to the one in seven people who have 'learning difficulties' like dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and autism.

For decades, neurodiverse people have been denied the same opportunities as neurotypical people. Even now, seven in 10 businesses will ignore their own neurodiversity policies. But we are beginning to see diversity of thought being championed in the business world, with companies like P&G and Google seeing it as a competitive advantage.

Total Score: 2539

USA: #14

BR: #20

Market Rankings

UK: #17

CN: #38



ANALYSIS

THE YEAR IN SEARCH

In June 2020, how to be anti-racist was searched more than how to be a millionaire for the first time. What we search for is a reflection of our concerns and our intentions. Our searches this year suggest we are becoming more altruistic and compassionate as a species.

- Health care workers' bravery inspired us all. The top searched thing people wanted to become during a pandemic year was a nurse. TIME recognised them as guardians of the year and Vogue put them on the front cover.
- Global search interest for foster a dog reached an all-time high in 2020. Pedigree stepped in to give away 1m grants to help end pet homelessness and connect people with their new dogs via zoom.
- Worldwide searches for support small business doubled compared to the previous year. AMEX launched the "Stand for Small" coalition whereas Burger King took the unusual step of promoting independent competitors.
- The world searched how to help more than ever - with many brands going the extra mile to give back during the pandemic and Giving Tuesday emerging as altruistic alternative to Black Friday.
- This year, we focused on helping others more than we focused on ourselves – how to donate was searched 2x more than how to save money. 3 out of 4 millennials donated during the pandemic whilst many brands channelled profits to relief efforts.



Covid-19 has undoubtedly caused communities to reunite and reenergised a sense of civic duty. The number of people who said they were strongly involved in their communities has risen by 9% in the United States and Britain, online conversation around 'community spirit' increased 82% in a single month and 61% believe their neighbours have become more important in their lives. And as the dust settles on a particularly divisive election season in the U.S., one comforting sign for next time around is the emergence of 'empathy-based dialogue' as an evidence based strategy for winning hearts and minds on the doorstep.

Total Score: 2566	USA: #08	BR: #47
Market Rankings	UK: #36	CN: #05



# SPOTLIGHT ON USA

Ranking #8 in the US Top 10, 'unifying our country and communities' is an indicative response to the fatigue felt by many after months and months of divisive Presidential Election campaigns. Regardless of what they believe, Americans are hoping for restored national unity at a time when the states are at their most separate in decades.

'Poverty, hunger and homeless in my country' was also one to feature high at #5, demonstrating the many issues the country is facing as it battles signs of a recession with few federal social safety nets. Perhaps this was connected to #10 - mental health. The topic is of rising importance for our respondents in the West as people understand its value during a difficult time.

But beyond that, the US respondents are still thinking about their role as a world leader, considering access to water and extreme poverty around the world to be some of the most important to address.



1. Unemployment and job security
2. Access to healthcare
3. Government transparency
4. Access to water and sanitation around the world
5. Poverty, hunger and homelessness in my country
6. Famine and food security
7. Access to quality education
8. Unifying our country and communities
9. Extreme poverty around the world
10. Mental health issues





# SPOTLIGHT ON CHINA

China was the only country where natural disaster relief and prevention just made it into the top 10 issues for our respondents, no doubt following years of increasing devastation in all areas of their large nation. But that wasn't the only one where they stood alone in their concern. 'Pollution of my local environment' at #3 was indicative of a nation seeing the effects of pollution in real time.

And whilst we're seeing climate change complete the environmental triad in China's Top 10, it was interesting to see that political, economic and social issues were all present for our respondents. In particular was the political trio, where health, education and sanitation issues made an understandable showing due to the pandemic.

All in all, China's Top 10 reflects a nation focused on coming together and moving forward on issues that are close to them personally.



1. Unemployment and job security
2. Famine and food security
3. Pollution of my local environment
4. Climate change
5. Unifying our country and communities
6. Access to healthcare
7. Global public health issues
8. Access to quality education
9. Access to water and sanitation around the world
10. Natural disaster prevention and relief

20

NATURAL DISASTER  
PREVENTION AND RELIEF



Sadly 2020 was a record breaking year for natural disasters. Global disasters made worse by climate change produced losses of \$210 billion as several countries, including the U.S. and China, battled wild fires, hurricanes, and floods. While this is only the latest in what the UN has called a 'staggering' rise in climate emergencies in last 20 years', scientists are saying the worst is yet to come. Even though other issues might have stolen the limelight recently, governments and businesses worldwide need to be aware of the increasing dangers caused by climate related disasters. It's going to call for a global effort both in terms of disaster risk reduction and in addressing the root causes of climate change, particularly by those countries who haven't felt the full force of the consequences. This is an issue that is only going to rise up the scale over the coming years.

Total Score: 2567

USA: #23

BR: #22

Market Rankings

UK: #30

CN: #10





19

CYBER AND DATA SECURITY

⌵

Catapulted into the mainstream by the [Cambridge Analytica scandal](#) and the dawning realisation of how [valuable our data is](#) to the internet overlords, it's no surprise that cyber and data security was a top 20 issue.

And in 2021 it shows no signs of abating, with millions leaving WhatsApp over its [privacy changes](#) and the suspected [antitrust cases](#) on the horizon threatening to break up big-tech.

Whilst until recently there has been little compelling evidence for companies to take privacy considerations seriously, this has swiftly changed. A recent Cisco survey found that [32% of consumers](#) don't just care about data privacy, but are willing to act on it by switching providers. The primacy of the issue is born out in the response of tech giants. Apple is today more concerned with putting privacy at the [heart of their marketing](#) than thinking different.

Taken together, these signs all point towards data privacy rising in relevance over the coming years, making good on the oft-cited prophecy that "privacy will be to the Information Age as product safety was to the Industrial Age".

Total Score: 2573	USA: #17	BR: #30
Market Rankings	UK: #28	CN: #12

18

RECYCLING AND WASTE

⊖

Recycling and waste has received increasing amounts of attention over the past few years and people still consider it extremely important. That's probably due to the issues still being faced and impactful innovative solutions. From the UK (one of the world's biggest producers of plastic waste) using its new found freedom from the EU to continue to [export waste to developing countries](#), to [Dow's inclusive recycling](#) initiative in Brazil that's helping change people's lives through waste picker cooperatives. There's still a long way to go in addressing the world's waste issues but approaches like this that focus on the human element and social impact are a step in the right direction.

Total Score: 2588	USA: #27	BR: #15
Market Rankings	UK: #12	CN: #20

17

FAIR WAGES

⌵

Ensuring fair pay is an issue being discussed across the globe and one that has a significant personal impact on billions of people. In the UK, even though the pandemic gave cause for the voluntary [real Living Wage](#) to be increased, almost [three-quarters](#) of frontline care workers were still found to be earning below it. Big businesses like Unilever are making commitments to ensure their entire supply chain earns at least a living wage and organizations like the [Global Living Wage Coalition](#) are fighting hard in countries like Brazil and China to ensure that workers can afford a decent life for themselves and their families. Workers are also increasingly being given tools to empower them such as MIT's [Living Wage calculator](#) and [Glassdoor's Know Your Worth](#).


Total Score: 2611	USA: #18	BR: #14
Market Rankings	UK: #20	CN: #23

16

THE HEALTH OF OUR OCEANS

⌵

The fact that this is falling in importance might not be a surprise to some given how under-represented the ocean and seas are at a global policy level. Whilst 2021 is undoubtedly going to be a critical year for the environment with key talks on the climate, biodiversity, food and agriculture, at the time of writing the United Nations Ocean Conference has still not been rescheduled for this year. In December of 2020, however, 14 countries, as part of the [Give it 100% Ocean Panel](#), made an unprecedented commitment to use marine ecosystems sustainably. With this year marking the start of the UN's decade devoted to ocean science and sustainable development and its second World Ocean Assessment due to be published, 2021 could see our oceans step back into the limelight.



Total Score: 2719	USA: #22	BR: #19
Market Rankings	UK: #08	CN: #14



15

CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

⬆

The vulnerability of the elderly to Covid-19 saw the issue rise in salience this year. The pandemic has laid bare the massive blind spot in elder care with fatality rates in care homes accounting for up to 80% of COVID deaths in some high-income countries and care home workers earning below the real living wage.

Age-based discrimination has also gone up due to Covid-19 with the WHO acknowledging ageism as the last socially accepted form of prejudice.

As the vaccines slowly roll out, we expect care for the elderly to remain front of mind as inquiries are launched into care home responses to the pandemic - with the WHO calling for a 'rethink' of elderly care after COVID-19 losses robbed us of a 'generation of wisdom'.

The level of care we provide for our most vulnerable people, especially at the end of their lives, is a measure of a civilised society - and one we are currently failing.

Total Score: 2757	USA: #11	BR: #16
Market Rankings	UK: #10	CN: #19

14

POLLUTION OF MY LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

⬇

Though not as high on other's lists, local pollution remains a top 3 issue for people in China. Whilst local air pollution levels seem to have improved slightly due to lockdown, a study last year claimed that it could have resulted in the premature deaths of 30.8 million adults since 2000. The water people drink isn't any safer either, with nearly 100 million people drinking water with 'unsafe' levels of toxic chemicals. And whilst the invention of biodegradable plastic sounds brilliant, its production in China is outpacing the country's ability to degrade it. Initiatives like Ikea's Better Air Now which turns crop residues that would otherwise be burnt, into renewable materials and products could help, but solving the problem is going to call for solutions at scale like the Clean Air Fund.

Total Score: 2791	USA: #25	BR: #17
Market Rankings	UK: #23	CN: #03

13

LARGE SCALE CONFLICT AND WAR

⬇

The Russian president's warning of potential all out war at Davos this year might have seemed extreme and dystopian to some, but the threat of conflict sits high on people's list of important issues. The International Crisis Group's '10 conflicts to watch in 2021' cover almost every continent and the causes are varied and complex. Climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, however, are being heralded as two of the biggest threats to world peace over the next few years. Luckily, people see both those as two of the most important issues so there's hope that a focus on addressing those underlying problems might help prevent more future conflicts.

Total Score: 2817	USA: #16	BR: #13
Market Rankings	UK: #24	CN: #11

12

POVERTY, HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS IN MY COUNTRY

⊖

Since the Covid-19 pandemic more young people are being forced out onto the streets due to losing their jobs or the breakdown of family relationships. With the shock to the economy crippling businesses of all sizes and leaving millions of Americans out of work, homelessness in the United States could grow as much as 45% in a year.

2021 is also shaping up to be the year poverty turns into poverties. We have Laptop Poverty, with a child twice as likely to achieve the equivalent of 5 A\*-C GCSEs if they have access to a laptop at home. Currently 1.78 million children across the UK don't. And then we have hygiene poverty, which not being able to afford many of the everyday hygiene and personal grooming products most of us take for granted.



Total Score: 2854	USA: #05	BR: #09
Market Rankings	UK: #14	CN: #26



2020 was a devastating year for global health. The COVID-19 pandemic that took hold of the world has killed over 2 million people, but according to a WHO report in December, 7 of the top 10 causes of death globally are still non-communicable (not transmissible between people). Not only has COVID-19 highlighted inequalities in healthcare systems across the world, it has also exacerbated other healthcare issues, threatening to set back previously hard-won global health progress. In 2021, countries will need to continue to battle COVID-19 whilst also repairing, reinforcing and rebalancing their health systems.

Total Score: 3065	USA: #12	BR: #06
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Market Rankings	UK: #06	CN: #07
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2020 was a turbulent year for almost all countries and the far reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic even exacerbated violent crime. Brazil saw the number of murders and other violent deaths increase by 7.1% in the first half of 2020, even despite lockdown measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

The levels of gun crime also rose drastically in the US with over 19,000 people killed in firearm-related incidents - the highest death toll in over 20 years. In fact things were so bad that for a brief moment Walmart removed guns from its stores around concerns about "civil unrest". The retailer later reversed its decision but it will be interesting to see how other retailers respond in 2021 - both those that sell guns and those that don't.

Total Score: 3101	USA: #15	BR: #04
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Market Rankings	UK: #11	CN: #13
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## SPOTLIGHT ON BRAZIL

In a country plagued by violence for years, gun control and crime remains a top 5 concern in Brazil. In fact it was the only country where it reached the top 10.

It was also the second most frequently stated unprompted issue for Brazilians, so it's definitely top of mind for many. A relaxing of ownership rules lead to a surge in gun license applications and Brazilians' are beginning to feel the effects, with increasing numbers of deaths among vulnerable groups such as women and children, especially Black children.

Whilst political issues featured highly in all countries, 7 out of Brazil's top 10 were political - a sure sign of a country struggling with the relationship between its people and its government. Similar to the US, government transparency and threats to democracy also made it into the top 10 and that's an issue we expect to continue to rise in importance for Brazilians over the coming 12 months, especially leading up to the 2022 elections.



1. Unemployment and job security
2. Access to healthcare
3. Extreme poverty around the world
4. Crime, violence, gun control
5. Famine and food security
6. Global public health issues
7. Access to water and sanitation around the world
8. Access to quality education
9. Poverty, hunger and homelessness in my country
10. Government transparency and threat to democracy





Americans ranked this as a top 5 issue, which could be because they are more aware of the plight of the billions of people around the world who don't have access to clean water or proper sanitation. It could equally be because they live in a country where over 2 million people lack access to running water. 30 million lack safe drinking water. 110 million people drink toxic chemicals in their water and 15 million have had their water supply cut off. Scientists are also warning that in 50 years the country's freshwater supply could be reduced by as much as a third due to decreasing precipitation and rising populations. All eyes are on businesses and governments to avoid entering a new dawn of water wars.

Total Score: 3115

USA: #04

BR: #07

Market Rankings

UK: #07

CN: #09



Matt Damon's Water.org shifted its focus to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the fight for a Covid vaccine received an unexpected boost last year when Dolly Parton donated \$1m to research. It was suggested that "Dollying" should become shorthand for referencing an occasion when a celebrity does something that makes you love them even more. In the UK, "Doing a Rashford" was also used in reference to Man Utd's striker Marcus Rashford forcing the UK government to confront child poverty and reinstate free meals for underprivileged schoolchildren. Brad Pitt was also spotted delivering groceries to disadvantaged LA households. As celebrity activism becomes more visible, we expect to see their role in keeping causes top of mind continue.



The storming of the US Capitol at the beginning of 2021 was seen by 6 in 10 voters as a threat to democracy. It's not surprising therefore that Americans ranked this as a top 3 issue. But with millions believing the election was stolen and 72% of Republicans saying they don't trust the presidential election results, the important question for many is how can democracy in the US be saved? Some answers could be found in Taiwan's radical approach to digital democracy which helped the country hold COVID-19 at bay.

Total Score: 3126

USA: #03

BR: #10

Market Rankings

UK: #15

CN: #16

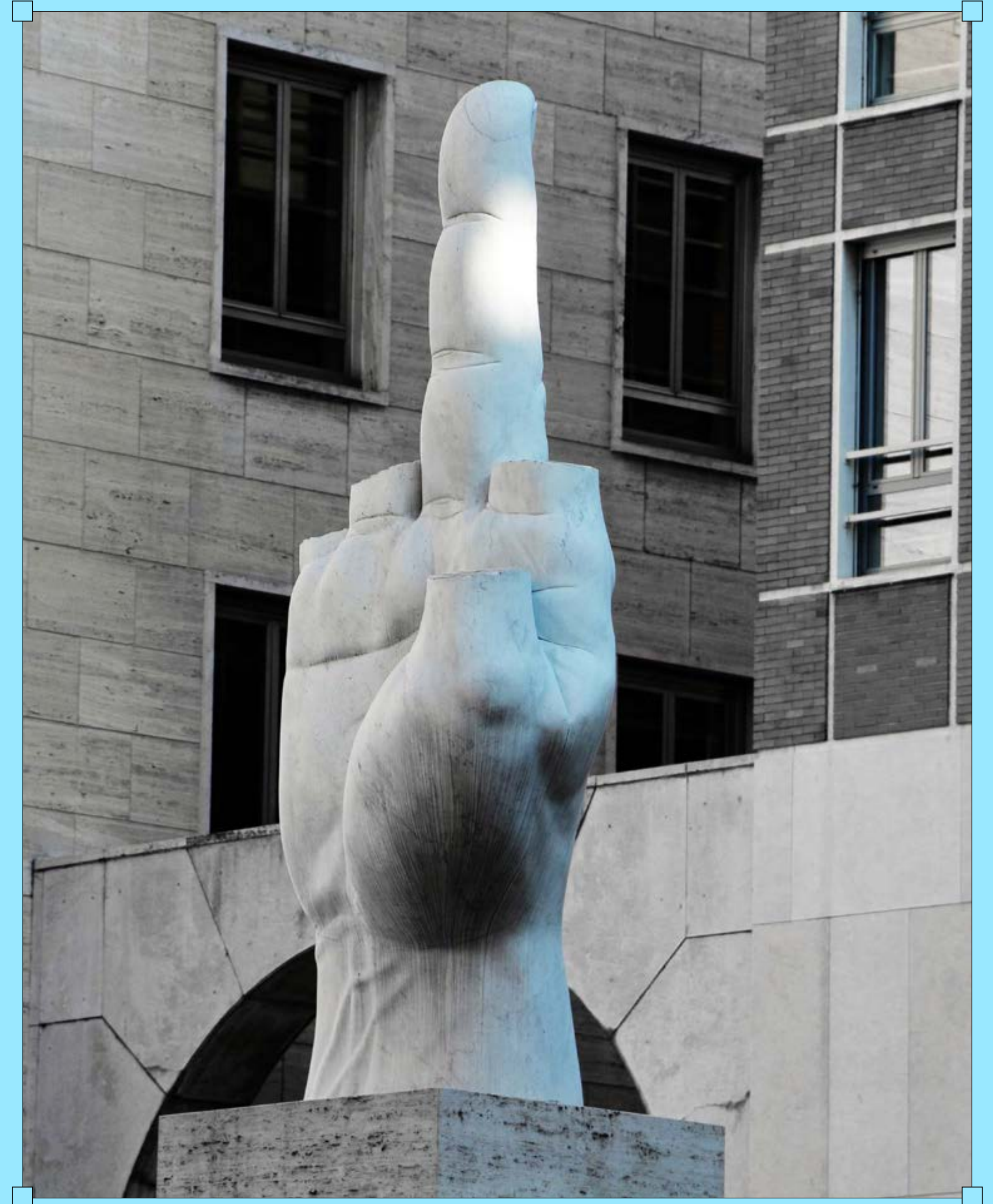




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People working in banking and finance cared about threats to democracy 18% less than average.

– CTC, 2021







Mental health is projected to become the leading cause of morbidity and mortality globally by 2030. And over the past 12 months, COVID-19 has only exacerbated this epidemic with 51% of adults feeling that COVID-19 has negatively affected their mental health. Amid worrying trends in youth mental health, it's worth stepping back to take in the good news: today's teens are by far the healthiest, the safest, and the most risk averse of any generation in modern history.

Total Score: 3130	USA: #10	BR: #12
Market Rankings	UK: #02	CN: #17



# SPOTLIGHT ON UK

Mental health issues were the second highest concern amongst people in the UK, higher than in any other country. This is no surprise when you examine the data.

The Centre for Mental Health predicts almost a fifth of the population needing mental health support as a direct consequence of the pandemic. The young appear particularly affected, with one in four in the UK feeling 'unable to cope'. The long term forecast also spells trouble, with the British Medical Journal warning recently that "the mental health impact of the pandemic is likely to last much longer than the physical health impact". One positive explanation for its high ranking is the normalcy with which influential figures now open up about their private struggles. Most notably, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry's shedding the infamous stiff upper lip perception to take on the stigma around seeking help.

Another anomaly from the UK is that it's the only nation where Unemployment and Job Security didn't take the top spot. Instead that went to Climate Change - and there is arguably no better barometer of how mainstream an issue it has become than its appearance on the front page of The Sun in 2020.



- 1. Climate Change
- 2. Mental Health Issues
- 3. Access to healthcare
- 4. Unemployment and job security
- 5. Extreme poverty around the world
- 6. Global public health issues
- 7. Access to water and sanitation around the world
- 8. The health of our oceans
- 9. Access to quality education
- 10. Care for the elderly



06

EXTREME POVERTY AROUND THE WORLD

⌵

One of the most revealing insights from this index has been the discrepancy between what people care about and what gets reported in our media. People remain deeply committed to humanitarian crises (famine and food security, access to water and sanitation around the world and large scale conflicts and war also ranked highly) despite the fact that they're consistently underreported in the news media. The launch of PlayStation 5 received 26 times more news attention than 10 humanitarian crises combined in 2020.

Total Score: 3156	USA: #09	BR: #03
Market Rankings	UK: #05	CN: #25



05

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

⊖

In 2020, we saw an increased awareness of education issues as 91% of students worldwide were impacted by schools closing due to the pandemic. Parents of 1.6 billion students were suddenly expected to manage their children's learning and for the first time the world saw a decrease in learning time.

On top of that, we've also seen a widening of the education gap. Disadvantaged students struggled with parents unable to support, less access to computers and digital tools, and fewer hours of direct teaching support. As the UN's Quality Education SDG acknowledges, 'education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty' - but with less access over the past year, this has become more difficult for many.

In Brazil, the effects of pandemic (and the tech divide) has been compounded with cultural challenges including disinterest in learning and the need to work. Despite significant work by civil society initiatives (such as the Street Football Institute), half a million high school students dropped out in 2020. A further 28% are not thinking about going back to school after the pandemic restrictions are lifted. The nation is acutely aware of the knock-on effects this will have for individuals and the economy.

For China, rural students are also struggling with a lack of equipment to learn remotely - up to 80 million people in China don't have internet access, and for many more, they have to work around the working schedules of their parents. China's efforts to eradicate poverty in 2020 may still have come to fruition - but longer term goals to educate the nation may have slowed.

And we saw more prioritisation from the US respondents as further coverage of the college admissions scandal highlighted the inequalities of access to higher education, even before the pandemic wreaked its havoc.



Total Score: 3222	USA: #07	BR: #08
Market Rankings	UK: #09	CN: #08





Hunger has been an issue that governments have found hard to swallow this year. But as we've seen community groups step up to feed those increasing numbers in need, so too did awareness of the scale of the issue.

With climate change already impacting agricultural regions with changing weather patterns, the pandemic put even more strain on international food movement. According to the World Bank, 2020 saw the most severe increase in global food insecurity.

In the past twelve months alone, China had to contend with the pandemic, African swine fever, corn pest infestations, mass flooding and drought in key agricultural areas, and record breaking typhoons - all whilst trying to feed 1.4bn people. In order to mitigate the impacts, President Xi had to launch a national campaign to stop food waste in homes.

Before the pandemic, 44% of rural Brazilian homes already lacked food security, with hunger increasing 43% over the preceding 5 years. Covid-19 has seen restrictions placed on food markets and food stalls, reducing access - but this was met with a rise in tech based solutions that connected farmers to communities under pressure, elevating stories related to these issues.

Similarly, community initiatives in the USA have been working to support those in need, whilst drawing attention to the national issue. 35 million people needed food support pre-COVID, but according to Action Pact, the need for food assistance quadrupled as the pandemic set in. The lack of a safety net for many American families meant job losses led to even more widespread hunger.

But even with a security net, people still slipped through in the UK. Free school meals for disadvantaged students became headline news as campaigner and footballer Marcus Rashford drove the fight to government. His work raised awareness of the struggles many are facing in the country to put food on the table, and drove national unity to get more and better food to over 1.5 million children.

Total Score: 3283	USA: #06	BR: #05
Market Rankings	UK: #13	CN: #02







This was the year we relied on our healthcare system more than in most people's lifetimes. Even before Covid-19 struck, at least half the world's population lacked access to essential health services. With those in the developing world reliant on an extortionate private system and an overburdened and underfunded mental health system.

Pressure on healthcare systems is set to rise in line with the chronic health problems of an ageing population which according to Zhou Maigeng from the Chinese Center for Disease Control "will far exceed infectious diseases".

The sliver of good news is the pandemic has necessitated a global digital-health revolution, with the UK's NHS undergoing a decade of change within a week. We're also seeing consumers take charge of their health more than ever before and having their confidence restored in the medical system.

This begs the question, what credible role can businesses play here? As medicine evolves from "a clinical science supported by data to a data science supported by clinicians", big tech are poised to disrupt. Should Alexa be able to analyse your cough and tell you if it is covid?

And beyond the frontline of healthcare access, we're seeing a wellness revolution take hold and a growing consensus among consumers that brands should help them on the journey.

Total Score: 3409

USA: #02

BR: #02

Market Rankings

UK: #03

CN: #06







Despite being sidelined by the Covid-dominated news agenda, climate change remains one of the very top concerns for the majority of people in the majority of places. The science is no longer being ignored.

For many it has gone from the abstract to the potentially apocalyptic, as we wrap our heads around the mass displacement and extinction unfolding as we speak, which is disproportionately impacting the developing world.

As we emerge into a post pandemic reality - with our expectations of what governments can do for us dramatically upended - global focus will turn to solving the emergency. In November, World leaders will gather in Glasgow for COP26, the successor to the landmark Paris meeting of 2015. The truth is, the sum of “nationally determined contributions”(NDCs) is not sufficient to prevent catastrophic warming.

But there are glimmers of hope. 110 countries have set net zero targets for 2050, representing 65% of global emissions. And with a newly elected Biden committing the U.S to net zero, taken together with European and Chinese pledges, we now have an expiry date for 45% of global emissions.

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In terms of energy, two-thirds of the world's people now live in countries where renewable sources are less expensive than coal.

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In the private sector, we've seen a surge of companies going net positive, unprecedented levels of ESG investing, fossil fuel divestment gathering pace amongst major banks, and companies with the least carbon risk outperforming their rivals in the markets - most notably Tesla, who recently became the world's most valuable car company.





Our number one concern reflects the speed and depth with which the global economy came to such a grinding halt and the wave of mass unemployment that ensued. Last year 54% of the global workforce saw their work hours reduced or their jobs eliminated, with unemployment predicated to be much more severe than the financial crisis of 2008.

China was the only major economy to expand last year, but even that hasn't prevented a deepening unemployment crisis in the middle classes, with the government taking the surprising step of encouraging students to stay in schools.

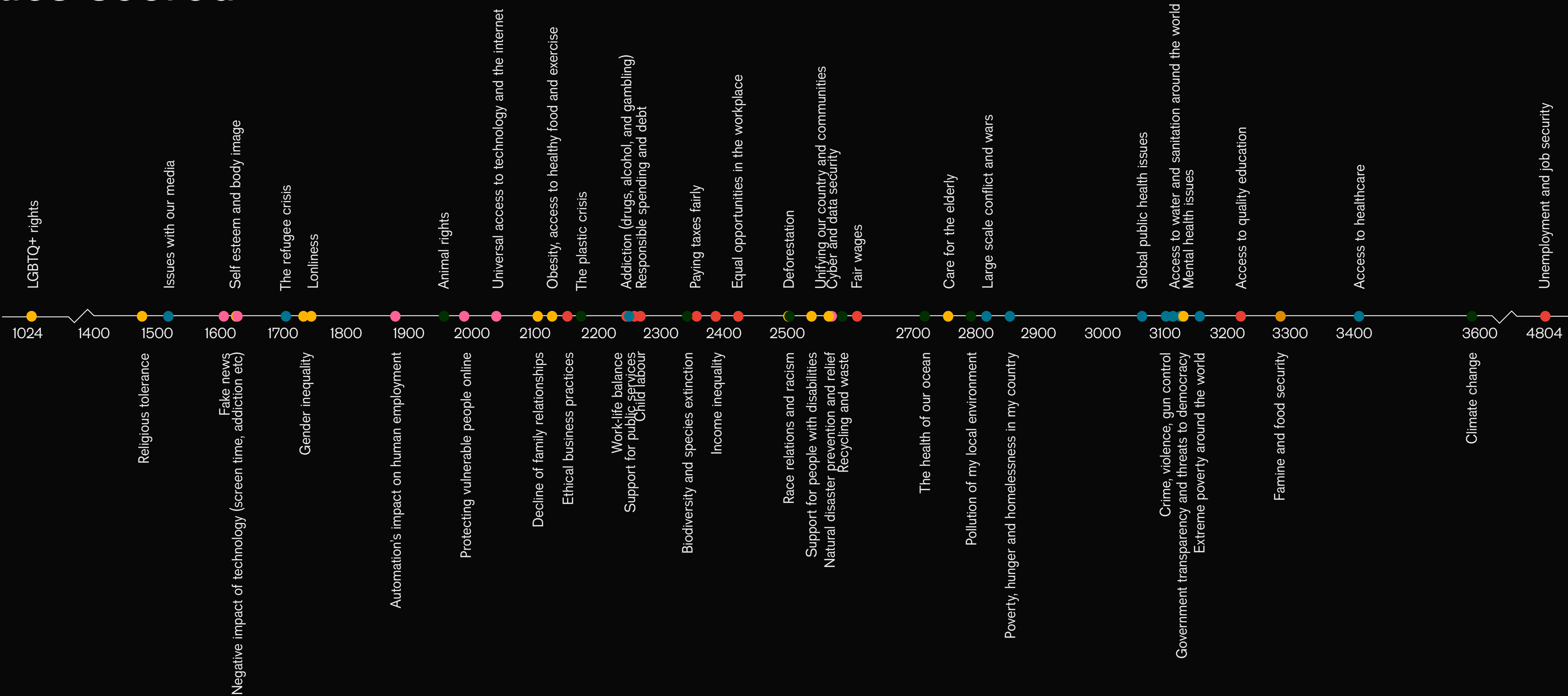
The pandemic will exacerbate inequality as it disproportionately affects lower income people who are less able to do their jobs from home and exacerbates the generational wealth gap with young people more likely to lose their jobs.

Expect to see more solidarity and support. It's not surprising that support for Universal Basic Income has gained momentum in the U.S. whereas Spain are undertaking the world's largest pilot project on it. After calls to 'share the pain', we saw CEOs and Premier League footballers take lower salaries to stave off job losses. Prominent brands sought to save their partners from the brink, and channeled profits their way.





# How our top 50 issues scored





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REPORT