



Workplace Civility 2025:

Measuring the Impact of Social and Political Divides on Employee Experience



April 2025

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Executive Summary

As political polarization and social tensions continue to spill into the workplace, questions around respect, inclusion, and civility have taken center stage. While many organizations are publicly committing to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), the lived experience of employees suggests a more complex reality. This report, based on a nationally representative **survey of 1,000 U.S. adults conducted by Sogolytics**, examines whether workplace civility is improving or eroding and how broader societal dynamics are shaping employee experiences and consumer behavior.

Findings show that nearly half of respondents believe workplace civility has improved over the past year. However, this perceived stability coexists with persistent issues as **close to half of all participants reported witnessing or experiencing incivility in the workplace**, with women significantly more likely than men to encounter such behavior. Factors influencing civility range from internal changes—such as communication and leadership—to external pressures like economic stress, cultural polarization, and political discourse.

The data also reveal that **workplace civility is not just an internal issue—it carries real reputational and financial consequences**. Many consumers now consider how companies treat their employees before making purchasing decisions, and some have stopped supporting brands perceived as toxic or discriminatory. Additionally, employee retention is at risk, with a notable percentage of workers admitting they have considered leaving a job due to incivility.

The report offers a comprehensive look at how workplace civility is experienced today, where the fault lines lie, and what organizations must do to create a culture rooted in mutual respect. As incivility becomes costlier and more public, **businesses have both a strategic and ethical imperative to act**.



Introduction: Why Civility Matters Now More Than Ever

Workplace civility is more than just politeness—it's a core driver of trust, collaboration, and productivity. Defined as **respectful, inclusive, and courteous behavior among colleagues**, civility enables people to contribute fully, feel psychologically safe, and engage meaningfully in their work. In contrast, incivility ranging from overt rudeness to subtle exclusion **undermines workplace cohesion** and can erode morale over time. SHRM's Q1 2025 Civility Index places the national civility score at **48.8 out of 100**, indicating that disrespectful behavior continues to be a routine part of daily life for many workers. While the score dipped slightly from its Q4 2024 peak, **it remains the second highest on record**, reflecting continued attention to civility even as challenges persist. Alarmingly, SHRM estimates that **8.7 million acts of incivility occur every hour** across U.S. workplaces, translating into an estimated **\$2.1 billion in daily productivity losses**.

In an era marked by political polarization, social justice debates, and organizational shifts around diversity and inclusion, the workplace has become a mirror of broader societal tensions. Employees bring these external stressors to work, and when leadership fails to address them effectively, friction can grow. At the same time, organizations are under increasing scrutiny—not only for how they treat their employees, but for how internal culture aligns with external values. This report explores whether workplace civility has improved or declined over the past year, how employees are navigating politically and socially charged environments, and what steps organizations can take to foster respect across differences. In doing so, it provides a critical pulse check on how employees experience civility in today's workplace—and what it will take to build environments where everyone can thrive.



Survey Objectives & Methodology

This survey was conducted to **evaluate the current state of workplace civility** in the United States and examine the influence of political, social, and organizational dynamics on employee experiences. The goal was to assess whether civility in the workplace has declined over the past year and to identify the key drivers of change, including DEI-related controversies, ideological polarization, and instances of exclusion or discrimination. The study also explored the extent to which workplace culture impacts consumer trust and purchasing behavior.

The survey was conducted by Sogolytics and distributed to a nationally representative sample of 1,000 U.S. adults. Respondents represented a diverse range of industries, job levels, genders, age groups, political affiliations, and work environments, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The questionnaire included 23 items, combining Likert-scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended formats to gather both quantitative data and personal perspectives. The survey design ensured coverage of key demographic segments to support meaningful analysis and cross-comparisons.

This methodology supports a **comprehensive understanding of how workplace civility is being perceived, experienced, and shaped** across today's polarized social and professional landscape.



The Civility Shift: How the Past Year Has Changed Workplaces

Perception vs. Reality

Despite growing concerns about polarization and division in public discourse, most employees report that workplace civility has either held steady or improved slightly over the past year. When asked to reflect on how respectful and inclusive their work environment has become over the past 12 months (based on a nationwide survey conducted in March 2025), nearly half of respondents said things had improved to some degree. Still, a significant portion of respondents, 42%, reported no change, while 12% said their workplace had become less civil.

Perceived Change in Workplace Civility Over the Past Year

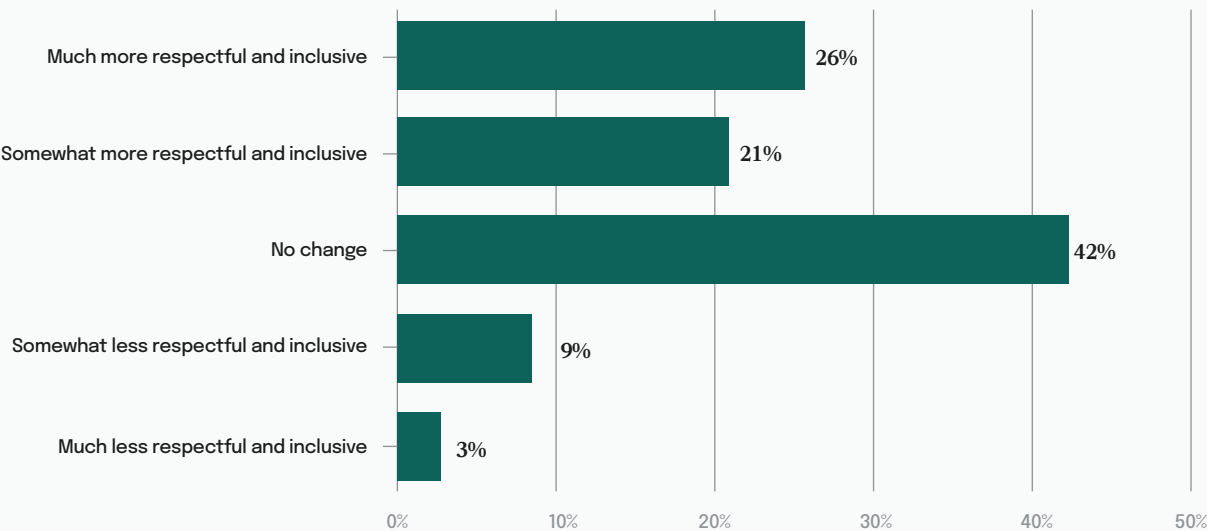


Figure 1: This graph shows how employees perceive changes in workplace civility over the past year, reflecting shifts in respect and inclusivity within their organizations.



At first glance, these numbers suggest a relatively stable or slightly improving climate. **But a deeper look reveals a more complicated reality.**

While overall perceptions of civility may not have declined significantly, personal experiences with incivility remain common. **Nearly half of respondents said they had witnessed or experienced incivility in the past year, some frequently, others on occasion.** This gap between perceived stability and lived experience suggests that while organizational tone may appear civil on the surface, many

Frequency of Incivility

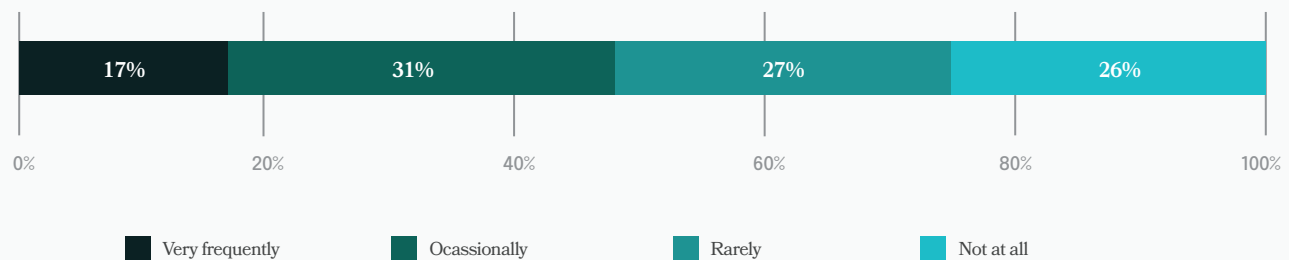


Figure 2: This graph shows how often employees witnessed or experienced incivility in the past year, reflecting the day-to-day reality of workplace behavior. Because percentages are rounded to whole numbers, the total may not equal exactly 100%.

Civility may be improving in formal policies or leadership messaging, but these shifts haven't fully translated into consistent, respectful interactions across all teams. It's also possible that some employees have grown accustomed to a certain baseline of incivility, tolerating behavior that would once have stood out or viewing top-down improvements as superficial.



Gap By Gender

Importantly, these experiences are not universal. **Women were significantly more likely than men to report experiencing incivility**, with 55% saying they encountered it frequently or occasionally, compared to just 40% of men. Men, by contrast, were more likely to report no experiences with incivility at all.

These gender-based differences highlight an important part of the civility conversation. Where improvements exist, they may not be reaching everyone equally. As organizations assess progress, they must consider how civility is experienced across different groups to ensure that change is truly inclusive and not just cosmetic.

Shifting Behavior at Work

In today's polarized climate, many employees are changing how they navigate workplace conversations. Whether it's steering clear of divisive topics or softening their tone, these adjustments reflect a growing sense of caution. In fact, **nearly half of respondents said they've adjusted their behavior** at least occasionally in the past year to avoid conflict related to political or social issues.

Behavioral Adjustments to Avoid Conflict

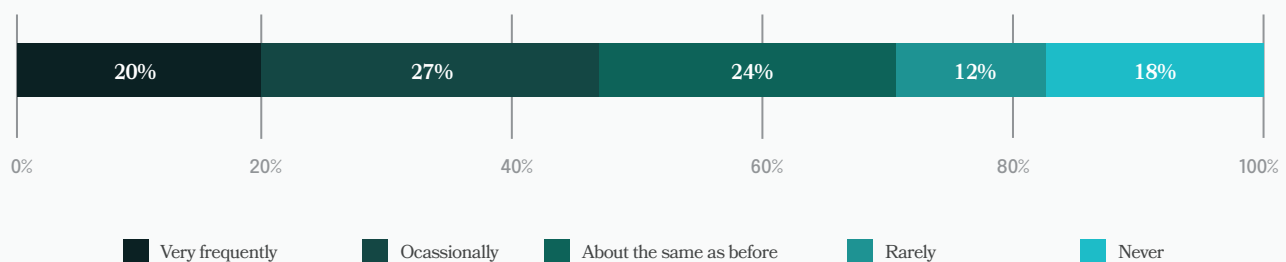


Figure 3: This graph shows how frequently employees changed how they speak or act at work to avoid political or social conflict highlighting the growing impact of external tensions on workplace dynamics. Because percentages are rounded to whole numbers, the total may not equal exactly 100%.

While 18% say they've made no changes, others are holding back, highlighting the tension between authenticity and workplace harmony. These shifts point to a need for clearer norms and a workplace culture that supports respectful, open dialogue.



Politics, DEI, & Social Tensions at Work

Political and Social Disagreements at Work

Tensions around political and social issues are increasingly finding their way into workplace dynamics. According to the survey, **64% of employees say they've witnessed disagreements related to these topics in the past year.** These interactions may take the form of subtle unease during conversations or more visible, direct conflicts between colleagues. Regardless of severity, they reflect the growing challenge of navigating differing worldviews in professional spaces.

Witnessing Political or Social Disagreements at Work

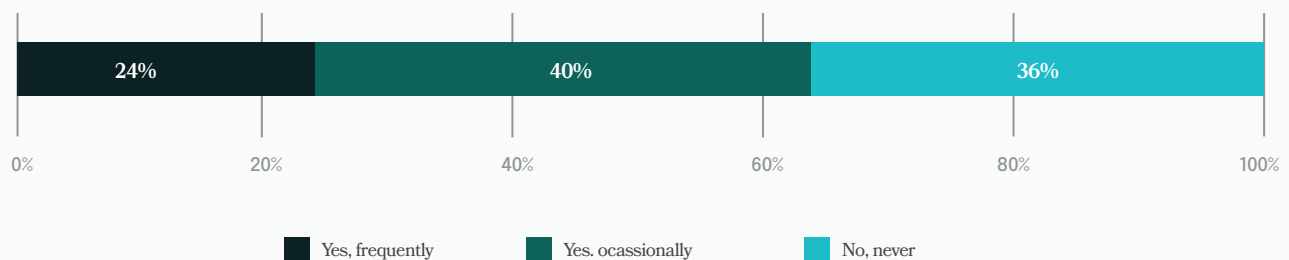


Figure 4: This graph shows how frequently employees have encountered workplace disagreements tied to political or social topics, offering insight into how external tensions are affecting internal dynamics.

The work environment plays a significant role in shaping these experiences. **Among those who reported never witnessing such disagreements, the majority (56%) work remotely.** In contrast, in-office and hybrid employees were far more likely to encounter political or social conflict. These findings suggest that physical proximity increases both the likelihood and visibility of tension-raising important considerations for team communication, culture-building, and conflict resolution in increasingly polarized times.



Comfort Expressing Personal Views

While many organizations promote open dialogue, employees remain divided in how comfortable they feel sharing personal political or social views at work. Only about one-third of respondents say they feel comfortable doing so, while another third report feeling uncomfortable. The rest, 33% of respondents, land squarely in the middle, choosing neutrality.

Comfort Expressing Political or Social Views at Work

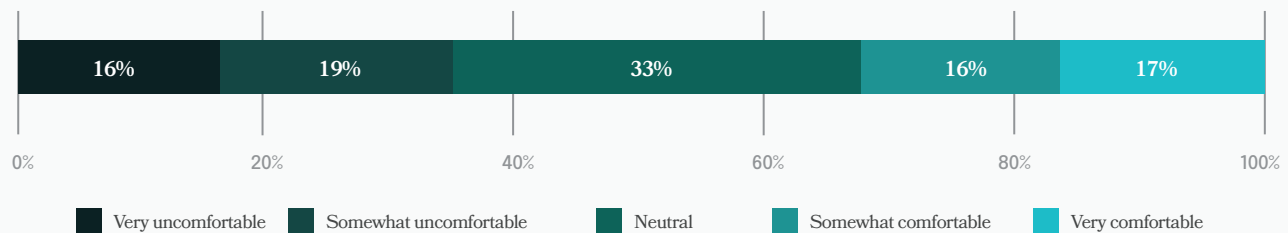


Figure 5: This graph illustrates employees' comfort levels when it comes to expressing personal political or social views at work, revealing how divided sentiment and neutrality shape workplace dialogue. Because percentages are rounded to whole numbers, the total may not equal exactly 100%.

This preference for neutrality is especially notable across age groups, where it consistently emerges as the most common response, ranging from 30% to 38%. This points to a **widespread preference for playing it safe**, avoiding personal disclosures that could spark tension or misunderstanding.

Looking deeper, age appears to influence comfort levels. Gen Z employees (ages 18–28) and Baby Boomers (61–79) report the highest levels of discomfort, with a combined 30–36% saying they feel either very or somewhat uncomfortable expressing their views. In contrast, **Millennials (29–44) and Gen X (45–60) show slightly more ease in sharing personal perspectives.**

These patterns suggest that both early-career and later-career professionals may be more cautious about speaking up, possibly due to concerns about job security, professional reputation, or generational differences in communication norms.



Impact of Issues on Professional Relationships

Political and social issues don't just shape individual perspectives; they can also influence workplace relationships. While most employees don't see constant disruption, a significant share report some level of impact. **Roughly one-third say these issues affect professional relationships very frequently or occasionally**, while another 30% say it happens rarely. Only 21% report never experiencing such an impact.

Impact of Political or Social Issues on Workplace Relationships

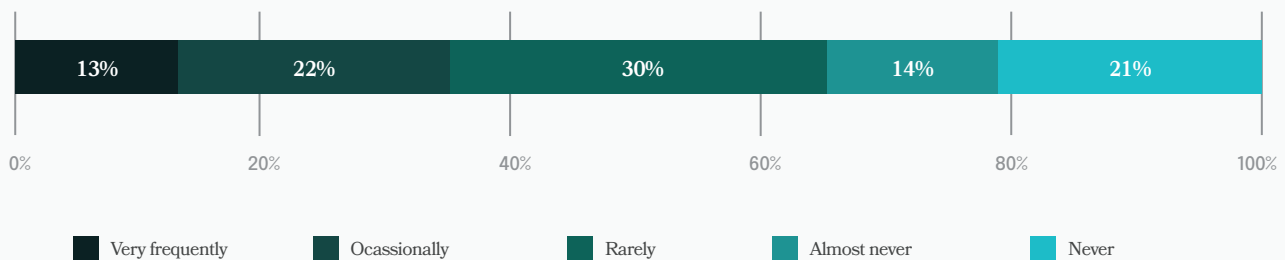


Figure 6: This graph shows how often political or social issues affect professional relationships at work.

As with earlier findings, the work environment plays a noticeable role. **In-office and hybrid employees are more likely to see political or social issues affect their relationships with coworkers.** For instance, 40% of in-office employees report at least occasional impact, compared to just 23% of remote employees. On the other hand, over a third of remote workers (36%) say these issues never affect their workplace relationships—more than double the in-office rate.

These differences point to the influence of physical proximity in shaping workplace dynamics. While remote work may reduce exposure to sensitive interactions, in-person environments often create more opportunities for tension—or connection—to surface.



DEI's Impact on Workplace Dynamics

In today's politically charged climate, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have become a frequent point of debate both inside and outside the workplace. Once broadly embraced as steps toward a more equitable professional environment, DEI programs are now under growing scrutiny, with critics questioning their fairness, effectiveness, or potential to deepen divides rather than bridge them.

The survey data reflects this polarization. While roughly **one-third of employees believe DEI initiatives have improved workplace civility**, nearly the same share **says these efforts have had no noticeable impact**. Another quarter reports that DEI has actually caused more division among colleagues.

Perceived Impact of DEI Initiatives on Workplace Civility

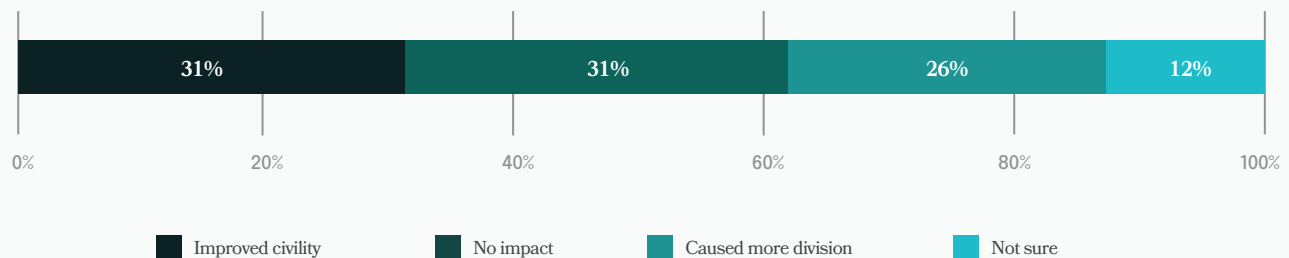


Figure 7: This graph shows how employees perceive the impact of DEI initiatives on workplace civility, reflecting the polarized views surrounding inclusion initiatives in today's workplace.

This divide becomes more pronounced when viewed through the lens of political identity. Among self-identified liberals, nearly half (49%) say DEI has improved civility, while just 15% believe it has caused more division. In contrast, conservatives are more likely to see DEI as divisive (36%) than unifying (30%). Moderates tend to land in between, with more balanced views.



These differences suggest that perceptions of DEI are shaped not only by workplace culture but also by broader social narratives and individual belief systems. As such, the success of DEI efforts may hinge not just on program design but also on how they're communicated, implemented, and aligned with organizational values.

In a moment where DEI itself has become a flashpoint, organizations face a crucial challenge in ensuring that efforts meant to foster inclusion don't inadvertently contribute to division. **Clear communication, a focus on shared values, and room for respectful dialogue are essential for moving forward with both credibility and care.**

Experiences of Exclusion or Ideological Bias

While much of the focus around workplace civility centers on visible conflict or open disagreement, exclusion can also take quieter forms, like subtle social distancing, judgment, or the feeling of simply not belonging. According to the survey, **nearly half of employees say they've experienced some level of discrimination** or exclusion at work due to their political, social, or ideological beliefs. Of these, 19% report it happening frequently.

Experiences of Exclusion Based on Beliefs

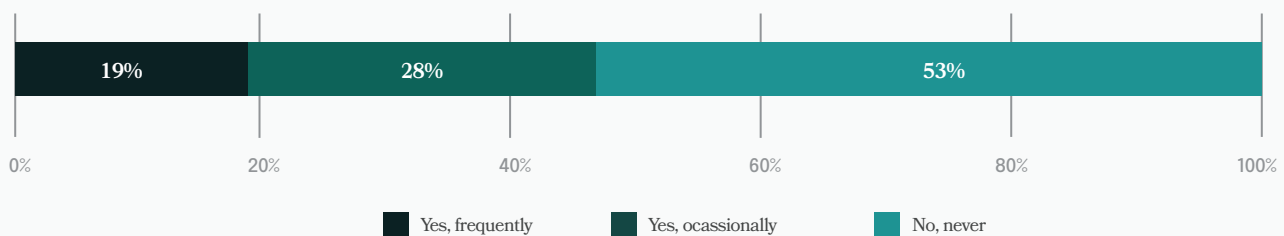


Figure 8: This graph highlights how frequently employees report feeling excluded or discriminated against in the workplace based on personal beliefs, offering insight into the quieter dimensions of workplace incivility.



These experiences span a range of settings and belief systems. One respondent shared, "I worked at a place that had very religious leaders—it made those of us who weren't religious feel very uncomfortable." Another recounted a more direct encounter: "While I was doing my clinical for nurse practitioner, I was continually harassed and picked on by my mentor due to differences in our personal identities. I'm heterosexual. She threatened to fail me."

These stories, while anecdotal, highlight a broader truth that **ideological bias, whether rooted in religion, politics, or cultural norms, can show up in subtle but powerful ways**, especially in professional hierarchies or environments with strong cultural leanings. Even when not explicitly stated, these dynamics can affect professional development, team cohesion, and employees' overall sense of psychological safety.

As organizations aim to create inclusive workplaces, it is critical to consider not just what is being said, but what is being felt. **True inclusion requires creating space for all belief systems, not just the most prominent or publicly supported ones.**



From Culture to Consumer: Civility's Influence on Brand Perception

Workplace Culture and Consumer Choice

More than ever, consumers are paying attention to how companies treat their employees. **Workplace culture, especially civility, fairness, and ethical behavior, is becoming part of the purchasing equation.** It's no longer just about price or product quality; it's about the values a company stands for and the way it treats its people behind the scenes.

In the survey, nearly 60% of respondents said a company's internal culture influences whether they choose to buy from them. Many actively seek out brands that reflect their own values and ideals, particularly when it comes to employee treatment, equity, and organizational ethics. For this group, supporting a business isn't just a transaction; it's an endorsement.

Influence of Workplace Culture on Purchasing Decisions

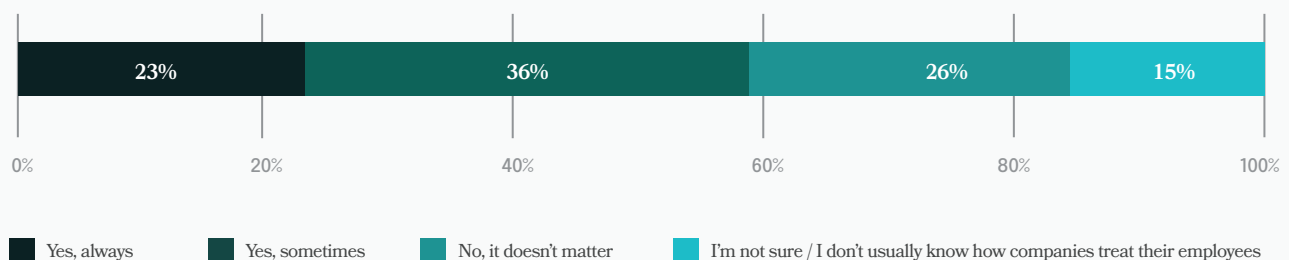


Figure 9: This graph illustrates how much workplace culture, including civility and ethical treatment of employees, influences purchasing behavior and reflects the increasing importance of internal values in building brand trust.



And for many, these values drive more than intention; they drive behavior. **Nearly half (49%) of respondents say they've actually stopped purchasing from a brand after hearing about toxic workplace conditions, discrimination, or mistreatment.** These aren't theoretical stances; they're decisions that reflect a growing demand for accountability and ethical consistency.

Even when internal culture isn't visible to the average consumer, today's digital landscape makes it easier than ever for stories to surface, whether through media coverage, employee testimonials, or viral social posts. As a result, consumers are increasingly evaluating not just what companies sell, but how they operate.

In this climate, workplace culture is no longer a background issue. **It's a visible, high-stakes part of a brand's identity and one that can have a direct impact on consumer trust, loyalty, and long-term success.**

Trust and Expectations Around Brand Values

As workplace culture becomes more visible, companies are increasingly vocal about their commitments to civility and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). But how much do consumers actually trust these messages? According to the survey, **trust is mixed.** While 45% of respondents say they trust these efforts either completely or somewhat, a significant portion remains skeptical. **One in five believe such messaging is mostly for public relations,** and another 9% say they don't trust it at all.

Trust in Companies' Public Messaging on Civility or DEI

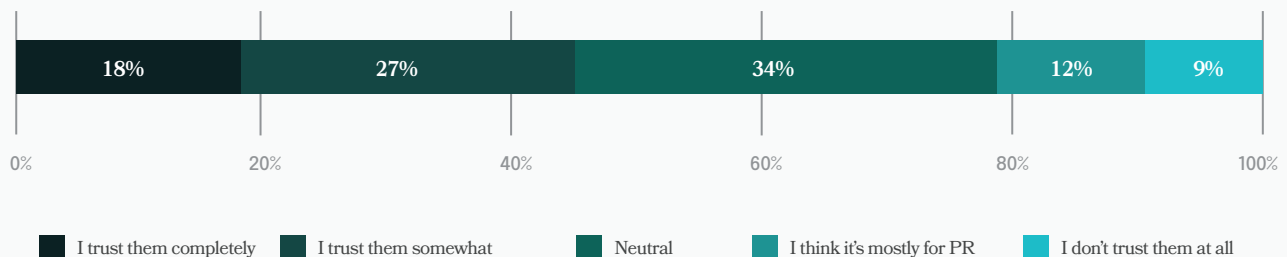


Figure 10: This graph reflects varying levels of trust in corporate messaging about workplace civility and DEI, revealing how some consumers remain skeptical while others are more receptive to these public commitments.



This trust gap suggests that many consumers are looking for substance behind the slogans. Public commitments alone aren't enough; people want to see these values reflected in everyday business practices, employee experiences, and leadership behavior.

At the same time, **expectations around corporate messaging remain divided.** While 27% of respondents say they want companies to take public stances on social and political issues, a clear majority (56%) prefer that companies remain neutral. Another 17% say it depends on the issue—indicating that context, credibility, and timing all play a role in how these messages are received.

Together, these findings highlight a delicate balance for brands. Speaking out strongly can lead to skepticism or backlash, while staying silent can make a company appear indifferent. Consumers are increasingly attuned to authenticity, and they are watching closely to see whether companies follow through on the values they promote.



The Business Impact: Retention, Morale, & Organizational Risk

How Civility Affects Employee Retention

Workplace civility plays a far greater role in employee retention than many organizations may realize. While it's easy to associate turnover with compensation, workload, or growth opportunities, this data makes one thing clear-how employees are treated on a day-to-day basis directly influences whether they stay.

In the survey data, **over half of respondents said they've either left a job or seriously considered leaving due to workplace incivility.** That's not just a red flag; it's a flashing warning sign that culture matters. Whether it's persistent disrespect, exclusion, or a toxic workplace, the toll pushes many to simply walk away.

Impact of Workplace Incivility on Job Retention

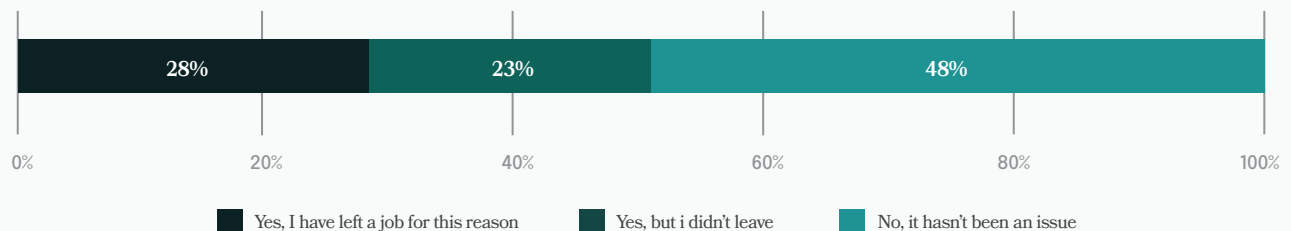


Figure 11: This graph illustrates the relationship between workplace civility and employee retention, highlighting how disrespectful or toxic environments influence decisions to leave or stay in a job. Because percentages are rounded to whole numbers, the total may not equal exactly 100%.



Gender-wise, the differences are subtle but telling. **Women were slightly more likely than men to report actually leaving a job due to incivility** (29% vs. 27%), suggesting they may be more likely to take action when workplace culture becomes intolerable. Meanwhile, men were marginally more likely to report staying despite considering leaving. Across both groups, about half said civility hasn't been an issue—but the other half represents a sizable portion of the workforce feeling the strain.

These findings reinforce the idea that **culture isn't a soft metric; it's a retention driver**. Organizations investing in employee experience need to go beyond surface-level perks and address how people interact, lead, and resolve conflict. Employees won't always speak up when things go wrong, but they will leave. And when they do, incivility is often a primary driver.

Key Workplace Behaviors Driving Incivility

Incivility doesn't emerge in a vacuum—it's often the product of repeated behaviors and patterns that chip away at respect, inclusion, and psychological safety. When asked which workplace behaviors contribute most to uncivil environments, respondents pointed to a range of factors, with a clear frontrunner being **disrespectful communication**.

Over half (55%) of respondents identified condescending tones, rude remarks, or dismissive language as top contributors to incivility. These may seem like minor moments in isolation, but over time, they create a culture where people feel undervalued or unsafe speaking up.



Most Common Workplace Behaviors Contributing to Incivility

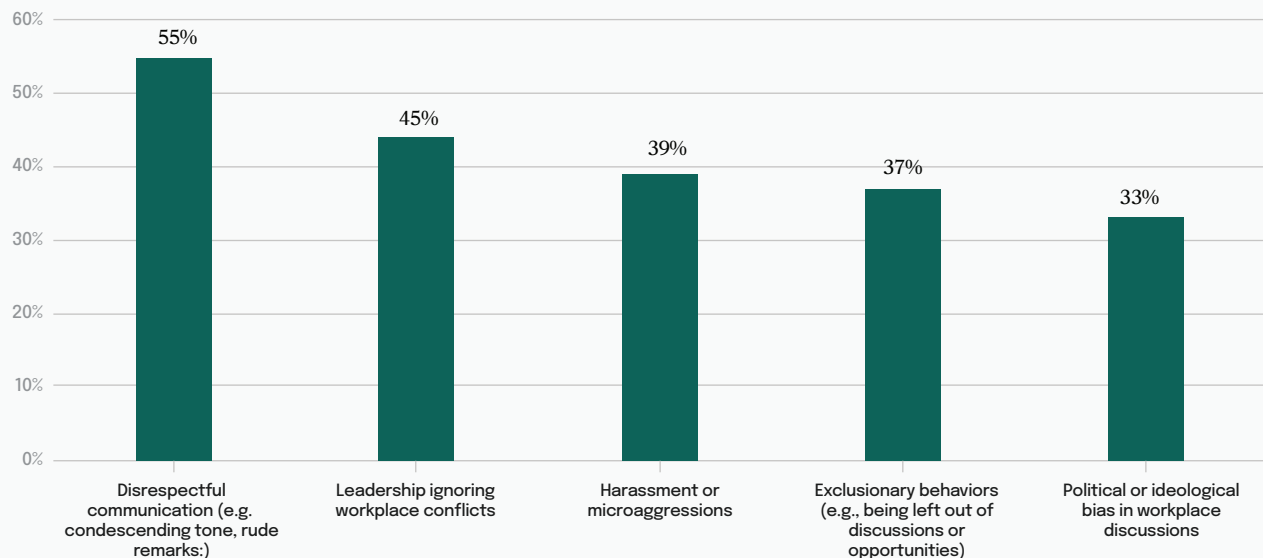


Figure 12: This chart identifies key workplace behaviors that drive incivility, from disrespectful communication to leadership inaction and exclusion. These recurring patterns often shape employee experience more than formal policies do. Because multiple answers per participant are possible, the total percentage may exceed 100%.

Another major factor is **leadership inaction**. 45% said leaders ignoring conflict or failing to address workplace issues is a driving force behind incivility. When managers fail to intervene—or worse, set the tone themselves it sends a message that poor behavior is tolerated, even normalized.

Harassment and microaggressions, exclusion from opportunities or conversations, and political or ideological bias in workplace discussions were also cited as key contributors. While these behaviors may take different forms, they all share one thing in common—they undermine connection and trust.

Together, these insights make it clear that incivility isn't just about individual clashes; it often reflects deeper cultural gaps in communication, inclusion, and accountability. **Addressing it requires more than policies; it calls for proactive leadership, consistent standards, and a culture that values mutual respect.**



Perception of How Well Employers Handle Incivility

Recognizing workplace incivility is one challenge responding to it effectively is another. According to employees, **many organizations still fall short when it comes to addressing uncivil behavior.** While some workplaces are proactive and responsive, others leave issues unresolved, allowing toxic patterns to persist and morale to erode.

In the survey, only **4 in 10 employees felt their employer handles incivility very well**, meaning issues are addressed promptly and directly. Another third said their employer does somewhat well, indicating a lack of consistency some incidents are handled, while others are ignored or downplayed.

Employee Perceptions of How Well Incivility Is Managed

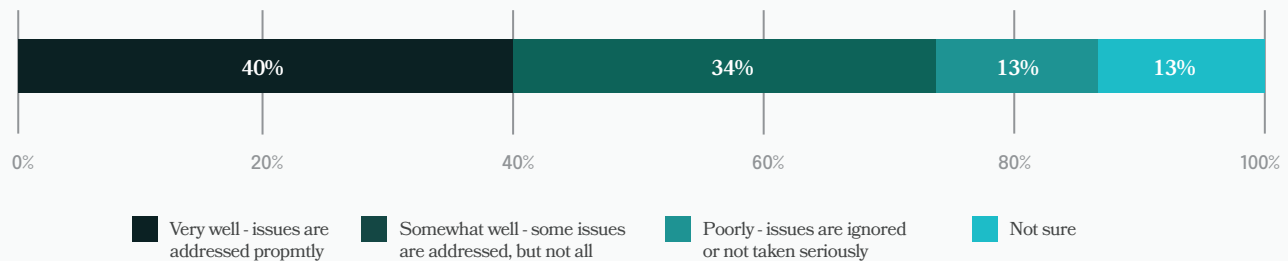


Figure 13: This chart shows how employees perceive their employer's response to workplace incivility. While some believe their concerns are handled effectively, others report inconsistent or inadequate responses.

That inconsistency matters. Employees notice when standards aren't applied evenly, when certain behaviors go unchecked, or when leadership avoids difficult conversations. When 1 in 4 respondents either said their employer handles issues poorly or weren't sure how their organization responds at all; it reveals a troubling gap not just in policy, but in trust.

The perception of how well incivility is managed has a ripple effect. **When employees believe concerns won't be taken seriously, they're more likely to disengage, remain silent, or ultimately leave.** On the flip side, employers who respond quickly, fairly, and transparently signal that respect isn't optional; it's part of the culture.



Pathways to Progress: What Employees Want

Employees identified a range of practical actions that can improve workplace civility. Based on both survey data and personal stories, here are the top strategies they believe would make the biggest difference:

- **Model Respect from the Top**

48% of employees say the most important factor in improving civility is leadership setting the tone through respectful behavior.

“I witnessed leadership promoting respectful communication, which positively impacted team morale.”

- **Establish Clear Policies and Consequences**

46% say companies need clear, enforced standards around workplace behavior to hold everyone accountable.

“Management should set standards and policies to address these issues when the need arises.”

- **Provide Training on Conflict and Communication**

39% believe civil discussion and conflict resolution training can equip teams to handle disagreements better.

“Promoting open communication, respect, and conflict resolution training can improve civility at work.”



- **Address Political Tension Thoughtfully**

Opinions vary, with **37%** wanting to reduce political discussions, while 28% support encouraging open conversations with proper boundaries.

“There should be a rule where no political discussions are allowed. It creates conflicts and chaos immediately.”

“Disagreements are okay, but if they disrupt the work environment, more needs to be done.”

- **Recognize and Appreciate Employees**

Simple gestures like thank-yous, public recognition, and listening can go a long way in building respect and morale.

“A simple ‘thank you’ or public acknowledgment can boost morale and engagement.”

“We try to get close to the employees and improve communication. By those efforts, we’re improving civility at our workplace.”

These suggestions reflect not just preferences but lived experiences. For many employees, workplace civility starts with leadership, but it lives in the small, consistent actions that shape daily interactions.



Conclusion

Workplace civility is more than a matter of etiquette; it is a reflection of organizational values and a predictor of both employee well-being and business outcomes. This study reveals that while some progress has been made, many employees continue to navigate environments where respect is inconsistent and inclusion uneven. The gap between policy and practice remains a key challenge, especially as political and social tensions shape daily interactions.

To build truly civil workplaces, organizations must move beyond surface-level efforts and address the deeper dynamics that influence behavior, trust, and belonging. Civility must be lived, not just stated. As the line between internal culture and external reputation grows thinner, the cost of inaction becomes harder to ignore.

Moving forward, organizations that want to improve employee retention, boost performance, and earn public trust must see the creation of respectful workplaces as critical, not optional.



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