



# RAIL OMBUDSMAN

# CONSUMER EXPERIENCE SURVEY

**Report**

**December 2020**

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# Background and objectives

Since its formation in November 2018, the Rail Ombudsman has provided a free and independent service that provides a point of escalation for complaints about service providers in the rail industry.

Part of the Rail Ombudsman's role is to raise standards in the industry by providing training whilst also delivering a fair and impartial service when mediating between rail passengers and Rail Operating Companies.

The Rail Ombudsman appointed Ipsos MORI, an independent research agency, to collect feedback, where possible, from

rail passengers who have contacted the Rail Ombudsman.

This research provides an insight into the experience of rail passengers. Feedback focuses on consumers who have had a case closed by the Rail Ombudsman, with their feedback separated from those whose cases were outside of the Rail Ombudsman's scope.

## Methodology

- Fieldwork dates: 13th November 2020 – 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020
- 10 minute online survey sent out to 2,036 rail passengers who had contacted the Rail Ombudsman since the start of its operation
- 27% completion rate
- 504 rail passengers with cases that were in scope for the Rail Ombudsman completed the survey in 2020, along with 43 out of scope responses

# Definitions

Term	Definition
<b>In Scope</b>	A complaint accepted as being eligible for the Rail Ombudsman scheme.
<b>Out of Scope</b>	A complaint that is outside the remit of the Rail Ombudsman scheme.
<b>Simple Resolution</b>	A stage in the Rail Ombudsman process that provides an opportunity, in some circumstances, to quickly resolve an issue.
<b>Complex Resolution</b>	A stage in the Rail Ombudsman process where a simple resolution is not possible. The Rail Ombudsman will first mediate and then where applicable, adjudicate to resolve an in scope complaint.
<b>Mediation</b>	The process by which, assisted by an independent view from the Rail Ombudsman, a settlement in relation to an in scope complaint can be negotiated to which both the rail passenger and the participating Rail Operating Company agree.
<b>Cases resulted in a full or partial rail passenger remedy</b>	The Ombudsman instructs Rail Operating Company to take action, rail passenger complaint upheld in part, rail passenger complaint upheld in full, resolution reached between both parties prior to mediation and settled through mediation.
<b>Cases ruled in favour of the Rail Operating Company</b>	Rail passenger complaint not upheld.

# Executive Summary



## Experience of the Rail Ombudsman remains, on balance, positive

For rail passengers whose cases are dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman, the experience tends to be positive. Over half say the overall experience has been positive, with a similar number likely to recommend the Rail Ombudsman.



## Accessibility and staff remain important strengths

Accessibility and trustworthiness are areas of strength, with ratings of fairness rising in 2020. Staff remain a key strength, with almost two-thirds rating the professionalism of the Rail Ombudsman's staff positively.



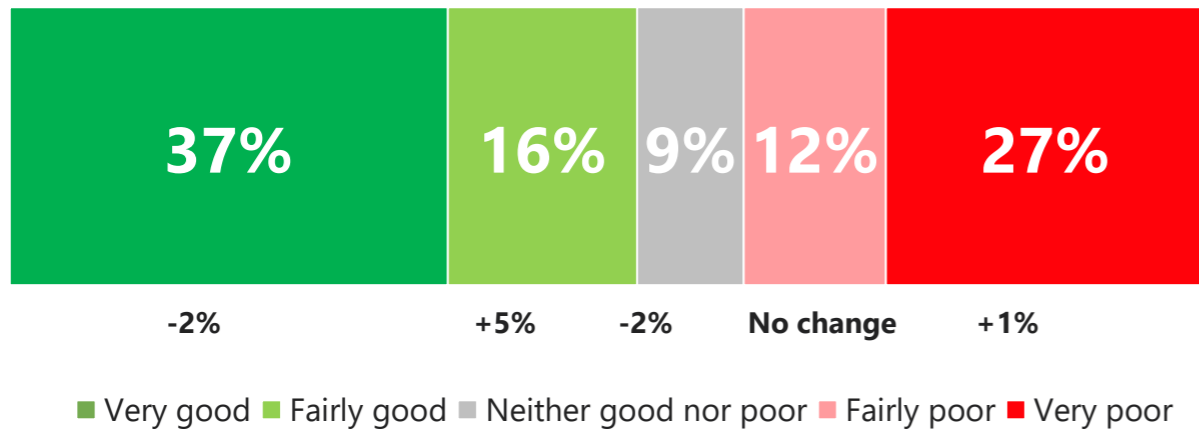
## Rail passengers are divided on how well the Rail Ombudsman is signposted by TOCs

Signposting is a particular issue at the start of rail passengers' experience with their case. Almost three-quarters are only told about the Rail Ombudsman at the point their complaint needed escalating.

# Rail passengers whose cases are dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman tend to have a positive experience overall

## Percentage rating experience overall as...

**53% rate their experience as very or fairly good** +3% vs 2019



% change from 2019

## Difference between case types

### Proportion of participants based on case outcomes

% of in-scope cases in each category

**73%** of cases resulted in a full or partial rail passenger remedy  
-2%

**27%** of cases ruled in favour of the Rail Operating Company  
+2%

### Experience of the Rail Ombudsman

% rating fairly or very good overall

Simple n=256

**66%** No change

Mediation n=93

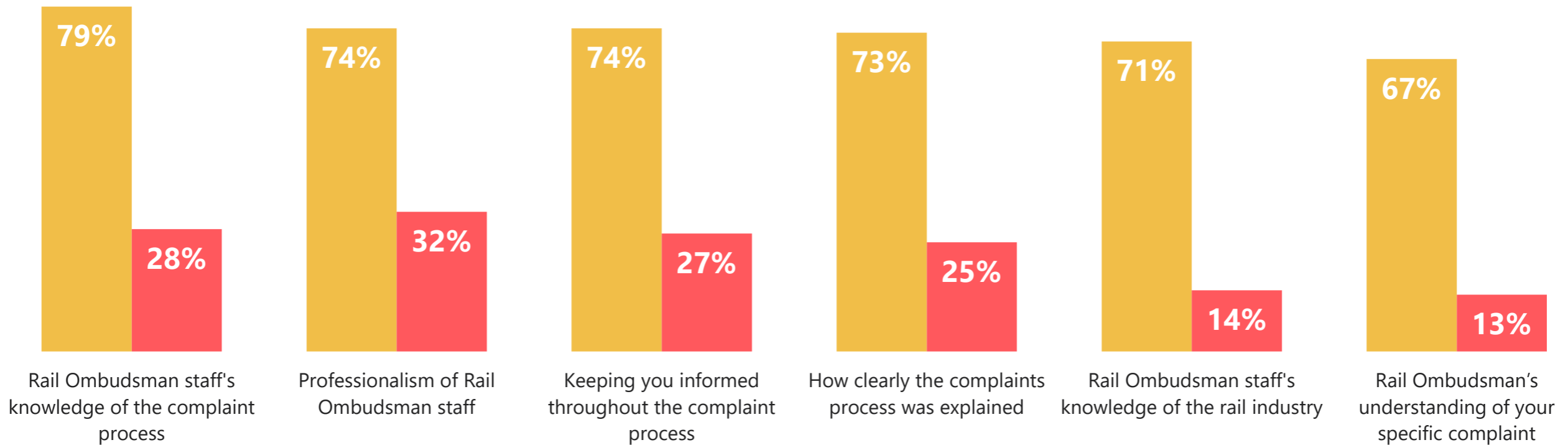
**67%** +10%

In favour of Rail Operator n=134

**12%** -9%

# Ratings differ depending on the outcome. The Ombudsman's staff are the highest rated aspect even for cases decided in favour of the Rail Operator

Percentage rating as good or very good



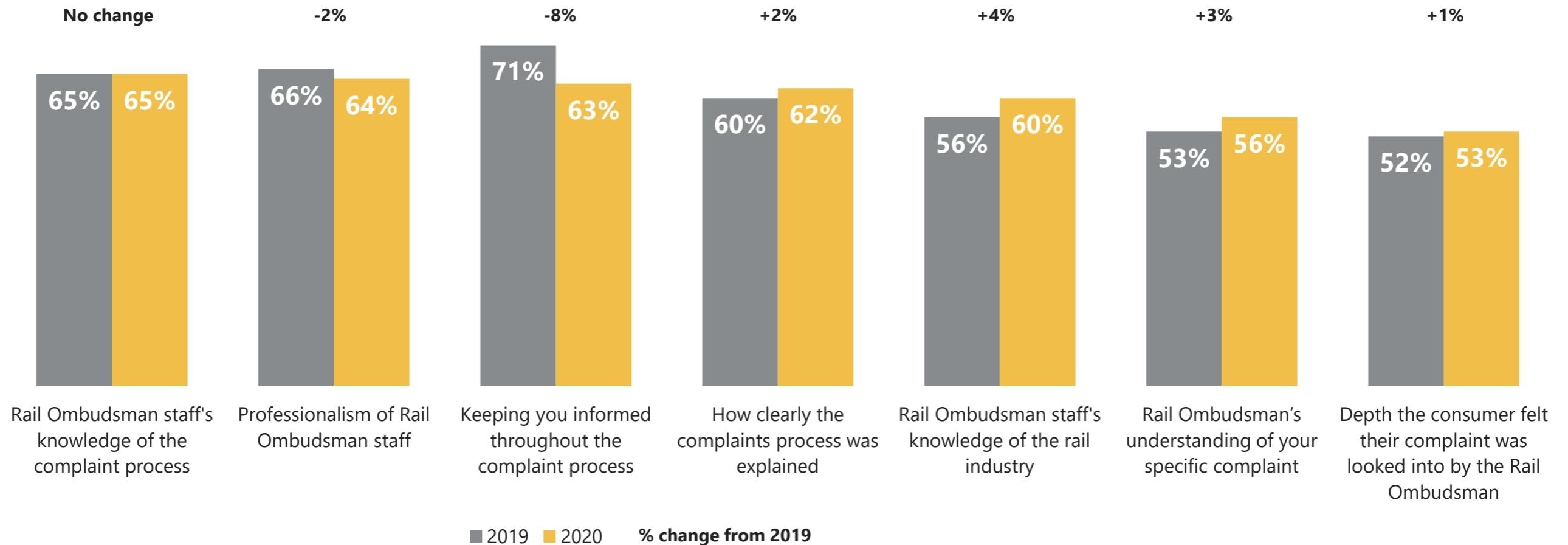
■ Case decided fully or partially in favour of consumer ■ Case decided in favour of Rail Operating Company



Q11. How would you rate the following aspects of the Rail Ombudsman's service? Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman. Cases decided fully or partially favour of rail passenger (370), Cases decided in favour of Rail Operating Company (134).

# The majority of rail passengers contacting the Rail Ombudsman rate staff positively

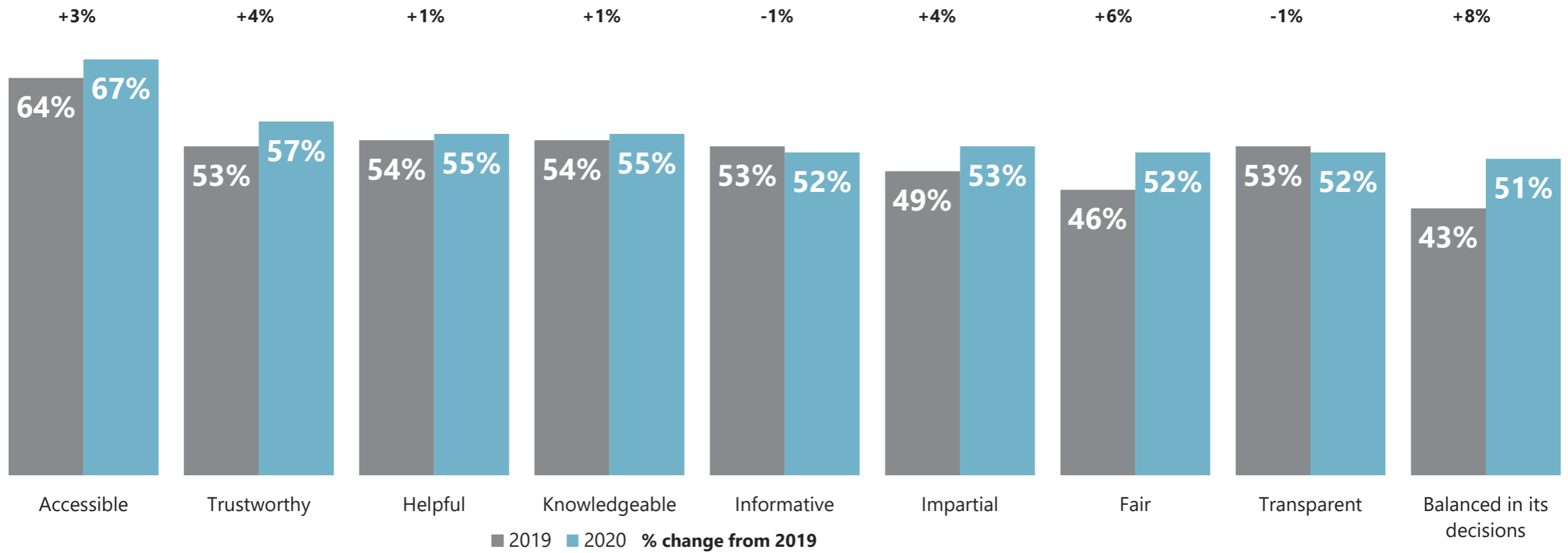
Percentage rating as good or very good



Q11. How would you rate the following aspects of the Rail Ombudsman's service? Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman (2020: 504., 2019: 180).

# Perceptions of the Rail Ombudsman show signs of improvement across many attributes

Percentage agreeing that the Rail Ombudsman is...

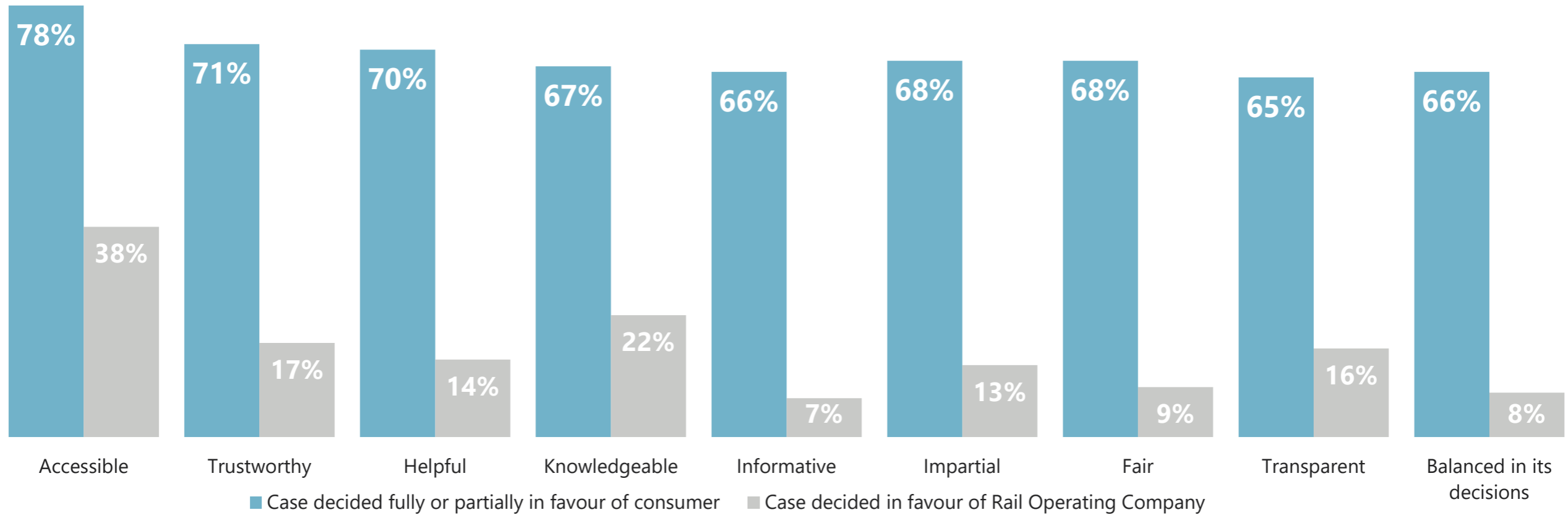


Q4. Taking into account your overall experience, how strongly do you agree or disagree that the Rail Ombudsman is... Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman (2020: 504., 2019: 180).



# Perceptions of the Rail Ombudsman are heavily influenced by the case outcome

Percentage agreeing that the Rail Ombudsman is...



**Ipsos** Q4. Taking into account your overall experience, how strongly do you agree or disagree that the Rail Ombudsman is... Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman  
Cases decided fully or partially in favour of rail passenger (370), Cases decided in favour of Rail Operating Company (134).

# Customers with a positive experience praise swift responses; those with a more negative experience question the neutrality of the Ombudsman process

## Why do you rate your experience positively/negatively?

“

Very quick to process all aspects of a case, impressive during current "work from home" culture. Able to get swift and more than satisfactory solutions from TOC's

Simple case

”

“

The system is one sided because the TOC has a good understanding of what's reasonable and has a much better idea than the average customer about how the Ombudsman is likely to rule

Complex case

”

“

I felt taken care of, that someone was fighting on my behalf. The responses were quick.

Complex case

”



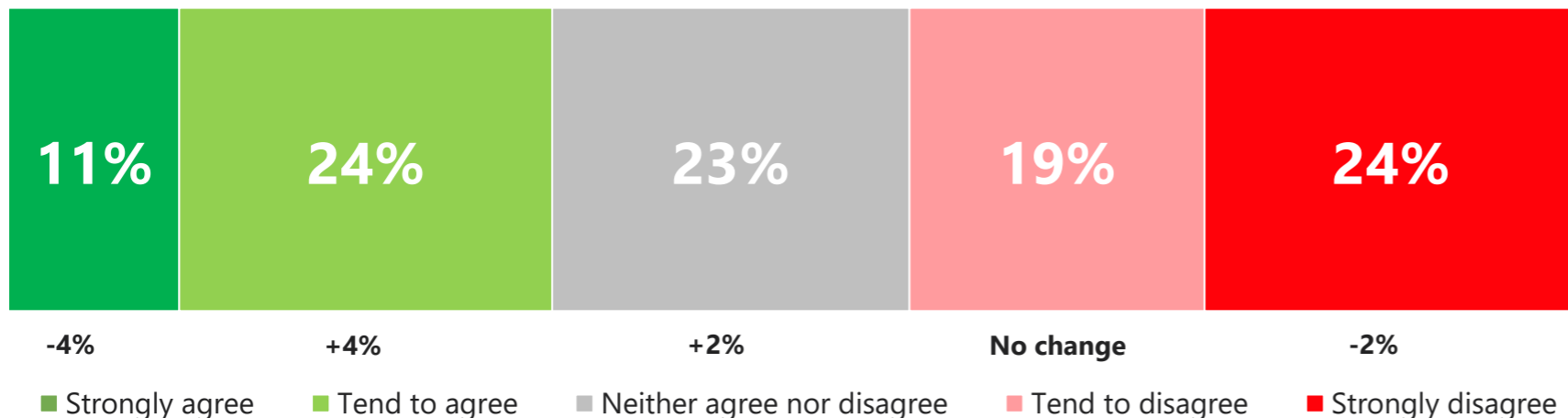
Q2a. Why did you rate your experience of the Rail Ombudsman positively?

Q2b. Why did you rate your experience of the Rail Ombudsman poorly?

# Most rail passengers are first told about the Rail Ombudsman only when their complaint needed escalating

The Rail Ombudsman was well signposted by the Train Operating Company...

**35% agree** No Change vs 2019



-4%      +4%      +2%      No change      -2%

■ Strongly agree   ■ Tend to agree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Tend to disagree   ■ Strongly disagree

% change from 2019

Point at which rail passengers were told about the Rail Ombudsman

**7%** +5%

Told about the Rail Ombudsman when first complained to the Rail Operator

**21%** +4%

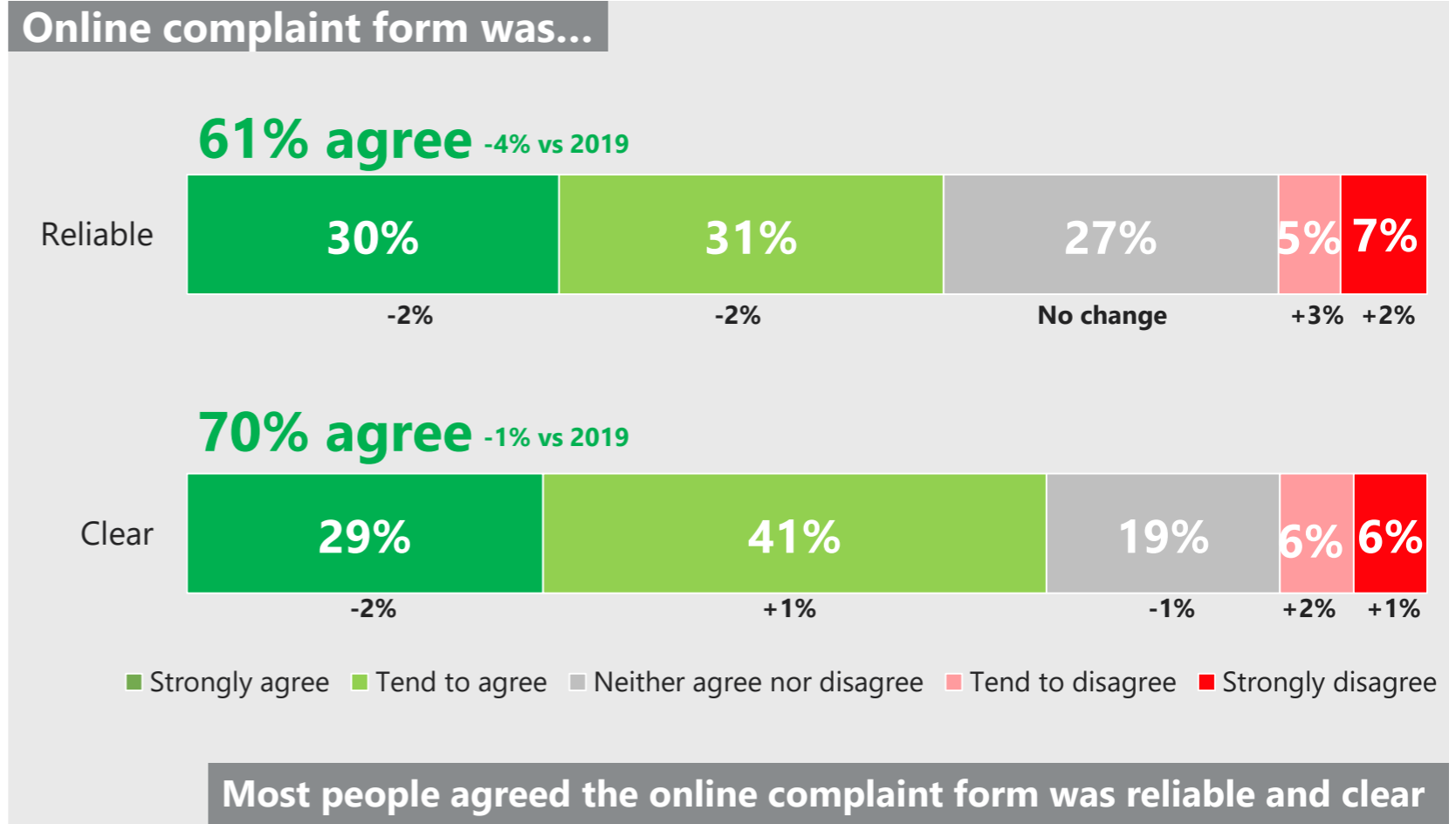
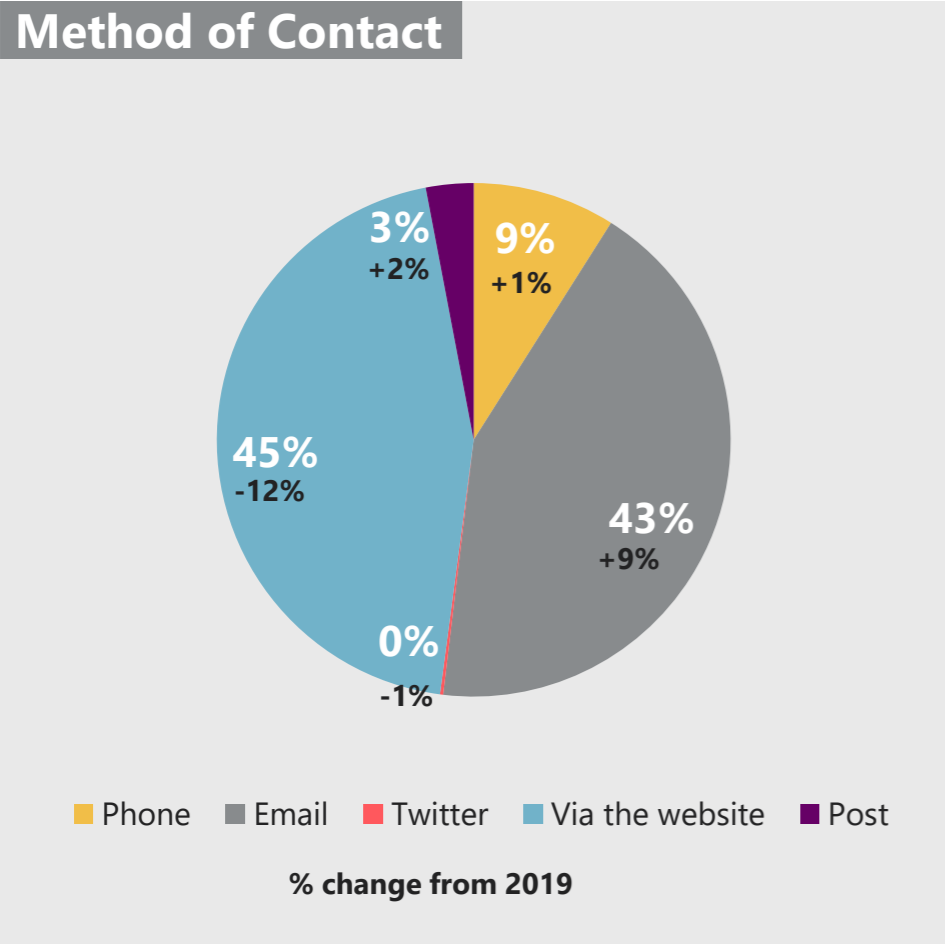
During the complaints process

**72%** -8%

When the complaint needed escalating beyond the Rail Operator

**Ipsos** Q6. How strongly do you agree or disagree that the Rail Ombudsman was well signposted by the Train Operating Company?  
 Q7. At what point were you told about the Rail Ombudsman during the complaint process with the Train Operating Company? Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman (504)

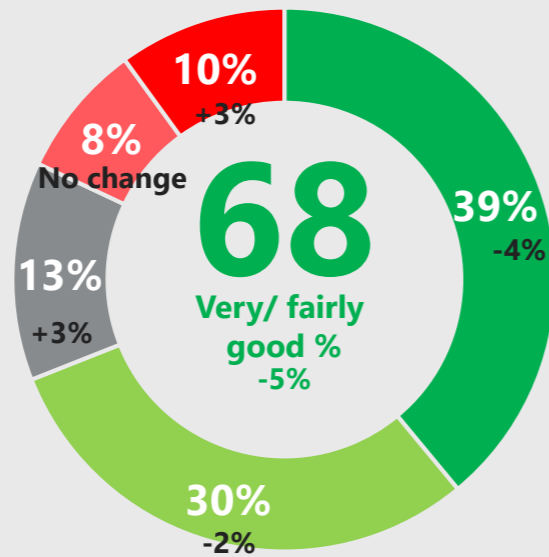
# Online channels remain the most widely used method of contact. The online complaint form is widely seen as reliable and clear



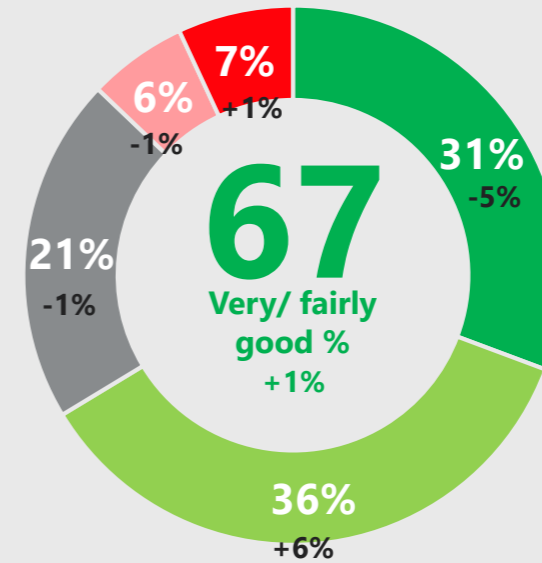
**Ipsos** Q8. How did you first access the Rail Ombudsman to make your complaint?  
 Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the initial online complaint form was... Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman (504).

# Ratings of speed of response and the range of contact methods remain relatively consistent in 2020, with two thirds of passengers positive

Speed with which the rail passenger received an initial response



The different ways to contact the Rail Ombudsman about the complaint



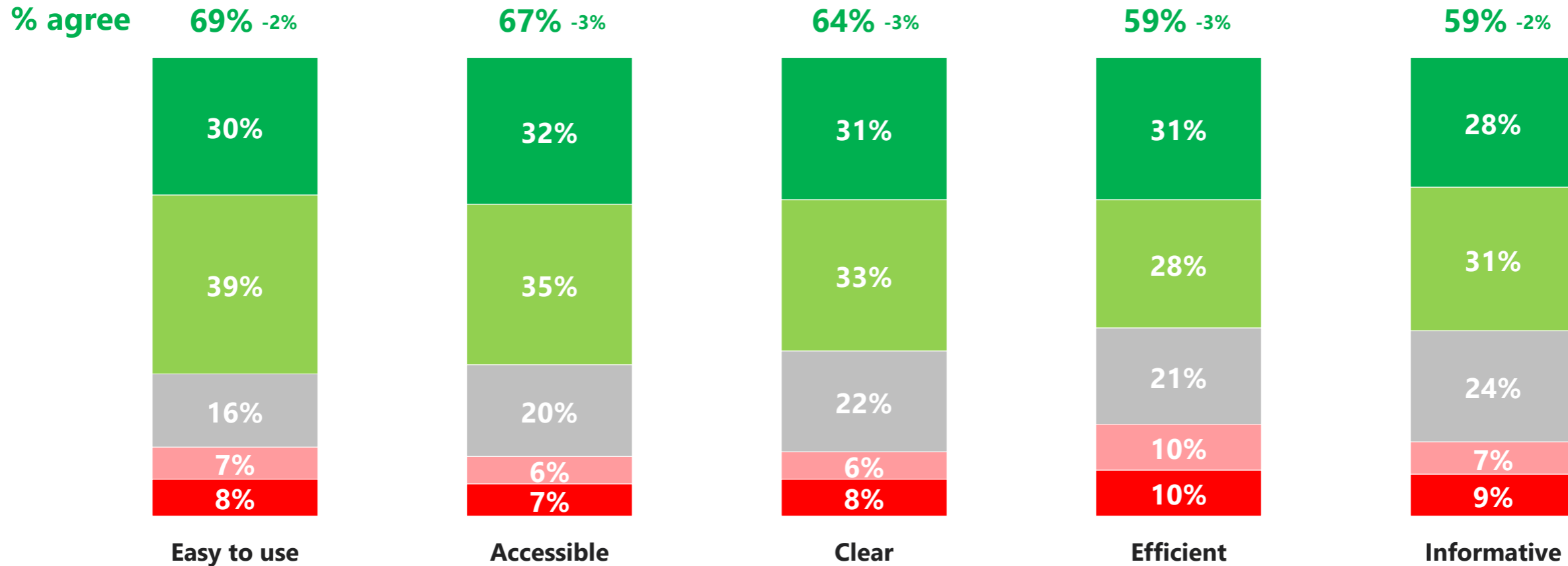
- Very good
  - Fairly good
  - Neither good nor poor
  - Fairly poor
  - Very poor
- % change from 2019



Q10. How would you rate the following aspects of your initial contact with the Rail Ombudsman? Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman (504)

# Nearly 70% of rail passengers agreed that the application portal was easy to use and accessible

The application portal was...

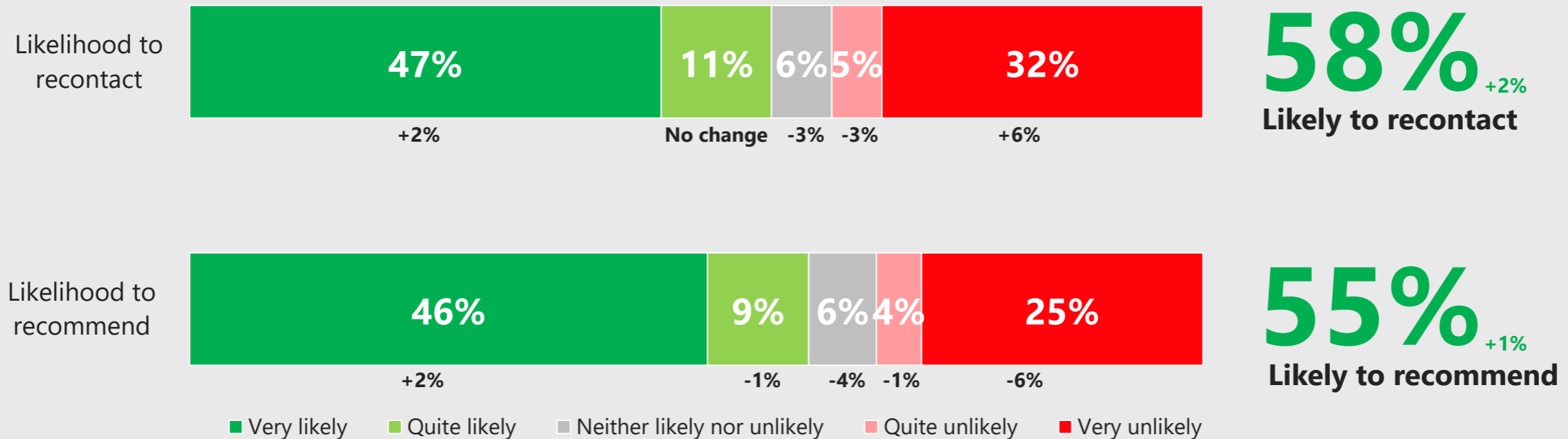


■ Strongly agree  
 ■ Tend to agree  
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree  
 ■ Tend to disagree  
 ■ Strongly disagree  
 % change from 2019

Q17. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the application portal is... Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman (504)

# Over half of complainants are likely to recontact or recommend the Rail Ombudsman, in line with 2019

Based on the experience...



**Q22.** Based on your recent experience, how likely or unlikely are you to contact the Rail Ombudsman again if you had another complaint?  
**Q23.** Based on your recent experience, how likely or unlikely are you to recommend the Rail Ombudsman to someone who has a complaint? Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman (504)

% change from 2019

# The majority of rail passengers felt Covid-19 did not impact their case

77%

Do not believe that Covid-19 had a bearing on the complaint they escalated

74%

Do not believe that Covid-19 had a negative operational effect on the consideration of the case

“ The train company refused to refund my pre purchased advanced tickets when the government banned non essential travel back in March. ”  
**Simple case**

“ Rail companies sought to grab as much money as they could off passengers during the pandemic, and the Ombudsman was not prepared for this eventuality. ”  
**Simple case**

“ I had stopped travelling by rail due to the pandemic, and I was being financially punished and ripped off for this by the rail company, who were profiteering during a time of national crisis by not offering a fair refund or suspension of annual rail passes. ”  
**Simple case**

“ Initial delay in my response from the train operator to my Annual Season Ticket refund was understandable, given their staff were working from home at the start of Lockdown 1, but as the months went on and my query had not been resolved... hence me turning to The Rail Ombudsman. ”  
**Simple case**

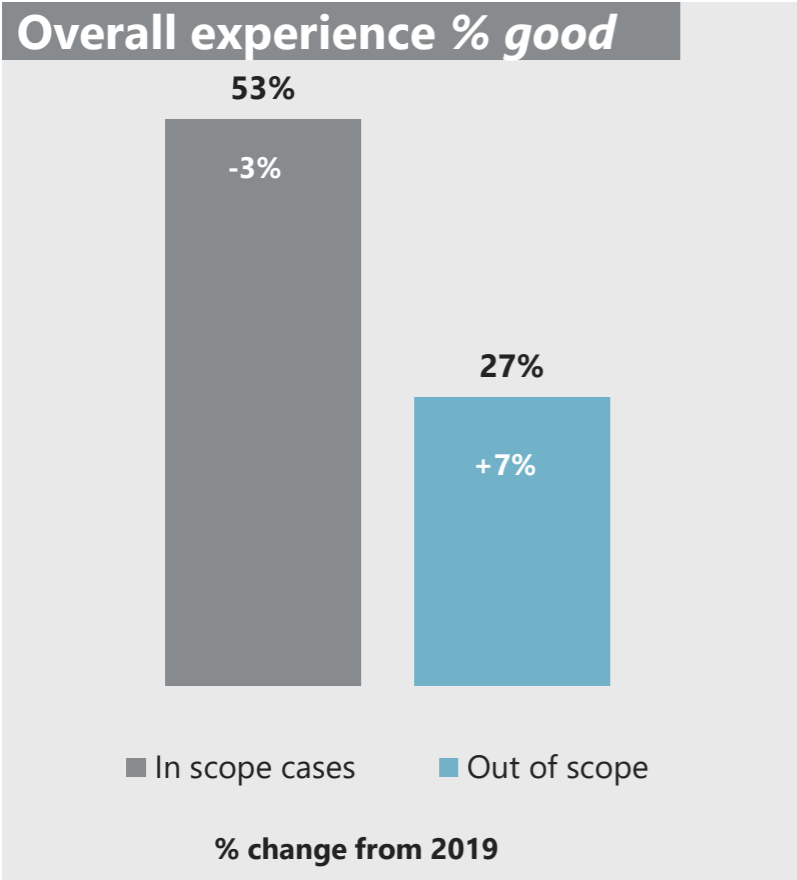


**Q21a.** Did the COVID-19 pandemic, or the restrictions or limitations caused by it, have any bearing on the complaint you escalated to the Ombudsman? **Q21b.** Do you feel that any of the operational changes the Ombudsman has had to make during the COVID-19 pandemic have had a negative effect on the process of considering your case? Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman (504)



In addition to cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman, we also surveyed consumers whose cases were out of scope

## Unsurprisingly, rail passengers with complaints that were out of scope are less positive about their experience



### Why do you rate your experience negatively?

“

Virtually instant rebuff of my case as not being within their remit, without me understanding why.

Out of Scope ”

“

The Rail Ombudsman did not consider my case in any detail and simply provided a standard response, that they were unable to assist me.

Out of Scope ”



Q1. Taking everything into consideration how would you rate your overall experience with the Rail Ombudsman? Base: Cases dealt with by the Rail Ombudsman 504, Out of scope (43)

# THANK YOU

Laura Godfrey

Director

☎ 0203 059 3335

✉ [laura.godfrey@ipsos.com](mailto:laura.godfrey@ipsos.com)

David Ireland

Associate Director

☎ 0207 347 3228

✉ [david.ireland@ipsos.com](mailto:david.ireland@ipsos.com)



[www.ipsos-mori.com/](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/)

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Ipsos MORI's standards & accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Moreover, our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a 'right first time' approach throughout our organisation.



**ISO 20252** – is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911 / MRQSA & incorporates IQCS Interviewer Quality Control Scheme; it covers the 5 stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos MORI was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.



**MRS Company Partnership** – By being an MRS Company Partner, Ipsos MORI endorse and support the core MRS brand values of professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness, and commit to comply with the MRS Code of Conduct throughout the organisation & we were the first company to sign our organisation up to the requirements & self regulation of the MRS Code; more than 350 companies have followed our lead.



**ISO 9001** – International general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994 we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.



**ISO 27001** – International standard for information security designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos MORI was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.



**The EU 2016/679 General Data Protection Regulation GDPR & the UK Data Protection Act 2018 DPA** – Ipsos MORI is required to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation and the UK Data Protection Act; it covers the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy.

Ipsos MORI is an active member of **EphMRA** and **BHBIA**.



**HMG Cyber Essentials** – A government backed and key deliverable of the UK's National Cyber Security Programme. Ipsos MORI was assessment validated for certification in 2016. Cyber Essentials defines a set of controls which, when properly implemented, provide organisations with basic protection from the most prevalent forms of threat coming from the internet.



**Fair Data** – Ipsos MORI is signed up as a 'Fair Data' Company by agreeing to adhere to ten core principles. The principles support and complement other standards such as ISOs, and the requirements of Data Protection legislation.

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**This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for market research, ISO 20252**