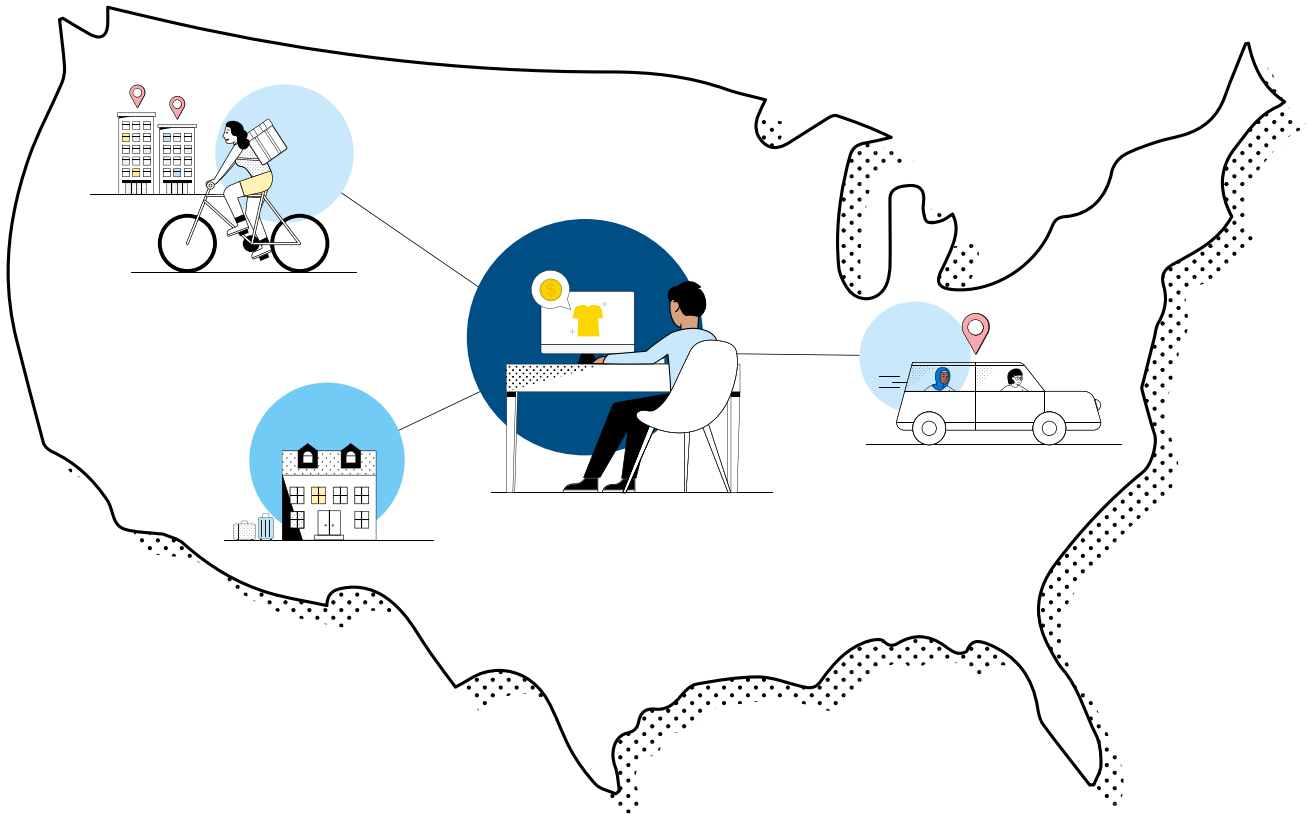


Legal & General U.S. Gig Economy study

Part 5

Gig Workers' independent mindset opposes corporate team-think



1 in 5 U.S. gig workers say they could not work in a corporate setting



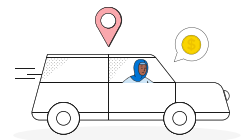
61% say being able to work when they want is most important



Only **2%** claim they want to get out of gig work as soon as possible



56% say being able to do the type of work they want is the best thing about gig work (**66%** for those with 15+ years in gig work)



53% say not having a boss is the main benefit of gig work (**63%** of non-office workers)

Recent attempts by California and New York State to reclassify many independent contractors as employees are likely to be met with strong opposition by gig workers who have embraced this way of working. California's [Assembly Bill 5](#), which classifies workers as employees unless they are free from control by the hiring entity, perform work that is outside the hiring entity's bailiwick, and customarily engage in the type of work they're hired to do, is [viewed](#) by some as "ruinous"—and at minimum exploitative. A similar bill proposed in New York, [S2052](#), is currently in committee. This report will look at what drives Gig Economy workers to choose autonomy over conventional employment, and why these bills are likely to be resisted, even deplored by the independent-minded gig workforce.

Research uncovers a strain of fierce independent mindedness among Gig Workers

We've been looking at the segment of the U.S. population that describes itself as part of the Gig Economy—a sizeable chunk ([36 percent](#)) of the workforce that is both growing and appears to be causing meaningful shifts in the employment landscape. Our [research](#) has covered multiple facets of the gig work phenomenon, starting with [Part 1](#)'s report that gig work is here to stay;

[Part 2](#) viewed the broad scope of pay scales and industries that can be seen across the gig economy; and [Part 3](#) asserted that the vast majority of people (82 percent) engage in gig work by choice.

From there, the reporting took a deep dive into the U.S. technology sector, which has been experiencing mass layoffs of traditional workers. Our [Flash Report](#) on the role of gig work in the tech industry shows a picture of relative affluence, youth, and financial security among tech gig workers compared with the overall cohort of gig workers. [Part 4](#) of the research found that, despite overall satisfaction with this model of work, many of those in the gig economy struggle with a lack of basic social and financial safety nets such as health insurance, life insurance, and retirement planning. No model is without its shortcomings, and this aspect of the research underpinned the fundamental truth that we can't have economic health without first attending to our population's physical health.

With the need for leveling-up solutions to the Gig Economy's problems beginning to come into focus, we now turn our attention to gaining a deeper understanding of some attitudinal aspects of the gig working mindset.

Fierce independent mindedness seeped through the data, as well as a strain of pride in the choice to become or remain a gig worker that came out in the verbatim responses gathered in anticipation of the study, including:



The best thing about being a gig worker? Oh, definitely the independence of it.”

One telling factor running through the research was that less than 10 percent of independent workers were interested in the idea of returning to a traditional workplace to advance their career, while 11 percent said that ethical issues connected with corporate America was an important reason for their choice to work this way—and 19 percent said they couldn't work in a corporate setting or a traditional employer-employee setting. It's not hard to find evidence of why this is. A January 2023 [survey](#) of social media posts shows how corporate workers—particularly those further down the ladder—are being treated. Corporate management's draconian response to issues of pay equity and transparency, healthcare coverage and support, overtime pay and end-of-year bonuses, tight staffing and misallocated investments, working conditions, being paid on time, and even the socks one employee chose to wear—all paint a picture of a rigid model that, much like the healthcare system, is not addressing the current needs of people in the post-Covid 21st Century. Something is broken: can it be fixed?

The gig working population isn't banking on it. Only 2 percent of those we talked to claimed that they were looking to get out of the gig work cycle as soon as possible. That leaves 98 percent who, to a greater or lesser degree, have made their peace with earning most of their living working freelance or independently.

One respondent liked



Being my own boss and controlling what work I do and when I work.”

Another had a creative and timely four-word response to our question, Which financial security benefits do you currently have?:



I can't be fired.”

Other research paints a similar picture: This [2019](#) report holds that 75.7 percent of freelancers would not quit their gig for a full-time job; while in this [survey](#), 82 percent of full-time independents say they are happier working on their own—and tellingly, 69 percent said it is better for their health. According to this 2022 [research](#), the number of U.S. freelancers with a reported income of over \$100,000 keeps growing each year—it currently stands at 3.1 million people, or 20 percent of the workforce.

Perhaps gig workers don't think of work in the same linear way as those on traditional career paths; other indicators point to their sense of workflow and time management being part of an organic whole with family life, travel, and their overall mental and physical health. But they don't seem to be suffering from punitive managers and unreasonable working conditions. As one gig worker we talked to put it:



No 8 to 5, no office but my kitchen table, no transportation costs.”

Live Free or Die

The popular state motto of New Hampshire wasn't adopted until [1945](#), though it's attributed to a Revolutionary War hero. While the phrase was not codified until much later than many other states', the thought still summed up the belief system of an America then ending another pivotal war. In 1775, Patrick Henry had closed his famous oration with "Give me liberty or give me death!" There's a case to be made that, in addition to also coming late to the party in terms of official recognition, the gig economy adheres to this same sentiment.

Our research showed that 53 percent—63 percent of non-office workers—said that not having a boss was the main benefit of gig work. Working when they want to was cited by 61 percent as the most important aspect of independent work; and the ability to make more money when and as needed was valued by 46 percent. A third of gig workers feel that being able to negotiate their own pay rate is a key benefit. One respondent summed up his thoughts on the best thing about gig work this way:

“

Being my own boss and controlling what work I do and when I work.”

Taking the Live Free or Die discussion a step further, gig workers express their freedom in ways beyond economics. The rise of the concept of [digital nomads](#), popularized in 2007 by the book [The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape the 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich](#), offered a seemingly foolproof way for gig workers to have it all. More than a decade later, our research shows that a quarter (24 percent) of gig workers are still seduced by the lure of travel, and consider being able to work in different geographies and locales, 'wherever I am' a major benefit. The downside is that, unlike Tim Ferriss and his 4-hour workweek, many had trouble finding the balance, in these circumstances, between working enough hours to get the job done and working nonstop, seven days a week.

“

I finally have a life. I make less money but don't feel a difference at all. I am living a much fuller, happier life.”

“

It is enabling me to be free and to make my own schedule.”

We also picked up a note of libertarianism among some of the gig workers we talked to, another manifestation of the Live Free or Die mentality. In a few cases, gig work appeared to be more of a moral choice than a necessity. We asked the question, *Which financial security benefits do you wish you had?* — to which we got some surprising responses:

“

A fiscally responsible government and energy independence from other countries.”

“

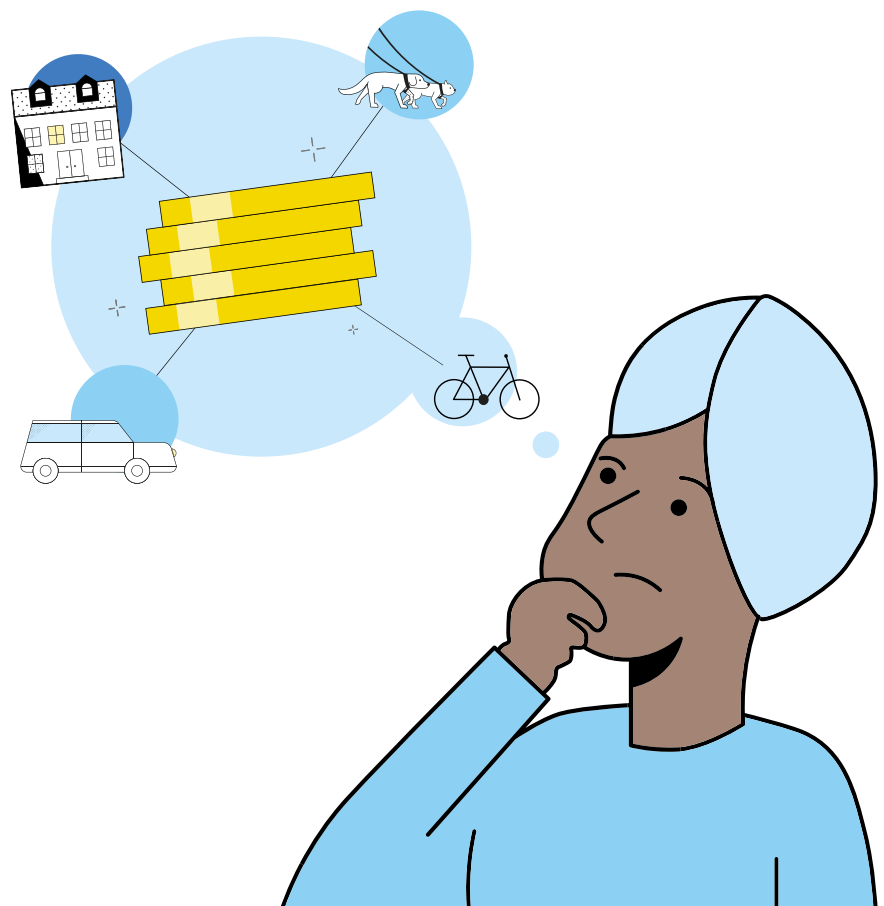
NOTHING GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED.”

Other answers were not so surprising, in light of our previous research findings:

“

Someone matching my contributions would be great.”

This brings us full circle to the next area of inquiry in our Gig Economy study: freelance workers' realities around **retirement saving and planning**. Here, the longest word in the English language, **antidisestablishmentarianism**—originally constructed to describe those who show reluctance to break with an established church or religion—might come in handy as we try to make sense of the contradictions of the gig working mindset. On the one hand, they consider themselves mavericks of a freer style of work, and in many respects, they are; but on the other hand, they crave and have trouble doing without the 'established church' of traditional work benefits. These include a steady paycheck, but more importantly, health insurance and retirement contributions—and a plan to get off the hamster wheel someday. You kind of want to hear some Enrico Morricone and watch Clint Eastwood riding off into the distance.



Methodology

The data was collected via online survey fielded to individuals sample sourced from YouGov's US panel. The survey scripted and hosted on Gryphon, YouGov's proprietary survey scripting platform and the field work took place between August 19 and 31, 2022. 1,044 surveys of freelancers and self-employed workers between 18 and 60 years old, non-student/non retired drawing 60% or more of their income from gig work were completed. Key demographics such as age, gender and region were allowed to fall out naturally. 20 questions were designed to understand facts about earnings, drivers of and barriers to gig working, financial product ownership & financial capacity when coming across adverse situations, and future expectations of being involved in the gig economy. Verbatim comments were captured by Legal & General in research carried out in June 2022 among 100 U.S. respondents.

Study authors



Sir Nigel Wilson
Group Chief Executive
Legal & General

Sir Nigel Wilson was knighted in the Queen's New Year's Honours list 2022 and has served on the UK government's Levelling Up Council. He has been a member of the Prime Minister's Business Advisory Group for two Prime Ministers and has chaired and served on a variety of UK government commissions. He was appointed Group Chief Executive of Legal & General in 2012 and holds a PhD in Economics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).



John Godfrey
Director of Levelling Up
Legal & General

John has worked in the City of London for over 30 years. Having joined the firm in 2006, with responsibility for communications, public policy issues and the group brand, he spent 2016-2017 working at Number Ten Downing Street as Head of Policy under Prime Minister Theresa May, where his team was responsible for advice on a broad range of UK domestic and Brexit-related issues.



Edyta Borowy
Group Brand Insight Manager
Legal & General

Edyta specializes in designing and developing research studies that look into current consumer and customer behavior and sentiment. Eliciting insights from the findings, she then translates them into business initiatives and strategies.