



Free to be flexible?

The politics of new ways of working

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**KING'S
BUSINESS
SCHOOL**

**THE
POLICY
INSTITUTE**

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Work/Place

London returning

Executive summary

The working-from-home revolution kickstarted by the pandemic remains highly politicised and fiercely debated, with disputes over what this shift means for productivity and the economy, and over who should have a say in where people work.

To explore these issues, the Policy Institute and King's Business School carried out a representative survey of 2,030 London workers aged 16+, between 23 June and 12 July 2022, as part of a joint programme of activities and research called **Work/Place: London returning**. The survey reveals the following key findings:

Employees in the capital disapprove of politicians telling people where they should be working – and they take even less kindly to politicians suggesting that people who work from home are less hardworking

- Two-thirds of London workers (66%) think it is unacceptable for politicians to urge people to work from home less often, compared with 16% who think it is acceptable. And both workers who voted Labour in 2019 and workers who voted Conservative in 2019 are more likely to feel this is unacceptable than acceptable – although a far greater proportion of the former group than the latter feel this way (78% Lab vs 46% Con).
- Eight in 10 London workers (80%) think it is unacceptable for politicians to suggest home-workers are less hardworking than people who do not work from home at all. This view cuts across gender, age and political lines, with even two-thirds (64%) of those who never work from home feeling such suggestions are unacceptable.

- 58% of London workers support flexible working for politicians themselves, and workers who were 2019 Labour voters (66%) are far more supportive of such measures than their Conservative counterparts (48%).
- Three-quarters of London workers say they trust advice from friends and family (72%) on working from home, but only a small minority say trust such advice from politicians (7%) or the UK government (11%).

There are signs that the rising cost of living could lead to greater levels of home-working, as well as less spending in the capital – but older people are less likely to think this will have an impact on their behaviour

- Over half (54%) of London workers say they are likely to be deterred from travelling to their workplace due to the increased cost of living. While the majority of those aged 16 to 25 (66%) and 25 to 49 (59%) agree, only 38% of people aged 50+ say the same.
- Similarly, seven in 10 London workers say the cost of living is likely to discourage them from spending money in the capital, with 16 to 24s (84%) far more likely to agree than those aged 50+ (62%).

“Levelling up” the country has been a key feature of political rhetoric in recent years, and large proportions of London workers think new ways of working could help rebalance the economy and have a positive impact on places outside of the capital

- Three-quarters (76%) agree that giving people the freedom to decide where they work for at least part of the week will mean a broader range of people can apply for jobs, while seven in 10 (69%) feel there will be greater economic benefits for areas where fewer jobs are traditionally

Executive summary

located, and 56% think this shift will mean smaller towns and rural areas have stronger communities.

- Majorities of London workers who voted Labour (74%) and Conservative voters (64%) in 2019 think that areas which have historically had fewer jobs will benefit economically from people having greater freedom over where they work.

Note: Throughout this report, some figures described may differ from those shown on charts. This is due to rounding.

Figures for Conservative/Labour are based on 2019 general election vote.

For sizes of subgroups described, see the survey details section at the end of this report.

Employees in the capital disapprove of politicians telling people where they should be working – and they take even less kindly to politicians suggesting that people who work from home are less hardworking



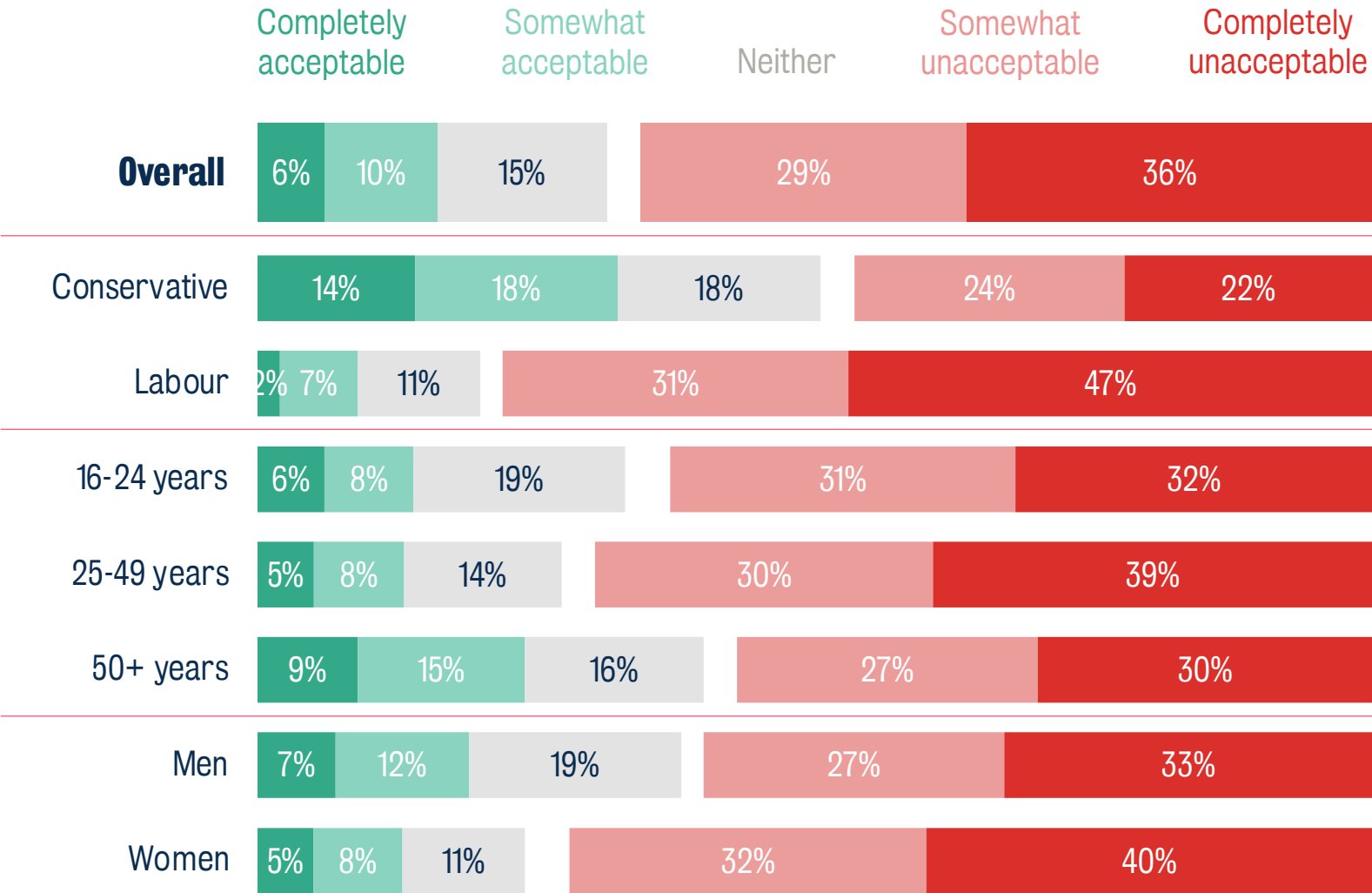
London workers overwhelmingly disapprove of politicians telling them to work from home less often

Two-thirds of London workers (66%) think it is unacceptable for politicians to urge people to WFH less often, compared with 16% who think it is acceptable.

Both 2019 Labour voters and 2019 Conservative voters are more likely to feel this is unacceptable than acceptable – although a far greater proportion of the former group than the latter feel this way (78% Lab vs 46% Con).

Majorities of all age groups surveyed also think this is unacceptable, while women (72%) are more likely than men (60%) to think politicians shouldn't be putting such pressure on home-workers.

How acceptable or unacceptable do you find the following? **Politicians urging people to work from home less often**



Base: 2,030 London workers aged 16+, surveyed online by YouGov, 23 Jun–12 Jul 2022
(Con: 493; Lab: 717; 16-24: 128; 25-49: 1,373; 50+: 529; men: 1,046; women: 984)

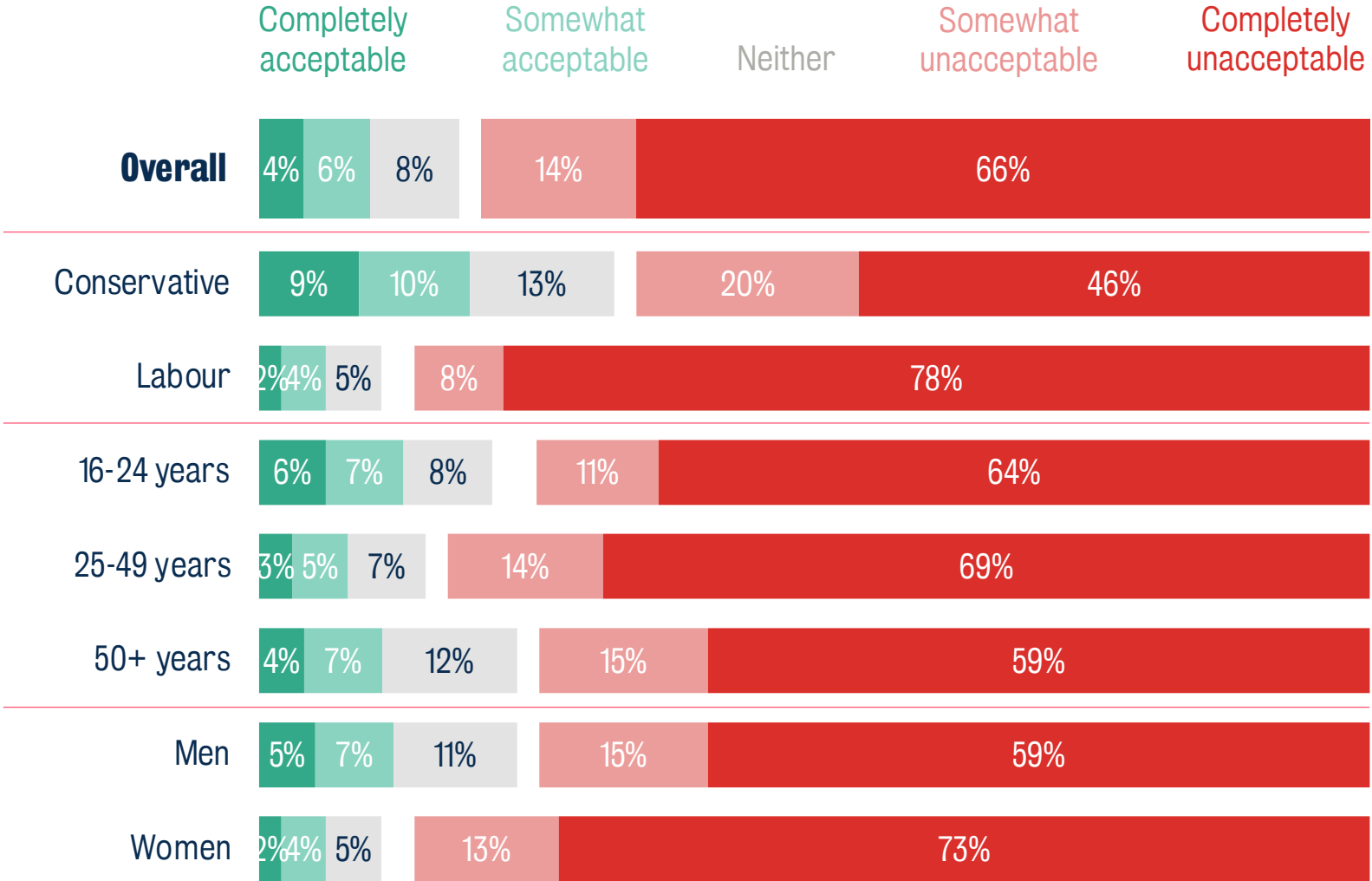
And they are even more disapproving of politicians suggesting home-workers are less hardworking

London workers overwhelmingly disapprove of politicians suggesting that people who often work from home are less hardworking than those who don't WFH at all.

80% of London workers find this unacceptable, including 66% who say this is *completely* unacceptable.

This view cuts across gender, age and political lines, however, London workers who voted Labour in 2019 (87%) are considerably more likely to feel this way than Conservative voters (66%), and women (86%) are more likely to than men (74%).

How acceptable or unacceptable do you find the following? **Politicians suggesting that people who often work from home are less hardworking than people who do not work from home at all**



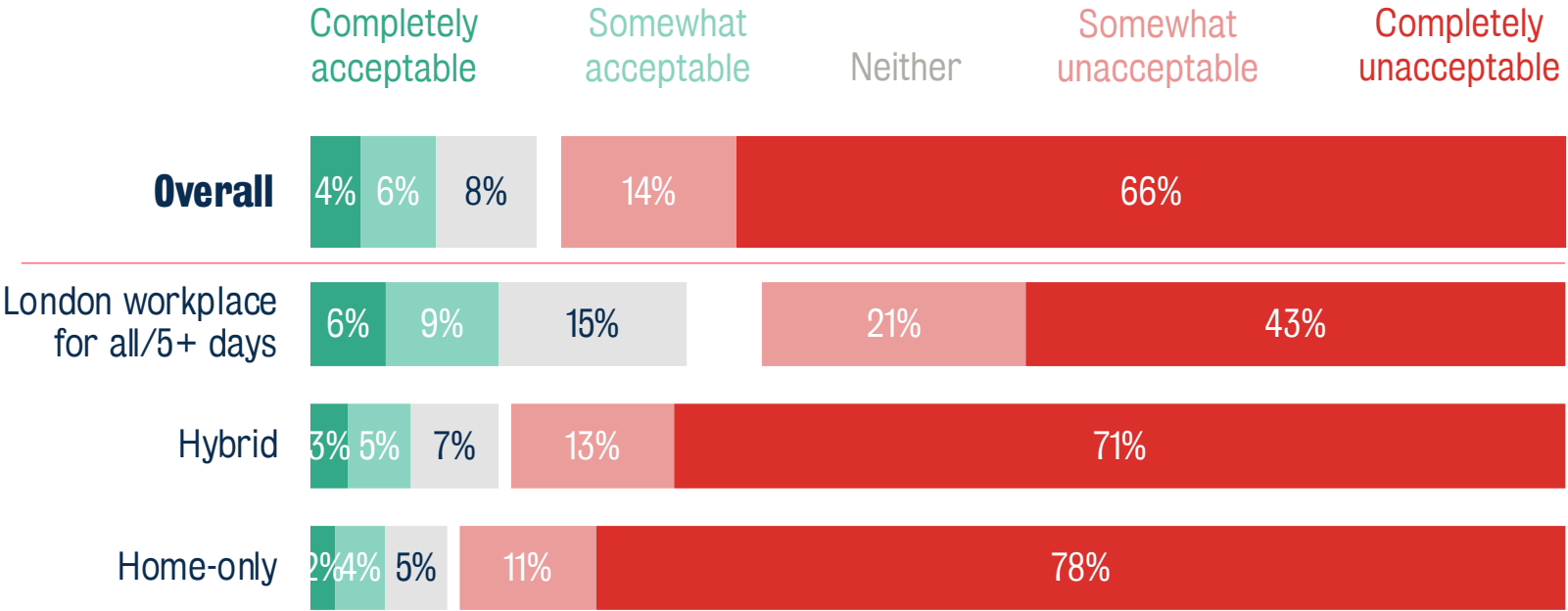
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(Con: 493; Lab: 717; 16-24: 128; 25-49: 1,373; 50+: 529; men: 1,046; women: 984)

Even those who don't work from home at all think such suggestions from politicians are unacceptable

Two-thirds (64%) of London workers who go to their workplace in the capital five or more days a week consider it unacceptable for politicians to suggest home-workers are less hardworking.

Those who work from home some (84%) or all (89%) of the time are even more likely to take issue with politicians judging home workers as less hardworking.

How acceptable or unacceptable do you find the following? **Politicians suggesting that people who often work from home are less hardworking than people who do not work from home at all**

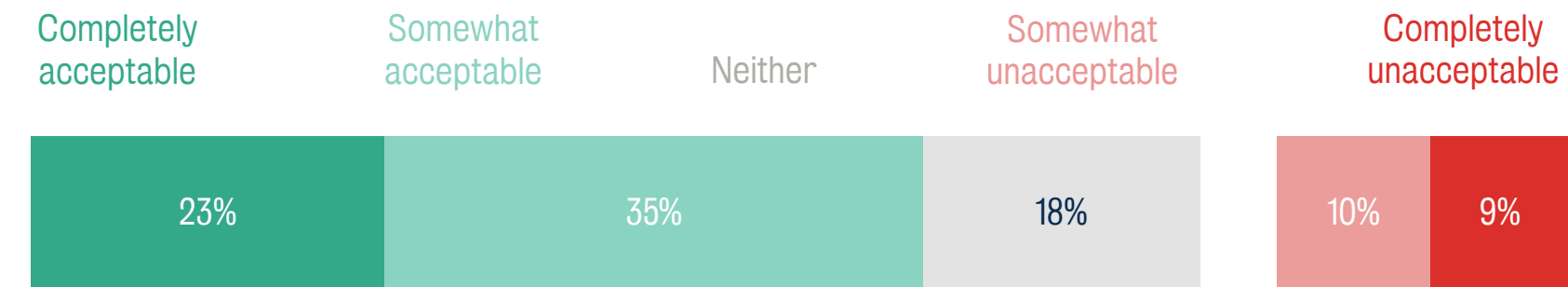


And a majority support flexible working for politicians themselves

58% of London workers think it's acceptable for politicians to work from home at least part of the week.

However, support for this is split across political lines – two-thirds (66%) of Labour voters think it's acceptable, compared with around half (48%) of Conservative voters.

How acceptable or unacceptable do you find the following? **Politicians working from home at least part of the week**



Base: 2,030 London workers aged 16+, surveyed online by YouGov, 23 Jun–12 Jul 2022

% who agree/strongly agree



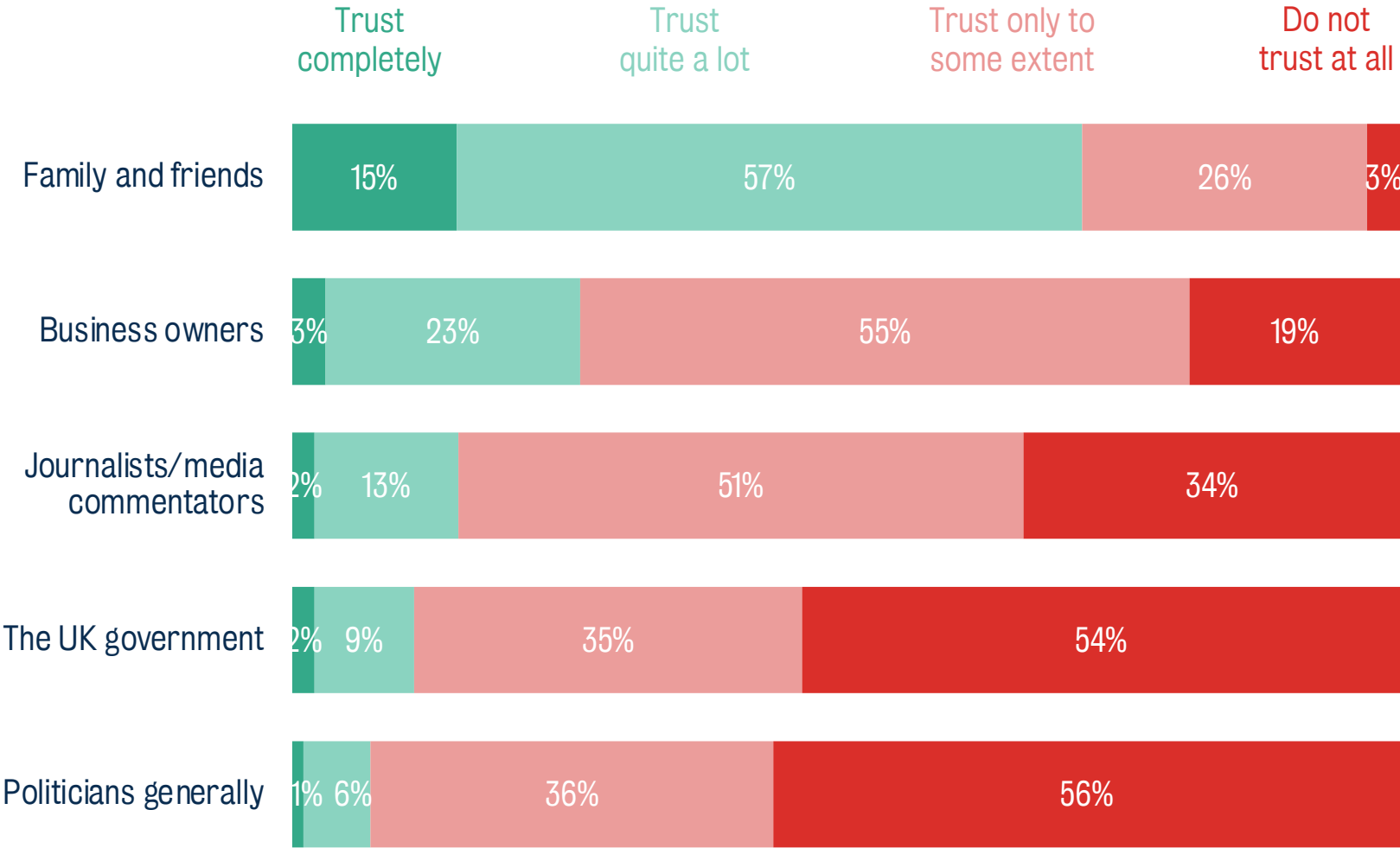
Base: 493 London workers aged 16+ who voted Conservative in the 2019 general election and 717 who voted Labour, surveyed online by YouGov, 23 Jun–12 Jul 2022

Most London workers place at least quite a lot of trust in advice from friends and family about where to work, but they're much more sceptical of guidance from politicians and government

While the majority (72%) of London workers trust advice on working from home quite a lot or completely when it comes from friends and family, only a small minority say they trust such advice when it comes from politicians (7%) or the UK government (11%).

Indeed, London workers are overwhelmingly sceptical of advice on home-working from every other source, with the majority not trusting, or only partly trusting, business owners (74%), the media (85%), the UK government (89%) and politicians generally (93%).

To what extent, if at all, do you trust the advice on working from home given by the following groups?



Base: 2,030 London workers aged 16+, surveyed online by YouGov, 23 Jun–12 Jul 2022

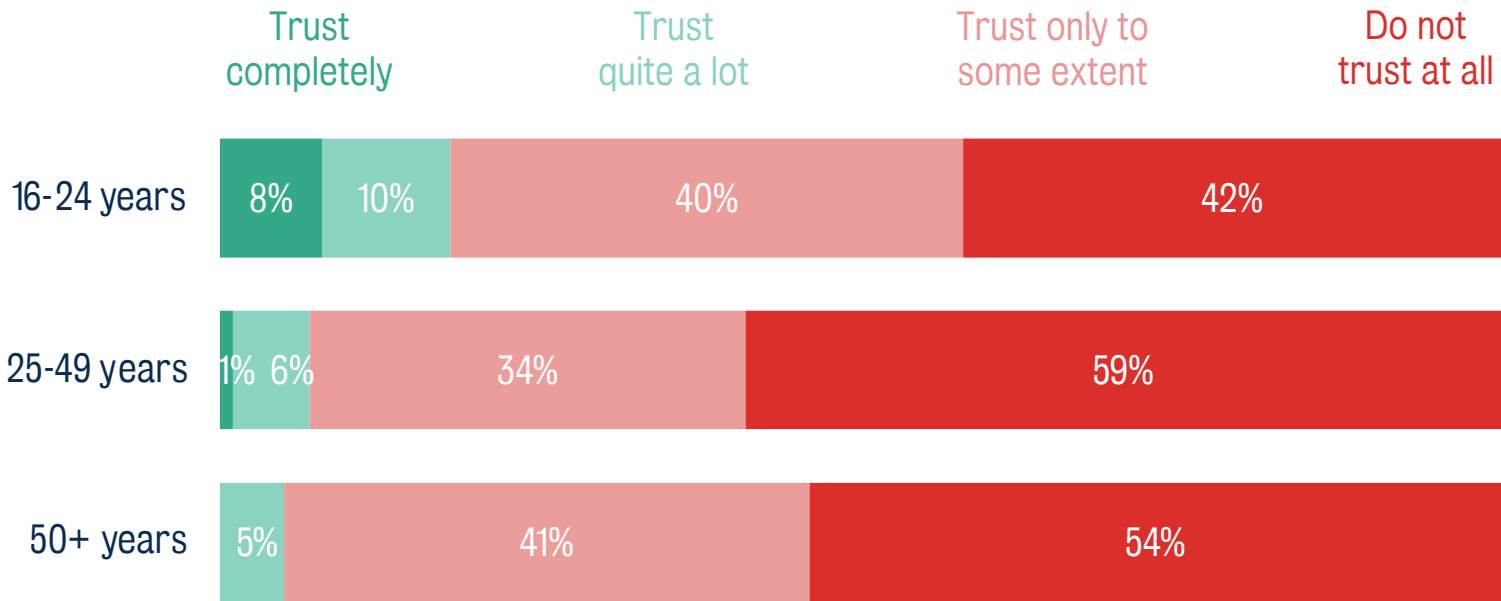
Older age groups are the least trusting of advice from politicians on working from home


London workers of all ages are overwhelmingly distrustful of government advice on working from home, and older groups are particularly sceptical.

While 82% of those aged 16-24-year-olds do not trust, or only partly trust, advice on home-working from politicians, 25-49-year-olds (93%) and 50+ year-olds (95%) are even more likely to feel this way.

To what extent, if at all, do you trust the advice on working from home given by the following groups?

Politicians generally



An aerial photograph of Manchester, UK, showing a mix of modern and older architecture. In the foreground, there's a curved tramway with a white tram and a few pedestrians. To the right, a large, modern building with a glass facade and a curved ramp is visible, with the words 'MANCHESTER ARNDALE' on its side. In the background, several tall office buildings are visible, including one labeled 'city tower'. A large red semi-transparent box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

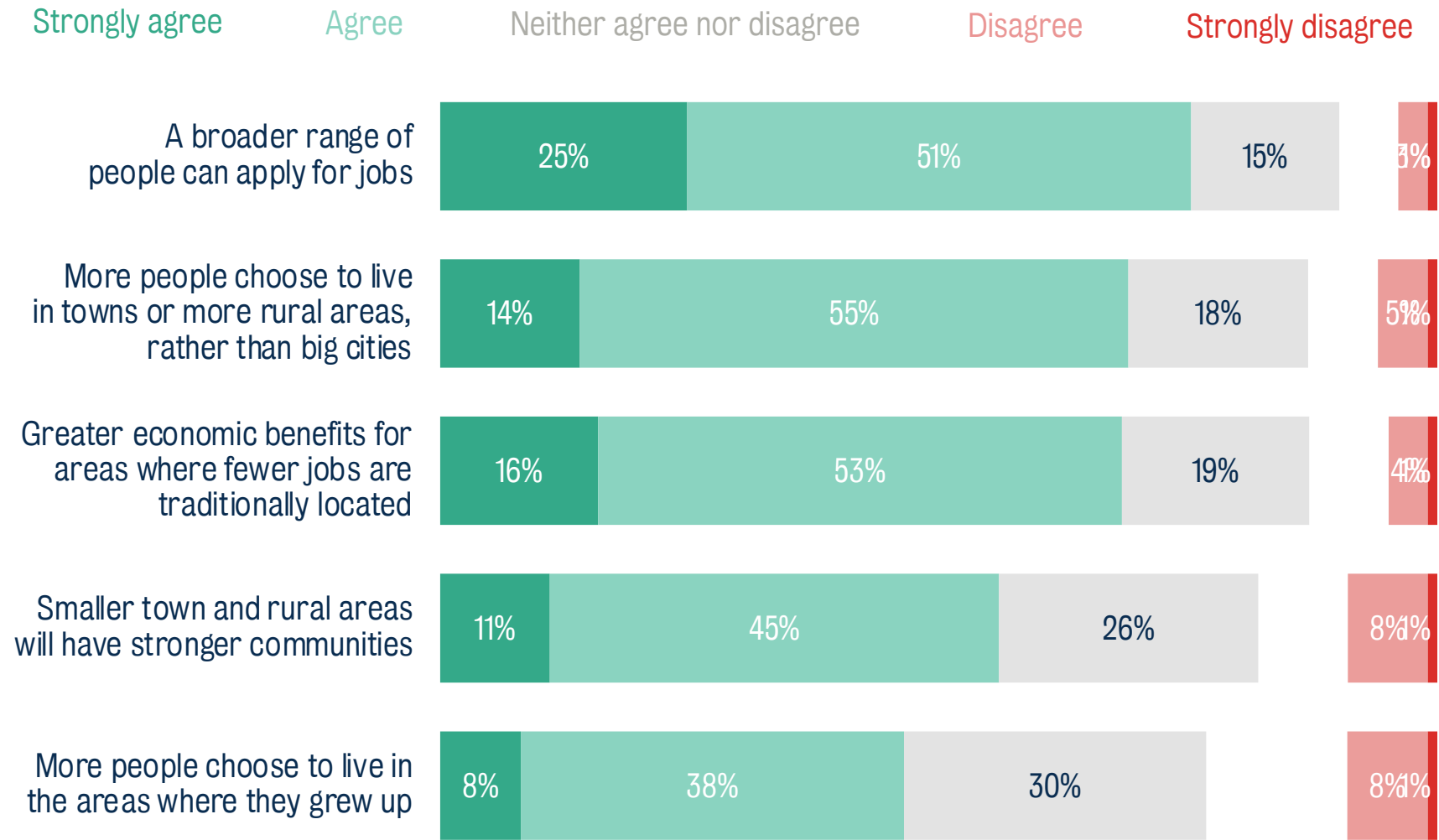
“Levelling up” the country has been a key feature of political rhetoric in recent years, and large proportions of London workers think new ways of working could help rebalance the economy and have a positive impact on places outside of the capital

Large proportions of London workers think regional and economic benefits will result from flexible working

Three-quarters (76%) of workers in the capital agree that giving people the freedom to decide where they work for at least part of the week will mean a broader range of people can apply for jobs. Seven in 10 (69%) also think it will mean more people choose to live in towns or more rural areas, rather than cities, and that there will be greater economic benefits for areas where fewer jobs are traditionally located (69%).

Over half (56%) think smaller town and rural areas will develop stronger communities as a result, while just under half (46%) think more people will choose to live in the areas where they grew up.

To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree that giving people the freedom to decide where they work for at least part of the week will mean...



Base: 2,030 London workers aged 16+, surveyed online by YouGov, 23 Jun–12 Jul 2022

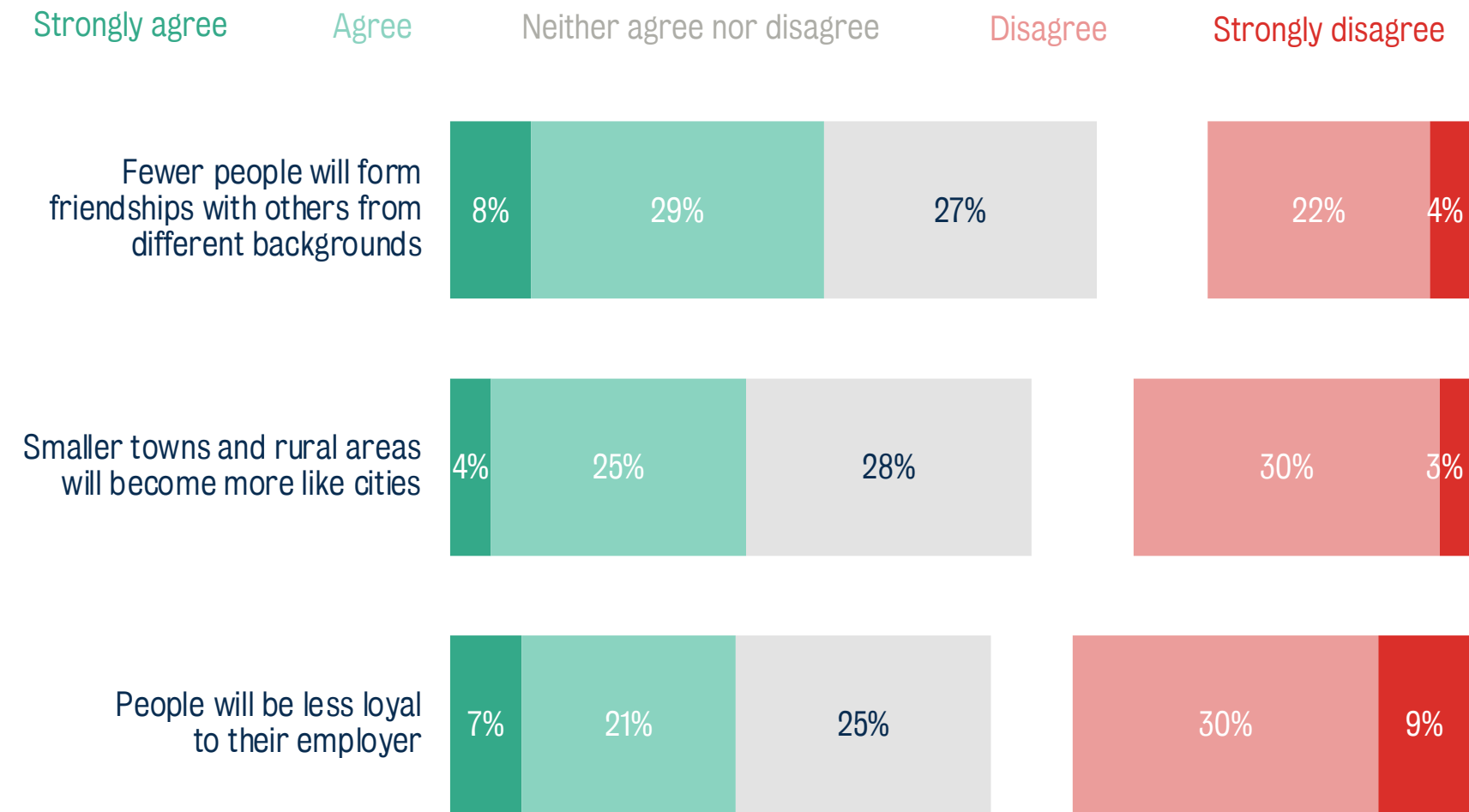
But they are less certain about other impacts of this shift

London workers are more divided on other outcomes of the move to flexible working. For example, 37% agree it will mean fewer people will form friendships with others from different backgrounds, compared with 26% disagree.

Similarly, while three in 10 (29%) think the rise of hybrid working could lead to smaller towns and rural areas becoming more like cities, virtually the same proportion (33%) do not think this is likely.

There is a similar split in opinion on whether flexible working will mean people become less loyal to their employer, with three in 10 (28%) agreeing and four in 10 (39%) disagreeing.

To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree that giving people the freedom to decide where they work for at least part of the week will mean...



Labour voters are more likely to think flexible working will broaden the pool of candidates for jobs and produce economic benefits for deprived areas

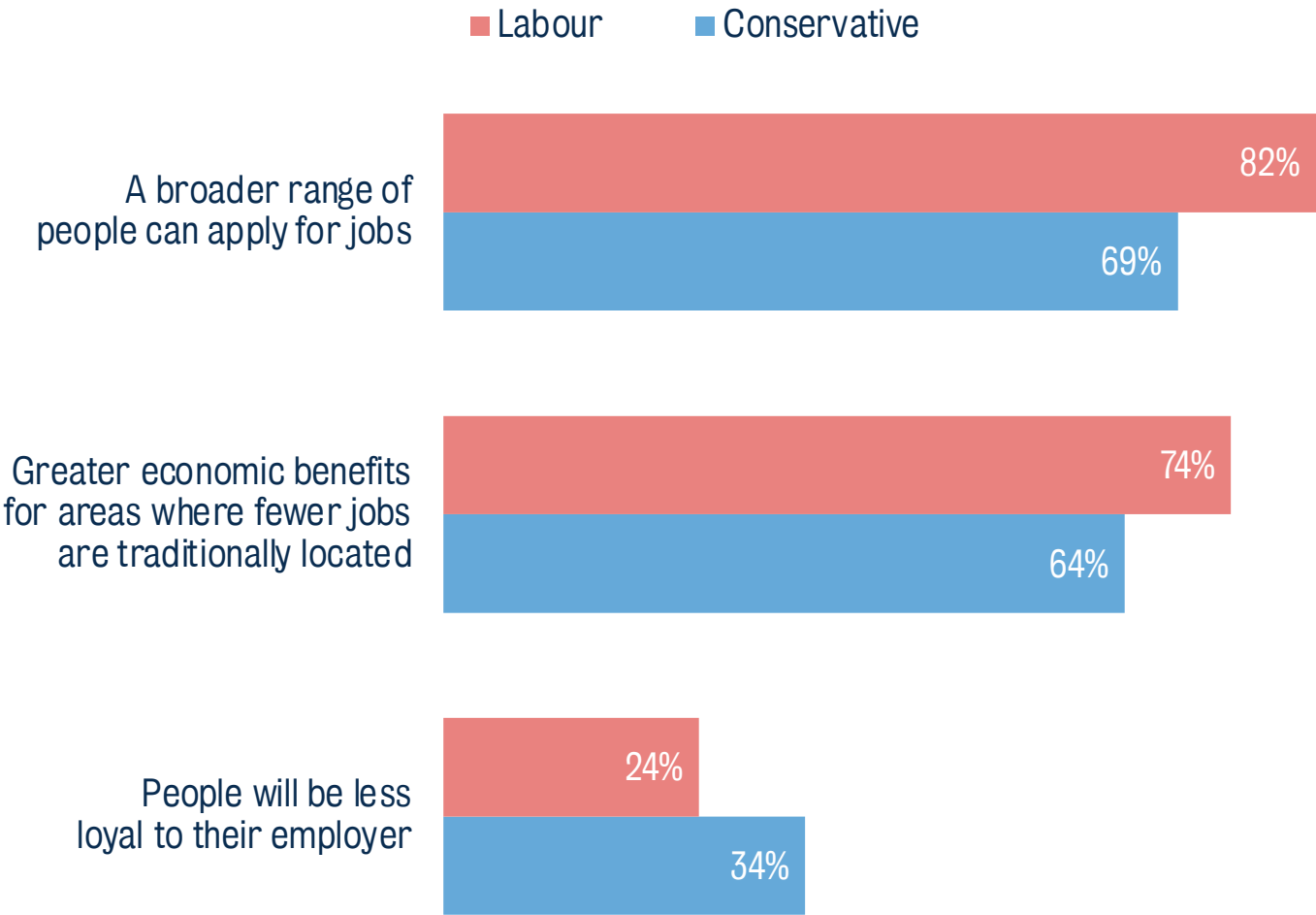
Large majorities of voters for both main parties recognise the “levelling up” potential offered by hybrid working, but London workers who voted Labour in the 2019 general election are more likely to think this shift will produce benefits.

Eight in 10 (82%) Labour voters believe that hybrid working will open up jobs to a wider range of potential applicants, compared with seven in 10 (69%) Conservative voters who say the same.

Labour voters (74%) are also more likely than Conservative voters (64%) to think flexible working has the potential to boost the economies of towns and cities across the country.

But Conservative voters are more inclined to think people will be less loyal to their employer, with a third (34%) agreeing this will be a result of increased flexible working, compared with a quarter (24%) of Labour voters.

To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree that giving people the freedom to decide where they work for at least part of the week will mean... % who agree/strongly agree, by 2019 general election vote



There are signs that the rising cost of living could lead to greater levels of home-working, as well as less spending in the capital – but older people are less likely to think this will have an impact on their behaviour

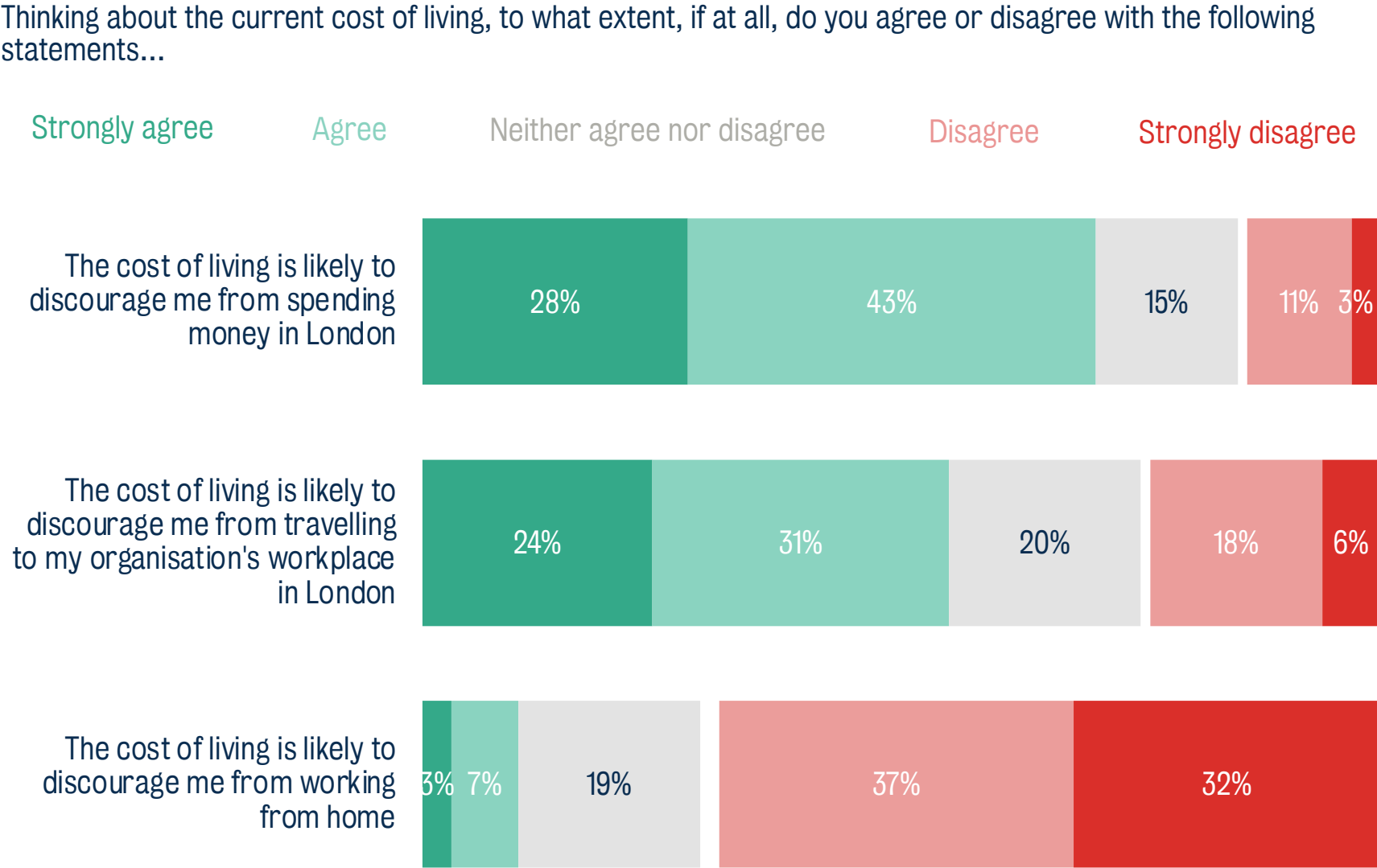


A majority say rising living costs are likely to discourage them from commuting

London workers are more than twice as likely to agree (54%) than disagree (25%) that they will be deterred from travelling to their workplace due to the increased cost of living.

On the flip side, only one in 10 (10%) say rising living costs would discourage them from home-working. This suggests that, for London workers, commuting costs may outweigh expenses associated with working from home, such as heating.

Similarly, seven in 10 London workers (70%) say the cost of living is likely to discourage them from spending money in the capital, with only a small minority (14%) disagreeing.

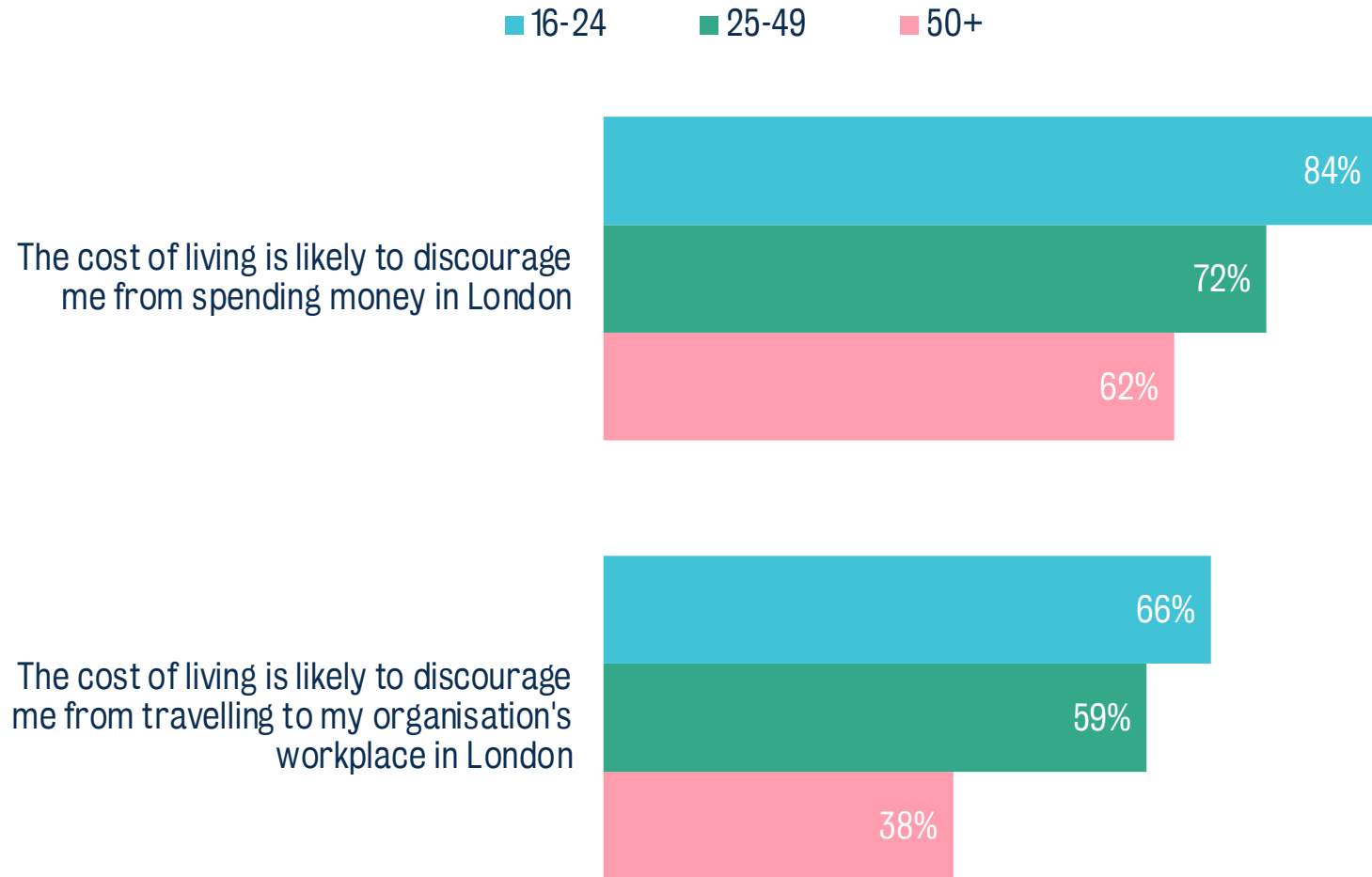


And younger groups say they are most likely to be affected

The majority of London workers say they are likely to curb their spending in the capital because of the increased cost of living. This cuts across all age groups but is particularly felt by younger workers – eight in 10 (84%) of those aged 16 to 24 agree, compared with six in 10 of those aged 50 and above (62%).

Younger workers are also far more likely than older workers to be discouraged from travelling into their workplace because of rising living costs. While the majority of those aged 16 to 24 (66%) and 25 to 49 (59%) agree, only 38% of those aged 50+ say the same.

Thinking about the current cost of living, to what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements... % who agree/strongly agree, by age



Base: 2,030 London workers aged 16+, surveyed online by YouGov, 23 Jun–12 Jul 2022 (16-24: 128; 25-49: 1,373; 50+: 529)

Survey details

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,030 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 23 June and 12 July 2022. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of London workers, defined as those who have a regular workplace in the capital.

Subgroups

Variable	Base	Variable	Base
Gender		Work pattern/location	
Male	1,046	London-based place of work for all/ 5+ work days	389
Female	984	Hybrid (at least 1 day WFH and <5 days in London-based place of work)	1,333
Age		Home-only (All WFH)	176
16-24	128		
25-49	1,373		
50+	529		
2019 general election vote			
Conservative	493		
Labour	717		



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