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# Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing

*24% of Americans report earning money from the digital ‘platform economy’ in the past year. The extra income they make is a luxury for some, but a necessity for others.*

**BY** Aaron Smith

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## Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing

*24% of Americans have earned money from the digital ‘platform economy’ in the past year. The extra income they make is a luxury for some, but a necessity for others.*

From neighborhood handymen to freelance computer programmers, Americans have long taken on piecemeal work in lieu of (or in addition to) traditional salaried employment. But today a variety of apps and online platforms are making it easier than ever for people to connect with customers who might like to hire them to do any number of jobs – from performing various types of online tasks to driving for ride-hailing services or cleaning someone’s home. These platforms also allow users to earn money in a range of other ways, such as sharing their possessions with others or selling their used goods or personal creations.

Proponents of these digital earning platforms argue that they offer important benefits, such as the freedom and flexibility to work at a time and place of one’s choosing or the ability to turn a hobby or pastime into a source of income. But others worry that this emerging “gig economy” represents a troubling shift in which workers face increased financial instability and are required to shoulder more of the burden for ensuring their own pay and benefits.

Against this backdrop, a new Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults finds that a relatively substantial share of the public has earned money recently from a digital commerce platform. In the context of gig employment, nearly one-in-ten Americans (8%) have earned money in the last year using digital platforms to take on a job or task. Meanwhile, nearly one-in-five Americans (18%) have earned money in the last year by selling something online, while 1% have rented out their properties on a home-sharing site. Adding up everyone who has performed at least one of these three activities, some 24% of American adults have earned money in the “platform economy” over the last year.

### 8% of Americans earned money from an online ‘gig’ platform in the last year; 18% earned money selling something online

*% of U.S. adults who earned money from an **online job platform** in the last year by doing ...*



*% who earned money in the last year by **selling** \_\_\_ online*



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016.

“Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing”

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Beyond these overall figures, the survey also illustrates the wide variety of experiences among providers in the platform economy. At one end of the spectrum are casual users who perform mostly online tasks in their spare time. These users tend to take on these jobs for modest amounts of money. In fact, many describe their main motivation as simply passing the time and say the actual income they earn is not particularly essential to them. At the other end are dedicated users who rely on the income they earn from these digital platforms to a much greater extent; who are more likely to gravitate towards physical tasks; and whose usage of these platforms is motivated largely by financial considerations or the need to find work that can fit around the other demands on their time, such as schooling or child care.

### **Digital commerce platforms provide diverse experiences for a wide range of needs**

These survey findings highlight several key themes related to the emerging platform economy. First, they illustrate the wide diversity of ways in which Americans are earning money from various digital commerce platforms. In the case of gig work, 5% of Americans indicate that they have earned money from a job platform in the last year by doing online tasks – which might include anything from IT work to taking surveys or doing data entry. Some 2% of Americans have earned money by driving for ride-hailing services, while 1% each have used these platforms to perform shopping or delivery tasks, as well as cleaning or laundry tasks (an additional 2% have done a wide variety of tasks that fall outside of these four general groupings).

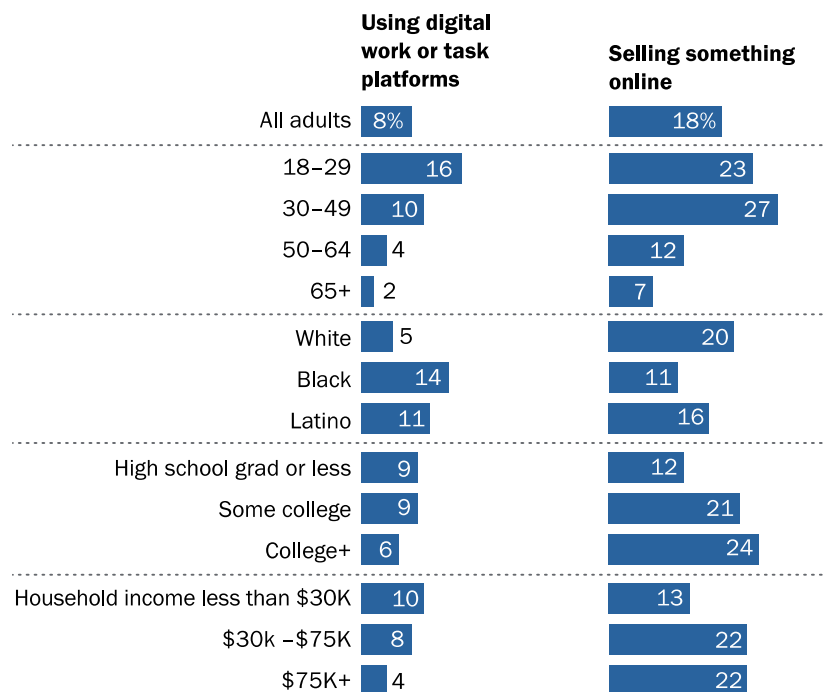
Online selling is similarly wide-ranging. The largest share of online sellers are using digital platforms to sell their own used or second-hand goods, but others use these sites to sell a wide range of handmade items and consumer goods.

Second, this survey finds pronounced differences between Americans who earn money from *labor platforms* where users contribute their time and effort, versus those who earn money from *capital platforms* where they contribute their goods or possessions. Participation in labor platforms, for example, is more common among blacks and Latinos than among whites, more common among those with relatively low household incomes than those with relatively high household incomes, and more common among young adults than any other age group. But when it comes to capital platforms such as online selling, the reverse is true: Online selling is more prevalent among whites than blacks, more common among the well-off and well-educated than those with lower levels of income and educational attainment, and is engaged in by a relatively broad range of age groups.

Along with these demographic differences, users of labor platforms and capital platforms express different levels of reliance on the income they earn from these sites. Some 60% of labor platform users say that the money they earn from these sites is “essential” or “important” to their overall financial situations, but just one-in-five online sellers (20%) describe the money that they earn in similar terms.

## Gig work, online selling appeal to different segments of the population

% of U.S. adults in each group who have earned money in the last year by ...



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016.  
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Third, along with these differences *across* labor and capital platforms the survey finds differences *within* these platforms as well – specifically, between those who depend heavily on the money they earn from these sites and those who describe their income as merely “nice to have.” In the case of gig work, workers who describe the income they earn from these platforms as “essential” or “important” are more likely to come from low-income households, to be non-white and to have not attended college. They are less likely to perform online tasks for pay, but more likely to gravitate towards physical tasks such as ride-hailing or cleaning and laundry. They are also significantly more likely to say that they are motivated to do this sort of work because they need to be able to control their own schedule or because there are not many other jobs available to them where they live.

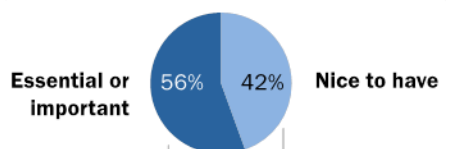
## Differences between casual ‘gig workers’ and those who are more financially reliant

*% of U.S. adults who ...*

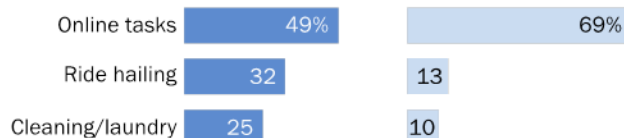
**Earned money in the last year from online job platforms**

8% 92% did not earn money in this way

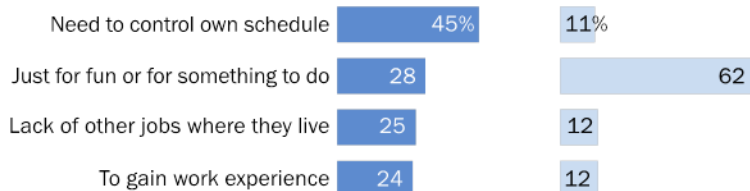
*Of that share, % saying that income is ...*



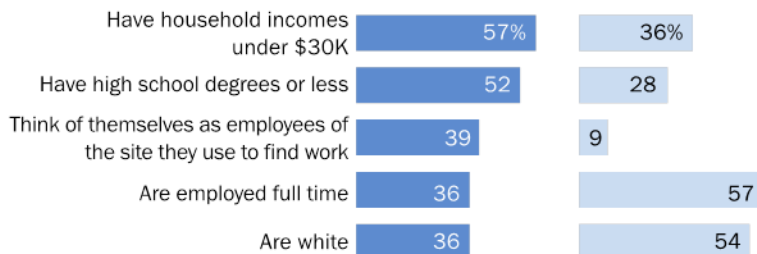
*% who do ...*



*% who have these motivations*



*% who ...*



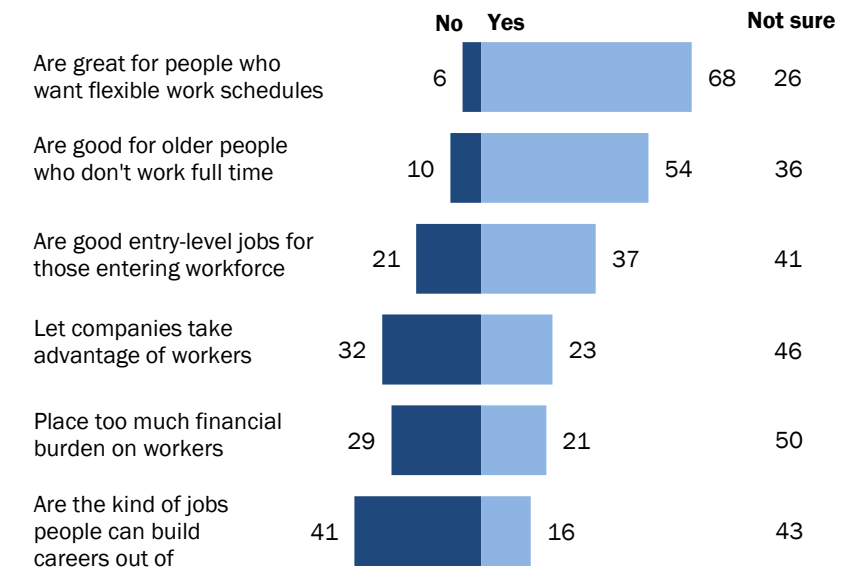
Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016.  
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Fourth, the survey finds that the broader public has decidedly mixed views about jobs in the emerging gig economy. On one hand, a majority of Americans feel that these jobs are good options for people who want a flexible work schedule (68%) or for older adults who don't want to work full time any more (54%). On the other hand, around one-in-five feel that these jobs place too much financial burden on workers (21%) and let companies take advantage of workers (23%), while just 16% feel that this type of work offers jobs that people can build careers out of.

### Americans express mixed views of the benefits of internet-enabled 'gig work'

% of U.S. adults who say that these jobs ...



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 24-Dec. 21, 2015.  
"Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing"

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Among the other findings in this report:

- 23% of those who utilize digital "gig" platforms for work are students; a majority describe themselves as being employed either full (44%) or part time (24%), but 32% say they are not employed.
- One-in-five online sellers (19%) say that social media is extremely important to helping them sell their wares; women who sell online are more likely than men to say that they rely on social media.
- 26% of gig platform users consider themselves to be employees of the services they use to find work; 68% view themselves as independent contractors.
- 29% of gig workers have performed work using these sites for which they did not receive payment.

This report is part of an ongoing series of Pew Research Center studies examining the new digital economy and the future of work more broadly. Previous reports in this series have examined the [shifting economic landscape](#) of work and employment, the use and adoption of a variety of [sharing economy services](#), and the tasks and workers that make up the [Mechanical Turk marketplace](#).



## 1. Introduction

Recent advances in technology have greatly expanded and simplified the ways in which people can work and make money. Craftspeople and artisans can use sites like Etsy to sell their wares; homeowners can use home-sharing platforms to earn money renting their properties to others on a short-term basis; workers are able to make money from their time, expertise or energy using a variety of on-demand services and digital task marketplaces.

Together, these various services operate at the intersection of two major social trends. The first is the emergence of online platforms that facilitate direct transactions between consumers and providers. The second is the [growing prevalence](#) of temporary, part time and contingent employment. Put simply, these services allow people to work or otherwise make money at the time of their choosing, using whatever resources they have available, and with the digital services themselves handling issues such as customer matching and payment resolution.

Despite outward similarities in how these services look and operate, they encompass a wide range of behaviors and characteristics. A young professional who occasionally supplements her income by renting out her apartment on Airbnb is much different from a single mother who works for a ride-hailing service in between child care obligations. And each of these examples is in turn vastly different from sites like [Upwork](#) that connect businesses with highly specialized freelance workers.

Ultimately, there is no universally accepted definition of the range of activities that fall into the “gig economy” or for who should be counted as a “gig worker.” As a result, research on this subject has produced a wide range of estimates for how many people are using digital platforms to work or otherwise earn money:

- A [2015 survey](#) by Lawrence Katz and Alan Krueger found that nearly 16% of all workers are engaged in “alternate work arrangements” of one kind or another (such as temporary, contract or freelance work) and that those who provide services through “online intermediaries” (such as Uber or TaskRabbit) account for 0.5% of the total workforce.
- More recently, a [2016 study](#) by the McKinsey Global Institute estimated that 20%-30% of the working age population in the U.S. and Europe engage in in some type of independent work and that 15% of these independent workers have utilized digital platforms to find jobs.
- A [2016 study](#) by the Freelancers Union and Upwork estimated that 55 million Americans engage in some type of freelance work and that 54% of these workers have been paid for projects that they found and completed online.

- A JPMorgan Chase [analysis](#) of its checking account customers conducted in late 2015 estimated that 1% actively earn income from some type of online platform in a given month and that 4% had participated in one of these platforms over a three-year period.
- A [survey of independent workers](#) by the consulting firm MBO Partners found that 9% of these workers (totaling around 2.7 million people) use “on-demand platforms” to connect with job opportunities.

Several federal agencies have also taken steps to define and track these emerging modes of work and economic activity. The [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) has been tracking “contingent and alternative work arrangements” for a number of years (most recently in 2005) and will be including supplementary questions designed to capture technology-enabled “gig work” in its May 2017 survey. And a recent [U.S. Department of Commerce report](#) proposed a new definition for what it refers to as “digital matching services.” These services are defined as those that 1) facilitate peer-to-peer transactions using online platforms or mobile apps; 2) utilize user-based rating systems; 3) offer workers flexibility in determining their hours; and 4) place responsibility on workers to provide whatever tools or assets are necessary to accomplish their work.

Against the backdrop of this existing research, Pew Research Center conducted a nationally representative survey that explores three ways that people might utilize online platforms to work or otherwise earn money. The first of these is [technology-enabled “gig work.”](#) For the purposes of this report, someone is considered a technology-enabled gig worker if they earned money in the last year from website or mobile apps that: connect workers directly with people who want to hire them; require workers to create a profile in order to find and accept work assignments; and coordinate payments once the task or job is completed. This definition was adapted from a conceptual framework developed by several researchers conducting ethnographic research on participants in various “crowdworking” platforms.<sup>1</sup>

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### How this survey measured the use of digital ‘gig work’ platforms

To measure the prevalence of technology-enabled gig work, the survey asked respondents if they had earned money in the past year using websites or mobile apps meeting the following three characteristics:

- 1) The websites or apps connect workers directly with people needing a project or task to be done.
- 2) They require workers to create a profile in order to find or accept work assignments.
- 3) They coordinate payment between workers and requesters once the task is complete.

Those who indicated they have earned money from this type of platform are considered to be digitally enabled “gig workers.”

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<sup>1</sup> See [The Crowd is a Collaborative Network](#), M. L. Gray, S. Suri, S. S. Ali, and D. Kulkarni, Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (CSCW) 2016.

In addition to this type of gig work, the survey measured two other ways of earning money via digital platforms: home sharing and online selling. These services allow people to profit from their *goods or capital* (a home, a physical creation, a used item) rather than their *time or labor*.

In some respects, the activities and behaviors discussed in this report are defined more broadly than other research that has been conducted on this topic. For example, online gig work and home-sharing each fall under the Commerce Department's definition of digital matching firms, but online selling does not. Moreover, the survey was designed to establish broad estimates for the share of Americans who have engaged in each of these money-earning behaviors in the recent past – regardless of the intensity or regularity with which they do so.

In other ways, this study takes a more narrow view. For instance, technology-enabled gig work as defined in this report is but one small component of the broader world of contingent or contract labor as studied by researchers like Katz and Krueger, and it is beyond the scope of this particular study to document that broader universe.

## 2. Labor platforms: technology-enabled ‘gig work’

A number of digital platforms have arisen in recent years that seek to match people who need a job done with people who are willing to provide that service. These platforms represent a technological evolution tied to the ongoing labor force shift towards freelance work and independent contracting. They allow platform users to connect with a wide range of jobs with varying degrees of specialization. These might include physical tasks such as driving for ride-hailing services, simple online tasks like completing surveys, or relatively complex tasks like providing legal services.

In an effort to examine this emerging mode of work, Pew Research Center conducted a survey of Americans’ experiences with digital “gig work” platforms. The Center took an expansive approach to measuring the prevalence of this type of work: Respondents were asked if they had earned money in the last year through any websites or mobile apps that connect workers directly with people who want to hire them, that require workers to create a user profile in order to find or accept work assignments, and that coordinate payments to workers once their task is complete.

In addition to asking if they had earned money from this type of digital task platform, the survey also asked a series of questions about the types of jobs these users have engaged in, as well as questions about their motivations and overall experiences.

In one sense, the survey finds that this type of work is relatively widespread, especially considering how new these kinds of digital platforms are. Nearly one-in-ten American adults (8%) report that they have earned money from some type of digital work platform in the last year, often by doing online tasks. Yet at the same time, these workers are extremely diverse in their motivations, their experiences and the extent to which they rely on the income they earn from these services. Many users depend heavily on these services as a key source of income and describe their motivations for using them in largely economic terms. Others use these services in a much more casual way and describe their work primarily as “something to pass the time,” rather than as a source of financial gain.

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### 8% of Americans have earned money from an online ‘gig’ platform in the last year

*% of U.S. adults who earned money from an online job platform in the last year by doing ...*



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016.

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## 8% of Americans have earned money in the last year from an online employment platform

In total, 8% of Americans have earned money in the last year via some sort of digital work platform. When asked about certain types of tasks they may have performed, online tasks (which might include tasks as varied as coding, data entry, taking surveys, or identifying and categorizing images) emerge as among the most common. Some 5% of all American adults report that they have earned money by performing online tasks through digital job platforms during the last year. By comparison, 2% of Americans have earned money in the last year by driving for ride-hailing services, and 1% each have earned money by shopping for or delivering household items, or by cleaning or doing laundry for someone.

In addition, 2% of Americans indicate that they have done some other type of “platform work” outside of the four categories listed above. And their descriptions of these jobs highlight the wide diversity of tasks that users can take on via digital work platforms. Some described doing relatively basic tasks like moving furniture or working as a parking lot attendant. But others indicated that they use these platforms to engage in highly specialized white-collar work (a selection of these responses is included in the accompanying table).

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### Quotes from our survey respondents: Other types of digitally enabled gig work

“Babysitting”	“Manuscript editing”
“Mystery shopper”	“Freelance writing”
“Legal services”	“Home repair”
“Writing SEO copy”	“Moving furniture”
“Personal online secretary”	“IT consulting”
“Architectural plans”	“Tutoring”
“Energy broker”	“Doing surveys”
“Parking lot attendant”	“Webcam [work]”

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## Young adults and non-whites are especially likely to have earned money from online gig platforms in the last year

Participation in technology-enabled gig work varies by a number of factors, with age being among the most prominent. Some 16% of 18- to 29-year-olds have earned money from online gig work platforms in the last year – roughly five times the share among those ages 50 and older (3%). The median age of U.S. adults who are gig platform earners is just 32 years old. When it comes to the specific types of work that they do, young adults are especially likely to gravitate towards online task work. Fully 12% of 18- to 29-year-olds have earned money doing online tasks, but that share falls to 4% for Americans ages 30 to 49 and just 1% among those 50 and older.

Along with these differences by age, platform work is also more prevalent among blacks and Latinos than among whites. Some 14% of blacks and 11% of Latinos have earned money in the last year from online gig work platforms, but just 5% of whites have done so. Blacks and Latinos are

each more likely than whites to have earned money doing online tasks (7% of blacks and Latinos have done so, compared with 3% of whites). But blacks in particular are more likely than whites to have earned money doing physical tasks like working as a ride-hailing driver, or by taking on jobs involving cleaning or laundry (5% of blacks have done each of these activities in the last year, compared with 1% of whites).

In addition, lower-income Americans (those with annual household incomes of \$30,000 or less) are more than twice as likely to engage in technology-enabled gig work, compared with those living in households earning \$75,000 per year or more.

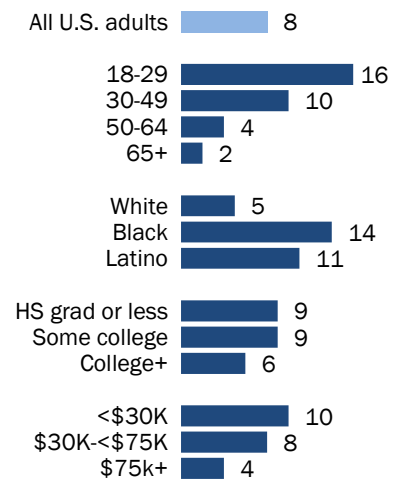
### **Roughly one-quarter of digitally enabled gig workers are students; fewer than half are employed full time**

These digital platform workers occupy their time in a wide range of ways outside of task work. For instance, a substantial minority of these workers (23%) indicate that they participate in this type of work while being enrolled as either full- or part-time students. Meanwhile, some 5% indicate that they are retired from regular employment. They also describe their overall employment status in a range of ways: around two-thirds indicate that they are employed either full- (44%) or part time (24%), but around one-in-three (32%) describe themselves as being not currently employed.

These workers also differ in some respects from the overall population when it comes to the financial and other types of assets they possess. Some 77% of platform earners are covered by some type of health insurance (10 points lower than the national average), while 48% have a credit card (15 points lower). And comparatively few of these platform earners are actively saving for their future retirement: 27% have a personal retirement account like an IRA or 401(k) (13 points lower than the national average) and just 8% are covered by some type of pension plan. In addition, a majority of these earners (56%) rent, rather than own, their current homes.

### **Young adults, non-whites especially likely to get work via online gig platforms**

*% in each group who have earned money in the last year from online gig work platforms*



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016.

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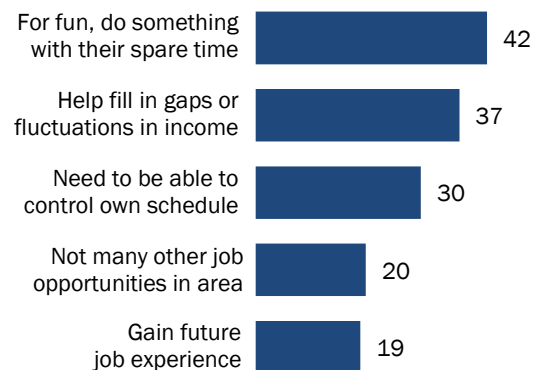
## Having something to do in one's spare time and filling in gaps in income are the top reasons people turn to technology-enabled gig work

When presented with a list of reasons why they might use digital platforms to find paid jobs or tasks, these workers cite a range of motivations. The most common (mentioned by 42% of platform earners) is simply having fun or having something to do in their spare time. Meanwhile, a comparable share (37%) says that they use these platforms because to help fill gaps or fluctuations in their other sources of income.

The time flexibility that this type of work provides also ranks relatively high on users' list of motivations: 30% say they do this type of work because they need to be able to control their own schedule due to school, child care or other obligations. And around one-in-five say that they use these services because other job opportunities in their area are limited (20%) or because they are looking to gain work experience that they can put to use in other jobs in the future (19%).

### Something to do, filling gaps in income are top motivations for technology-enabled gig workers

*% of gig platform workers who use online job/task platforms for the following reasons*



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016. "Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing"

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## Nearly one-in-three digital gig workers say the income they earn is essential to meeting their basic needs; a similar share report that they have performed work on these platforms for which they were not paid

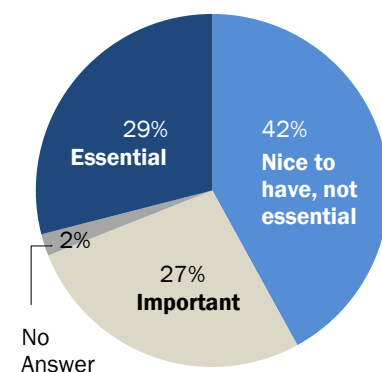
Just as they have a range of motivations for doing this sort of work in the first place, platform workers assign varying levels of importance to the income they earn from these services. More than half of platform workers describe the income they earn as being either essential to meeting their basic needs (29%) or as an important component of their overall budget (27%). By contrast, 42% indicate that the income they earn is nice to have, but that they could live comfortably without it.

These findings are especially notable in the context of concerns over so-called “[wage theft](#)” – workers being denied or refused payment for work they completed – in the gig economy.<sup>2</sup> A substantial minority of platform workers (29%) say they have performed work using one of these services for which they did not receive payment.

The legal status of workers who provide these services is another key policy debate involving technology-facilitated gig work. A recent Pew Research Center [study](#) of consumers who utilize shared and on-demand services found that they largely view the workers who provide these services as independent contractors, rather than workers. And when asked a similar question in this survey about how they view their own relationship with these companies, some 68% of platform earners indicate that they see themselves as independent workers who simply use these services to connect with potential customers. However, a substantial minority (26%) think of themselves as employees of the apps or services that they use to find jobs.

## 29% of platform workers say income is essential for meeting basic needs

*% of gig platform workers who say the income they earn is ...*



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016.  
“Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing”

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## A key dividing line in the world of digitally enabled gig work: casual users who are motivated by fun or diversion and perform mostly online tasks versus financially reliant users who gravitate towards physical labor

As noted earlier, more than half of platform earners describe the income they earn as “essential” or “important” to their overall financial situations, while a somewhat smaller share describe that income as “nice to have” but not particularly essential. And this division – between those who depend heavily on the money they earn and those who do not – represents a key dividing line in the world of digitally enabled gig work. These two groups differ from one another in a variety of ways: They have different demographic characteristics, gravitate towards different types of tasks and express different motivations for utilizing digital employment platforms in the first place.

Demographically, financially reliant users tend to be more racially diverse and to have lower levels of household income and educational attainment. Compared with those who say that the income

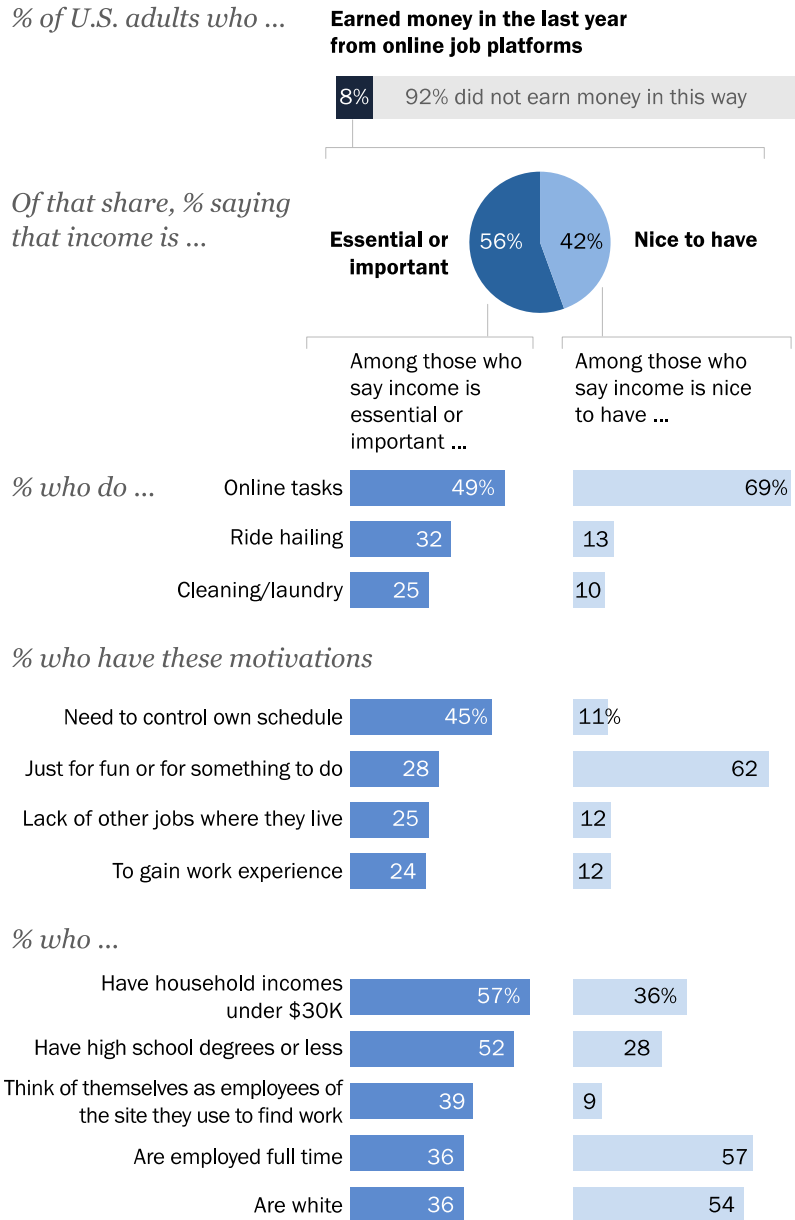
<sup>2</sup> Hillary Clinton mentioned this issue in a [2015 speech](#) outlining her economic policy.



they earn from online gig work is merely “nice to have,” those who describe the income they earn as “important” or “essential” are more likely to have annual household incomes of less than \$30,000 per year (57%) and to have high school degrees or less (52%). They also contain a higher share of non-whites and a lower share who indicate that they are employed full time. They are also much more likely to view themselves as employees of the companies or services that they use to find jobs, rather than as independent contractors who simply use these services to connect with customers.

Workers who depend heavily on the income they earn from gig employment are also more likely to gravitate towards jobs involving physical labor or effort, rather than online tasks. Some 32% of these financially reliant platform workers say that they have worked for ride-hailing services, while 25% have earned money from services that involve cleaning or doing laundry – only around 10% of those who are less financially dependent on gig work income have done these sorts of tasks.

### Differences between casual ‘gig workers’ and those who are more financially reliant



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016. “Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing”

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In terms of their motivations, workers who depend on gig platforms as an income stream are much more likely to say that they do this type of work because they need to be able to have control over their work schedules (45% vs. 11%), because there are not many other jobs available in their area (25% vs. 12%), or because they are trying to gain experience for future job opportunities (24% vs. 12%). By the same token, they are much *less* likely to say that they engage in gig work for fun or for something to do: 28% of financially dependent platform workers cite this as motivation, half the share (62%) among those for whom financial considerations are less relevant.

### 3. Capital platforms: online selling and home sharing

Digital work platforms allow users to earn money from their *labor* – in other words, their time or skills. But other platforms allow them to earn money from their *capital* (in other words, things that they own or possess). This survey examined two types of these capital platforms: home-sharing sites, where people can rent out all or part of their homes for a short period of time, and online selling platforms, where users can sell items ranging from used goods to their own personal handicrafts.

Ultimately, very few Americans (just 1%) have used home-sharing sites to supplement their income. But nearly one-in-five have sold something online in the last year – most often used or second-hand goods. As a group, online sellers tend to be older, wealthier and more highly educated than the gig platform workers discussed in the preceding chapter and are also generally less reliant on the income they earn from online selling. But much like gig workers, online sellers are fairly diverse: Around one-in-five rely heavily on the money they earn from selling items online, and these users tend to be older and less financially secure compared with more casual online sellers.

#### 18% of Americans have earned money in the last year from selling something online

Nearly one-in-five Americans (18%) have earned money in the last year by selling something online. To an even greater extent than the technology-enabled gig work discussed in the previous chapter, online selling is dominated by one activity in particular: Fully 74% of these online sellers (representing 14% of American adults) have earned money in the last year by selling their own used or second-hand goods. A much smaller share of Americans have earned money by selling handmade items online or by selling a line or brand of consumer goods (2% each).

#### 18% of Americans have earned money selling something online in the last year

*% of U.S. adults who earned money in the last year by selling \_\_\_\_\_ online*



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016.

“Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing”

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In addition, 3% of Americans say they have earned money in the last year by selling something online *other than* second-hand goods, handmade items or consumer products. And their descriptions of the items they have sold illustrate the wide-ranging nature of this corner of the digital world (a selection of their responses is included in the nearby table).

**Quotes from our survey respondents:  
Other items they have sold online**

“Architectural plans”	“Collectibles”
“Insurance”	“Hair”
“Sports tickets”	“Art”
“Books”	“Puppies”
“Cellphones”	“Gift cards”
“Fine China”	“Apples”

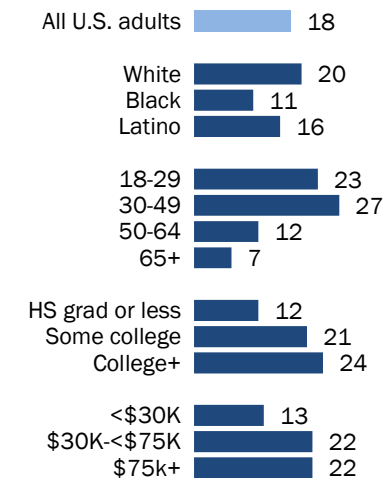
**Americans under the age of 50, as well as those with relatively high levels of income and education, are especially likely to be online sellers**

Demographically, participation in online selling follows a much different pattern than the technology-enabled gig worked discussed in [Chapter 2](#) of this report. In sharp contrast to gig platform workers, online selling is more prevalent among those who have graduated college (24% of whom are online sellers) than among those who have only attended high school (12%); more common among whites (20%) than among blacks (11%); and more common among those with relatively high household incomes than among those with lower incomes.

In comparison to digitally enabled gig work, online selling is also popular among a relatively wide range of age groups. Roughly one-quarter (27%) of 30- to 49-year-olds have earned money from online selling in the last year, as have 10% of those ages 50 and older. And the median age of online sellers is 37 years old – five years older than the median age for gig platform workers.

**Online selling common among those under age 50, college attendees**

*% in each group who have earned money in the last year by selling something online*



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016.  
“Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing”

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### **One-in-five online sellers say social media is extremely important for marketing their products and finding customers, although one-in-three say it is not important at all**

A substantial share of online sellers utilize social media in the course of selling their wares. One-in-five online sellers (19%) say that social media is “extremely important” to helping them find customers and market the items they sell, and an additional 26% feel that social media is somewhat important in this regard. Around half of online sellers feel that social media is either not very (22%) or not at all (33%) important.

Women are much more likely to utilize social media when selling items online, as 29% of female online sellers (and just 11% of male online sellers) describe social media as extremely important to their online selling activities.

### **Most online sellers describe the income they earn as nice to have, but not essential**

Compared with the gig workers discussed in the preceding chapter, online sellers as a whole rely less heavily on the income they earn. A total of one-in-five online sellers describe their earnings as either essential to meeting their basic needs (9%) or as an important component of their overall budgets (11%). But a far larger share (80%) describe the income they earn as nice to have, but not particularly essential to them.

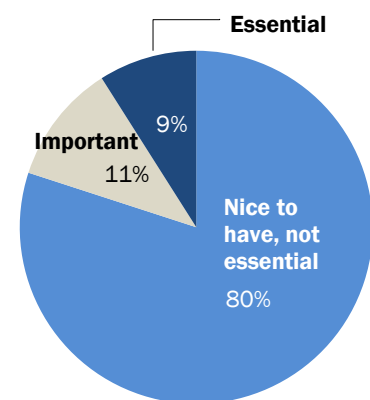
As in the case of gig platform workers, there are dramatic differences between online sellers who depend heavily on the income they earn and those who describe their online selling income as simply nice to have.

In terms of their actual experiences with online selling, those who depend on the income they earn are much more likely to gravitate toward selling handmade items (22% do so, compared with 8% of those who are less financially dependent) as well as selling items *other than* used goods, consumer goods or handmade items (35% vs. 12%). They are also more likely to rely on social media in the course of selling their wares, but less likely to gravitate toward selling used or second-hand items.

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### **80% of online sellers say extra income is nice to have but not essential**

*% of online sellers who say they income they earn is ...*



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016.  
“Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing”

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Compared with more casual sellers, these financially reliant sellers also tend to be older (nearly one-third are 50- to 64-years-old), are less likely to have attended college (37% have high school degrees or less) and have lower incomes more generally (52% say their household incomes are less than \$30,000 per year). And many have health or other physical conditions that might make other types of employment difficult: 55% have some sort of chronic health condition and one-third have a physical disability that prevents them from fully engaging in common everyday activities.

**Just 1% of Americans have earned money in the last year from an online home-sharing platform**

Roughly [one-in-ten Americans](#) have used a home-sharing site to stay in someone’s home for a period of time, but just 1% have earned money renting out their own homes or properties using one of these sites.

This behavior is quite rare across a wide cross-section of demographic groups, even among those who are relatively likely to utilize home-sharing sites as users. For instance, 24% of Americans with annual household incomes of \$75,000 or more per year have stayed in someone’s house after booking it on a home-sharing site – but only 2% of Americans at this income level have earned money themselves from home-sharing sites in the last year.

---

**Online sellers who rely heavily on their incomes are older, lower-income, more likely to sell handmade items**

*% of online sellers in each group who ...*

	<b>Among those who say online selling income is <u>essential</u> or <u>important</u></b>	<b>Among those who say online selling income is <u>nice to have</u></b>
Sell handmade items	22	8
Sell used goods	54	79
Say social media is “extremely important”	28	16
Ages 50-64	31	15
High school grad or less	37	21
Black, non-Hispanic	15	5
Family income <\$30K	52	23
Have a disability	33	12
Have a chronic health condition	55	37

Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016.  
“Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing”

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## 4. Public attitudes towards online gig work

While a relatively small share of Americans engage in technology-mediated “gig work,” a substantially larger share has [utilized these services](#) as consumers. And in addition to asking about workers’ experiences using online platforms to perform tasks or services for others, Pew Research Center asked a series of questions of the broader public in order to gauge their views about these new modes of work (note: these findings were taken from a separate survey conducted in late 2015, see the [Methodology section](#) of this report for more details). Overall, their attitudes reflect a mixture of positive and negative views, along with a healthy dose of uncertainty about the relative merits of gig work.

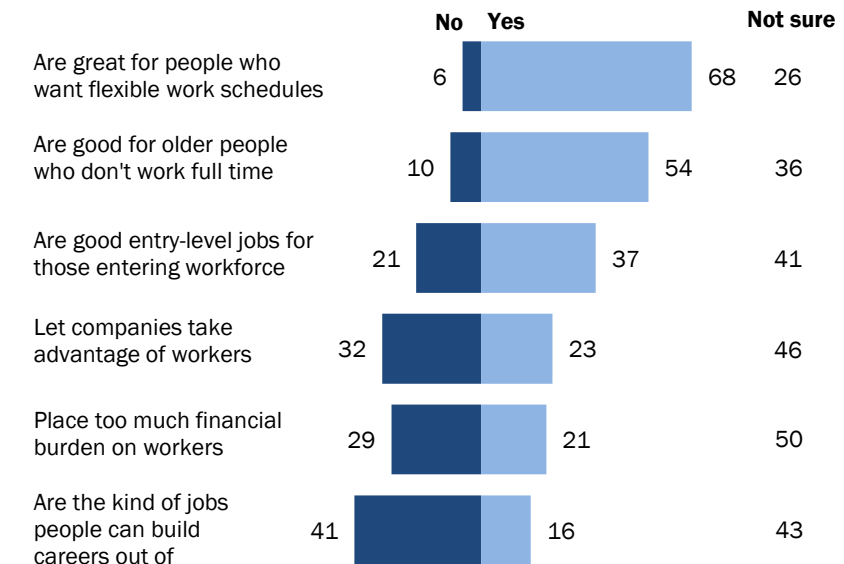
Americans’ opinions about these jobs are quite positive in some respects. Most prominently, 68% of Americans think they are good for people who want flexible schedules, while just 6% do not think this is the case. They are also more likely to agree than disagree – albeit by a lesser margin – that these jobs are good options for older adults who don’t want to work full time or that they are good entry-level jobs for people who are just entering the workforce.

Yet even as they generally approve of the flexibility that these jobs offer to workers, Americans are less

enthusiastic about other aspects of digitally enabled gig work. Just 16% of Americans feel that these jobs are the type of work people can build careers out of (41% think they are not). Similarly, 23% worry that these jobs let companies take advantage of workers (32% think that this is not the case), while 21% think that they place too much financial burden on workers (29% disagree).

### Americans express mixed views of the benefits of internet-enabled ‘gig work’

*% of U.S. adults who say that these jobs ...*



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 24-Dec. 21, 2015.  
“Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing”

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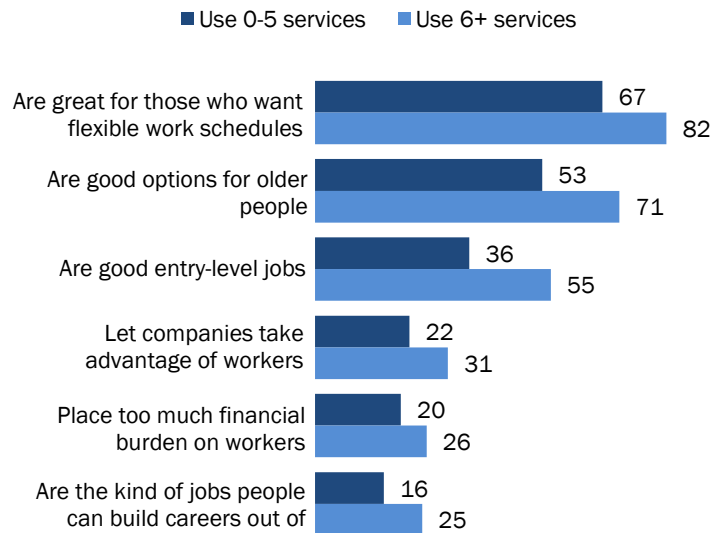
And reflecting the fact that a large number of Americans are simply unfamiliar with many of these services, a substantial share of the public is simply unsure how to feel about the jobs they create. One-quarter to one-half of the public is not sure how these jobs stack up on each of the six different attributes examined in this survey.

In general, those with the greatest amount of personal exposure to shared and on-demand services tend to have more positive views about the merits of the jobs these services create. Americans who have personally used [six](#) [or more](#) shared and on-

demand services (out of a total of 11 measured in the survey) are significantly more likely than those who have used five or fewer services to feel that gig economy jobs are good for those who want flexible schedules, good for older adults, and good for workers who are just entering the job force. But even this group of “super users” has some hesitation about the ultimate impact of these jobs: roughly one-in-three think that these jobs let companies take advantage of workers (31%), while 26% think that they place too much financial burden on workers and just 25% think that these are the kind of jobs people can build careers out of.

### Intensive users of shared and on-demand services generally more positive about online ‘gig work’

*Among U.S. adults who have used 0-5 or 6-11 shared/on-demand online services, the % who say that online ‘gig’ jobs ...*



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 24-Dec. 21, 2015.  
“Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing”

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## Methodology

This report is drawn from two surveys conducted as part of the American Trends Panel. The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults living in households. Respondents who self-identify as internet users and who provided an email address participate in the panel via monthly self-administered web surveys, and those who do not use the internet or decline to provide an email address participate via the mail. The panel is being managed by Abt SRBI.

Data in this report are drawn primarily from the July wave of the panel, conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016 among 4,579 respondents (4,165 by web and 414 by mail). The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 4,579 respondents is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points.

Members of the American Trends Panel were recruited from two large, national landline and cellphone random-digit-dial (RDD) surveys conducted in English and Spanish. At the end of each survey, respondents were invited to join the panel. The first group of panelists was recruited from the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey, conducted Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014. Of the 10,013 adults interviewed, 9,809 were invited to take part in the panel and a total of 5,338 agreed to participate.<sup>3</sup> The second group of panelists was recruited from the 2015 Survey on Government, conducted Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015. Of the 6,004 adults interviewed, all were invited to join the panel, and 2,976 agreed to participate.<sup>4</sup>

Participating panelists provided either a mailing address or an email address to which a welcome packet, a monetary incentive and future survey invitations could be sent. Panelists also receive a small monetary incentive after participating in each wave of the survey.

The ATP data were weighted in a multi-step process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original survey selection probability and the fact that in 2014 some panelists were subsampled for invitation to the panel. Next, an adjustment was made for the fact that the propensity to join the panel and remain an active panelist varied across different groups in the sample. The final step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014

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<sup>3</sup> When data collection for the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey began, non-internet users were subsampled at a rate of 25%, but a decision was made shortly thereafter to invite all non-internet users to join. In total, 83% of non-internet users were invited to join the panel.

<sup>4</sup> Respondents to the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey who indicated that they are internet users but refused to provide an email address were initially permitted to participate in the American Trends Panel by mail, but were no longer permitted to join the panel after Feb. 6, 2014. Internet users from the 2015 Survey on Government who refused to provide an email address were not permitted to join the panel.

American Community Survey. Population density is weighted to match the 2010 U.S. Decennial Census. Telephone service is weighted to estimates of telephone coverage for 2016 that were projected from the January-June 2015 National Health Interview Survey. Volunteerism is weighted to match the 2013 Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement. It also adjusts for party affiliation using an average of the three most recent Pew Research Center general public telephone surveys. Internet access is adjusted using a measure from the 2015 Survey on Government. Frequency of internet use is weighted to an estimate of daily internet use projected from the 2013 Current Population Survey Computer and Internet Use Supplement. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish, but the Hispanic sample in the American Trends Panel is predominantly native born and English speaking.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	4,579	2.4 percentage points
18-29	551	6.8 percentage points
30-49	1276	4.5 percentage points
50-64	1450	4.2 percentage points
65+	1298	4.4 percentage points
Gig workers	298	9.2 percentage points
Online sellers	914	5.3 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The web component of the July wave had a response rate of 82% (4,165 responses among 5,064 web-based individuals in the panel); the mail component had a response rate of 74% (414 responses among 557 non-web individuals in the panel). Taking account of the combined, weighted response rate for the recruitment surveys (10.0%) and attrition from panel members who

were removed at their request or for inactivity, the cumulative response rate for the July ATP wave is 2.9%.<sup>5</sup>

### *Additional survey data*

Some data in this report are also drawn from the December wave of the same panel, conducted Nov.24-Dec. 21, 2015, among 4,787 respondents (4,317 by web and 470 by mail). The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 4,787 respondents from the April wave is plus or minus 1.9 percentage points. Sample sizes and sampling errors for subgroups in this wave are available upon request.

The web component of the December wave had a response rate of 68.4% (4,317 responses among 6,308 web-based individuals in the panel); the mail component had a response rate of 66% (417 responses among 712 non-web individuals in the panel). Taking account of the combined, weighted response rate for the recruitment surveys (10.0%) and attrition from panel members who were removed at their request or for inactivity, the cumulative response rate for the December ATP wave is 3%.

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<sup>5</sup> Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves are removed from the panel. These cases are counted in the denominator of cumulative response rates.

## Appendix: Profile of gig earners and online sellers

### Profile of gig workers and online sellers

*% in each group who are ... (figures read down)*

	All U.S. adults	Gig workers	Online sellers
	%	%	%
Male	48	45	56
Female	52	55	44
White	65	43	70
Black	12	19	7
Hispanic	15	21	13
Other	8	14	8
18-29	22	42	26
30-49	34	39	48
50-64	26	15	18
65+	19	4	7
Less than \$30,000	26	49	29
\$30,000-\$74,999	35	35	40
\$75,000 or more	38	14	30
College grad+	28	21	38
Some college	31	37	37
HS grad or less	41	42	25
Employed full-time	43	44	56
Employed part-time	18	24	15
Not employed	39	32	41
Covered by health insurance	87	77	87
Have retirement account	40	27	49
Have pension plan	22	8	19
Rent current home	33	56	37
Full- or part-time student	11	23	17

Note: All adults based on non-institutionalized adults ages 18 or older. Whites and blacks include only single-race non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Other includes non-Hispanic persons reporting single races not listed separately and persons reporting more than once race. Full-time workers are those working 35 hours or more per week and 50 to 52 weeks in that year. Part-time workers are those working under 35 hours per week. Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 8, 2016. "All adults" figures (excluding retirement account and pension plan) based on Pew Research Center tabulations of 2014 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS).

"Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing"

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## Topline questionnaire

### 2016 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL

WAVE 19 July

FINAL TOPLINE

July 12 – August 8, 2016

TOTAL N=4,579

WEB RESPONDENTS N=4,165

MAIL RESPONDENTS N=414

#### ASK ALL:

Thinking about ways you might earn money...

ONLSELL1 In the last year, did you earn money by selling something online?

July 12-Aug 8

2016

18	Yes
81	No
0	No Answer

#### ASK IF SELL ONLINE (ONLSELL1=1) [N=914]:

ONLSELL2 Which of the following have you sold online in the last year? **[RANDOMIZE; KEEP ITEM d LAST]**

*[Check all that apply]*

July 12-Aug 8

2016

74	Used or second-hand goods
11	Items that you made yourself
13	A line or brand of consumer goods (such as makeup, clothes, or health/fitness products)
17	Something else [TEXT BOX] <b>RESPONSES NOT SHOWN</b>
0	No answer

#### ASK IF SELL ONLINE (ONLSELL1=1) [N=914]:

ONLSELL3 Which of the following statements best describes the income you earn from selling online? **[REVERSE SCALE FOR RANDOM HALF OF RESPONDENTS]**

July 12-Aug 8

2016

9	It is essential for meeting my basic needs
11	It is an important component of my budget, but not essential
80	It is nice to have, but I could live comfortably without it
0	No Answer

**ASK IF SELL ONLINE (ONLSELL1=1) [N=914]:**

ONLSELL4 How important are social media sites like Facebook and Twitter when it comes to finding customers and marketing the items you sell online?

July 12-Aug 8

2016

19	Extremely important
26	Somewhat important
22	Not very important
33	Not important at all
0	No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

GIGWORK1 Some people find paid jobs or tasks by connecting directly with people who want to hire them using a particular type of website or mobile app. These sites require workers to create a user profile in order to find and accept assignments, and they also coordinate payment once the work is complete.

In the last year, have you earned money by taking on jobs through this type of website or mobile app (for example, by driving someone from one place to another, cleaning someone's home, or doing online tasks)?

July 12-Aug 8

2016

8	Yes
92	No
1	No Answer

**ASK IF HAVE EARNED MONEY FROM ONLINE GIG WORK (GIGWORK1=1) [N=280]:**

GIGWORK2 What sorts of jobs or tasks have you performed in the last year using these services?  
**[RANDOMIZE; ITEM e ALWAYS LAST]**

*[Check all that apply]*

July 12-Aug 8

2016

19	Driving for a ride-hailing app (such as Uber or Lyft) <sup>6</sup>
14	Shopping for or delivering household items
60	Performing tasks online (like completing surveys or doing data entry)
20	Cleaning someone's home or doing laundry
22	Something else <i>[TEXT BOX]</i> <b>RESPONSES NOT SHOWN</b>
4	No Answer

<sup>6</sup> In addition to this question asked of respondents who answered "yes" to GIGWORK1, respondents who said "no" to GIGWORK1 received an additional standalone question: "Did you earn money by working as a driver for a ride-hailing app (such as Uber or Lyft)?" Less than 0.5% of respondents receiving this question responded in the affirmative, and they are included in the overall incidence of ride-hailing usage reported in this study.

**ASK IF HAVE EARNED MONEY FROM ONLINE GIG WORK OR RIDE HAILING (GIGWORK1=1 OR RIDESHR=1) [N=298]:**

GIGWORK3 Which of the following statements best describes the income you earn from using these services? **[REVERSE SCALE FOR RANDOM HALF OF RESPONDENTS]**

July 12-Aug 8

2016

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 29 | It is essential for meeting my basic needs                   |
| 27 | It is an important component of my budget, but not essential |
| 42 | It is nice to have, but I could live comfortably without it  |
| 2  | No Answer  |

**ASK IF HAVE EARNED MONEY FROM ONLINE GIG WORK OR RIDE HAILING (GIGWORK1=1 OR RIDESHR=1) [N=298]:**

GIGWORK4 Which of the following are reasons why you use these services? **[RANDOMIZE; ITEM f ALWAYS LAST]**

*[Check all that apply]*

July 12-Aug 8

2016

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 30 | You need to be able to control your own schedule due to child care, school, or other obligations |
| 37 | It helps to fill in gaps or fluctuations in your other sources of income                         |
| 19 | To gain work experience for future job opportunities   |
| 42 | For fun, or to do something with your spare time   |
| 20 | Because there are not many other job opportunities in your area                                  |
| 7  | Some other reason <i>[TEXT BOX]</i> <b>RESPONSES NOT SHOWN</b>                                   |
| 3  | No Answer  |

**ASK IF HAVE EARNED MONEY FROM ONLINE GIG WORK OR RIDE HAILING (GIGWORK1=1 OR RIDESHR=1) [N=298]:**

GIGWORK5 Which statement best describes how you view your relationship with these services? **[RANDOMIZE]**

July 12-Aug 8

2016

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 26 | I think of myself as an employee of these services   |
| 68 | I think of myself as an independent worker who simply uses these services to connect with customers or clients |
| 6  | No Answer  |

**ASK IF HAVE EARNED MONEY FROM ONLINE GIG WORK OR RIDE HAILING (GIGWORK1=1 OR RIDESHR=1) [N=298]:**

GIGWORK6 Have you ever performed work using any of these services for which you did not receive payment?

July 12-Aug 8

2016

- |    |                             |
|----|-----------------------------|
| 29 | Yes                         |
| 66 | No, this has never happened |
| 5  | No Answer                   |



**ASK ALL:**

HOMESHR1 In the last year, did you earn money from renting out a house or apartment on an online home-sharing site (such as Airbnb or VRBO)?

July 12-Aug 8

2016

1	Yes
97	No
1	No Answer

**ASK IF HAVE EARNED MONEY FROM HOME-SHARING (HOMESHR1=1) [N=71]:**

HOMESHR2 Did you earn money from a home-sharing site by allowing someone to rent...  
[RANDOMIZE; ITEM e ALWAYS LAST]

**Results not shown due to small sample size (n<100)**

**ASK IF HAVE EARNED MONEY FROM HOME-SHARING (HOMESHR1=1) [N=71]:**

HOMESHR3 Which of the following statements best describes the income you earn from home-sharing sites? [REVERSE SCALE FOR RANDOM HALF OF RESPONDENTS]

**Results not shown due to small sample size (n<100)**

**2015 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL  
WAVE 13 DECEMBER  
FINAL TOPLINE  
November 24 – December 21, 2015  
TOTAL N=4,787  
WEB RESPONDENTS N=4,317  
MAIL RESPONDENTS N=470**

**ASK ALL:**

## GIG\_ATTITUDE.

In recent years, technology has allowed individual workers to perform one-off tasks for consumers or companies who need those services. Some examples of this trend include drivers for ride-hailing services like Uber or Lyft; people who perform deliveries through services like Instacart; or people who perform tasks through services like TaskRabbit or Amazon Mechanical Turk.

These workers typically do not follow a set schedule, get paid as they pick up assignments from customers instead of receiving an hourly wage or salary, and are responsible for providing many of their own benefits. Based on what you know, do you think these jobs... **[RANDOMIZE]**

		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not sure/ No answer</u>
a.	Are a good entry-level job for people who are entering the workforce Nov 24-Dec 21, 2015 [N=4,787]	37	21	41
b.	Place too much of a financial burden on workers Nov 24-Dec 21, 2015 [N=4,787]	21	29	50
c.	Are great for people who want a flexible schedule Nov 24-Dec 21, 2015 [N=4,787]	68	6	26
d.	Are the kind of jobs you can build a career out of Nov 24-Dec 21, 2015 [N=4,787]	16	41	43
e.	Let companies take advantage of workers Nov 24-Dec 21, 2015 [N=4,787]	23	32	46
f.	Are a good option for older people who don't want to work full-time anymore Nov 24-Dec 21, 2015 [N=4,787]	54	10	36