

The Politicization of **Return to Office**

March 21, 2024



Where are we as business today?

Four Years into the Work-from-Home Experiment, *Culture War is in Full Swing*

Los Angeles Times

Why remote work is becoming a blue-state privilege

FORTUNE

The remote-work revolution is morphing into a perk for the wealthiest, most educated workers

AXIOS

What remote-first Gen Zers want at work

BUSINESS INSIDER

Dell workers can stay remote — but they're not going to get promoted

Harvard Business Review

Research: The Growing Inequality of Who Gets to Work from Home

Bloomberg

Return-to-Work Policies Devolve Into a Toxic Cultural Flashpoint

The debate over working remotely has turned ugly as companies call employees back to the office and workers resist the loss of a popular perk.

The New York Times

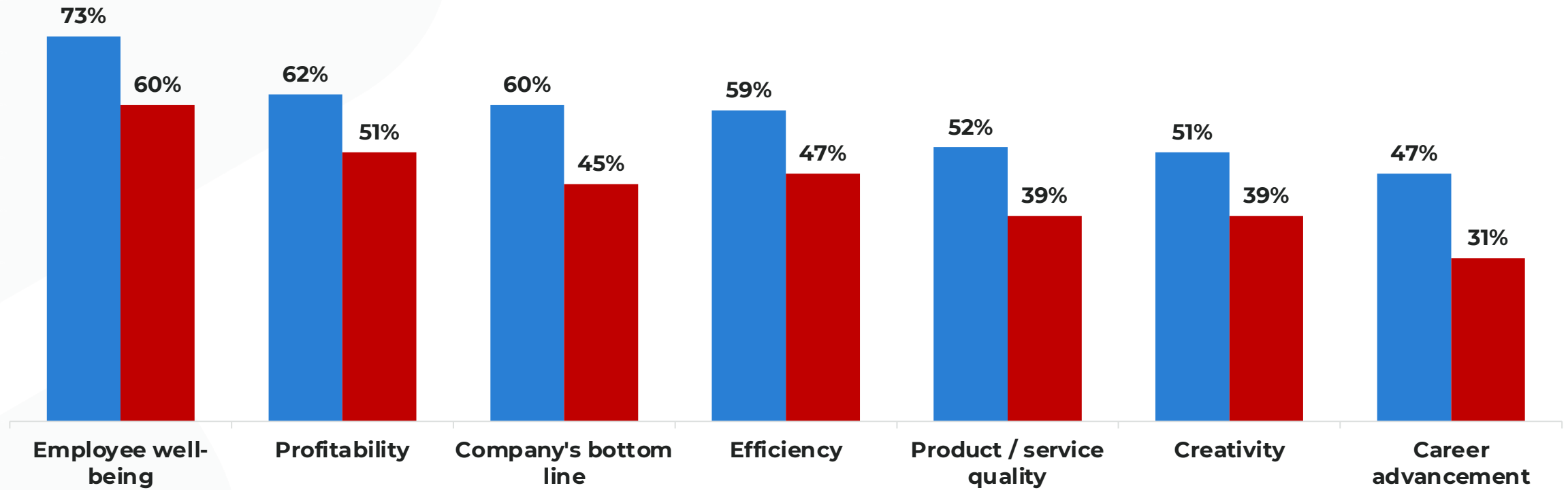
The ZIP Code Shift: Why Many Americans No Longer Live Where They Work

A new study shows that white-collar employees who can work remotely now live roughly twice as far from their offices as they did pre-pandemic.

WHERE YOU WORK FROM HAS BECOME A PARTISAN ISSUE

Remote work is good for:

■ Democrat ■ Republican





Q: What's Causing the Culture War related to Work From Home?

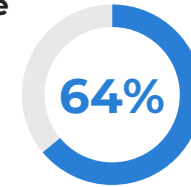
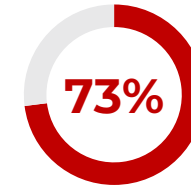
A: Difference **in Values**

GOP: WFH DETRIMENTAL TO WORKERS, CAREER AND INDUSTRY

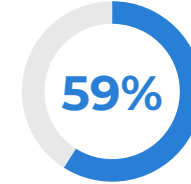
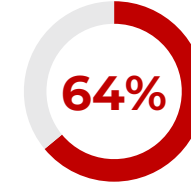
Republicans Democrats

% Agree

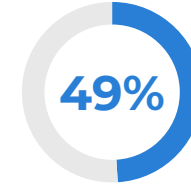
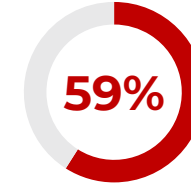
It's frustrating hearing complaints about having to work in-person when so many **front-line workers do it daily**.



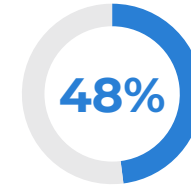
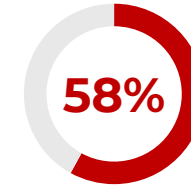
I strongly **associate remote work with the pandemic**, not as a long-term work trend.



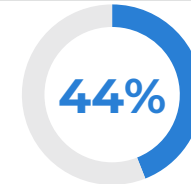
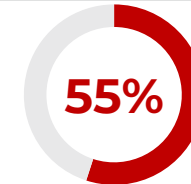
Work has **traditionally been "in-person"** and that's how it should be.



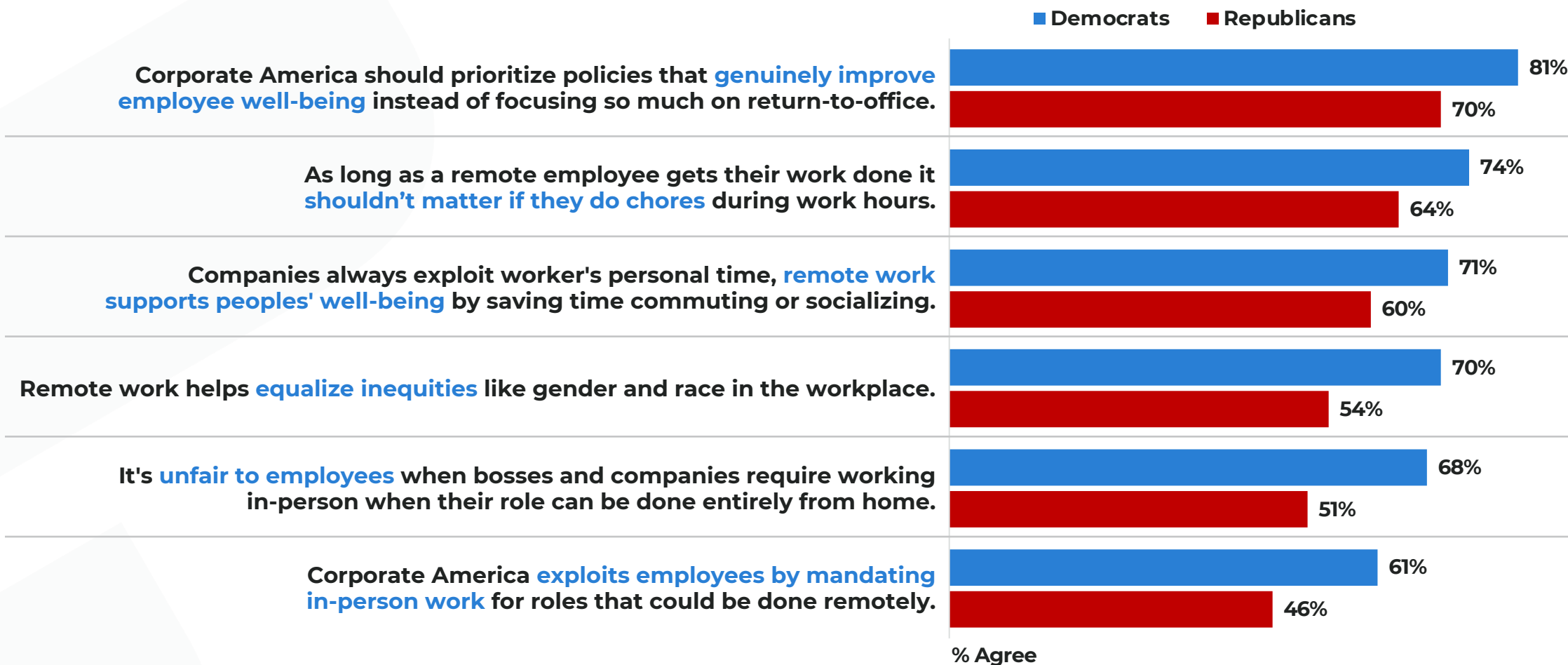
Remote work is **detrimental to career advancement**.



Companies are **hurting financially** from remote workers not being as productive as they are in-person.



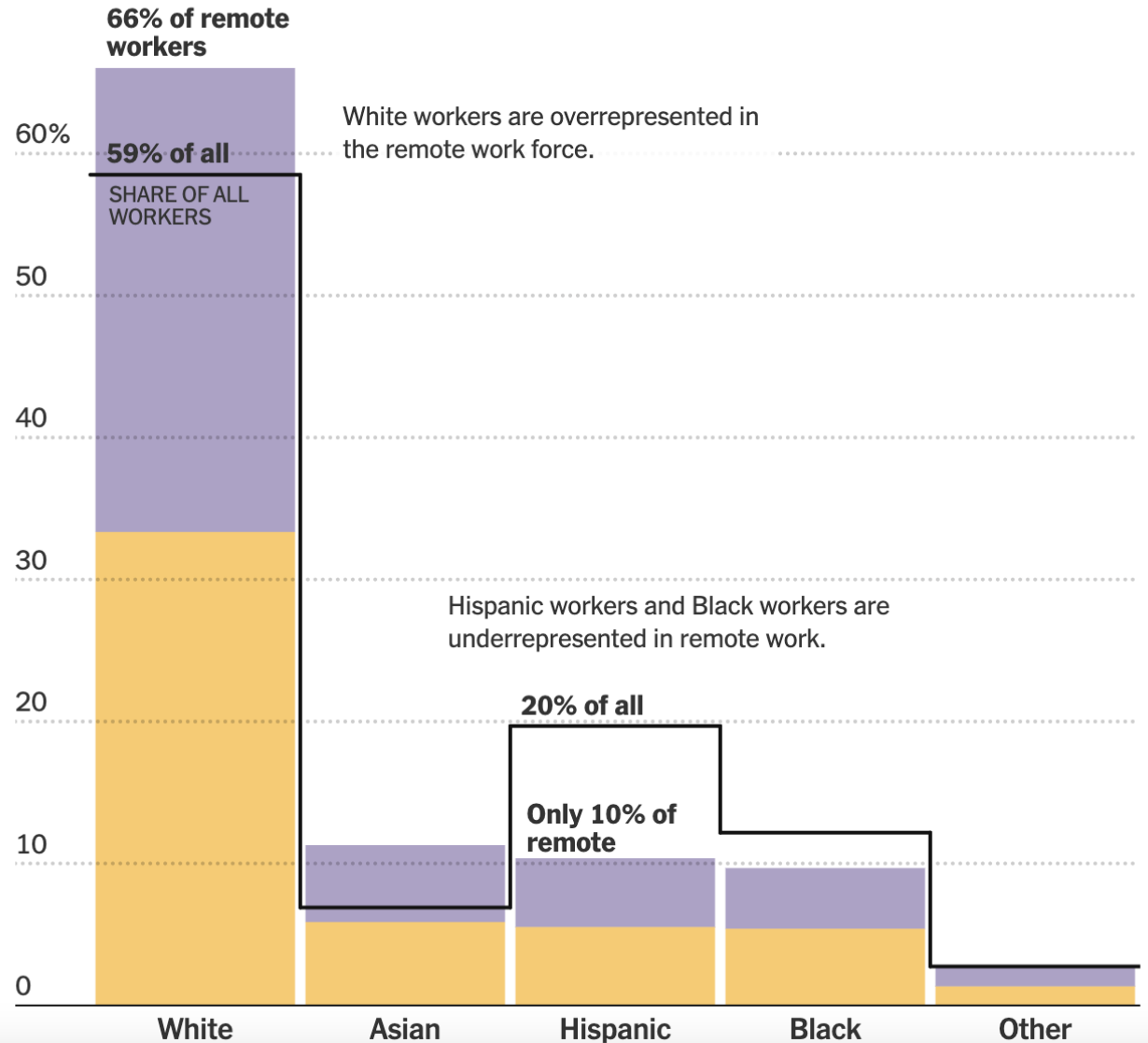
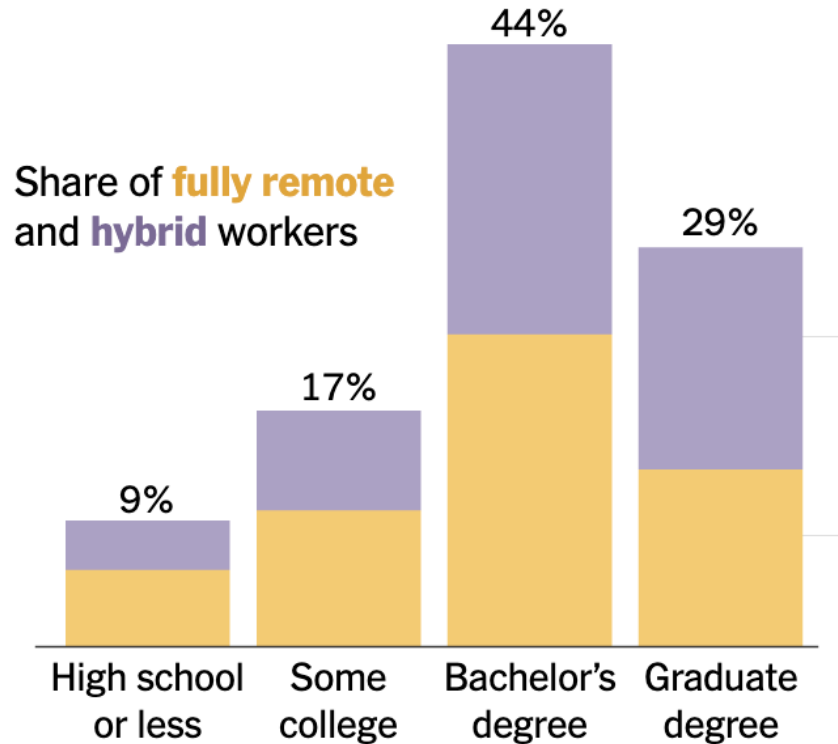
DEMOCRATS: WFH SUPPORTS INCLUSION, WELL-BEING



A: Diverging

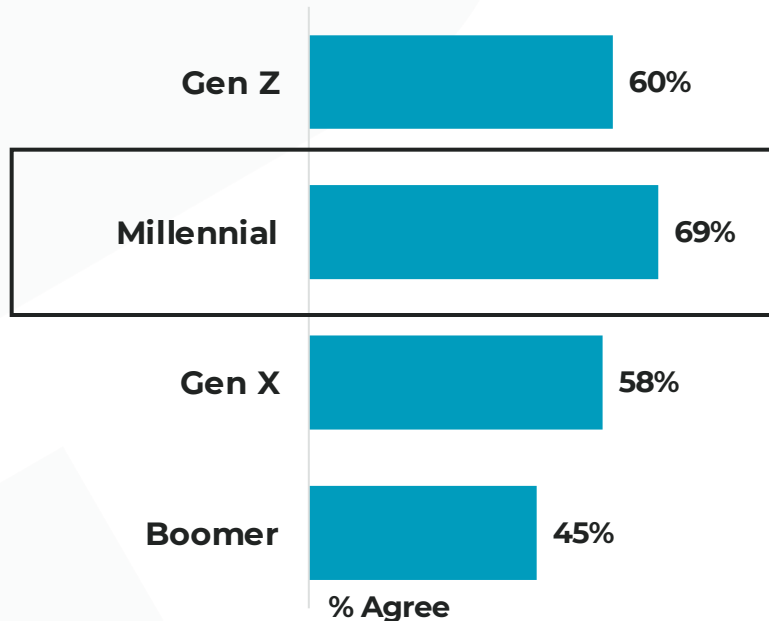
Demographics

WFH MORE COMMON AMONG EDUCATED, WHITE AMERICANS

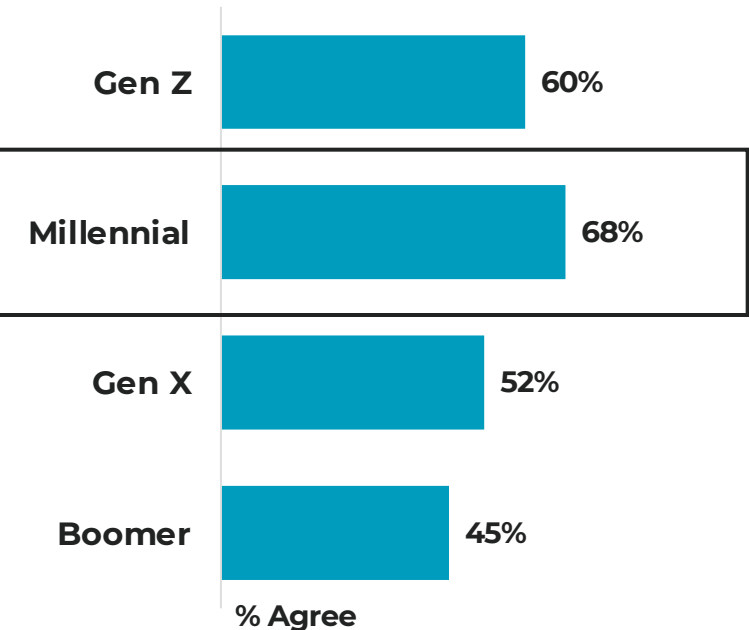


MILLENNIALS, GEN Z ARE LEADING THE WFH NARRATIVE

“Companies are out of touch for focusing so heavily on back to office protocols”



“Companies exploit employees by mandating in-person work for roles that could be done remotely”



71% of Millennials

“I could readily seek out a job with higher pay” (64% General Public)

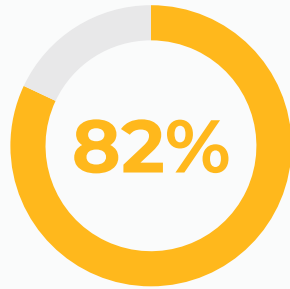
62% of Millennials

“I feel like my employer needs me more than I need my job” (56% General Public)

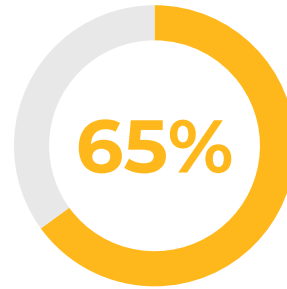
55% of Millennials

“I have the power in negotiations more than my employer” (48% General Public)

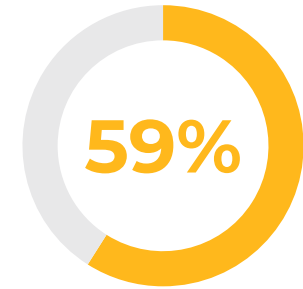
AT THE SAME TIME, GEN Z HAS A STEEP LEARNING CURVE



of managers say their new Gen Z hires' soft skills need more guidance, time and training



of Gen Z workers say they don't know what to talk about with their coworkers



of Gen Z workers say they still need to figure out who to turn to for help in the workplace

FORTUNE + The Harris Poll

Managers' latest complaints about Gen Z: They lack soft skills and have unrealistic workplace expectations

Gen Z has no idea how to interact with their coworkers—and it could cost them a promotion

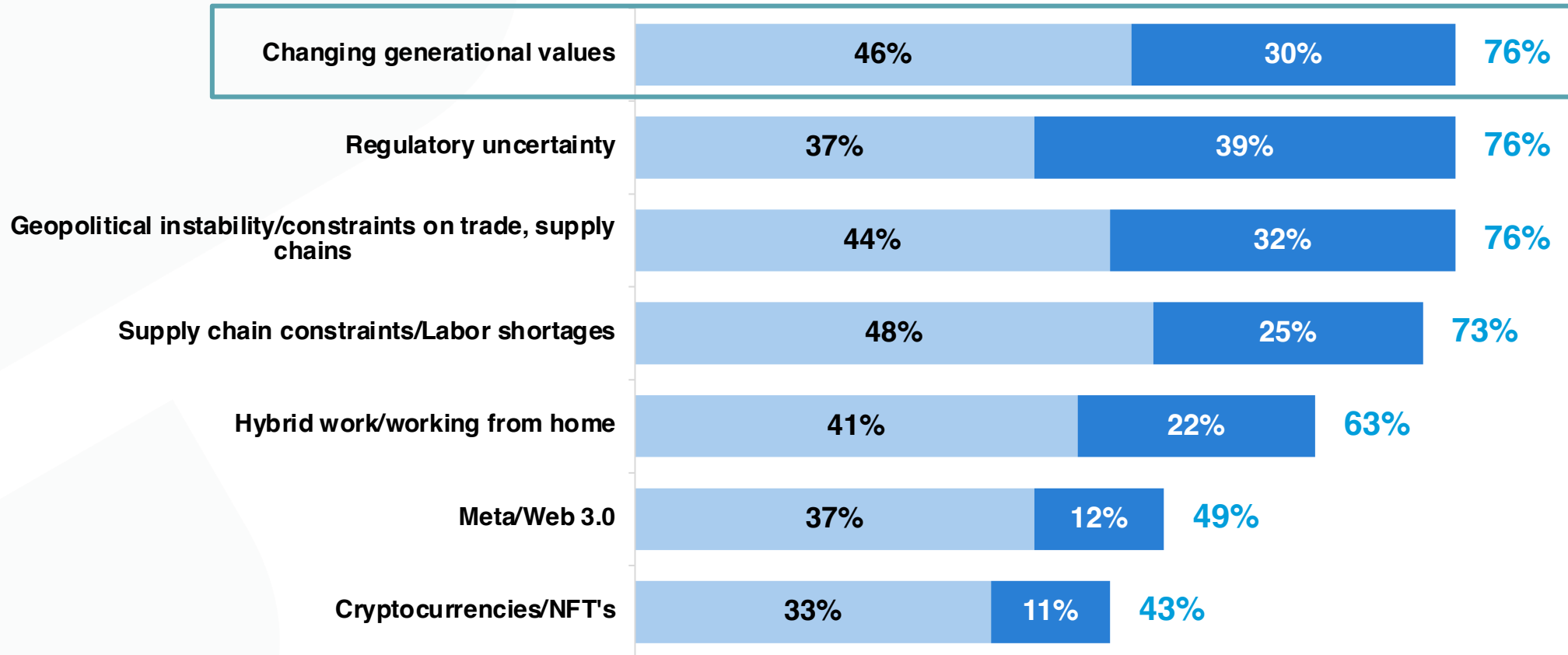
Now that
Everything is
Politicized,

**What Does the Future of
Work Look Like?**

GENERATIONAL VALUES TOP BUSINESS LEADERS' CONCERNS

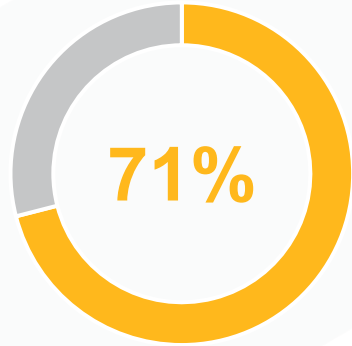
How much or little of an impact do you think the following will have on business operations?
Among global business leaders at the Milken Institute Global Conference

■ A little bit of an impact ■ A lot of an impact Impact NET

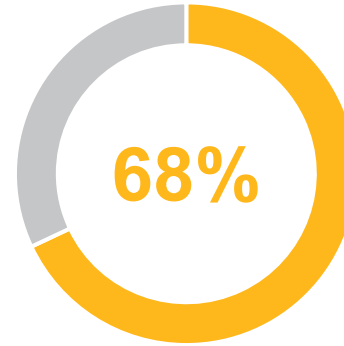


Source: The Milken Institute-Harris Poll Listening Project (April/May 2022)

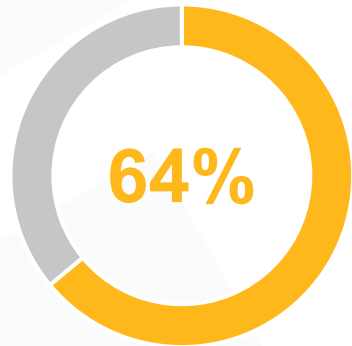
AMERICANS PLACE QUALITY OF LIFE OVER SUCCESS AT WORK



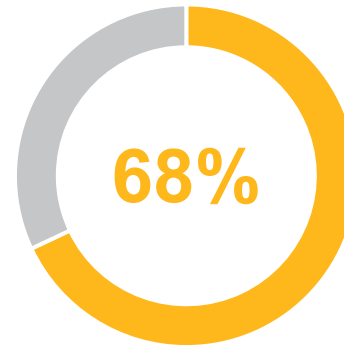
Americans say that “quality of life today is determined” by how one spends their time rather than how much money one makes



Employed Americans agree that they “care more about who they are outside of work” than they do about their work identity
(Gen Z: 71%)

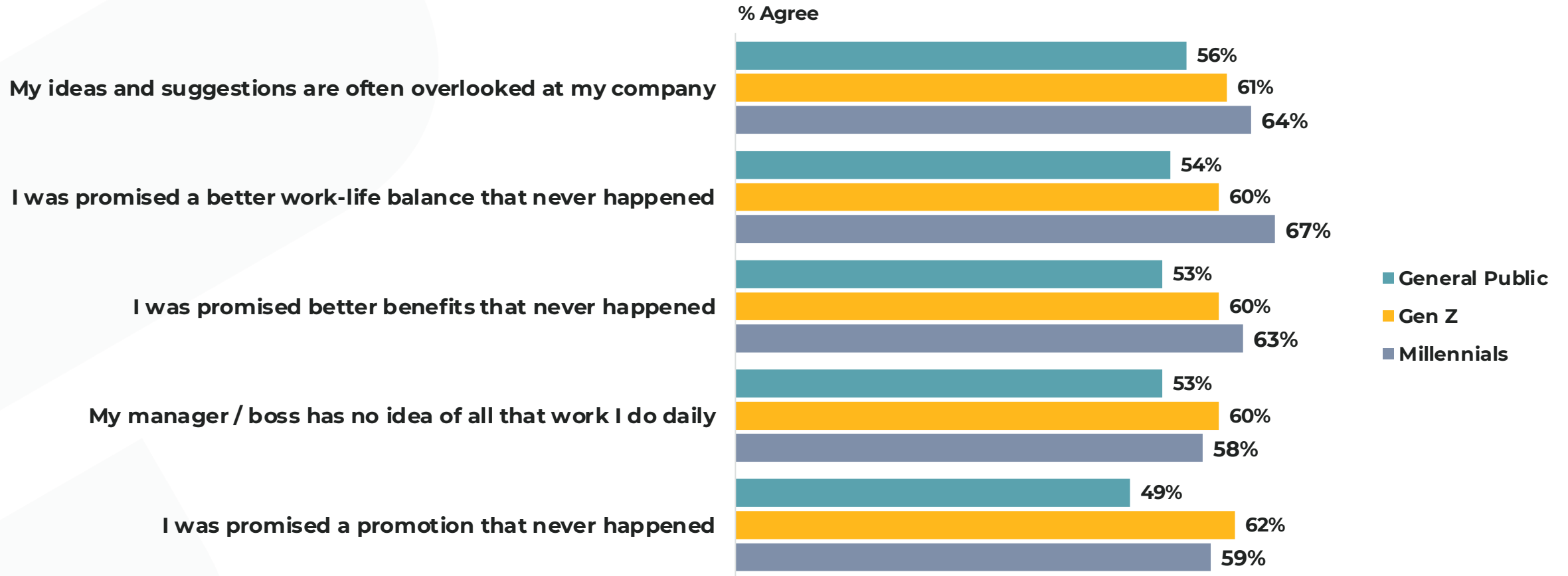


Americans report their top goals in improving their life is optimizing energy and time rather than optimizing money



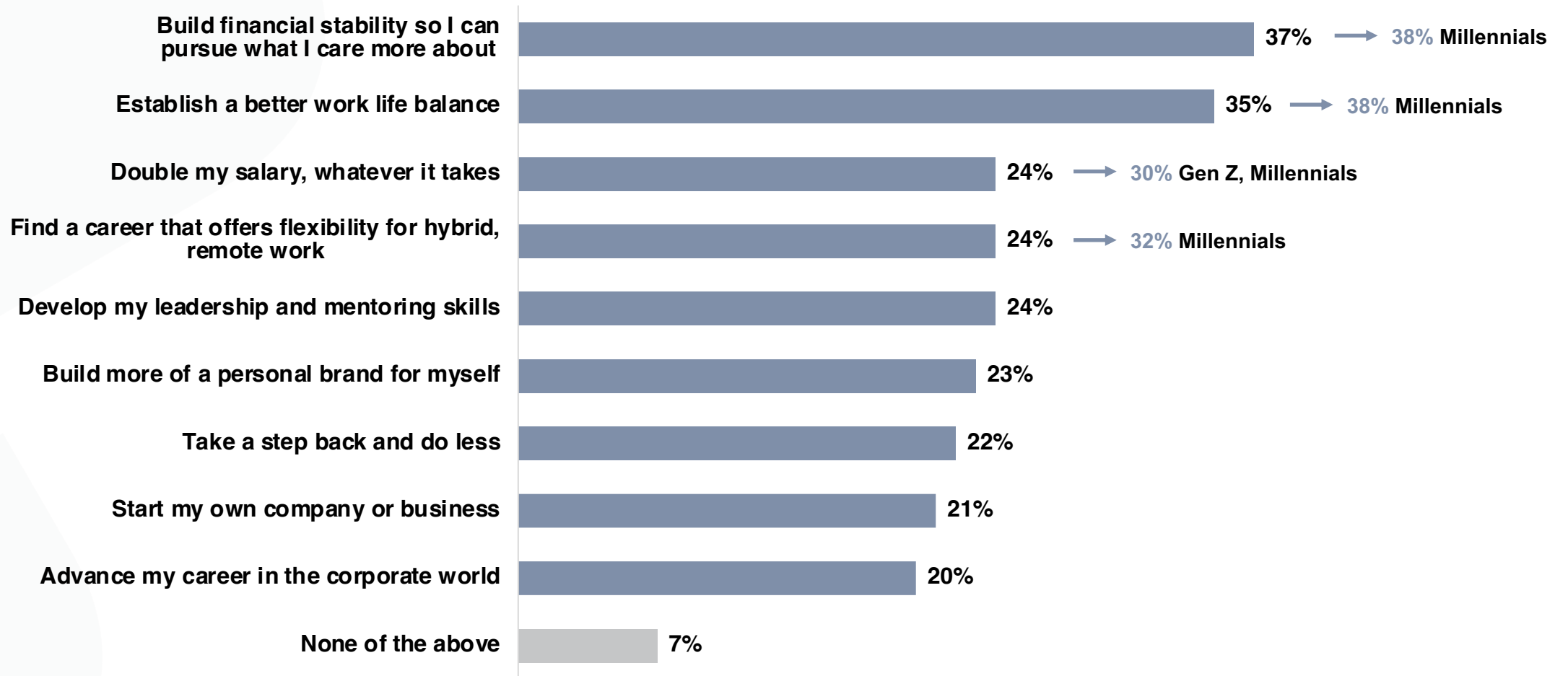
Employed Americans agree their work doesn’t dictate how successful of a person they are overall
(Gen Z: 76%)

'BROKEN PROMISES' LEAD TO YOUNGER WORKERS' DISCONTENT



EMPLOYEES' PRIORITIES HAVE SHIFTED

What are you looking for in your career in the next 5-10 years? Please select all that apply.
Among employed Americans



Productivity Boosters

78%

of American workers

would be **more productive** if their company let them **choose their own working hours**

74%

of American workers

would be **more productive** if their company let them **choose where they work from**

Loyalty Boosters

77%

of American workers

would be **more loyal** to a company that gave employees freedom to **choose what hours they work**

78%

of American workers

would be **more loyal** to a company that gave employees freedom to **choose where they work from**



So, what do we, as business leaders, do?

What employees want:

- In most companies, 70+% say they **don't have a clear view of the company's strategy**
- 50% of employees say the **top two topics** to help them do a better job are: 1) **operational changes** and 2) **organizational goals, plans and initiatives**
- The two topics employees say are **least critical** – but often the most seen internally: 1) **generic business updates** and 2) **macro news**
- 77% of leaders believe **employees need more context** about what they are doing and how it relates to the company vision; 46% of employees agree
- What employees want: 40% want **more thoughtful and insightful details**; 36% want to **hear from leaders** more often; 34% want **more consistent communications**

Where employee comms can go wrong:

- 74% of Millennials say new technology makes their lives easier, 54% feel new technology helps them be more connected, yet **only 45% say today's workforce is "connected"**
- LinkedIn data: **employee-shared content is 3X more authentic**, with click-through rates 2X higher than corporate messaging. **Too often, we focus only on formal company channels**
- **Trust in local comms is 10 points higher than mass communications** – highlighting the importance of supervisor-to-employee communications
- Humans require **repetition 6 to 12 times** before committing information to long-term memory. As business leaders, **we often tire of our internal communications all too quickly**

Advice for Business Leaders Today

- 1. Know your work force – and values at both ends of spectrum**
Understand and respect stark difference in values between Gen Z and older employees, pressures they feel, opportunities they see
- 2. Communicate *and live* your values – don't make it political**
Help employees understand business better, including how their role and where / how they work supports success, not politics
- 3. Make career development a year-round conversation**
While younger employees are most vocal about WFH, be clear about specific personal benefits of learning directly from others
- 4. Shore up communication skills of mid-level managers**
Better supervisor-to-employee communications are among the most untapped HR / comms opportunities for businesses today
- 5. An ounce of flexibility can produce a pound of productivity**
Be willing to meet employees on their terms – in listening, training, scheduling – moving past 'my way or else' leadership

Thank you!

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