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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

What do platform workers in the UK gig economy want?

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Abstract

Despite the considerable debate concerning the gig economy, research has yet to investigate what platform workers themselves want. In part, this is due to the difficulty of undertaking traditional social surveys in this sector. Therefore, this article makes use of a novel research design that generates a strategic non-probability sample of 510 platform workers with which to investigate workers' preferences regarding labour rights, representation and voice. Findings suggest strong support for labour rights, trade unions and co-determination. The low pay, insecurity, risk and lack of organizational voice that we find provides a rationale for these preferences. Moreover, platform workers' preferences are seemingly influenced by wider inequalities, with significant differences according to gender and country of birth.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In little over a decade the 'gig economy' has risen from obscurity to become synonymous with the contemporary digitalized labour market. Indeed, recent research suggests that approximately 750,000 adults in the United Kingdom currently work in the gig economy (Charlton-Czaplicki & Hukal, 2022), but rarely has a form of paid work proved so contentious (see, e.g., Taylor, 2017). Concern for workers in the gig economy has led politicians, journalists, activists and researchers to advocate a range of measures to mitigate the perceived negative aspects of this work (see, e.g.,

Collins, 2022; Taylor, 2017). Missing from the debate surrounding the gig economy, however, is evidence of what workers themselves want. This article seeks to fill this gap by providing the first focused quantitative evidence on what platform workers in the UK gig economy want and why. We do so by investigating gig workers' preferences regarding labour rights, public policies, collective organization, representation and voice.

Investigating what workers want has become an important endeavour within industrial relations research (see, e.g., Bryson, 2003; Bryson & Freeman, 2007; 2013; Charlwood, 2002; Freeman & Rogers, 1999; 2006; Freeman et al., 2007; Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2022; Jansen, 2019). The growing interest in worker preferences is a reflection of declining trade union membership which has sparked debate over whether this decline reflects a shift in worker attitudes or whether there exists unmet demand for unions. For instance, Hertel-Fernandez et al. (2022) have recently found that workers in the United States continue to value unions and their traditional functions of collective bargaining and to support the core institutions of industrial democracy: co-determination and works councils.[1] Clearly answering such questions requires researching workers' stated preferences even though this might or might not reflect their actual behaviours (Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2022).

Despite detailed studies by Bryson (2003), Bryson and Freeman (2007; 2013) and Charlwood (2002) into what UK workers generally want, less is known regarding the preferences of substantively important subgroups that have emerged as the focus of policy debates in recent years. Platform work in the gig economy is a prime example of one such subgroup, with much of a 2017 UK Government review into modern working conditions focusing on this sector despite accounting for only a relatively small segment of the labour force (Taylor, 2017).

Platform work in the gig economy refers to the use of digital platforms to buy and sell labour (Taylor, 2017; Vallas & Schor, 2020). While other types of gig work have long existed, it is the rapid expansion of platform work that gave rise to the so-called 'gig economy'. Therefore, it is the centrality of digital platforms to this work that renders it distinct from traditional forms of freelance, contract and project-based work. Platform companies claim that their platforms simply provide digital means for entrepreneurs to connect and do business. However, research highlights that labour platforms entail algorithmic management: the use of software algorithms in organizational control via the automation of direction, evaluation and discipline (Kellogg et al., 2020; Wood, 2021).

Digital platforms are used in the UK gig economy to manage paid work both locally (Deliveroo, Uber, TaskRabbit, Amazon Flex, etc.) and remotely (Upwork, Fiverr, etc.). Locally undertaken work requires that workers and customers be physically proximate to each other. This includes: delivering food, packages and messages; driving passengers to locations (often referred to as ride-hailing); cleaning; and handyperson work. In contrast, remote platform work entails work, such as data entry, graphic design and writing, which can be delivered remotely over the Internet. As such, remote platform work does not require physical proximity between workers and customers. A recent analysis of the large-scale Understanding Society Survey suggests that UK platform workers are 64 per cent male and 14 per cent non-White (Wang et al., 2022), while the Labour Force Survey data suggest that 65 per cent are male (71–79 per cent among ride hail, delivery drivers and couriers) and 20 per cent non-White (30–38 per cent among ride hail, delivery drivers and couriers) (Cockett & Willmott, 2023).

Whether local or remote, platform work usually entails working alone on the streets or in the home, rendering those undertaking such work a hard-to-reach population for traditional methods for surveying the working population. Surveys that attempt to use quota sampling, for instance, often end up with implausible estimates of the size of the population, seemingly

suffering from significant unobserved self-selection bias due to relying on online panels which themselves closely resemble remote platform work (Piasna, 2020). Moreover, where traditional survey techniques have been attempted (e.g. McDonald et al., 2019), very large samples had to be collected to ensure adequate coverage of the gig economy in particular, making such an approach prohibitively expensive for most research projects. For this reason, most extant research into what UK platform workers want is qualitative, as the sample size is less important to such research designs.

We seek to fill this gap by presenting findings from a novel non-probability 'river' sample of UK-based platform workers (a river sample being one that recruits respondents while they are online doing something else, such as checking their social media). This sample was generated by advertising our survey directly to UK platform workers active on Facebook and Instagram for local workers and on Upwork for remote workers. The advantage of this approach is that Facebook and Instagram use is so widespread that self-selection into the sampling frame is not a concern (Schneider & Harknett, 2019) and Upwork is the dominant platform for remote work both in the UK and globally.

The result is a unique sample of 510 UK workers that allows us to investigate the degree to which a broad range of factors influence work experiences and shape views towards labour rights in three key segments of the gig economy (delivery, ride hail and digital) that span local and remote types of platform work. The aim was not a representative sample of the UK gig economy but rather a sample of sufficient size and diversity to explore within-population differences and to stimulate policy debate in an area where traditional survey techniques are difficult to use.

The article proceeds with a review of existing evidence relating to gig worker preferences for flexibility, labour rights and voice. Where it exists, quantitative evidence from the UK is considered first, followed by the greater volume of existing qualitative evidence as well as some influential international research, which we relate to the UK context. We then explain our research design and methodology before presenting our findings and discussing them in relation to the extant literature.

2 | FLEXIBILITY VERSUS LABOUR RIGHTS

Considering, first, the extant quantitative evidence from the UK, Berger et al. (2019) surveyed 1001 randomly selected London Uber drivers who reported a strong preference for flexibility over labour rights, such as holiday pay, a minimum wage and employee status.[2] In fact, over 80 per cent of workers chose flexibility and independent contractor status over labour rights and employee status, respectively. However, Berger et al. (2019) use a form of double-barrelled questioning that Berg and Johnstone (2019) argue requires respondents to make false choices between flexibility and labour protections. Nevertheless, the valuing of flexibility by UK platform workers is further supported by Lepanjuuri et al. (2018) who use an online quota sample of 343 platform workers (although only 189 undertook platform work at least once a month). These researchers find that only small minorities (less than 20 per cent) are dissatisfied with their level of independence or flexibility.

The CIPD (2017) use a similar sample and likewise find only a small minority of workers (around 10 per cent) are dissatisfied with the flexibility, independence and autonomy/control they experience. Interestingly, the CIPD's (2017) findings contradict the conclusions of Berger et al. (2019) that UK platform workers do not want labour rights, instead finding that a majority of respondents feel the government should regulate the gig economy so that all platform workers

receive a basic level of rights and benefits (e.g. Living Wage/holiday pay) (63 per cent agree vs. 11 per cent disagree). Additionally, half of the respondents felt that gig economy firms should have an obligation to provide an occupational pension (58 per cent). These findings further demonstrate that it can be misleading to play flexibility off against labour rights as workers may actually have a strong preference for both.

Indeed, ethnographic research in the United States by Dubal (2021) suggests that ride-hail platform workers want labour protections and rights as well as flexibility but are ambivalent towards employee status. However, analysis of global media coverage of local platform worker mobilizations (including in the UK) suggests that, for some platform workers at least, employment status is something that they are willing to protest for (Bessa et al., 2022). Moreover, in remote platform work, quantitative research among European (including UK) workers by Wood et al. (2021) finds that 39 per cent of the workers surveyed support government regulation and 55 per cent support minimum wages for platform work. Wood et al. (2021) also find this support to be associated with the feeling that platform fees are too high and pay rates are too low.

3 | DEMAND FOR INDEPENDENT VOICE

The above CIPD (2017) study also found that only 10 per cent of UK platform workers would go to a trade union or Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) if they wanted to complain or seek compensation about their experience of working in the gig economy. It is possible that there is considerable support for unions among these workers but that they feel no union currently represents them. Nevertheless, that this number is so low is surprising given that several UK qualitative studies suggest considerable support for trade unions in the gig economy. These studies attribute trade union support to the low pay, income insecurity, lack of sick pay and injury insurance and arbitrary algorithmic management entailed by platform work (Aslam & Woodcock, 2020; Cant, 2019; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2021). Kougiannou and Mendonça (2021) add to these findings, highlighting that algorithmic management diminishes opportunities for non-union forms of voice and thus generates support for collective voice mechanisms that would enable couriers to initiate a formal dialogue.

Likewise, international research supports the contention that platform workers turn to trade unions when they face problems at work (see Maffie, 2020). For instance, a quantitative study of 262 Belgian Deliveroo workers by Vandaele et al. (2019) finds that despite trade union membership being low among these delivery platform workers they are not hostile to unions. In fact, 27 per cent of workers responded that they would probably or definitely join a union if they had a problem in their Deliveroo job. Additionally, Wood et al. (2021) find that 50 per cent of the European remote platform workers they surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that if there was a trade union or workers' association for freelancers they would join and that support for unionization is associated with feeling that platform fees are too high and pay rates are too low.

These findings of trade union support are in spite of commonly held assumptions that self-employed workers are inherently hostile towards trade unions due to being legally constituted as a business in their own right (see Jansen, 2019). Indeed, Wood and Lehdonvirta (2021) argue that industrial relations and collective action theories predict that self-employed workers will utilize exit rather than voice due to lacking dependence on a single employer. Additionally, as indicated above, Hertel-Fernandez et al. (2022) recently found that while US workers generally continue to

value unions, they also support means of achieving industrial democracy via co-determination and works councils. Yet, little is known regarding the views of the self-employed generally or platform workers specifically regarding co-determination.

4 | INDUSTRY DIFFERENCES IN PREFERENCES

Platform workers are often discussed as if they constitute a homogeneous group (Joyce et al., 2023; Vallas & Schor, 2020) but, in reality, as pointed out above, they work across several industries that can be broadly categorized as fitting within two broad types: local and remote. In the UK, both local and remote platform workers tend to be classified as self-employed (with Uber drivers being classified as workers or, in legal terms, 'limb b contractors' since March 2021). However, local platform work tends to entail precarious manual labour and a higher degree of platform control that closely resembles traditional employment, while remote platform work is closer to white-collar traditional freelance self-employment (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Prassl, 2018; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2021). Moreover, remote platform workers have been found to earn more than their local counterparts (CIPD, 2017). Income, autonomy and security have all been found to influence workers' political attitudes (Langsæther & Evans, 2020). Thus, we might expect that there will be marked differences between remote and local platform workers, with local platform workers likely to be more favourable to labour protections and collectivist policy interventions.

5 | DATA AND METHODS

The Gig Rights Project (GRP) set out to answer the following research questions:

(1) If platform work constitutes self-employment, what rights do workers believe would be most beneficial?
(2) Do UK platform workers want trade unions despite being self-employed?
(3) Do UK platform workers want co-determination and works councils?
(4) Do local and remote platform workers exhibit differences in their stated policy and representational preferences?

Taking inspiration from the Shift Project (Schneider & Harknett, 2022), the GRP used an innovative online survey method. The hard-to-reach nature of the gig worker population and its likely small size means that the use of national population-level surveys is very costly and would result in relatively small sample sizes (Lehdonvirta et al., 2021). In such circumstances, Lehdonvirta et al. (2021) highlight the innovative use of online surveys as a means for undertaking exploratory or policy-relevant research.

In our study, we have sought a strategically targeted 'river' sample which includes good representation across conceptually important categories, such as remote or local platform work, migrant or UK born, male or female, younger or older and more or less educated. By doing so, we are able to highlight where preferences for rights and policies seem unlikely to be influenced by such characteristics due to the absence of substantial differences between groups. Conversely, this approach allows to identify outcomes that are more likely to be sensitive to the actual makeup of the platform worker population. To generate our targeted sample, we advertised our survey directly to UK-based workers active on Facebook and Instagram using the advertising portal

(Facebook Ads Center) which allows the placement of advertisements on both social media platforms. The advantage of this approach is that Facebook and Instagram use is so widespread that self-selection into the sampling frame is not a concern (Schneider & Harknett, 2019). Recent estimates indicate that approximately 71 per cent of adults in the UK are active on Facebook (Battisby, 2019) and are not especially stratified by demographic characteristics (Greenwood et al., 2016). Moreover, the research of Lehdonvirta et al. (2021: 17) suggests that river samples from online surveys are 'not statistically or practically different [from online panel samples] on relevant attitudinal and behavioural characteristics'. Indeed, in the United States, a team of gig economy researchers have successfully used this method to research delivery platform work (Griesbach et al., 2019; Milkman et al., 2021).

Using the platform advertising features, we directly targeted our survey at users who, for example, listed their interests as 'Ubereats', 'delivery (commerce)', 'Uber (company)', 'Drive with Uber', 'Taxi Driver', 'Hybrid electric vehicle', 'TaskRabbit', 'Care.com' or 'Airtasker'; their employer as 'Deliveroo', or their job title as 'delivery' 'Taxi Cab Driver' or 'Car Driver'. Users matching these interests, employer or job titles were targeted with bespoke adverts designed for delivery, drivers and domestic platform workers on Facebook/Instagram. Between March and June 2022, the GRP surveyed 510 UK gig economy workers active on Facebook, Instagram or Upwork.

Advertisements on Facebook and Instagram reached 1.2 million people, of whom 15,500 people clicked through to the survey landing page. The survey could be completed in English, Bengali, Polish, Portuguese or Spanish. By doing so, we were able to collect data from 257 local platform workers. The three main platforms used by workers were Deliveroo, UberEats and Uber. We supplemented with data from 253 remote platform workers who were randomly selected from the Upwork, the globally dominant remote work, platform, in line with quotas for task and gender derived from the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Online Labour Index (Stephany et al., 2021). Those completing the survey were offered the chance to win an iPad and those recruited via Upwork were additionally compensated with a £10 payment.

Our survey was developed with input from our advisory partners Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas), Charted Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD), ILO, Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) (see below). The survey was piloted with five current or former platform workers: two current remote platform workers, a former delivery local platform worker, a former ride-hail local platform worker and a current handyperson local platform worker. Where possible, to ease comparison with existing quantitative research, we based our questions or survey items on established social surveys (see below). Improvements were made to the wording of the questions based on the feedback provided during the piloting. The research received ethical approval from the Bristol University School of Management Research Ethics Committee. Data is available upon request.

6 | SURVEY DESIGN

We fielded an online survey which collected data on job characteristics, working conditions, wellbeing, political values and behaviour, collective organization and action, communication, preferences for labour rights and policy interventions, and demographics. The survey first asked the following screening questions to ensure the respondent was a platform worker:

(i) 'Thinking about the past month, which, if any, of the following have you done in order to make money using a website, platform or app?' (tick all that apply)
   - Carried passengers in your vehicle (e.g. taxi rides)
   - Delivered food and drink from restaurants and food outlets to people
   - Provided courier services (e.g. package and postal deliveries, messenger services, etc.)
   - Performed manual tasks (e.g. cleaning, decorating, building, home fixtures and repairs, pet-sitting, etc.)
   - Performed non-manual tasks (e.g. web and software development, writing and translation, accounting, legal and admin services, marketing and media, audio and visual services, etc.)
   - None of these

(ii) For these services or tasks, are the payments made to you through the website, online platform or digital app that you use to find work?

Further questions were then asked to identify what type of platform work undertaken and in what quantity. These initial questions were adopted from the Understanding Society (University of Essex, 2021) and COLLEEM (Pesole et al., 2018) surveys.

In order to gain an understanding of which of the publicly debated policy interventions platform workers preferred, we partnered with Acas, CIPD, ILO, RSA and TUC to advise us in developing survey items that would reflect the then current policy debates regarding labour rights and other policy interventions for the UK gig economy. This process produced the following two questions (survey usability necessitated splitting the policy interventions in this way):

(i) Please choose the three labour rights which would most benefit your working life if applied to your platform work (options detailed below).

(ii) Thinking about your platform work, please choose the three policies that would most benefit your working if applied to your platform work (options detailed below).

We also included questions to assess respondents' support for various forms of a collective organization – these items were adapted or inspired by several relevant extant studies and are detailed below (e.g. Hadwiger, 2022; Jansen, 2020; Wood et al., 2018; 2021). The job quality questions were largely adapted from the Skills and Employment Survey (SES) (Gallie et al., 2018) with some additional questions being based on the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) (Eurofound, 2022) and the iLabour survey (Wood et al., 2021). The political behaviour and values and demographic questions were taken from the British Social Attitudes survey (Butt et al., 2022).

Following quality checks, responses with implausibly short completion times were excluded from the analyses ($n = 34$), leaving a minimum of 3.5 min (median 17). Checks on the remaining sample for respondents simply selecting the first available answer revealed no suspicious activity. For example, on the two survey items requiring most time — the lists of workers' rights and policy options — only 2 per cent and 1 per cent of workers selected the first three options, respectively, and none did so on both.

Given the limitations of our river non-probability sample, it was necessary to adopt an exploratory approach to analyses which used both descriptive statistics and multivariate regressions. Therefore, we do not attempt formal hypothesize testing and we are mindful of our ability to make inferences to the population of UK platform workers (Lehdonvirta et al., 2021). But in the spirit of EDA (Exploratory Data Analysis – see, for instance, Marsh and Elliott, 2008), we attempt to develop some fertile directions for future research. Given the limited quantitative evidence on preferences for social policies and labour rights among UK gig workers, the aim of our approach

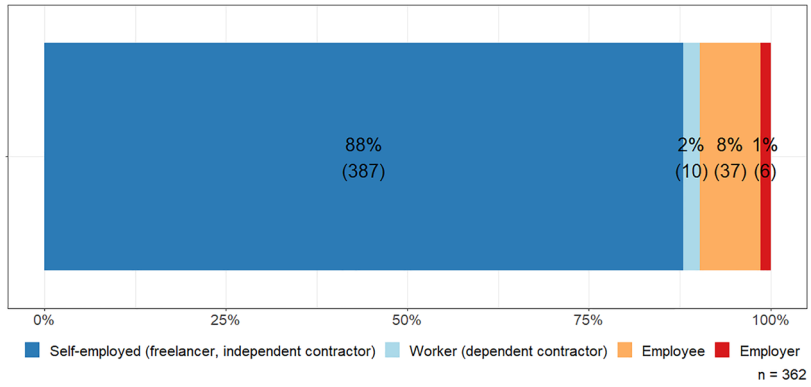

FIGURE 1 Thinking about your main platform work, how would you describe your employment status. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 1 Demographic comparison of UK-based self-employed workers across surveys.

	Male (%)	Age (median years)
Gig Rights Survey	72%	33
EWCS 2010	62%	47
EWCS 2015	69%	50
EWCS 2021	65%	51
SES 2017	63%	48

was to provide some indications of workers' preferences in these areas as well as some analysis of why preferences may vary among subgroups.

7 | RESULTS

7.1 | Self-employment

One of the most contentious issues surrounding the gig economy is whether platform companies are falsely classifying their workers as self-employed. This issue has been repeatedly debated in the law courts, press and academia. Our respondents, perhaps surprisingly, widely believed their work to be best described as self-employment (Figure 1) (i.e. working as a freelancer or independent contractor). This finding suggests that the controversy regarding the employment status of platform workers is not shared by platform workers themselves. Whether the respondent was undertaking remote or local platform work had no significant influence. Moreover, that this work is best described as self-employment was even accepted by the majority of Uber drivers despite a recent Supreme Court ruling that their employment classification is that of 'workers'.

Despite overwhelmingly reporting that they regard themselves as self-employed, Gig Rights survey respondents differ from the self-employed more generally. Respondents are slightly more likely to be male and are considerably younger than the self-employed in the UK samples of the most recent EWCS (EWCS 2010, 2015, 2021) (Eurofound, 2022) and the most recent SES (SES 2017) (Gallie et al., 2018) (Table 1). There are also considerable differences in occupational and industrial compositions. While nearly half (47 per cent) of Gig Rights respondents are drivers (delivery, ride

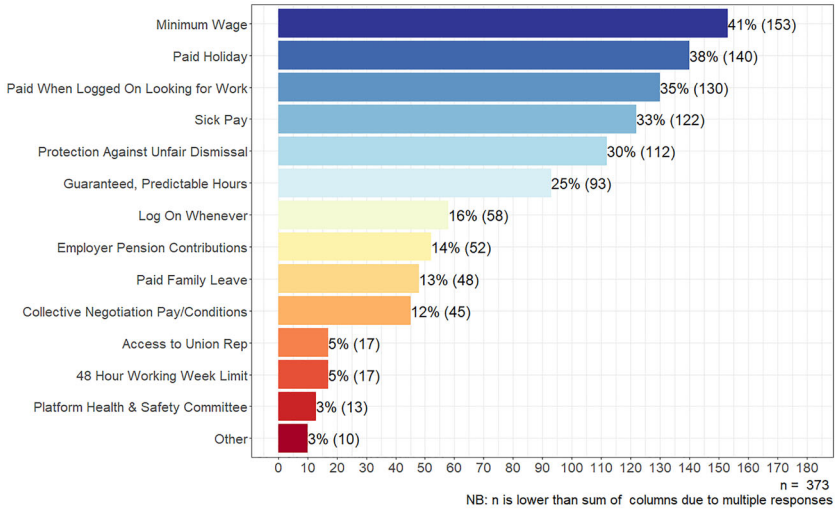

FIGURE 2 Support for rights. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

hail), in SES 2017, only 8 per cent of the self-employed are in Standard Occupational Classification 2010 categories that include drivers. In SES 2017, more than a quarter (28 per cent) of the self-employed report working in skilled trades (e.g. plumbers, electricians), whereas among Gig Rights respondents, the percentage of skilled traders cannot exceed the 3 per cent who report doing any manual non-driving work.

Where the availability of survey items makes it possible, in the analysis that follows, reported working conditions in the Gig Rights sample will be compared to those of the SES (SES 2017) and UK sub-samples of the EWCS (EWCS 2010, 2015, 2021). Comparisons will be made chiefly with self-employed respondents, with the aim of elucidating the factors that may account for platform worker preferences for rights and social protections which are not commonly assumed to be priorities for the self-employed more traditionally conceived. However, for some SES and EWCS items, the self-employed have not been asked to respond. In these cases, and others, comparisons will be made with the full sample of UK workers to highlight the contrast between conditions for platform workers and the wider workforce.

7.2 | Labour rights and minimum standards

Having affirmed that platform workers in our study overwhelmingly view their work as self-employment, we turn to the question of what rights they believe would be most beneficial. The GRP survey asked respondents to pick three labour rights from a list of 13, developed with our advisory project partners, that would most benefit their working lives if applied to their platform work. As can be seen in Figure 2, workers' five most immediate priorities were ones that would provide minimum standards for pay, that is 'the national minimum wage' (41 per cent), 'paid holiday time' (38 per cent), 'payment whenever logged on to the platform/app and looking for work' (35 per cent) and 'sick pay' (33 per cent); as well as 'protection against unfair dismissal (including platform deactivation)' (30 per cent).[3] These are all rights that currently ensure minimum standards in the treatment of employees with the self-employed being excluded from these pro-

tections. In fact, 94 per cent of the respondents selected at least one of these five core employment rights in their top three. These results imply that it is misplaced to assume that because they are legally classified and self-classified as self-employed and supposedly able to negotiate with those purchasing their labour that platform workers do not desire the same rights as employees with regard to minimum standards around wages and job security. Moreover, it suggests that focusing on the possible misclassification of platform workers fails to recognize the potential for these workers to be correctly classified as self-employed and still lacking adequate labour rights and protections.

At the other end of the scale, 'collective negotiation of pay and conditions', 'access to a trade union representative', '48-hour limit to the working week' and a 'platform health and safety committee' were deemed less immediate priorities. As we shall see later, this is likely a reflection of the greater perceived effectiveness of minimum standards for improving conditions in the gig economy rather than evidence of anti-union sentiment.

7.3 | Working conditions

Demand for labour rights that protect minimum standards is perhaps not surprising when we consider the working conditions experienced by our respondents. The real gross hourly rate of pay (i.e. what they earned on average per hour including waiting times before tax and other deductions) was low and often below minimum wage (with the median rate being £8.97 per hour). In fact, 52 per cent were earning below the minimum wage at the time (£9.50). These estimates of *gross pay* are lower than even those for *net* median hourly pay for self-employed workers in SES 2017, which we estimate to be £15 (2022 prices), with 25 per cent earning below the then current minimum wage.[4] One factor contributing to our respondents' low rates of pay was the significant amount of time they report spending logged on to their platform and waiting for or looking for work (median = 5 h per week). The imposition of a wage floor would, therefore, substantially strengthen the ability of many workers to make ends meet and thus constitutes a rational demand irrespective of employment status.

Support for labour rights such as sick pay and protection against unfair dismissal (including platform deactivation) can be understood as a response to platform work not only being poorly paid but also very risky and insecure. Forty per cent of our respondents felt there was a chance of them losing their ability to make a living on their main platform and becoming unemployed in the next 12 months. This suggests that platform workers are much more likely to feel they are at risk of unemployment than workers generally or the self-employed in particular. For example, the 2017 SES found that only around 9 per cent of all workers and 14 per cent of the self-employed felt there was a chance of becoming unemployed in the next 12 months. Additionally, as can be seen in Figure 3, other types of work-related insecurity are widespread among our respondents. Sixty-five per cent were anxious regarding their future pay; 54 per cent about having less say over how their job is done; 53 per cent about it becoming more difficult for them to use their skill. This insecurity appeared much more widespread among our respondents than has previously been found in the labour market generally, with, for example, the 2017 SES finding that around 25 per cent of all workers experienced these anxieties (Felstead et al., 2018).

Another very widespread source of insecurity was unexpected changes to hours with 50 per cent of platform workers experiencing this anxiety. This insecurity also appears substantially more widespread than among the general population of workers, with the 2017 SES finding only 7 per cent anxious regarding unexpected changes to their hours. Moreover, in line with recent findings

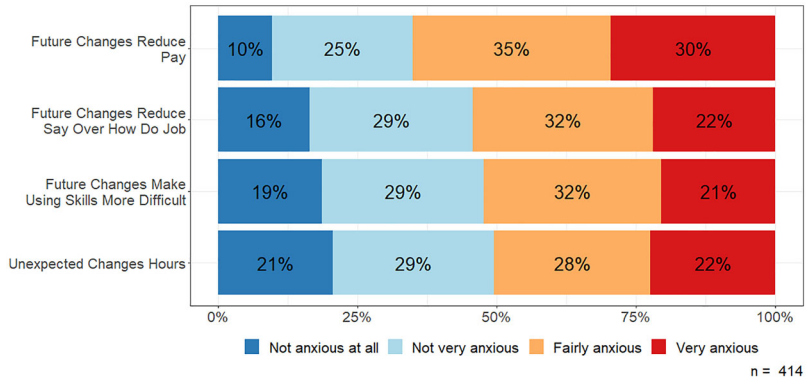

FIGURE 3 Work-related insecurity. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

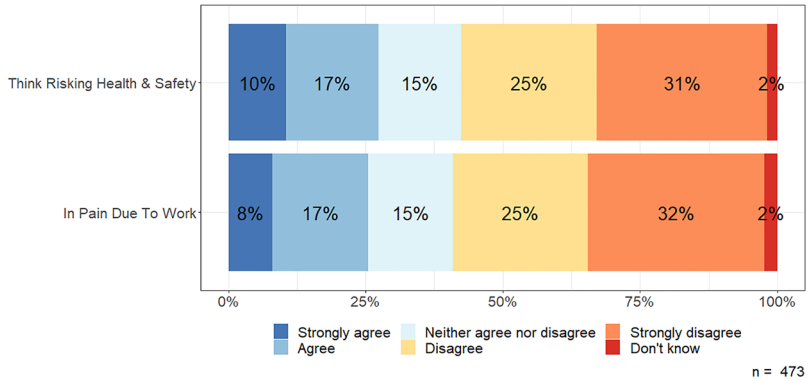

FIGURE 4 Risking health and safety and experiencing pain as a result of platform work. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

that platform algorithms might amplify precarity by creating a new type of 'reputational insecurity' (Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2022), 67 per cent of our respondents agreed that they worry about clients giving them unfair feedback that impacts their future income.

Twenty-eight per cent of our respondents felt that they were risking their health or safety in doing platform work, while 25 per cent experienced pain as a result of their work (Figure 4). In EWCS 2021, a similar proportion (26 per cent) of the self-employed reported risking their health and safety at work. These perceptions of physical risks are probably underestimates of the real risks and in the case of platform work are not surprising given its intensity has been highlighted by existing studies (Gregory, 2021; Wood et al., 2019). In the GRP survey, nearly half of our respondents (47 per cent) said their work involved working to tight deadlines at least three-quarters of the time.[5]

Whether workers were doing remote or local platform work made little difference to what rights they wanted. As can be seen in Table 2, the only statistically significant differences were local platform workers being more likely to support paid holiday and less likely to support protection against unfair dismissal. Gender was of similar explanatory power with female respondents being more likely to support paid holiday and employer pension contributions. Whether a respondent was a migrant was also an important predictor of views towards labour rights with UK-born

TABLE 2 Support for labour rights with controls.

	Dependent variable:												
	48 h Limit	Collective Negotiation Wages	Guaranteed Hours	H&S Committee	Login Flexibility	Paid When Logged In	Minimum Wage	Paid Holiday	Paid Family Leave	Pension Contributions	Protection Against Unfair Dismissal	Sick Pay	Union Rep Access
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
Gender (Ref: Female)													
Male	0.001	0.078	−0.078	0.053	0.054	0.028	−0.011	−0.143*	−0.020	−0.104*	0.109	−0.089	−0.018
	(0.025)	(0.041)	(0.057)	(0.027)	(0.046)	(0.062)	(0.065)	(0.062)	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.059)	(0.060)	(0.027)
	(0.113)	(0.188)	(0.258)	(0.125)	(0.209)	(0.281)	(0.294)	(0.284)	(0.201)	(0.207)	(0.267)	(0.274)	(0.124)
Age	−0.001	−0.00000	−0.004	0.002	0.005*	−0.002	−0.0001	−0.004	−0.004*	0.006**	−0.0001	−0.005	0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.001)
Born UK	−0.011	0.082*	0.020	−0.017	−0.001	0.114*	−0.089	0.008	−0.068	0.050	−0.074	0.029	0.069**
	(0.023)	(0.038)	(0.053)	(0.026)	(0.043)	(0.057)	(0.060)	(0.058)	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.025)
Sector (Ref: Remote)													
Local	−0.040	0.051	−0.048	−0.024	0.045	−0.078	0.073	0.184**	−0.067	−0.050	−0.190**	0.122	0.052
	(0.027)	(0.045)	(0.062)	(0.030)	(0.050)	(0.067)	(0.071)	(0.068)	(0.048)	(0.050)	(0.064)	(0.066)	(0.030)
Highest Education (Ref: None)													
Primary	−0.050	−0.070	−0.061	−0.016	−0.126	0.966	0.319	−0.273	−0.319	0.009	−0.058	0.652	0.006
	(0.205)	(0.341)	(0.467)	(0.226)	(0.378)	(0.508)	(0.533)	(0.514)	(0.363)	(0.375)	(0.484)	(0.497)	(0.224)
Secondary	−0.066	0.035	0.047	0.031	0.130	0.254	−0.299	0.112	−0.174	0.194	0.247	−0.068	0.020
	(0.067)	(0.112)	(0.154)	(0.074)	(0.124)	(0.167)	(0.175)	(0.169)	(0.119)	(0.123)	(0.159)	(0.163)	(0.074)
Post-Secondary	−0.112	0.225*	0.125	0.111	0.094	0.207	−0.246	0.106	−0.101	0.128	0.221	−0.065	0.043
	(0.064)	(0.107)	(0.147)	(0.071)	(0.119)	(0.160)	(0.168)	(0.162)	(0.114)	(0.118)	(0.152)	(0.156)	(0.070)

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Dependent variable:												
	48 h Limit	Collective Negotiation Wages	Guaranteed Hours	H&S Committee	Login Flexibility	Paid When Logged In	Minimum Wage	Paid Holiday	Paid Family Leave	Pension Contributions	Protection Against Unfair Dismissal	Sick Pay	Union Rep Access
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
Graduate	−0.087	0.179	0.113	0.046	0.140	0.178	−0.218	0.018	−0.139	0.106	0.261	−0.127	0.111
	(0.062)	(0.103)	(0.141)	(0.068)	(0.114)	(0.154)	(0.161)	(0.155)	(0.110)	(0.113)	(0.146)	(0.150)	(0.068)
Post-Graduate	−0.084	0.218*	0.110	0.044	0.056	0.104	−0.157	0.153	−0.150	0.164	0.097	−0.093	0.140*
	(0.064)	(0.107)	(0.146)	(0.071)	(0.118)	(0.159)	(0.167)	(0.161)	(0.114)	(0.118)	(0.152)	(0.156)	(0.070)
Doctorate	−0.121	0.092	0.334	0.004	0.221	−0.193	−0.353	−0.024	−0.029	0.161	0.629**	−0.132	0.172
	(0.091)	(0.152)	(0.209)	(0.101)	(0.169)	(0.227)	(0.239)	(0.230)	(0.163)	(0.168)	(0.217)	(0.222)	(0.100)
Constant	0.184*	−0.165	0.365*	−0.104	−0.201	0.228	0.647**	0.490*	0.456***	−0.116	0.108	0.622***	−0.175*
	(0.077)	(0.128)	(0.175)	(0.085)	(0.142)	(0.191)	(0.200)	(0.193)	(0.136)	(0.141)	(0.182)	(0.186)	(0.084)
Observations	348	348	348	348	348	348	348	348	348	348	348	348	348
R^2	0.044	0.083	0.050	0.039	0.091	0.057	0.041	0.071	0.055	0.074	0.085	0.057	0.060
Adjusted R^2	0.004	0.045	0.010	−0.001	0.053	0.017	0.0003	0.032	0.015	0.036	0.047	0.017	0.021
Residual Std. Error (df = 333)	0.190	0.316	0.433	0.210	0.350	0.471	0.494	0.477	0.337	0.348	0.449	0.460	0.208
F Statistic (df = 14; 333)	1.105	2.156**	1.257	0.974	2.385**	1.436	1.008	1.824*	1.374	1.913*	2.222**	1.436	1.528

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

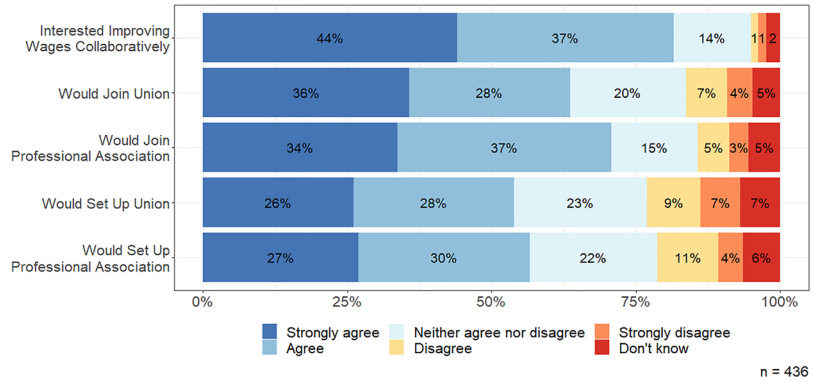

FIGURE 5 Support for collective organization. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

workers being significantly more favourable towards the right to access a trade union representative, payment whenever logged on to the platform/app and looking for work, and the collective negotiation of wages.

7.4 | Collective representation and voice

Despite the importance of this work to our respondents and the harms and risks it can entail, 59 per cent of our respondents felt that they would not have any say in decisions that changed the way they went about their work. Moreover, Gig Rights respondents have far less say than the self-employed in the pooled EWCS (2010–2021) data, for whom only 4.6 per cent reported rarely or never having such influence on such decisions.

Labour rights and government policies that would extend the reach of trade unions into the gig economy were generally less popular than those that would create minimum standards. It was, therefore, surprising that when asked directly about their willingness to join or even organize a trade union, the response was overwhelmingly positive (Figure 5). This was despite the fact that only 11 per cent of our respondents were already trade union members, 5 per cent engaged in trade union activities several times a month (including membership and activism not related to their platform work) and 10 per cent had participated in a coordinated group action, such as a protest, memorial, demonstration, strike or logging out of the app. Despite these low percentages, Gig Rights respondents were, nevertheless, much more likely to engage in union activity than the self-employed in EWCS (2010–2021) 96 per cent of whom reported never doing so.

Fully 64 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they would join a trade union if there was one for workers on the main platform where they worked. This is a much higher level of support than found previously among non-union workers in the UK. For instance, Bryson and Freeman (2007) and Charlwood (2002) find, respectively, that 46 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively, of non-union workers would join a union if their colleagues formed one at their workplace. However, what is particularly striking was that 54 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they 'would like to join with colleagues to assist in setting up a trade union' for their main platform. Therefore, compared to workers generally, those in the gig economy seem much more supportive of trade unions.

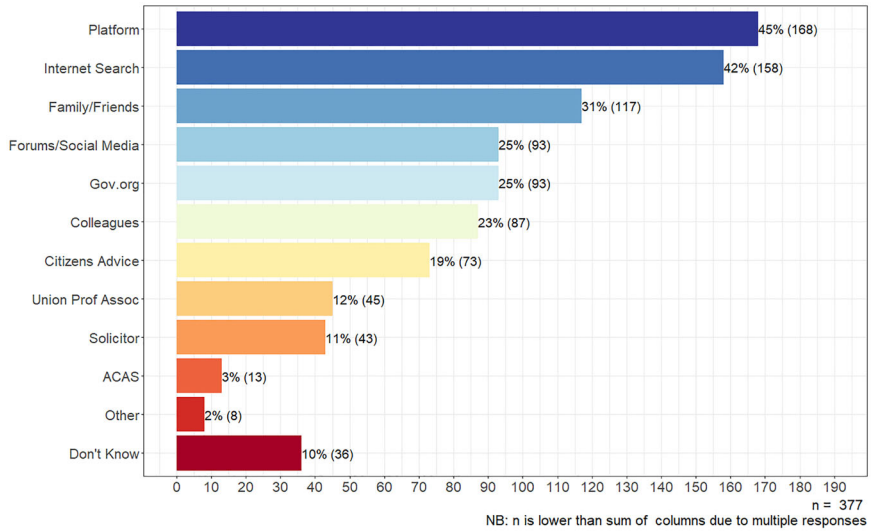

FIGURE 6 Where would you go to find advice/assistance or guidance related to your working conditions? [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

This support for joining and forming trade unions was tempered, however, by scepticism regarding their immediate effectiveness for improving conditions in the gig economy. For example, when asked how likely on a scale of 0–10 they were to join a trade union (or remain a member if already one) in the next 2 years, the median score was 4. When asked to rate on a scale of 0–10 how important trade unions are for improving the working conditions of their platform work, the median response was 5. When asked to rate how focused on achieving positive changes for your platform work are trade unions, the median response was again 5. That our respondents were ambivalent regarding the current ability and commitment of trade unions to support platform workers was also reflected in the fact that only 12 per cent felt that they would turn to a trade union or other professional body for advice/assistance or guidance related to their working conditions. Workers were most likely to turn to the platform they work for, the Internet, or family and friends for advice (see Figure 6).

Our respondents' ambivalence regarding the immediate focus and potential of trade unions in the gig economy perhaps explains their strong support for minimum standards and non-union forms of worker voice, such as co-determination (discussed below).

In fact, we find a strong sense of collectivism among platform workers, with these workers being just as enthusiastic about other ways of working cooperatively. For instance, similar numbers were enthusiastic about improving wages collaboratively, and joining and assisting in setting up professional associations for platform work as they were about unions. Additionally, workers were even more positive regarding their likelihood of joining a professional or trade organization (e.g. an association for photographers, designers or taxi drivers); solo self-employment (freelancers) organizations (such as IPSE [the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed]); and co-working spaces. However, the respondents as a whole were just as ambivalent towards the focus of such alternative organizations on achieving positive changes for platform work as they were towards trade unions. It was only solo self-employed organizations that were viewed as being more important for improving working conditions in the gig economy. Additionally, local platform workers were more positive regarding the focus and importance of professional or trade

organizations than remote platform workers; this difference is partly due to differences in education with the association becoming non-significant when education is added as a control as can be seen in Table 2.

This strong sense of collectivism was also reflected in the political orientation of our respondents with large majorities agreeing or strongly agreeing that the government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off (60 per cent), that big business benefits owners at the expense of workers (75 per cent), that ordinary working people do not get a fair share of the nation's wealth (72 per cent), that there is one law for the rich and one for the poor (67 per cent), and that management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance (68 per cent). In fact, 75 per cent of the respondents can be considered to hold left-wing views (agreeing or strongly agreeing with three or more of the above questions) compared to 3.5 per cent holding right-wing views (disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with three or more of the above questions). Moreover, around twice as many respondents supported left-of-centre parties (Labour, Green, SNP, Sinn Fein, SDLP, Plaid Cymru) as did right-of-centre ones (Conservative, Brexit/Reform, DUP) both in terms of who they voted for in 2019 and who they would vote for at the time of the survey (spring 2022). In fact, not voting among those eligible to vote was a more popular choice than the combined support for right-of-centre parties.

Whether respondents were undertaking local or remote platform work had no significant effect on their willingness to join a union but was significantly associated with perceptions of union importance and focus on achieving positive change. Remote workers were 1.1 points lower on a 0–10 scale for both. Moreover, local platform workers were much more likely to be engaged in a trade union than their remote counterparts or to have participated in a coordinated group action, such as a protest, memorial, demonstration, strike or logging out of the app (23 per cent were members vs. 3 per cent and 19 per cent vs. 6 per cent). Gender made little difference to views towards unions or other forms of collective organization.

7.5 | Co-determination

In addition to asking respondents what labour rights would most benefit their working lives, we also developed with our advisory project partners a list of 15 other policies that might benefit platform workers (see Figure 7). For both local and remote platform workers, the most immediate priorities were those connected to co-determination and the strengthening of worker voice beyond traditional trade union-facilitated collective bargaining. Policies offering differing degrees of co-determination had similar levels of support and included: all major platform changes that impact on employment and working conditions being approved by an elected body of worker representatives (32 per cent); workers being consulted on all major changes to working practices and pay (31 per cent); and platforms having to hold regular meetings at which workers could express their views (30 per cent). In total, 72 per cent of workers selected some form of co-determination in their top three most beneficial policies for improving their working lives. Additionally, the right to appeal platform deactivations or restrictions of work was similarly popular (30 per cent).

Interestingly, very few workers felt that 'companies legally having to consult their workforce when introducing new technologies' was a priority for improving their working lives. This is an important finding as such policies have been advocated by politicians and organizations as a response to the digitalization of work (see, e.g., Labour, 2022; TUC, 2021). Likewise, there was little support for a data-centric approach whereby workers would have access to 'information about

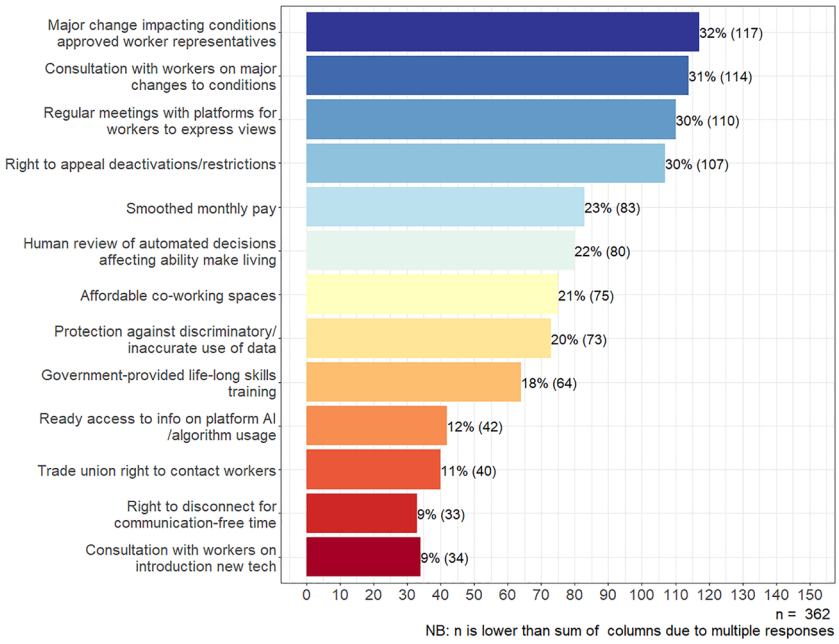

FIGURE 7 Support for other policy interventions. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

how the platform uses AI and algorithms and a right to request a personal and understandable explanation'. Additionally, the 'right to disconnect' has frequently been trumpeted as a means of countering overwork (see, e.g., Labour, 2022; TUC, 2021) but workers in our survey generally did not feel that it would be of much benefit to them – however, there were substantial differences in responses according to gender. As can be seen from Table 2, female platform workers were more likely to support the right to disconnect and were less convinced of the benefits of workers being consulted on all major changes to working practices and pay – however, there was little difference in female respondents' views towards other forms of co-determination.

As can be seen from Table 3, country of birth was also an important influence on views towards wider policies with migrants being more supportive of: (i) companies legally having to consult their workforce when introducing new technologies; (ii) government-provided life-long skills training; and (iii) data discrimination protection. Further, migrant workers were less convinced by (i) the benefits of human reviews of all major automated decisions (such as ratings and deactivations), (ii) all major platform changes that impact on employment and working conditions being approved by an elected body of worker representatives and of the need for affordable co-working spaces.

8 | DISCUSSION

Our findings highlight strong support among gig economy workers for labour rights, such as the national minimum wage, sick pay, holiday pay, protection against unfair dismissal and employer contributions to pensions. Additionally, we find strong support for greater voice via trade unions and co-determination. Sampling evenly across remote and local platform work, we found surprisingly little evidence for differences between remote and local UK platform workers'

TABLE 3 Support other policy interventions with controls.

	Dependent variable:												
	Platform Meetings	Approved Changes	Consult Changes	Consult Technology	Union Contact	Smoothed Pay	Gov Skills Training	Human Review	Protection Data Discrim	Right to Disconnect	Info on Algorithm	Coworking Space	Right of Appeal
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
Gender (Ref: Female)													
Male	0.030	0.031	0.155*	0.045	0.026	−0.049	−0.056	−0.049	0.032	−0.103**	−0.026	−0.068	0.038
	(0.060)	(0.061)	(0.060)	(0.036)	(0.039)	(0.054)	(0.051)	(0.054)	(0.052)	(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.052)	(0.060)
Age	−0.003	−0.001	0.002	0.001	0.004*	−0.007**	0.003	−0.003	0.002	−0.001	−0.003	−0.002	0.002
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Born UK	0.055	0.145*	0.005	−0.084*	0.032	−0.055	−0.094*	0.166**	−0.160**	0.018	0.032	0.097*	−0.058
	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.034)	(0.037)	(0.051)	(0.047)	(0.050)	(0.048)	(0.036)	(0.040)	(0.049)	(0.056)
Sector (Ref: Remote)													
Local	0.018	0.039	−0.131	0.0002	0.111*	0.048	0.034	−0.033	−0.173**	−0.020	−0.026	−0.181**	−0.023
	(0.067)	(0.067)	(0.067)	(0.041)	(0.044)	(0.060)	(0.056)	(0.060)	(0.058)	(0.043)	(0.047)	(0.058)	(0.066)
Highest Education (Ref: None)													
Primary	0.858	0.695	−0.351	−0.173	0.854**	0.064	0.002	−0.046	−0.304	−0.043	−0.053	−0.001	−0.007
	(0.496)	(0.501)	(0.498)	(0.301)	(0.325)	(0.447)	(0.418)	(0.444)	(0.428)	(0.318)	(0.350)	(0.431)	(0.494)
Secondary	0.298	−0.168	−0.019	−0.074	−0.029	0.207	0.150	0.124	−0.036	−0.095	−0.142	0.154	0.213
	(0.164)	(0.165)	(0.164)	(0.099)	(0.107)	(0.147)	(0.138)	(0.146)	(0.141)	(0.105)	(0.116)	(0.142)	(0.163)
Post-Secondary	0.229	−0.043	0.072	0.050	0.003	0.226	0.133	0.143	−0.066	−0.050	−0.090	0.044	0.055
	(0.156)	(0.158)	(0.157)	(0.095)	(0.102)	(0.141)	(0.132)	(0.140)	(0.135)	(0.100)	(0.110)	(0.136)	(0.156)

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Dependent variable:												
	Platform Meetings	Approved Changes	Consult Changes	Consult Technology	Union Contact	Smoothed Pay	Gov Skills Training	Human Review	Protection Data Discrim	Right to Disconnect	Info on Algorithm	Coworking Space	Right of Appeal
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
Graduate	0.203	−0.103	−0.015	−0.025	−0.021	0.093	0.086	0.141	0.058	−0.018	−0.032	0.142	0.103
	(0.150)	(0.152)	(0.151)	(0.091)	(0.098)	(0.135)	(0.126)	(0.134)	(0.129)	(0.096)	(0.106)	(0.130)	(0.150)
Post-Graduate	0.235	−0.050	0.043	−0.005	0.068	0.103	0.051	0.110	−0.030	−0.0002	−0.138	0.150	0.084
	(0.155)	(0.157)	(0.156)	(0.094)	(0.102)	(0.140)	(0.131)	(0.139)	(0.134)	(0.100)	(0.110)	(0.135)	(0.155)
Doctorate	0.069	0.140	−0.182	−0.091	0.061	−0.067	0.276	0.140	−0.149	0.096	−0.070	−0.046	0.456*
	(0.222)	(0.224)	(0.223)	(0.135)	(0.145)	(0.200)	(0.187)	(0.199)	(0.191)	(0.142)	(0.157)	(0.192)	(0.221)
Constant	0.140	0.325	0.167	0.072	−0.098	0.424*	0.066	0.196	0.213	0.217	0.319*	0.225	0.138
	(0.187)	(0.189)	(0.188)	(0.114)	(0.123)	(0.169)	(0.158)	(0.168)	(0.162)	(0.120)	(0.132)	(0.163)	(0.187)
Observations	343	343	343	343	343	343	343	343	343	343	343	343	343
R^2	0.052	0.053	0.054	0.040	0.079	0.070	0.047	0.055	0.097	0.050	0.046	0.094	0.038
Adjusted R^2	0.012	0.012	0.013	−0.001	0.040	0.030	0.007	0.014	0.058	0.009	0.005	0.056	−0.003
Residual Std. Error (df = 328)	0.459	0.463	0.461	0.279	0.301	0.413	0.387	0.411	0.396	0.294	0.324	0.398	0.457
F Statistic (df = 14; 328)	1.297	1.302	1.326	0.966	2.021*	1.758*	1.160	1.350	2.503**	1.231	1.120	2.444**	0.916

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

preferences for rights and other policy interventions. While this absence of evidence cannot be taken necessarily as evidence of an absence, that little difference is discernible after controlling for possible masking effects of relevant demographic variables in multivariate models (Tables 1 and 2) strengthens our confidence in this conclusion. Thus, this exploratory research has generated a somewhat surprising hypothesis that can be tested by future research: that differences in the labour processes and employment relations involved in local and remote platform work do not generate substantial differences in preferences for rights or social policies. This might result from the trumping of more fine-grained differences in labour processes and employment relations by the overriding precarity of low-paid self-employment in market-orientated employment systems. Future research should test this proposition by investigating whether different institutional contexts and, in particular, welfare states related to various 'employment regimes' (Gallie, 2007), are associated with distinctive platform worker preferences.

Turning to our first research question, what labour rights do UK platform workers believe would be most beneficial to them? Our respondents overwhelmingly saw their platform work as constituting self-employment but, nevertheless, felt that it would be beneficial if those labour rights currently reserved for employees that ensure minimum standards for pay and dismissals also applied to platform work. This was true across the local/remote divide and demographics, such as gender and migrant status. These findings contradict the conclusions drawn by Berger et al. (2019) and support the arguments of Berg and Johnstone (2019) and Dubal (2021) that satisfaction with flexibility and autonomy does not preclude support for labour rights, such as the minimum wage. This finding is also in line with those drawn from more limited samples by CIPD (2017) and Wood et al. (2021).

As with previous research (e.g. Berger et al., 2019; Bloodworth, 2018; Cant, 2019; CIPD, 2017; Gregory, 2021; Lepanjuuri et al., 2018; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Wang et al., 2022), we find that work in the UK gig economy is marked by low pay, insecurity and risk. This provides a rationale for why platform workers would support the imposition of a wage floor and protections against unfair dismissal – despite being self-employed. In fact, comparing the Gig Rights data with the EWCS and SES suggests that platform workers earn on average 60 per cent less than the standard UK self-employed, experience far less organizational voice, are four times more likely to express anxiety about insecurity and are just as likely to be risking their health and safety. Moreover, that these platform workers believe that self-employment best describes their work highlights that focusing on whether platform workers are being misclassified may fail to recognize the potential for these workers to be correctly classified as self-employed and still lack adequate labour rights and protections.

Our second research question was whether, despite being self-employed, UK platform workers want trade union representation. Again, we find strong support for trade unions, despite our respondents seeing their platform work as self-employment. These workers were actually much more favourable towards both joining and setting up trade unions than previous research would suggest is the case for standard non-union workers in the UK (i.e. Bryson & Freeman, 2007; Charlwood, 2002). However, we do find differences between local and remote platform workers regarding trade union membership and participation, with those doing local platform work being markedly more likely to be a member of a trade union or to have participated in trade union activity. Additionally, undertaking local platform work is significantly and positively associated with the view that trade unions are important and focused on achieving positive change for platform workers but not with workers' willingness to join, nor was there evidence of a gender or country of birth effect. This suggests that there is likely greater unmet demand for trade unions

among remote platform workers and that their lower level of exposure likely means they are more sceptical regarding the motives and benefits of trade unions.

Our findings are also in line with the CIPD's (2017) that only a small minority of UK platform workers would currently go to a trade union if they wanted to complain or seek compensation about their experience of working in the gig economy. However, this is seemingly a function of an absence of adequate trade union representation rather than hostility to unions per se. In line with previous research, we find support for setting up trade unions for both remote (Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2021; Wood et al., 2021) and local platform work (Aslam & Woodcock, 2020; Cant, 2019; Kougiannou & Mendonça, 2021; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020). Again, the widespread low pay, insecurity and risk across the gig economy provide a rationale for platform workers' support for trade unions. Additionally, as pointed out by Kougiannou and Mendonça (2021) in their UK delivery platform work research, algorithmic management seemingly diminishes opportunities for non-union forms of voice and thus generates support for collective voice mechanisms. Indeed, in our research, most platform workers do not feel that they would have a say in decisions that changed the way they went about their work.

Turning to our third research question, in line with the recent findings of Hertel-Fernandez et al. (2022) in the United States, low pay, insecurity, risk and lack of voice also provide a rationale for platform worker support for forms of voice via co-determination (i.e. worker representatives and consultation mechanisms). Interestingly, female respondents and those born outside the UK were somewhat less supportive of some aspects of co-determination. Specifically, female workers were less supportive of workers being consulted on all major changes. One reason for this may be that the well-documented unequal division of domestic labour in the UK means that female workers are more hesitant to take on the additional burden that greater consultation might entail. Indeed, there was no statistically significant difference between men and women when it came to other forms of co-determination, such as worker representatives approving decisions and the holding of assemblies, which might be considered less burdensome for individual workers. This interpretation is supported by James' (2022) qualitative study of UK remote platform workers that finds that female workers value flexibility in the gig economy as a means of combining childcare and domestic labour with paid work. Likewise, non-UK quantitative research by Berg et al. (2018) and Gerber (2022) also finds that female platform workers are more likely to undertake this work due to caring responsibilities. Additionally, a mixed methods study of African and Asian remote workers highlights the ability to combine productive and reproductive work as being a major benefit for female workers (Wood et al., 2016). That female platform workers frequently combine caring and paid work is also supported by the mixed methods US delivery research of Milkman et al. (2021). Therefore, it may be that the wider gendered division of labour shapes workers' views towards forms of co-determination in the gig economy. The uneven gendered division of domestic labour might also explain why female workers were more supportive of the right to disconnect, paid holiday and employer pension contributions.

The responses of migrant workers were also seemingly shaped by wider inequalities with these workers tending to face discrimination in the UK labour market (Heath & Di Stasio, 2019). Non-UK-born workers were less supportive of an elected body of worker representatives approving changes that impact employment and working conditions and human reviews of all major automated decisions (such as ratings and deactivations). They were, likewise, more supportive of government-provided life-long skills training and government protections against data discrimination. These findings are in line with recent research that has emphasized the importance of understanding platform work as shaped by racial and migration dynamics (Dias-Abey, 2022; Gebrial, 2022; Van Doorn et al., 2023).

An interesting policy that has been advocated by politicians and trade unions in response to the digitalization of work is that companies be legally required to consult their workforce when introducing new technologies (see, e.g., Labour, 2022; TUC, 2021). But our findings suggest that workers are in fact keen to avoid such a fixation with technology, whereby its regulation becomes an end in itself, separate from issues of employment and working conditions. There was also little support for a data-centric approach whereby workers would have access to 'information about how the platform uses AI and algorithms' and 'a right to request a personal and understandable explanation'. Again, policies such as these have frequently been trumpeted as a means of countering overwork (see, e.g., Labour, 2022; TUC, 2021). This is not to say that those advocating such policies are wrong to do so, or that if implemented they would be ineffectual in terms of improving the lives of platform workers. But it does suggest that advocates for such policies may need to do a better job of communicating the benefits of such polices to workers. At present, the benefits of these narrow technology-focused policies are not seemingly obvious to workers who instead prioritize policies focusing on co-determination.

Our final research question was whether local and remote platform workers exhibit differences in their stated policy and representational preferences. Whether workers were doing remote or local platform work made little difference to their support for labour rights, co-determination or trade unions. The only statistically significant differences were local platform workers being more likely to support paid holiday and less likely to support protection against unfair dismissal and these workers perceiving trade unions to be more effective and focused on improving the platform economy than their remote counterparts.

9 | CONCLUSION

Investigating what workers want is an important strand within industrial relations research (Bryson, 2003; Bryson & Freeman, 2007; 2013; Charlwood, 2002; Freeman & Rogers, 1999; 2006; Freeman et al., 2007; Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2022; Jansen, 2019). However, little is known about the preferences of hard-to-reach but policy-relevant subgroups, such as platform workers. Nevertheless, there has been great political, public and academic interest regarding the UK gig economy. However, the lack of a robust sampling frame makes traditional survey sampling techniques poorly suited for investigating these workers' policy and representational preferences. This article attempts to rectify this by making use of a novel online sampling technique to generate a strategic non-representative sample with which to investigate within population differences and their absence.

Our results highlight a high level of support for rights that ensure minimum standards for pay and protection from unfair dismissal. This support exists despite the workers in our study seeing their platform work as self-employment, and the self-employed being excluded from such rights and protections. We also highlight a widespread unmet demand for collective organization (including trade unions) and greater voice via co-determination mechanisms.

In line with extant qualitative research, we principally explain these findings with reference to the low pay, insecurity, risk and lack of organizational voice that platform work frequently entails. That these precarious working conditions are shared across local and remote types of platform work explains the surprising finding that across this divide what workers want is largely similar despite undertaking very different types of work. Extant research supports the picture that emerges from our data and we, therefore, believe there are grounds for confidence in the findings holding for more representative samples. However, this is something that needs to be

tested once a robust sampling frame for the UK gig economy has been established. Additionally, findings and proposed mechanisms relating to the differences in support for co-determination policies by sex and migrant-status should be tested. Such preferences tend to be more focused on ensuring work-life balance and avoiding discrimination by humans, respectively. These concerns seemingly align with the wider gendered division of domestic labour and experiences of discrimination in the UK labour market. The implication that precarious working conditions such as low pay, insecurity, risk and lack of organizational voice generate support for stronger labour rights, collective organization and co-determination across different types of work regardless of employment classification might have important implications for the future of work generally. Deskilling, precarity and intensity have been highlighted as likely consequences of the spread of algorithmic technologies to standard workplaces (Wood, 2021), this raises the question of whether the future might witness consonant growth in support for labour rights, collective organization and co-determination at work.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Research was performed on humans/animals and received ethical approval from the Bristol University School of Management Research Ethics Committee. Data are available upon request.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Codetermination refers to 'a structure of decision-making within an enterprise whereby employees and their representatives exert influence on decisions, often at a senior level and at a relatively early stage' (Eurofound, 2020).

[2] In the UK, employee status entails a written or implied contract for regular work with an employer who directs when and how this work is done. This contrasts with (i) 'worker' status where the employment contract does not commit the worker or employer to regular work, and (ii) 'self-employed' or 'independent contractor' status where the worker decides when, how and if work is to be done and is typically paid for individual jobs via invoices to clients. More employment rights accrue to employees than workers (e.g. minimum notice periods if their employment is ending, protection against unfair dismissal, time off for emergencies, statutory redundancy, sick and parental pay).

[3] Sixth placed 'guaranteed predictable weekly hours' was only 4 percentage points outside of the top five priorities, there was then a 7 percentage point drop to seventh place.

[4] Gross pay data are not available for the 2017 SES.

[5] Although it should be noted that intense working is a widespread feature of the UK labour market. The 2017 SES finds similarly high numbers working to tight deadlines across the UK (Green et al., 2022).

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