The Two Faces of the New Work Order

Navigating Flexibility and Mobility in Canada's Talent Economy

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The Gig Economy is No Longer on the Fringe. It's One-Fifth of the Workforce.

22%

Nearly one-quarter of all Canadians are now participating in the gig economy. Most have turned to this work out of financial necessity, often in response to the rising cost of living, while others are drawn by the promise of flexibility. This represents a fundamental shift in how Canadians earn, work, and live.

Source: Securian Canada, 'Behind the Gig' Survey

Beyond the ‘Gig Worker’: A New Framework for a Complex Reality

The term ‘gig worker’ is often used as a monolith, but the reality is far more diverse. To understand this new workforce, we must look beyond the single label and examine the different types of capital—capital—human, social, and economic—that workers bring to the table. This lens reveals four distinct archetypes.

Source: Future Skills Centre, ‘A Typology of Gig Workers in Canada’.

Four Archetypes, Four Different Realities

The Platform Professional

Leverages specialized skills and expertise on a project basis. *High Human, High Economic Capital.*

Upwork 99designs Talmix

The Entrepreneurial Influencer

Builds a personal brand and leverages social capital for income. *High Human, Low Economic Capital.*

YouTube KICKSTARTER

The Asset Enabler

Monetizes a personal, durable asset they own or lease. *Low Human, High Economic Capital.*

Uber lyft TURO

The Tasker

Provides on-demand labor for specific, often low-skill tasks. *Low Human, Low Economic Capital.*

TaskRabbit foodora amazon Mechanical Turk

Flexibility Comes at a Price: The Growing Financial Vulnerability of Gig Workers

For many, gig work is a response to economic pressure, not a choice for pure flexibility. This creates a dangerous paradox: the very people turning to gig work for financial reasons are often the most exposed to risk.

A significant portion of gig workers remain uninsured or under-insured, increasing their financial vulnerability.

- Many gig workers are supplementing full-time employment to make ends meet, revealing underlying economic pressures.
- Most have turned to gig work out of financial necessity.
- A significant insurance gap exists, leaving many without a safety net.

Source: Securian Canada

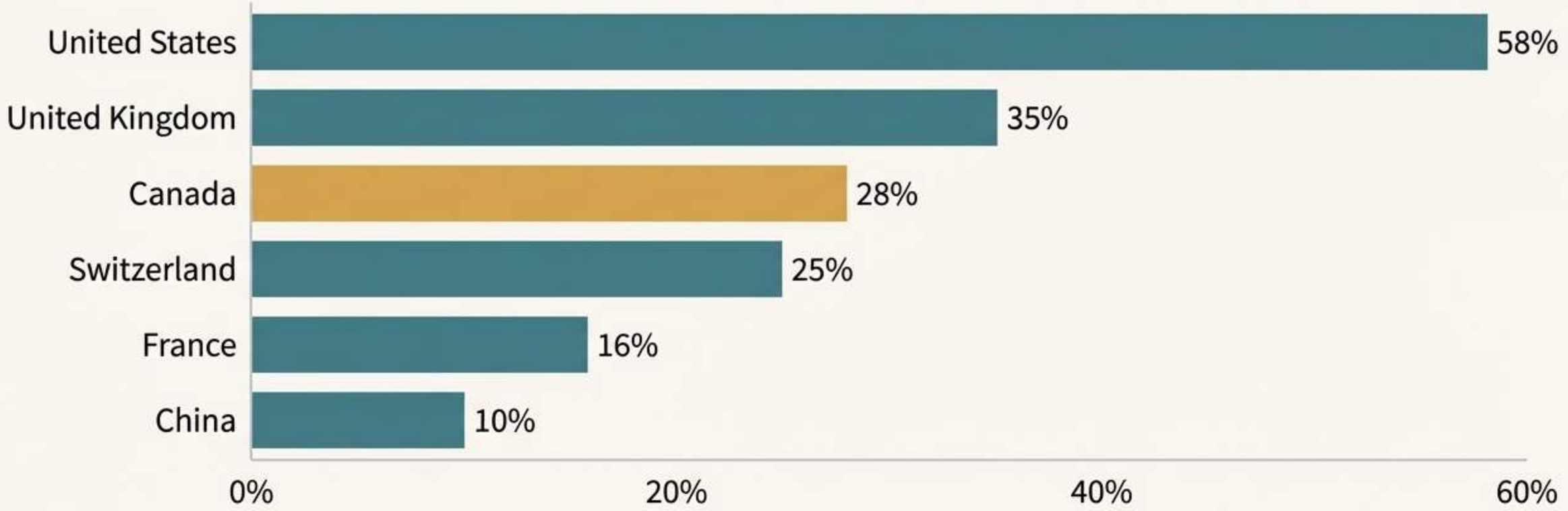
While One Workforce Seeks Stability, Another Redefines Mobility

At the other end of the spectrum, a different story is unfolding. A fierce global competition is underway for elite talent, particularly in high-growth fields like Artificial Intelligence. For these highly skilled professionals, the world is an open marketplace. Canada has emerged as a key player in this contest, but attracting talent is only half the battle.

Canada is a Top-Tier Destination in the Global Race for AI Talent

Top Destinations for Elite AI Researchers

Percentage of researchers with a >25% likelihood of moving to the country in the next 3 years



Key Takeaway: Canada ranks third globally as a potential destination for top-tier AI researchers, outperforming major hubs in Europe and Asia.

Source: Zwetsloot et al., "Skilled and Mobile: Survey Evidence of AI Researchers' Immigration P

The Brain Drain is Over. The Battle for "Brain 'Circulation" Has Begun.

Canada excels at attracting foreign talent, but it faces a significant challenge in retaining it. Skilled immigrants are more likely than Canadian-born citizens to pursue opportunities in the U.S., turning Canada into a “way station” rather than a final destination.

Higher Emigration Rate

The rate of emigration to the U.S. is nearly **twice as high** for Canada’s foreign-born population (**8.2 per 10,000**) compared to its Canadian-born population (**4.8 per 10,000**).

Growing Share of Departures

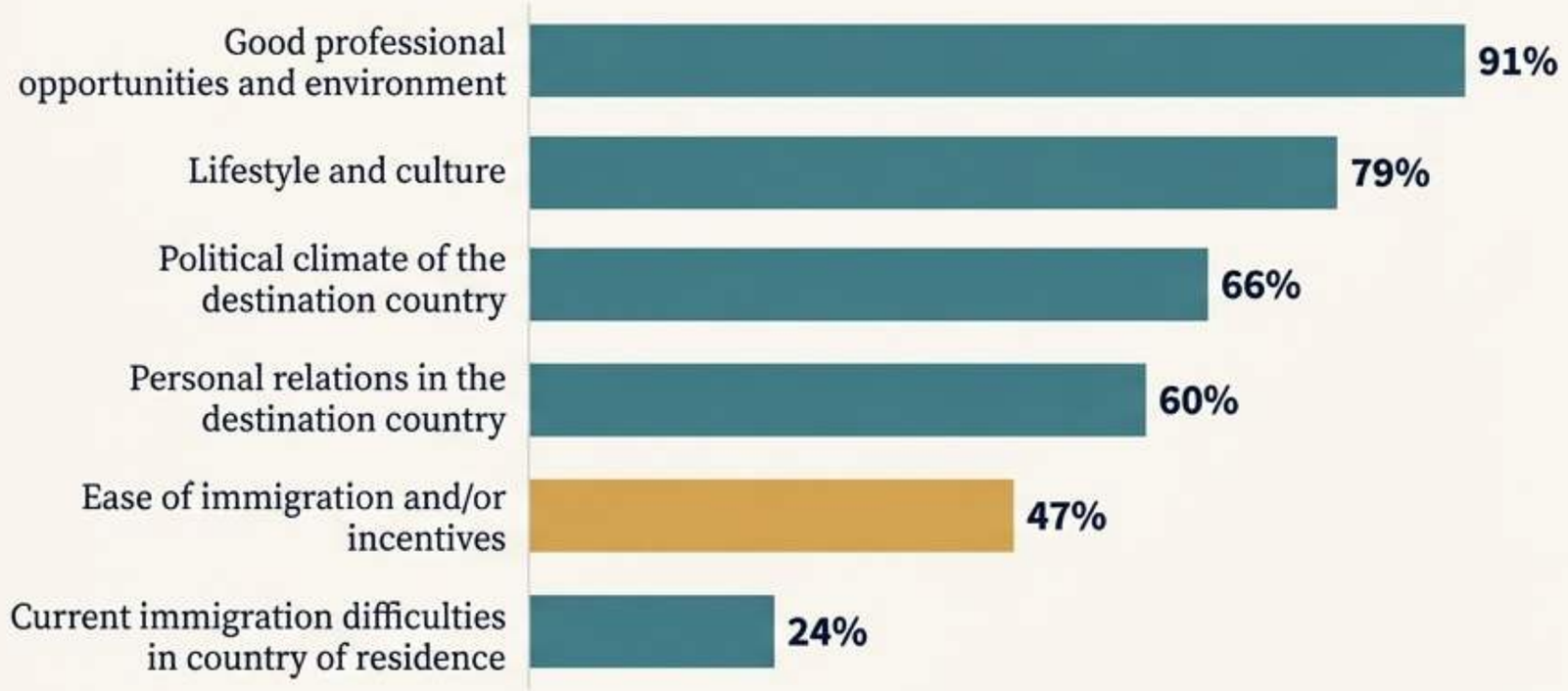
By 2024, foreign-born Canadian citizens accounted for **60% of all Canadian applicants** for U.S. permanent labor certification, up from **54%** a decade earlier.

Source: Statistics Canada

What Drives the Decisions of the World's Most Mobile Talent?

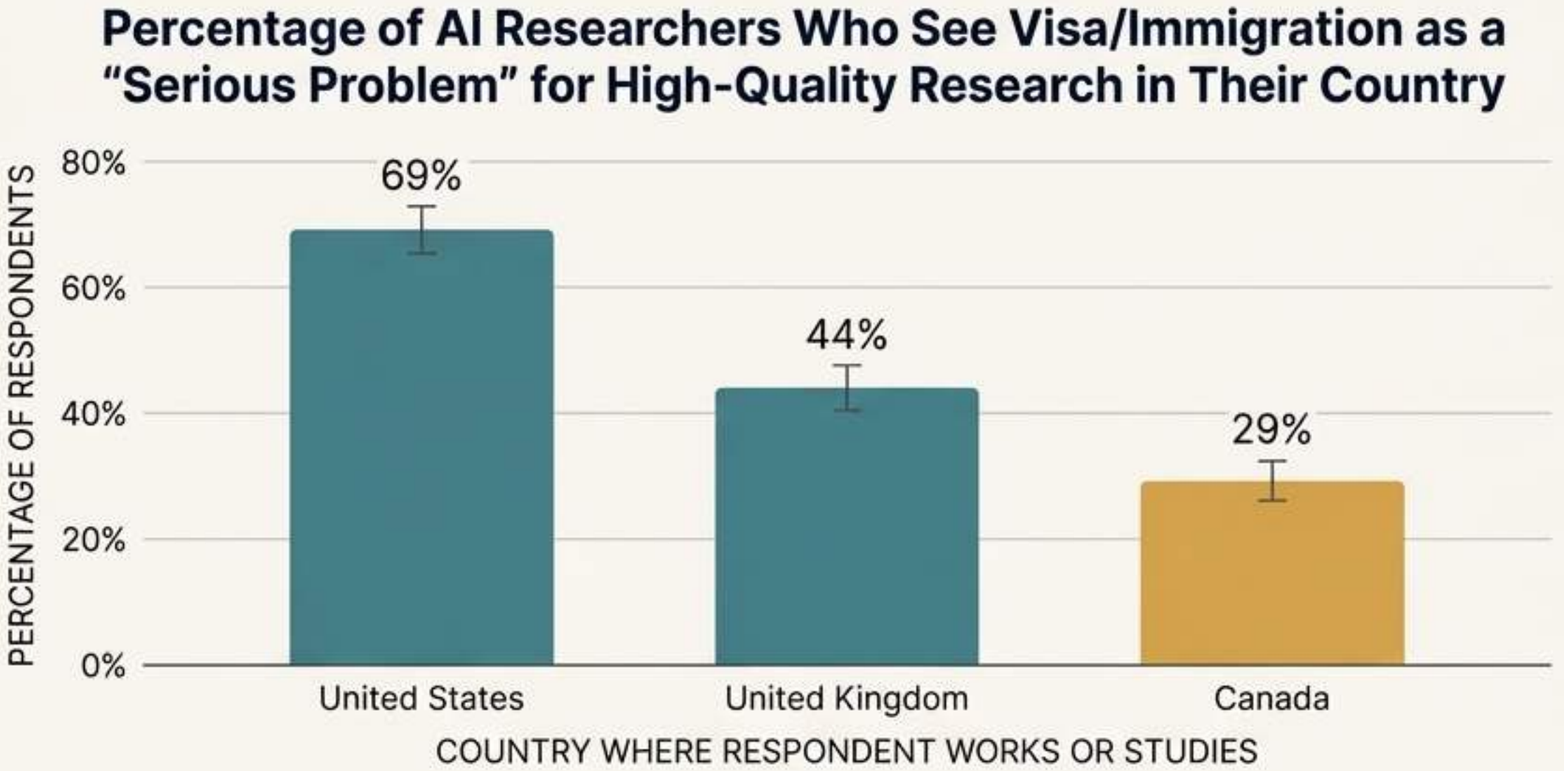
For elite researchers, career moves are a multi-faceted decision. While professional environment is paramount, factors like culture, political climate, and—critically—the ease of immigration play a significant role.

Factors Influencing AI Researchers' Immigration Decisions



Source: Zwetsloot et al., "Skilled and Mobile: Survey Evidence of AI Researchers' Immigration Preferences"

Immigration Friction is a Serious—and Solvable—Barrier to Retaining Talent



Key Insight: Nearly one-third of top AI researchers already in Canada view its immigration system as a significant impediment. While not as severe as in the U.S. or U.K., this friction actively undermines Canada's ability to be a long-term 'home' for the talent it attracts.

Source: Zwetsloot et al., "Skilled and Mobile: Survey Evidence of AI Researchers' Immigration Preferences"

Two Sides of f the Same Coin: The Great Unbundling of Work

The precarity of the ‘Tasker’ and the hyper-mobility of the ‘AI Researcher’ are not separate trends. They are both consequences of the same fundamental shift: the decoupling of work from the traditional, stable, single-employer relationship. The old systems of support, career progression, and social safety nets were built for a world that is rapidly disappearing.

A Tale of Two Workers

Amir, the Newcomer Tasker

Highly skilled, but with credentials undervalued by the traditional job market, Amir turns to gig work for immediate entry into the Canadian workforce. The flexibility is a benefit, but he operates without an insurance safety net, exposing his family to financial risk.

Data Tie-in
Cites over-representation of new immigrants in precarious gig work and the insurance gap identified by Securian Canada.

Chloe, the Mobile AI Researcher

Recruited to a top Canadian AI institute, Chloe is drawn by the country's strong research community. However, she finds the path to permanent residency complex and faces constant recruitment from U.S. firms offering higher salaries and more streamlined visa options. For her, Canada risks being a stopover, not a destination.

Data Tie-in
Cites Canada's #3 ranking, the 29% who see visa issues as a problem, and the high rate of skilled immigrant outflow to the U.S.

The New Questions for a New Work Order

1 

How can we design a 21st-century safety net for a workforce defined by flexibility and independence?

(Links to the precarity issue; mentions concepts like portable benefits)

2 

What turns a country from a talent destination into a talent ‘home’?

(Links to the retention issue; mentions reducing friction in immigration and fostering long-term career paths)

3 

Who is responsible for skills development and career progression when long-term roles unbundle into short-term tasks?

(Connects both themes to the future of skills and lifelong learning)