



# HOW BACK-TO-OFFICE POLICIES RESONATE THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE ECONOMY

An Ipsos Point of View

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GAME CHANGERS



## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Less than half of American workers are commuting to the office full-time, and many say they “haven’t missed a beat” working remotely
- Back-to-office decisions will affect businesses from commercial real estate to small businesses to public transportation
- Many workers have their eye on the door as many options have opened amid the Great Resignation, so companies must be careful about forcing employees to return

## As COVID cases decline, many companies are reconsidering back-to-office plans—but must be mindful of workers’ preferences amid the Great Resignation

As cases of coronavirus decline, states and localities are gradually reducing or eliminating pandemic restrictions and requirements in an effort to get back to “normal.” One result: Many American workers are heading back to the office after working remotely for quite some time.

The return, however, is far from the normal work routines they had two years ago. Changes in worker preferences and company policies have truly impacted office life and a ripple effect is being felt by the companies that have long supported the American office culture. Large commercial real estate companies and small businesses like coffee shops will both need to adjust to the new normal in order to stay afloat.

Prior to COVID, almost 7 in 10 workers commuted to their office/place of work 5 days a week (or more), according to polling from Ipsos’ Coronavirus Consumer Tracker. One in five (21%) say they commuted 1 to 4 days a week, and 10% of workers worked remotely from home all week.

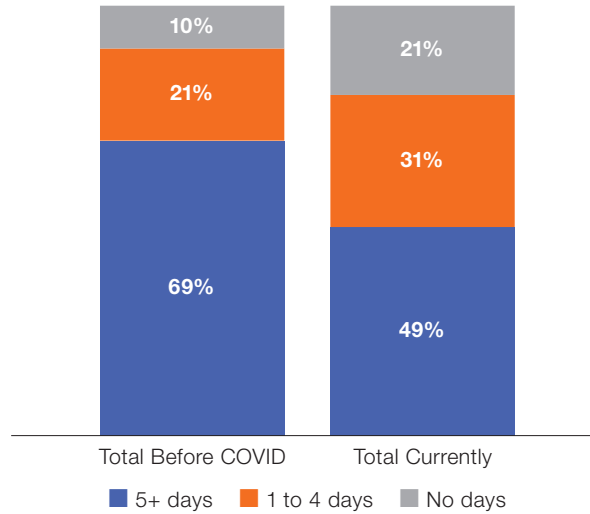


While many offices have reopened since the early days of the pandemic, we still see that fewer than half of U.S. workers have returned to commuting a full 5 days a week. About a third of workers have

returned part time (1 to 4 days), while 21% of employed adults are still only working remotely—more than double the number who did so prior to the pandemic.

### Number of days commuting per week

Pre-COVID compared to Current



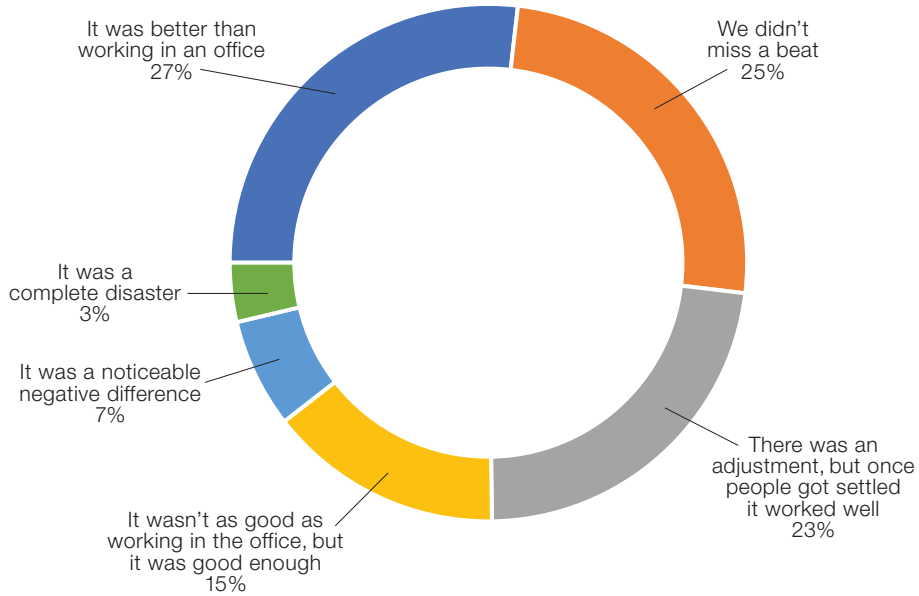
Q. Before the pandemic, how many days a week did you commute to your workplace? (Base = Employed adults)  
 Q. Currently, how many days a week are you commuting to your workplace?  
 Source: Ipsos Coronavirus Consumer Tracker



The return to the office is being met with mixed emotions. When asked how successful working from home was for their company, the vast majority of workers had a positive view, while only 1 in 4

workers felt negative. In fact, more than half of all workers who shifted to at home/remote-officing during the pandemic said it was “better than working in an office” or that they “didn’t miss a beat.”

### Total working from home



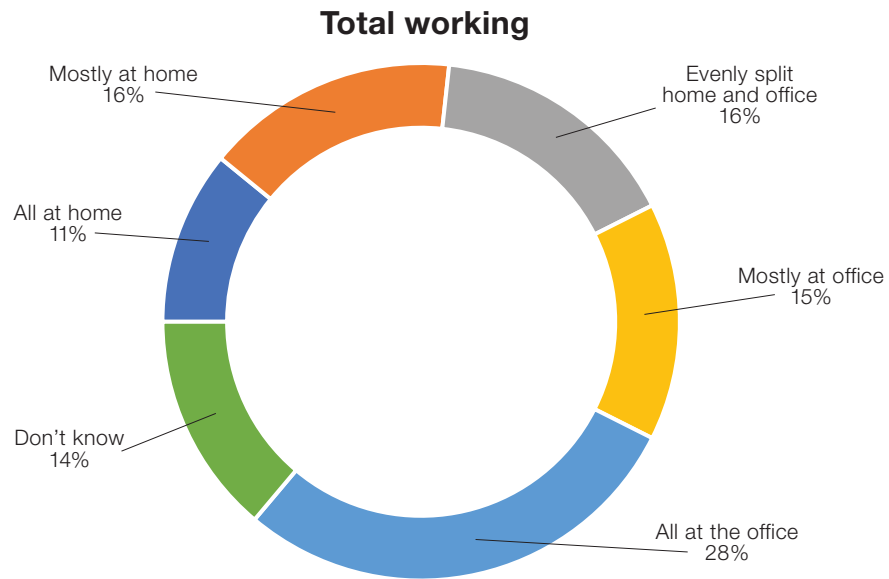
Q. How successful was working from home for your company? (Base: All adults who worked from home during the pandemic)  
Source: Ipsos Affluent Barometer – Q1-2022





Given how successful the pandemic working arrangement has been, it's no surprise that many workers see the future of work as quite different from the past. Having enjoyed the freedom of fewer hours lost to commuting—which for many resulted in a better work/life balance—it's understandable

that few workers want to go back to the status quo that existed before COVID. The majority of workers (58%) feel that the right mix of work should include some days working from home versus working in an office all of the time. Just 28% of workers believe that work should be “all at the office.”



Q. In your opinion, what is closest to the right mix of working from home versus working in an office after pandemic restrictions are lifted?  
Source: Ipsos Coronavirus Consumer Tracker



If the hybrid in-office/work-from-home model continues, it will have massive implications for both the office set-up and the interactions that will happen among colleagues. About a third of workers who have returned say that their companies are limiting the number of employees that can be in the workplace on any given day, and an equal number say that their companies are reducing the number of days workers need to be in the office. It remains to be seen if commercial real estate is hurt by these decisions, as roughly the same number of workers say that their companies reorganized the workplace to allow for more distance between employees. If that continues, companies may still need to lease the same amount of space they currently do, despite the fact that fewer employees are on premise.

Alternatively, if companies feel that productivity has remained high and a significant portion of their workforce wants flexible working arrangements, this could deeply affect small businesses that will suffer if fewer people are coming daily to downtown cities or office parks. That means restaurants and stores in those areas would likely never regain their pre-pandemic business, leaving a gaping hole in urban economies.

While most workers believe that returning to the office means they'll return to their old commuting routine, roughly 1 in 4 believe they will change the way they commute. Of those people who say their commute will change, the majority (56%) expect that they will drive to work more often, with an additional 23% saying they expect to walk or bike more often. Given the continued concerns about the potential to be infected in crowded situations, it's not surprising to see that people are looking at alternatives other than public transportation.

Looming over it all remains the dynamic of the Great Resignation and the state of worker satisfaction. According to our poll, a little less than half (44%) of employed adults are satisfied with their current job and not looking for another—and 30% of employees say they are either actively looking for a new job or would consider another offer if something came up.

This highlights the tightrope that employers are currently navigating as they try to make decisions about balancing productivity needs with employee desire for flexible work options. With almost 1 in 3 employees potential flight risks, good company policies and practices may help keep highly valuable talent.



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