

# LSRA SURVEY ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS

Damian Loscher  
Jessica Nogueira  
Jiahui Sun

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# INTRODUCTION

# 01

# Background, Objectives & Methodology

## Background

The Legal Services Regulatory Authority (LSRA) has introduced regulations to establish legal partnerships (LPs) as a new business structure for legal services providers in Ireland. LPs allow barristers and solicitors, or barristers and barristers, to work together, sharing profits and liabilities. The sharing of resources between solicitors and barristers may create efficiencies, which should result in cost savings.

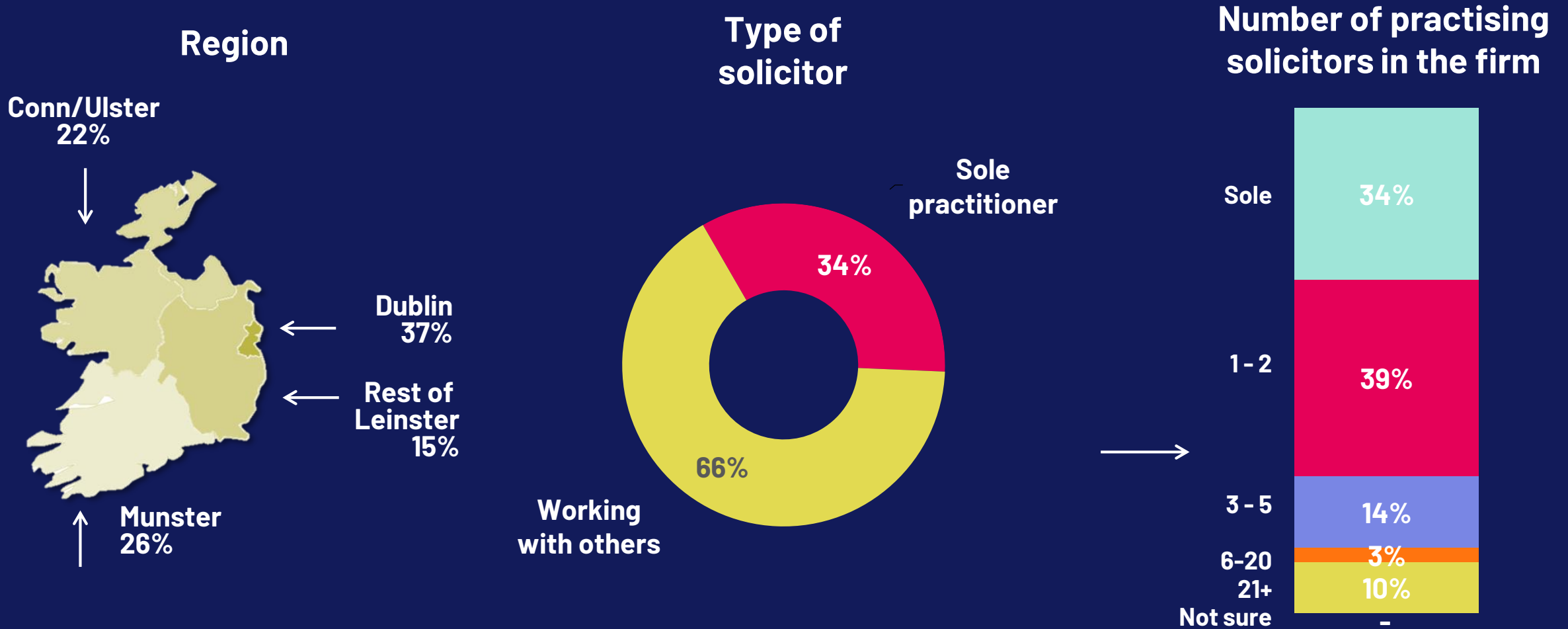
## Objectives

- Gauge the awareness and perspectives of solicitors regarding the introduction of legal partnerships in Ireland.
- Understand the potential impact, benefits, and concerns of this new business structure among solicitors in Ireland.

## Methodology

- Fieldwork Dates: 29th August to 17th September 2024.
- Final Sample: Survey of 213 solicitors selected from 201 legal firms. Participants were managing partners and senior partners.
- Sample: Solicitor firms sample sourced from Bill Moss Partnership, supplemented by a "Top 20 Solicitors Firms" list provided by LSRA in order to ensure the large firms would be included in the research as they have a significant impact on the legal services market.
- Methodology: Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI)

# Sample Profile



Q.1 Firstly, some questions about your firm. Are you the sole practising solicitor or are there other qualified solicitors working in the firm?

Base: All Respondents: 213

Q.2 And how many other practising solicitors are employed by the firm?

Base: All that have other qualified solicitors working in the firm: 141

# FINDINGS

# 02



# VIEWS ON LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS



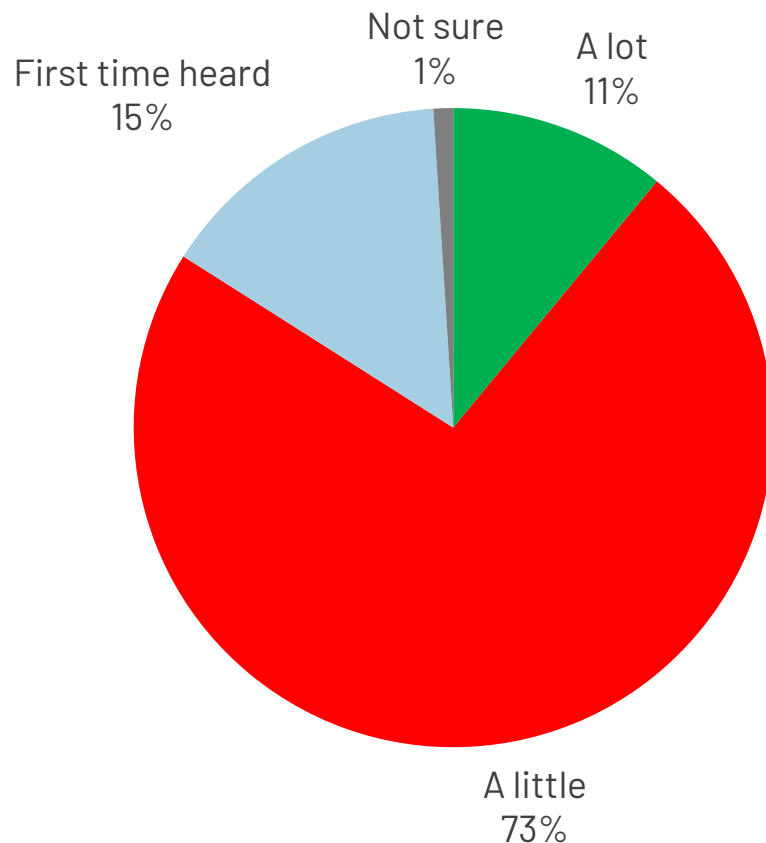
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# Level of Awareness of Legal Partnerships

Awareness of LPs among solicitors is limited, with 7 in 10 saying they have little knowledge about the topic. 15% heard about LPs for the first time during the interview.



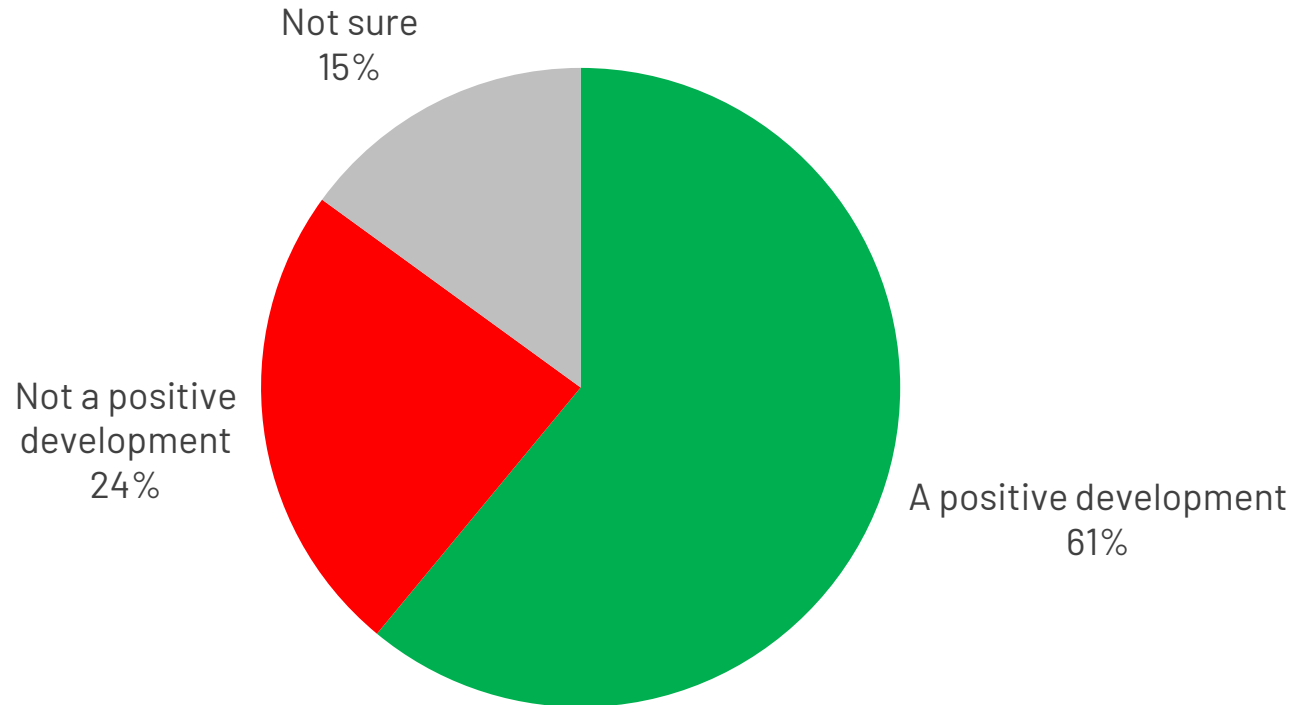
Those saying they **know a lot** about LPs are more likely to be the solicitors in **Dublin** (16%) and those **working with other solicitors** (14%).

Q.4 The focus of the survey is on the planned introduction of legal partnerships in Ireland. Would you say you know a lot or a little about the planned introduction of legal partnerships, or is this the first time you have heard of it?  
Base: All Respondents: 213



# Views on Introduction of Legal Partnerships

The majority (61%) see the introduction of LPs in Ireland as a positive development for the legal services market, while 24% say it's not a positive development.



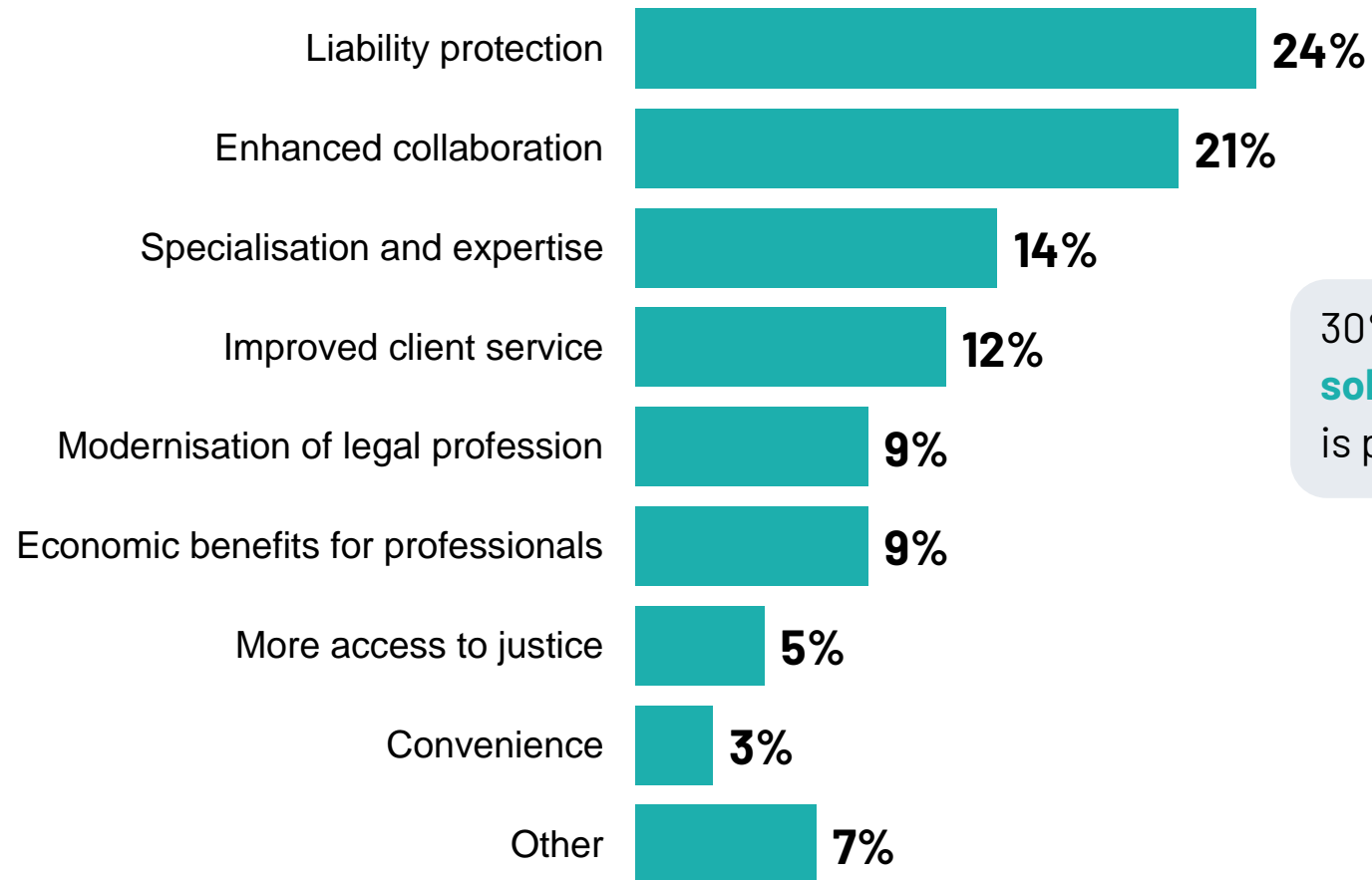
Those saying the introduction of LPs in Ireland is a positive development are more likely to be **female** solicitors (75%) and solicitors working in **Connaught/Ulster** (74%).

Those working in firms with **5+ solicitors\*** are also more likely to think it's a positive development compared to those working in smaller firms (63%\* vs 56% respectively).

Q.5 In general, do you think the introduction of legal partnerships is a positive or welcome development in the legal services market in Ireland or not?  
Base: All Respondents: 213

# Positive Views – Spontaneous Reasons

Increased liability protection and enhanced collaboration between solicitors and barristers are the two main reasons for holding a positive view of LPs.



30% of those working **as sole solicitors** say the introduction of LPs is positive due to liability protection.

Q.6a In your own words, why do you think it is positive?  
Base: All who think it is a positive development: 129

# Positive Views – Reasons (Verbatim)

*"It limits the personal liability of the participants."*

*"It limits the liability of the partners and of their claims."*

*"It will enhance skill sets."*

*"Cannot do it as an individual anymore, partnerships are necessary going forward."*

*"It will enable solicitors to retire and save on personal liability."*

*"It can only improve on services to the customer."*

*"It will allow for combining skills and efficiencies."*

*"Being innovative allows barristers to form in effect a chamber in a more formal structure. Barristers & solicitors can practice together as partners, and they can give a better offer to the public."*

*"This brings in extra expertise into a firm about legislation, people working together on different aspects of law is better than working on their own."*

*"It will assist younger barristers with a certainty of income."*

*"It brings us into line with other countries and modernises the legal system."*

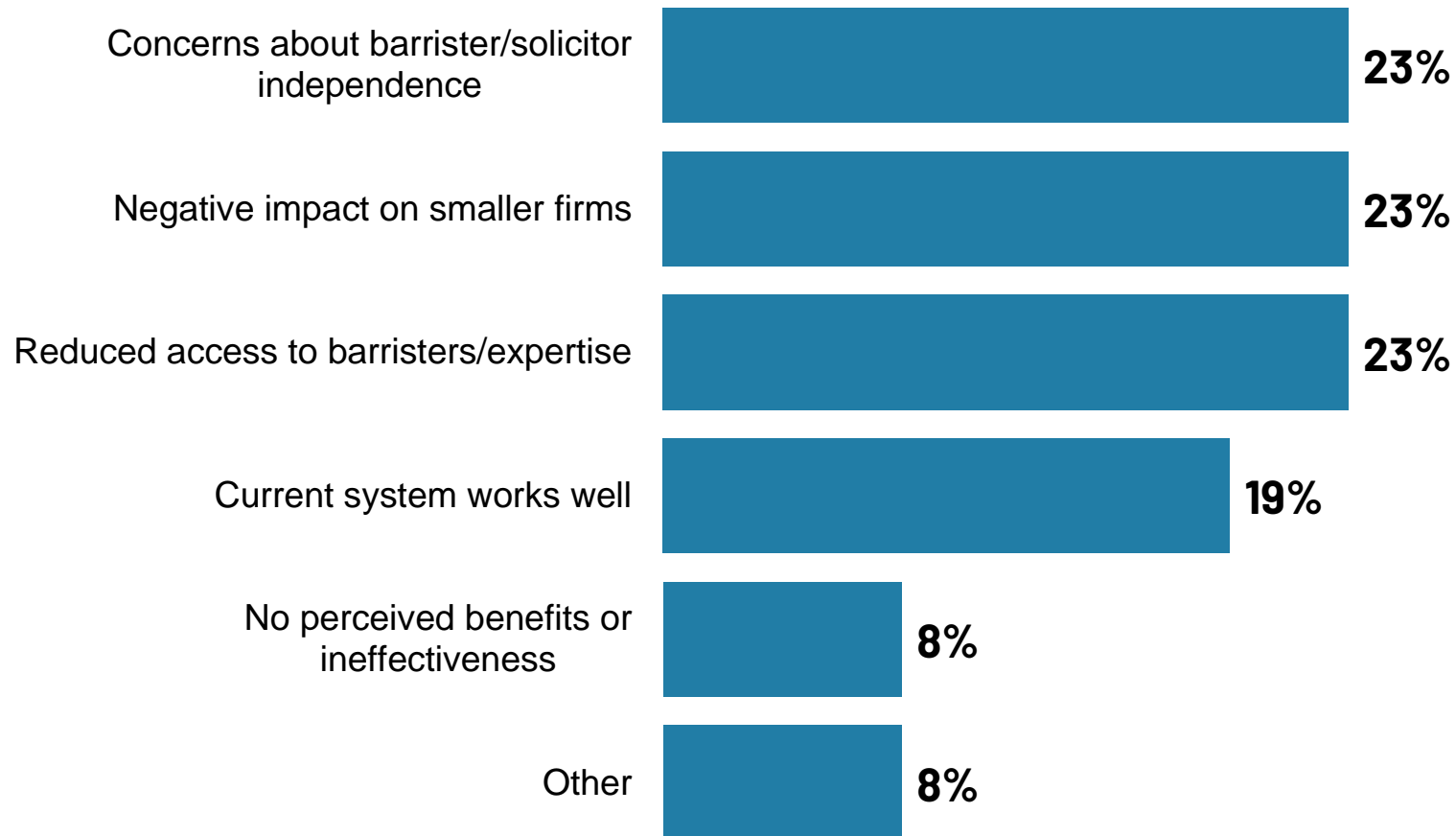
*"Because it will be a one-stop shop for in-house work and convenient for both parties to be able to talk to each other directly."*

*"It is easier for solicitors to negotiate with barristers about cases."*

*"Provide more access to justice."*

# Not Positive Views – Spontaneous Reasons

Among those saying LPs are not a positive development, there are concerns about barrister and solicitor separation and independence as well as the potential negative impact on small firms and access to barristers.



Q.6b In your own words, why do you think it is not positive?  
Base: All who think it is not a positive development: 52

# Not Positive Views – Reasons (Verbatim)

*“Barristers should be independent of solicitors.”*

*“I think there should be equal access for all, if big practices buy in the top barristers, it will reduce access to others.”*

*“The bigger law firms will enter into partnership with the best barristers, and they won't be available then to the smaller firms.”*

*“It is appropriate that barristers & solicitors be kept separate entities.”*

*“If it's allowed, the small firms would lose access to barristers.”*

*“The independence of the barrister is very important to the public, in general.”*

*“At present, as a solicitor, I have access to any barristers throughout the country. If they form partnerships with others it will lead to a situation where they won't be available to everyone.”*

*“I do not think solicitors and barristers should be in the one partnership because barristers are better to be self employed. System at the moment works perfectly.”*

*“It's not positive, won't have any impact. I can't see many barristers wanting to partner with a solicitor.”*

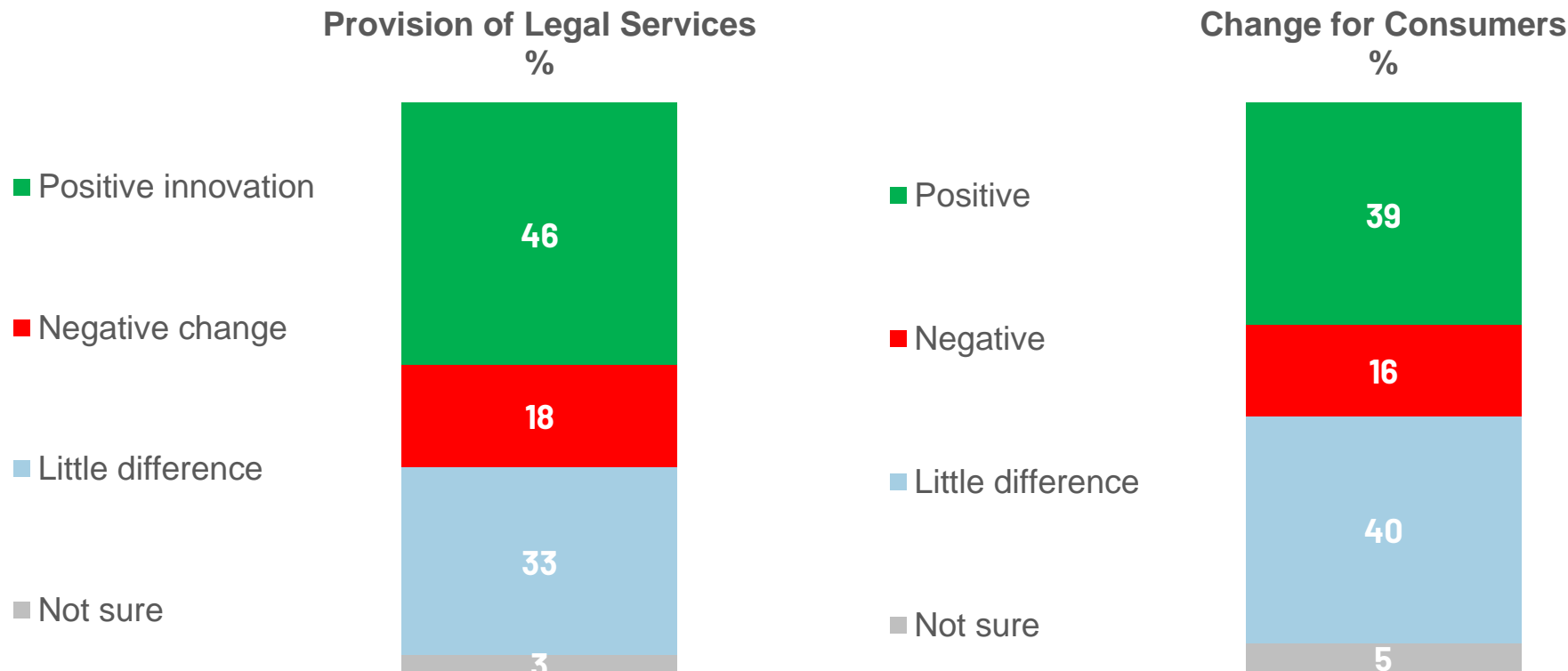
*“Waste of time because the systems works well as it is.”*

*“It restricts the access for firms like mine to the top-quality barristers as the big firms will have availed themselves of them.”*

*“It will concentrate on the legal expertise in a smaller number of businesses depriving ordinary people of access to legal services. It will take away independent barristers who are available to everyone.”*

# Views on Impact of LPs for Provision of Legal Services and for Consumers of Legal Services

46% see the introduction of LPs as a positive innovation for the provision of legal services, while 39% say it will be positive for consumers.



**Sole practitioner solicitors** are more likely to see LPs as a positive innovation (56%) and a positive change for consumers (47%) than those working with other solicitors.

Q.7 Do you think the introduction of legal partnerships will be a positive innovation or a negative change for the provision of legal services, or will make little difference?

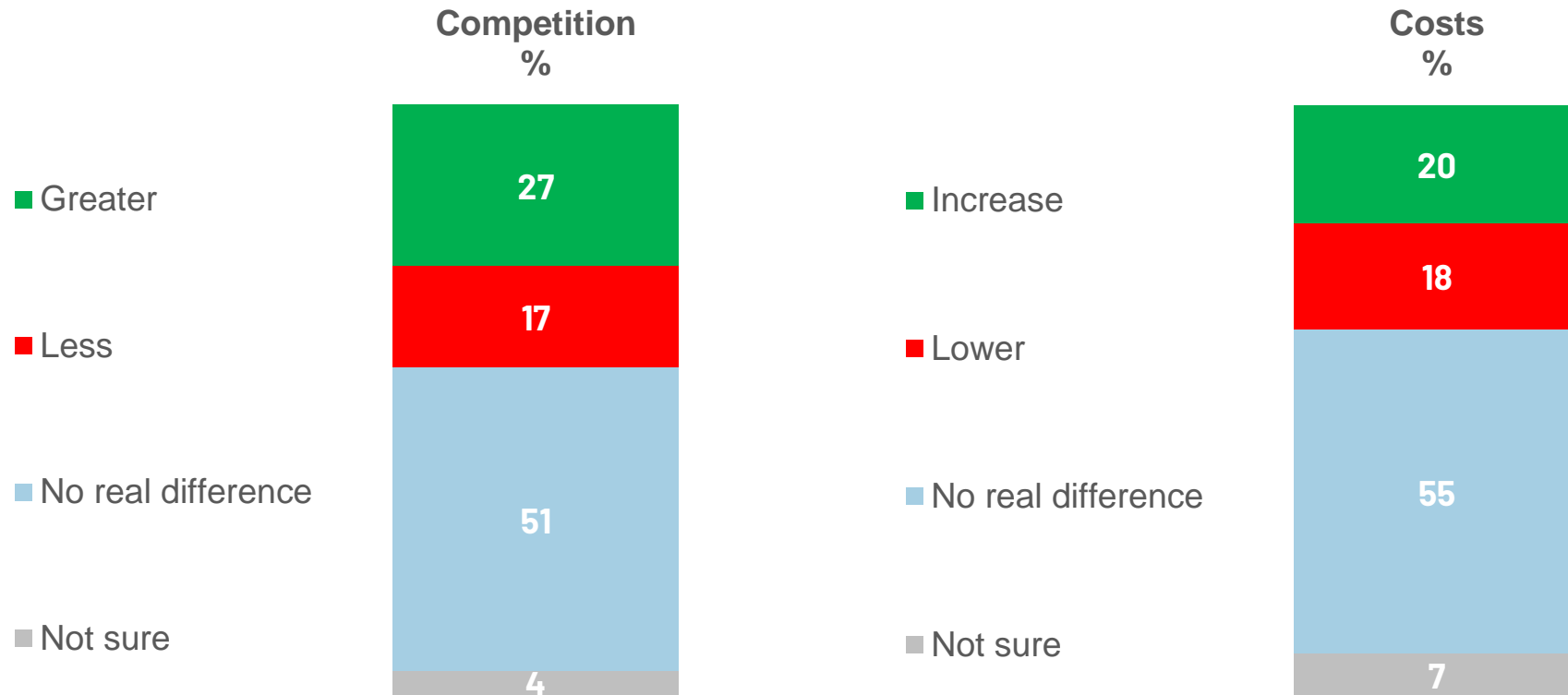
Base: All Respondents: 213

Q.8 Do you think the introduction of legal partnerships will be a positive or a negative change for consumers of legal services, or will make little difference?

Base: All Respondents: 213

# Views on Impact of LPs on Competition and Costs

About half of solicitors think the introduction of LPs will make no difference in terms of competition (51%) or legal costs (55%) for consumers.



53% of **solicitors working in small firms** (2 to 4 solicitors) say LPs will make no real difference in competition. 63% of them say the same about costs.

Solicitors with **positive views** on the introduction of LPs are more likely to say it will result in greater competition (40%) and lower costs (25%).

Q.8a Do you think it will result in greater competition in the legal services market, less competition or will it make no real difference?

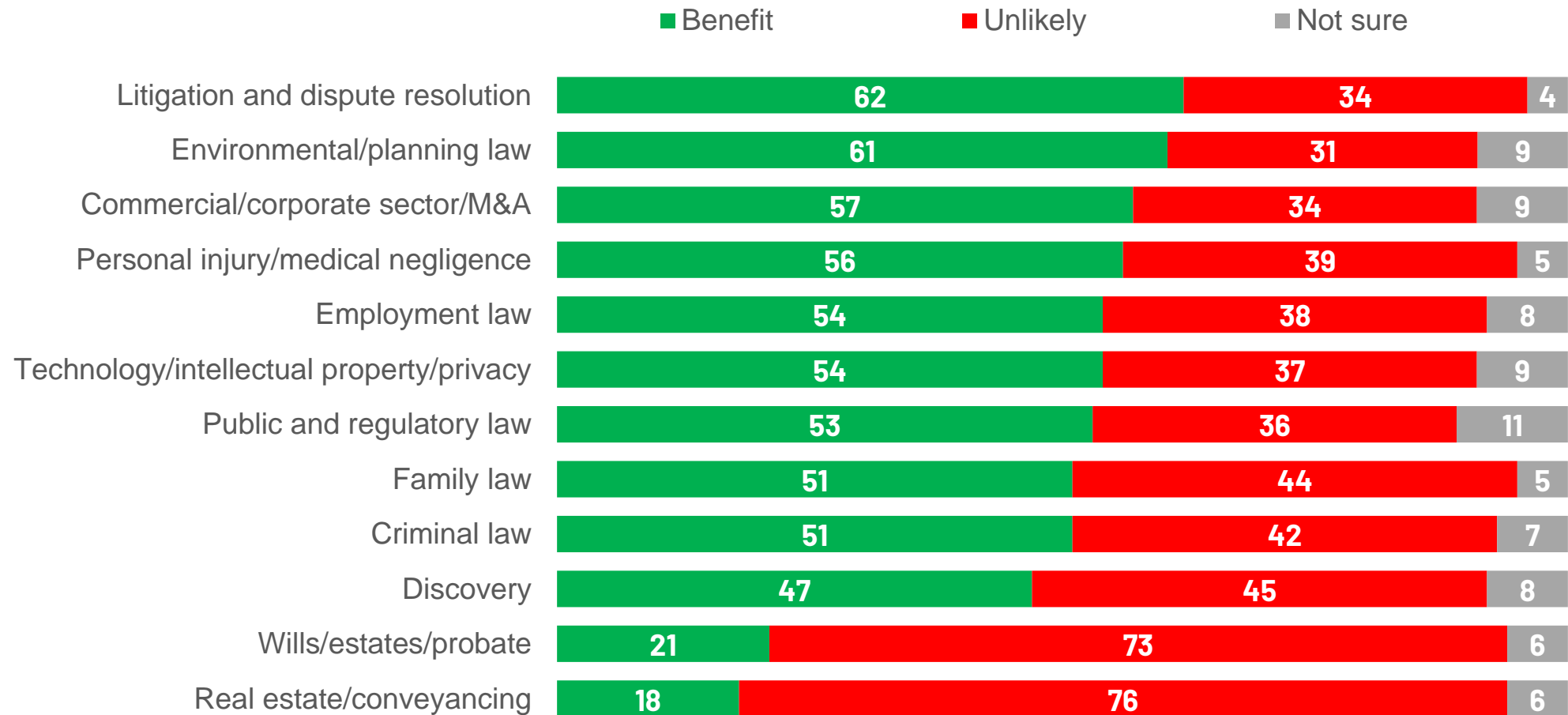
Base: All Respondents: 213

Q.8b And do you think it will increase legal costs for consumers, lower costs or make no real difference?

Base: All Respondents: 213

# Views on Benefits of LPs in Different Areas of Legal Practice

All areas of law are seen to have the potential to benefit from the introduction of LPs, except Wills/estate/probate and Real estate/conveyancing.



Q.9 I am going to read out different areas of law, and for each one please tell me if you think that area will benefit from the introduction of legal partnerships or if you think that area is unlikely to benefit?

Base: All Respondents: 213



# SOLICITOR-BARRISTER LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS EXPECTATIONS

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# Average Proportion of Firms Expected to Form Solicitor-Barrister Legal Partnerships in the Next 5 Years, as Estimated by Respondents

# 14%

Among **sole practitioner solicitors**, the expectation is that 18% of firms will form solicitor-barrister legal partnerships versus 13% among solicitors working with others.

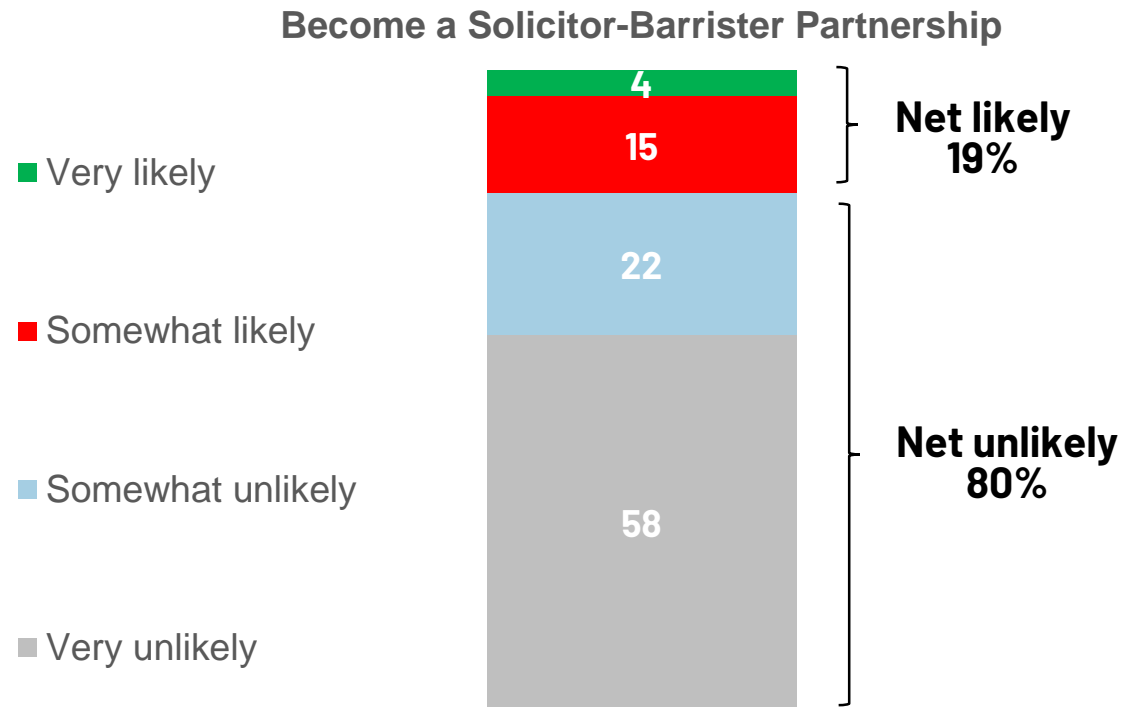
Solicitors working in **firms with 5+ solicitors** are less likely to expect firms to form LPs in the next 5 years (7%\*).

Q.9a There are just over 3,000 law firms in the country, about what percentage of firms do you think will become solicitor-barrister partnerships within say the next 5 years?

Base: All Respondents: 213

# Likelihood of Respondent Firm Forming Solicitor-Barrister Legal Partnership in the Next 5 Years

About 1 in 5 (19%) respondents believe it is likely that their firm will become a solicitor-barrister legal partnership in the next 5 years.



21% of **solicitors working with others** say it is very or somewhat likely that the firms they work for will form LPs within the next 5 years.

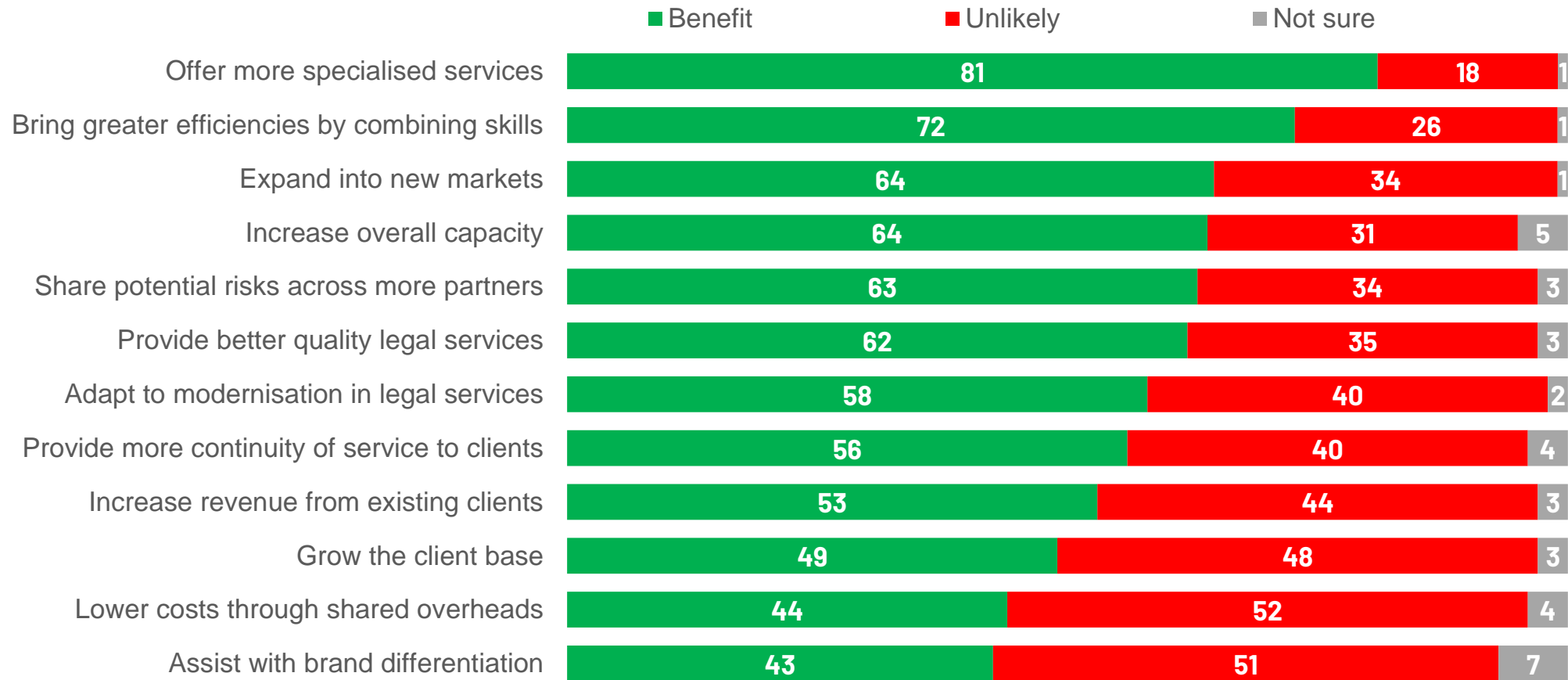
31% of solicitors with **positive views** on the introduction of LPs say that their firms are very or somewhat likely to form solicitor-barrister partnerships.

Q.10 And how likely or unlikely would your firm be to become a solicitor-barrister partnership in the next 5 years – would that be very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely?

Base: All Respondents: 213

# Expected Benefits for Law Firms

The most likely benefits expected to accrue from solicitor-barrister LPs relate to scale (more services, greater efficiency, expansion, more capacity, shared risks etc.), with lower costs and brand differentiation the benefits least likely to accrue.



Q.11 I am now going to read out a list of ways firms could potentially benefit from becoming solicitor-barrister partnerships. For each one, please tell me if you think firms that become solicitor-barrister partnerships will benefit in that way or if you think they are unlikely to benefit in that way?

Base: All Respondents: 213



# PERCEIVED MOTIVATIONS FOR BARRISTERS TO FORM BARRISTER-ONLY PARTNERSHIPS

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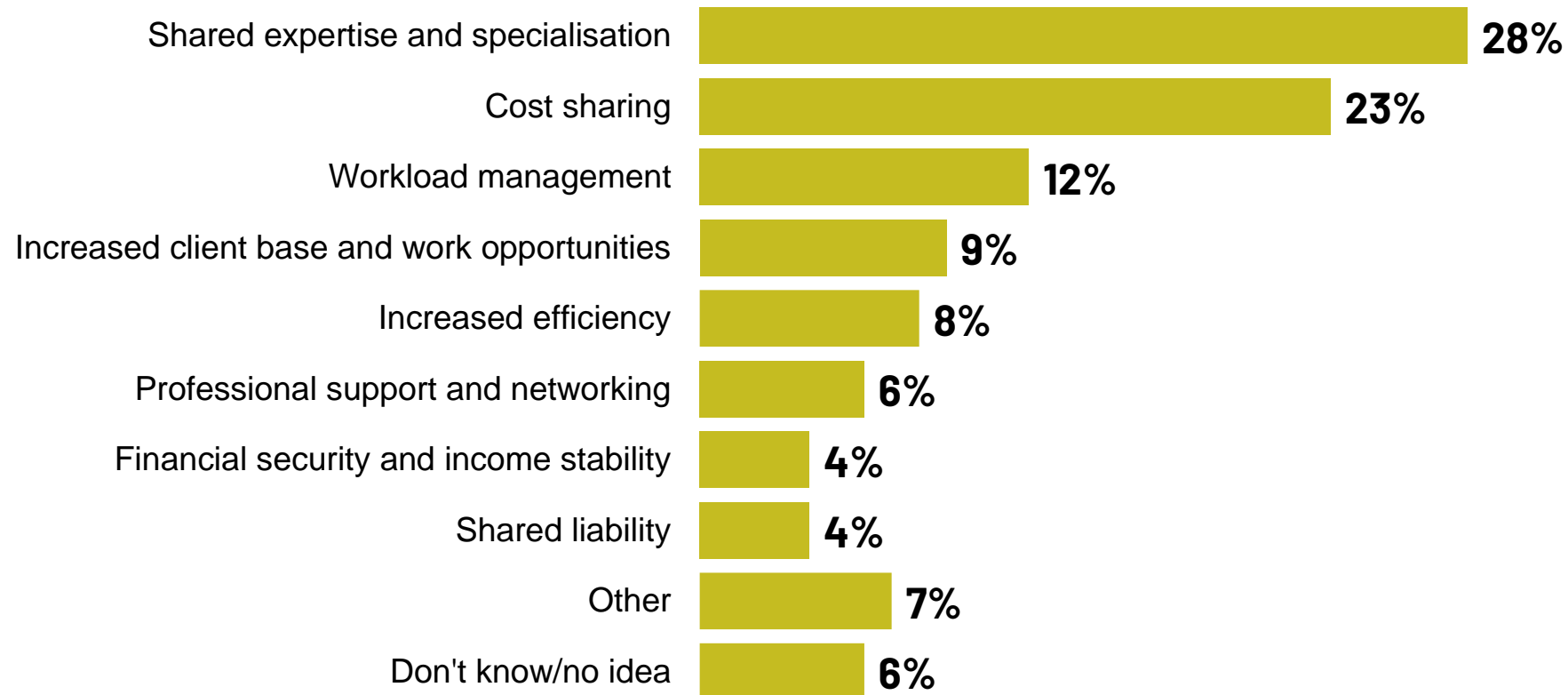
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# Perceived Motivations for Barristers to Form Barrister-only Partnerships

Shared expertise/specialisation and cost sharing are seen by solicitors as the main reasons barristers may wish to form barrister-only partnerships.



Q.12 Lastly, a question about barristers being able to form partnerships with other barristers. What do you think would be the main reason why barristers would come together to form a legal partnership??

Base: All Respondents: 213

# Conclusion – I

- Awareness of legal partnerships is limited with 73% of solicitors knowing little about the planned introduction. Just 11% claim to know a lot, so plenty of scope to build awareness.
- For solicitors, the introduction of LPs is a net positive (61% vs. 24%).
- Liability protection (24%) is the number one benefit offered spontaneously by solicitors and is seen to be even more beneficial to sole practitioners (30%).
- Solicitors also see the potential for more collaboration (21%) and specialisation (14%) from being able to partner with barristers.
- While improved client service is a potential benefit, views among solicitors is somewhat mixed, with 39% expecting it to be positive for consumers, 16% negative, with 40% saying it will make no difference.

# Conclusion – II

- Solicitors see benefits of legal partnerships accruing in most areas of law listed, with ‘Litigation and Dispute Resolution’ and ‘Environmental Planning’ being the areas that solicitors believe will benefit the most from the introduction of legal partnerships.
- Areas of law typically relied upon by local, small practices – ‘Wills/estates/probate’ and ‘Real estate/conveyancing’ – are not generally regarded as likely to benefit from legal partnerships.
- About 1 in 5 solicitors (19%) considered their own firms will (very or somewhat likely) become legal partnerships in the next 5 years.
- Specialised services (81%) and greater efficiencies by combining the skills (72%) are the top two selected from a list of benefits of becoming a solicitor-barrister legal partnership.



# THANK YOU

**NAME:** Damian Loscher

**DETAILS:** damian.loscher@ipsos.com

**NAME:** Jessica Nogueira

**DETAILS:** jessica.nogueira@ipsos.com

**NAME:** Jiahui Sun

**DETAILS:** jjahui.sun@ipsos.com

