



# Rebuilding Trust in the Age of Skepticism

*A joint publication by RONIN International and myCLEARopinion Insights Hub*

Year-End 2025 Findings

# About This Study

The *Workforce Confidence Index* is a multi-wave quantitative tracking study conducted collaboratively by [\*\*RONIN International\*\*](#) and [\*\*myCLEARopinion Insights Hub.\*\*](#)

It measures U.S. workforce sentiment toward job security, financial confidence, institutional trust, and economic outlook.

This whitepaper draws on data from **Waves 2 through 5 (August–December 2025)**, reflecting responses from more than 2,500 U.S. professionals across key sectors including industrial, construction, manufacturing, engineering, HVACR, food and beverage, technology, energy, healthcare, logistics, and professional services

# Workforce Confidence Scorecard: Wave 4 – Most Recent Snapshot

<u>Workforce Stability</u>	<u>Institutional Trust</u>	<u>Information Trust + Risk</u>
 <b>Job Security:</b> 59% high, 14% low	 <b>Federal Government Confidence:</b> 27% high, 52% low	 <b>Media Accuracy:</b> 20% accurate, 59% inaccurate
 <b>Financial Confidence:</b> 49% high, 17% low	 <b>Transparency of Regulations:</b> 19% agree, 62% disagree	 <b>Industry Publication Trust:</b> 77%
 <b>Job Change Intent:</b> 68% not looking, 15% actively/likely to look	 <b>Enforcement Consistency:</b> 23% agree, 62% disagree	 <b>Local News Trust:</b> 39%
	 <b>Regulations Support Innovation:</b> 28% agree, 50% disagree	 <b>Cable Networks Trust:</b> 18%
		 <b>Top Threat:</b> Economic slowdown – 30%

*This scorecard summarizes the most recent readings across workforce stability, institutional trust, and information trust.*

# Executive Summary:

Across **Waves 2–5 (August–December 2025)**, a clear and persistent trust hierarchy emerges across the workforce. Trust is strongest where information is **proximate, specialized, and grounded in real industry experience** – and weakest where it is distant, generalized, or politicized.

Workers consistently place the greatest confidence in **industry-specific publications and trade-aligned sources**, while trust declines sharply across local, national, and political media channels. By year end, fewer than one in three workers express confidence that general media accurately report on their industry, underscoring deep skepticism toward broad, non-specialized coverage.

Institutional trust follows a similar pattern. Confidence in federal policy support and regulatory systems remains low and largely unchanged throughout the period, reflecting sustained doubt about transparency, consistency, and alignment with industry realities. These findings suggest not a temporary dip in sentiment, but a **structural trust deficit** affecting large, centralized institutions.

In contrast, **industry publications retain exceptionally high credibility**, with roughly **three-quarters of workers** naming them as trusted information sources. This divergence highlights a widening trust gap – one driven less by authority or scale and more by **relevance, expertise, and lived experience**.

This white paper examines how trust is formed in today's skeptical environment, why traditional institutions continue to struggle for credibility, and how organizations can rebuild trust by communicating through channels that workers already recognize as credible, relevant, and worth listening to.

# Methodology:

Respondents were screened for U.S. employment across a diverse mix of sectors, including construction, engineering, HVACR and mechanical systems, manufacturing, food and beverage, energy, logistics, technology, healthcare, and professional services.

Wave	Field Dates	Sample (n)
Wave 2	Aug 2025	788
Wave 3	Sep 2025	594
Wave 4	Oct 2025	760
Wave 5	Nov-Dec 2025	643

# Trust in General Media

In this study, *general media* refers to the broad, overall measure assessing respondents' trust in the media ecosystem as a whole – including television news, newspapers, social media, and other mainstream information channels – to report accurately on their industry. This measure reflects overall sentiment toward media coverage at large, rather than trust in any specific outlet or platform.

Across Waves 2–5 (August–December 2025), trust in general media remains consistently weak. High trust never exceeds 30 percent in any wave and falls to just 20 percent in the November–December wave. Low trust dominates throughout the period, rising to 59 percent by year end. Neutral sentiment remains elevated – hovering around one-fifth of respondents – suggesting disengagement, ambivalence, or a lack of reliance on broad media for industry-specific information.

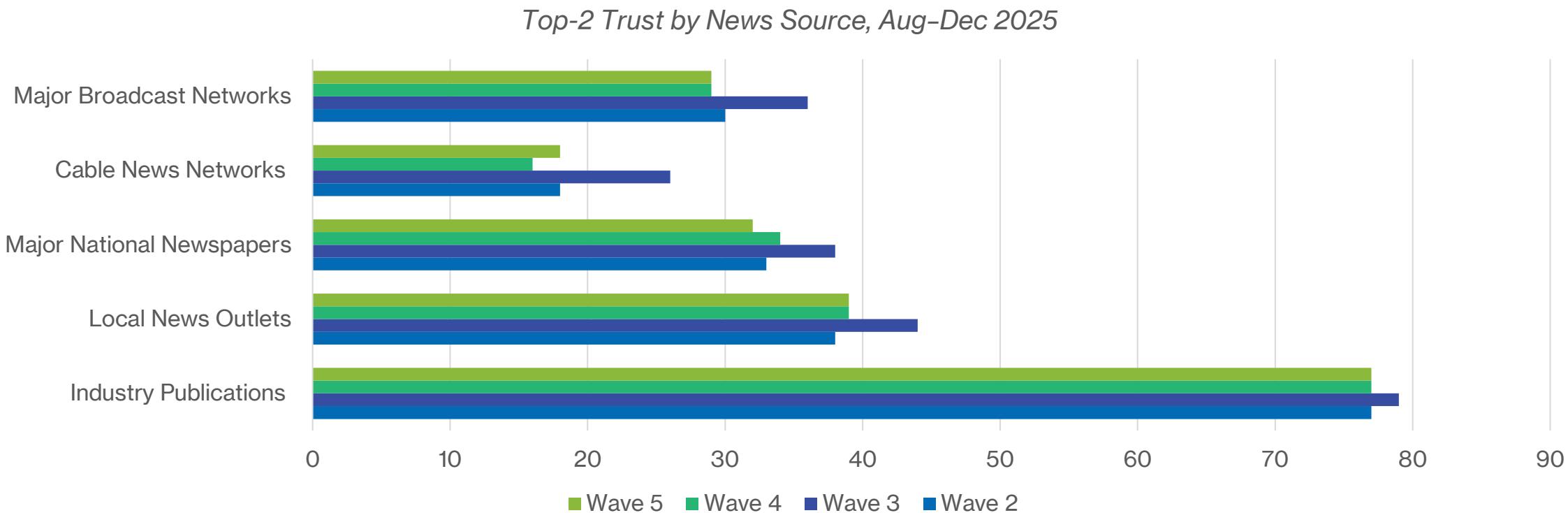
Rather than signaling short-term volatility, these patterns point to entrenched skepticism toward generalized media coverage of industry issues. Workers appear increasingly unlikely to look to mainstream media for accurate, relevant insight into their professional environment.

Wave	High Trust	Neutral	Low Trust
Wave 2	22%	25%	53%
Wave 3	30%	20%	51%
Wave 4	20%	24%	56%
Wave 5	20%	21%	59%

# Trust Varies Dramatically by News Source

Workers clearly distinguish between news categories. Industry-specific publications dominate the trust hierarchy with 78–79 percent expressing high trust. Local news outlets form a middle tier with 38–44 percent. National and political channels, major newspapers, cable news, and major broadcast networks, form the lowest tier with 17–38 percent.

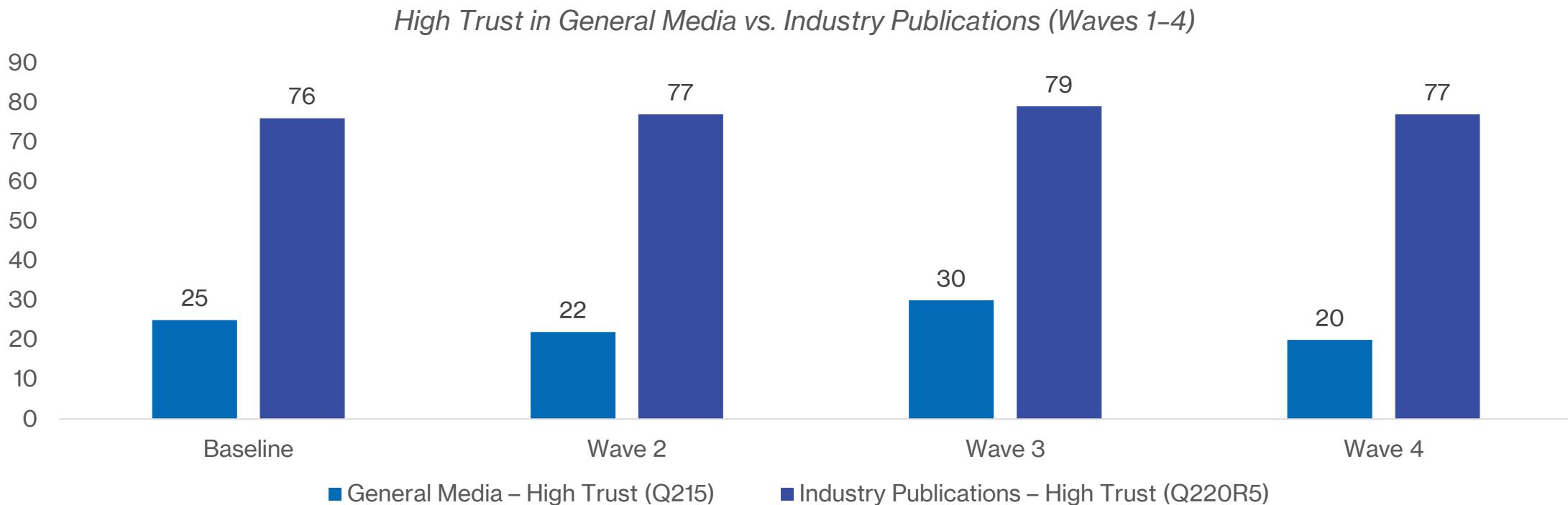
This categorization remains consistent across all waves, suggesting a stable trust hierarchy.



**Q220.** Please rate your level of trust in the following news sources when reporting on your industry.

# Why Trust is Fragmenting

**Perceived Accuracy Declines with Distance:** Trust in media accuracy never exceeds 30 percent. Workers do not attribute accuracy to general media but do attribute it to industry sources that reflect concrete experience, technical nuance, and domain expertise.

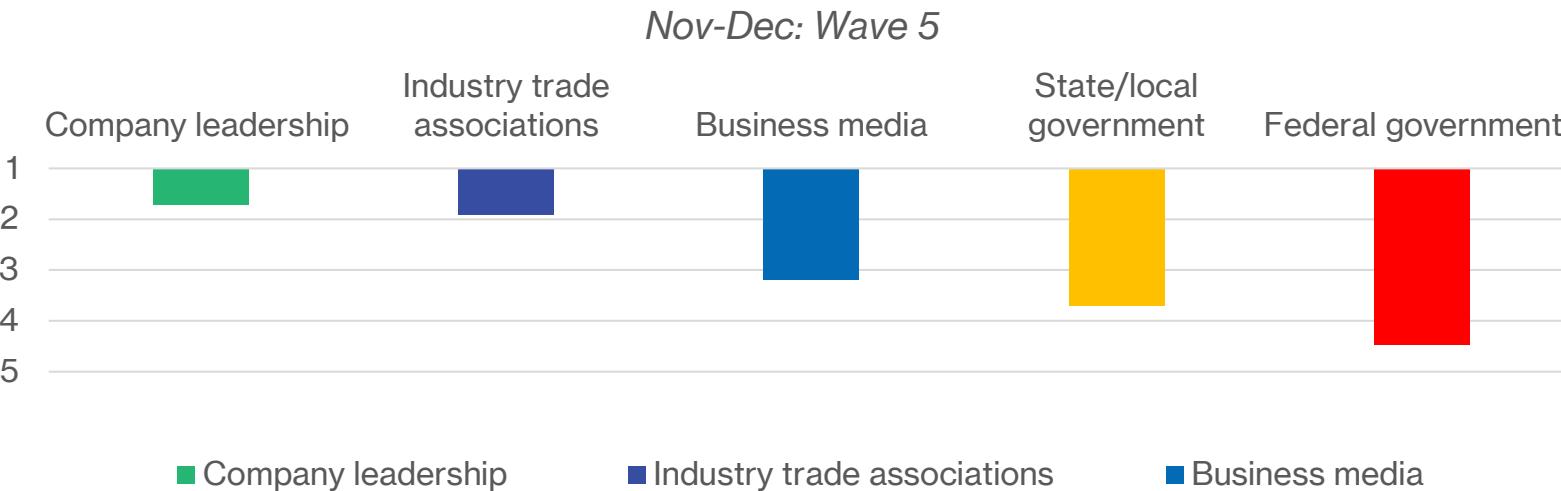


**Q215.** How much do you trust the media (TV, newspapers, social media, etc.) to report accurately on your industry?

# Institutional Trust Is Uneven

Wave 5 results reinforce a clear and persistent institutional trust hierarchy. Company leadership remains the most trusted institution, with trust strengthening further in the November–December wave (mean 1.72). Industry trade associations continue to rank close behind (mean 1.91), reflecting sustained confidence in industry-aligned organizations.

Business media occupies a distant middle tier (mean 3.20), while state and local government rank lower still (mean 3.71). Federal government remains the least trusted institution by a wide margin, unchanged at a mean score of 4.47.



Rather than signaling volatility, these shifts suggest deepening trust polarization. Confidence continues to consolidate around institutions perceived as proximate, knowledgeable, and directly accountable, while trust in more distant or political systems remains weak or continues to erode

# Workers Fill the Trust Vacuum with Industry Expertise

Across Waves 2 through 5 of the study, workers consistently rely on the institutions closest to their day-to-day reality – company leadership, trade associations, and industry publications.

These entities occupy the top trust positions because they deliver what workers perceive as missing from national media and government communication:

- ▶ **Context that reflects actual field conditions**
- ▶ **Technical and domain-specific expertise**
- ▶ **Information that directly supports decision-making**
- ▶ **A sense of proximity, accountability, and operational familiarity**

This pattern holds and strengthens in Wave 5. Trust in general media remains low, rarely exceeding 30 percent, while trust in industry publications consistently reaches nearly 80 percent. At the same time, confidence in company leadership and trade associations remains substantially higher than trust in government institutions, with internal trust improving further in the most recent wave.

Taken together, the data show a clear response to institutional skepticism: when national systems lose credibility, workers fill the trust vacuum with industry-grounded expertise – sources that feel knowledgeable, relevant, and aligned with how work actually gets done.

# Implications for Organizations and Communicators:

## **Recommendation 1: Prioritize Credibility Close to the Work**

Workers place the greatest confidence in company leadership, direct managers, trade associations, and industry publications. Messages grounded in operational reality – rather than broad national narratives – are consistently the most trusted.

## **Recommendation 2: Use Industry Publications as Primary Channels**

With roughly 77–79% Top-2 trust across waves, trade media outperform national media by 40+ percentage points. These channels should be the default partner for communicating industry insights, workforce messaging, product positioning, and policy implications.

## **Recommendation 3: Frame Macro Issues in Industry-Specific Language**

Workers consistently distrust abstract economic forecasts, government communications, and generalized news coverage. Effective communication requires translating macro forces into clear, practical, industry-level impact.

## **Recommendation 4: Precision and Expertise Are Non-Negotiable**

Generalized messaging weakens credibility. Workers respond most positively to specialized content, technical nuance, expert voices, and sector-specific data – the same attributes that sustain trust in industry media and associations.

# Conclusion:

Data from August through December 2025 show that the workforce is not cynical – it is discerning. Workers place trust in information they can verify, that reflects their operational reality, and that is grounded in industry expertise.

They remain skeptical of political institutions, national news outlets, and generalized communications that lack specificity or practical relevance. This skepticism is stable rather than reactionary, reflecting a structural shift in how credibility is evaluated.

Rebuilding trust in this environment requires proximity, expertise, and transparency. Organizations that anchor their communication in specialist channels – company leadership, trade associations, and industry publications – will be best positioned to reach an audience that is increasingly selective about where it places confidence and increasingly reliant on industry-specific insight over broad institutional narratives.

# Appendix | Aug-Dec 2025 Snapshot:

## General Media (Q215)

Trust in general media remains extremely low. In the most recent wave, 20% express high trust, while 56% report low trust – yielding a -36 net trust score, the weakest credibility position observed across the study period. Low trust in general media is persistent rather than episodic, reinforcing that skepticism toward broad media coverage is structural, not reactionary.

## Industry Publications (Q220R5)

Industry-specific publications remain the most trusted information source by a wide margin. Across Waves 2–5, 77–79% of respondents express Top-2 Box trust – outperforming general and national media by 40+ percentage points. This sustained advantage reinforces the value of expert-driven, industry-grounded reporting as the primary credibility anchor for workforce audiences.

## Institutional Trust (Q225)

Mean trust rankings (1 = highest):

- Company leadership: 1.72
- Trade associations: 1.91
- Business media: 3.20
- State/local government: 3.71
- Federal government: 4.47

Trust remains concentrated in institutions closest to workers' operational reality. Federal institutions continue to rank lowest by a substantial margin, with no meaningful improvement observed in the most recent wave.

## Regulatory Transparency (Q210)

Perceptions of regulatory transparency remain weak. Only about one-quarter of respondents agree that regulatory processes are clear or transparent, while more than half express disagreement – indicating sustained skepticism toward regulatory clarity and consistency.

## Overall Trust Gap

Across Waves 2–5, a clear trust gap persists. Workers overwhelmingly place confidence in proximate, industry-grounded sources – company leadership, trade associations, and industry publications – while remaining persistently skeptical of federal institutions, national media, and generalized narratives.

This divide underscores a structural shift in how credibility is evaluated: expertise, relevance, and proximity now outweigh institutional authority.

# About the partners:

## [RONIN International](#)

RONIN International is an independent global research agency specializing in high-quality data collection, market research consultancy, and strategic intelligence. With deep expertise in hard-to-reach B2B audiences and custom fieldwork solutions, RONIN guarantees transparent, reliable measurement of sentiment and behavior across industries and geographies. Its advanced research operations and rigorous quality controls ensure that insights are trusted, consistent, comparable, and decision-ready.

## [myCLEARopinion Insights Hub](#)

myCLEARopinion is the B2B research division of BNP Media, providing both full-service custom research and direct access to verified trade-industry respondents. Built on BNP Media's audited subscriber base and industry-specific events, myCLEARopinion offers highly targeted access to skilled professionals across construction, manufacturing, engineering, HVACR, food & beverage, and related industrial sectors.

Organizations rely on myCLEARopinion for high-quality respondent access as well as end-to-end research support, including survey design, fieldwork, analysis, and reporting – delivering accurate, industry-grounded insights for strategic decision-making.