



Regulation vs. Innovation: Why Regulatory Skepticism Remains Entrenched

A joint publication by RONIN International and myCLEARopinion Insights Hub

Insights from Waves 8–10 of the Workforce Confidence Index (Mar-May 2026)

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 edition draws on data collected between **March-May 2026** from roughly 1,800 professionals across key sectors including industrial, construction, manufacturing, engineering, food and beverage, technology, energy, healthcare, and professional services.

Workforce Confidence Scorecard: Wave 10 – Most Recent Snapshot

Workforce Stability


 **Job Security:**
52% high, 19% low


 **Financial Confidence:**
45% high, 19% low


 **Job Change Intent:**
53% not looking,
25% actively/likely to look

Institutional Trust


 **Federal Government Confidence:**
25% high, 55% low

 **Transparency of Regulations:**
21% agree, 63% disagree

 **Enforcement Consistency:**
23% agree, 63% disagree

 **Regulations Support Innovation:**
28% agree, 49% disagree

Information Trust + Risk

 **Media Accuracy:**
18% accurate, 63% inaccurate

 **Industry Publication Trust: 78%**

 **Local News Trust: 35%**

 **Cable Networks Trust: 16%**

 **Top Threat:**
Economic slowdown – 25%

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

Executive Summary:

Findings from Waves 8–10 (March through May 2026) of the Workforce Confidence Index continue to show deep and persistent skepticism toward the U.S. regulatory environment. Across recent waves, workers consistently report that regulations lack transparency, are applied inconsistently, and do not adequately support innovation or business growth.

While several measures improved modestly in the latest wave, positive sentiment remains substantially outweighed by negative perceptions across every major regulatory dimension. The findings suggest that skepticism toward the regulatory system remains structural rather than reactive or temporary.

Key Takeaways:

Regulatory transparency remains weak: Approximately 63–68% say the regulatory process is not transparent, while only 15–21% believe transparency exists.

Regulations are viewed as inconsistently applied: Approximately 63–68% report inconsistent enforcement, compared with just 20–23% who perceive consistency.

Innovation is not perceived as supported by policy: Only 27–28% agree regulations support innovation, while 49–53% disagree, reinforcing the perception that regulation often constrains progress rather than enabling it.

Government policies are not viewed as enabling business growth: Approximately 50–54% report that policy does not support business growth, while only 26–31% believe it does.

Federal-level confidence remains the weakest of all institutions: Just 22–25% express confidence in federal policy support, while 55–60% report little or no confidence, maintaining its position as the lowest-ranked institution measured.

Regulatory skepticism remains entrenched: Despite modest improvement in several measures during the latest wave, sentiment remains overwhelmingly negative across key dimensions, indicating that skepticism toward the regulatory environment remains deeply embedded and slow to change.

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 8	Mar 2026	596
Wave 9	Apr 2026	614
Wave 10	May 2026	578

The Regulatory Sentiment Profile

Across Waves 8–10 (March through May 2026), workers continue to express skepticism toward the regulatory environment. Majorities report that regulations lack transparency, are applied inconsistently, and do not adequately support innovation or business growth.

While several measures improved in the latest wave, negative sentiment continues to outweigh positive perceptions across every regulatory dimension measured. Workers remain more likely to view the regulatory environment as opaque, inconsistently applied, and misaligned with industry needs than as a source of clarity or support.

The findings suggest that regulatory skepticism remains deeply embedded across industries. Recent improvements may indicate some softening in sentiment, but they have not materially altered the broader perception that regulation often creates friction rather than enabling growth and innovation.

Regulatory Dimension (Q210)	W8 - % Bottom 2 (Disagree)	W8 - % Top 2 (Agree)	Interpretation
Regulations based on expertise	54%	31%	Confidence in expertise remains limited
Regulatory transparency	63%	21%	Process still viewed as opaque
Consistent application	63%	23%	Enforcement still viewed as uneven
Supports innovation	49%	28%	Innovation support remains weak
Balances consumer/business needs	53%	27%	Balance concerns persist
Enables business growth	50%	31%	Growth support viewed skeptically

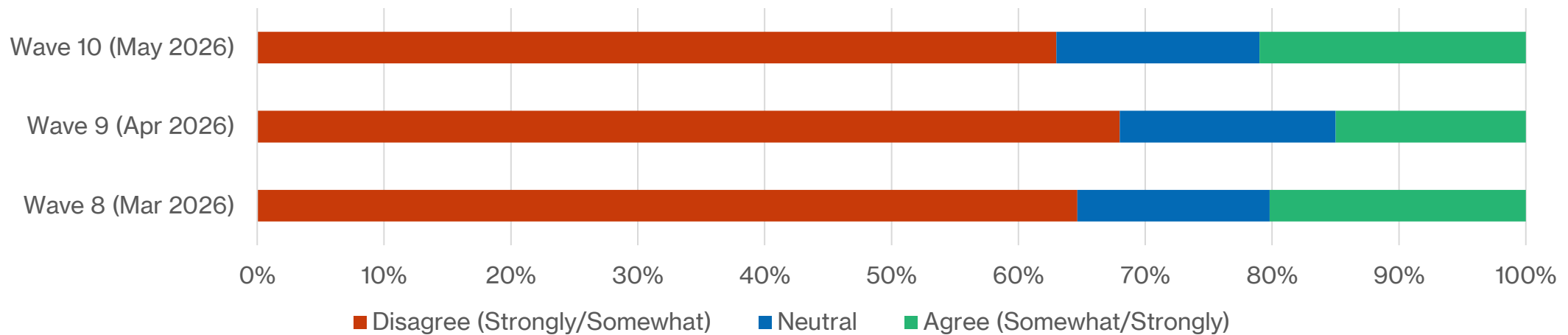
Regulatory Transparency Trend

Perceptions of regulatory transparency remain weak across recent waves, although the latest wave shows modest improvement.

Following elevated skepticism in March and April, May results show a decline in disagreement and a corresponding increase in agreement. Despite this improvement, a substantial majority of workers continue to view the regulatory process as lacking transparency.

Overall, the findings suggest that perceptions of transparency remain broadly negative. While recent movement is encouraging, workers continue to view the regulatory process as opaque, difficult to navigate, and insufficiently aligned with industry realities.

Perceived Regulatory Transparency, Mar–May 2026



Regulatory Enforcement Remains Inconsistent

Across recent waves, workers continue to report low confidence in the consistent application of regulations.

While the latest wave shows modest improvement, perceptions of inconsistency remain widespread. Nearly two-thirds of workers continue to disagree that regulations are applied consistently across industries and situations.

These findings reinforce an ongoing lack of confidence in how regulations are enforced in practice. Although sentiment improved somewhat in May, perceptions of uneven application remain deeply embedded across the workforce.

Wave	Bottom 2 (Disagree)	Interpretation
Wave 8	59%	Sentiment remains negative
Wave 9	68%	Perceived inconsistency increases
Wave 10	63%	Modest improvement, but skepticism remains high

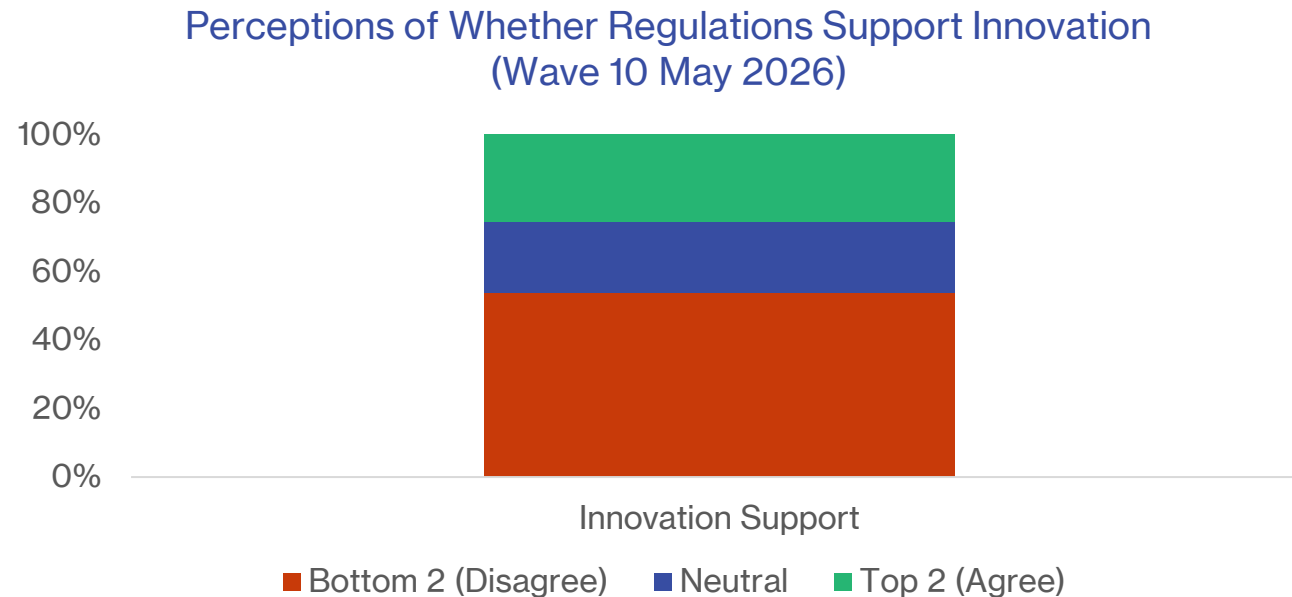
Perceptions of consistency improve modestly, but skepticism remains widespread.

Do Workers Believe Regulations Support Innovation?

Perceptions of whether regulations support innovation remain weak.

In the most recent wave, nearly half of workers report that regulations do not support innovation, while fewer than three in ten believe they do. Neutral responses remain meaningful, suggesting some uncertainty, but not enough to materially shift overall sentiment.

Compared with earlier waves, perceptions improved modestly in May, with disagreement declining and agreement increasing slightly. Despite this movement, workers remain substantially more likely to view regulation as a constraint on innovation than as a driver of technological advancement and business progress.



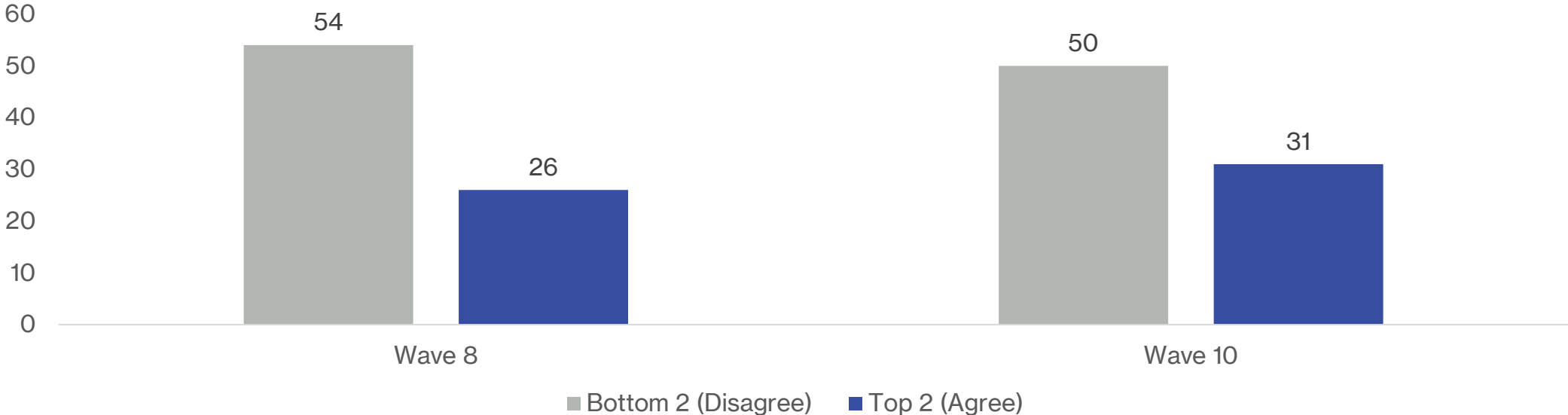
Regulations Are Not Seen as Enabling Growth

Perceptions of whether regulations enable business growth remain weak.

In the most recent wave, half of workers report that government policies do not support business growth, while approximately three in ten believe they do. Although skepticism continues to outweigh confidence, the latest wave shows modest improvement in perceptions of policy support for growth.

These findings suggest that many workers continue to view regulatory frameworks as insufficiently aligned with business needs. While recent sentiment has become somewhat more positive, policy is still not widely perceived as a driver of growth, expansion, or long-term industry development.

Perceptions of Regulations Enabling Business Growth



Where Regulatory Trust Fits in the Larger Landscape

When placed in context with other institutions, government continues to rank at the bottom in perceived alignment with industry needs.

In the most recent wave (May 2026), company leadership and trade associations remain the most trusted institutions by a wide margin, while the federal government ranks lowest, with a mean trust score of 4.45.

Despite modest improvement in several regulatory measures, the broader trust hierarchy remains highly stable. Workers continue to place greater trust in institutions that are closer to their day-to-day operational experience, while confidence declines across more distant, policy-driven systems.

Institution	Mean Score (1 = Highest Trust)
Company leadership	1.75
Trade associations	1.96
Business media	3.20
State/local government	3.65
Federal government	4.45

The Regulation–Innovation Disconnect

Across Waves 8–10 (March through May 2026), workers continue to describe a regulatory climate that is unpredictable, opaque, and misaligned with industry needs.

The data highlight five consistent themes:

1. **Regulations lack transparency** – 63–68% disagree that the regulatory process is transparent.
2. **Enforcement is inconsistent** – 59–68% disagree that regulations are applied consistently.
3. **Rules not seen as supporting innovation** – only 27–28% agree regulations support innovation.
4. **Policies do not enable growth** – 26–31% agree government policy enables business growth.
5. **Institutional trust is concentrated elsewhere** – company leadership and trade associations score 1.75–1.96, while the federal government scores 4.45 (lowest trust).

This creates a persistent innovation disconnect:

While perceptions improved modestly in the latest wave, policy is still not widely viewed as enabling innovation. Many workers continue to perceive regulation as a system businesses must navigate rather than one that actively supports progress, growth, or long-term industry development.

Conclusion & Implications for Industry Stakeholders

Workers are not rejecting regulation outright. They are responding to a system that feels difficult to interpret, inconsistently applied, and disconnected from how work actually happens. While several measures improved modestly in the latest wave, confidence in the system's transparency, consistency, and alignment with industry realities remains limited.

As a result, regulation is not functioning as a source of clarity or confidence. Instead, workers increasingly rely on alternative signals such as company leadership, industry networks, trade associations, and trusted industry media to interpret what matters and how to respond.

Implications:

Clarity is now a competitive advantage: In an environment where rules are perceived as unclear, organizations that can interpret and communicate regulatory impact effectively will stand out.

Credibility continues to shift from institutions to interpreters: Workers are not primarily looking to regulators for guidance. They are looking to industry voices to explain what regulations mean in practice.

Consistency matters more than intent: Even well-designed policies lose credibility if enforcement appears uneven. Perceived inconsistency undermines trust more than disagreement with the rules themselves.

Regulation is not yet a source of confidence: Despite modest improvement in recent measures, regulation continues to be viewed more as a system businesses must navigate than a framework broadly perceived as enabling innovation and growth.

Appendix | May 2026 Snapshot:

Regulatory Transparency: Transparency remains weak. Just 21% agree the regulatory process is transparent, while 63% disagree, resulting in a –42 net transparency score. Neutral responses (16%) indicate some uncertainty, but not enough to materially shift overall sentiment.

Consistency of Enforcement: Perceptions of consistent enforcement remain weak. Only 23% believe regulations are applied consistently, compared with 63% who disagree, yielding a –40 net score and reinforcing the view that enforcement remains uneven.

Regulations Supporting Innovation: Perceptions of regulatory support for innovation remain limited. 49% say regulations do not support innovation, while 28% believe they do, resulting in a –21 net innovation score and continued concern about the role of policy in enabling progress.

Consumer vs. Business Balance: Views on balance between consumer protection and business needs remain negative overall. 53% say regulations are not balanced, compared with 27% who see balance, yielding a –26 net score and indicating continued misalignment between regulatory priorities and business realities.

Policies Enabling Business Growth: Confidence that policy enables business growth remains limited. Just 31% believe policies support growth, while 50% disagree, resulting in a –19 net growth-support score and reinforcing the perception that policy is not fully aligned with business needs.

Federal Government Confidence: Trust in federal policy action remains low. Just 25% express confidence, while 55% report little or none, resulting in a –30 net confidence score, the weakest among institutions measured.

Institutional Context: The trust hierarchy remains unchanged. Federal government continues to rank last in mean confidence (4.45), behind state/local government (3.65), business media (3.20), trade associations (1.96), and company leadership (1.75).

The May data suggest modest improvement across several regulatory measures, particularly transparency, consistency, and perceptions of business growth. However, regulatory skepticism remains structural and deeply embedded. Workers continue to view the regulatory environment as opaque, inconsistently applied, and insufficiently supportive of innovation and growth, despite signs of gradual improvement.

About the partners:

[RONIN International](#)

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