



Industry at a Crossroads: Competing Pressures and Shifting Workforce Risks

A joint publication by RONIN International and myCLEARopinion Insights Hub

Insights from Waves 8–10 of the Workforce Confidence Index (Mar-May2026)

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:

Across Waves 8–10 (March–May 2026) of the Workforce Confidence Index, workers continue to describe an environment defined by economic pressure, institutional skepticism, and accelerating workplace change.

Economic slowdown and inflation remain the dominant threats facing industry. Together, these concerns account for nearly half of all structured threat selections, reflecting continued anxiety around growth, costs, affordability, and long-term economic stability. Government policy uncertainty, labor shortages, technological disruption, and geopolitical instability remain important secondary concerns, contributing to a risk landscape that is broad rather than concentrated around a single issue.

At the same time, open-ended responses reveal a different dimension of workforce concern. Artificial intelligence, automation, and technology-driven workforce change emerged as the most frequently cited role-specific concern, surpassing economic and policy-related themes. Workers increasingly describe uncertainty around job displacement, organizational restructuring, changing skill requirements, and the long-term impact of AI on future employment opportunities.

Despite these pressures, confidence within organizations remains comparatively resilient. Leadership confidence, job security, and personal financial confidence remained stable across the three-wave period, while industry outlook improved in May following softer results in April. Workers continue to express significantly greater confidence in their immediate work environments than in broader institutions.

This pattern is reinforced by the study's institutional trust findings. Company leadership, industry trade associations, and sector-specific business media continue to rank as the most trusted sources acting in workers' best interests. By contrast, trust in federal government, regulatory systems, and general media remains substantially lower, reinforcing a persistent confidence gap between institutions workers experience directly and those perceived as more distant.

Taken together, the findings suggest a workforce adapting to overlapping pressures rather than responding to a single dominant crisis. Economic uncertainty remains central, but concerns about technology, policy, workforce stability, and institutional trust increasingly shape how workers evaluate the future. In this environment, organizations, industry associations, and trusted trade publications continue to play an outsized role in maintaining confidence, credibility, and stability.

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

What Workers Identify as the Top Threats

Threat Category	Wave 8 (Mar 2026)	Wave 9 (Apr 2026)	Wave 10 (May 2026)
Economic slowdown / recession	19%	22%	25%
Inflation / rising costs	19%	20%	22%
Government regulation / policy uncertainty	15%	15%	14%
Labor shortages	9%	13%	11%
Geopolitical instability / global conflict	12%	11%	9%
Technological disruption / automation	12%	8%	9%
Supply chain disruption	8%	8%	8%

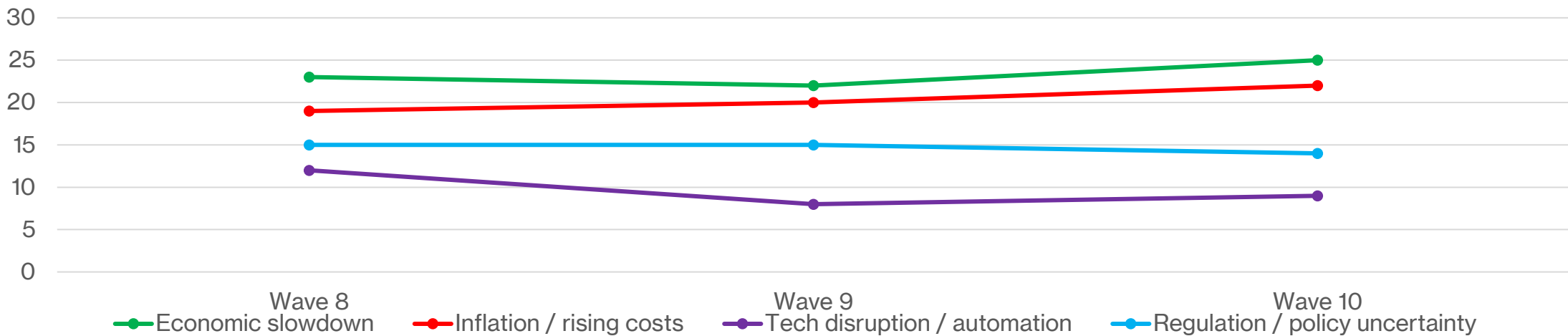
Threats Trended Over Time

Economic pressure remains the leading concern across Waves 8–10, with both economic slowdown and inflation increasing in May. Workers continue to identify slowdown or recession as the primary threat facing their industries, while inflation and rising costs strengthened further and remain a close second.

Policy uncertainty continues to represent a persistent source of friction, holding relatively stable throughout the period. Technology disruption and automation remain part of the broader risk landscape, though concern remains below economic and cost-related pressures.

Together, these findings point to a workforce navigating sustained economic pressure while balancing a wider mix of operational and structural challenges.

Top Emerging Risks, Feb–Apr 2026



Deep Dive: Economic and Cost Pressures

Economic pressure continues to anchor workforce risk perceptions across Waves 8–10. Economic slowdown remained the leading concern in May and increased following April's dip, while inflation and rising costs continued to strengthen throughout the period.

Beyond economic pressures, workers reported shifting concern across several secondary risks. Technology disruption rebounded modestly in May following its April decline, while labor shortages eased after a temporary spike. Geopolitical instability continued to recede, and policy uncertainty remained relatively stable.

Overall, the findings suggest that workers remain focused on economic conditions while continuing to recalibrate their attention across a broader mix of operational and structural risks.

Key Signals:

 **Economic Pressure:** Economic slowdown increased to 25%, reasserting itself as the leading concern.

 **Cost Pressure:** Inflation and rising costs climbed for the third consecutive wave (19% → 20% → 22%).

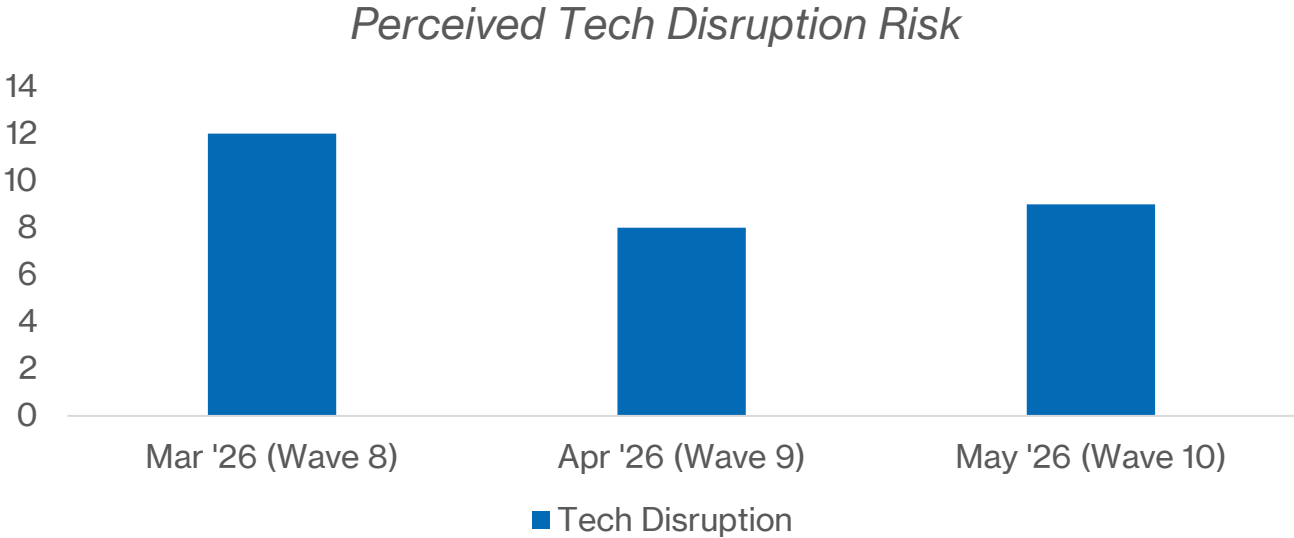
 **Technology:** Tech disruption rebounded modestly in May after softening in April (12% → 8% → 9%).

 **Labor Availability:** Labor shortages eased from April's spike but remain above March levels (9% → 13% → 11%).

Automation & Technology: A Present but Fluctuating Pressure

Technology disruption remained a meaningful workforce concern across Waves 8–10, though attention fluctuated during the period. Mentions declined sharply in April before rebounding modestly in May, suggesting that workers continue to view automation, AI, and digital transformation as important long-term risks even as economic pressures remain the dominant near-term concern.

While technology disruption remains a secondary threat in structured responses, open-ended feedback points to growing concern around AI-driven workforce change, job displacement, and the future role of human labor. This suggests that technology-related risk continues to influence workforce sentiment beyond what is captured in the structured threat rankings.

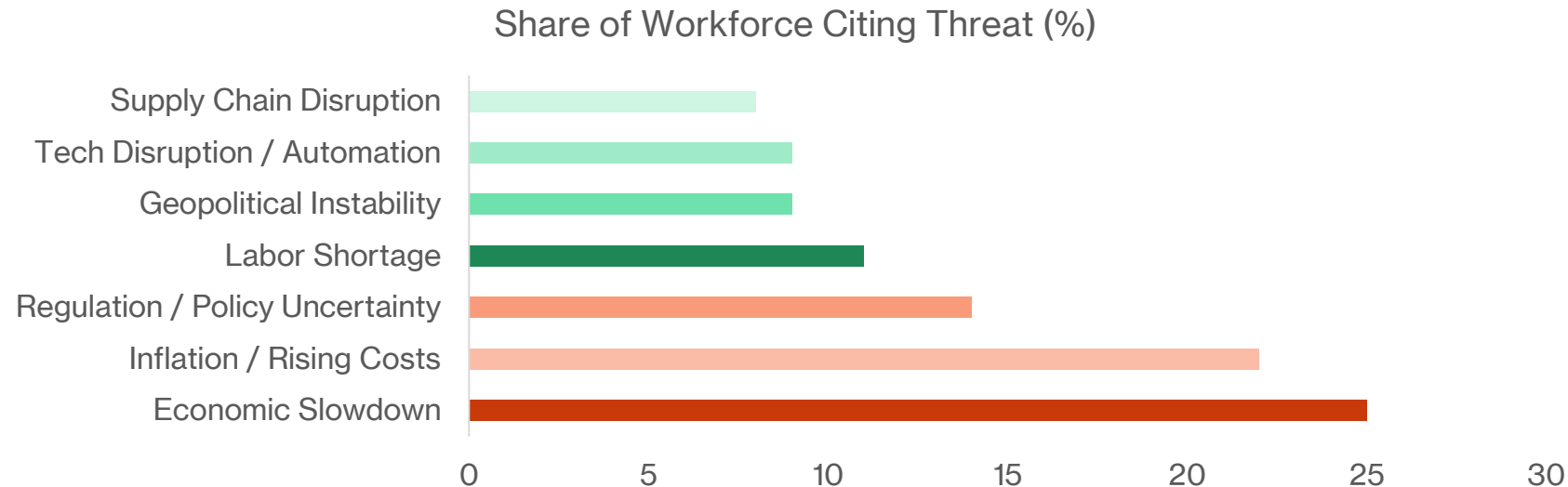


Regulation Fatigue: A Persistent but Secondary Pressure

Economic pressure continues to lead the workforce threat landscape, with economic slowdown and rising costs remaining the dominant concerns across Waves 8–10. Regulation and policy uncertainty remain a consistent mid-tier pressure, holding relatively stable throughout the period.

At the same time, technology disruption rebounded modestly in May following its decline in April, while labor shortages moderated after a temporary increase. Geopolitical instability continued to ease, though it remains elevated relative to longer-term norms.

Overall, the risk landscape remains broadly distributed, with workers balancing economic, operational, and structural pressures simultaneously rather than concentrating on a single dominant source of risk.



Synthesis: Defining the Current Workforce Risk Landscape

Across Waves 8–10, economic pressure continues to anchor workforce risk perceptions, with economic slowdown and inflation remaining the dominant concerns. Together, these two threats account for nearly half of all responses in May, reinforcing the continued influence of cost pressure, affordability concerns, and broader economic uncertainty.

At the same time, workers continue to identify a broader mix of operational and structural challenges. Policy uncertainty remains a persistent source of friction, labor shortages remain a meaningful workforce concern, and technology disruption continues to attract attention despite remaining secondary to economic pressures in structured responses.

What emerges is not a workforce focused on a single dominant risk, but one navigating multiple overlapping pressures simultaneously. Economic conditions remain central, but workforce sentiment is increasingly shaped by concerns related to policy, talent availability, technological change, and broader uncertainty about the future operating environment.

Trust, Regulation, and Workforce Risk

Across Waves 8–10, workers continue to express low confidence in regulatory systems, particularly in areas such as transparency, consistency, and support for innovation. While perceptions improved modestly on several measures in May, overall sentiment remains more negative than positive across all regulatory dimensions.

At the same time, workers remain highly focused on the economic and operational pressures shaping their industries. Concerns continue to center on affordability, workforce stability, policy uncertainty, and the long-term implications of technological change.

For industry leaders, the implication is not to expect rapid shifts in sentiment, but to operate effectively in an environment where trust remains strongest in organizations, industry associations, and information sources closest to workers' day-to-day experience. Clear communication, consistency, and credibility remain critical in maintaining confidence amid ongoing uncertainty.

Implications for Industry Leaders

Economic pressure continues to anchor workforce risk perceptions, with economic slowdown and rising costs remaining the dominant concerns across Waves 8–10. At the same time, policy uncertainty, labor shortages, technological disruption, and geopolitical instability continue to shape how workers assess the operating environment.

What distinguishes the current landscape is not the emergence of a single dominant threat, but the persistence of multiple competing pressures. Workers continue to balance economic concerns with workforce challenges, policy uncertainty, and longer-term technological change, creating a risk environment that remains broad and interconnected.

For industry leaders, the focus shifts from short-term reaction to sustained adaptation. Clear communication, workforce stability, operational discipline, and thoughtful engagement with technological and organizational change will remain critical to maintaining confidence and trust.

Organizations that recognize this environment for what it is – a workforce navigating persistent economic pressure while adapting to evolving technological, policy, and labor-market realities – will be better positioned to navigate uncertainty, maintain credibility, and lead with stability over time.

Appendix | Workforce Threat Landscape (Waves 8–10)

Economic Slowdown (25%) Economic slowdown remained the leading workforce concern across Waves 8–10. Between 22% and 25% of respondents identified slowdown or recession as the top threat facing their industry. After easing slightly in April, concern increased in May, reinforcing continued sensitivity to growth, demand, and broader economic conditions.

Inflation / Rising Costs (22%) Inflation and cost pressures continued to strengthen across the three-wave period, rising from 19% in March to 22% in May. The results suggest that affordability concerns, operating expenses, and broader cost pressures remain significant challenges across industries.

Regulation / Policy Uncertainty (14%) Regulatory pressure remained a consistent mid-tier concern. While slightly lower in May than in March and April, policy uncertainty continues to represent an ongoing source of friction for workforce planning, investment decisions, and business operations.

Labor Shortages (11%) Labor constraints remain a meaningful operational concern, cited by 9% to 13% of respondents across the period. After peaking in April, labor-related pressures eased modestly in May but continue to affect workforce availability and hiring across industries.

Technology Disruption & Automation (9%) Technology-related concerns remained present throughout the period. While automation and technology disruption ranked below economic concerns in structured responses, open-ended feedback increasingly highlighted AI, workforce restructuring, changing skill requirements, and concerns about future job displacement.

Geopolitical Instability (9%) Geopolitical risk remained visible across Waves 8–10, though concern declined from 12% in March to 9% in May. The findings suggest workers continue to associate global instability with broader economic uncertainty, energy markets, and operational risk.

Overall: The threat landscape across Waves 8–10 remains centered on economic pressure, with slowdown and inflation continuing to dominate workforce concerns. At the same time, workers continue to balance a broader mix of policy, labor, geopolitical, and technology-related risks, reinforcing the view that workforce sentiment is being shaped by multiple overlapping pressures rather than a single defining challenge.

About the partners:

[RONIN International](#)

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[myCLEARopinion Insights Hub](#)

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