



Rebuilding Trust: The Hierarchy of Credibility

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:

Across Waves 8–10 (March through May 2026), a clear and durable hierarchy of credibility continues to shape workforce trust across media, institutions, and information sources.

Trust remains strongest in sources that are proximate, specialized, and grounded in real industry experience. Workers continue to place the greatest confidence in industry publications, trade associations, company leadership, and other industry-aligned sources, while trust declines sharply across broader national and political media channels. In the most recent wave, fewer than one in five workers report high trust in general media accuracy.

Institutional trust follows a similar pattern. Confidence in federal policy support and regulatory systems remains low and continues to lag significantly behind trust in industry-centered organizations and leadership. Skepticism around transparency, consistency, and alignment with industry realities remains deeply embedded across waves.

At the same time, the latest wave reveals a notable improvement in industry outlook. Confidence in the economic prospects of respondents' industries increased meaningfully in May, with workers expressing greater optimism about the year ahead despite continued concerns about government effectiveness, regulatory systems, and media credibility.

Industry publications continue to retain exceptionally high credibility, with nearly eight in ten workers identifying them as trusted sources. This reinforces a persistent credibility hierarchy driven less by authority or scale and more by relevance, expertise, operational familiarity, and lived experience.

Taken together, the findings suggest that workforce optimism and institutional trust are not moving in lockstep. Workers are becoming more confident about industry conditions while remaining highly selective about the institutions and information sources they trust. The broader hierarchy of credibility remains remarkably stable, even as confidence in the future begins to improve.

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 |

Trust in General Media Remains Stubbornly Low

Trust in general media remains consistently low across recent waves.

Across Waves 8–10, fewer than one in five workers report high trust in the media to report accurately on their industry, while approximately six in ten continue to express low trust. Despite modest month-to-month movement, overall confidence in general media remains weak and highly stable.

The latest findings reinforce a persistent pattern within the workforce: workers remain skeptical of broad, non-specialized coverage of industry issues and continue to place greater trust in information sources that are closer to their day-to-day professional realities. As a result, general media continues to occupy a lower position within the broader hierarchy of credibility that shapes workforce perceptions.

| Wave | High Trust | Neutral | Low Trust |
|---------|------------|---------|-----------|
| Wave 8 | 17% | 23% | 60% |
| Wave 9 | 19% | 22% | 59% |
| Wave 10 | 18% | 19% | 63% |

Trust Remains Concentrated in Industry Sources

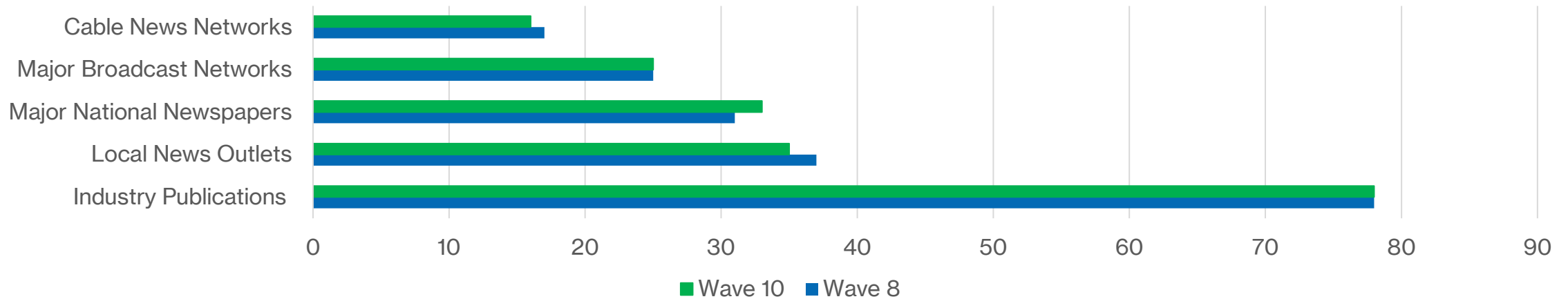
Workers continue to distinguish sharply between information sources, with trust remaining concentrated in industry-specific and professionally relevant channels.

Industry publications, trade associations, and company communications maintain the highest levels of trust, substantially outperforming national media outlets, cable news networks, and social media. The latest wave shows only modest movement across individual sources, reinforcing the stability of the broader credibility hierarchy.

What drives this divide is not simply familiarity, but perceived expertise and relevance. Workers consistently place greater confidence in sources that demonstrate direct knowledge of their industries and provide information that is applicable to real-world business and operational decisions.

The results suggest that trust is earned through specialization and proximity rather than scale. Sources closest to the work continue to command the greatest credibility, while broader media channels remain significantly less trusted.

Top-2 Trust by News Source (Wave 7 vs Wave 9)



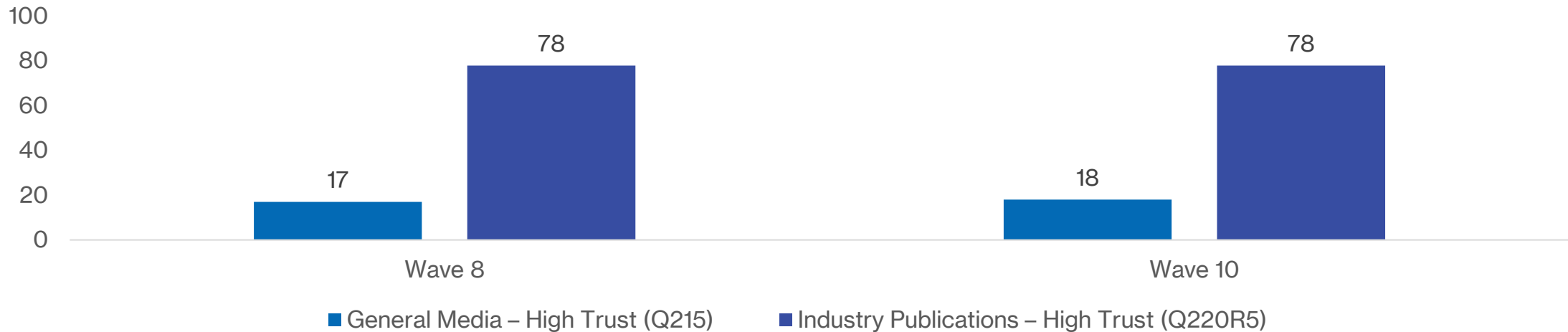
Why Trust Remains Selective

Trust remains sharply divided between general media and industry-specific sources.

While fewer than one in five workers report high trust in general media, nearly eight in ten continue to trust industry publications when reporting on their sector. This substantial gap has remained remarkably consistent across recent waves, highlighting the enduring importance of expertise, specialization, and industry relevance in shaping credibility.

The latest findings reinforce a clear pattern within the workforce: trust is not distributed evenly across information sources. Instead, workers continue to place greater confidence in sources they perceive as knowledgeable, practical, and closely connected to the realities of their industries. As a result, industry publications remain the dominant credibility anchor within the broader information ecosystem.

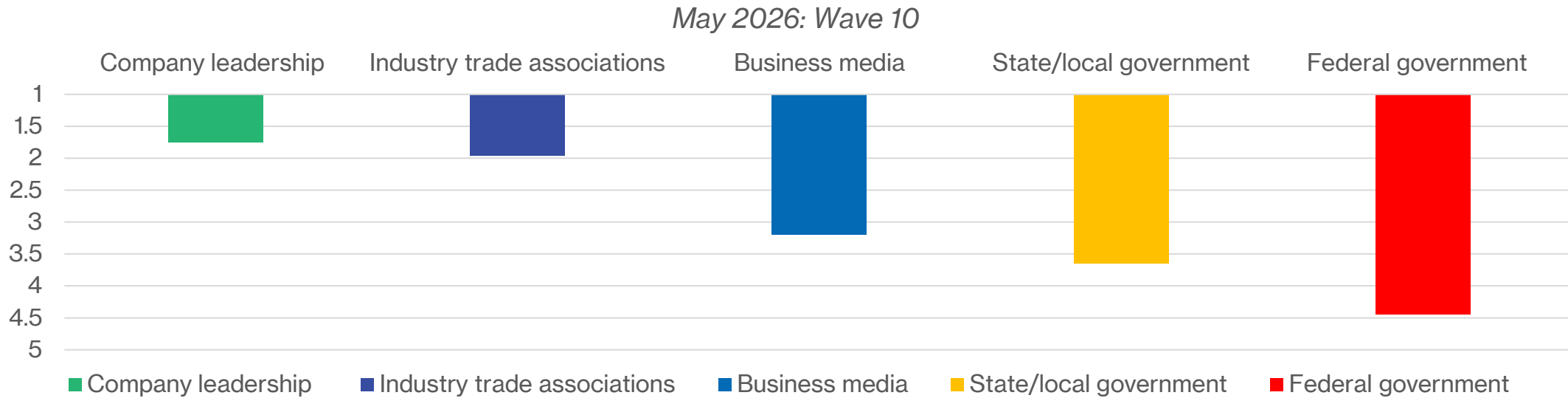
High Trust in General Media vs. Industry Publications (Wave 8 vs Wave 10)



Workers Trust Industry Institutions Far More Than Government

Trust in institutions remains highly uneven, with confidence concentrated in organizations closest to industry operations.

Company leadership and industry trade associations continue to rank as the most trusted institutions, reflecting strong confidence in sources perceived as knowledgeable, accessible, and aligned with industry realities. Business media occupies a clear middle tier, while trust declines across state and local government and remains lowest for the federal government.



This pattern reinforces a highly durable dynamic within the workforce. Even as confidence in industry conditions improved in the latest wave, workers continue to place greater trust in institutions they perceive as relevant, accountable, and closely connected to how work actually gets done. The overall hierarchy of institutional trust remains remarkably stable.

Workers Fill the Trust Vacuum with Industry Expertise

Across Waves 8–10, workers continue to rely on the institutions closest to their day-to-day reality, including 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 continues in the most recent wave. Industry publications maintain exceptionally high credibility, while confidence in company leadership and trade associations continues to exceed trust in government institutions by a substantial margin.

At the same time, workers are expressing greater confidence in the economic outlook for their industries. The latest wave shows a meaningful increase in industry optimism, even as trust remains concentrated in the same industry-aligned sources. While confidence may be improving, the hierarchy of credibility remains remarkably stable.

Taken together, the findings continue to show strong reliance on industry-grounded expertise. Workers place the greatest trust in sources they perceive as knowledgeable, practical, and closely connected to how work actually gets done, particularly in an environment where broader institutional trust remains limited.

Implications for Organizations and Communicators:

Recommendation 1: Prioritize Credibility Close to the Work

Workers continue to place the greatest confidence in company leadership, direct managers, trade associations, and industry publications. Messages grounded in operational reality and day-to-day experience remain the most effective for sustaining trust and credibility.

Recommendation 2: Use Industry Publications as Primary Channels

With nearly 80% Top-2 trust in the most recent wave, industry publications continue to outperform national media by a substantial margin. These channels remain highly effective partners for communicating industry insights, workforce messaging, and policy implications.

Recommendation 3: Frame Macro Issues in Industry-Specific Language

Workers are becoming more optimistic about the future of their industries, yet trust remains concentrated in specialized sources. Organizations should connect broader economic and policy developments to tangible industry impacts that reflect real operating conditions and business realities.

Recommendation 4: Precision and Expertise Are Non-Negotiable

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

As industry confidence improves, maintaining trust will continue to require clarity, consistency, operational relevance, and communication grounded in demonstrated expertise.

Conclusion:

Data from March through May 2026 show that the workforce remains discerning, not cynical. Workers continue to place trust in information they can verify, that reflects their operational reality, and that is grounded in industry expertise.

Skepticism toward political institutions, national media, and generalized communication remains firmly entrenched. At the same time, trust in more proximate and industry-aligned sources continues to remain substantially stronger, reinforcing the importance of relevance, expertise, and operational familiarity in shaping credibility.

While confidence in industry economic conditions improved in the latest wave, the broader trust structure remains remarkably stable. Workers continue to place their confidence in organizations and information sources they perceive as knowledgeable, practical, and closely connected to how work actually gets done.

Rebuilding trust in this environment requires proximity, expertise, and transparency. Organizations that anchor their communication in specialist channels such as company leadership, trade associations, and industry publications will be best positioned to reach an audience that is increasingly selective about where it places confidence.

Trust remains selective, concentrated, and closely tied to perceived expertise and relevance.

Appendix | Mar-May 2026 Snapshot:

General Media (Q215)

Trust in general media remains low. In the most recent wave, 18% express high trust, while 63% report low trust, reinforcing continued skepticism toward broad, non-specialized media coverage of industry issues. Overall trust levels remain highly stable across recent waves.

Industry Publications (Q220R5)

Industry-specific publications remain the most trusted information source by a wide margin. In the most recent wave, 78% of respondents express Top-2 Box trust, continuing to outperform general and national media substantially. This sustained advantage reinforces the role of expert-driven, industry-grounded reporting as the primary credibility anchor for workforce audiences.

Institutional Trust (Q225)

Mean trust rankings (1 = highest):

- Company leadership: 1.75
- Trade associations: 1.96
- Business media: 3.20
- State/local government: 3.65
- Federal government: 4.45

Trust remains concentrated in institutions closest to workers' operational reality. Federal institutions continue to rank lowest by a substantial margin, while company leadership and trade associations maintain the strongest trust positions. The overall hierarchy of institutional trust remains highly stable across recent waves.

Regulatory Transparency (Q210)

Trust remains concentrated in institutions closest to workers' operational reality. Federal institutions continue to rank lowest by a substantial margin, while company leadership and trade associations maintain the strongest trust positions. The overall hierarchy of institutional trust remains highly stable across recent waves.

Overall Trust Gap

A clear trust gap persists. **Workers continue to place greater confidence in proximate, industry-grounded sources such as company leadership, trade associations, and industry publications**, while remaining skeptical of federal institutions, national media, and generalized narratives. Even as confidence in industry economic conditions improved in the latest wave, the findings reinforce a highly durable hierarchy of credibility driven by relevance, expertise, and operational familiarity.

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.