



Advancing American Freedom - Small Business Owners Survey
N=301 small business owners with 1–499 employees
 Online survey, sample provided by Cint
 Field Dates: March 4–11, 2026
 Margin of Error: ± 6.6 percentage points

THE ECONOMY AND BUSINESSES

1. **[QHowWell] Overall, how well do you feel things are going for your business right now?**

[RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-4, 4-1]

VERY/SOMEWHAT WELL	88%
Very well	39%
Somewhat well	49%
Not that well	11%
Not at all well	1%
Unsure	-

2. **[QChallenges_OE] What are the biggest challenges facing your business right now, if any?**

(Describe up to 3 challenges.)

[OPEN END] [RESPONSES CODED INTO CATEGORIES]

Client or customer acquisition and retention / Not enough demand	26%
Staffing issues	21%
Costs / Inflation	18%
The economy / Economic conditions in general	14%
Cash flow management	13%
AI and technological adaptation	10%
Operational efficiency / Other operational challenges	9%
Supply chain issues	8%
Tariffs and trade issues	7%
Competition	6%
Government and regulatory issues	6%
Marketing and brand awareness	6%
Seasonal fluctuations / Weather issues	2%
Other specific challenges	11%
No challenges	4%

3. **[QOverallEcon] Overall, would you say current economic conditions in the United States are favorable or unfavorable for your business? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-5, 5-1]**

VERY/SOMEWHAT FAVORABLE	41%
VERY/SOMEWHAT UNFAVORABLE	35%
Very favorable	12%
Somewhat favorable	30%
Neither favorable nor unfavorable, or equally mixed	24%
Somewhat unfavorable	24%
Very unfavorable	11%

4. **[QPast12Months] In the past 12 months, would you say economic conditions for your business have improved, gotten worse, or stayed about the same? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-3, 3-1]**

Improved	29%
Stayed about the same	41%
Gotten worse	28%
Unsure	2%

5. **[QNext12Months] Looking ahead, do you think economic conditions for your business will improve, get worse, or stay about the same in the next 12 months? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-3, 3-1]**
- | | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Will improve | 45% |
| Will stay about the same | 30% |
| Will get worse | 20% |
| Unsure | 5% |
6. **[QDemand] In the past 12 months, has consumer demand for the products or services your business provides... [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-5, 5-1]**
- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| INCREASED A LOT/LITTLE | 45% |
| DECREASED A LOT/LITTLE | 21% |
| Increased a lot | 18% |
| Increased a little | 27% |
| Stayed the same | 33% |
| Decreased a little | 16% |
| Decreased a lot | 5% |
| Unsure | 1% |
7. **[QInflationResponse] In the past 12 months, has your business made any changes in response to inflation? Select all that apply. [RANDOMIZE 1-8] [SELECT MULTIPLE]**
- | | |
|---|-----|
| Tried to find lower cost supplies | 41% |
| Raised prices | 40% |
| Delayed investments or expansion | 24% |
| Delayed hiring | 16% |
| Not increased wages | 14% |
| Increased wages | 11% |
| Reduced staff | 8% |
| Reduced business property space | 2% |
| Other (Please specify) | 1% |
| No, my business has not made any changes in response to inflation | 25% |
8. **[QBusinessCosts] In the past 12 months, has the cost of supplies or materials necessary for your business... [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-5, 5-1]**
- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| INCREASED A LOT/LITTLE | 77% |
| DECREASED A LOT/LITTLE | 3% |
| Increased a lot | 28% |
| Increased a little | 49% |
| Stayed the same | 19% |
| Decreased a little | 2% |
| Decreased a lot | 1% |
| Unsure | 1% |
9. **[QDifficultyHiring] In the past 12 months, has your business had any difficulty when trying to hire workers? [RANDOMIZE 1-2]**
- | | |
|---|-----|
| No, have not had difficulty | 43% |
| Yes, have had difficulty | 25% |
| Not applicable — Have not tried to hire workers | 32% |

[IF HAS HAD DIFFICULTY WHEN TRYING TO HIRE WORKERS, ASK:]

10. [QReasonHiringDiff] What caused difficulty when your business was trying to hire workers? Select all that apply. [RANDOMIZE 1-8] [SELECT MULTIPLE]

	(n=78)
Applicants were not well-qualified for the role(s)	47%
Expectations for pay or benefits exceeded what we could offer	47%
Applicants' work preferences (e.g., schedule, location) did not align with our needs	33%
Did not receive enough applications	31%
Transportation challenges for workers	19%
Complying with legal/regulatory requirements related to hiring	19%
Housing costs nearby are too high for workers to afford	18%
Changes to immigration or visa policies	8%
Something else (Please specify)	4%

[IF HAS NOT TRIED TO HIRE WORKERS (QDifficultyHiring=3), ASK:]

11. [QWhyNotHired] What is the main reason your business has not tried to hire workers in the past 12 months? [RANDOMIZE 1-6]

	(n=94)
Have not needed additional workers	62%
Uncertainty about the economy	11%
Cannot afford to pay additional workers	11%
Prefer not to hire additional workers	10%
Legal/regulatory requirements make hiring too difficult or costly	2%
Have not had time/bandwidth to handle hiring	1%
Other reason	2%

POLICIES AND OTHER CHANGES

12. [QTrumpApprove] Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Donald Trump is handling the economy? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-4, 4-1]

STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT APPROVE	49%
STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT DISAPPROVE	45%
Strongly approve	22%
Somewhat approve	26%
Somewhat disapprove	12%
Strongly disapprove	33%
Unsure	6%

13. [QPartyBetter] In general, which political party's policy positions do you think are better for small businesses? [RANDOMIZE 1-2]

The Republican Party	44%
The Democratic Party	27%
Both are equally good for small businesses	12%
Neither are good for small businesses	12%
Unsure	4%

14. [QPolicyChange_OE] If you could have elected officials make one policy change that would affect your business, what would be most helpful for your business?

[OPEN END] [RESPONSES CODED INTO CATEGORIES]

Tax relief	28%
Tariff reduction or repeal	19%
Lowering costs / Addressing inflation	12%
Regulation reduction	6%
Healthcare policy	5%
Economic stability	4%
Funding and grants	4%
Small business support	4%
Lower interest rates	4%
Other	15%
Non-specific/unsure responses	6%
No change desired	2%

15. [QEB] What kind of overall effect would you say each of the following are currently having on your business? [DISPLAY AS GRID] [RANDOMIZE ITEM ORDER] [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-5, 5-1]

	1. Very positive effect	2. Somewhat positive effect	3. Neither positive nor negative effect	4. Somewhat negative effect	5. Very negative effect	6. Unsure				
			VERY / SOME. POS. EFFECT	VERY / SOME. NEG. EFFECT	Very positive effect	Somewhat positive effect	Neither positive nor negative effect	Somewhat negative effect	Very negative effect	Unsure
Artificial intelligence (AI)			52%	13%	24%	28%	32%	6%	7%	4%
Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives			27%	18%	12%	15%	52%	6%	12%	3%
State policies for businesses in the main state where you operate			28%	25%	7%	21%	44%	17%	9%	4%
Federal policies for businesses			23%	32%	6%	17%	40%	21%	11%	6%
Tariffs and recent changes to U.S. trade policy			13%	53%	6%	7%	32%	26%	27%	2%

16. [QCurrentReg] In general, do you think there is too much, about the right amount, or too little federal government regulation of small businesses? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-3, 3-1]

Too much	47%
About the right amount	35%
Too little	6%
Unsure	12%

17. [QRegulatoryChange] In the past 12 months, do you think the federal regulatory environment for small businesses has gotten better, worse, or stayed about the same? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-5, 5-1]

A LOT/LITTLE BETTER	24%
A LOT/LITTLE WORSE	36%
A lot better	5%
A little better	19%
Stayed about the same	37%
A little worse	25%
A lot worse	11%
Unsure	3%

18. [QRC] As a small business owner, how difficult, if at all, do you find each of the following?
 [DISPLAY AS GRID] [RANDOMIZE ITEM ORDER] [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-4, 4-1]

	1. Very difficult	2. Somewhat difficult	3. Not that difficult	4. Not difficult at all	5. Does not apply to me	6. Unsure			
			VERY / SOME. DIFFICULT	Somewhat difficult	Not that difficult	Not difficult at all	Does not apply to me	Unsure	
Knowing about changes to regulations that affect my business			52%	12%	40%	27%	15%	3%	2%
Dealing with the expenses related to staying compliant with regulations			50%	14%	36%	24%	17%	5%	5%
Staying compliant with federal, state, and local regulations			41%	9%	32%	36%	17%	4%	2%

19. [QTaxCutsHelp] In 2017, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) cut federal taxes for small businesses. In 2025, Congress voted to keep those tax cuts for small businesses in place beyond the end of 2025 as part of the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act”. How much will the continuation of those tax cuts help your business? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-4, 4-1]

A LOT/SOME	60%
A lot	17%
Some	43%
Not much	23%
Not at all	8%
Unsure	8%

20. [QIfCutsExpired] If the 2017 TCJA tax cuts for small businesses had expired and your taxes had increased as a result, how much would that have hurt your business?
 [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-4, 4-1]

A LOT/SOME	58%
A lot	20%
Some	38%
Not much	28%
Not at all	6%
Unsure	8%

21. [QTariffsSupport] Over the last year, the U.S. government has made changes to trade policy and imposed tariffs on the import of goods from certain foreign countries. In general, do you support or oppose these tariffs? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-4, 4-1]

STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT SUPPORT	41%
STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT OPPOSE	46%
Strongly support	17%
Somewhat support	24%
Somewhat oppose	17%
Strongly oppose	29%
Unsure	13%

22. [QTariffsEffect] In what ways, if any, have tariffs affected your business? Select all that apply. [RANDOMIZE 1-6] [SELECT MULTIPLE]

Raised the cost of things my business needs to buy	42%
Caused me to raise prices for my customers	36%
Had to change suppliers or vendors	26%
Raised cost of living for my employees	25%
Caused me to absorb increases in costs without raising prices	25%
Made it harder for me to access overseas markets	18%
Other way	3%
Not applicable - Tariffs have not affected my business	23%
Unsure	4%

23. [QHCPremiums] In the past 12 months, have your business's health insurance premium expenses... [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-5, 5-1]

INCREASED A LOT/LITTLE	39%
DECREASED A LOT/LITTLE	2%
Increased a lot	16%
Increased a little	22%
Stayed the same	28%
Decreased a little	1%
Decreased a lot	*%
Not applicable - My business does not pay for health coverage	26%
Unsure	5%

24. [QACAHelp] In 2009, the Affordable Care Act was signed into law, making significant changes to our healthcare system. In general, has the Affordable Care Act helped or harmed your business? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-3, 3-1]

Helped	25%
Had no effect	52%
Harmed	13%
Unsure	10%

25. [QAIUse] How much, if at all, is your business currently using any type of artificial intelligence (AI) in its day-to-day operations? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-4, 4-1]

A LOT/SOME	60%
A lot	19%
Some	40%
Not much	20%
Not at all	17%
Unsure	3%

26. [QAIExpect] In the next 12 months, do you expect that your business's use of AI will... [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-5, 5-1]

INCREASE A LOT/LITTLE	54%
DECREASE A LOT/LITTLE	5%
Increase a lot	18%
Increase a little	36%
Stay the same	36%
Decrease a little	2%
Decrease a lot	4%
Unsure	5%

27. [QAIHelpHarm] In the next few years, do you think AI will... [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-3, 3-1]

Help your business	54%
Have no real effect	24%
Harm your business	13%
Unsure	9%

DEMOGRAPHICS

28. [QBirthYear] Which range of years includes the year you were born?

1903 – 1927	-
1928 – 1945	*%
1946 – 1964	19%
1965 – 1980	46%
1981 – 1996	30%
1997 – 2012	5%

29. [QGender] Do you describe yourself as a man, a woman, or in some other way? [RANDOMIZE 1-2]

Man	57%
Woman	43%
Some other way	1%

30. [QRace] What is your race or ethnicity? [SELECT MULTIPLE] [RANDOMIZE 1-6]

White	77%
Black or African American	18%
Hispanic or Latino	8%
Asian	4%
Native American or Alaska Native	3%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%
Other race or ethnicity (Please specify)	1%

[QRaceRecode] Recoded Race/Ethnicity

White, non-Hispanic	70%
Black, non-Hispanic	13%
Hispanic	8%
AAPI, non-Hispanic	3%
Other/2+, non-Hispanic	6%

31. [QEducation] What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High school or less	16%
Some college	21%
Associate degree	13%
Bachelor's degree	31%
Graduate degree	19%
Prefer not to say	*%

32. [QPartyID] Do you consider yourself a...? [RANDOMIZE 1-2]

Republican	40%
Democrat	26%
Independent	30%
Member of another party	2%
Unsure	2%

[IF INDEPENDENT, MEMBER OF ANOTHER PARTY, OR UNSURE (QParty=3-5), ASK]

33. [QPartyLeanView] Even if neither political party perfectly represents your views, who do you agree with more often on issues that are important to you? [RANDOMIZE 1-2]

	(n=108)
Democrats	27%
Republicans	21%
Both equally often	42%
Unsure	10%

[QPartyConsolidated] QPartyID and QPartyLeanView

Total Republican+Republican-leaning Independents	47%
Total Democratic+Democratic-leaning Independents	35%
Total Independent	18%

SCREENERS / DEMOGRAPHIC QUOTAS (ASKED AT BEGINNING OF SURVEY)

34. [QAge] What is your age? [TEXT NUMBER BOX] [TERMINATE IF <18 OR OVER 120]

18 - 34	14%
35 - 49	34%
50 - 64	39%
65+	13%

35. [QBusinessOwn] Are you an owner or co-owner of a business?

Yes		100%
No	TERMINATE	-
Prefer not to say	TERMINATE	-

36. [QBusinessOperating] What is your business's operating status?

Not yet operating	TERMINATE	-
Currently operating		99%
Temporarily closed		1%
Permanently closed or has been sold/transferred	TERMINATE	-

37. [QOwnerRole] Which of the following best describes your current role as a business owner? [RANDOMIZE SCALE 1-3, 3-1]

I am directly involved in making decisions about the business's finances and operations		95%
I am familiar with the business's current finances and operations, but I am not directly involved in decisionmaking		5%
I am not familiar with the business's current finances and operations	TERMINATE	-

38. [QHeadquarters] Is your business headquarters located in the United States, or another country? (A business headquarters is the location where primary business functions are coordinated. For instance, for some businesses, a headquarters may be a residence, a shop or an office.) [RANDOMIZE 1-2]

United States		100%
Another country	TERMINATE	-

39. [QState] In which state is your business headquarters located?

States in the Northeast	13%
States in the Midwest	19%
States in the South	47%
States in the West	21%

40. [QNumberEmployees] How many paid employees does your business have in the United States, EXCLUDING owner(s)? (Include both full-time and part-time employees.)

0	TERMINATE	-
1-4		56%
5-9		18%
10-19		13%
20-49		5%
50-99		4%
100-249		3%
250-499		2%
500 or more	TERMINATE	-

41. [QBusinessIndustry] In what industry does your business operate?

Accommodation and Food Services	5%
Administrative, Support, or Waste Management Services	*%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	1%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	7%
Construction	12%
Educational Services	1%
Finance and Insurance	5%
Health Care and Social Assistance	12%
Information	3%
Manufacturing	2%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	-
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	10%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	8%
Retail Trade	13%
Transportation and Warehousing	3%
Utilities	-
Wholesale Trade	4%
Other	15%

42. [QYearEstablished] In what year was your business established? (YYYY) [NUMBER BOX]

Before 2000	14%
2000-2009	15%
2010-2019	29%
2020 or after	42%

[IF BUSINESS WAS ESTABLISHED IN OR BEFORE 2025, ASK:]

43. [Q2025Revenue] What were your business's total revenues in 2025? (Please provide your best estimate.)

	(n=297)
Less than \$25,000	4%
\$25,000 – \$49,999	4%
\$50,000 – \$99,999	5%
\$100,000 – \$249,999	24%
\$250,000 – \$499,999	13%
\$500,000 – \$999,999	18%
\$1 million – \$4.9 million	25%
\$5 million – \$9.9 million	3%
\$10 million or more	5%
Prefer not to say	1%

METHODOLOGY

The survey was fielded online from March 4–11, 2026 in English among a sample of 301 small business owners with 1–499 employees nationwide using non-probability sampling.

The sample was provided by Cint based on quota targets derived from benchmarks from the U.S. Census Bureau's Annual Business Survey (ABS), County Business Patterns (CBP), and Business Dynamics Statistics (BDS).

Measures taken to ensure data quality included measures to prevent duplicate responses, questions designed to disqualify inattentive respondents, and the removal of respondents from the data file who answered more than one-third of the questions they were asked in less than one-third of the median response time per question.

The sample was weighted to benchmarks for small businesses in the United States. Weighting dimensions and benchmark data sources included:

- Annual Business Survey (ABS) - Urban vs. rural; Total annual sales/receipts
- County Business Patterns (CBP) - Industry; Number of employees
- Business Dynamics Statistics (BDS) - Business age (years in business)

Calculated the way it would be for a random sample and adjusted to incorporate the effect of weighting, the margin of sampling error is ± 6.6 percentage points.