



FREEDOM TO WORK AND ENTERPRISE

Affordability depends equally on how much something costs and how much income someone earns. Work and enterprise are the only enduring sources of income, and they are foundational to the American dream and to human flourishing. The freedom to work and to enterprise—to decide how to use one's talents and efforts to provide for oneself and to serve others—has fueled 250 years of American prosperity.

People's labor—both physical and intellectual—is an essential input in the goods and services that sustain us and make our lives easier and more enjoyable. When Americans have the freedom to work and to hire others, we get more goods and services at lower costs—thus, greater affordability.

The freedom to work is more than the ability to get a job. It's about people being able to agree to work on mutually acceptable terms without the government acting as a gatekeeper. It's about allowing employers and employees to negotiate directly, instead of allowing third-party representatives to take away workers' individual voices.

The freedom to work is inextricably linked to the freedom of enterprise—the entrepreneurial pursuit of creating new products and services or building new businesses through the coordination of workers and capital. While businesses come in all shapes and sizes, they share two unavoidable realities: every business starts small, and every business faces the risk of failure. Labor policies that purport to be pro-worker but impose heavy burdens on business enterprises ultimately hurt workers and consumers by reducing incomes and raising prices.

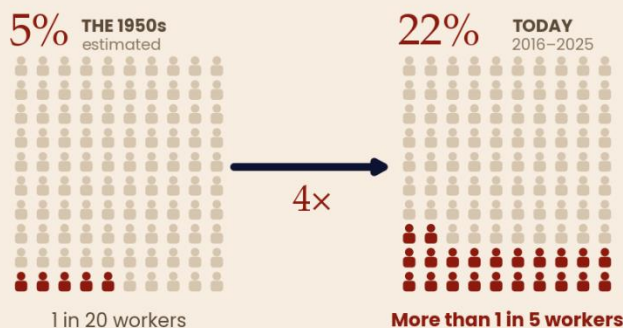
Many laws and regulations seek to control how the labor market operates, effectively limiting people's ability to set their own terms of employment. These limits reduce the productivity and incomes of some workers, cost others their jobs, and push some out of the labor force altogether.

Enacting policies consistent with the freedom to work and enterprise would ensure that more Americans earn their own incomes, achieve rising incomes, and produce goods and services at lower costs for others.



More than one in five workers now needs government permission

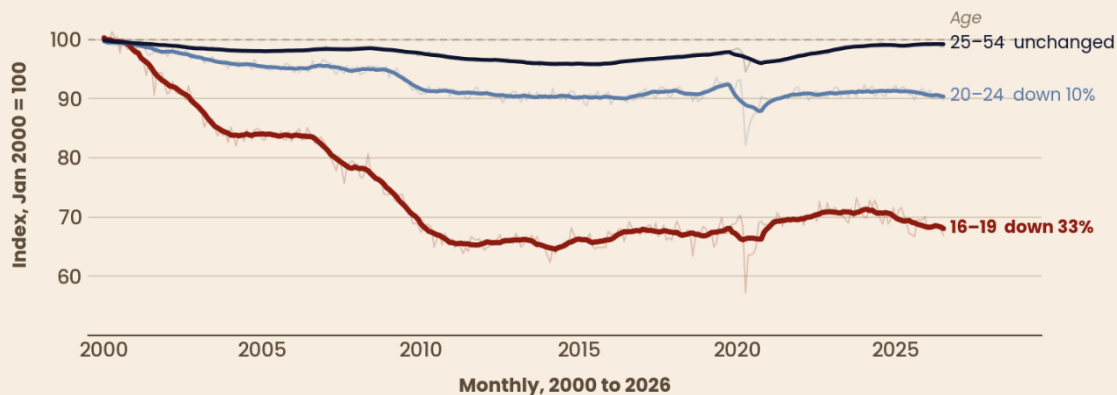
Share of American workers who need a license to do their job



Sources: Juliet Cramer and Ryan Nunn, "What new data tell us about the growth of occupational licensure," Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, December 19, 2025. The 22% share is from the BLS Current Population Survey; the 1950s figure is a researcher estimate from Kleiner and Krueger (2013), not a BLS measurement, and is not drawn from the same survey. www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2025/what-new-data-tell-us-about-the-growth-of-occupational-licensure

Teen labor force participation has fallen by a third since 2000

Labor force participation rate by age, indexed to January 2000 = 100



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Participation Rate by Age (LNS11300012, LNS11300036, LNS11300060) — via FRED. Faint lines are monthly readings; bolder lines are 12-month averages, since the teen series is drawn from a small CPS sample and is noisy month to month.

