



# 2026 State of the App-Based Economy



## Executive Summary

The app-based economy is now larger, more broadly distributed, more deeply woven into American economic life, and more politically durable than when Morning Consult and Flex first measured it three years ago.

The scale of consumer adoption tells the story.

Seven in ten U.S. adults have used an app-based platform, and one in four now use these services more than five times a month. As platforms expand to include categories such as prescription delivery, same-day retail, and rideshare in suburban markets that were underpenetrated just three years ago, they are solving real, recurring problems. Today, two-thirds of adults say these services are valuable to their daily lives, up from 63% in 2023.

The workforce behind these services has grown in step. Nearly three in ten U.S. adults now earn income on an app-based platform, with the fastest growth coming in states that previously lagged the national average. Platform-based work remains overwhelmingly part-time and supplemental, with most earners layering platform income on top of traditional W-2 employment. Yet the financial value of platform income has proven durable: 82% of current earners say platform income has been helpful in dealing with inflation, a finding that has held across very different economic conditions.

The policy landscape reflects this reality. There is significant support for maintaining independent contractor classification across party lines, racial and ethnic groups, and income brackets, with U.S. adults 1.7-to-1 more likely to penalize rather than reward politicians who back reclassification. That consensus has held essentially unchanged since 2023 and firmly positions the preservation of independent contractor status as one of the few issues where workers, consumers, and voters broadly agree.

**Platform-based work remains overwhelmingly part-time and supplemental, with most earners layering platform income on top of traditional W-2 employment.**



**69%**

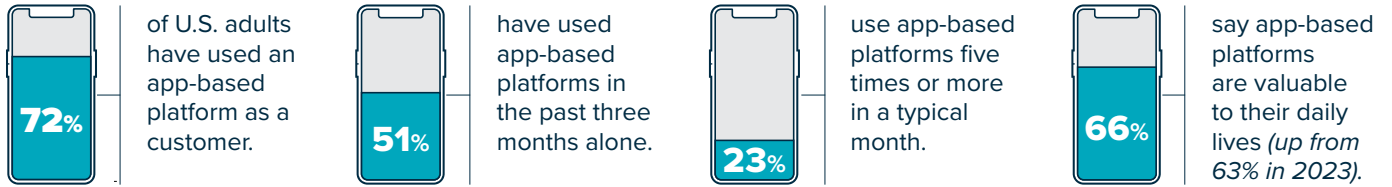
**put in 15 hours or fewer per week**

**63%**

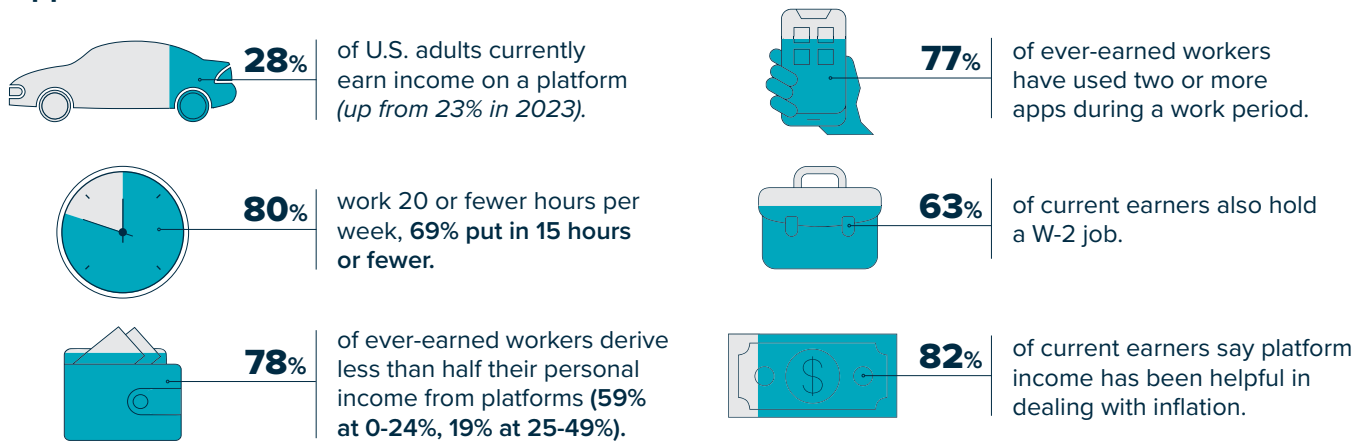
**supplement a traditional W-2 job**

# The State of the App-Based Economy in 2026

## Consumer Use of App-Based Platforms



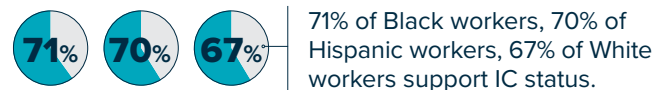
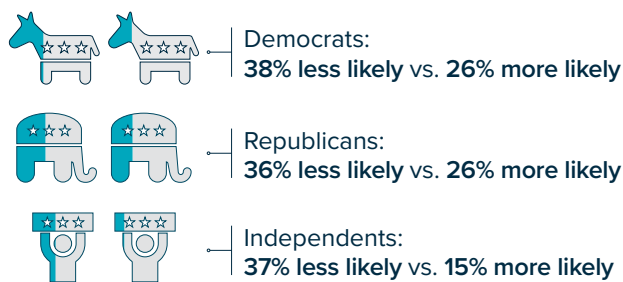
## App-Based Workforce



## Perceptions of Independent Classification

**Nearly 2-to-1:** Among adults with a directional view, opposition to reclassification politicians outweighs support.

Opposition outpaces support across party lines:



## Methodology

This nationwide poll was conducted online by Morning Consult between **March 18-March 26, 2026**, among a sample of **10,010 U.S. adults**. State-level results are estimated by a Multilevel Regression and Poststratification (MRP) model weighted by age, race/ethnicity, gender, and educational attainment within each state. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 1 percentage point.

The data were then subset to “Adults Who Have Ever Been an App-Based Worker” (n=4,354) as well as “Adults Who Are Currently App-Based Workers” (n=2,804). All “Adults Who Are Currently App-Based Workers” are included as part of the sample of “Adults Who Have Ever Been an App-Based Worker”. Results from both subsets have a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

## The App-Based Economy Has Become Part of Daily Life

### Consumer adoption has cleared the saturation threshold.

Seventy-two percent of U.S. adults have used an app-based platform, 51% used one in just the past three months, and 23% use platforms more than five times a month. The breadth of adoption reflects how far these services have expanded beyond their original footprint. Grocery delivery is now routine for millions of families, rideshare has moved into suburban and mid-size markets where transit is limited, and delivery platforms have given local businesses reach well beyond their neighborhoods. The common driver is demand from time-constrained households, aging adults, and communities without walkable retail.

As a result, more Americans value these services today. Two-thirds of U.S. adults (66%) say app-based platforms are valuable to their daily lives, up from 63% in 2023. For frequent users, platforms have become part of how people manage daily life rather than an occasional convenience. This distinction carries meaningful implications for any policy that could disrupt service availability.

### A broader, more representative workforce.

The 2026 data confirms that app-based work is now a national phenomenon. The share of U.S.

adults currently earning on a platform rose from 23% to 28%, with the share of those who have ever earned on app-based platforms also rising from 36% to 43%. Participation now spans every region of the country, with the fastest growth in states that started below the national average. Active worker rates now exceed 30% in seven states, led by D.C. at 35%. Alaska, Oklahoma, Maine, Idaho, and South Dakota each gained 10 to 13 percentage points.

“As a disabled United States veteran, shopping on the Instacart platform has been a true lifesaver. Not only do my earnings help supplement my pension, but shopping provides much-needed structure to my day and has helped me enter the middle class.”

**Benjamin C. | PA**  
Instacart



**The share of U.S. adults currently earning on a platform rose from 23% to 28%, with the share of those who have ever earned on app-based platforms also rising from 36% to 43%.**

The profile of this workforce has not changed as much as its geography. App-based work remains overwhelmingly part-time: 69% of workers put in 15 hours or fewer per week, up from 67% in 2023; 80% work 20 hours or fewer. Moreover, nearly two-thirds (63%) of current earners are supplementing a traditional W-2 job.

**Platform income is more strategic and more durable.**

When Flex first fielded this survey in 2023, headline inflation was elevated and platform income offered acute relief. Since then, inflation has followed an uneven path, moderating through late 2025 before re-accelerating in early 2026 on the back of surging energy costs.

Through it all, 82% of current earners say platform income has been helpful in dealing with inflation, evidence that the financial case for platform work does not depend on any single macro moment. The shift is in intensity: ‘very helpful’ softened from 54% to 42% while ‘somewhat helpful’ rose from 31% to 39%, suggesting what began as a response to economic pressure has settled into an established earning pattern.

“Shipt has been a convenient and flexible way to earn money amidst rising costs. We have added \$400 of monthly income, which has helped us tremendously. I am thankful for the opportunity to work for Shipt and hope I can for years to come!”

**Katherine B. | TX**  
Shipt



**7 in 10**

**app-based workers support maintaining independent worker classification.**

Workers have adapted accordingly. Seventy-seven percent of ever-earned workers say they have earned on two or more apps during a work period, with 43% doing so very or somewhat often. Rather than choosing a single platform, workers layer multiple apps to optimize their earnings, treating each as one channel in a broader income strategy.

**Classification consensus holds across every meaningful divide.**

Sixty-nine percent of app-based workers support maintaining independent contractor classification, virtually unchanged from 70% in 2023. This support holds across racial and ethnic groups (Black workers 71%, Hispanic 70%, white 67%), across party lines (Democrats 72%, Republicans 73%, Independents 61%), and across income brackets.

The voter intent question sharpens the point. Among the 59% of adults who hold a directional view, opposition outweighs support by 1.7-to-1. Critically, 37% of U.S. adults say they would be less likely to support a politician who backs reclassification, while only 22% say they would be more likely to support such a politician. Opposition runs 36% among Democrats, 39% among Republicans, and 37% among Independents, a narrow partisan range that makes reclassification a difficult position for candidates of either party.