What Real-Time Data Says About the Economy

Services
Investment Management

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Most economic reports are released with a delay, which means investors are often looking at what happened weeks or even months ago after economists have had time to gather the data. The Federal Reserve's Weekly Economic Index helps fill that gap by providing a more up-to-date snapshot of economic activity. The index combines several real-time measures of the economy, including consumer spending, employment trends, rail activity, electricity use, fuel sales, and steel production, to estimate the economy's growth rate. Through the first half of 2026, the estimate has run around +3%, well above the long-term average growth rate of +2.0% (Figure 1). The signal has been consistent: the economy remains on solid footing in 2026.

Manufacturing activity tells a similar story. The ISM Manufacturing Index, a widely followed survey of purchasing managers at factories, rose to 54 in May, its strongest reading in four years (Figure 2). May was the fifth straight month above 50, the threshold that signals expansion, with 16 of 18 industries reporting growth. After a challenging period from 2023 through most of 2025, manufacturers are benefiting from lower interest rates and increased business investment. Tech companies are investing hundreds of billions into data centers, computer chips, and power infrastructure, providing an additional boost to the manufacturing sector. In addition, some businesses appear to be pulling orders forward due to concerns that the Middle East conflict could push oil prices and production costs higher.

Labor market data shows a similar story. Hiring picked up in early 2026 after slowing in the second half of 2025. Employers added 172,000 jobs in May, with the prior two months revised higher, and unemployment has declined from a peak of 4.5% late last year to 4.3%. Consumers, who account for nearly 70% of economic activity, are still spending, though at a modestly slower pace than a year ago. The reports reflect past activity, but they reinforce the message coming from the real-time data: economic growth remains solid.

As we move into the second half of 2026, the economy continues to show resilience, even as the headlines remain unsettled. The Middle East conflict has pushed oil and gas prices higher and kept inflation above the Fed's 2% target. Interest rates have come down but remain elevated, and with inflation still running above target, the Fed appears likely to hold interest rates steady the remainder of this year. None of that has derailed the economy so far. The big story of 2026 is an economy that has kept growing through a noisy and uncertain stretch.

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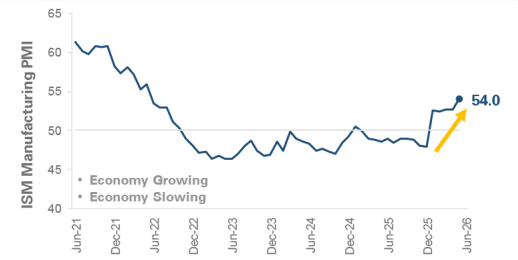
Figure 1 – Federal Reserve Weekly Economic Index

Source: Federal Reserve. The Weekly Economic Index (WEI) is a composite measure designed to provide a timely estimate of U.S. economic growth using high-frequency economic data. Time Period: January 2008 to June 2026. Latest available data as of 6/12/2026.

Figure 2 – Manufacturing Survey Rises to a 4-Year High



Source: ISM. The ISM Manufacturing PMI is a survey-based indicator that measures business conditions in the U.S. manufacturing sector. Readings above 50 generally indicate expansion, while readings below 50 indicate contraction. Time Period: June 2021 through May 2026. Latest available data as of 6/12/2026.

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The S&P 500 Index or Standard & Poor's 500 Index is a market-capitalization-weighted index of 500 leading publicly traded companies in the U.S.

The Russell 2000 index measures the performance of approximately 2,000 small-cap US equities.

The MSCI EAFE Index is a stock market index that measures the performance of large- and mid-cap companies across 21 developed markets countries around the world. Canada and the USA are not included.

The MSCI Emerging Markets Index captures large and mid cap representation across 24 Emerging Markets (EM) countries.

The Nasdaq 100 Index is a stock index of the 100 largest companies by modified market capitalization trading on Nasdaq exchanges.

The Russell 1000 Growth index is an index that tracks large cap, growth stocks. This benchmark is important for investors that might tilt their investments towards large cap growth. Growth stocks, in comparison to value stocks, are considered companies with a more growth potential, and a higher risk profile.

The Russell 1000 Value index is an index that tracks large cap, value stocks. This benchmark is important for investors that might tilt their investments towards large cap value. Value stocks, in comparison to growth stocks, are considered companies with a stable cash flow, and more mature business model.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, or simply the Dow, is a stock market index that indicates the value of 30 large, publicly owned companies based in the United States, and how they have traded in the stock market during various periods of time. These 30 companies are also included in the S&P 500 Index. The value of the Dow is not a weighted arithmetic mean and does not represent its component companies' market capitalization, but rather the sum of the price of one share of stock for each

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component company. The sum is corrected by a factor which changes whenever one of the component stocks has a stock split or stock dividend, so as to generate a consistent value for the index.

The Bloomberg US Aggregate Bond Index is used as a benchmark for investment grade bonds within the United States. This index is important as a benchmark for someone wanting to track their fixed income asset allocation.

The Bloomberg US Corporate Index covers performance for United States corporate bonds. This index serves as an important benchmark for portfolios that include exposure to investment grade corporate bonds.

The Bloomberg US Corporate High Yield Index covers performance for United States high yield corporate bonds. This index serves as an important benchmark for portfolios that include exposure to riskier corporate bonds that might not necessarily be investment grade.

Treasuries, also known as Treasury securities, are debt obligations issued by the United States government. They are used to raise cash needed to fund government operations and help finance the federal deficit. Treasuries are backed by the full faith and credit of the US government, making them one of the safest investments. They are an important instrument in monetary policy, allowing central banks to control the money supply.

The Prime Rate is the interest rate that commercial banks charge their most creditworthy corporate customers. The prime rate is derived from the federal funds rate, usually using fed funds + 3 as the formula.

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