THE 2026 STATE OF SITE SELECTION PULSE CHECK

SITE SELECTORS GUILD

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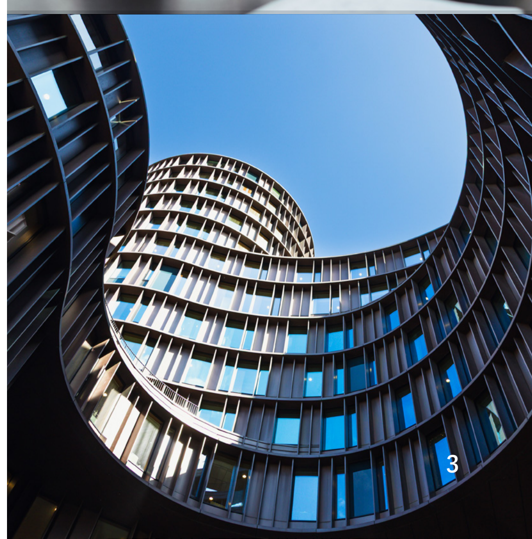
About the Site Selectors Guild and DCI

THE SITE SELECTORS GUILD

The Site Selectors Guild is the only association of the world's foremost professional site selection consultants. Guild members provide location strategy to corporations worldwide and to every industry, sector and function. Founded in 2010, the Site Selectors Guild is dedicated to advancing the profession of international corporate site selection by promoting integrity, objectivity and professional development. The peer-nominated members are vetted and must demonstrate significant professional location advisory experience. Guild membership is the highest standard in the site selection industry.

DEVELOPMENT COUNSELLORS INTERNATIONAL (DCI)

DCI, the leader in marketing places, specializes in economic development, tourism and talent attraction research and marketing. Established in 1960, the firm has worked for more than 500 cities, regions, provinces, states and countries — from thriving states and metropolitan regions to rural areas striving to compete. DCI understands the challenges and opportunities that economic development organizations (EDOs) and investment promotion agencies face.



Methodology

This summary report is an update to **The 2025 State of Site Selection**, a primary research study conducted annually that identifies the top trends impacting the domestic and international facility location decision-making process. The most recent edition of the study was conducted during July 2025; however, given the rapidly evolving political, economic and social global landscape, this interim report was conducted to serve as a pulse check on how conditions and the weighting of location factors have changed and to shed light on the issues that are top of mind for corporate decision-makers and their advisors.

This update captured input from 49 Guild members from across the globe. Responses were heavily weighted toward industrial specialists (82%) with a smaller percentage focused on office (18%).

A Message from Guild Board Chair Michelle Comerford

When we published the 2025 edition of **The State of Site Selection** late last year, we documented an industry navigating opportunities and challenges. My Guild colleagues and I saw a resurgence of manufacturing activity and a stabilizing office market on one hand, and tariff and federal policy volatility, energy constraints and increasing community pushback towards projects on the other. We knew even then that the landscape would not stand still.

Six months is a long time in corporate location strategy, both in terms of project timelines and how quickly the environment is changing. The pace of change in federal policy, global trade dynamics and infrastructure capacity has been extraordinary and consequential to the site selection industry. Skill mismatches and workforce shortages are adding another layer of complexity.

The 2026 State of Site Selection Pulse Check was designed to do exactly what its name suggests and take the pulse of those at the front lines of location decisions at a critical inflection point. Rather than wait for the next annual cycle, we went back to our Guild members to ask: What has changed? What has accelerated? What has emerged as a new concern that was not on our radar before?

As always, the Site Selectors Guild remains committed to objective, data-driven and process-oriented counsel. We hope this update serves as a timely and useful resource to you and your stakeholders as we navigate the challenges and opportunities that define the location decision landscape in 2026.

Sincerely,
Michelle Comerford
Site Selectors Guild Board Chair, Project Director and Industrial & Supply Chain Practice Leader, BLS & Co.

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> Site Selectors Guild Board Chair, Project Director and Industrial & Supply Chain Practice Leader, BLS & Co.

A Pulse Check on the State of the Site Selection Industry in 2026

Results for our survey of Guild members reveal a profession under pressure but adapting as needed. All of the themes from the 2025 study still hold true, and several of them continue to intensify their impact on location decisions. Utility and infrastructure capacity, specifically electric power and grid access, has moved from a growing concern to the most-consequential site-elimination factor. Tariff and federal policy uncertainty continues to delay or postpone projects at a ratio of roughly four-to-one over the acceleration of projects. Meanwhile, the pressure on speed-to-market strategies has grown so acute that two-thirds of respondents report having compromised on site or policy quality simply to meet clients' timelines.

Another notable trend that has only intensified since last summer is the impact of community resistance. Typically referred to as NIMBYism, project pushback is becoming a more organized and deliberate force, particularly around data centers and energy-intensive facilities, but it seems no industry is immune to pushback lately.

One theme — which has grown more relevant during the last few months — has unified this study with the previous one: traditional location playbooks are no longer sufficient. Today's location strategy playbook consists of enhanced scenario planning, reputational risk screening and the ability to move quickly within constrained infrastructure and workforce environments. These remain fundamentals and non-negotiable factors that Guild members must consider as they continue to work to mitigate risk for clients and the economic development organizations they partner with.

Overall Sentiment Is Divided

Outlook on the industry since **The 2025 State of the Site Selection** study is split fairly evenly: 37% are more optimistic, 31% unchanged and 33% less optimistic. This near-three-way split reflects uncertainty around the state of location decisions rather than a clear directional trend and the industry appears to be at inflection point.

Overall sentiment seems to be largely dependent on four factors and results in a bifurcated outlook.

- **Project stage**
- **Project origination**
  (foreign direct investment versus domestic)
- **Sector specialization**
- **Project type**
  (such as greenfield opportunities versus mergers and acquisitions [M&A]. Some consultants report M&A activity is outpacing greenfield activity by two-to-one.)

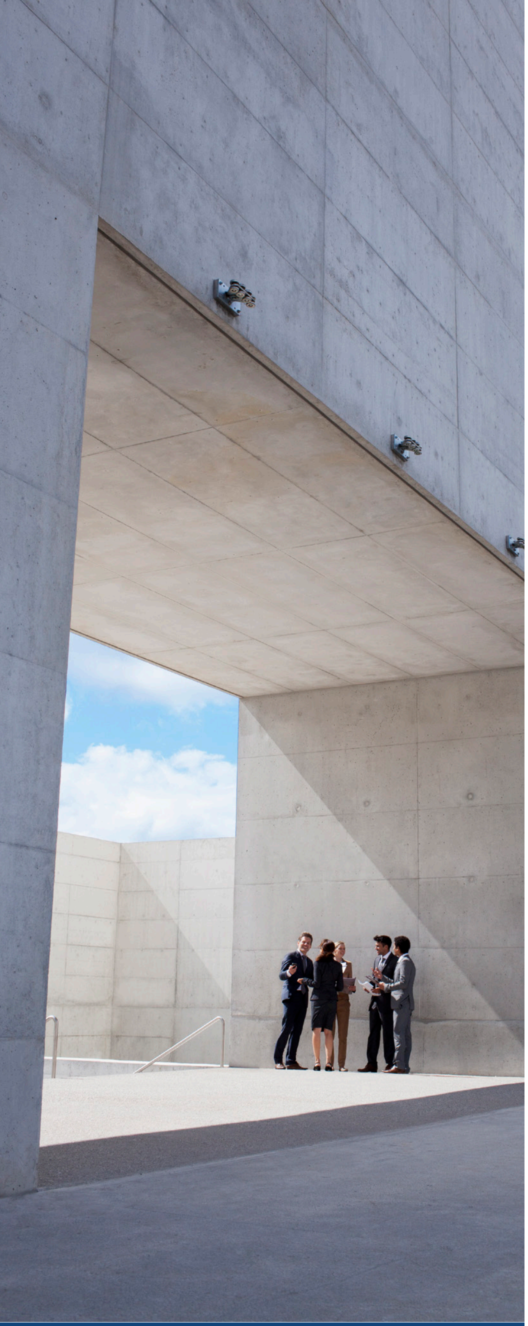


FIGURE 1

Current Outlook on the Industry, 2025 vs. 2026

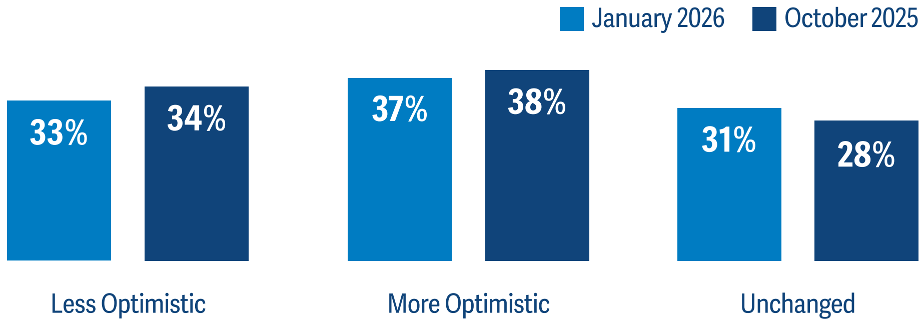
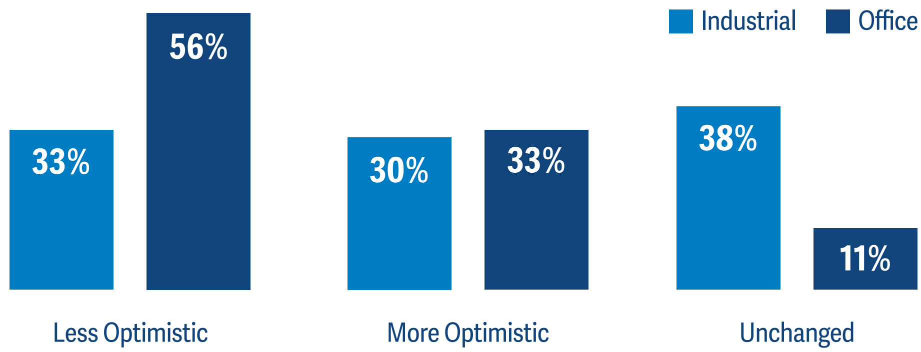


FIGURE 2

Current Outlook on the Industry, Industrial vs. Office



When comparing industrial respondents to office respondents, industrial responses are considerably more polarized when asked about the industry outlook in 2026.

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Respondents that are "More Optimistic"

- Normalization of volatility
  - Lower interest rates
  - Federal tax certainty
  - Streamlined regulations
  - Less tariff "dynamics"
  - Companies adapting to uncertainty
- Surge in pipeline and project activity
- Reshoring and domestic manufacturing (supply chain restructuring)
- AI and energy booms (growth in data centers, investments in energy generation and acceleration in the defense sector)

Respondents that are "Less Optimistic"

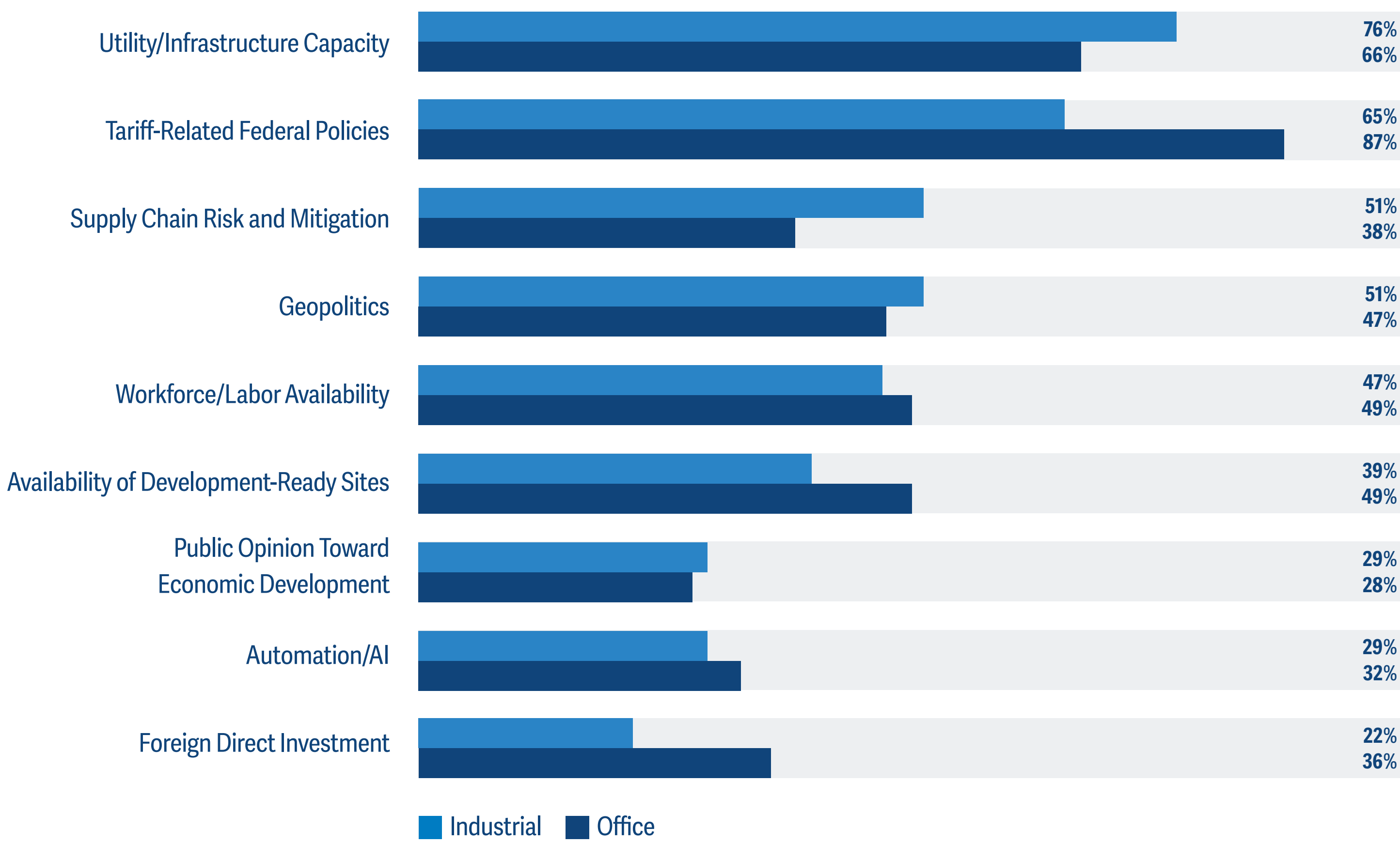
- Infrastructure and energy constraints
- Policy and tariff uncertainty
  - Tariff churn (impose, lift and reimpose)
  - Trade tensions (Europe, Canada and Korea)
  - Geopolitics moving from being background noise to being a primary risk factor
- Geopolitical and macro risks (a decline in consumer confidence and concerns about a possible recession)
- FDI slowdown (international investors questioning U.S. stability)

The outlook among office responses is more optimistic. Those who report more optimism believe that increased access to capital, lower interest rates, an overall stabilization of the post-pandemic market, footprint optimization strategies and sector-specific opportunities -- such as headquarters and tech functions -- are positive market indicators.

When asked which specific factors have the greatest **current** impact on the site selection industry, respondents slightly reprioritized factors from last year's report, with utility and infrastructure capacity commanding the position as the top factor impacting location decisions. Tariff-related federal policies are still a top force impacting location decisions, but they are slightly less disruptive than in mid-2025.

FIGURE 3

Factors Having the Greatest Current Impact on the Site Selection Industry



Other key findings reinforce how some themes have intensified since the release of the 2025 report; others continue to maintain their position as project fundamentals.

1. Infrastructure Capacity Is the Top Concern by a Significant Margin

Utility/infrastructure capacity (electric, water, natural gas) dominates as both a top factor impacting location decisions (76% of respondents) and the #1 site elimination factor (61% of respondents). This points to a structural bottleneck that is actively delaying or prohibitive to the successful siting of projects. The surge in AI/data center demand is straining grid capacity in a way that is becoming a hard constraint for project feasibility.

2. Tariffs Continue to Disrupt Project Timelines Adversely

Tariff-related federal policies rank as the #2 impact factor (65%) compared to being the top factor in Q4 2025. When asked about the direct timeline impact, 66% of respondents say projects are being delayed or postponed.

Separately, respondents rated a series of topic statements on a 1–5 scale. "Global tariff uncertainty is forcing companies to rethink location strategies" scored the highest agreement at 4.2.

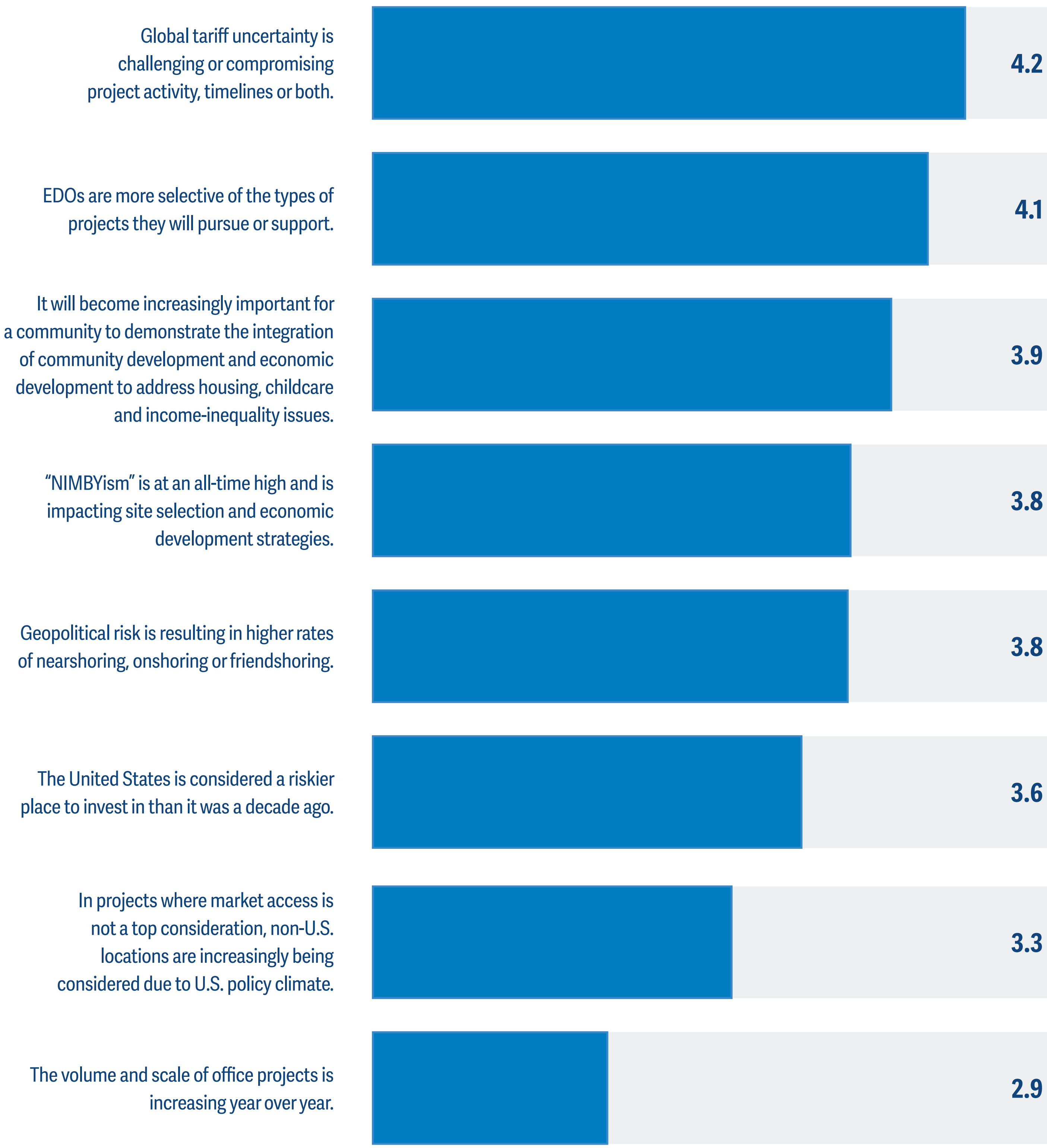
76%

of respondents report utility/infrastructure, such as electricity, water and natural gas, is the top factor impacting location decisions.

FIGURE 4

Level of Agreement with Select Statements

(1 = don't agree, 5 = strongly agree)



3. Speed to Market Continues to Be Compromised

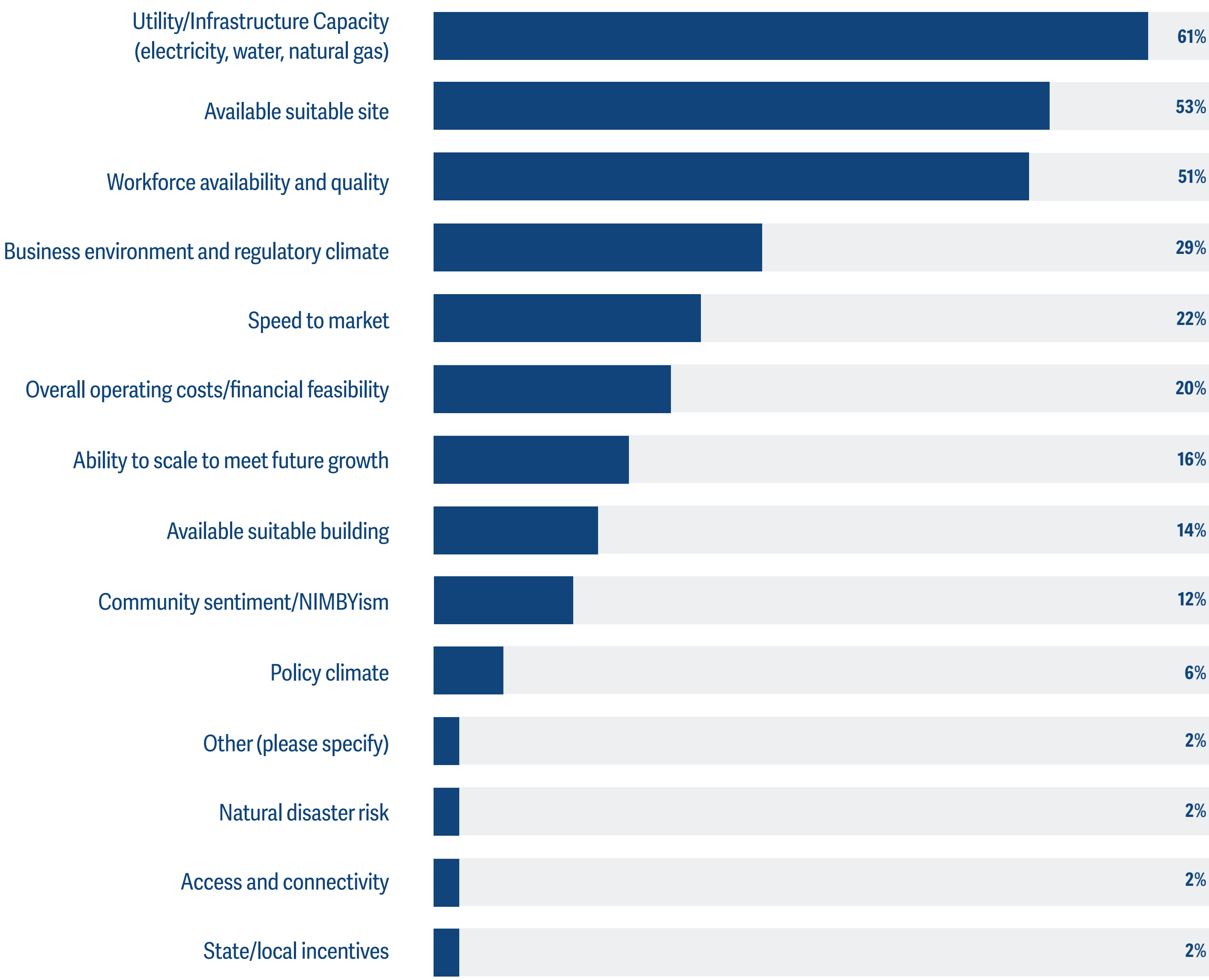
About 67% of respondents say they have compromised on product, regulatory or incentive policies to guarantee speed to market for recent projects, which is a significant signal. The pressure to secure a project is pushing consultants to accept less-optimal conditions to meet clients' project timelines.

4. Workforce and Site Readiness Round Out the Top Elimination Factors

Beyond infrastructure, "available suitable sites" and "workforce availability and quality" are the next most-common reasons that projects are eliminated from a location. Together, the top three elimination factors — infrastructure, sites and workforce — create a trifecta of supply-side constraints that EDOs must address to compete for and win projects.

FIGURE 5

Current Top Elimination Factors



5. NIMBYism is a recognized and growing concern, but it's not yet the dominant project-killer

When asked to rate the statement that "NIMBYism is increasingly a barrier to economic development projects," respondents gave it a 3.8 out of 5, with a strong 69% rating it a 4 or 5. This rating signifies broad agreement that community resistance is intensifying. Notably, industrial (3.80) and office (3.78) respondents rated NIMBYism almost identically. In particular, data centers are becoming a lightning rod due to concerns about water and electricity consumption. Although community sentiment hasn't overtaken infrastructure capacity or site availability as a primary deal-killer, the trajectory in the open-ended responses suggests it's becoming a more-deliberate and more-organized form of resistance and one that EDOs will need to address with greater sophistication. Conducting sentiment studies about development in the community before a prospective project is presented can help direct messaging and communication strategies.

6. AI/Data Centers, Defense, and Energy Dominate Project Activity

Open-ended responses about where the greatest project activity is occurring consistently show data centers, AI-related functions, defense/aerospace, energy generation (including renewables) and critical minerals despite several of these sectors being targets of community pushback and resistance. Food and beverage, life sciences and distribution/logistics remain steady sectors as well. The theme of energy-intensive, infrastructure-heavy industries runs throughout those sectors showing the greatest activity.

69%

of respondents rate the statement "NIMBYism is increasingly a barrier to economic development projects" a 4 or 5 out of 5.

The 2026 Pulse Check reflects a market under pressure from policy uncertainty, infrastructure and workforce constraints and geopolitical volatility.

The 2026 Pulse Check reflects a market under pressure from policy uncertainty, infrastructure and workforce constraints and geopolitical volatility. The strongest signal shared by Guild members is that infrastructure capacity, particularly power, continues to have the potential to be a top deal-breaker. EDOs that can credibly solve for power, sites and workforce, and have community support for development, will be best positioned to capture activity in the sectors driving growth: data centers, defense, energy, and advanced manufacturing.

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