

Consumer Pulse Study

Consumer behaviours and attitudes about current and future household budgets, spending and debt

South Africa Q4 2025

TransUnion's quarterly survey explores how consumers' personal finances have changed and what changes they expect in the future. The study measures shifting consumer attitudes and behaviours based on the dynamics of income, debt and identity theft. The analyses and insights give consumers a voice and inform businesses' decision-making as they seek to create economic opportunities for consumers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Consumers continued to adapt amid financial strain: South African households remained under pressure, but signs of financial adaptation were evident. In Q4, 48% reported their household finances were better than planned, yet 36% anticipated missing bill payments. Half cut discretionary spending and 34% cancelled subscriptions or memberships. At the same time, 38% planned to increase retirement contributions and many were adjusting budgets to preserve long-term stability. These shifts reflect a population balancing short-term affordability with future preparedness in a persistently high-cost environment.



Credit access remained uneven despite high demand: Credit continued to play a central role in financial planning as 91% of consumers viewed it as important to achieving their goals. However, only 42% felt they had sufficient access; 33% did not. While 51% believed they would be approved if they applied, just 36% planned to do so in the next year. Credit cards, personal loans and buy now, pay later (BNPL) services remained the most sought-after products. Yet, barriers like high costs, income concerns and fear of rejection persisted, highlighting the need for more inclusive and affordable credit solutions.



Digital fraud threats drove cautious engagement: Fraud attempts remained widespread; 59% of consumers were targeted and 12% fell victim. Common scams included phishing, vishing and gift card fraud. In response to cybersecurity concerns, 58% changed passwords and 23% enabled multi-factor authentication. Yet, when notified they were affected by a data breach, only 16% signed up for identity monitoring. Many consumers remained unsure how to protect themselves; 53% cited confusion and 22% felt overwhelmed. These insights underscore the need for clearer cybersecurity guidance and tools to help consumers safeguard their digital identities. As digital threats evolve, proactive education and simplified protection tools will be key to building long-term resilience.

Household income (HHI), spending and bill payment impact

South African households continued to navigate a complex financial landscape, with income trends showing modest improvement but persistent strain. In Q4 2025, 48% of consumers reported household income was better than planned (up from 44% in Q2 2025), while 15% said their finances were as expected. However, 37% said household income was worse than expected. These figures reflected a population split between those benefiting from economic momentum and those still facing financial headwinds shaped by uneven sectoral recovery and inflationary pressures.

Confidence in future financial prospects remained steady, even as short-term stress persists. Seventy-two percent of consumers were optimistic about their household finances over the next year and 75% expected their incomes to grow. This sentiment suggests a resilient mindset despite 36% who anticipated difficulty meeting current bill and loan obligations. The contrast between forward-looking optimism and present-day financial strain highlights the importance of both short-term support and long-term planning. It also reflects a growing awareness among consumers of the need to manage risk while remaining hopeful about recovery.

In response to these pressures, households adjusted their financial behaviours with intent. Half reduced discretionary spending and 34% cancelled subscriptions or memberships. At the same time, 38% intended to increase contributions to retirement funds and investments, signalling a growing focus on future financial security. These actions reflect a population that's not only reacting to affordability constraints but also actively building financial buffers to withstand future financial volatility. The shift toward more conservative financial planning is evident across age groups, with younger consumers leading in planned spending on digital services and older consumers prioritising debt reduction in the next three months.

Rather than retreating in the face of uncertainty, many households are recalibrating with purpose. The emphasis on savings, debt management and reduced non-essential spending points to a more strategic approach to financial health. Consumers also showed greater interest in financial tools that offer flexibility and control, such as budgeting apps, credit monitoring services and tailored financial advice. For financial institutions and insurers, these evolving behaviours present an opportunity to engage more meaningfully with consumers through relevant, empathetic solutions. As South Africans continued to adapt, their financial choices reflected a deeper awareness of risk, commitment to long-term stability and desire to take ownership of their financial journeys. This growing sense of empowerment, even amid economic uncertainty, is shaping a more resilient and financially informed consumer base.

Figure 1. Household income change last three months

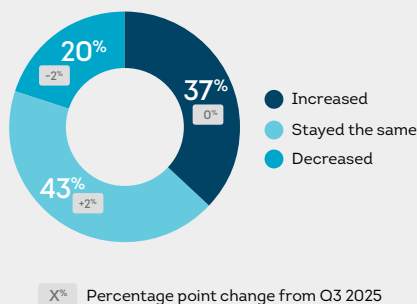


Figure 2. Expected household income change next 12 months

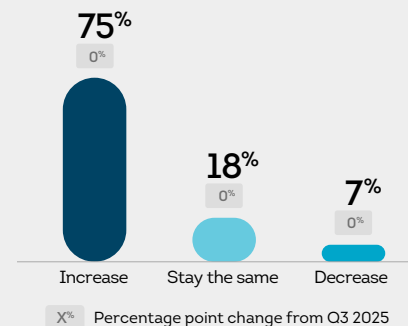


Figure 3. Expect to be unable to pay at least one of their current bills and loans in full

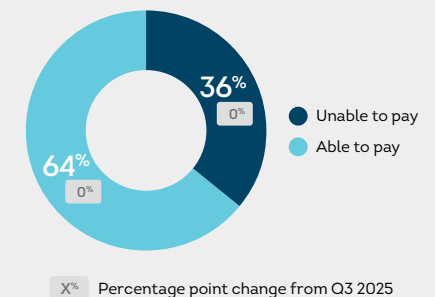


Figure 4. Optimism about household finances in next 12 months

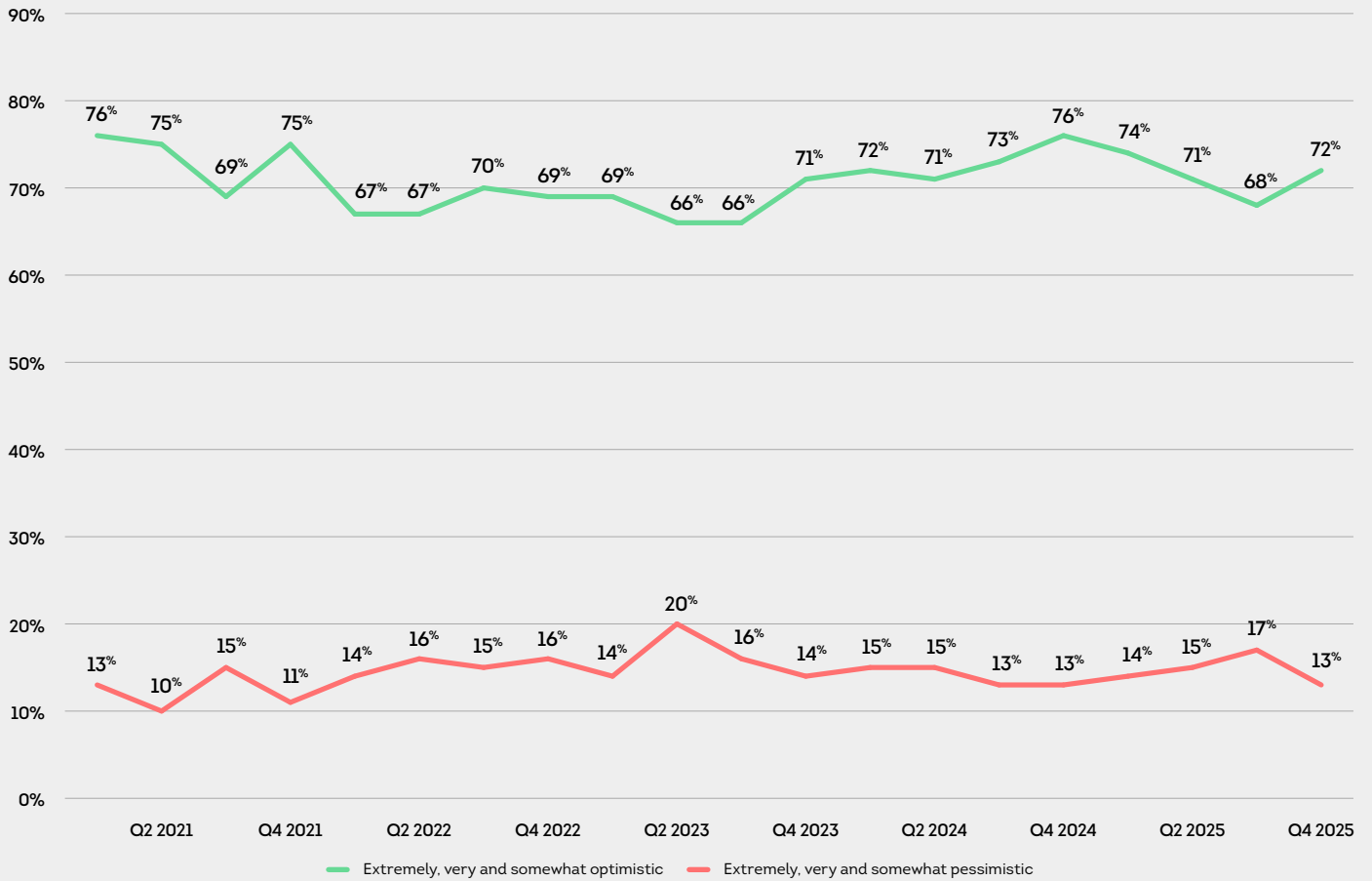


Figure 5. Biggest concerns affecting household finances in next six months
Percentage of consumers who said this concern was in their top three

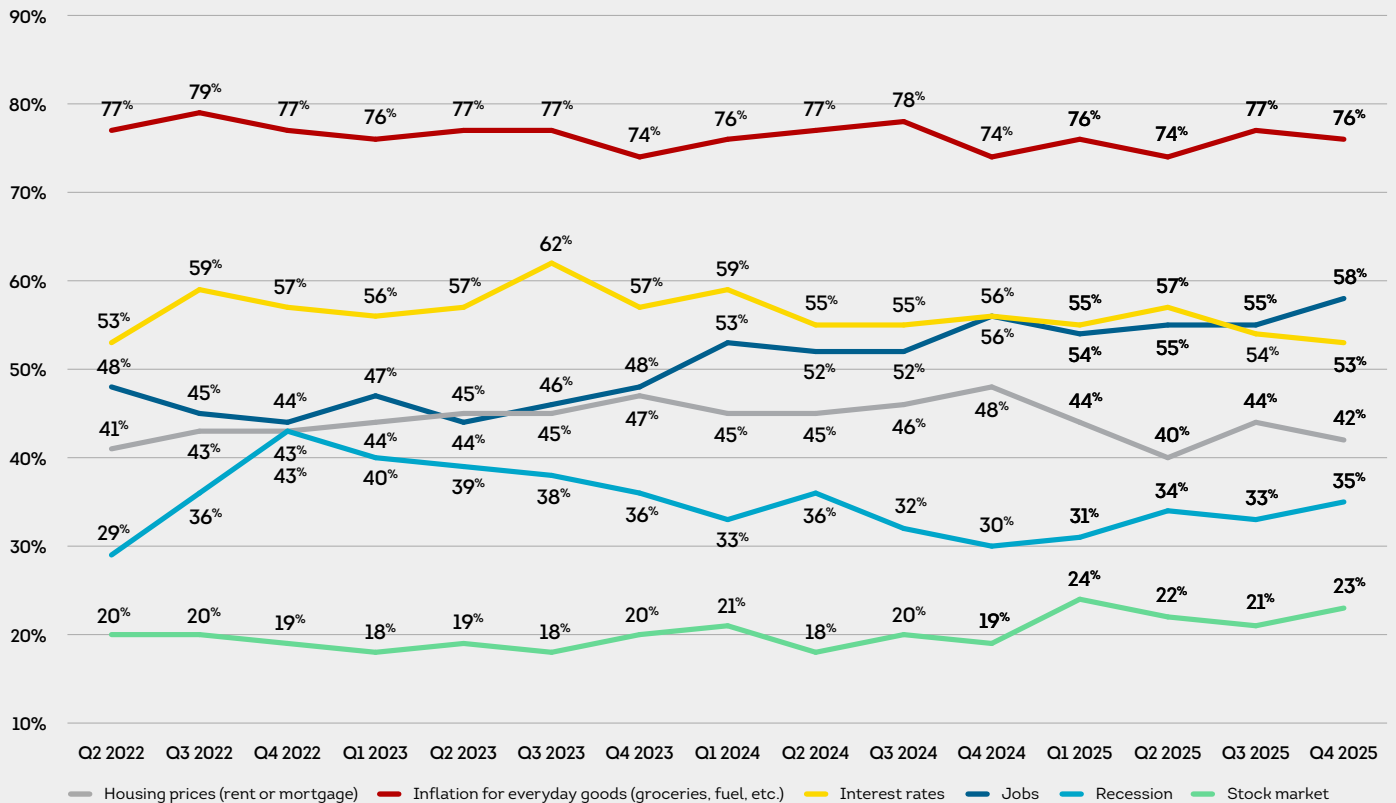
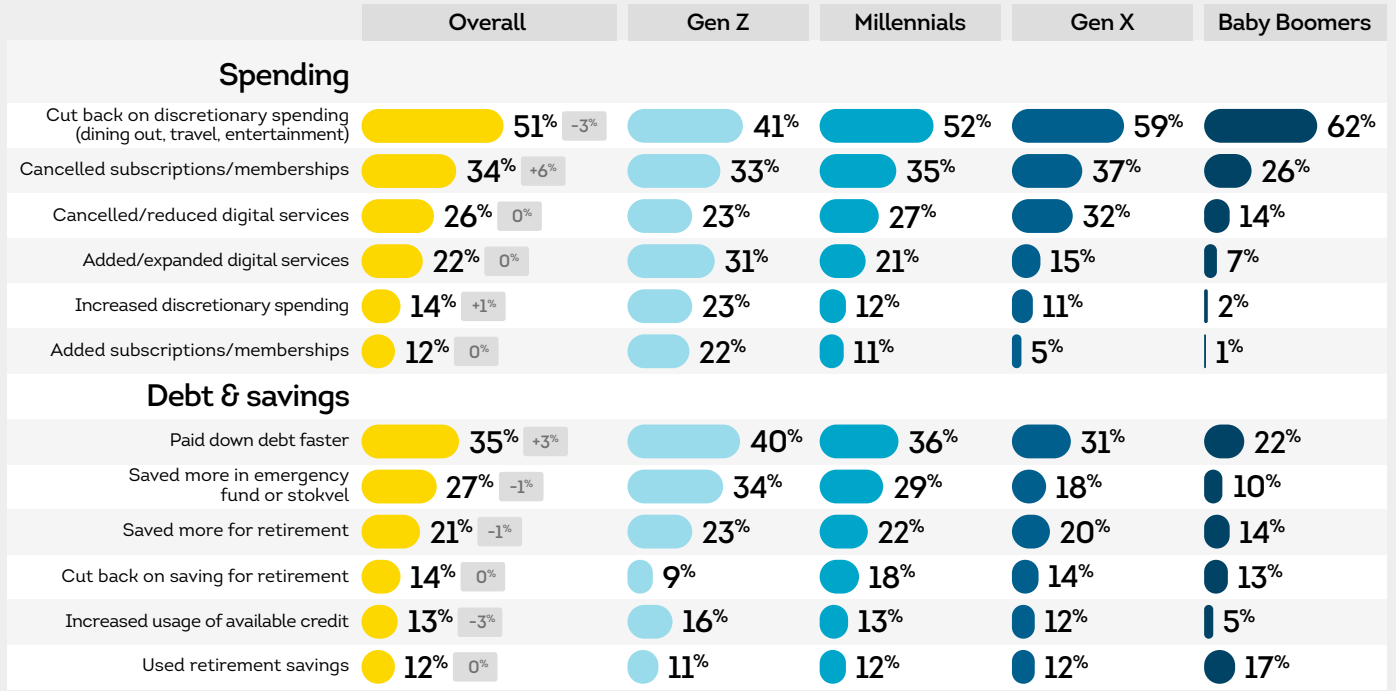
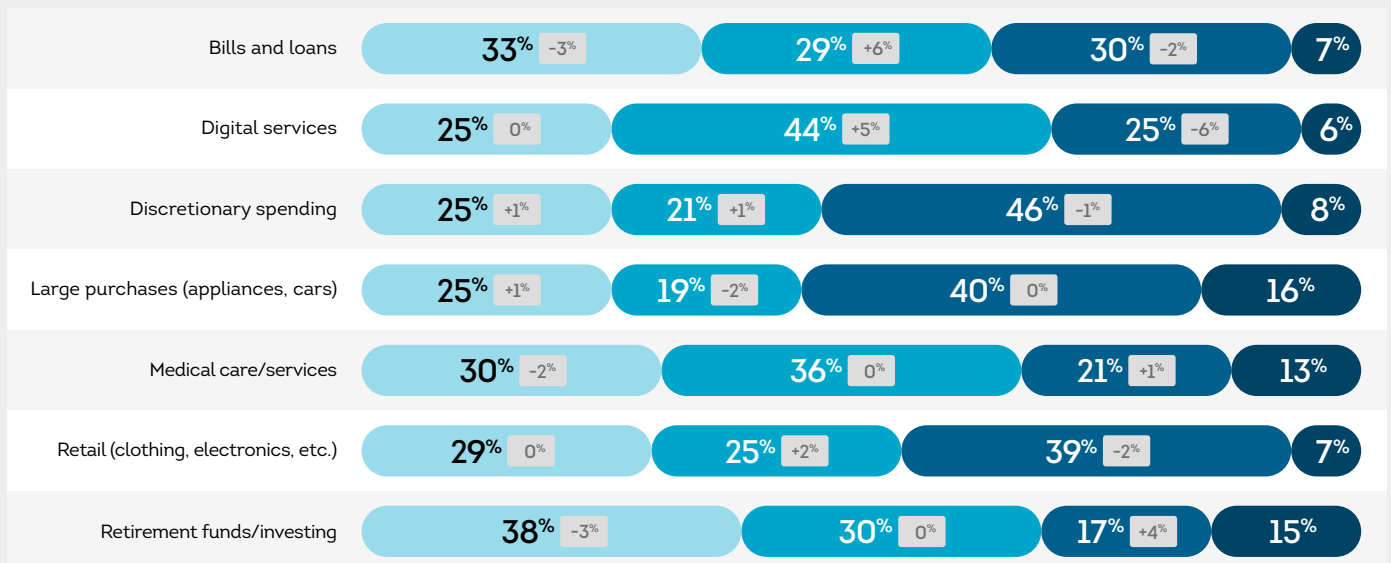


Figure 6. Changes to household budget in the last three months



X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025

Figure 7. Expected change to household spending over next three months



X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025 ● Increase ● Stay the same ● Decrease ● Not applicable

Attitudes and plans for economic participation

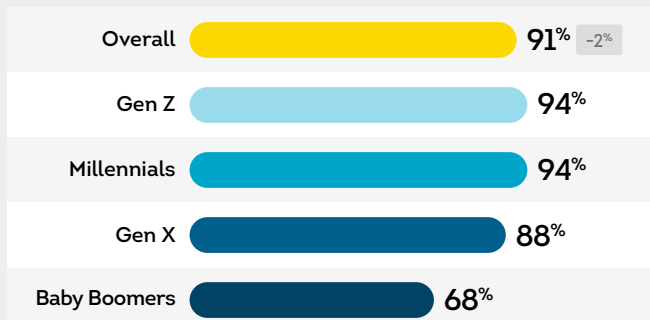
Access to credit remained essential for South Africans as 91% said it was important to achieving financial goals. Yet only 42% felt they had sufficient access while 33% did not. Confidence in approval was slightly stronger (51% believed they'd be approved if they applied), but perceptions of access and eligibility continued to diverge.

Despite this, demand remained cautious. Just 36% planned to apply for new or refinance credit in the next year. Credit cards (30%), personal loans (28%) and car loans (20%) were the most sought-after credit products – while home loans and refinancing activity remained subdued. Younger consumers showed higher intent, but overall appetite was tempered by affordability concerns.

Barriers to credit persisted. Forty-four percent of consumers considered applying for credit but ultimately did not. Key reasons include high costs (33%), fear of rejection due to credit history (26%) or income (24%), and they found alternative funding (21%). These obstacles highlight the need for more inclusive and flexible credit solutions.

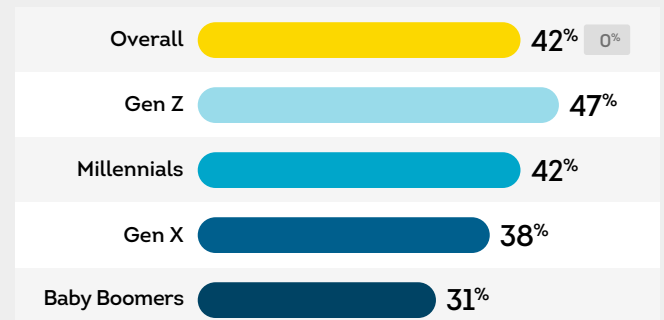
As households continue to manage financial strain, lenders have an opportunity to build trust by simplifying application processes, tailoring products to consumer needs and improving access for underserved segments. Supporting responsible credit use will be key to enabling financial progress.

Figure 8. Believe important to have access to credit and lending products to achieve financial goals



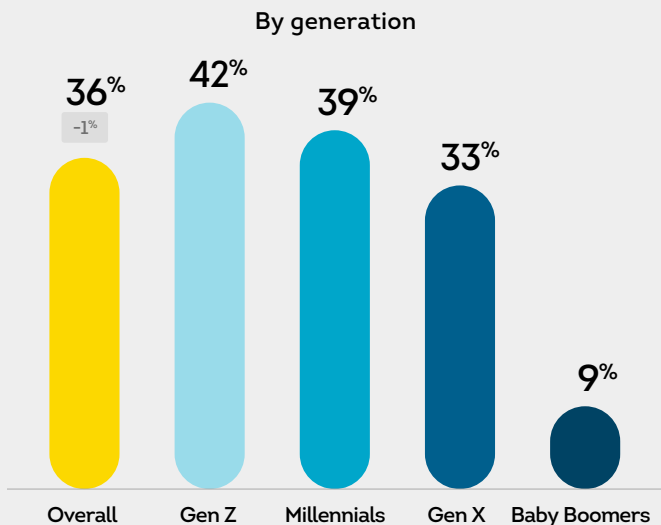
X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025

Figure 9. Believe have sufficient access to credit and lending products



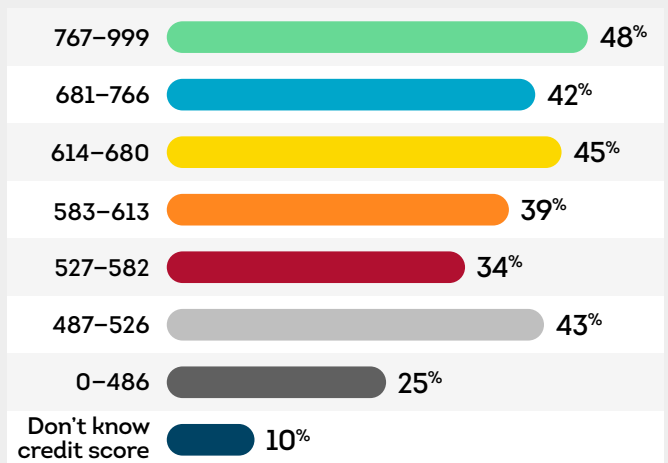
X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025

Figure 10. Plan to apply for new credit or refinance existing credit within the next year



X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025

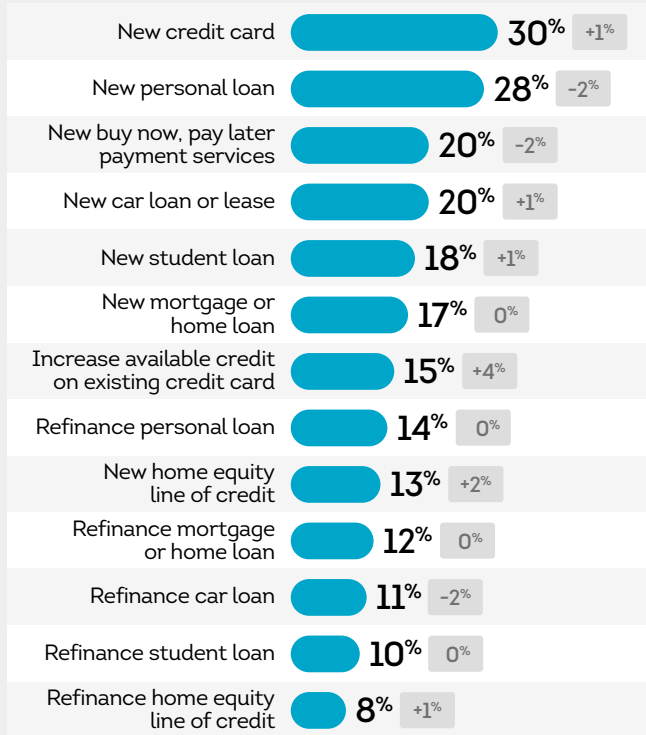
By credit score



Self-reported credit score ranges

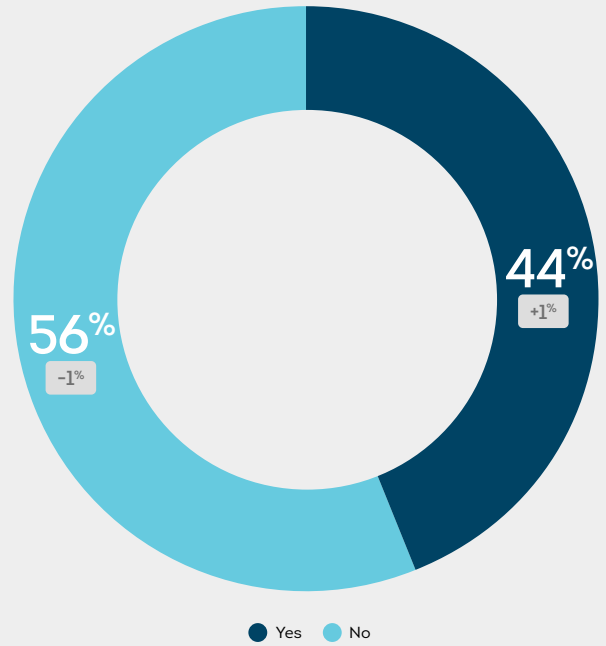
Figure 11. Type of new credit and loan activity planned in next 12 months

(among those who plan to apply for new or refinance existing credit)



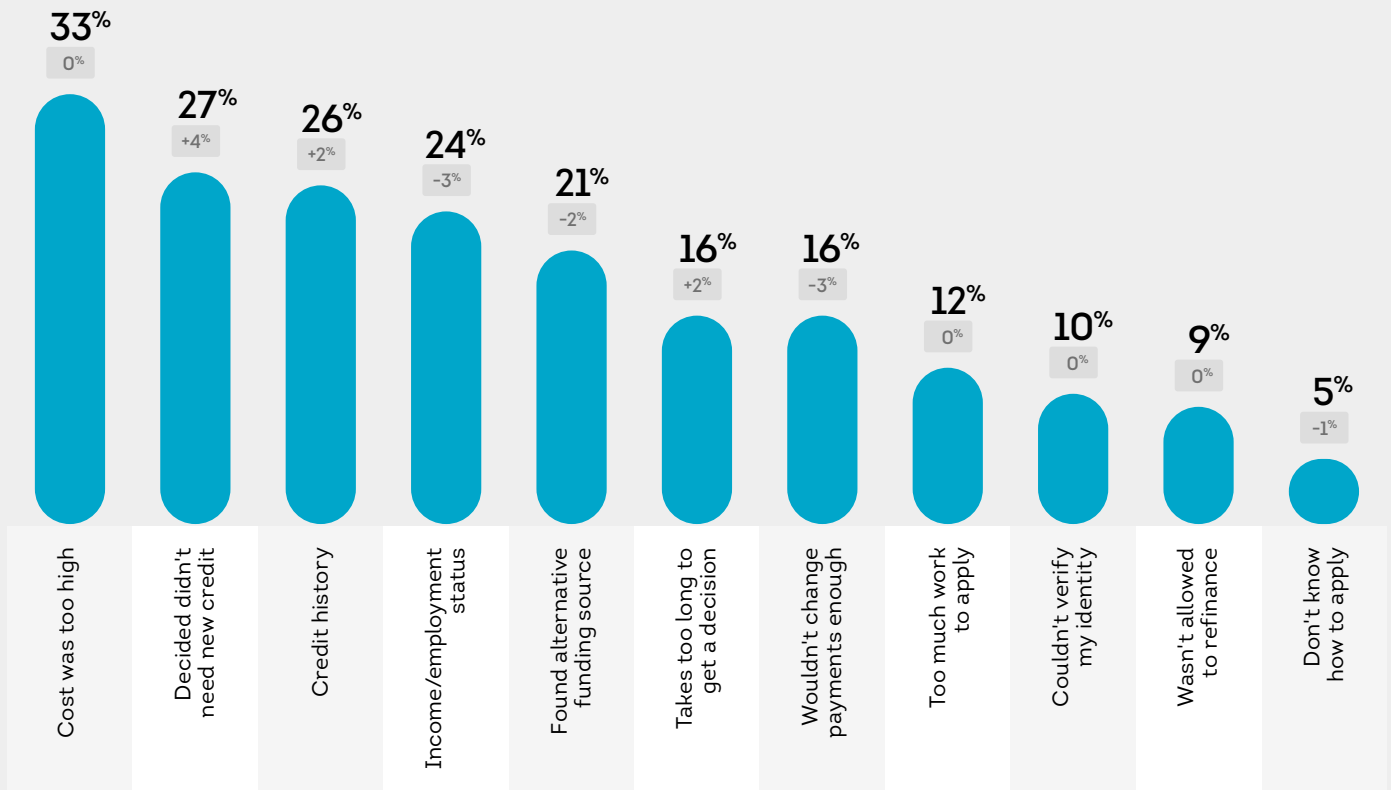
X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025

Figure 12. Abandoned plan to apply for new credit or refinance



X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025

Figure 13. Reasons for abandoning application for new credit or refinance



X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025

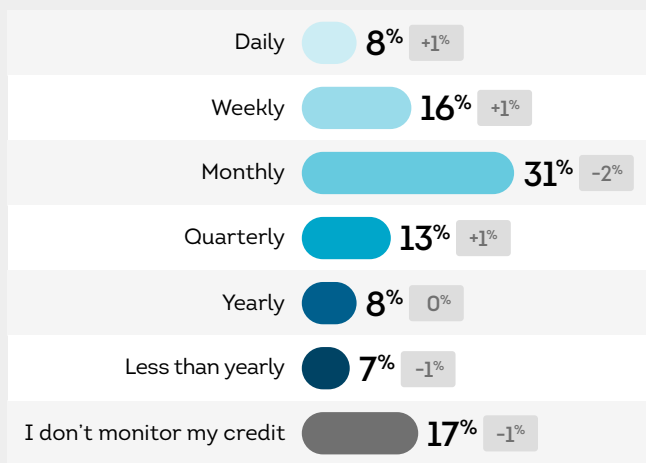
Attitudes and behaviour to manage financial choices

Credit monitoring remained a priority for South Africans: 93% said it was important and 31% rated it as extremely important. Most consumers checked their credit reports regularly, with monthly (31%) and weekly (16%) monitoring the most common. While Gen Z and Millennial consumers continued to lead in frequency, 17% of consumers did not monitor their credit at all.

Monitoring habits reflected growing financial awareness and digital engagement. Daily credit report checks rose slightly to 8% and quarterly credit report monitoring remained steady at 13%. These patterns suggest a shift toward more proactive credit management, though gaps in engagement persist among certain segments. Yearly and less frequent credit report checks remained common among older consumers.

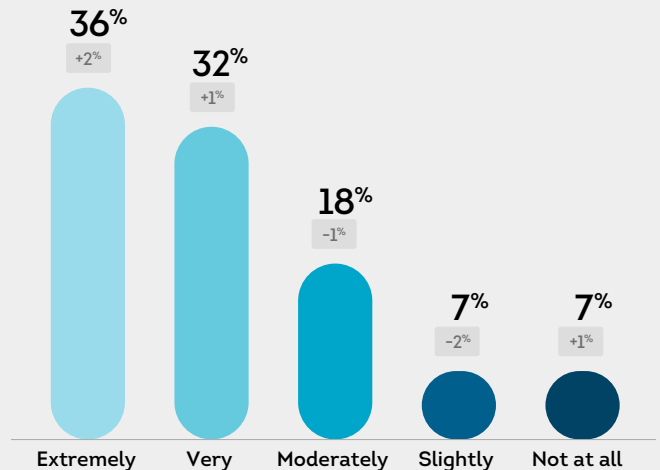
Half of consumers believed their credit scores would improve if alternative data were included, such as rental payments or buy now, pay later (BNPL) history. This belief was strongest among younger consumers, highlighting growing demand for more inclusive scoring models that reflect broader financial behaviour.

Figure 14. Credit report monitoring frequency



X% Percentage point change from Q3 2025

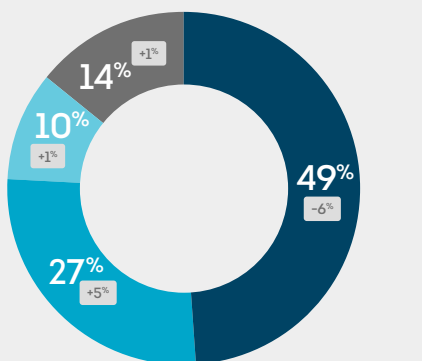
Figure 15. Believe monitoring credit report is important



X% Percentage point change from Q3 2025

Figure 16. How believe credit score would change if businesses used information not on standard credit report

Examples provided of non-standard information include: rental payments, short-term loan history and buy now, pay later loans



● Increase ● Stay the same ● Decrease ● Don't know

X% Percentage point change from Q3 2025

Identity risks and usage

Fraud attempts remained a persistent threat to South African consumers. In Q4 2025, 46% reported being targeted but avoided falling victim, while 12% were targeted and successfully defrauded. Forty-one percent were unaware of any attempts, suggesting scams were both widespread and increasingly covert. The most common tactics included money or gift card scams (32%), phishing (29%), vishing (30%) and smishing (27%), all of which rely on deceptive digital communication. Third-party seller scams (28%) and account takeovers (13%) also remained prevalent, underscoring the need for vigilance across multiple platforms.

Responses to data breaches showed mixed levels of engagement. Forty-two percent of affected consumers changed passwords, while 35% checked for unauthorised activity and 30% closed compromised accounts. However, only 16% signed up for identity monitoring and 25% checked their credit reports, indicating limited adoption of long-term protective measures. In the past 60 days in response to cybersecurity concerns, 58% changed passwords and 23% enabled multi-factor authentication, yet 19% took no action. Among those who took no action, 53% were unsure what steps to take and 22% felt overwhelmed by cybersecurity information, pointing to a need for clearer, more accessible guidance.

Concerns about online privacy remained high – with identity theft, data misuse and unsolicited marketing among top fears. While many consumers took steps to protect themselves, gaps in awareness and action persisted. Financial institutions, retailers and digital platforms have an opportunity to strengthen consumer trust by offering simple, proactive tools and education. As fraud tactics evolve, empowering consumers with knowledge and support will be key to building digital resilience. Continued investment in consumer education, simplified security tools and responsive fraud support will be essential to helping South Africans protect their digital identities and financial wellbeing.

Figure 17. Personal experience with online, email, phone call or text message fraud attempts in last three months

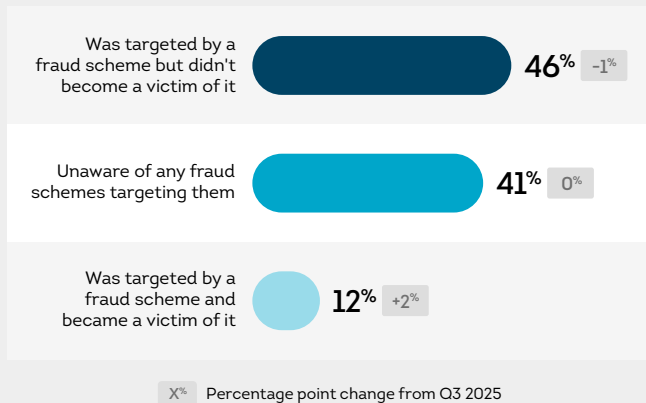


Figure 18. Most frequent fraud schemes targeting consumers
(among those targeted with online, email, phone call or text message fraud in the last three months)

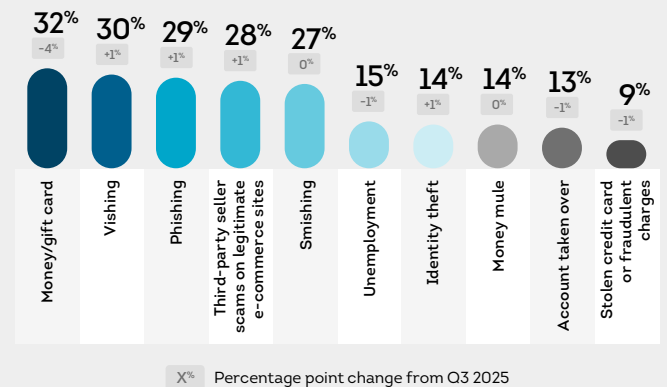
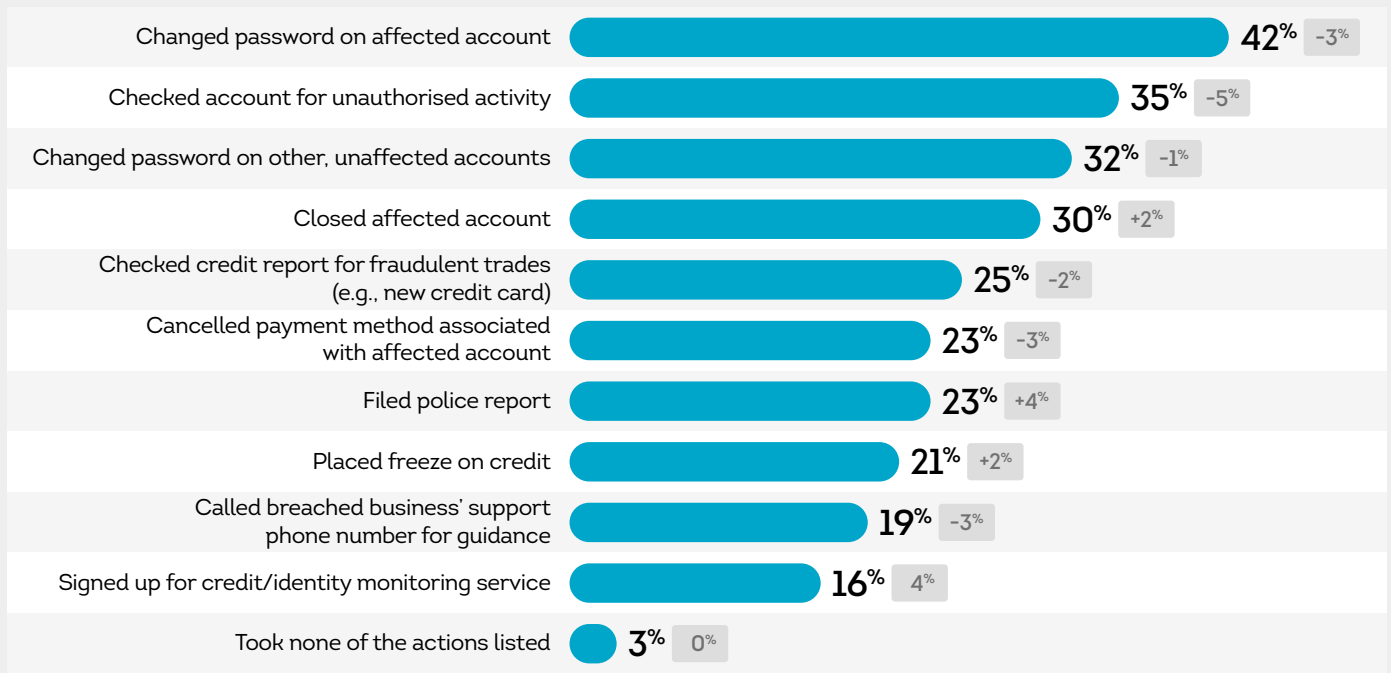


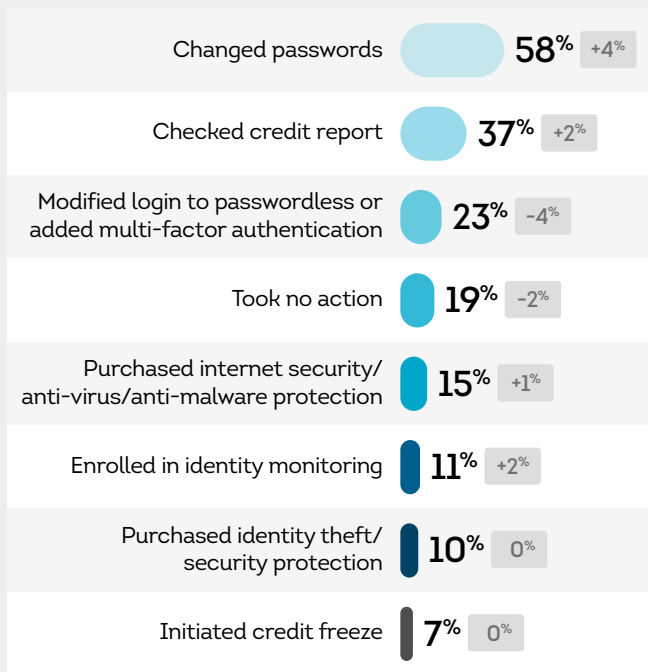
Figure 19. Most frequent actions data breach victims took

(among consumers notified in the last three months that details about their identities and/or online accounts were stolen)



X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025

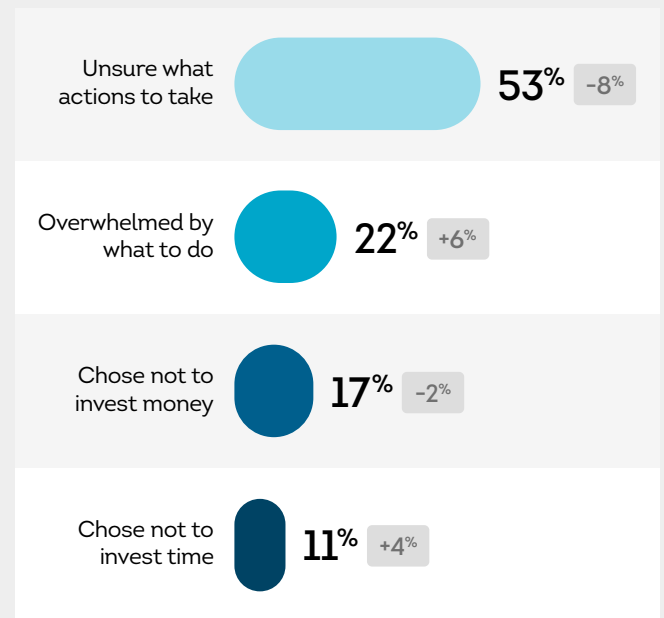
Figure 20. Actions taken in last 60 days due to cybersecurity concerns



X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025

Figure 21. Reasons did nothing about cybersecurity concerns

(among those who took no action about cybersecurity concerns in the last 60 days)



X* Percentage point change from Q3 2025

Research Methodology

This online survey of 992 adults was conducted Sept. 25–Oct. 9, 2025 by TransUnion in partnership with third-party research provider, Dynata. Adults 18 years of age and older residing in South Africa were surveyed using an online research panel method across a combination of desktop, mobile and tablet devices. Survey questions were administered in English. All regions are represented in the survey responses. To ensure general population sample representativeness across South Africa resident demographics, the survey included quotas to balance responses on the dimensions of age, gender, household income, race and region. Generations were defined in this research as follows: Gen Z, 18–28 years old; Millennials, 29–44; Gen X, 45–60; and Baby Boomers, age 61 and above. These research results are unweighted and statistically significant at a 95% confidence level within ± 3.1 percentage points based on calculated error margin. Please note some chart percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding or multiple answers being accepted.

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