Consumer Pulse Study

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

South Africa Q2 2026

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

South African households remained under sustained financial pressure with little evidence of recovery over the past year. In Q2 2026, the share reporting better than planned finances declined to 43% (from 44% in Q2 2025), while those worse off elevated to 40% compared to a 38% average for the last five quarters, indicating persistent strain rather than deterioration.

Inflation continued to dominate consumer concerns as 79% ranked it among their top three worries, up from 74% a year ago, reinforcing its entrenched impact on household finances.

While access to credit remained critical, engagement was constrained. Although 92% of consumers viewed credit access as important, only 36% (unchanged year on year) planned to apply – while 45% reported abandoning applications, highlighting ongoing barriers related to affordability and perceived approval risk.

Household income (HHI), spending and bill payment impact

Household financial conditions remained constrained with only marginal movement over the past year. The proportion of consumers reporting their finances as better than planned declined to 43% from 44%, while those worse off held steady at 40%, indicating persistent financial pressure rather than recovery.

Forward-looking sentiment weakened more meaningfully. Financial optimism fell to 66% from 71% a year ago – while pessimism rose to 19% from 15%, reflecting growing uncertainty about future financial stability.

Income trends remained largely unchanged but continued to lag cost pressures. While 36% reported income increases, flat year on year, 22% reported declines, slightly higher than last year. At the same time, expectations for income growth softened as 70% anticipated increases compared to 75% in Q2 2025, pointing to reduced confidence in earnings growth.

This pressure was reinforced by the persistent gap between income and inflation. Only 37% agreed their incomes are keeping up with inflation while 41% disagreed. Inflation remained the dominant financial concern, cited among the top three by 79% of households, far exceeding employment and interest rate concerns. As a result, consumers continued to prioritise essential spending and manage debt cautiously, reflecting a sustained period of financial adjustment rather than recovery.

Figure 1. Optimism about household finances in next 12 months

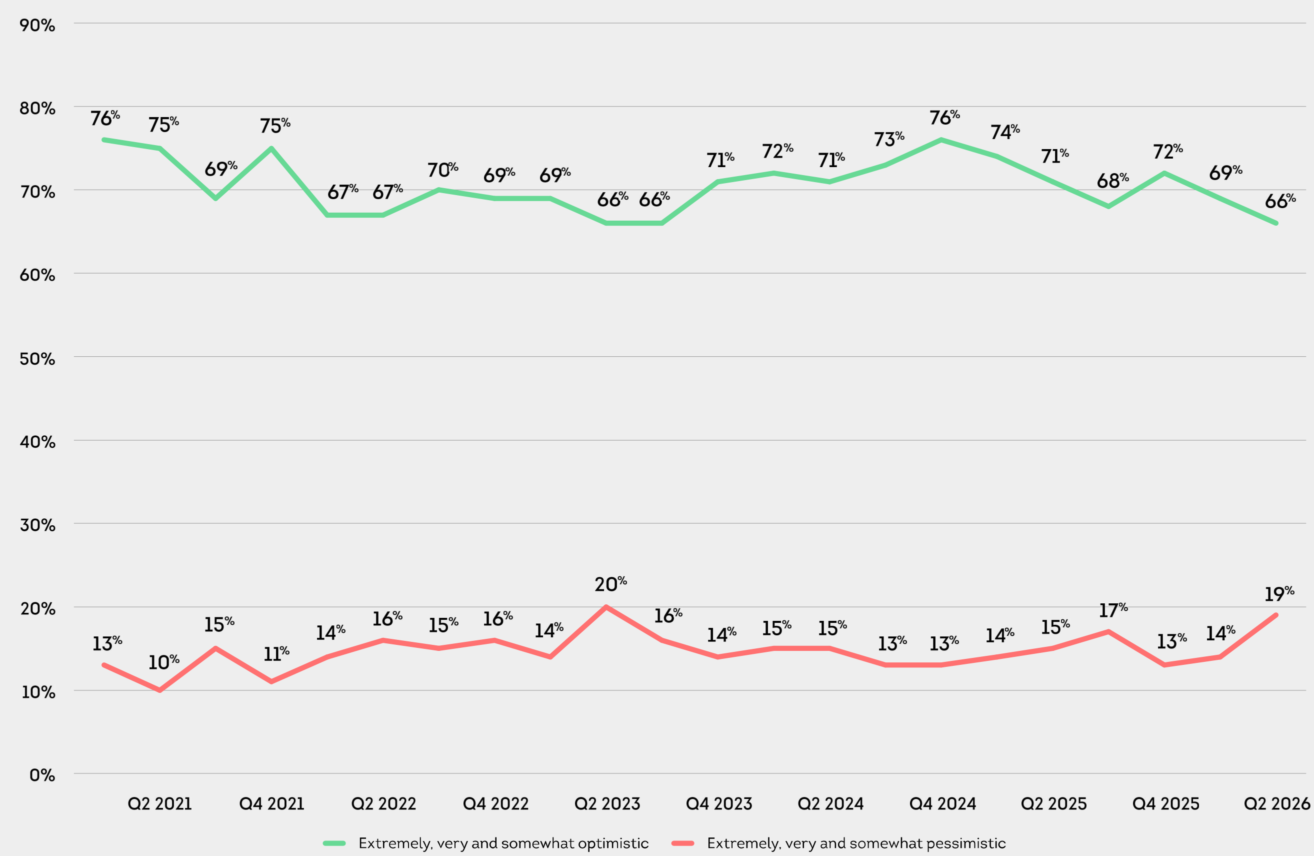


Figure 2. Biggest concerns affecting household finances in next six months
Percentage of consumers who said this concern was in their top three

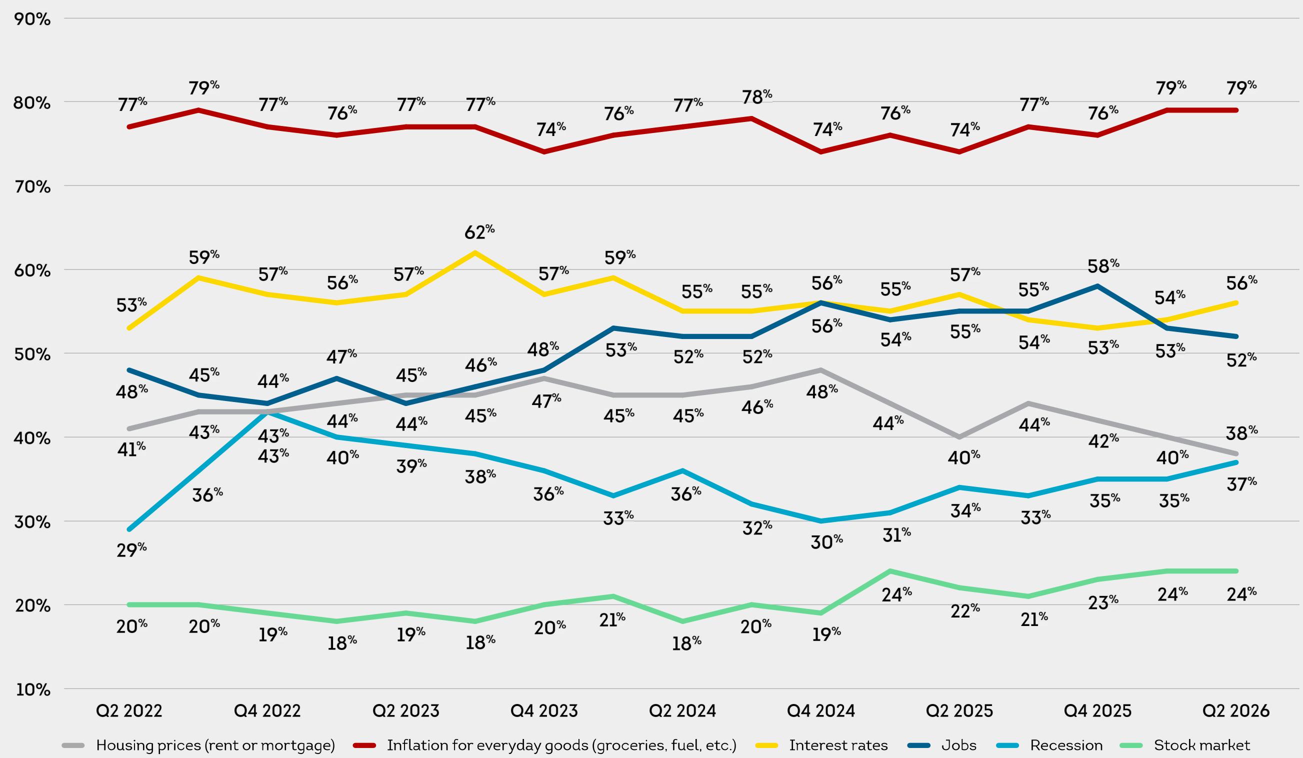


Figure 3. Household income change last three months

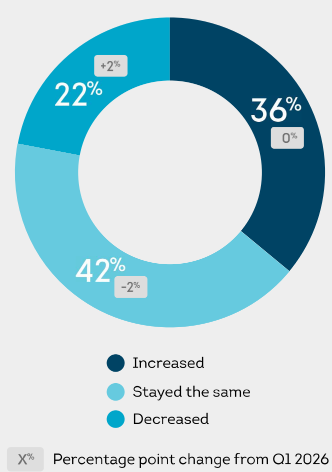


Figure 4. Expected household income change next 12 months

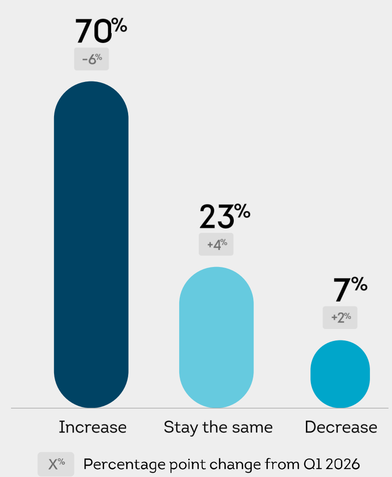
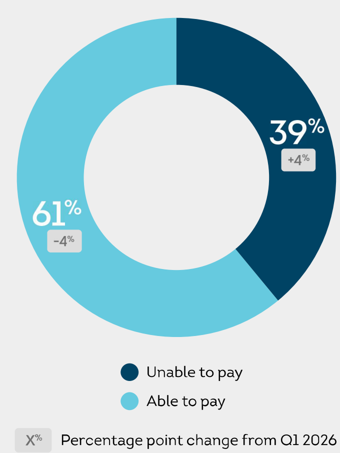


Figure 5. Expect to be unable to pay at least one of their current bills and loans in full



TransUnion

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

	Overall	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X
Spending				
Cut back on discretionary spending (e.g., dining out, travel, entertainment)	53% (+2%)	39%	54%	62%
Cancelled subscriptions/memberships	28% (-3%)	28%	31%	27%
Cancelled/reduced digital services (e.g., wireless, cable TV, internet)	24% (-1%)	24%	24%	24%
Added/expanded digital services	18% (-3%)	25%	20%	11%
Increased discretionary spending	13% (-3%)	17%	14%	9%
Added subscriptions/memberships	12% (-4%)	18%	14%	6%
Debt & savings				
Paid down debt faster	32% (-3%)	30%	37%	29%
Saved more in emergency fund/stokvel	27% (-2%)	40%	31%	11%
Saved more for retirement	20% (-2%)	29%	21%	14%
Cut back on saving for retirement	14% (-1%)	14%	14%	17%
Increased usage of available credit	14% (-1%)	14%	13%	16%
Used retirement savings	13% (+2%)	9%	13%	17%

X% Percentage point change from Q1 2026

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

	Increase	Stay the same	Decrease	Not applicable
Bills and loans (e.g., housing, utilities, insurance, credit cards)	37% (+2%)	27% (-2%)	29% (0%)	8%
Digital services	28% (+3%)	43% (-2%)	24% (-1%)	5%
Discretionary spending	23% (+1%)	21% (-4%)	48% (0%)	8%
Large purchases (e.g., appliances, cars)	24% (-1%)	22% (0%)	38% (0%)	16%
Medical care/services	33% (-2%)	37% (-1%)	17% (0%)	12%
Retail (e.g., clothing, electronics, durable goods)	30% (+1%)	26% (+1%)	37% (-3%)	7%
Retirement funds/investing	36% (-3%)	32% (0%)	16% (+1%)	16%

X% Percentage point change from Q1 2026 · Increase · Stay the same · Decrease · Not applicable

TransUnion

Attitudes and plans for economic participation

Access to credit remained widely recognised as essential; 92% of consumers rated it as important, unchanged year on year. Perceptions of access improved modestly: 45% of consumers believed they have sufficient access to credit (up from 38% in Q2 2025), while 50% believed they'd be approved if they applied, remaining broadly stable.

Despite this, demand for credit remained flat. The proportion planning to apply for credit stood at 36%, essentially unchanged year on year, suggesting while need persists, appetite is constrained by financial pressure. Where demand exists, it's increasingly concentrated in short-term products, with 34% of applicants planning to take personal loans (up from 28% in Q2 2025) and 27% planning to use BNPL (up from 25%), reflecting a shift toward liquidity management.

Structural barriers continued to limit participation. Overall, 45% of consumers reported they considered applying for credit but ultimately decided not to, with cost the primary constraint, cited by 30%, followed by concerns about income and credit eligibility. At the same time, digital channels expanded inclusion at the margin. Of consumers who said they're currently a customer of a neo/digital/challenger bank, FinTech firm and/or buy now, pay later (BNPL) provider, 56% reported using a BNPL provider, 46% a neo/digital/challenger bank and 23% a FinTech firm.

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

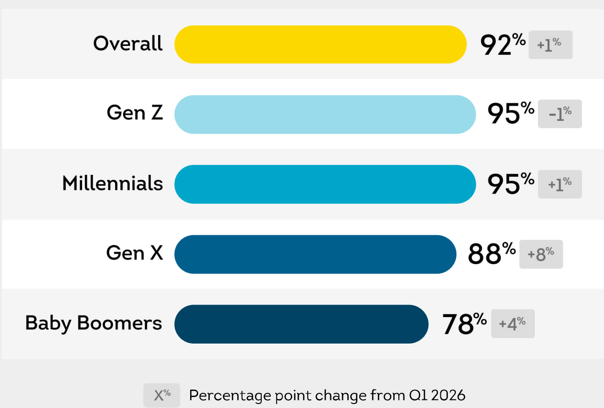


Figure 9. Believe have sufficient access to credit and lending products

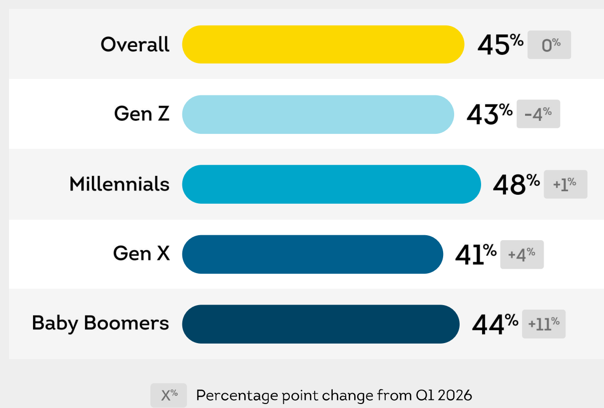


Figure 10. Plan to apply for new credit or refinance existing credit within the next year

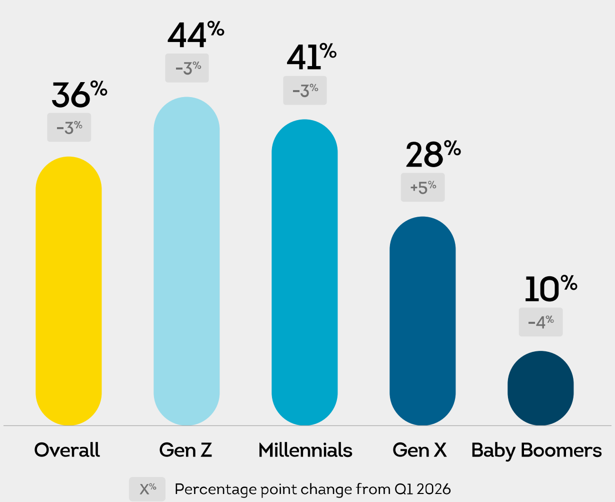


Figure 11. Type of new credit and loan activity planned in next 12 months
(among those who plan to apply for new or refinance existing credit)

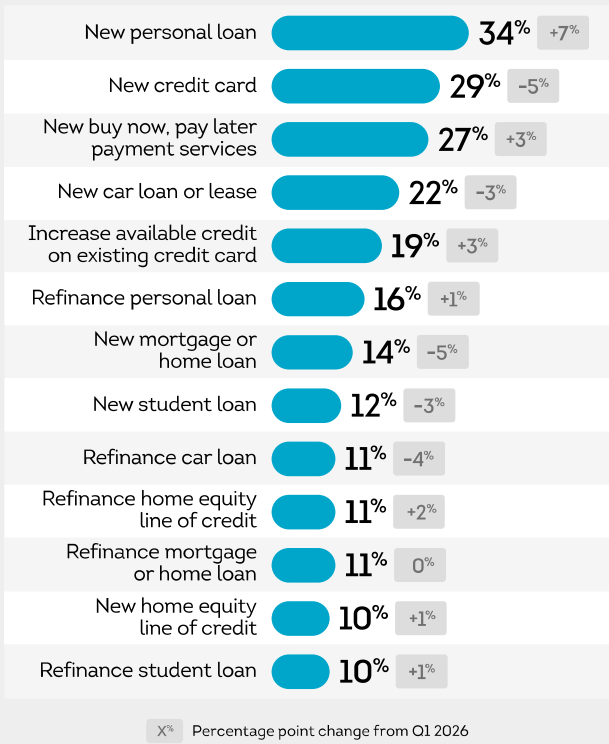


Figure 12. Abandoned plan to apply for new credit or refinance

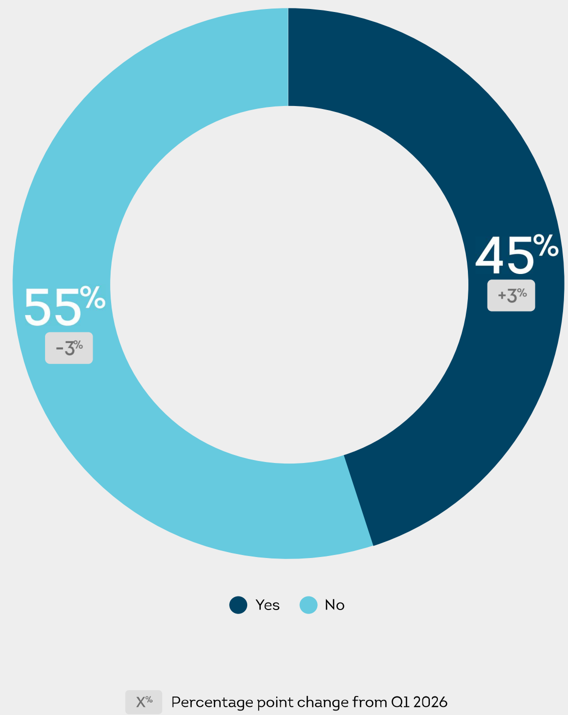
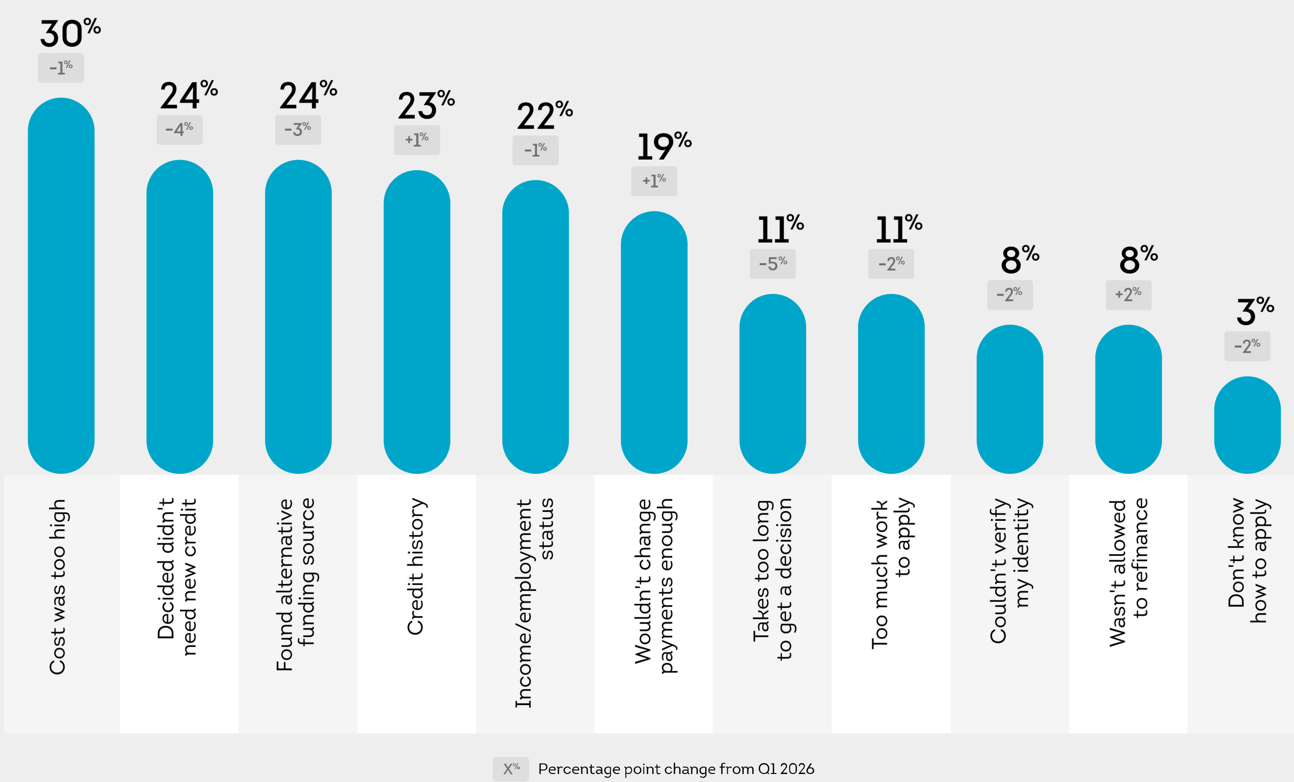


Figure 13. Reasons for abandoning application for new credit or refinance



Attitudes and behaviours to manage financial choices

Consumers continued to recognise the role of credit in enabling opportunity; 68% agreed access to credit can improve quality of life, although that softened slightly from 71% a year ago.

Expectations of digital financial services remained high. Around 82% of consumers consider real-time loan approval important, reflecting a sustained demand for speed, transparency and convenience in financial interactions.

Confidence in credit participation has gradually improved. Half of consumers believed they'd be approved for credit, up from 45% last year. However, this growing confidence contrasted with high rates of application abandonment, indicating affordability and process barriers continue to limit action despite improving sentiment.

Figure 14. Credit report monitoring frequency

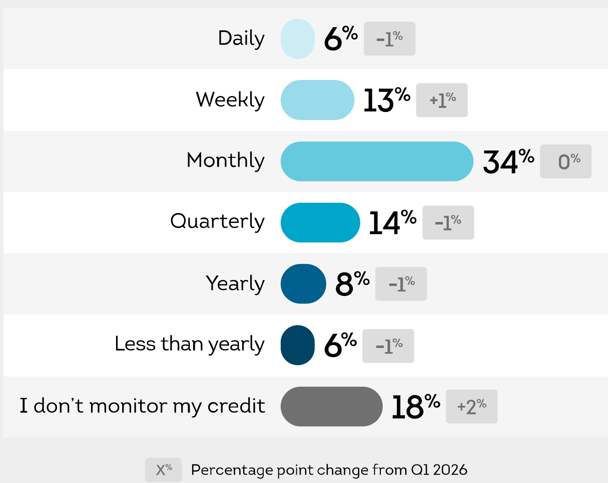


Figure 15. Believe monitoring credit report is important

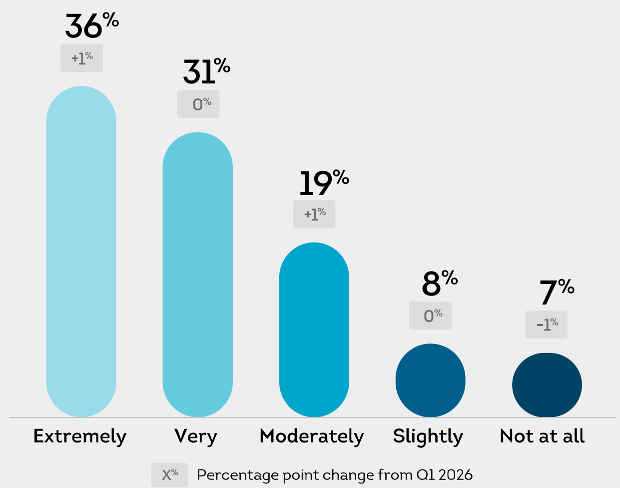


Figure 16. How believe credit score would change if businesses used information not on standard credit report

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

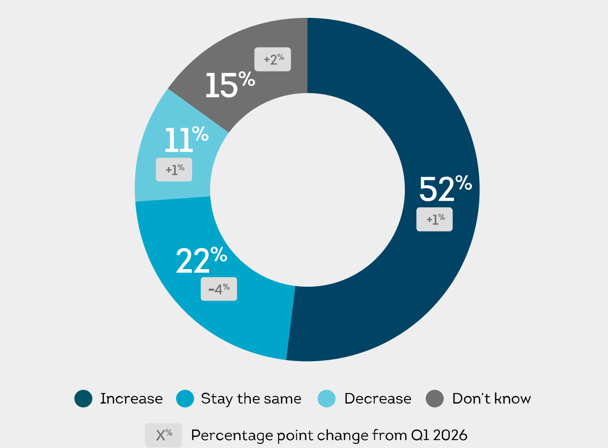
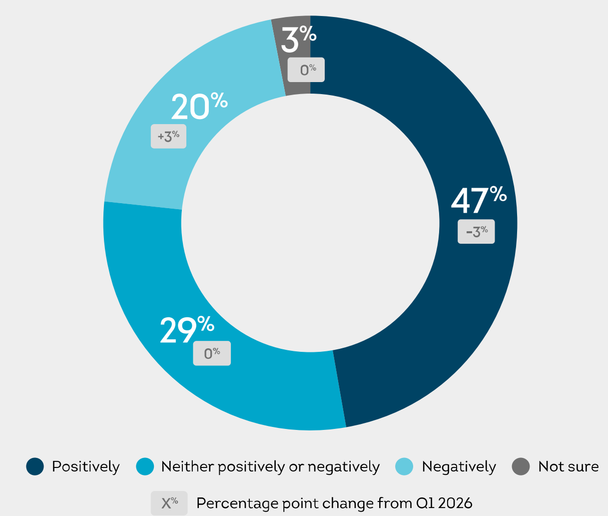


Figure 17. How consumers believe AI will impact them



Identity risks and usage

Exposure to fraud remained widespread and continued to shape consumer behaviour. Around 56% of consumers reported being targeted by fraud in the past three months, highlighting the scale of financial crime exposure in the market.

The nature of these threats is increasingly digital. The most common schemes reported were voice-based scams (34%), text-based scams (33%) and phishing (31%), reflecting a shift toward impersonation-driven and socially engineered attacks as digital adoption increases.

Consumers responded with heightened vigilance to cybersecurity concerns; over half took proactive steps like changing passwords or checking their credit reports (37%). However, gaps remained, with some consumers taking no action despite concerns. This was particularly relevant given 26% of consumers reported having been notified their identity details were compromised in a data breach, reinforcing identity protection is becoming a critical component of financial trust and participation.

Figure 18. Personal experience with online, email, phone call or text message fraud attempts in last three months

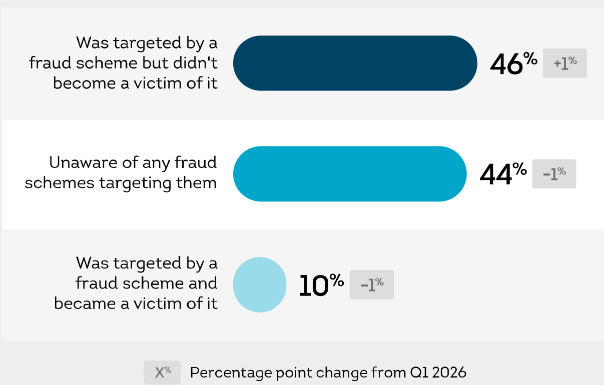


Figure 19. Most frequent fraud schemes targeting consumers
(among those targeted with online, email, phone call or text message fraud in the last three months)

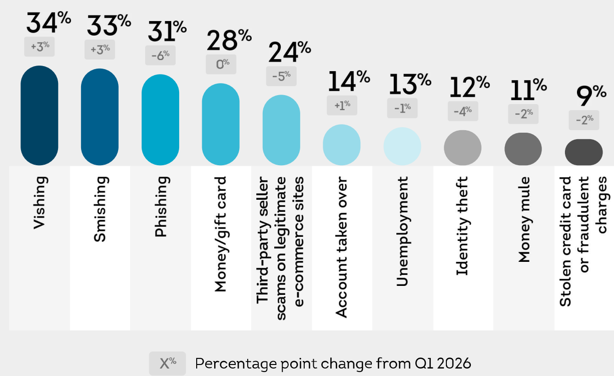


Figure 20. Most frequent actions data breach victims took
(among consumers notified in the last three months that details about their identities and/or online accounts were stolen)

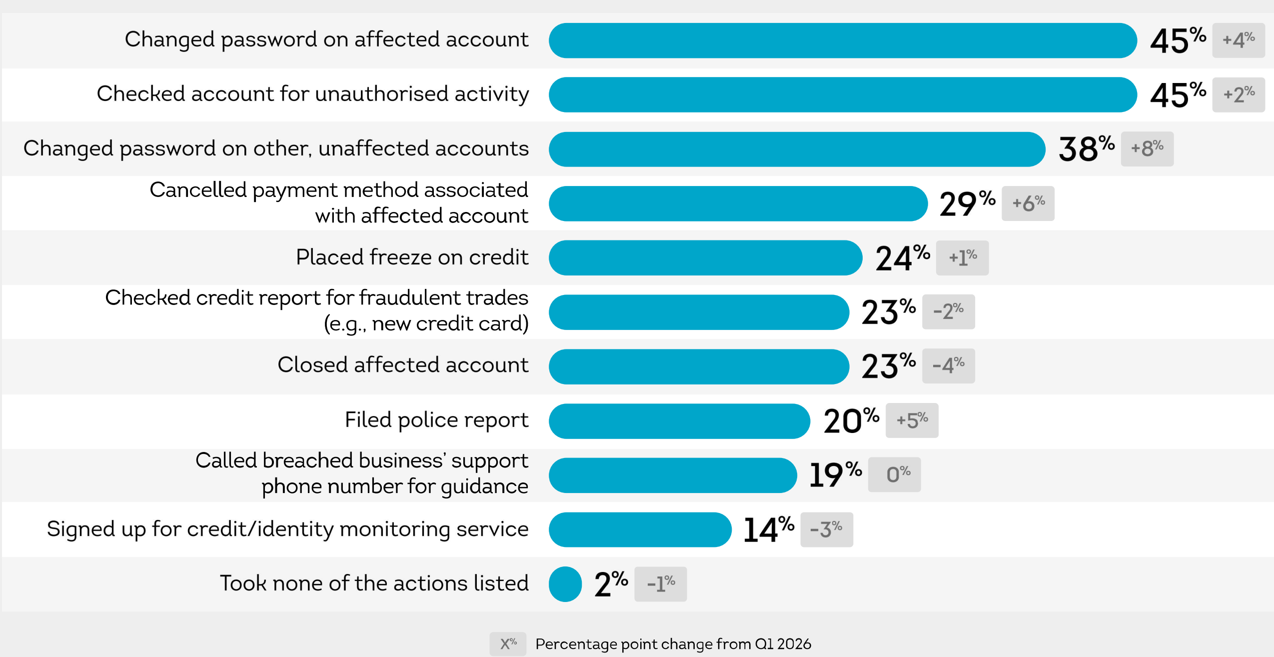


Figure 21. Actions taken in last 60 days due to cybersecurity concerns

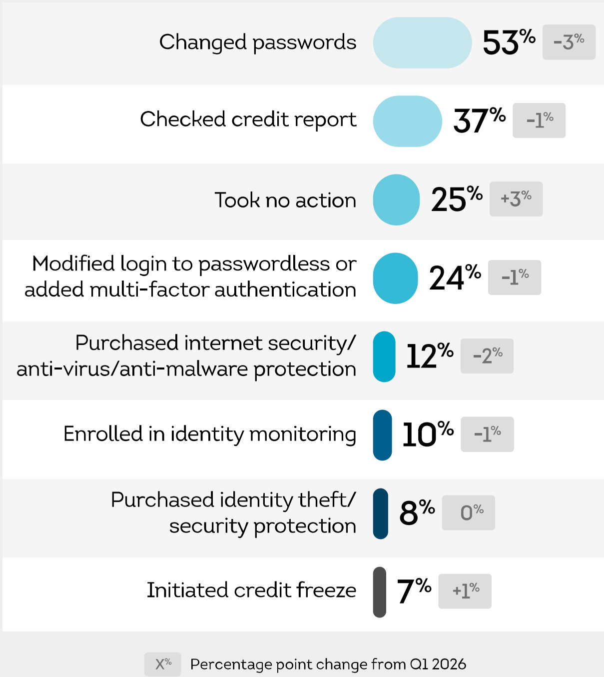
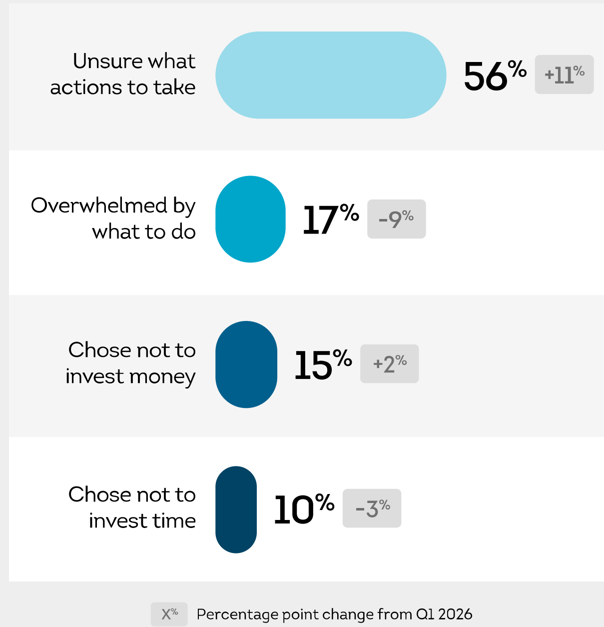


Figure 22. Reasons did nothing about cybersecurity concerns
(among those who took no action about cybersecurity concerns in the last 60 days)



TransUnion

Research Methodology

This online survey of 966 adults was conducted Apr. 29–May 14, 2026 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, 18–29 years old; Millennials, 30–45; Gen X, 46–61; and Baby Boomers, age 62 and above. These research results are unweighted and statistically significant at a 95% confidence level within ±3.2 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.

For previous Consumer Pulse Studies, visit
transunion.co.za/consumer-pulse-study

TransUnion®

About TransUnion (NYSE: TRU)

TransUnion is a global information and insights company with over 13,000 associates operating in more than 30 countries, including South Africa. We make trust possible by ensuring each person is reliably represented in the marketplace. We do this by providing an actionable view of consumers, stewarded with care. TransUnion is the only company in Africa's IT industry that manages multiple complex databases containing insurance, cellular, consumer, commercial and auto data assets.

Through our acquisitions and technology investments we have developed innovative solutions that extend beyond our strong foundation in core credit into areas such as marketing, fraud, risk and advanced analytics. As a result, consumers and businesses can transact with confidence and achieve great things. We call this Information for Good® – and it leads to economic opportunity, great experiences and personal empowerment for millions of people around the world.

For more information visit **transunion.co.za**