

May 13, 2026

Santander US Paths to Prosperity

Financial Prosperity in America:

Middle-income Americans remain financially resilient, even as affordability continues to shape financial decision-making.

For media use only.



Santander US Paths to Prosperity

At Santander, we strive to help consumers achieve prosperity. We commissioned this study to continue our efforts to better understand middle-income Americans' current financial state and future aspirations, so we can best support them on their journey. This research series explores the barriers and challenges facing consumers as they work toward achieving financial prosperity, and the tools and support that middle-income households need to get there, including vehicle access, housing, and banking solutions.

Building upon twelve quarters of prior research, this installment captures how middle-income households are navigating today's economic conditions and their impact on spending, saving, and other financial behaviors. This thirteenth edition also builds on prior findings about artificial intelligence (AI) and what it could mean for their financial futures.

Key Findings

- 1 Middle-income Americans remain financially resilient, with confidence in their own finances holding firm despite economic uncertainty.
- 2 Prosperity is defined by stability, flexibility, and adaptability. Having flexibility is ranked as a top factor associated with prosperity, and for 9 in 10, prosperity means being able to make choices, not just accumulating assets.
- 3 Consumers see practical benefits to artificial intelligence (AI) in helping them financially, with benefits outweighing concerns. 85% can identify at least one way AI can support financial prosperity.
- 4 Consumers rely on vehicles for work and economic opportunity, sustaining demand even as auto purchases are driven by affordability factors, including greater used car consideration and fuel efficiency prioritization.
- 5 AI is increasingly becoming part of the vehicle shopping and financing journey, with more than half of online car shoppers using it to compare options and make more informed and speedier decisions.

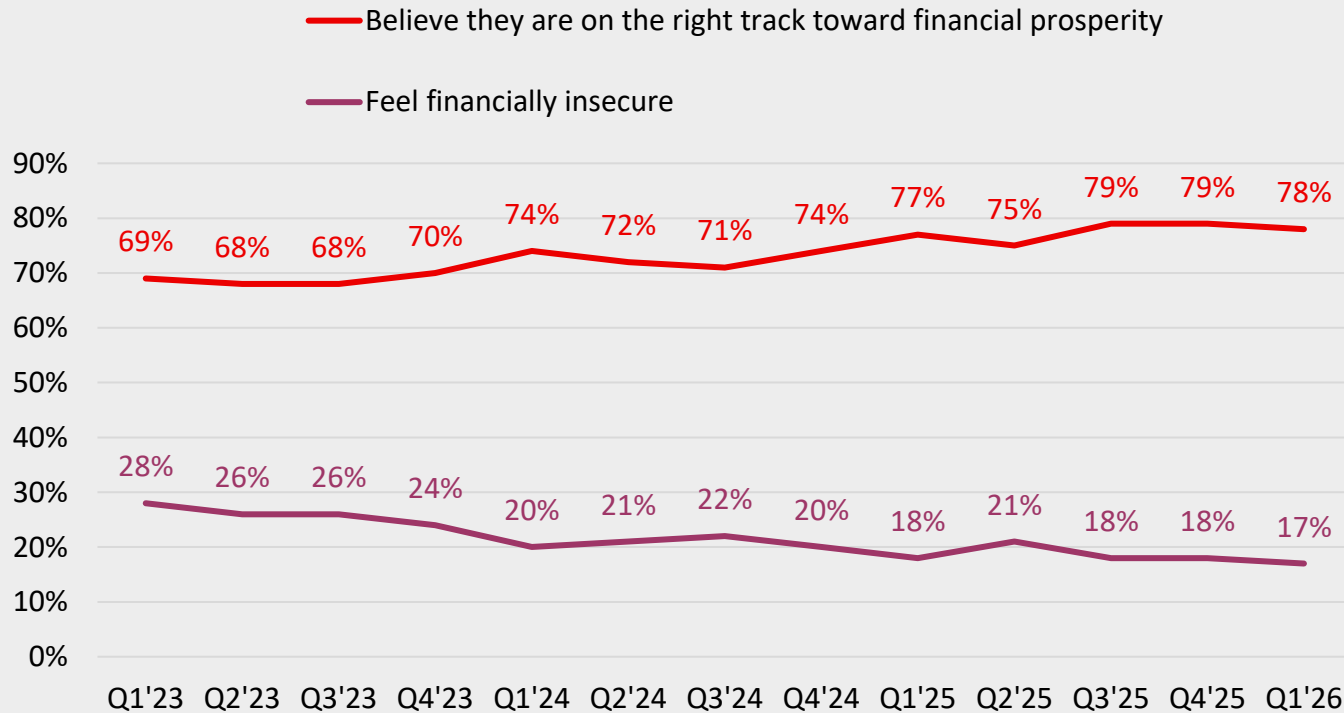
Middle-income Americans continue to show resilience through practical decision-making.



Middle-income Americans remain confident in achieving financial prosperity

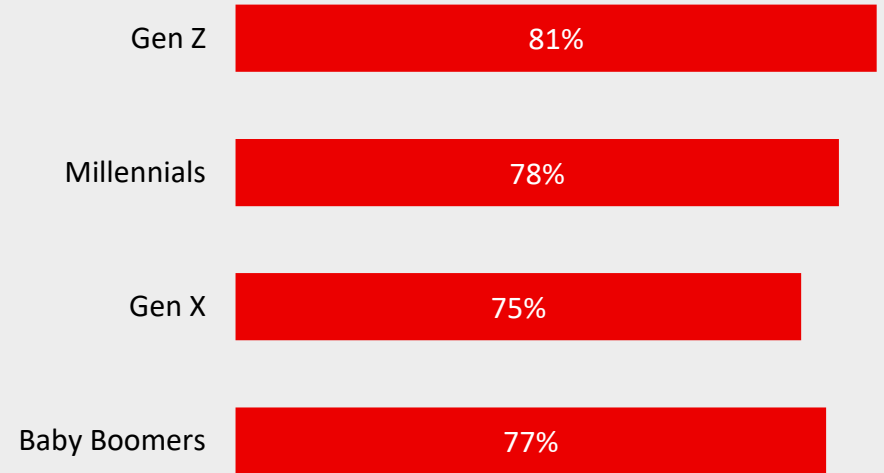
Confidence remains strong, with nearly 8 in 10 saying they are on the right financial track and the share feeling financially insecure dropping to a survey low.

Financial confidence remains elevated



Gen Z is leading the way in financial optimism

Percent who believe they are on the right track:



Consumers prioritize stability and financial freedom as core to prosperity

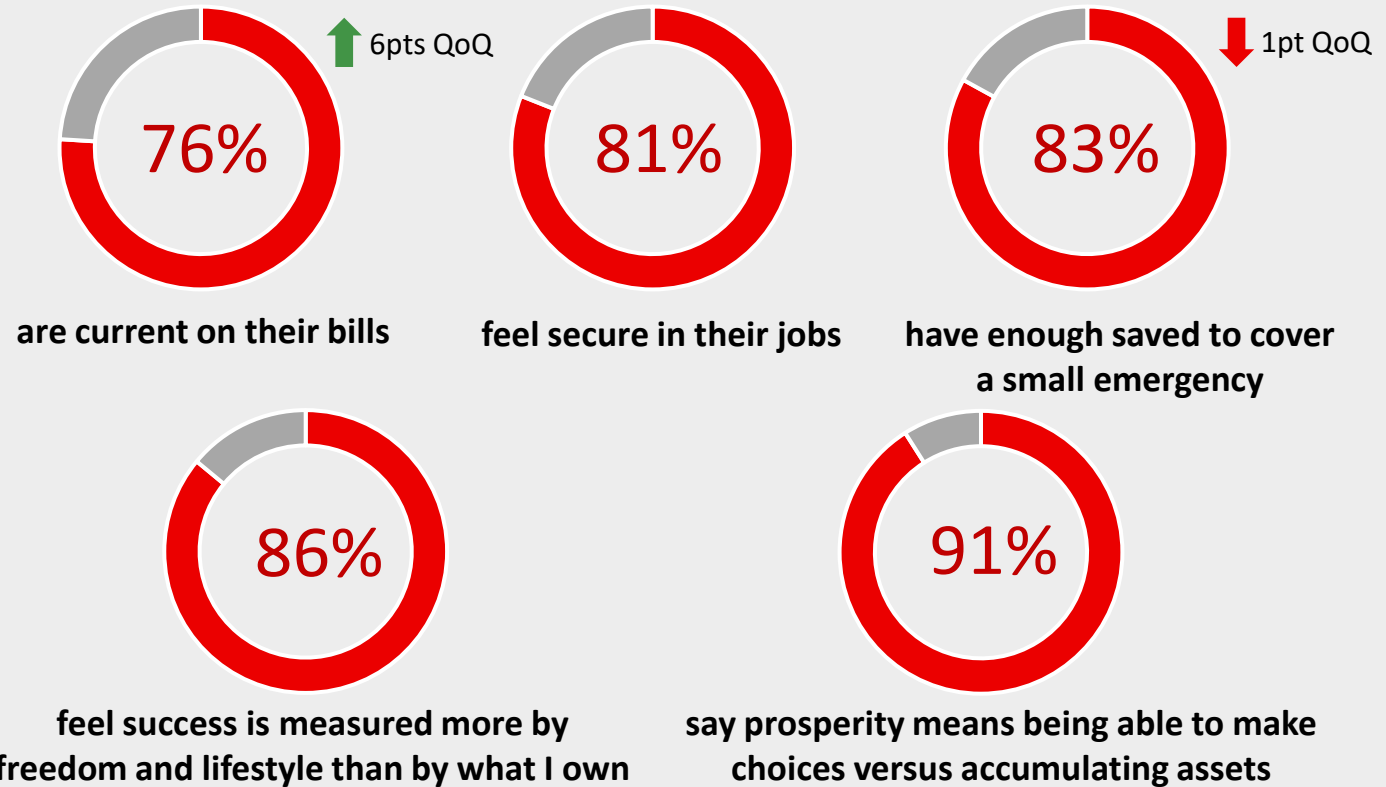
Most are current on their bills, feel confident in their job security, and have enough saved to cover small emergencies.

Top five factors middle-income Americans associate with financial prosperity*

- 1 Able to pay bills and expenses
- 2 Job security
- 3 Sufficient emergency savings
- 4 Debt-free
- 5 Having flexibility in how to live**

*Top response options shown.
**New to top 5.

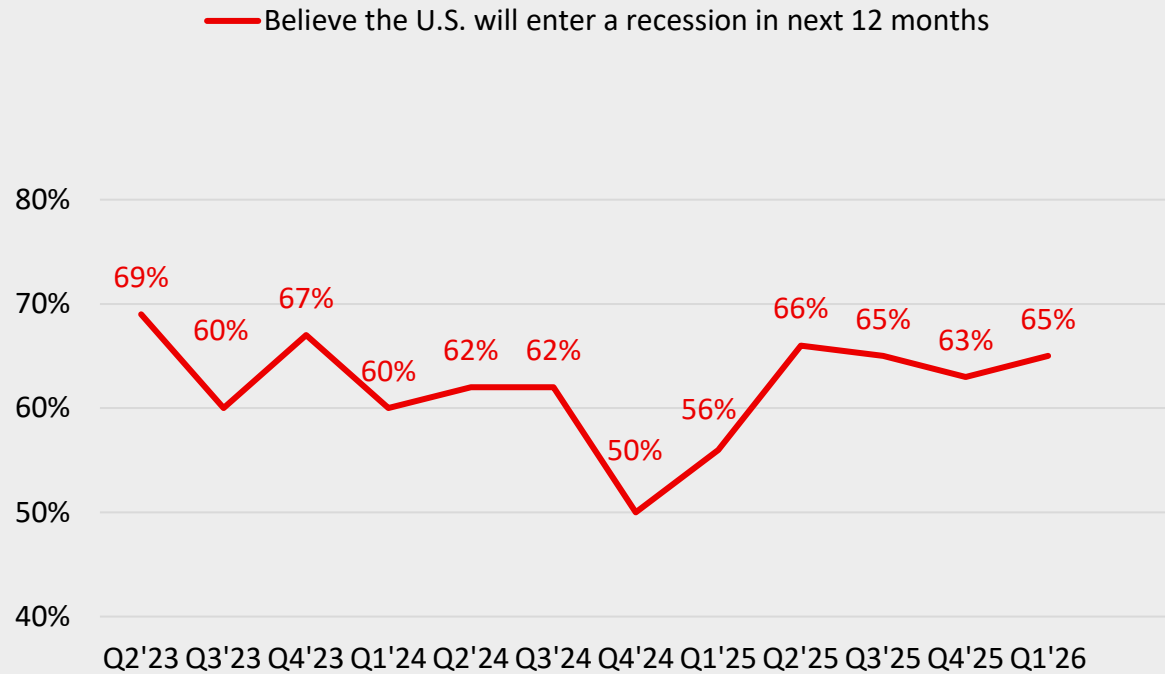
Key indicators of financial prosperity remain strong. For most, prosperity is measured more by financial freedom



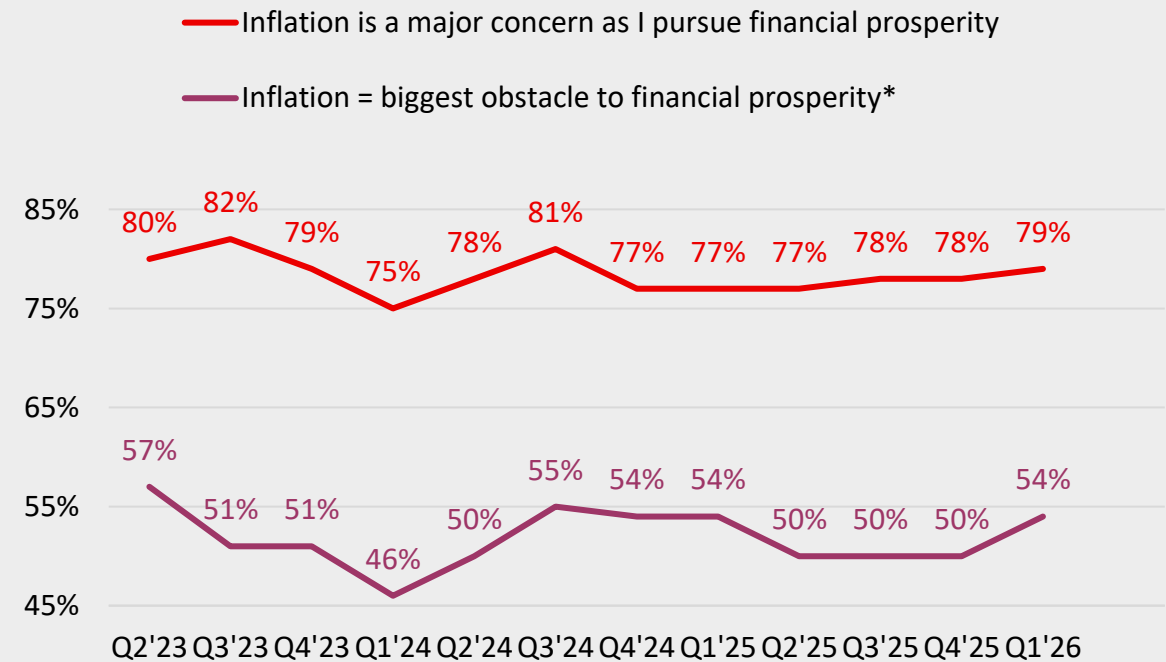
While personal confidence is high, broader concerns linger

For the twelfth straight quarter, inflation remains the dominant headwind to financial prosperity.

Recession expectations remain relatively flat over last four quarters



Concerns about inflation remain elevated

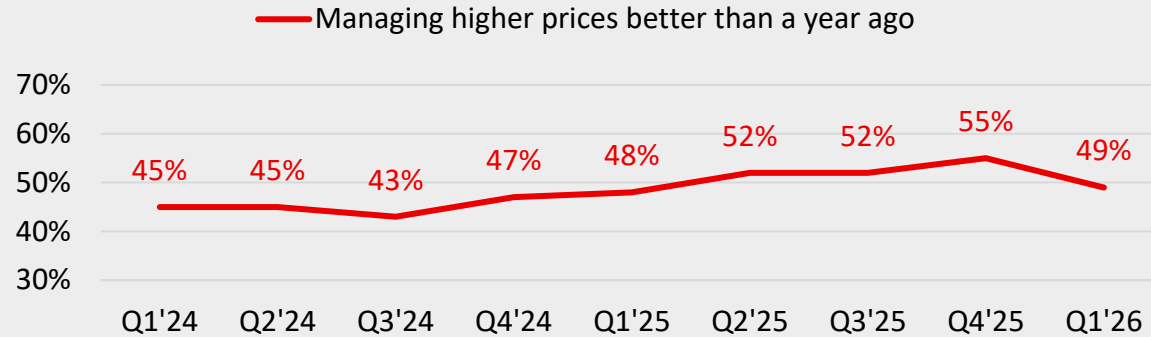


*54% indicated inflation is their biggest obstacle to financial prosperity, the highest of seven response options, including state of the job market/job security (10%) and home prices (10%).

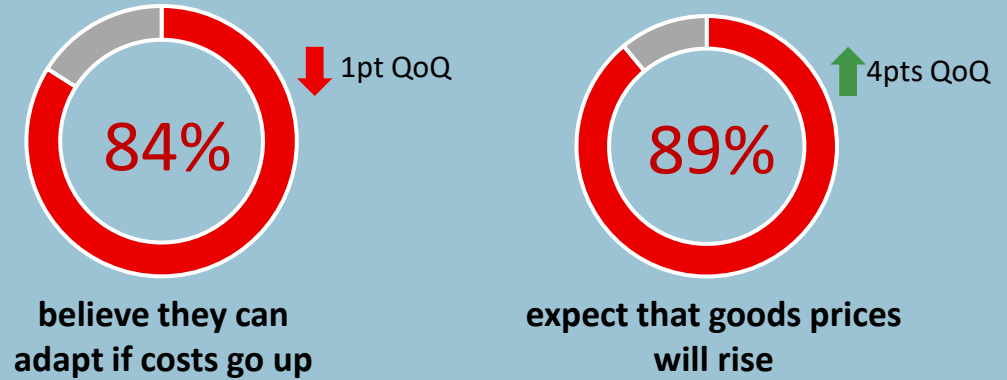
Consumers continue to take practical steps amid ongoing price pressures

Middle-income Americans remain resilient but are still adjusting their behaviors in response to inflation.

Middle-income Americans' confidence in managing higher prices

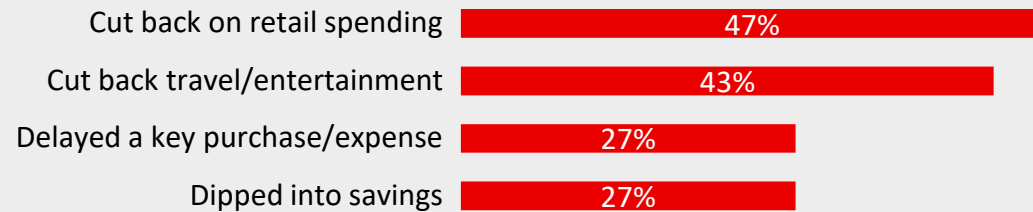


Consumers are planning for future price uncertainty



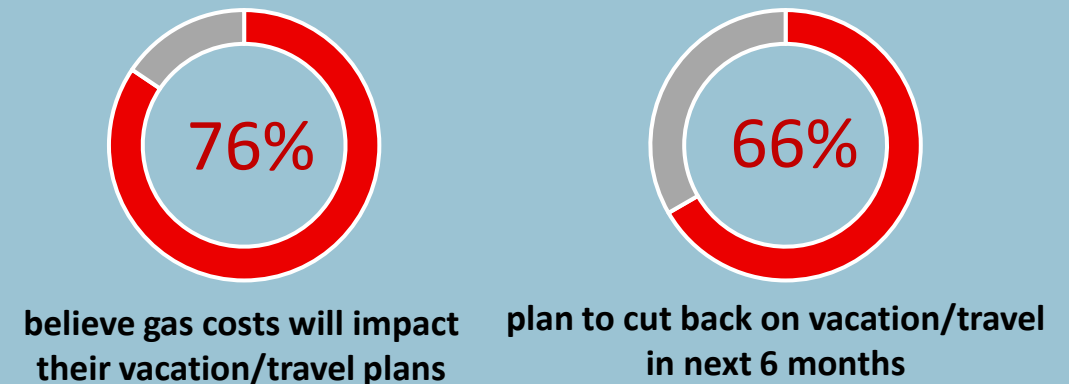
More than 9 in 10 (92%) took some action in response to inflation in Q1

Top actions taken due to inflation over past three months:*



*Respondents could select all that apply; only top actions shown.

Increasing costs may impact summer travel plans

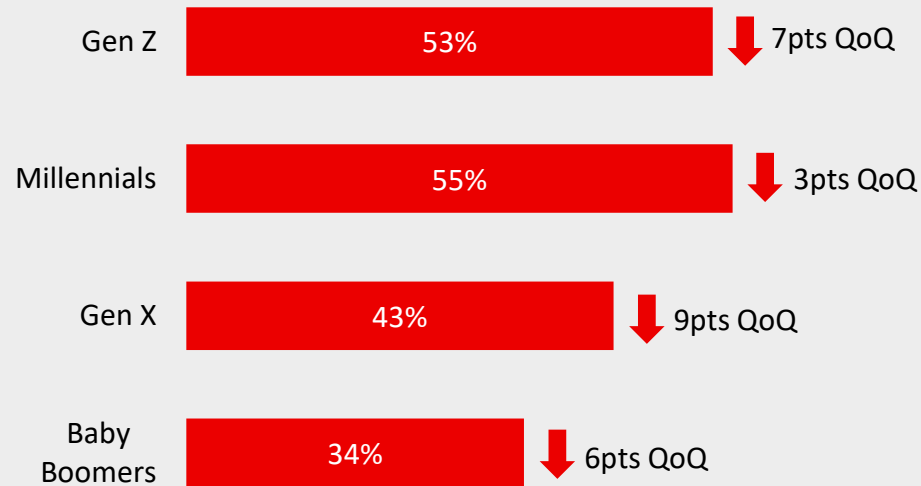


Generational differences shape inflation management

Younger generations experience stronger adaptation to inflation and respond in different, more active ways.

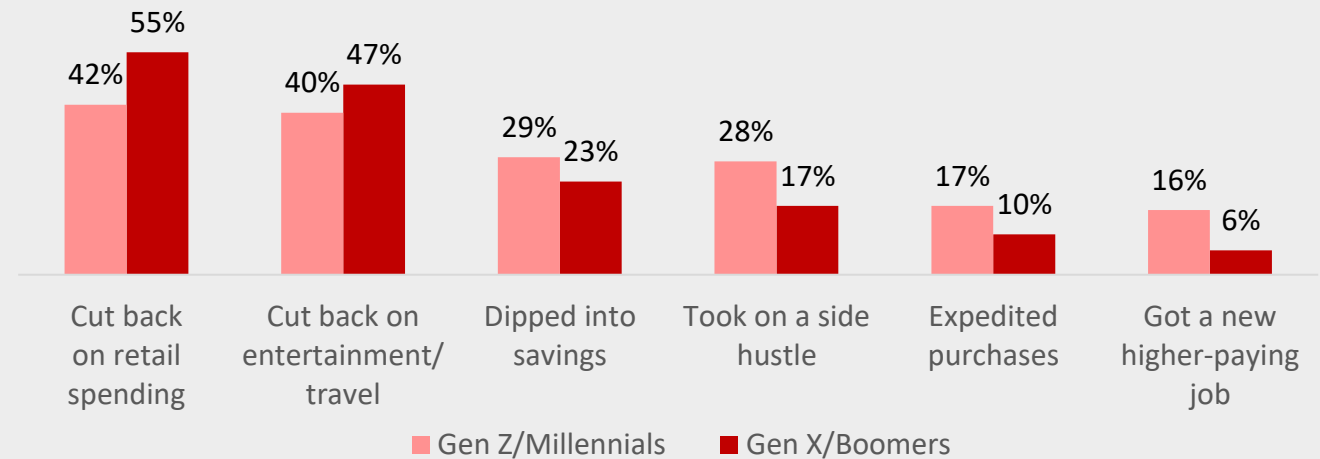
Younger generations report that they are managing price increases more effectively, but all consumers are feeling the impact

Percent who say they are managing higher prices better than a year ago:



Generations are adapting in different ways

*Select actions taken over the past three months in response to prolonged inflation**

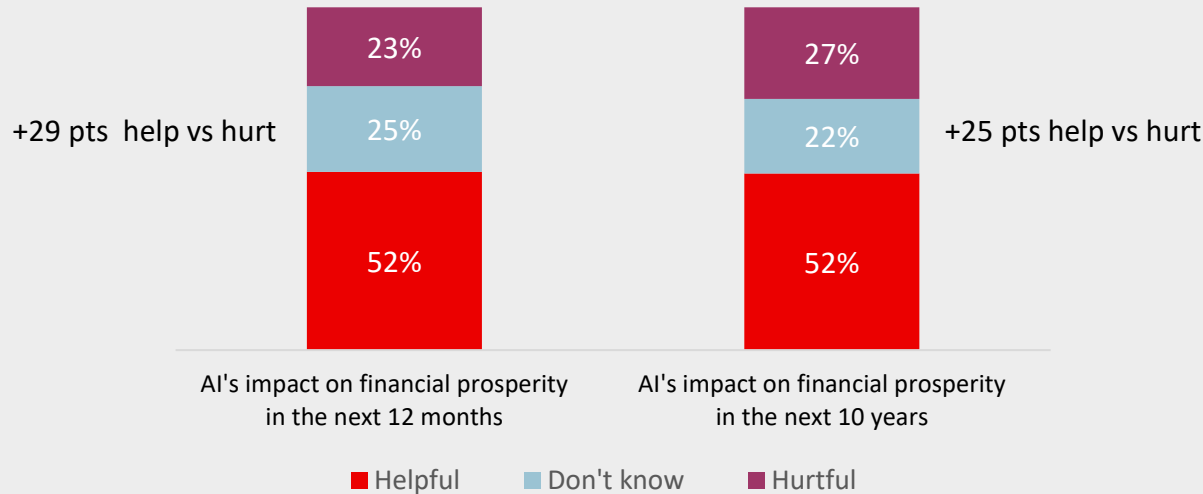


**Respondents could select all that apply; select actions shown.*

Top potential benefits of AI align closely with key drivers of financial prosperity

Even amid uncertainty, middle-income Americans see practical financial upside in AI.

Middle-income Americans believe AI can support their financial prosperity



Most consumers can see how AI can benefit them financially



Top three potential benefits of AI to help financial prosperity:

- 1 Help learn new skills
- 2 Make better savings and investment decisions
- 3 Budget/manage money more efficiently

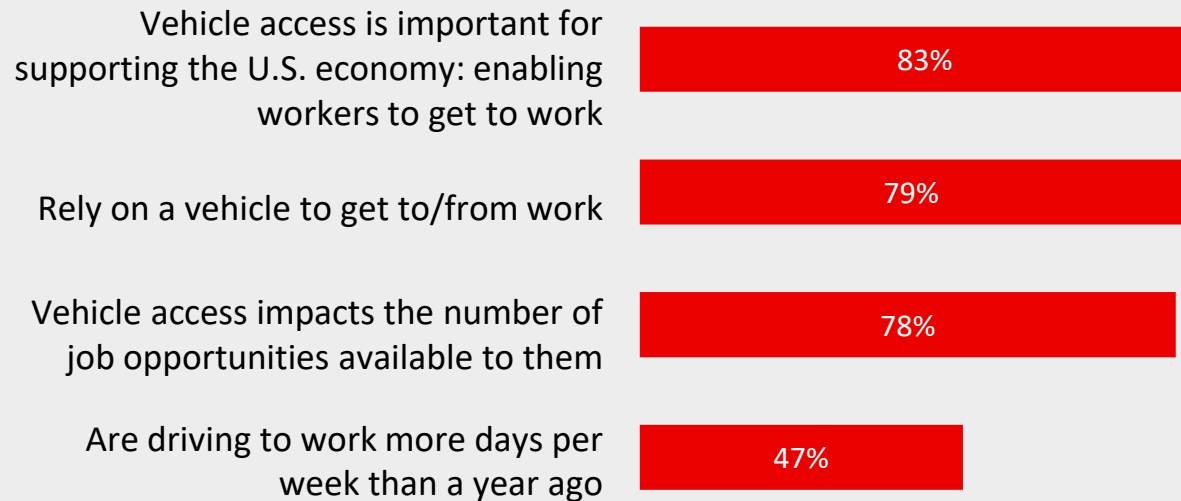
Vehicle access enables work and opportunity for middle-income Americans; affordability considerations drive purchasing decisions.



Vehicle access remains essential to work, mobility, and economic opportunity

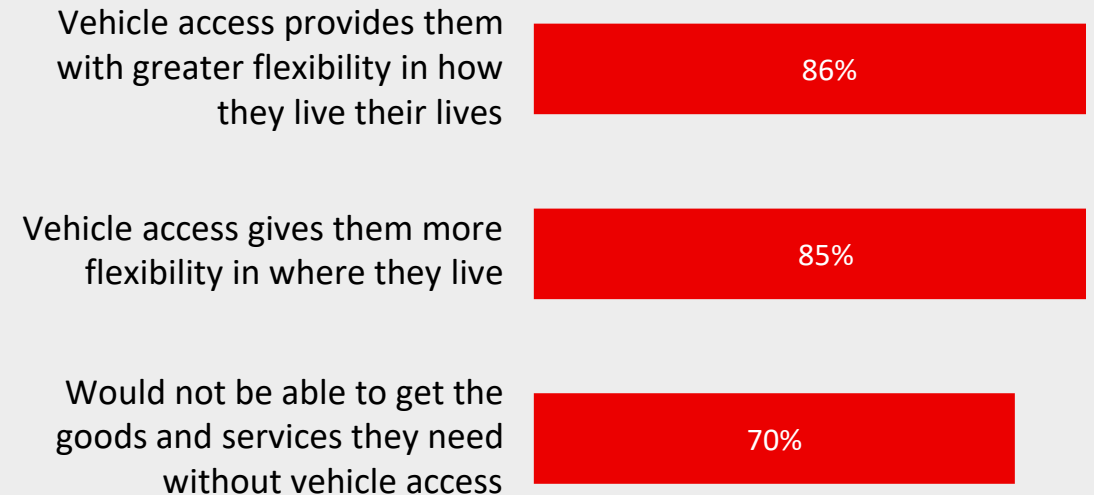
8 in 10 rely on a vehicle to get to work and nearly half are driving to work more than a year ago.

Vehicle access enables work, job access, and economic participation*



* Among all middle-income households.

Vehicle access supports flexibility, mobility, and everyday life*

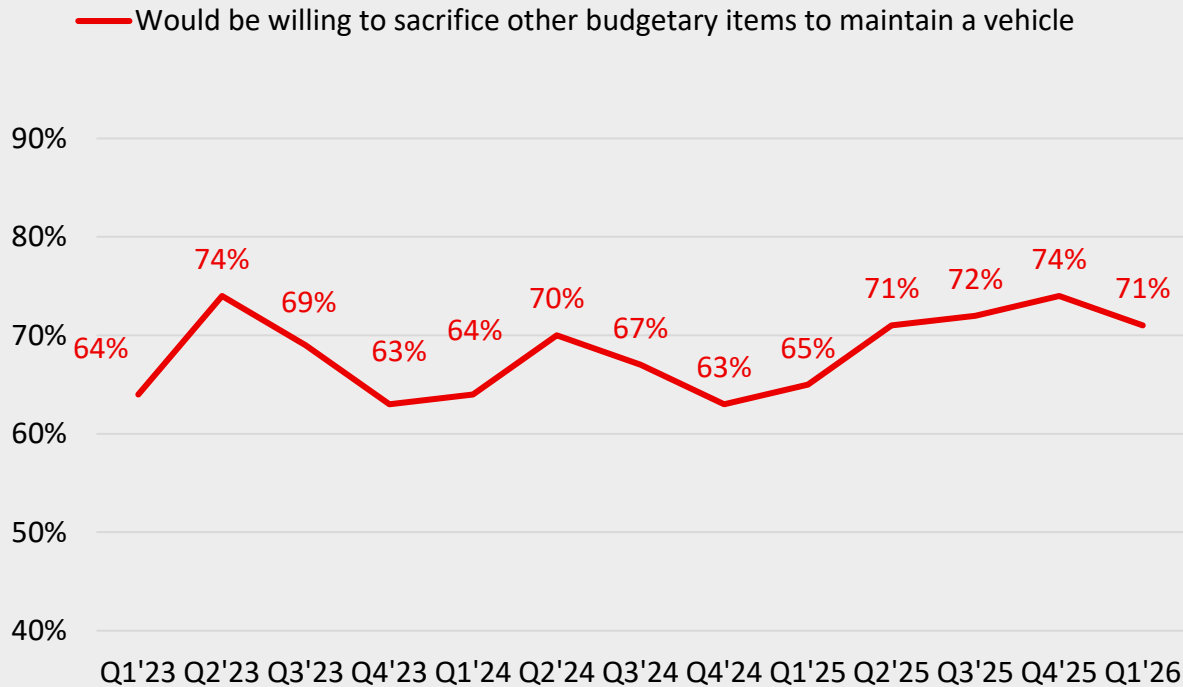


* Among all middle-income households.

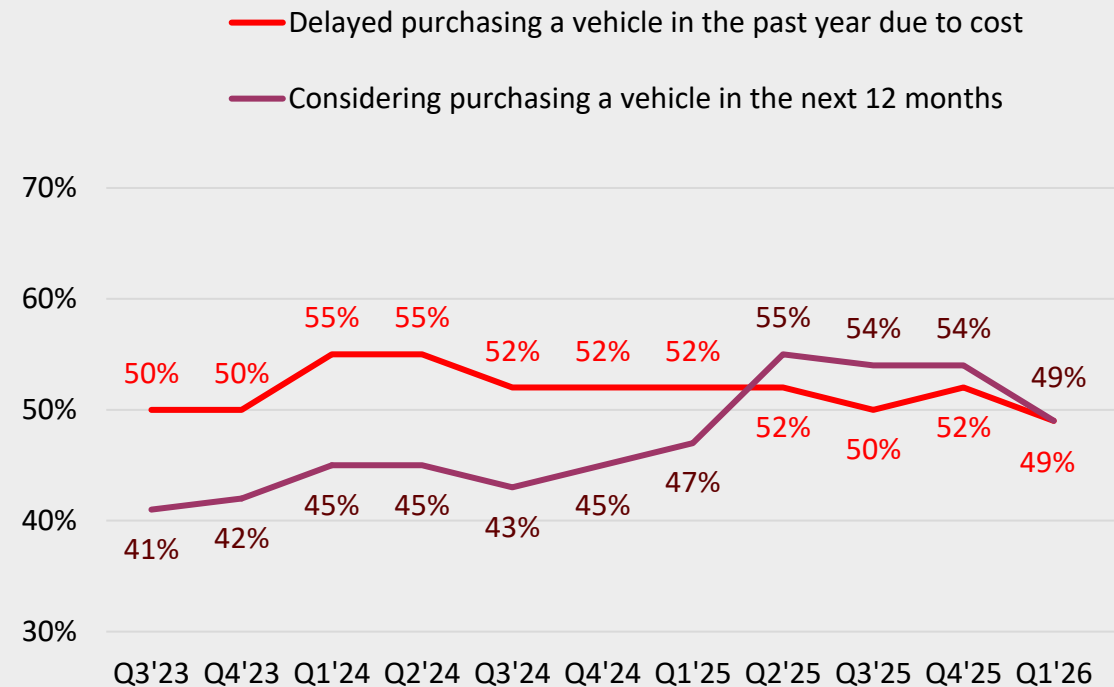
Maintaining vehicle access remains a high budgetary priority for households

Nearly half of middle-income consumers are considering a vehicle purchase in the next 12 months, a slight decline from Q1.

Consumers remain committed to maintaining vehicle access



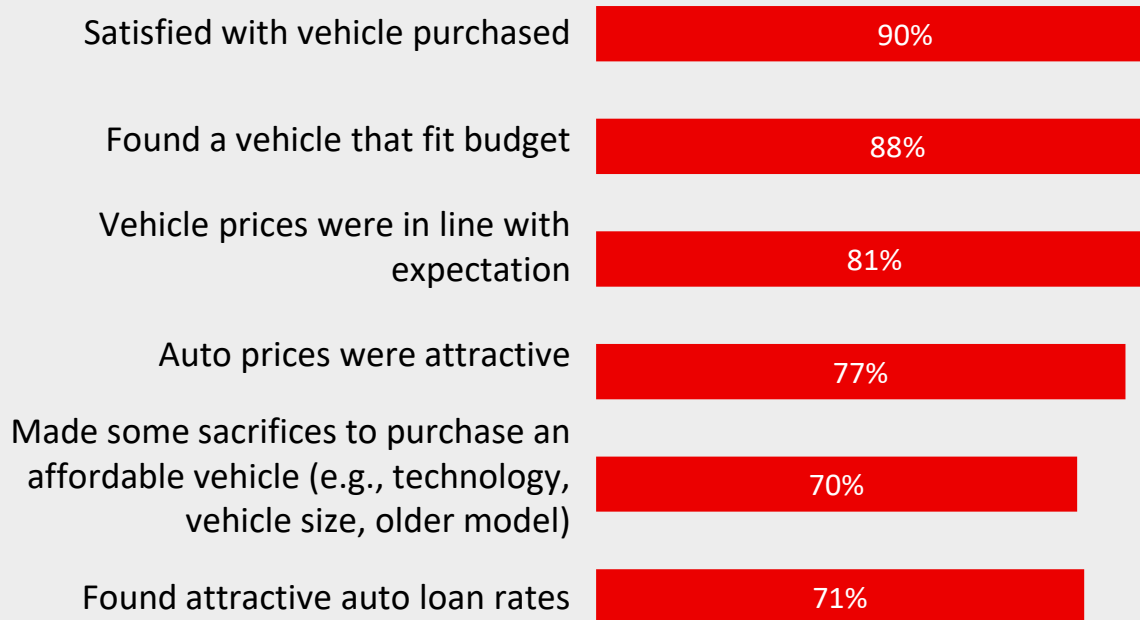
Vehicle demand remains elevated, though down from prior quarters



Car buyers are making pragmatic, budget-conscious choices

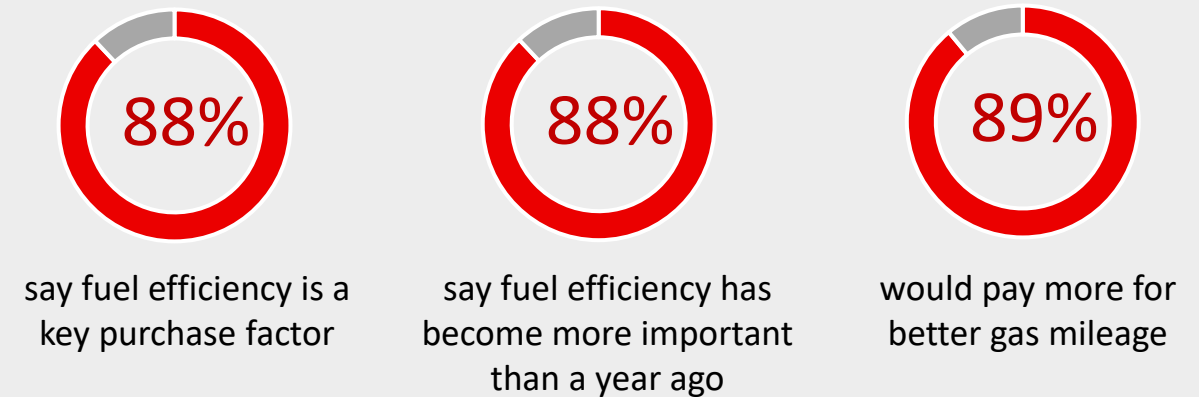
Fuel efficiency is emerging as a key cost consideration, raising interest in EVs and hybrids.

Most buyers* stayed within their budget and were satisfied with their purchase



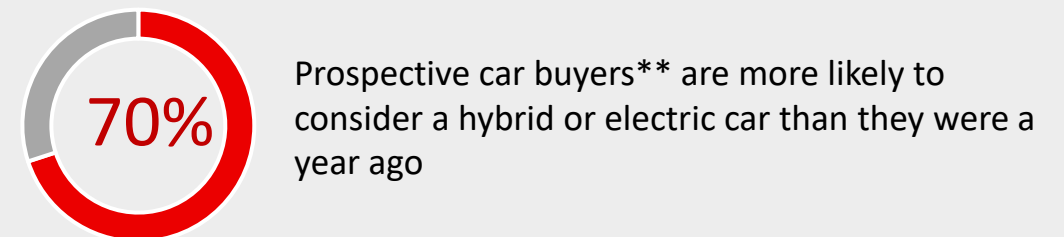
*Among those who purchased in the last 12 months.

Fuel efficiency is top of mind for auto buyers**



**Among those considering a vehicle purchase in the next 12 months.

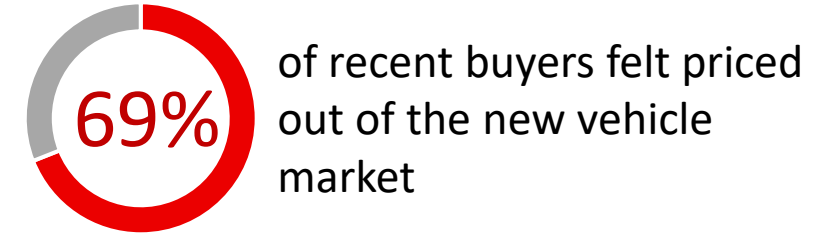
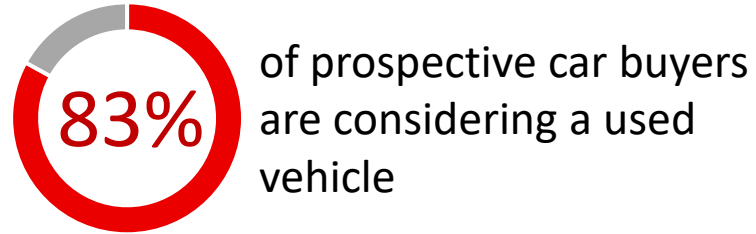
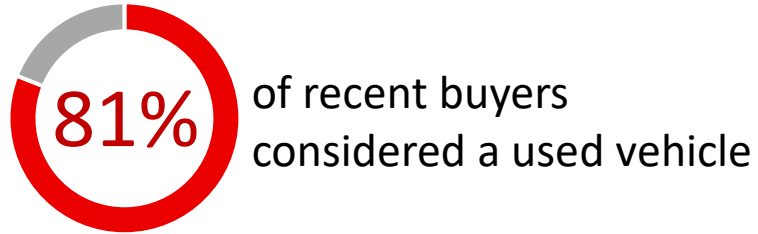
Elevated interest in electric vehicles (EVs) and hybrids



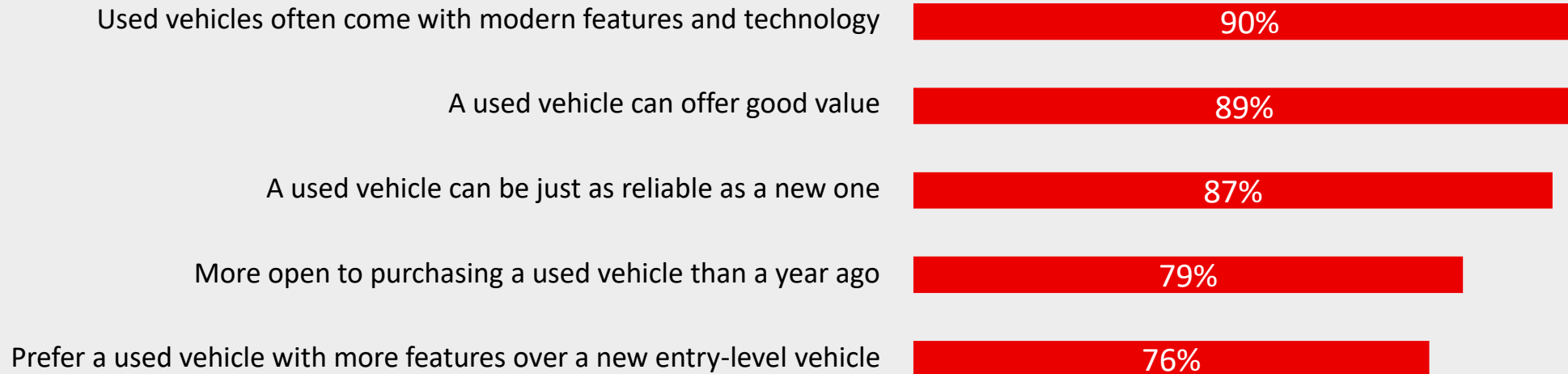
**Among those considering a vehicle purchase in the next 12 months.

Used vehicles are a mainstream affordability solution for consumers

Used vehicles are increasingly seen as a way to maximize value, features, and quality.



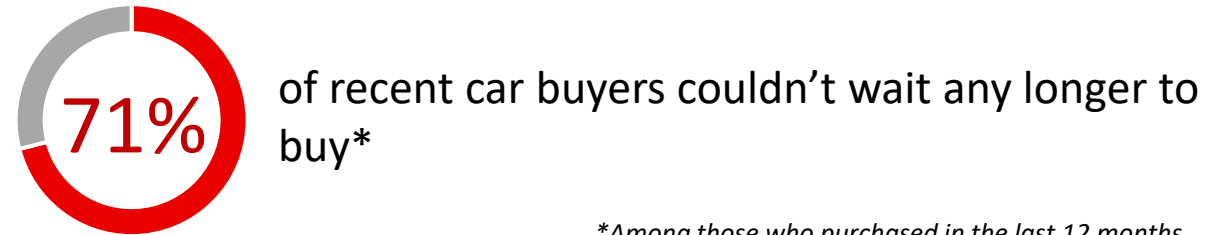
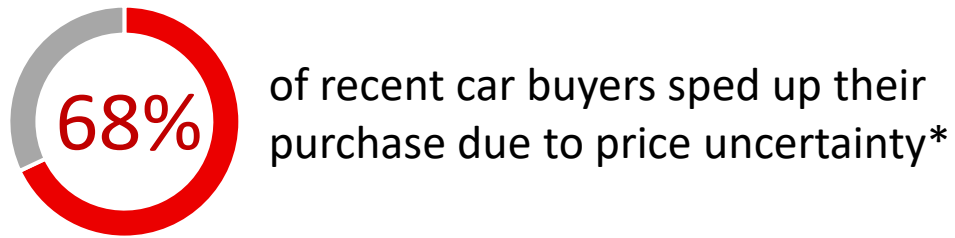
Used vehicles are seen as good value and reliable among prospective buyers*



*Among those considering a vehicle purchase in the next 12 months.

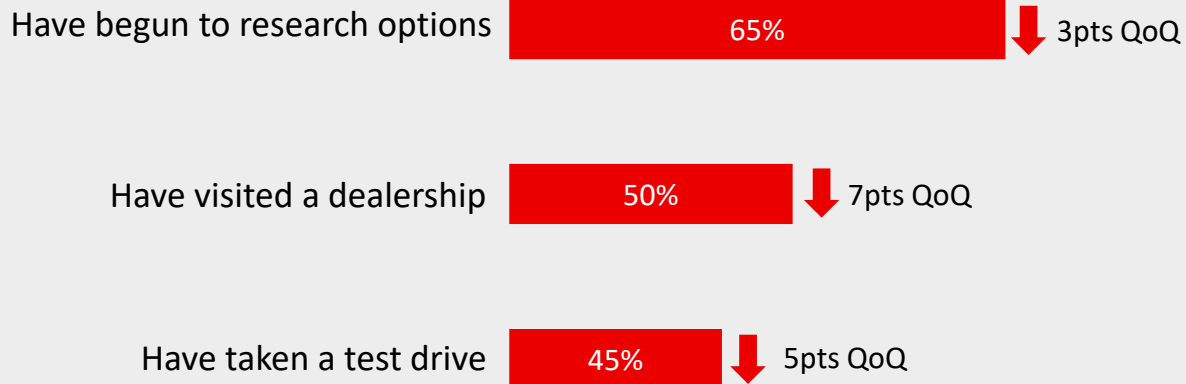
Factors impacting purchase intent and timing

Recent buyers say price expectations led them to expedite their purchases, while prospective buyers continue to see reasons to act in the months ahead.



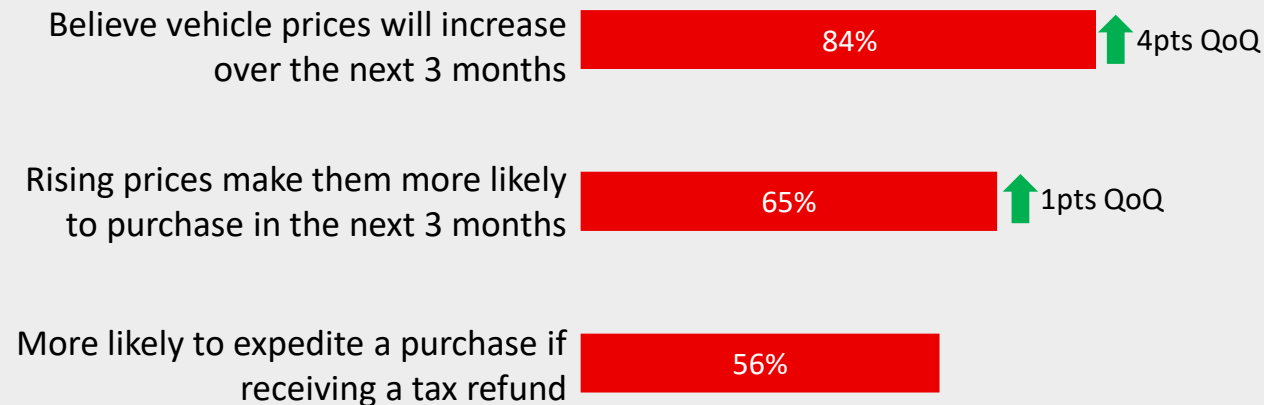
*Among those who purchased in the last 12 months.

Expedited purchases in 2025 may have contributed to a dip in activity among prospective buyers in Q1**



**Among those considering a vehicle purchase in the next 12 months.

Potential price increases and tax refunds may lead buyers to act in Q2**

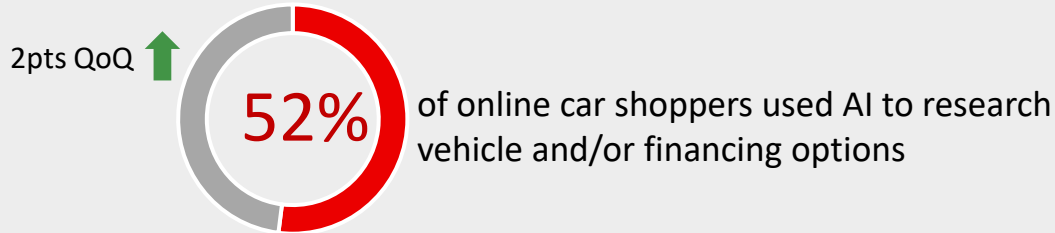


**Among those considering a vehicle purchase in the next 12 months.

Consumers use AI to make car shopping and financing more informed

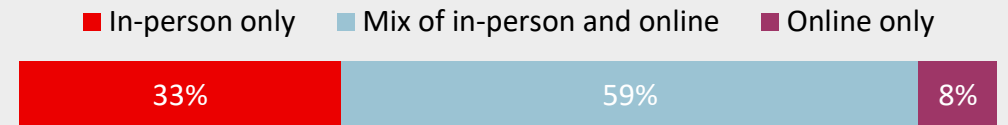
More than half of middle-income Americans who shopped online for their vehicle used AI to inform vehicle and financing options.

AI helps consumers make informed decisions*



**Among those who shopped online at any point in their car-buying experience.*

Where car buyers shopped for their vehicles



Top three AI uses when vehicle shopping**

- 1 Identify vehicles within their price range
- 2 Compare prices across dealerships
- 3 Compare vehicle features and research vehicle reviews

***Respondents using AI for shopping and financing; only top actions shown.*

Top three AI uses when financing a vehicle**

- 1 Compare financing options across lenders
- 2 Estimate what they could afford
- 3 Feel more confident in their financing decision

***Respondents using AI for shopping and financing; only top actions shown.*

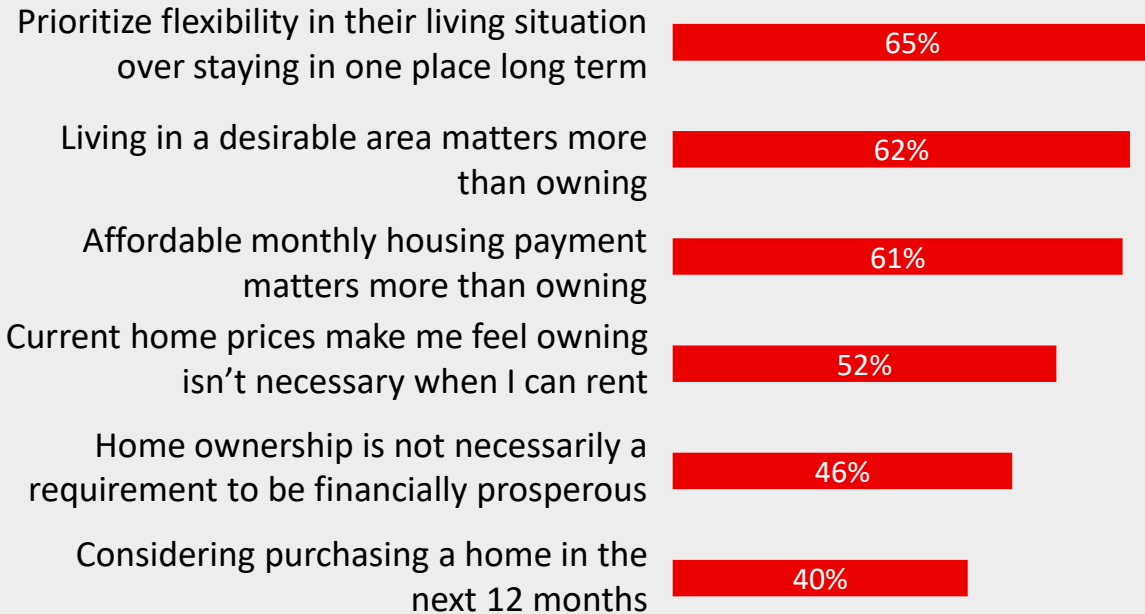
Flexibility and affordability are central to housing choices for middle-income Americans.



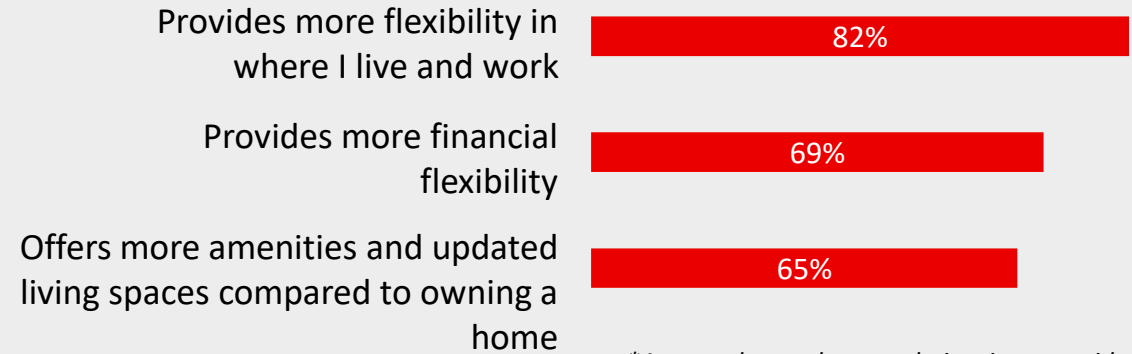
Housing success is defined by affordability and flexibility

Housing preferences are shaped by manageable monthly costs and life flexibility, rather than ownership alone.

Home ownership remains aspirational. Affordable monthly payments matters more than owning for 6 in 10 households

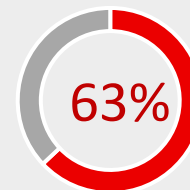


Renting is more affordable and more flexible for many middle-income Americans*

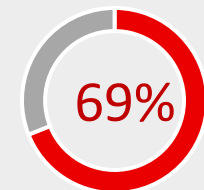


**Among those who rent their primary residence.*

Multifamily homes provide benefits for renters*



Believe multifamily homes allows more financial flexibility



Multifamily homes are a good option for renters

**Among those who rent their primary residence.*

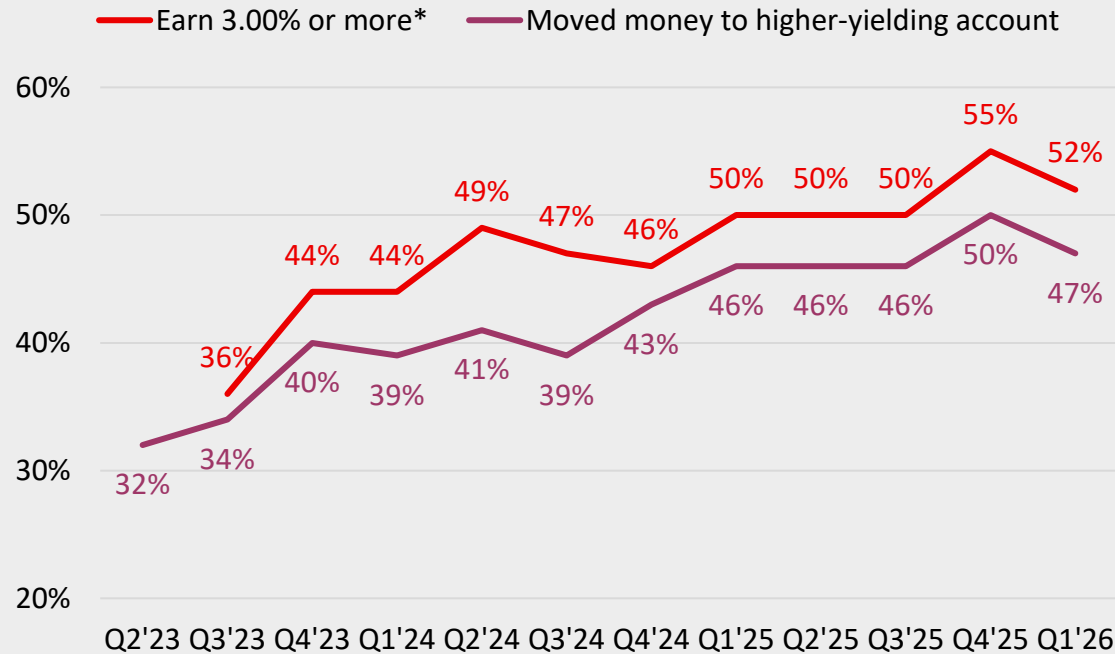
Middle-income Americans still have an opportunity to earn more interest on their savings.



Consumers continue to seek higher savings yields

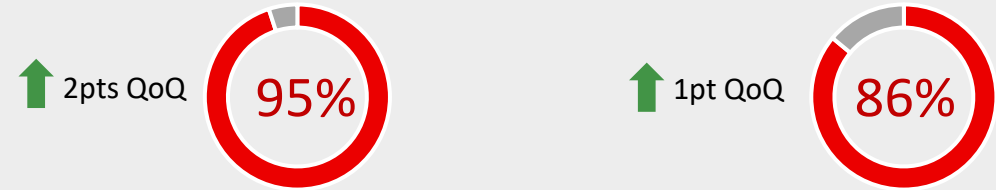
Nearly half have already moved money to a higher-yielding account. Digital access may help make accounts offering higher yield more accessible.

Half of middle-income Americans are earning 3% or more on their savings



*Among those who know their primary savings interest rate. 17% do not know the rate they earn on their savings.

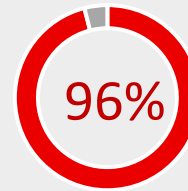
Consumers rely on flexible digital banking options to stay on top of their finances



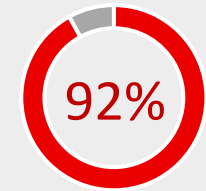
Say it's important their bank offers 24/7 digital account access

Bank digitally at least half the time

Important factors when considering a banking provider



Products that are easy to understand



Competitive interest on savings/rates on loans

Methodology



Methodology

This research on financial prosperity, conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of Santander US, surveyed 2,150 Americans who are bank and/or financial services customers, ages 18-76.

Survey participants are employed or looking for work, own/use at least one financial product, and are the primary or shared decision-maker on household finances with household income in the “middle-income” range of \$55,000 to \$167,000¹.

¹ Range based on median household income of ~\$83,500 (U.S. Census Bureau) and Pew Research Center definition of middle-income being two-thirds to double median household income.

This Q1 study was conducted from March 25-28, 2026. The interviews were conducted online, and the margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points for the total audience at a 95% confidence level. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

The data was weighted to target population proportions for a representative sample based on age, gender, ethnicity, region, and education.

The previous studies were conducted over the following time periods:

- Q1 2026: March 2026
- Q4 2025: December 2025
- Q3 2025: September 2025
- Q2 2025: June 2025
- Q1 2025: February 2025
- Q4 2024: December 2024
- Q3 2024: August 2024
- Q2 2024: May 2024
- Q1 2024: February 2024
- Q4 2023: December 2023
- Q3 2023: September 2023
- Q2 2023: May 2023
- Q1 2023: January 2023

Financial prosperity is defined as thriving financially. Achieving financial prosperity includes being able to cover living expenses, handle emergencies, and pursue life goals without significant tradeoffs.

Multifamily homes are generally housing properties with five or more residential units, such as an apartment building.

About Santander US

Santander Holdings USA, Inc. (SHUSA) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Madrid-based Banco Santander, S.A. (NYSE: SAN) (Santander), recognized as one of the world's most admired companies by Fortune Magazine in 2026, with approximately 176 million customers in the United States, Europe and Latin America. SHUSA is the intermediate holding company for Santander's five growing businesses in the United States. Santander's U.S. presence consists of auto lending, retail and digital banking, commercial banking, corporate and investment banking, and wealth management businesses, with a combined total of approximately 11,000 employees, 4.4 million customers, and assets of \$165 billion in the fiscal year ended 2025. In the U.S. market, Santander is recognized as a top-10 auto lender and a top-10 multifamily bank lender and servicer, and operates one of the fastest growing digital banks, Openbank by Santander, as a division of Santander Bank, N.A. For more information about Santander US, please visit www.santanderus.com.

Disclaimers

© 2026 Santander Bank, N.A. All rights reserved. Santander and the Flame logo are trademarks of Banco Santander, S.A. or its subsidiaries in the United States or other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.