

Survey Toplines

Voice of Main Street: Small businesses being strained by rising costs

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Download the full report from our website: <https://smallbusinessmajority.org/our-research/voice-of-main-street>

Methodology

The fifth Voice of Main Street survey is a poll of 247 small business owners in Small Business Majority’s national network. It was conducted between January 23 and March 5, 2026. The margin of error is +/- 6% at a 95% confidence level.

1. Are you the owner of a small business?

Yes, owner.....100%

2. How many people does your company employ, including yourself? Please include full-time and part-time employees, but do not include independent contractors

Self-employed 31%

Small business, 2-10 employees52%

Small business, 10-24 employees 11%

Small business, 25-49 employees5%

Small business, 50-74 employees0%

Small business, 75-100 employees0%

More than 100 employees.....0%

3. How optimistic or pessimistic are you about your business prospects over the next six months?

Very optimistic..... 15%

Somewhat optimistic32%

Neither optimistic or pessimistic.....18%

Somewhat pessimistic.....28%

Very pessimistic8%

Total optimistic47%

Total pessimistic.....36%

4. Not accounting for seasonality, in the past three months, has your business revenue increased, decreased or stayed the same?

Increased 15%

Decreased47%

Stayed the same38%

5. Not accounting for seasonality, in the past three months, have your business expenses increased, decreased or stayed the same?

Increased	64%
Decreased	9%
Stayed the same	27%

6. In the past three months, has the number of people your business employs increased, decreased or stayed the same?

Increased	8%
Decreased	19%
Stayed the same	74%

7. For each of the following financial challenges businesses face, indicate whether it's a major challenge, minor challenge, not really a challenge, or not a challenge at all for your business.

	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not really a challenge	Not at all a challenge
Increased costs of supplies/inventory	54%	28%	14%	4%
Difficulty accessing financing	44%	19%	22%	14%
Difficulty making payroll and/or paying businesses expenses.....	43%	28%	18%	11%
Reduced consumer spending.....	52%	29%	15%	4%

8. For each of the following marketing challenges businesses face, indicate whether it's a major challenge, minor challenge, not really a challenge, or not a challenge at all for your business.

	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not really a challenge	Not at all a challenge
Attracting new customers	52%	30%	15%	4%
Attracting potential investors, suppliers or other business partners	33%	23%	27%	17%
Seasonal changes resulting in fewer customers.....	31%	37%	22%	10%
Finding the right marketing channels to use	43%	32%	19%	7%

9. For each of the following technology challenges businesses face, indicate whether it's a major challenge, minor challenge, not really a challenge, or not a challenge at all for your business.

	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not really a challenge	Not at all a challenge
Problems with existing technology not working/malfunctioning	19%	37%	33%	11%
Integrating new technology into the business	26%	41%	24%	9%
Keeping up to date with new technology	31%	43%	19%	7%
Integrating different business systems together	31%	32%	26%	11%

10. For each of the following legal challenges businesses face, indicate whether it's a major challenge, minor challenge, not really a challenge, or not a challenge at all for your business.

	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not really a challenge	Not at all a challenge
Complex contract-related business transactions.....	21%	24%	35%	20%
Adhering to industry or government regulations.....	29%	29%	27%	15%
Legal action being taken against my business	9%	12%	28%	51%
Lack of access to legal assistance/expertise.....	20%	28%	27%	26%

11. For each of the following entrepreneurial mindset / motivational challenges businesses face, indicate whether it's a major challenge, minor challenge, not really a challenge, or not a challenge at all for your business.

	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not really a challenge	Not at all a challenge
Burnout / Not taking enough personal time	44%	35%	14%	7%
Fear of failure	37%	28%	21%	14%
Personal factors impacting ability to focus on business.....	32%	35%	23%	10%

12. For each of the following business expenses, please indicate if they have increased, decreased or stayed the same this past year:

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased
Healthcare premiums	71%	28%	2%
Utilities (electricity, gas).....	81%	19%	0%
Raw goods and materials.....	75%	23%	2%
Wages.....	47%	43%	10%

13. If your business relies on holiday sales, how did your sales perform during the 2025 holiday season?

Very well, better than previous years.....	6%
Somewhat well, similar to previous years.....	12%
Somewhat poorly, slightly worse than previous years	14%
Very poorly, much worse than previous years	11%
My business does not rely on holiday sales	51%
I don't know.....	6%

14. How have increasing costs and other economic conditions impacted your business? Select all that apply

Increased prices of my goods or services.....	65%
Froze hiring	20%
Laid off employees.....	8%

Delayed business investments	37%
Decreased profit margins.....	64%
Slowed customer growth	57%
My costs have not increased	7%
I don't know	4%

15. Have you had to pay tariffs on imports for your business?

Yes.....	30%
No	53%
I don't know	17%

16. How much time do you estimate you spend per week on tariff paperwork and regulations? (Asked of 74 respondents who had to pay tariffs)

No extra time	50%
Up to 5 hours	24%
6-10 hours.....	8%
11-20 hours	1%
More than 20 hours	4%
I don't know	12%

17. Where do you go for help or information on tariffs? Select all that apply.
(Asked of 74 respondents who had to pay tariffs)

Shipping companies.....	47%
Tariff brokers	9%
U.S. Customs and Border Protection website or office.....	16%
Local advisor or mentor.....	30%
Accountant / bookkeeper.....	43%

18. Changes to tariffs policy have affected many small businesses. Which of the following impacts, if any, has your business experienced? Select all that apply

Closed my business	2%
Suppliers have increased the prices my business pays	53%
Delayed importing materials or goods.....	24%
Increased the price of certain materials or products	47%
Sought suppliers in other countries where there is less tariff impact.....	13%
Changed my business model and/or product offerings.....	15%
Laid off workers and/or reduced their hours	7%
Delayed hiring new employees	19%
Delayed business growth expansion plans	26%
No impact on my business.....	23%
I don't know	7%

19. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about corporate consolidation and monopolies?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The federal government is not doing enough to regulate monopolies	9%	2%	22%	21%	46%
My state should do more to strengthen its anti-monopoly laws and enforcement	7%	2%	30%	28%	33%
There is a monopoly in my industry	17%	16%	41%	12%	13%

20. Has your business been negatively affected by any of the following unfair practices from larger companies? Select all that apply

Self-preferencing, where larger companies' own products or services appear first on a platform or search engine	35%
Price discrimination, where larger companies charge different prices for the same product to different buyers	25%
Predatory pricing, where larger companies undercharge for a product or service, forcing other businesses to lower their prices, potentially running them out of business	28%
Copycatting, where larger companies copy the product or service of a smaller business	21%
Forced advertising, where companies have to pay high fees to platforms or marketplaces to have their product or service featured more prominently or to access customers or fans they've already developed	24%
Exclusionary contracts, where platforms or main industry players forbid a business from selling goods or services on a competing platform or with competing players	14%
Toll booths, where platforms, marketplaces or other middlemen extract a percentage of each sale made by a business	12%
Tying, where a business is forced to purchase some product or service in order to access another product or service	14%
Noncompete compliance, where a business is unable to hire a qualified candidate due to them having an existing noncompete agreement with another company	10%
My business has not been negatively affected by any of the listed unfair practices from larger companies	38%

21. Which of the following best describes the type of artificial intelligence (AI) tools your business is using?

Off-the-shelf AI tools from major providers (e.g., Microsoft, Google, OpenAI)	34%
AI features built into software you already use (e.g., accounting, CRM, POS, marketing tools)	7%
Custom AI tools developed by an outside vendor or consultant	2%
AI tools developed in-house by your business	2%
A mix of multiple types	14%
Not applicable — we do not use AI	36%
I don't know	4%

22. When thinking about using artificial intelligence (AI) tools provided by outside companies (such as Microsoft, Google, OpenAI, or other vendors), which of the following concerns, if any, apply to your business? Select all that apply

None of these	11%
Cost or unpredictable pricing	29%
Data privacy (how business data is stored or used).....	58%
Protection of intellectual property or proprietary information	51%
Accuracy or reliability of AI outputs.....	60%
Security risks or potential data breaches.....	47%
Lack of control over updates or changes to the tool	34%
Compliance or legal risks.....	31%
Difficulty integrating with our existing systems	20%
Lack of staff expertise	36%
I don't know	11%

23. Which of the following categories best describes your business?

Agriculture & Mining.....	1%
Consulting & Business Services	12%
Education & Youth Services.....	5%
Energy & Utilities.....	1%
Engineering	2%
Food & Beverage	6%
Health, Beauty, Fitness.....	7%
Healthcare, Pharmaceuticals & Biotech	5%
Insurance & Financial Services.....	4%
Manufacturing	7%
Media & Entertainment.....	3%
Non-profit.....	2%
Real Estate & Construction.....	3%
Retail.....	19%
Service and Consumer Services	5%
Software & Internet	0%
Technology, Computers & Electronics.....	2%
Telecommunications	0%
Transportation & Storage	2%
Travel, Recreation & Leisure	1%
Wholesale & Distributors.....	2%
Other.....	10%

24. What is your business' annual revenue?

Less than \$25,000	17%
\$25,000 to \$49,999.....	8%
\$50,000 to \$99,999.....	13%
\$100,000 to \$249,999.....	16%
\$250,000 to \$499,999.....	13%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	12%
Over \$1 million	15%
Prefer not to answer.....	6%

25. Which of the following racial / ethnic groups do you identify with?

Asian, Asian American, East Asian, South Asian, and/or Southeast Asian	5%
Black, African or African American	18%
Hispanic, Latino/a or Spanish Origin.....	16%
Middle Eastern or North African	0%
Native American or Alaskan Native.....	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%
White or Caucasian.....	47%
Prefer not to answer.....	8%
Other.....	4%

26. What is your gender?

Male	39%
Female	55%
Prefer to self-identify	0%
Prefer not to answer.....	5%

27. What is your political affiliation?

Republican	7%
Independent- lean Republican	10%
Independent- No affiliation.....	16%
Independent- lean Democrat.....	13%
Democrat	27%
Third-party affiliation.....	0%
Decline to say.....	26%