

ISSUE BRIEF

How Detroit Households' Challenges Have Changed Since 2025

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OUTLIER MEDIA

OVERVIEW

This brief highlights findings from a recent survey by the Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS) at the University of Michigan, conducted in partnership with Outlier Media. The survey examines the challenges Detroiters are facing today and how they have changed since early 2025. It was fielded between June 22 and August 31, 2026, and captures the views of a representative sample of 1,859 Detroit residents. Results have been weighted to reflect the population of Detroit. See full results from DMACS surveys here. Findings from the survey can be found here.



INTRODUCTION

As newly elected officials take office and set their agendas, they are making decisions that will shape daily life in Detroit and throughout the country for years. Residents are clear about where they are feeling the most pressure. In a survey taken in the months before the election, more Detroiters than in early 2025 reported a major challenge for themselves or someone in their household in every area we asked about: neighborhood conditions, safety, K-12 schools, housing, employment, transportation, and food. These increases came during a period of big changes in economic conditions and in federal, state, and local policy.

Two concerns lead the list. Nearly 3 in 10 Detroiters name neighborhood conditions (28.7%) and crime or safety (28.6%) as major challenges, up from about 2 in 10 in early 2025. The fastest-growing concern is the quality of K-12 schools, which rose 8 points to 24.1%. Smaller but meaningful shares of Detroiters now report major challenges with housing (22.4%), employment (21.6%), food (20.7%), and transportation (20.1%).

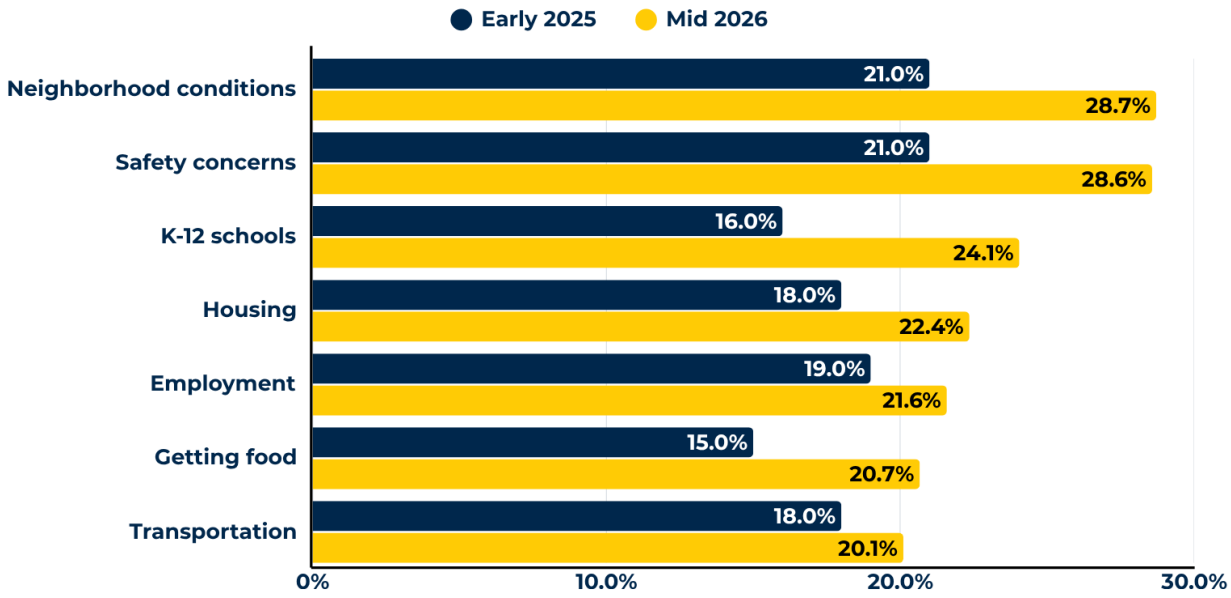
Underneath these numbers, residents point again and again to cost. Detroiters with housing challenges describe the cost of buying a home, keeping up with repairs, and paying rising property taxes and utility bills, especially water. Those with transportation challenges most often cite the cost of buying, maintaining, and insuring a car. Among those struggling with employment, inadequate pay is the top concern, both for people looking for work and for people unhappy in their current jobs.

Residents also offer concrete ideas about what would help. They want cleaner streets, an end to illegal dumping, and action on vacant structures. In K-12 schools, they want stronger teaching, a renewed focus on core subjects, and fairer school resources. On safety, some want more police presence, but about two-thirds named something else to address their safety concerns, including fewer vacant structures, better street lighting, and community-led efforts.

This brief describes the biggest challenges facing Detroit households, how they have changed since early 2025, and the changes residents most want to see. For elected officials, these findings show where action is most urgently needed and what kinds of responses residents believe would make a real difference.

Figure 1: Major challenges facing Detroit households

% of Detroiters reporting each issue is a major challenge for them or someone in their household

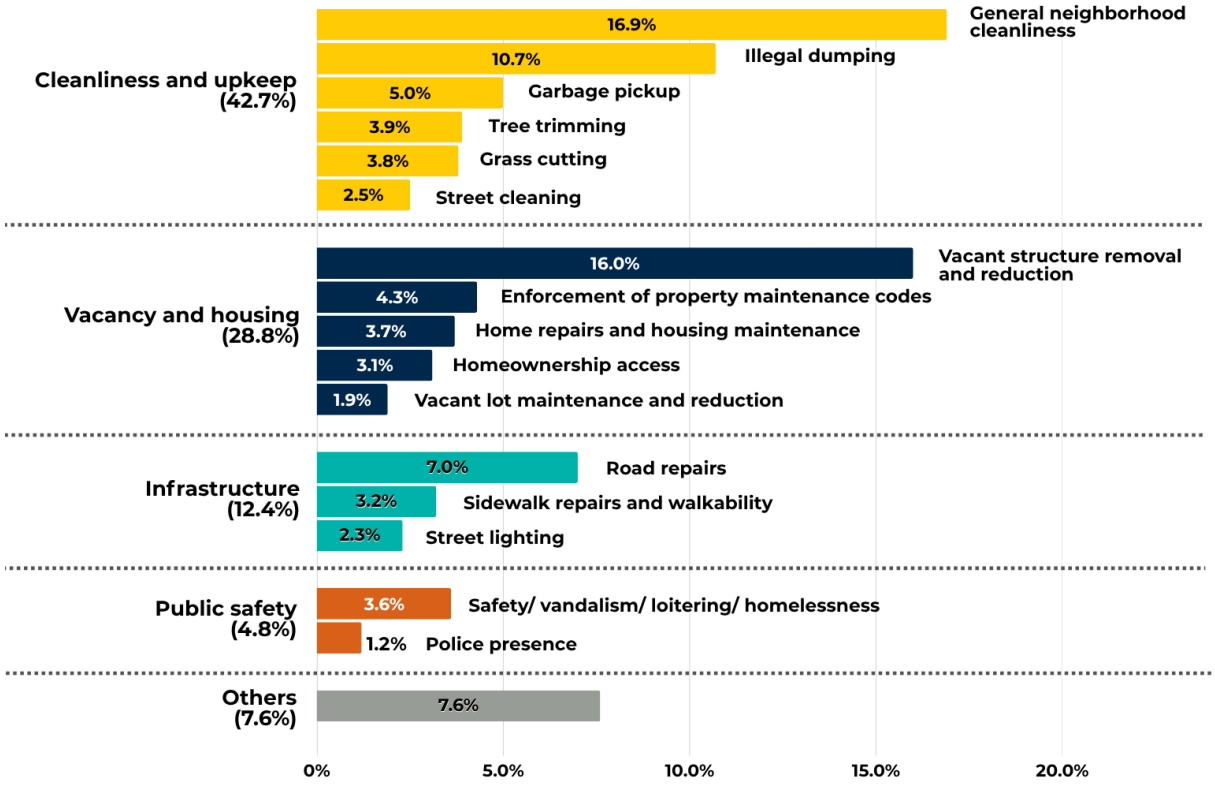


CONCERN ABOUT NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS IS RISING, WITH RESIDENTS CALLING FOR CLEANER STREETS AND ACTION ON VACANT PROPERTY

- Nearly 3 in 10 Detroiters (28.7%) say that neighborhood condition and upkeep (for example, trash, blighted homes, roads, sidewalks, and lighting) is a major challenge for them or someone in their household right now (see Figure 1).[1] This is a significant increase from early 2025 when just over 2 out of every 10 residents (21%) said the same.
- Residents who named neighborhood conditions as one of their top three challenges were asked what changes they would most like to see in their neighborhood right now. Their responses fell into four broad areas (see Figure 2):
  - **Cleanliness and upkeep (42.7%)**. This was the most frequently mentioned type of change residents wanted to see. It included general neighborhood cleanliness (16.9%), reducing illegal dumping (10.7%), better garbage pickup (5.0%), tree trimming (3.9%), grass cutting (3.8%), and street cleaning (2.5%).[2]
  - **Vacancy and housing (28.8%)**. Just under 3 in 10 residents called for changes related to vacant property and housing conditions, most often removing vacant structures (16%). Others mentioned enforcing property maintenance codes (4.3%), home repairs and housing maintenance (3.7%), expanding access to homeownership (3.1%), and maintaining or reducing vacant lots (1.9%).
  - **Infrastructure (12.4%)**. About 1 in 8 pointed to infrastructure needs, including road repairs (7%), sidewalk repairs and walkability (3.2%), and better street lighting (2.3%).
  - **Public safety (4.8%)**. A smaller share sought changes related to public safety as a way of addressing concerns about neighborhood conditions, including changes that would address general safety, vandalism, loitering, and homelessness (3.6%), as well as a desire for greater police presence (1.2%). It is notable that these residents raised safety even when asked specifically about neighborhood conditions, suggesting the two are closely linked for many Detroiters.

Figure 2: Changes Detroiters would like to see in their neighborhood

% seeking each type of change in an open-ended question, among those who named neighborhood conditions as one of the top three challenges facing their household



SAFETY CONCERNS RIVAL NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS AS A TOP CHALLENGE

- Nearly 3 in 10 Detroiters (28.6%) say crime or safety is a major challenge for them or someone in their household, about the same share as neighborhood conditions (28.7%) and up from 21% in early 2025 (see Figure 1).
- When asked about their greatest safety concern, residents described a wide range of issues (see Figure 3).[3] Gun violence was the most common (16.5%), followed by general concerns about crime and safety (12.4%) and home break-ins (9%). Others pointed to concerns that extend beyond crime, including concerns about or for teens (8.8%), reckless driving (8.2%), and slow or inadequate police response (4.6%).[4]
- When asked what would make them feel safer, about 1 in 3 called for a greater police presence (32.8%). Another 11% wanted better or more responsive policing , reflecting concerns about the quality of policing, not just its quantity. Residents also pointed to better street lighting (6.7%), gun control (3.7%), and community-led efforts such as block clubs and neighborhood watch programs (3.2%). Most residents, about two-thirds, named something other than more police that would make them feel safer (see Figure 4).[5]

Figure 3: Detroiters' greatest safety concerns

% naming each as their greatest safety concern, among those who named crime or safety as one of the top three challenges facing their household

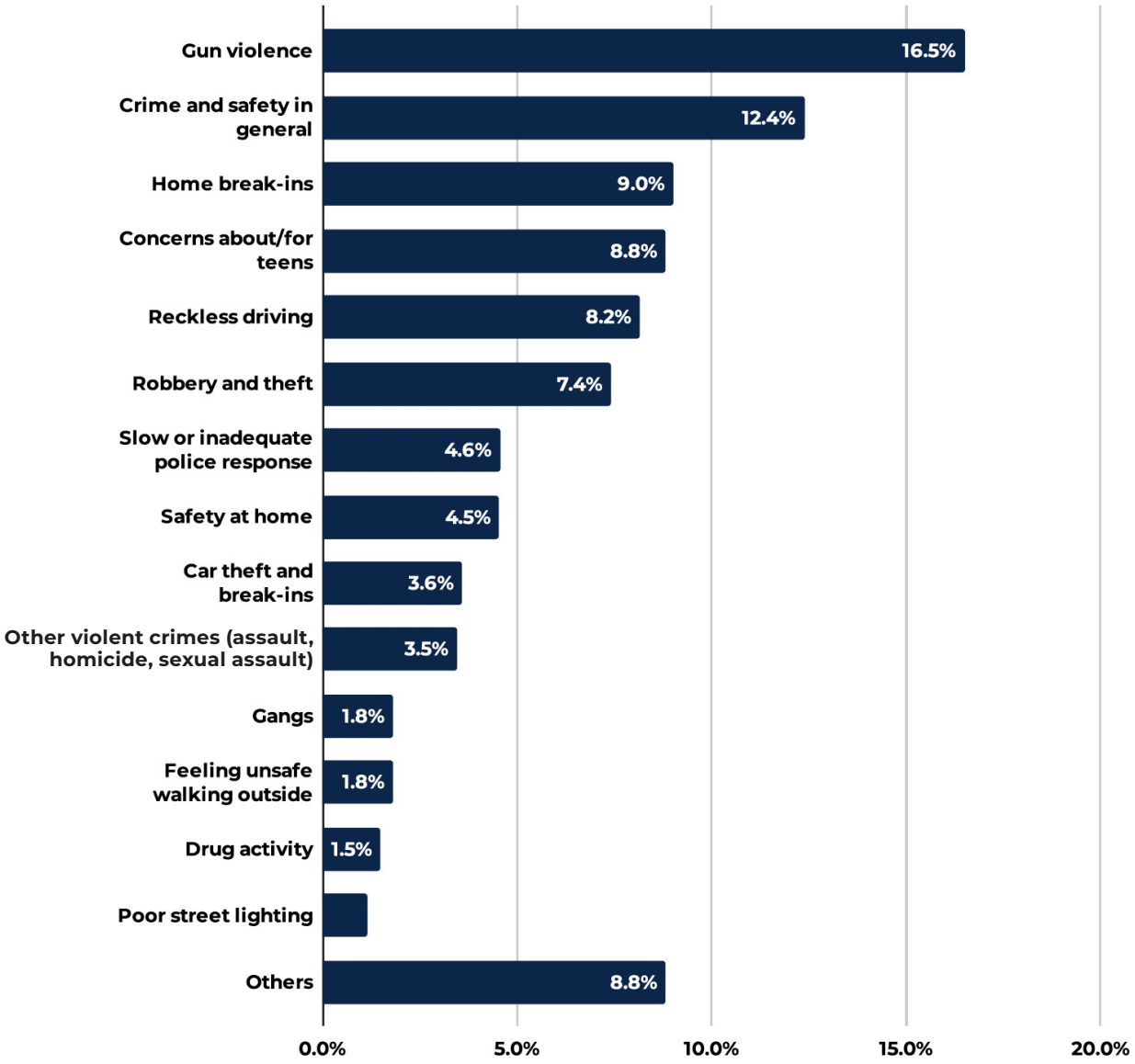
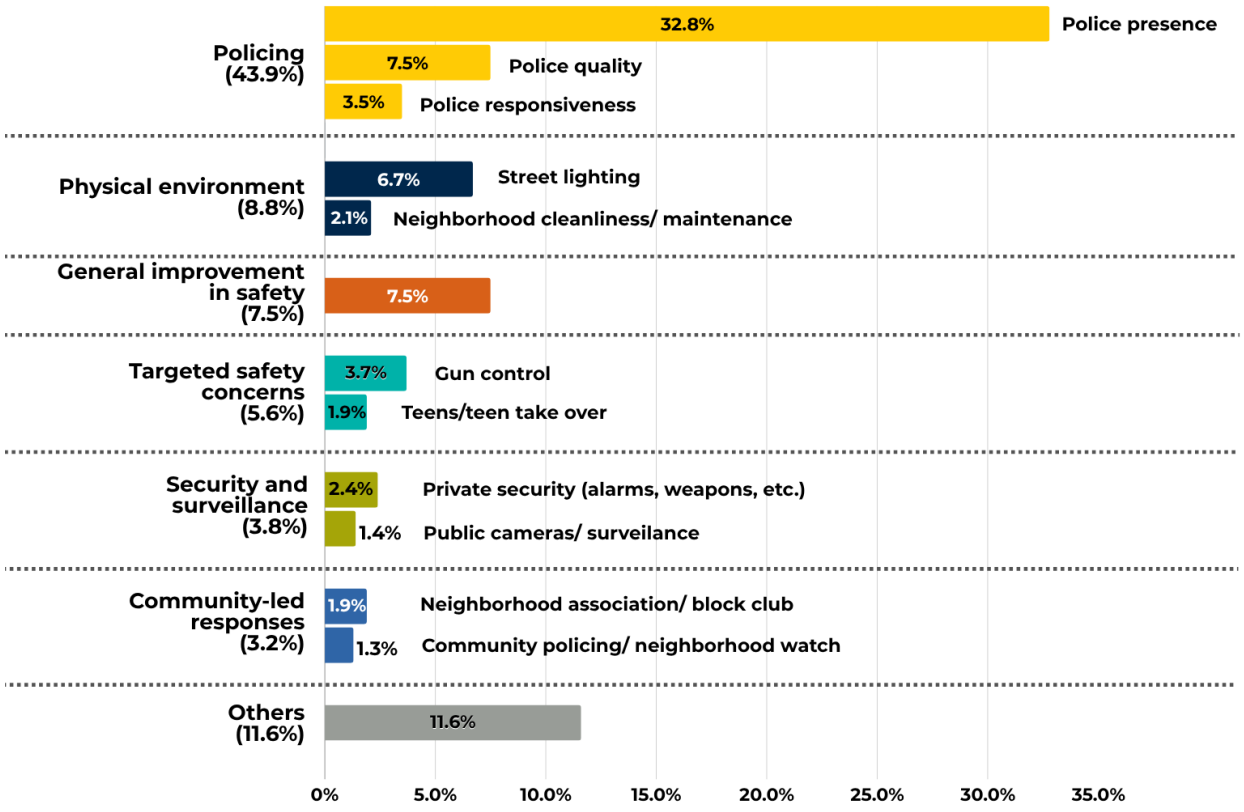


Figure 4: What Detroiters say would make them feel safer

% seeking each type of change in an open-ended question, among those who named crime or safety as one of the top three challenges facing their household



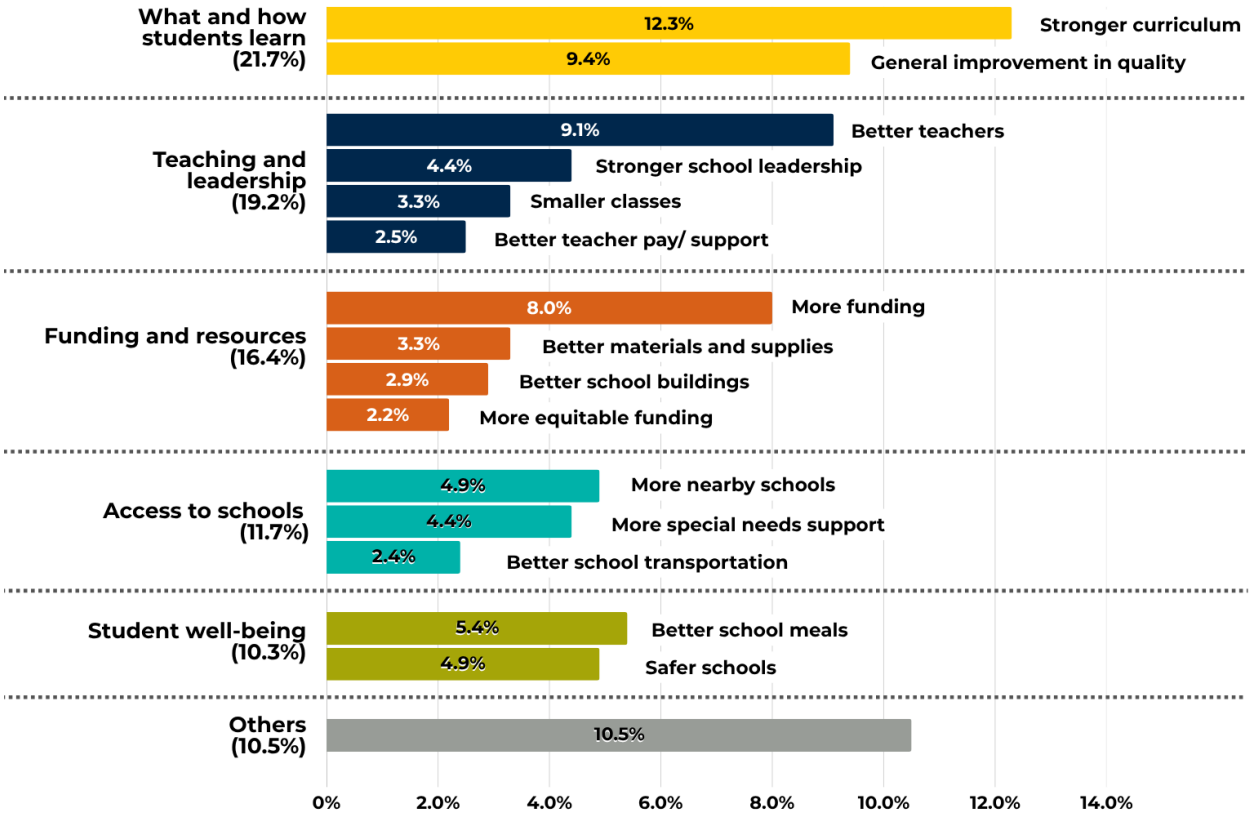
CONCERN ABOUT K-12 SCHOOLS ROSE MORE THAN ANY OTHER CHALLENGE, WITH RESIDENTS CALLING FOR BETTER TEACHING, CURRICULUM, AND RESOURCES[6]

- Nearly 1 in 4 Detroiters (24.1%) say the quality of K-12 schools is a major challenge for them or someone in their household, up from 16% in early 2025. That 8-point increase is the largest of any challenge in the survey.
- Residents who named school quality as a major challenge were asked what changes they would most like to see in K-12 schools. Their responses fell into several broad areas (see Figure 5):
  - **What and how students learn (21.7%)**. About 1 in 8 (12.3%) wanted changes to the curriculum, often a return to basics such as reading, writing, and math, or more life skills and trades. Others expressed a general desire for better-quality education (9.4%).
  - **Teaching and leadership (19.2%)**. Residents most often called for better teachers (9.1%), along with stronger school leadership (4.4%), smaller classes (3.3%), and better pay and support for teachers (2.5%). Many described wanting teachers "who actually care" and more one-on-one attention for students.
  - **Funding and resources (16.4%)**. Residents called for more funding (8%), better materials and supplies (3.3%), and improved buildings (2.9%). Some framed this as a matter of fairness (2.2%), calling for "resources equal to schools in the White neighborhoods" and "equal educational options as suburbs."

- **Access to schools (11.7%)**. Some residents said there are too few schools nearby (4.9%) or asked for better school transportation (2.4%). Others called for better access and support for students with special needs (4.4%), including more schools that provide meaningful support for students with special education plans or autism.
- **Student well-being (10.3%)**. Residents also raised concerns about school lunches (5.4%), calling for fresher, healthier food, and school safety (4.9%).[7]

Figure 5: Changes Detroiters would like to see in K-12 schools

% seeking each type of change in an open-ended question, among those who named the quality of K–12 schools as one of the top three challenges facing their household



AFFORDABILITY, WHETHER BUYING, RENTING, OR KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON, IS AT THE HEART OF DETROITERS' HOUSING CHALLENGES

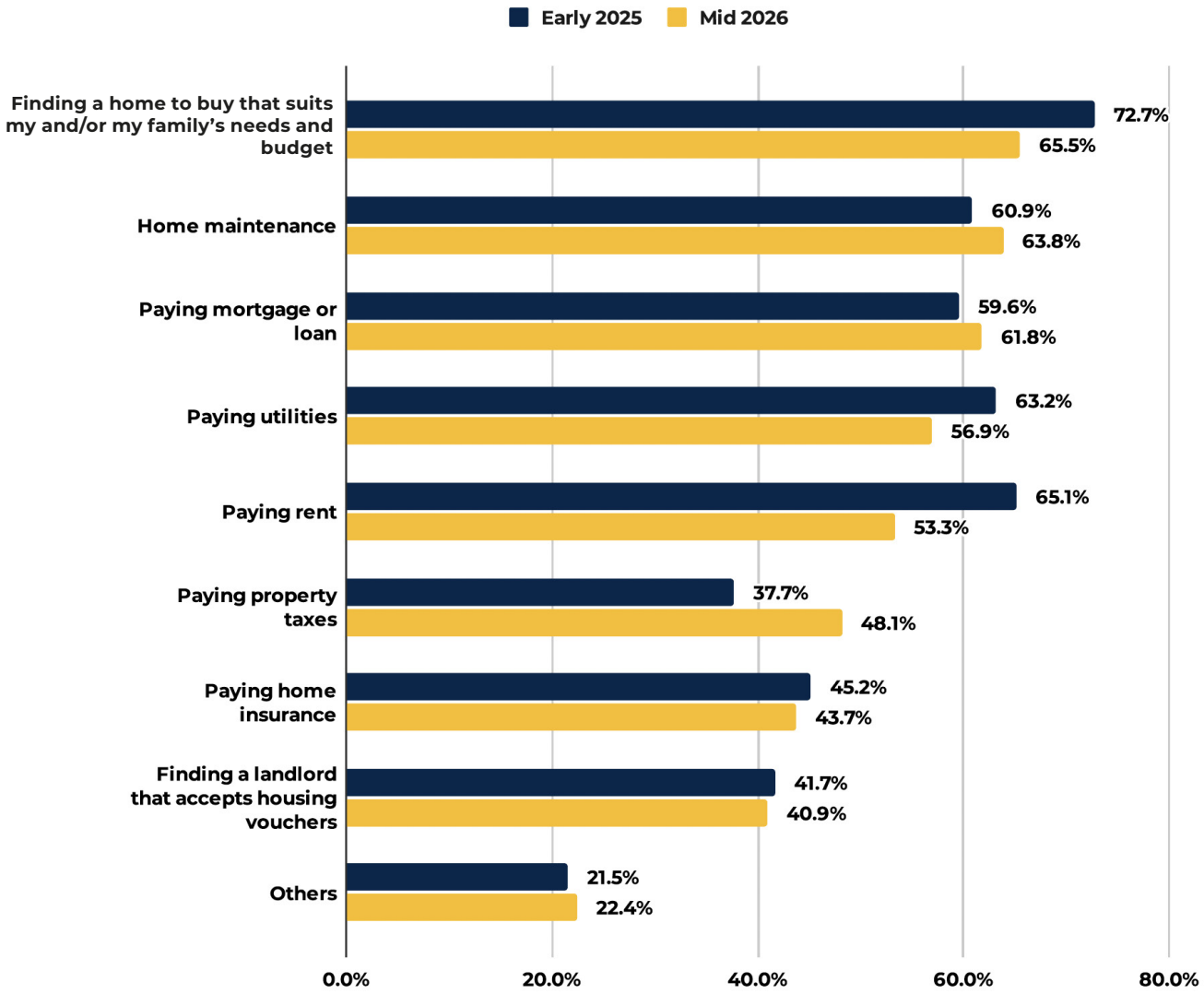
- More than 1 in 5 Detroiters (22.4%) say housing is a major challenge for them or someone in their household, up from 18% in early 2025.
- Residents who ranked housing among their top three challenges were asked about specific housing issues. About two-thirds of these residents (65.5%) said finding a home to buy that fits their needs and budget is a major challenge, down from 72.7% in early 2025. A similar share (63.8%) named home maintenance and repair.[8]
- Renting brings both cost and access barriers. More than half of these residents (53.3%) said paying rent is a major challenge, down from 65.1% in early 2025 though still a burden for more than half of those facing major housing challenges. About 4 in 10 residents (40.9%) said finding a landlord who accepts housing vouchers is a major challenge, similar to early 2025 (41.7%).[9]
- The costs of owning a home are rising. More than 6 in 10 of these residents (61.8%) said paying a mortgage or loan is a major challenge. Property taxes stand out as a growing

concern. The share naming them as a major challenge rose by about 10 points (from 37.7% to 48.1%) since early 2025, the largest increase of any item. More than 4 in 10 (43.7%) named paying home insurance, about the same as in early 2025 (45.2%).

- Utilities are a burden across the board. More than half of these residents (56.9%) said paying utilities is a major challenge.
- Energy and water bills drive utility concerns. Among those who said paying utilities is a major challenge, nearly 9 in 10 (86%) named electricity and about 7 in 10 (72.3%) named gas, both up about 6 points from early 2025. Water bills showed the largest increase, from 50.7% to 61.7%. Concerns about internet costs held steady (50.3%, compared with 53%).[10]

Figure 6: Types of housing challenges Detroiters face

% reporting each type of housing challenge, among those who named housing as one of the top three challenges facing their household



INADEQUATE PAY REMAINS THE BIGGEST EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGE FOR DETROITERS

- More than 1 in 5 Detroiters (21.6%) say employment is a major challenge for them or someone in their household, up slightly from early 2025 (19.0%).
- Among those who named employment as one of their top three major challenges, about two-thirds of residents (65.1%) reported that they have not been able to find a job, while about one-third (34.9%) said they are dissatisfied with their current job. This marks a shift from early 2025 when a larger share said they could not find a job (75.7%) and a smaller share said they were dissatisfied with their current job (24.3%).[11]
- Pay was the top concern for both groups.
  - Among those who have not been able to find a job, nearly 8 in 10 (77.9%) said more job opportunities with better pay would help them find work (see Figure 7). Other common answers were jobs with flexible schedules (64.2%), better transportation (58.7%), more education, training, or apprenticeship opportunities (57.1%), and more jobs in their field or area of interest (56.3%).[12]
  - Among those dissatisfied with their current job, about 7 in 10 (70.7%) said inadequate pay was a major challenge, up from 64.8% in early 2025 (see Figure 8). Nearly half (46.6%) cited a lack of upward mobility. Others named transportation (40.1%) and work outside their area of interest (38.2%). Concern about work schedules fell the most, from 49.7% in early 2025 to 36.3%.[13]
- Compared with early 2025, residents who said they have not been able to find a job were less likely to say most of the supports listed in the question would help (see Figure 7). For example, the share who said more flexible schedules would help fell by 9.8 percentage points, and the share who said more training opportunities would help fell by 11.7 points. This broad decline may reflect changes in the broader economic environment, as well as changes in who is looking for work. There were exceptions, with an increasing share of Detroiters saying childcare (34.4%, up from 31.9% in 2025) and clearing a criminal record (30.2%, up from 26.2%) would help them find a job.

Figure 7: Things that would help Detroiters find a job

% saying each would help them find a job, among those who named employment as one of their household's top three challenges and identified finding a job as their main employment challenge

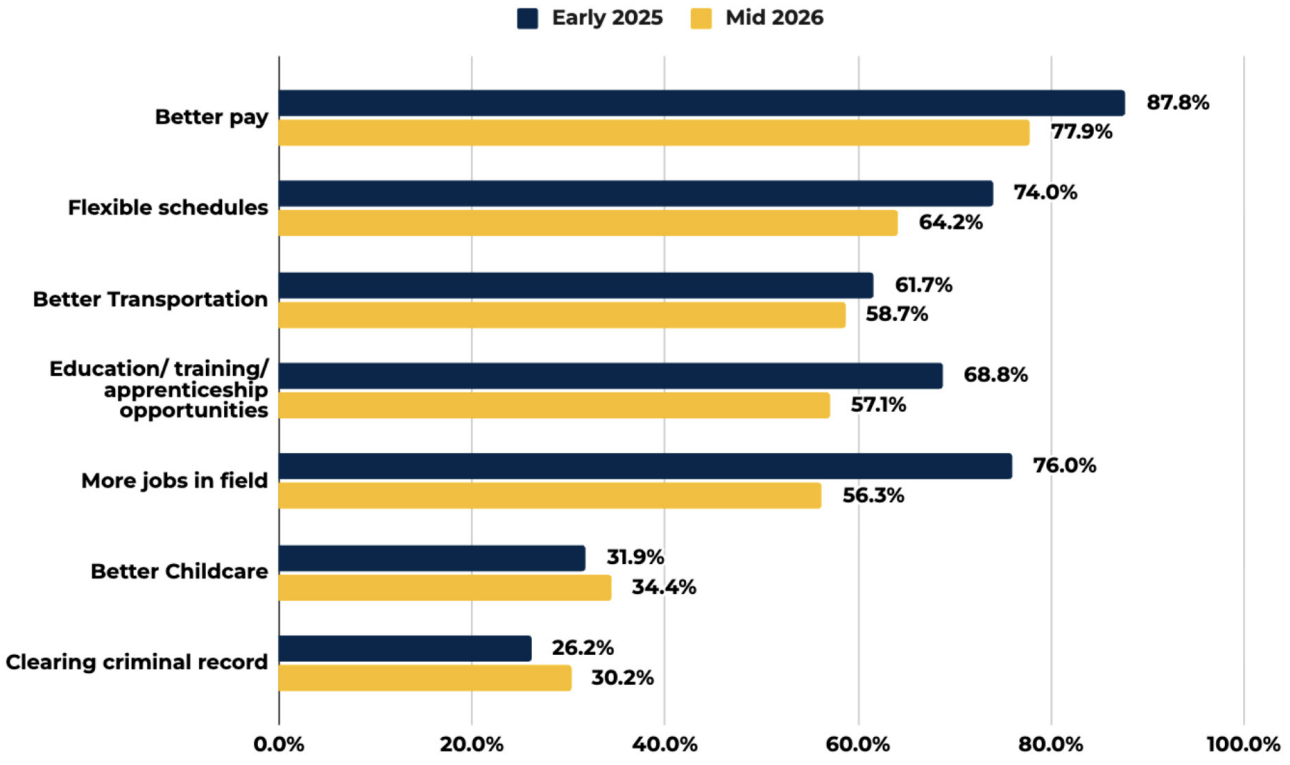
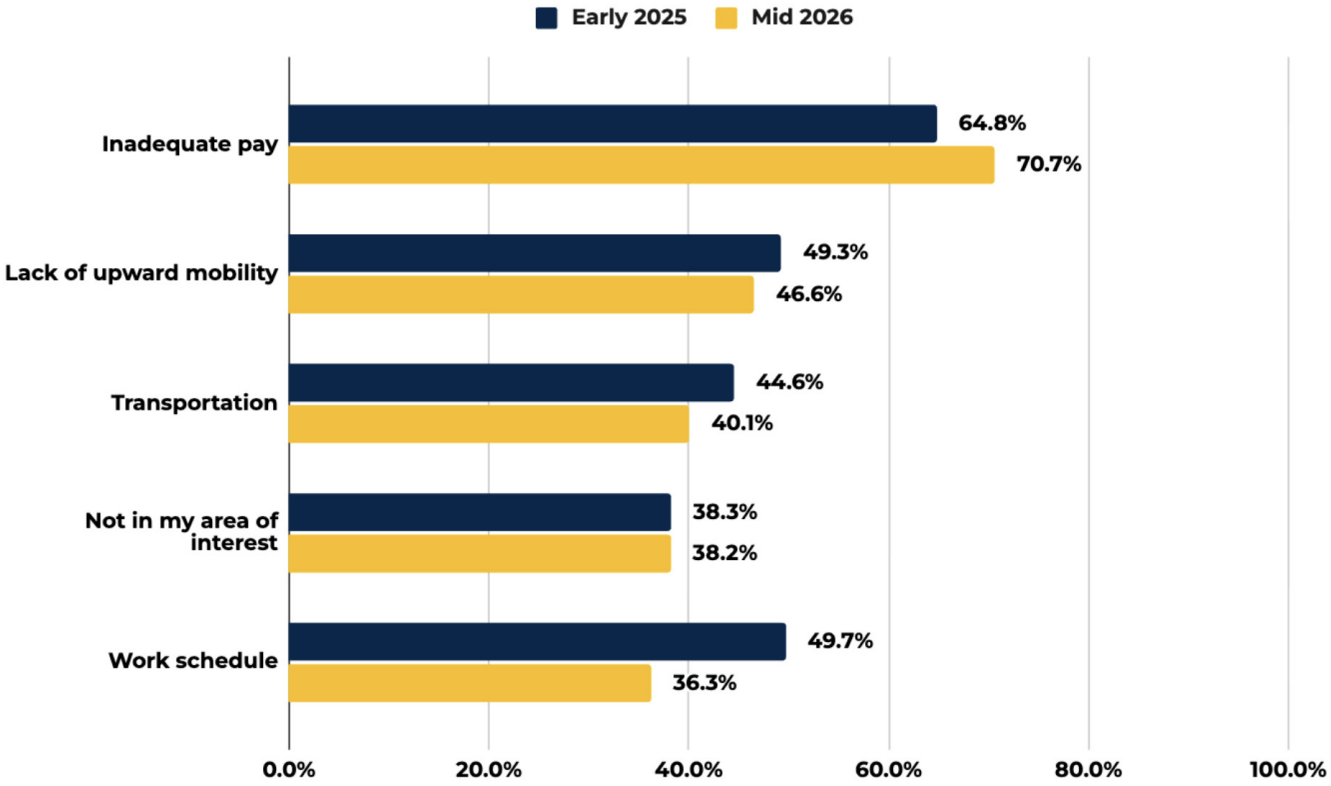


Figure 8: Challenges facing Detroiters dissatisfied with their current job

% naming each as a challenge with their current job, among those who named employment as one of their household's top three challenges and identified dissatisfaction with their current job as their main employment challenge



MORE DETROITERS ARE STRUGGLING TO GET THE FOOD THEY NEED, WITH COST AND QUALITY AT THE CENTER

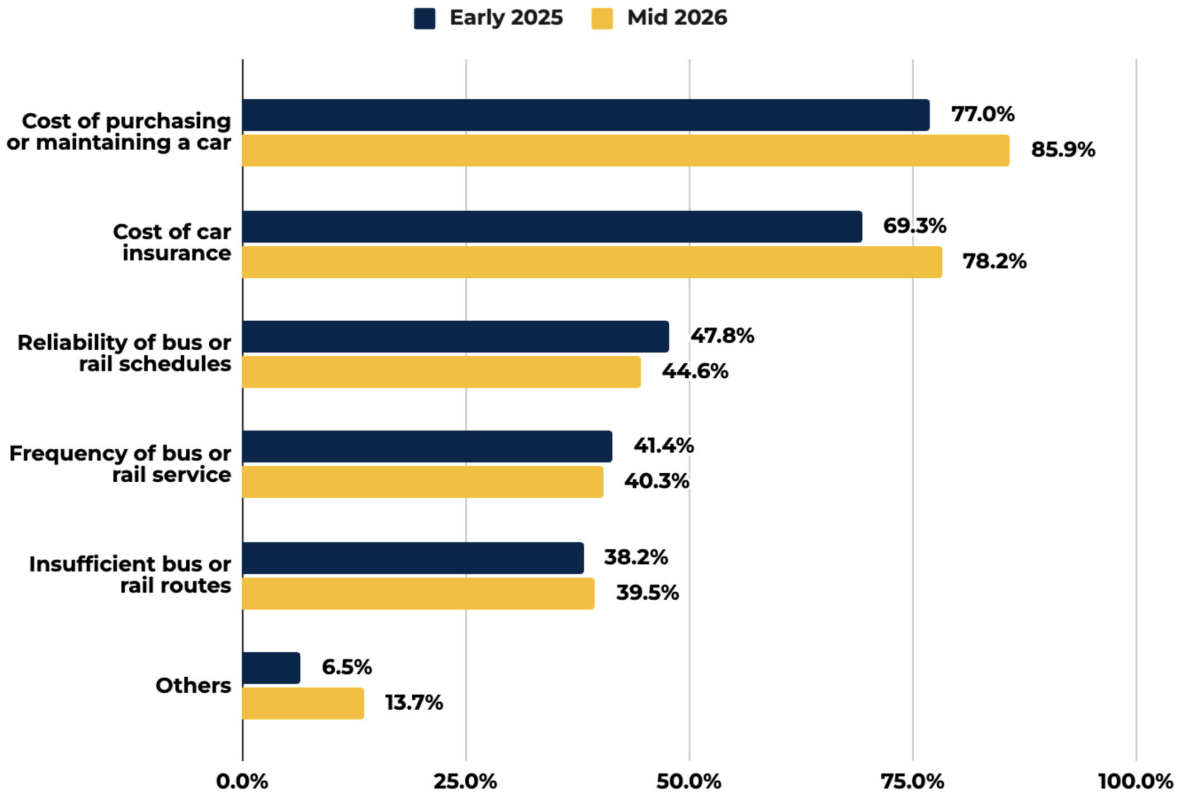
- About 1 in 5 Detroiters (20.7%) say getting the food they need is a major challenge for them or someone in their household, up from 15% in early 2025 (see Figure 1).
- When asked to describe the challenges facing their household, some residents described food as one of several rising costs competing for limited household budgets. Some said they must sometimes "choose between eating and paying rent," and one noted that their food stamps had been reduced. Others described working households that earn too much to qualify for assistance "but still need help with food and housing and bills."
- Residents also raised the quality of and access to food, describing difficulty "getting healthy food" and a desire for "quality neighborhood grocery stores." Some faced added barriers, such as a disability that made it hard to get to food pantries.

CAR-RELATED COSTS ARE THE MAIN TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGE FOR DETROITERS

- About 1 in 5 Detroiters (20.1%) say reliable transportation is a major challenge for them or someone in their household, up from 18% in early 2025.[14]
- Among residents who ranked transportation among their top three challenges, the cost of owning a car was the most common concern. Nearly 9 in 10 (85.9%) said the cost of buying or maintaining a car is a major challenge, and nearly 8 in 10 (78.2%) named the cost of car insurance. Both rose by about 9 points from early 2025 (77% and 69.3%).
- Concerns about public transit were less common and held steady. More than 4 in 10 (44.6%) named the reliability of bus or rail schedules as a major challenge, and about 4 in 10 named the frequency of service (40.3%) or insufficient routes (39.5%). These shares were similar to early 2025.
- Detroit residents' open-ended responses pointed to additional barriers. Some described difficulty getting to medical appointments, including unreliable Medicaid-provided rides. Others described buses that are hard to use with a wheelchair or disability, or said they feel unsafe waiting for buses late at night.

Figure 9: Transportation challenges facing Detroiters

% reporting each type of transportation challenge, among those who named transportation as one of the top three challenges facing their household



AUTHORS

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ENDNOTES

1 Percentages reflect the share of respondents who listed each item as a major challenge in response to this question: "To what extent are you or anyone in your household facing challenges with each of the following right now?" For each item, respondents could indicate whether it was a "major challenge," "minor challenge," or "not a challenge." Respondents could rate more than one issue as a major challenge.

2 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of respondents who indicated neighborhood condition and upkeep was one of the top three challenges facing their household. The item read: "You previously identified 'Neighborhood condition and upkeep' as a major challenge. What changes would you most like to see in your neighborhood right now?" Responses were open-ended and analyzed by DMACS staff.

3 Percentages reflect the share of respondents who listed safety or crime among one of the top three major challenges for their household. If a respondent selected more than three "major challenges," they were then asked: "Of the major challenges you selected, which three are presenting the greatest challenge for you or your household right now? Select up to three."

4 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of respondents who indicated crime or safety was one of the top three challenges facing their household. The item read: "You previously identified 'crime or concerns about safety' as a major challenge for you or your household. What is your greatest safety concern?" Responses were open-ended and analyzed by DMACS staff.

5 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of respondents who indicated crime or safety was one of the top three challenges facing their household. The item read: "You previously identified 'crime or concerns about safety' as a major challenge for you or your household. What would make you feel safer?" Responses were open-ended and analyzed by DMACS staff.

6 Percentages do not sum to 100% because some respondents did not answer this question.

7 These estimates are based on responses to a question asked of participants who identified the quality of K–12 schools as one of the top three challenges facing their household. The question read: "You previously identified 'the quality of K–12 schools' as a major challenge for you or your household. What changes would you most like to see in K–12 schools right now?" Responses were open-ended and analyzed by DMACS staff.

8 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of participants who identified housing as one of the top three challenges facing their household. The question read: "How much of a challenge are each of the following housing-related issues for your household right now?" Items included: "Finding a home to buy that suits my and/or my family's needs and budget," "Home maintenance and repair," "Paying rent," "Finding a landlord that accepts housing vouchers," "Paying mortgage or loan," "Paying property taxes," "Paying home insurance," "Paying utilities," and "Other." Response options were: "Major challenge," "Minor challenge," or "Not a challenge."

9 As of April 2, 2025, Michigan law bars landlords with five or more rental units from discriminating against tenants or applicants based on lawful source of income, including Housing Choice Vouchers. Additional information is available from the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan.

10 These estimates are based on responses to a question asked of participants who identified housing as one of the top three challenges facing their household and indicated that "paying utilities" was a major challenge. The question read: "How much of a challenge are each of the following utility costs for your household right now?" Items included: "Paying for gas," "Paying for electricity," "Paying for internet," "Paying for water," and "Other." Response options were: "Major challenge," "Minor challenge," or "Not a challenge."

11 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of respondents who indicated that employment was one of the top three challenges facing their household. The item read "Which of the following better describes your employment challenges right now?" Response options included: "Have not been able to find a job" or "Do not like my current job."

12 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of participants who identified employment as one of the top three challenges facing their household, and specified that not being able to find a job described their employment challenge: "How much would each of the following help you find a job?" Response options included: "Better transportation," "Better childcare," "More education/training/apprenticeship opportunities," "More jobs in my field or area of interest," "Assistance clearing a criminal record," "More jobs with flexible schedules," "More job opportunities with better pay," and "Other." For each item, respondents could indicate whether it "would help a lot," "would help some," or "would not help at all/not applicable."

13 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of participants who identified employment as one of the top three challenges facing their household and specified that not liking their job described their employment challenge. The question read: "How much of a challenge is each of the following with your current job?" Items included: "Transportation," "Work schedule," "Lack of upward mobility," "Not in my area of interest," "Inadequate pay/compensation," and "Other." Response options were: "Major challenge," "Minor challenge," or "Not a challenge."

14 These estimates are based on responses to a question asked of participants who identified transportation as one of the top three challenges facing their household. The question read: "How much of a challenge are each of the following transportation issues for your household right now?" Items included: "Cost of car insurance," "Cost of purchasing or maintaining a car," "Frequency of bus or rail services," "Reliability of bus or rail schedules," "Insufficient bus or rail routes," and "Other." Response options were: "Major challenge," "Minor challenge," or "Not a challenge."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on DMACS, please contact Sharon Sand, DMACS project manager, at slsand@umich.edu.

Learn more at www.detroitsurvey.umich.edu

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