

Taking Mzansi's temperature. A deeply concerned yet forward-looking nation

By [Stacy Saggars](#), issued by [Kantar](#)

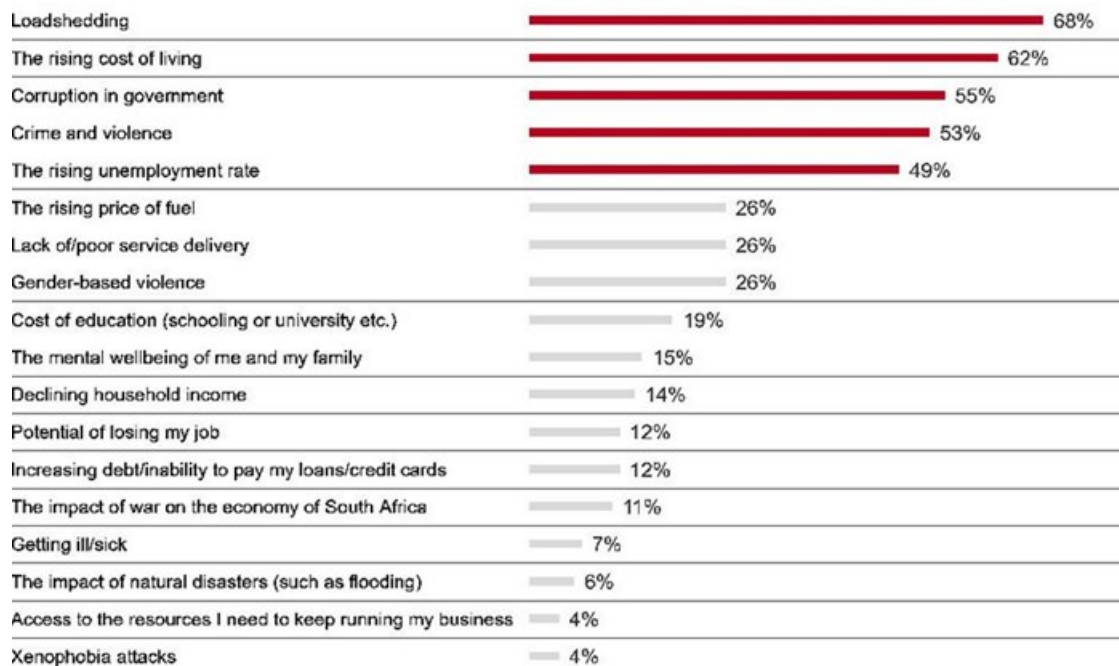
22 Aug 2023

South Africa is obviously experiencing unprecedented times, and it's important to understand how such a wide range of crises and challenges is affecting consumer sentiment in the country. That's why Kantar's Mzansi Consumer Barometer spoke with 393 connected and 107 township-based South Africans to determine what people are concerned about and how it is affecting their behaviour.



The top five concerns this year are, in order, load shedding, the rising cost of living, corruption in government, crime and violence, and the unemployment rate. Notably, this marks the first year that South Africans named load shedding as their number one concern, though it should come as no surprise as it touches the daily lives of a broad swathe of society. It is also creating significant economic headwinds, with the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) estimating it costs the economy R899m per day.

What South Africans are most concerned about in 2023



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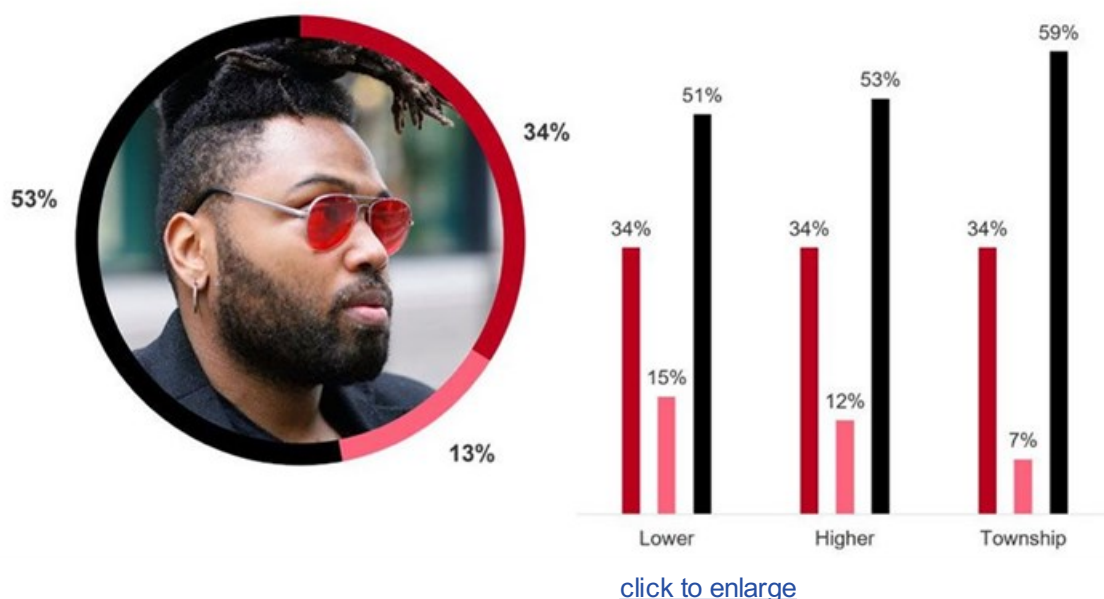
The rising cost of living takes second place for the second year in a row. Inflation in the first quarter of 2022 sits at 7.1% and has been slowly increasing since the 2021 low of 4.5%. While this compares favourably to some nations, such as the UK's 10.4% and Nigeria's 22%, it is felt most acutely in essential categories. A 2022 Kantar survey, for example, found that South Africans named petrol and grocery as the two areas where they were experiencing the highest inflation.

The country's unemployment rate is also among the highest in the world and has traditionally been the top concern of South Africans. But this year, it has fallen to fifth overall (and fourth for those whose monthly household income is R5000 or less). Likely, this reflects the changing priorities of South Africans, who are putting more essential issues ahead of jobs.

Without power and a sense of stability provided by good government, employers cannot hire more workers. And with rising crime rates, the desire to be free from violence is a basic human need. It's also worth pointing out that unemployment has decreased slightly since its record high of 35.3% in December 2021 to 32.7% earlier this year.

So, how do South Africans feel about their future outlook? When it comes to the country itself, they are not encouraged. Only a third believe things will get better over the next five years, while over half believe it will get worse.

Country outlook over the next five years



That said, on an individual level, they are much more sanguine about their prospects. Over half of South Africans believe that they will be in a better financial position five years from now. While this may seem a hopelessly optimistic perspective for people who are putting their kids to sleep in the dark, South Africa is also one of the most resourceful nations. Our colleagues abroad often refer to there being ‘something in the water’ with respect to how creative and solutions-focussed we are when in a bind.

Our research shows that South Africans are already making a plan, playing the hustle, and working towards a more favourable financial position for themselves and their families. How? Many are reducing their spending on nonessential items, while over a third are foregoing luxuries, saving or investing their money, researching prices online before going to a store, using loyalty cards, and applying strict budgeting principles.

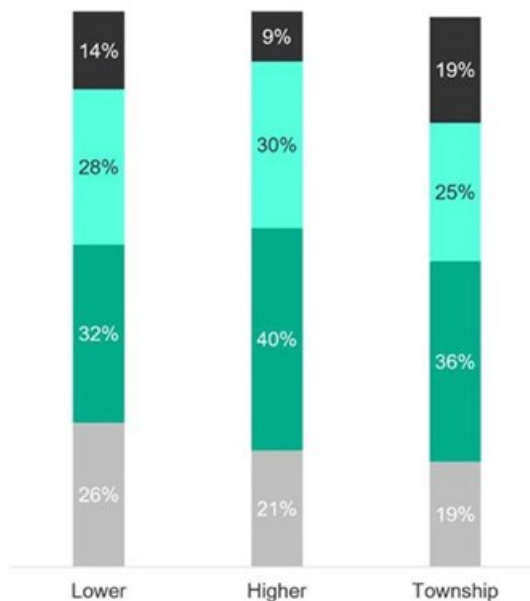
This marks a change from last year. Back then, our research showed that the number one activity that South Africans were doing more of was spending time on social media apps. That has dropped to eighth, as savings-related activities have increased in importance.

In fact, of the top seven activities they are increasingly spending time on, the only two not related to budgetary concerns are ‘spending more time with people in my family’ and ‘focussing on my personal development and wellbeing’.

We also asked about health and well-being, and three-quarters of South Africans either want to or have made healthier food choices in recent years (this may be an effect of the pandemic). When asked what eating and drinking healthier means to them, three-quarters say it is consuming more fruit and vegetables, half view it as fewer takeaways and less sugar, while a third see it as drinking less carbonated soft drinks.

Forty-three percent believe that being healthier means drinking less alcohol; and of those that drink alcohol, 40% say they are drinking less than they used to. In addition, over half of smokers are either smoking fewer cigarettes, switching to non-combustibles or have stopped smoking altogether.

Eating habits



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So, it would appear that South Africans have their thinking caps on and are working towards building a better future for themselves in the context of undeniably difficult circumstances. While unemployment remains high, and load shedding and the cost of living continue to increase, all of this seems to have been cushioned by the experience and resilience of a forward-looking nation of go-getters.

Want more? Catch the digital launch of our Mzansi Consumer Barometer by registering to view on demand [here](#).

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This article was first published in [the 2023 Kantar BrandZ Most Valuable South African Brands report](#).

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