

# »» FEE SENSITIVITY AND THE **OPT-IN** ECONOMICS OF **INSTANT PAYOUTS**

February 2026 Report



PYMNTS  
INTELLIGENCE

INGO Payments

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Key Findings . . . . .	4
What's At Stake . . . . .	10
Key Finding 01. . . . .	12
Key Finding 02 . . . . .	24
Key Finding 03 . . . . .	34
Key Finding 04 . . . . .	38
Key Finding 05 . . . . .	50
Actionable Insights. . . . .	56
Methodology. . . . .	59
About . . . . .	60

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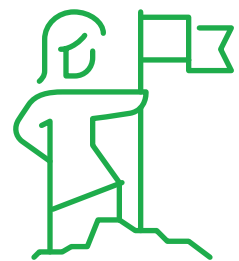


July 2025  
**Instant Payouts:**  
The New Paycheck for a  
Real-Time Economy

Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts was produced in collaboration with Ingo Payments, and PYMNTS Intelligence is grateful for the company's support and insight. [PYMNTS Intelligence](#) retains full editorial control over the following findings, methodology and data analysis.

# KEY FINDINGS

## 01



### INSTANT PAYOUTS TO CONSUMERS MOVE PAST THE EARLY-ADOPTER PHASE, REACHING MAINSTREAM SCALE.

Consumer use is up 2% in six months, with gains driven largely by insurance and winnings disbursements and growing use of instant-to-debit.

## 02



### YOUNGER CONSUMERS RESHAPE MARKET EXPECTATIONS, BUT ADOPTION DOESN'T MEAN LOYALTY.

Gen Z leads in instant uptake, with 84% having tried instant payouts (up 6% over six months), signaling strong latent demand—but declining loyalty suggests that access frictions are undermining sustained reliance.

## 03



## FOR GEN Z, HOW QUICKLY FUNDS ARE NEEDED MAKES OR BREAKS THEIR WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR INSTANT, MORE SO THAN FOR OTHER RECIPIENTS.

Forty percent of millennials would be willing to pay for instant, even when they can wait more than a week to receive the funds. Only 29% of Gen Z would be willing to pay when they can wait.

## 04



## THE OPT-IN ECONOMICS OF INSTANT PAYOUTS SHOWS HOW INSTANT-FOR-FREE WINS

Nearly two in three (65%) of recipients would be more likely to do business with a sender if it offered instant for free. This likelihood drops by half if the sender can pay them only by check, and further still if paying a fee is compulsory.

# 05



## FEES ARE NOT JUST A PRICING DECISION BUT ALSO A BEHAVIORAL LEVER.

Incidental payouts, such as insurance disbursements, show the highest sensitivity to choice and fees. If recipients are forced to pay for instant or if the only alternative is a paper check, the likelihood of choosing that type of sender falls seven-fold.



# WHAT'S AT STAKE

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**I**nstant payouts are quickly moving from a differentiated feature to an expected part of the payment experience—but adoption is not unfolding evenly across use cases, generations or pricing models. Overall uptake has risen in recent months, with nearly three in four recipients having received at least one payout instantly and a growing share now relying on instant methods most often. This shift reflects real behavioral change, not just awareness, as instant increasingly competes head-to-head with legacy payout options.

Growth, however, is being driven by specific segments and moments. Younger consumers—particularly Gen Z and millennials—lead in exposure, while gains are concentrated in high-impact disbursements such as insurance and winnings. Transactional payroll remains the anchor use case, with nearly half of recipients receiving earnings instantly most often. Method preferences are also evolving, with debit-card-based instant payouts gaining share as recipients favor speed that delivers funds directly into their primary financial account.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the data reveals a critical constraint: Fees shape whether instant becomes a habit or remains a situational choice. Millennials are increasingly relying on instant, but Gen Z—despite leading in overall uptake—is pulling back on reliance, suggesting that friction is limiting stickiness. Friction is clearest among transactional payroll recipients and younger workers, many of whom typically pay a fee for instant access. For Gen Z, how quickly they need their funds makes or breaks their willingness to pay for instant, more so than for other recipients.

The result is a market where instant clearly drives choice, but only under the right economics. Free instant payouts materially increase sender preference, while forced fees or restrictive options can erase that advantage—especially for recipients of incidental payouts, whose demand is highly elastic. Together, these dynamics point to the next phase of the instant payouts market: Success will hinge less on offering instant at all and more on whom it's offered to, in which moments, and at what price.

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<sup>1</sup> PYMNTS Intelligence uses the following approximate birth dates and approximate age ranges in 2026 for generational cohorts: baby boomers: born in 1964 or earlier and now aged 62 or older; Generation X: born between 1965 and 1980 and now aged 46–61; millennials: born between 1981 and 1996 and now aged 30–45; bridge millennials: born between 1978 and 1988 and now aged 38–48; zillennials: born between 1991 and 1999 and now aged 26–35; and Generation Z: born in 1997 or later and now aged 29 or younger.

01

**Instant payouts to consumers move past the early-adopter stage, reaching mainstream scale.**

**Most consumers are now exposed to instant payments through an employer, platform or merchant.**

Instant payouts have become a standard everyday behavior for recipients. The 2% increase in just six months among those who have received at least one payout instantly suggests that adoption is being pulled by real usage: More recipients are selecting instant when it's offered, not just trying it out as a novelty. And with 74% of recipients having received at least one payout instantly, instant delivery has reached mainstream scale: Most people are now exposed to it through at least one employer, platform or merchant.

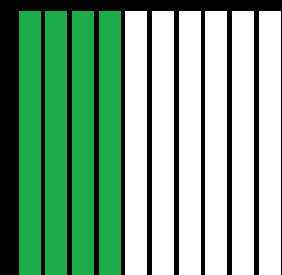
What's more telling is the depth of adoption. That gap between "ever received instantly" (74%) and "mostly receive instantly" (41%) is the story: Instant has broad reach, but it hasn't fully displaced legacy methods.

For many, the limiting factor is less preference and more practicality—payer availability, fees, eligibility or simply inertia. In other words, the market is past the early-adopter phase, and the next growth lever is turning “sometimes instant” into “usually instant” by making instant easier, cheaper and more consistently available.

**Adoption of instant payouts is up**

**2%** in the last 6 months

**74%** of payout recipients **received at least one instantly**

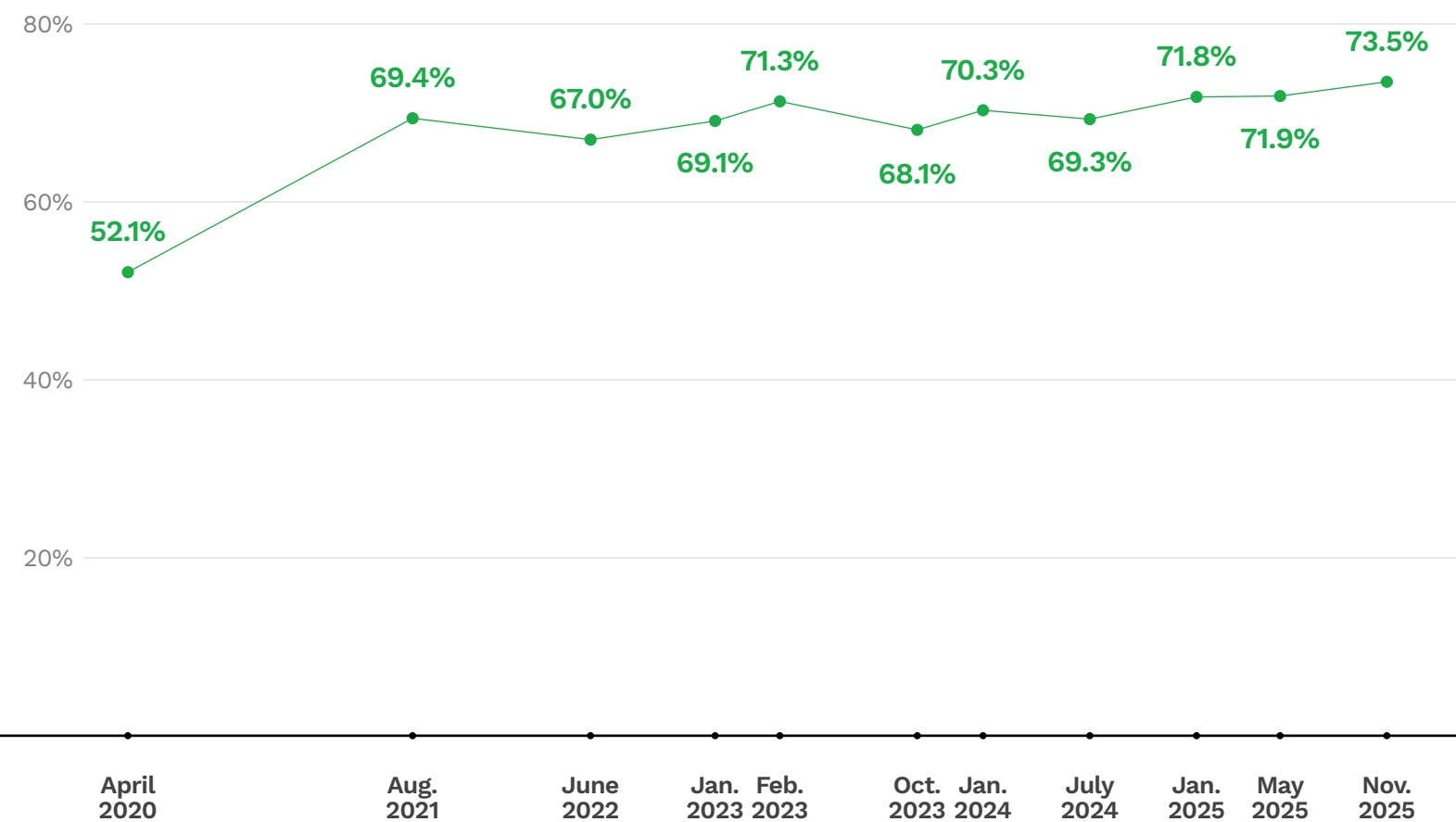


**4 in 10** recipients say this is how they receive most often

**FIGURE 1**

**Instant adoption over time**

Share of receivers who received at least one instant payout



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence  
 Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts, February 2026  
 N = 2,522: Complete responses. Respondents who received at least one disbursement over the last 12 months

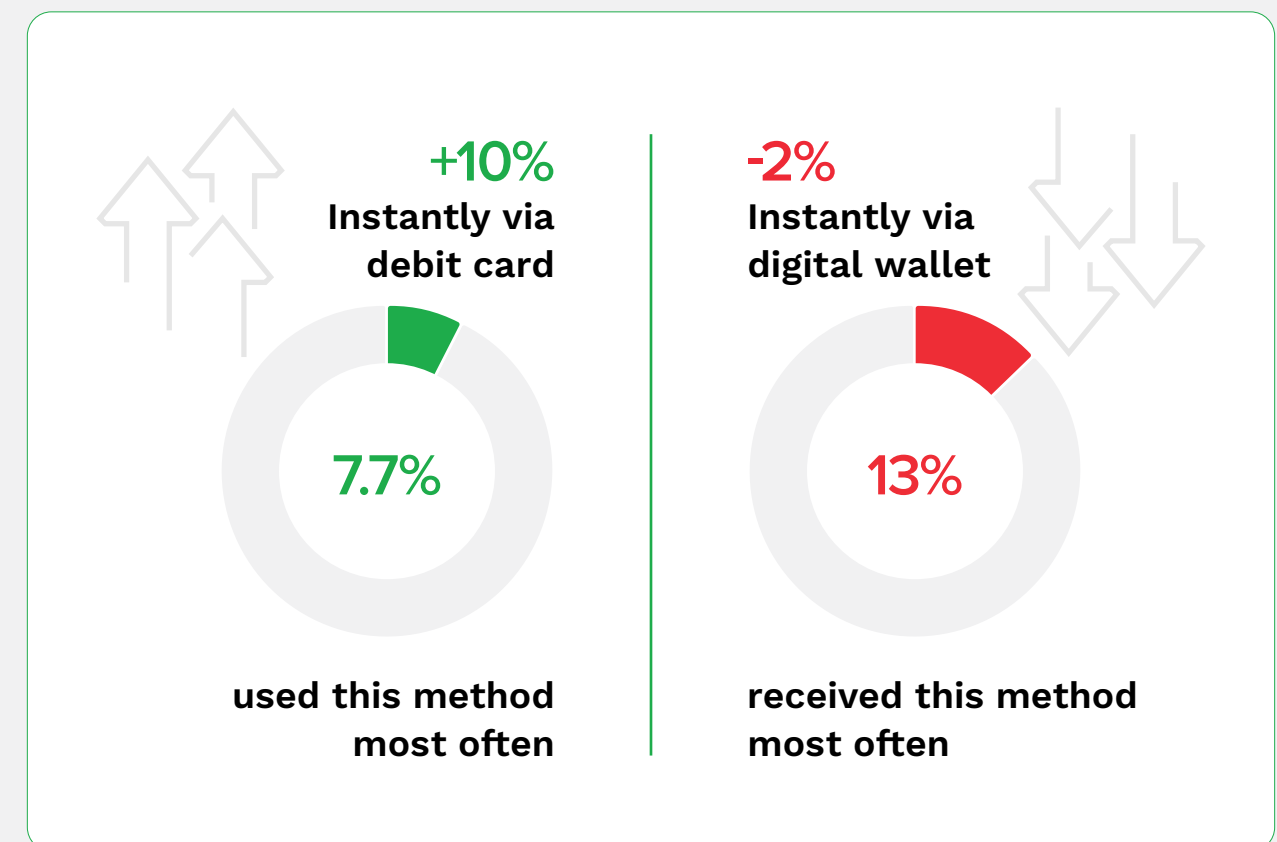
## Instant to bank account via debit card as the most used instant method showed a 10% increase over six months.

Instant to bank account via debit card as the most used instant method showed an 10% increase over six months, taking a small market share from digital wallets (down 2%) and credit cards.

Instant payouts via debit card are emerging as the clear beneficiary of recent growth. The increase in just six months points to a decisive shift in how recipients prefer to receive funds instantly. Debit card-based instant payouts effectively combine the best of both worlds: the speed of real-time rails with the familiarity and trust of a bank account.

This shift also signals a maturation of the instant payout ecosystem. As more payers enable push-to-debit at scale, recipients are gravitating toward methods that feel both immediate and “final.”

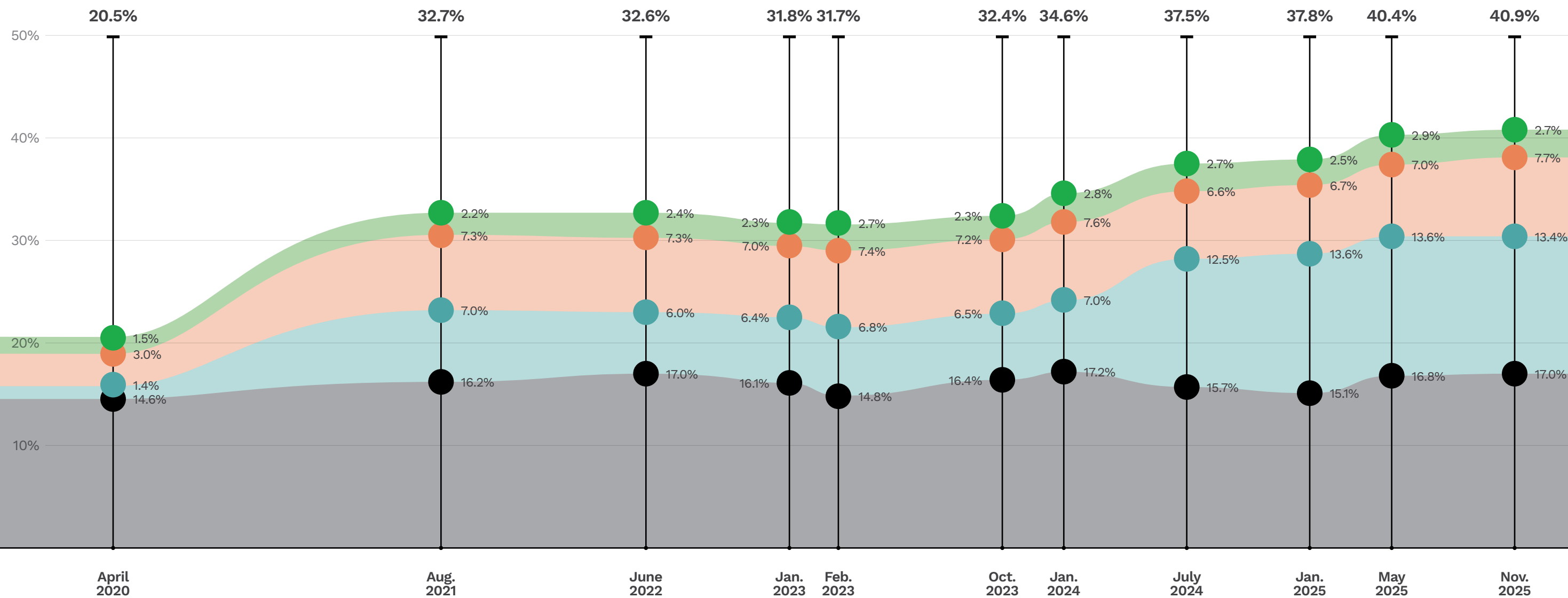
Over time, that dynamic could raise expectations that instant payouts should not just be fast but also arrive where consumers keep their core balances.



**FIGURE 2**

**Instant rails reliance**

Share of recipients who received payouts most often using selected instant methods



- Instant to credit card
- Instant payment to digital wallet
- Instant to bank account via debit card
- Instant bank account deposit

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence  
 Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts, February 2026  
 N = 2,522: Complete responses. Respondents who received at least one disbursement over the last 12 months

## Growth in instant payouts is being driven by insurance and winnings, while income and earnings remain the anchor—with 46% of transactional payroll received instantly most often.

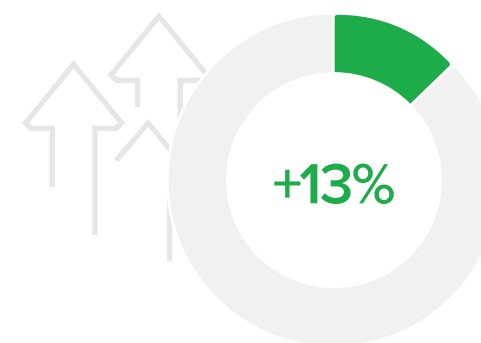
The latest instant payout growth is driven by high-impact moments. Gains in instant payouts are attributed primarily by insurance claims and winnings disbursements, categories where immediacy carries especially high perceived value.

As more insurers and gaming or rewards platforms enable instant options, recipients are increasingly choosing them, accelerating adoption in these use cases. In these moments, speed is closely tied to financial relief or emotional payoff, making instant delivery a clear upgrade over traditional methods.

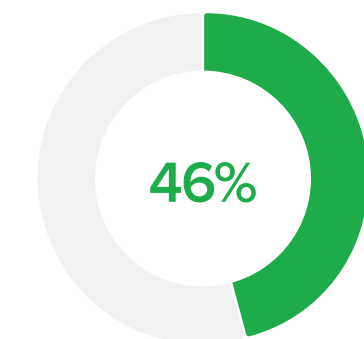
By contrast, income and earnings payouts remain stable at the top of the stack, underscoring that instant has already become embedded in everyday pay scenarios. Taken together, the pattern suggests a two-speed market.

Everyday earnings anchor instant payout usage at scale, while episodic, high-impact payments like insurance and winnings are now fueling the next wave of growth.

The share of recipients relying on most instant most often for insurance and winnings is up about



Income and earnings payouts are stable at the top

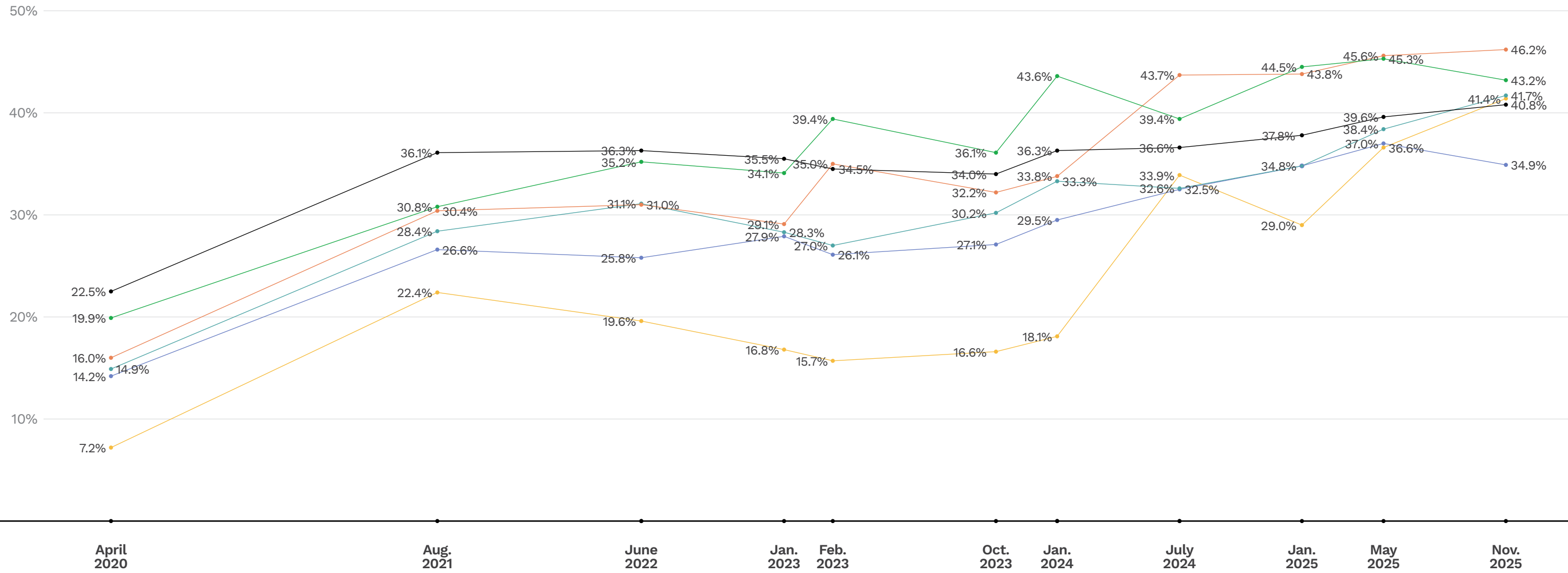


of transactional payroll received instantly most often.

**FIGURE 3**

**Payouts most often received instantly**

Share of recipients whose most typical way of receiving selected payouts is instant



- Borrowing
- Income and earnings
- Insurance
- Investment account
- Product/service purchase-related
- Winnings

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence  
**Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts, February 2026**  
 N = 2,522: Complete responses. Respondents who received at least one disbursement over the last 12 months

02

**Younger consumers  
reshape market  
expectations,  
but adoption doesn't  
mean loyalty.**

**Younger consumers are  
leading instant adoption gains  
with mobile-first habits  
and a preference for  
cash flow immediacy.**

Adoption gains in instant payouts are being led decisively by Gen Z and millennials, reinforcing the generational divide in how quickly payout expectations are evolving.

For both generations, instant payouts align naturally with mobile-first financial habits and a preference for immediacy and control over cash flow.

The speed of change among younger consumers matters because it reshapes market expectations. As Gen Z and millennials age into higher-earning and more financially complex life stages, their preference for instant access to funds is likely to spill over into mainstream payout categories.

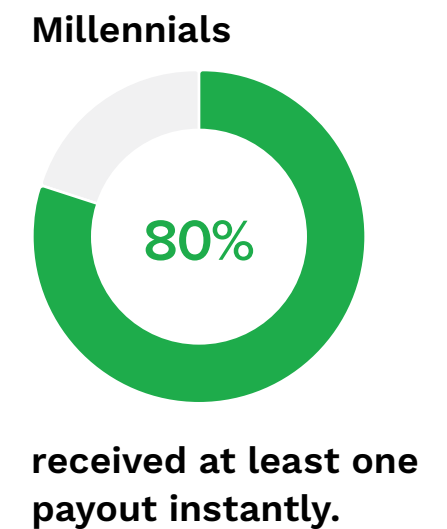
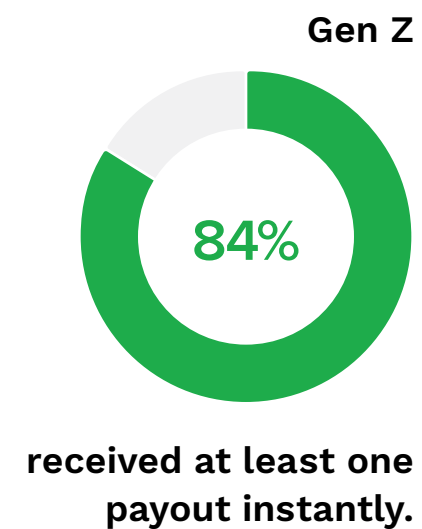
This dynamic positions younger cohorts not just as early adopters but as the primary force redefining what “normal” payout timing looks like across the broader economy.

**Gains in overall adoption are mostly driven by Gen Z, increasing by**

**6%**  
in six months.



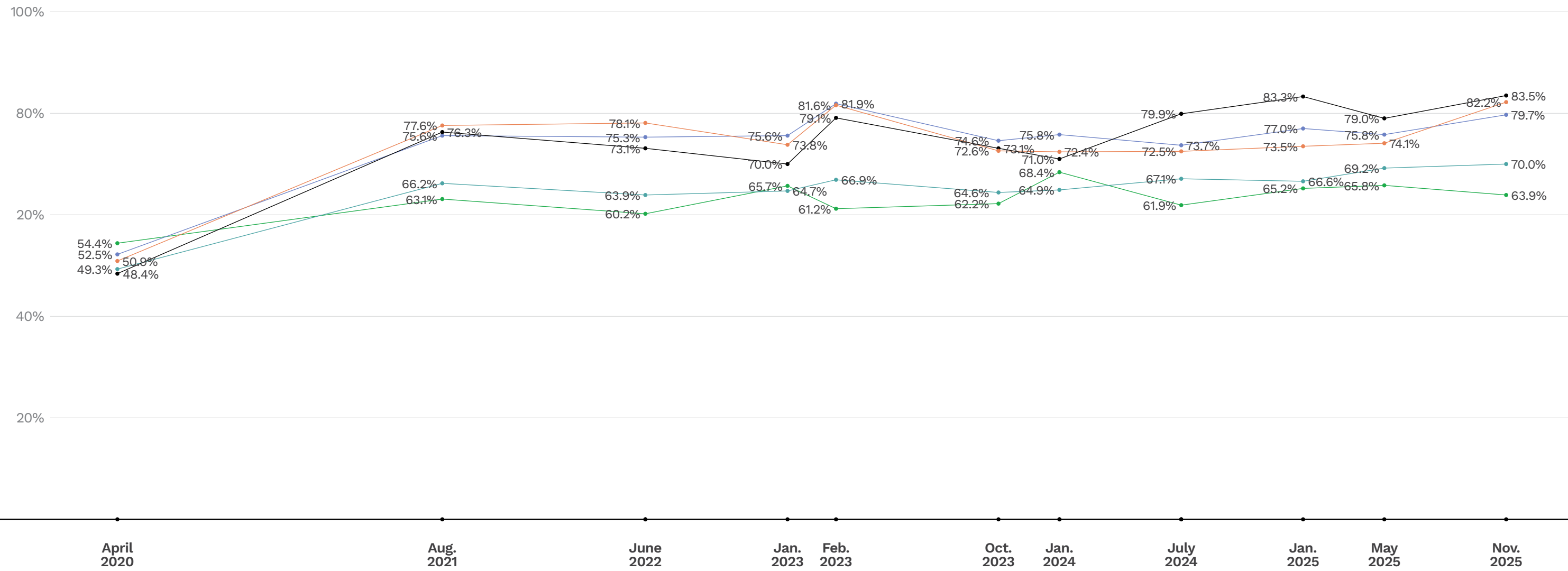

As Gen Z and millennials age into higher-earning and more financially complex life stages, their **preference for instant access to funds is likely to spill over into mainstream payout categories.**



**FIGURE 4**

**Payouts received instantly**

Share of recipients who received at least one payout instantly



- Baby boomers and seniors
- Generation X
- Bridge millennials
- Millennials
- Generation Z

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence  
**Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts, February 2026**  
 N = 2,522: Complete responses. Respondents who received at least one disbursement over the last 12 months

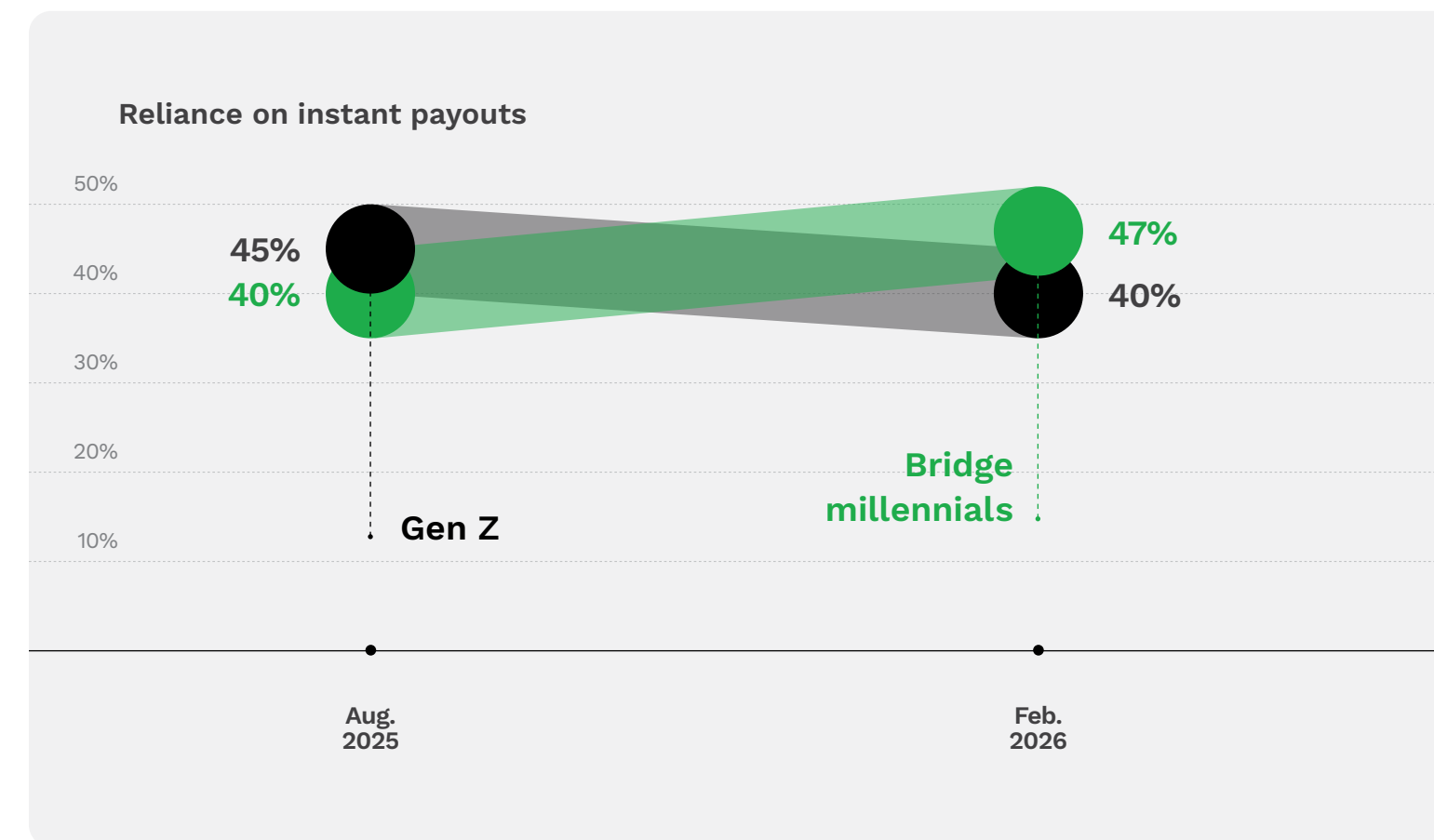
## Reliance on instant is rising among millennials but slipping for Gen Z—signaling that while the latter leads in uptake, fees and friction may be limiting stickiness.

Reliance on instant payouts is rising among millennials but easing among Gen Z, revealing an important nuance beneath the headline adoption numbers.

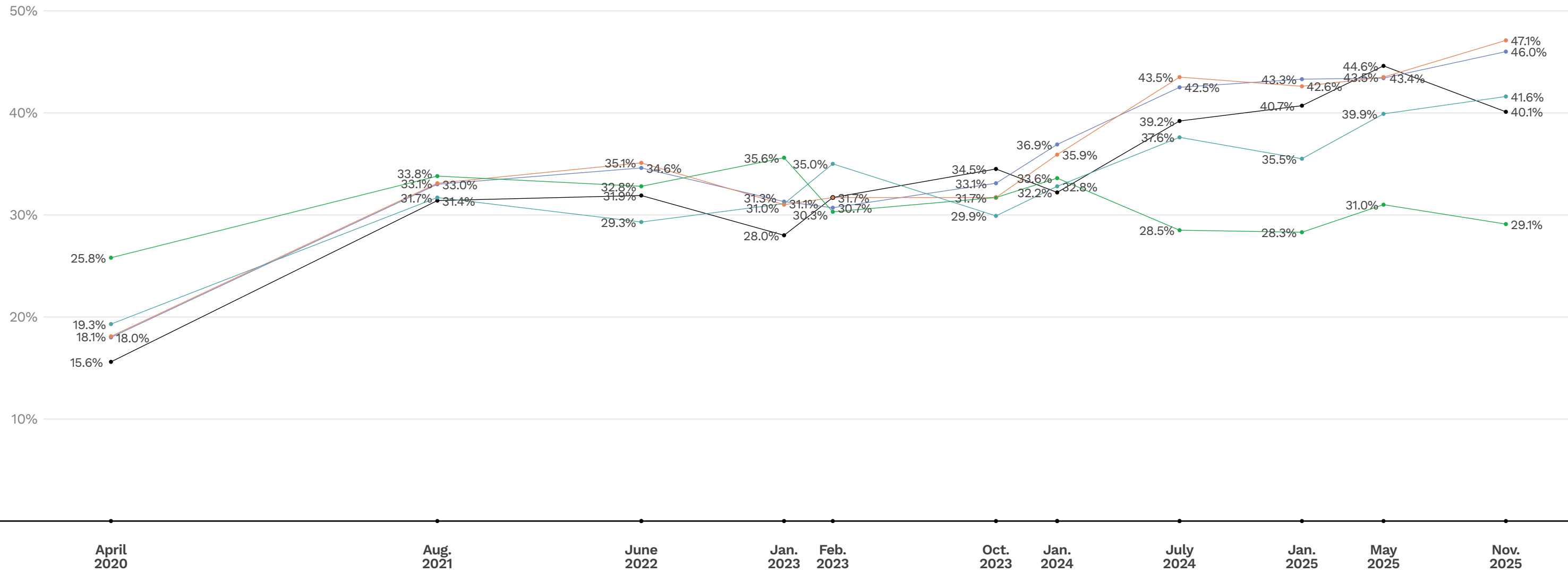
While Gen Z still leads in overall uptake, their declining reliance suggests that instant is being used but not consistently chosen. In contrast, millennials appear to be moving from experimentation to habit, increasingly selecting instant as their default payout method.

This divergence points to a stickiness challenge among Gen Z. Younger consumers may be more willing to try instant payouts when they are available, but also more sensitive to friction—especially fees, limits or uncertainty around costs. If instant carries a visible or variable premium, Gen Z may revert to standard options.

The pattern underscores a critical distinction for providers: Exposure does not equal loyalty. Gen Z's high uptake shows strong latent demand, but sustained reliance will depend on making instant payouts feel not just fast, but fair and predictable. Removing cost friction and clarifying value will likely be key to converting Gen Z's trial behavior into long-term dependence.



**FIGURE 5**  
**Payouts most often received instantly**  
 Share of recipients whose most typical way of receiving select payouts is instant



- Baby boomers and seniors
- Generation X
- Bridge millennials
- Millennials
- Generation Z

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence  
**Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts, February 2026**  
 N = 2,522: Complete responses. Respondents who received at least one disbursement over the last 12 months

03

**For Gen Z, how quickly funds are needed makes or breaks their willingness to pay for instant.**

## **Instant adoption scales through exposure, but instant stickiness scales through economics.**

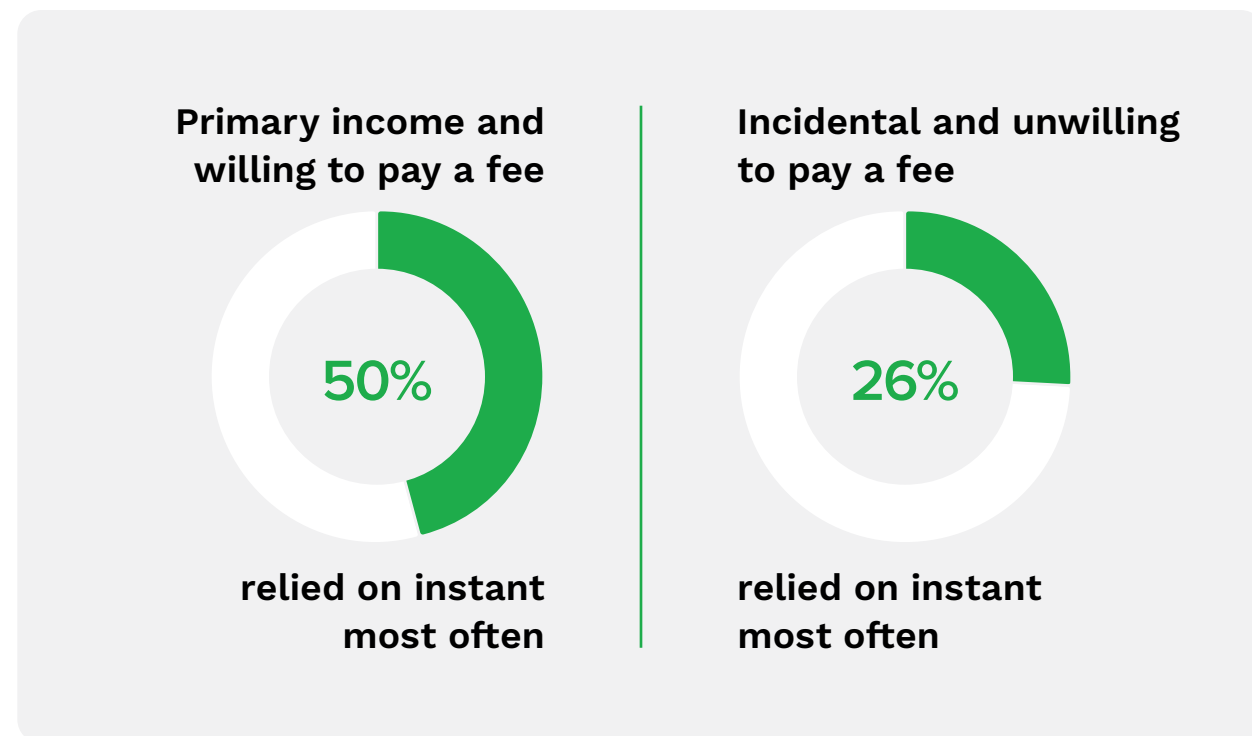
Reliance on instant payouts is highly concentrated among a specific profile: recipients of transactional payroll for whom payouts are primary income, those receiving 15 or more payouts per year, those who need their funds immediately and those open to paying a fee.

Reliance is highest among a specific group: those for whom payouts are primary income (i.e., core cashflow) and who are also willing to pay a fee for instant. Fifty percent of recipients in this group rely on instant most often.

For core cashflow recipients unwilling to pay a fee, this stands at 35% (which is 43% lower than the above group). However, the biggest drop is for those receiving incidental payouts who are unwilling to pay a fee, with merely 26% relying on instant.

These results underscore that reliance on instant payouts is strongly shaped by the combination of need and willingness to pay.

The implication is clear: Instant adoption scales through exposure, but instant stickiness scales through economics. Providers that align pricing, frequency and urgency are far more likely to convert instant from an occasional option into a default behavior.

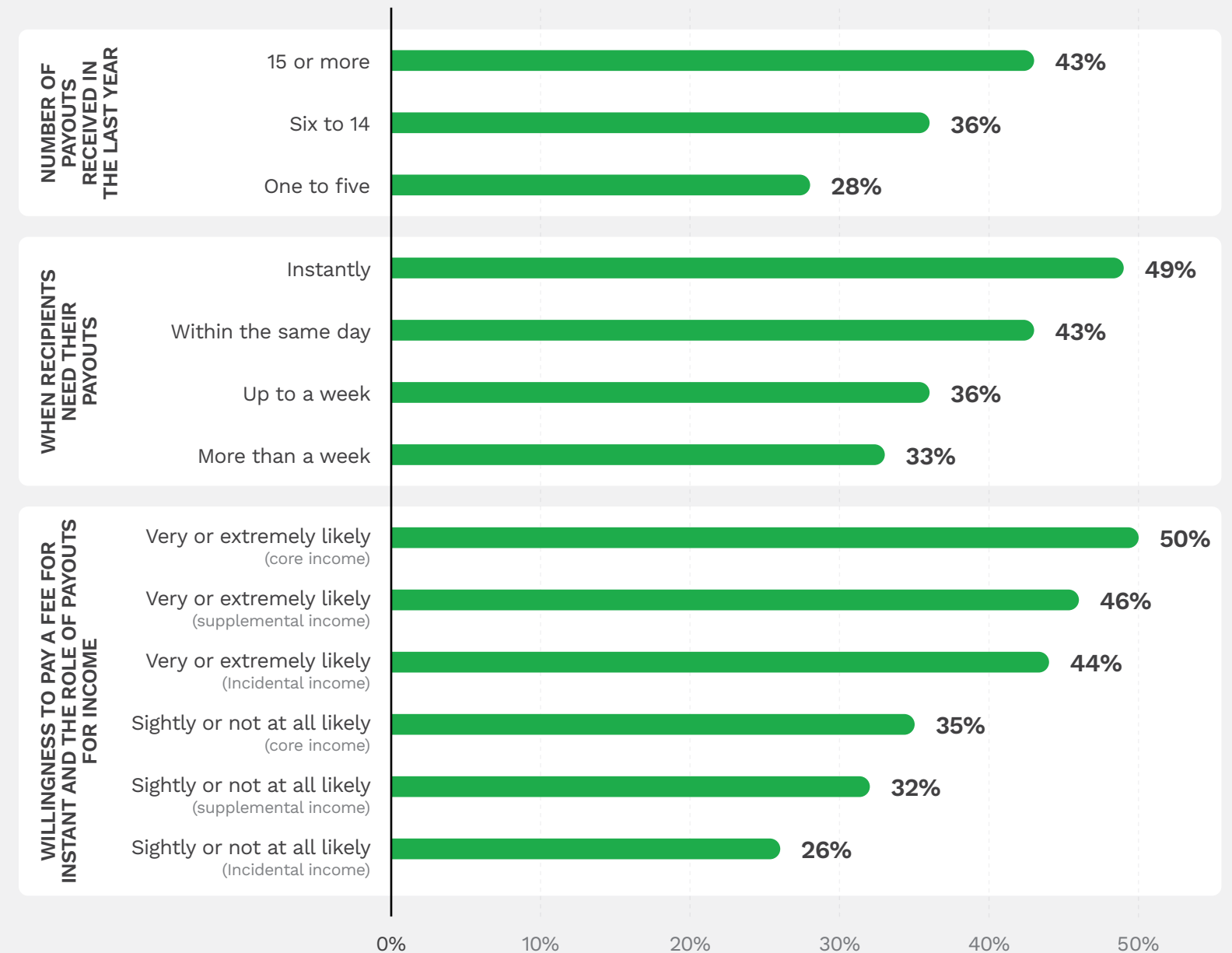


**Instant stickiness is determined by how important payouts are to income and the recipient's fee sensitivity.**

**FIGURE 6:**

**Payouts most often received instantly**

Share of recipients whose most typical way of receiving selected payouts is instant



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts, February 2026

N = 2,522: Complete responses. Respondents who received at least one disbursement over the last 12 months

04

**The opt-in economics of instant payouts show how instant-for-free wins.**

**For Gen Z, how quickly they need their funds makes or breaks willingness to pay for instant, more so than for other recipients.**

The data points to fees as a potential key friction limiting reliance on instant payouts among younger consumers. Six in 10 Gen Zers (63%) typically pay a fee to use their most-used instant method, closely mirroring the experience of transactional payroll recipients, where 72% also typically pay a fee. Given that younger generations make up the bulk of transactional payroll recipients (i.e., those who receive income and earnings through payouts), these two figures are tightly linked—and together may help explain why high uptake does not always translate into sustained reliance.

For Gen Z in particular, the value of instant is clear, but the cost trade-off appears to be binding. This cohort is highly engaged with instant payouts and often needs fast access to funds yet is also more fee-sensitive. Gen Z's willingness to pay a fee for instant is tied to certain conditions. Sixty-one percent would pay if they need the payout in under 30 minutes, but only 29% would pay when they can wait. Millennials, for example, are not as sensitive to fees; 40% would still be willing to pay for instant even when they can wait over a week for their payout.

When instant consistently carries an explicit charge, recipients may reserve it for moments of urgency rather than adopting it as a default, dampening repeat usage and long-term dependence.

The implication is that fees are not just a pricing decision but a behavioral lever. Among groups that both need speed and receive frequent payouts, reducing or rethinking fee structures could materially increase reliance on instant methods. Absent that shift, instant risks remaining a situational tool for younger and transactional workers—widely available and clearly valued but selectively used rather than fully embedded.

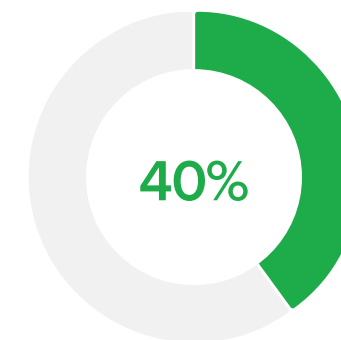
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When instant consistently carries an explicit charge, **recipients may reserve it for moments of urgency rather than adopting it as a default**, dampening repeat usage and long-term dependence.

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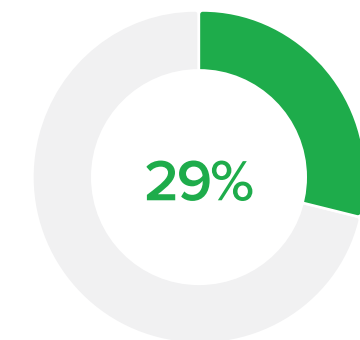
### WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR INSTANT

Millennials



are willing to pay even when they can wait more than a week.

Gen Z

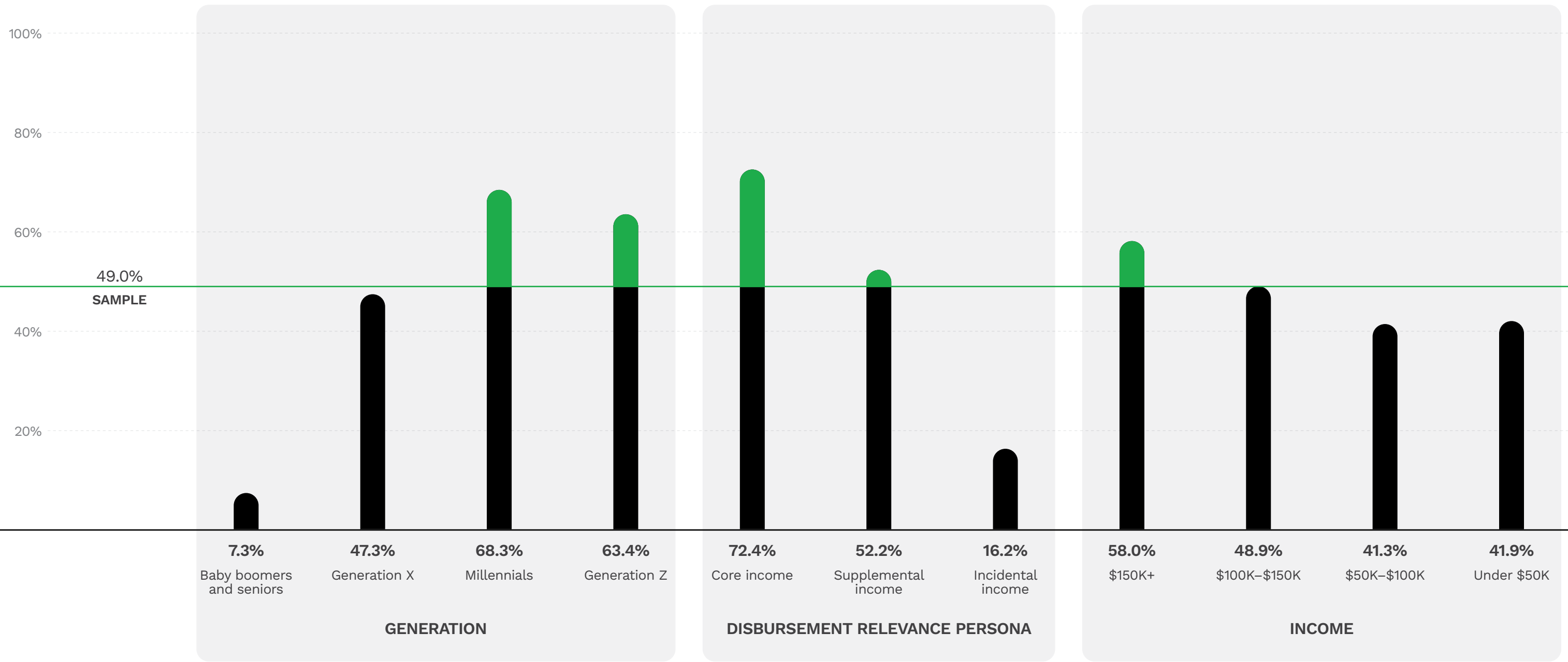


are willing to pay even when they can wait more than a week.

**FIGURE 7:**

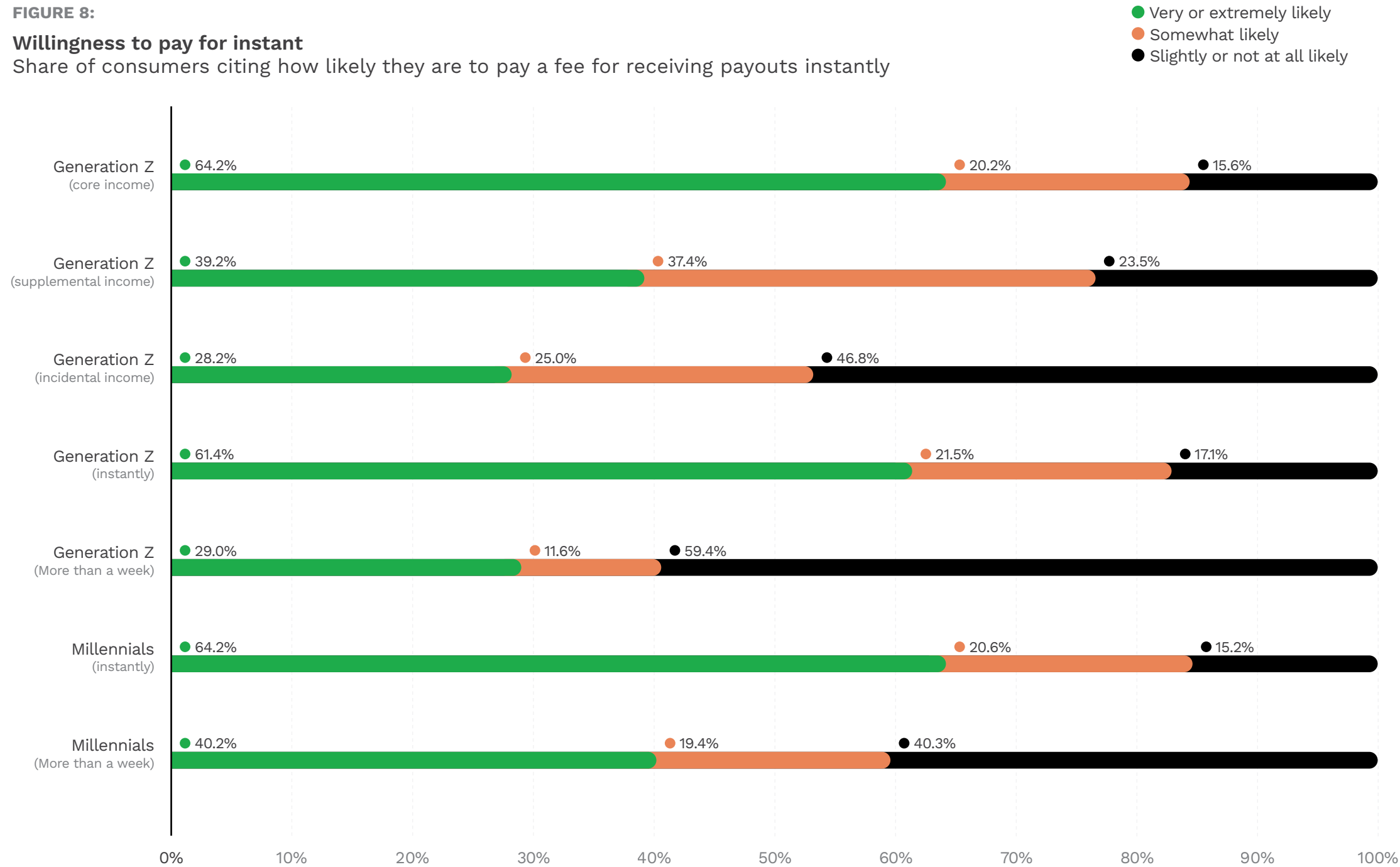
**Instant for a fee**

Share of recipients who typically pay a fee for their most-used instant payout



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence  
**Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts, February 2026**  
 N = 1,624: Respondents who received instant payments for at least one disbursement

**FIGURE 8:**  
**Willingness to pay for instant**  
 Share of consumers citing how likely they are to pay a fee for receiving payouts instantly



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence  
 Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts, February 2026  
 N = 2,522: Complete responses

For Gen Z, urgency to receive makes or breaks willingness to pay for instant, more so than for other recipients

**40%**  
 of millennials would still be willing to pay for instant, even when they can wait more than a week.

**Only 29%**  
 of Gen Z would be willing to pay when they can wait.

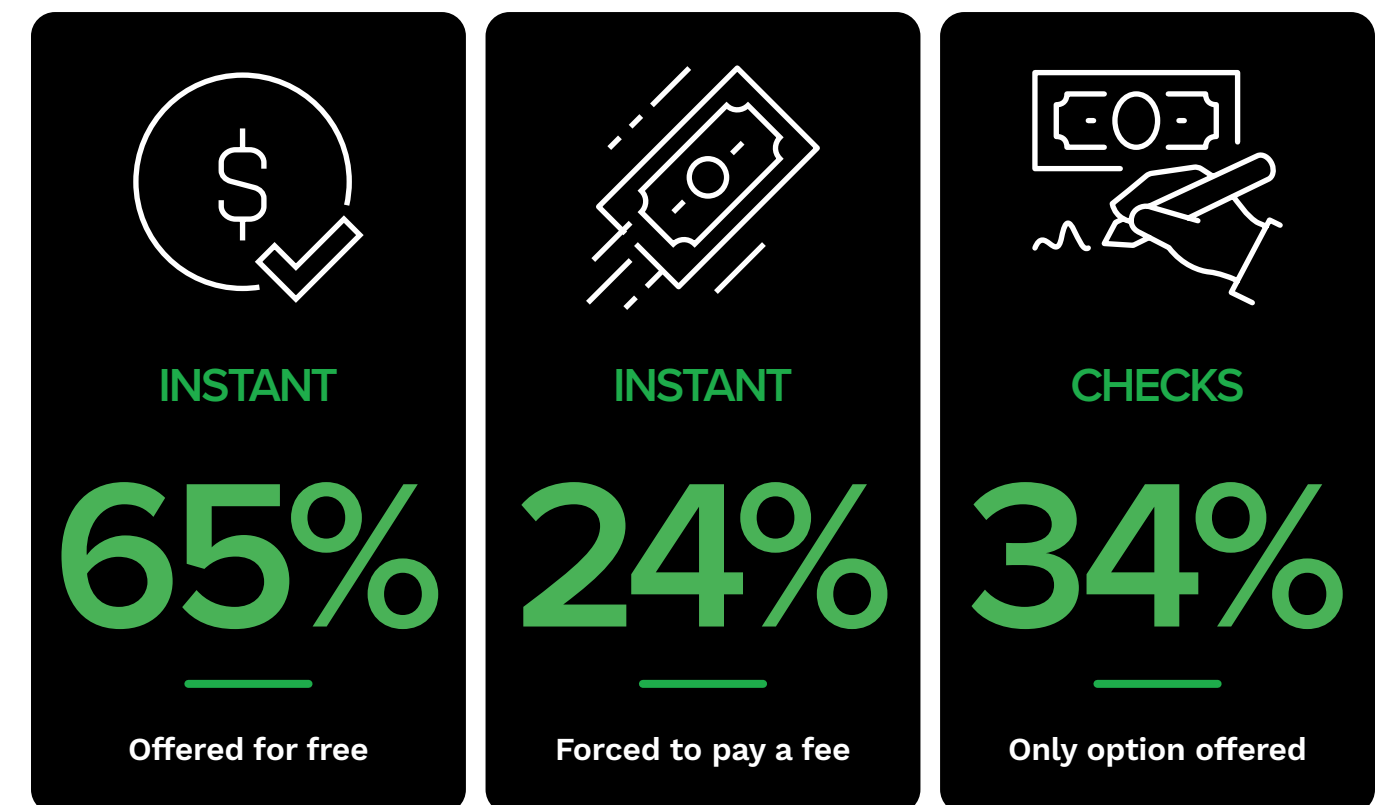
## 65% of recipients would be more likely to do business with a sender if it offered instant for free. This likelihood drops by half if the sender can only pay them by check.

The data makes clear that instant payouts are a powerful driver of sender choice—but only when recipients retain price control. When instant is offered for free, 65% of recipients say they would be more likely to do business with that sender, underscoring how speed has become a meaningful competitive differentiator rather than a peripheral feature.

That advantage erodes quickly when flexibility disappears. Likelihood to do business decreases by roughly half when the only option is payment by check, highlighting how legacy methods now actively deter engagement. But the sharpest decline occurs when recipients are forced to receive funds instantly with an obligatory fee. In that scenario, instant shifts from a benefit to a penalty—speed is no longer perceived as value but as imposed cost.

This pattern reinforces a critical insight: Instant drives choice, but only under opt-in economics. Recipients want the option of instant, not the obligation—and they want to decide when speed is worth paying for. Senders that frame instant as a free or optional upgrade can gain meaningful preference and loyalty, while those that mandate instant with fees risk neutralizing, or even reversing, its competitive advantage.

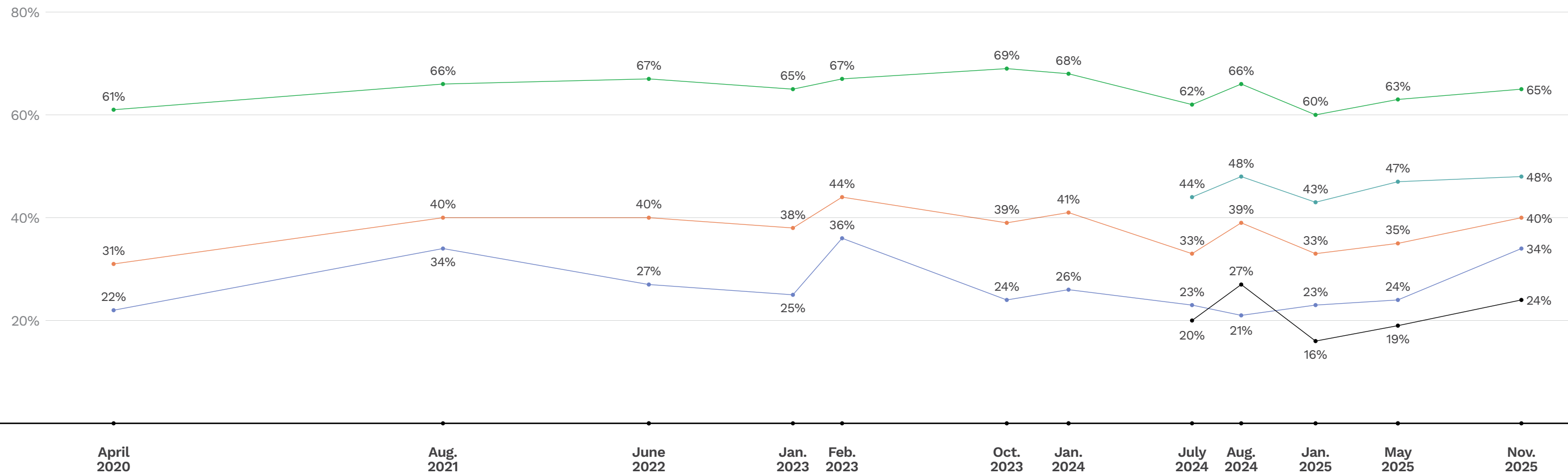
### MORE LIKELY TO DO BUSINESS



**FIGURE 9:**

**The impact of offering instant on recipient choice**

Share of recipients who would be more likely to continue to do business with senders based on selected scenarios



- Offered you the opportunity to receive instant payments for free
- Offered you a choice among many payment options-but not instant payments
- Forced you to use instant payments without having to pay a fee
- Forced you to use instant payments and pay a fee for this payment
- Could pay you only by sending you a check

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence  
**Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts, February 2026**  
 N = 2,522: Complete responses. Respondents who received at least one disbursement over the last 12 months

05

**Fees are not just a pricing decision but also a behavioral lever.**

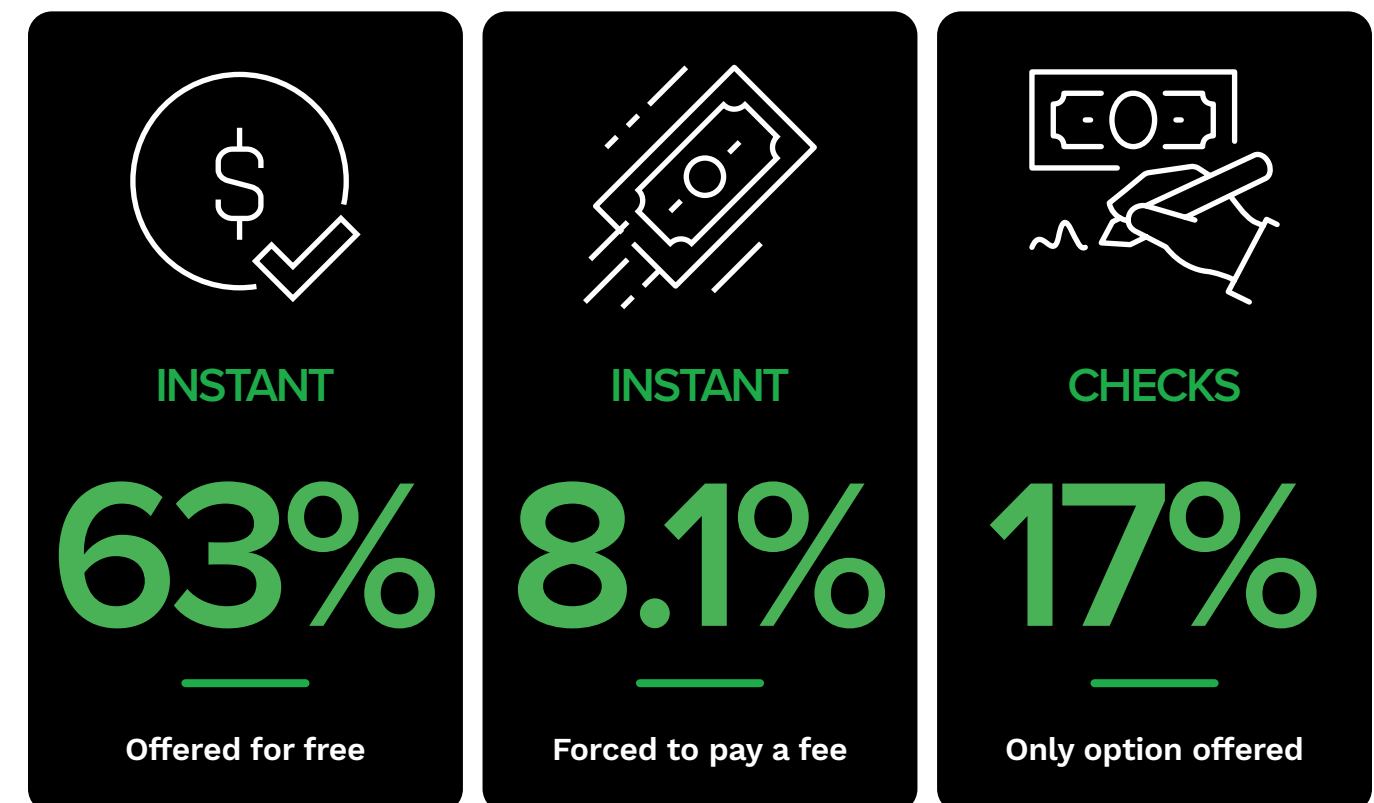
**Incidental payouts, such as insurance disbursements, show the highest sensitivity to fees and having choice.**

Recipients of incidental payouts show the most elastic demand for instant delivery, making their behavior highly sensitive to both price and choice. When instant payouts are offered for free, these recipients are far more likely to choose a sender, indicating that speed is valued—but only when it comes without added cost. In this context, instant acts as a compelling incentive that can materially influence sender selection.

That preference collapses when friction is introduced. If recipients are forced to pay for instant, or if the only alternative is a check, the likelihood of choosing the sender falls seven-fold. This sharp drop underscores that for incidental payouts—which are often unexpected, one-off or non-essential to immediate cash flow—the perceived value of speed is conditional. Without urgency, any fee or constraint quickly outweighs the benefit of immediacy. Insurance payouts are very likely to be in this group, however, and we know that they drove meaningful growth in instant reliance in the past six months.

The implication is clear: For incidental payouts, instant works as a promotional lever, not a toll road. Free instant delivery can meaningfully drive acquisition and preference, but mandatory fees or restrictive options can rapidly destroy that advantage. Senders targeting this segment stand to gain most by using instant strategically to attract recipients, rather than monetizing it at the point of disbursement.

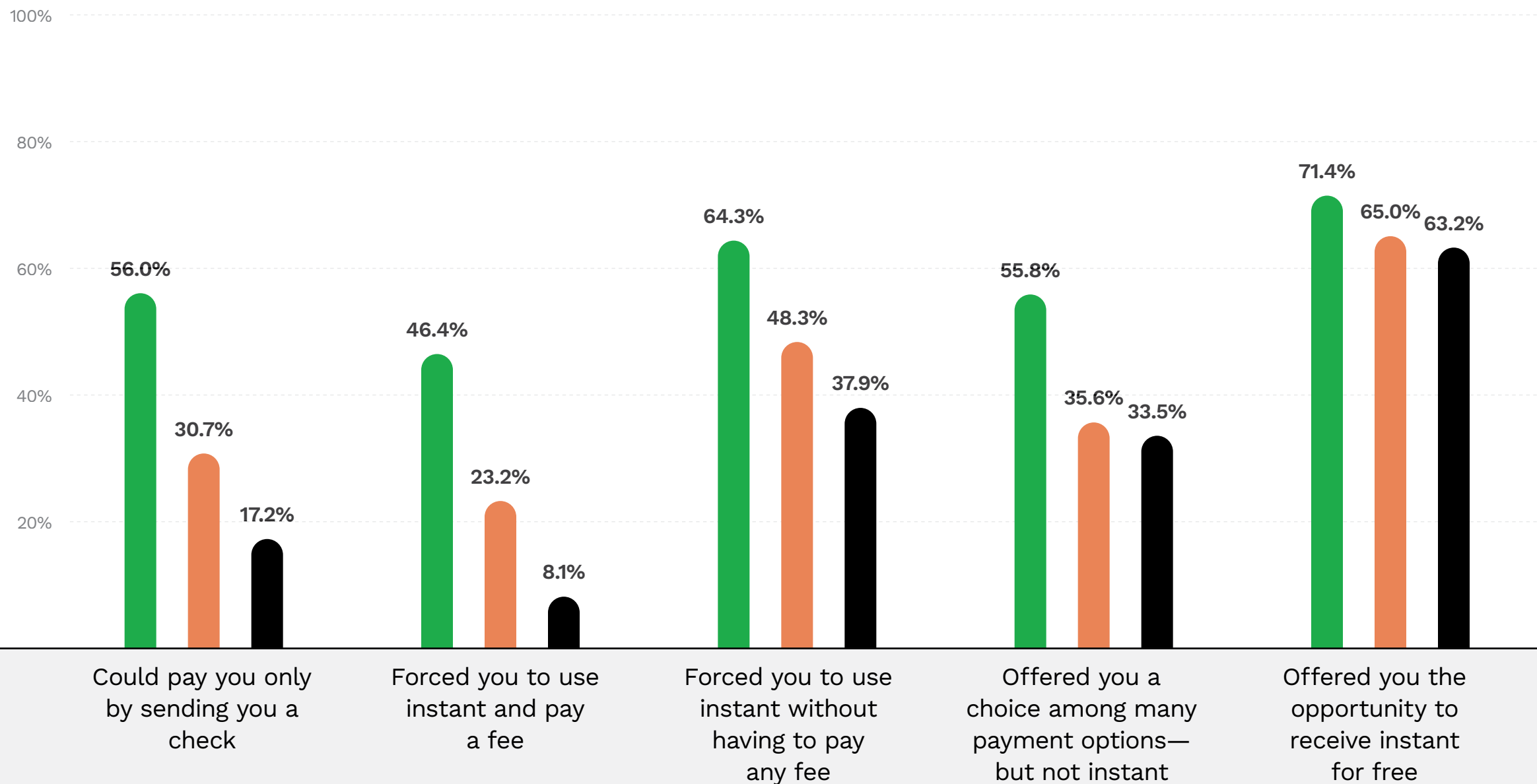
## INCIDENTAL PAYOUT RECIPIENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO DO BUSINESS IF



**FIGURE 10:**

**The impact of offering instant on recipient choice**

Share of recipients who would be more likely to continue to do business with senders based on selected scenarios



● Core income  
 ● Supplemental income  
 ● Incidental income

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

Fee Sensitivity And The Opt-In Economics Of Instant Payouts, February 2026

N = 2,522: Complete responses. Respondents who received at least one disbursement over the last 12 months

## SENSITIVITY TO FEE AND CHOICE

Sender preference is not as sensitive to fees and having choice for those who rely on payouts for primary income.

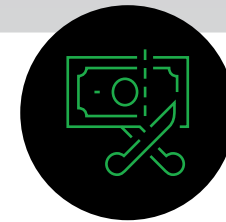
Sender preference is highly sensitive to fees and having choice for those who receive incidental payouts.

# ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS



## 01

**Instant payouts clearly influence choice and behavior, but adoption turns into reliance only when speed is paired with the right economics.** Younger and transactional recipients value immediacy, yet fees can quickly limit stickiness, especially in less urgent payout moments. The winners will be senders that treat instant not just as a capability but also as a targeted, optional benefit that balances urgency, frequency and cost.



## 03

**That willingness to pay, however, is highly conditional.** When urgency is low or payouts are incidental, demand becomes elastic and price sensitivity rises sharply. Even modest fees can outweigh the perceived benefit of speed, pushing recipients toward slower or cheaper options. Importantly, choice itself carries economic value. Free or optional instant preserves recipient surplus and increases sender preference, while mandatory instant with fees transfers cost to the recipient and destroys goodwill.



## 02

**Recipients consistently signal that faster access to funds has real utility—particularly when payouts are frequent, tied to income or critical to near-term cash flow.** In these contexts, demand for instant becomes relatively inelastic: Recipients are more willing to absorb a fee because speed reduces financial stress, avoids overdrafts or enables immediate spending.



## 04

**Instant payouts function less like a flat-priced utility and more like a situational upgrade.** Optimal economics align pricing with urgency and frequency, preserving optionality while capturing value where willingness to pay is highest.

# » FEE SENSITIVITY AND THE OPT-IN ECONOMICS OF INSTANT PAYOUTS

February 2026 Report



## METHODOLOGY

**F**ee Sensitivity and The Opt-In Economics of Instant Payouts is based on insights from a survey of 4,835 U.S. adult consumers conducted from Oct. 31st, 2025, to Dec. 30th, 2025. Analysis relies on 2,522 complete responses from consumers who received disbursements in the past year to examine how and why they adopt instant payouts and what ultimately determines whether instant becomes a default behavior or a situational choice. Our sample is 51% female, the average age was 48 years and 45% has a household income of more than \$100K.

### THE PYMNTS INTELLIGENCE TEAM THAT PRODUCED THIS REPORT:

Lynnley Browning  
Managing Editor

Yvonne Markaki, Ph.D  
SVP, Data Products

Javier Fik  
Research Analyst

PYMNTS  
INTELLIGENCE

INGO Payments

# ABOUT

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## PYMNTS INTELLIGENCE

[PYMNTS Intelligence](#) is a leading global data and analytics platform that uses proprietary data and methods to provide actionable insights on what's now and what's next in payments, commerce and the digital economy. Its team of data scientists include leading economists, econometricians, survey experts, financial analysts and marketing scientists with deep experience in the application of data to the issues that define the future of the digital transformation of the global economy. This multi-lingual team has conducted original data collection and analysis in more than three dozen global markets for some of the world's leading publicly traded and privately held firms.

## INGO Payments

Ingo Payments empowers banks, FinTechs and enterprises to deliver modern financial experiences through its full-service embedded banking platform. Ingo's bank-grade modern money stack, built with embedded compliance and risk management, enables seamless account funding, transfers, mobile deposits and payout solutions across a wide range of industries and use cases. With a vertically integrated platform, Ingo helps clients minimize third-party risk, reduce operational complexity and lower costs—all while accelerating go-to-market timelines. Head-quartered in Alpharetta, Georgia, Ingo employs more than 240 payments experts and serves some of the largest brands in North America. Learn more at [ingopayments.com](https://ingopayments.com).

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We are interested in your feedback on this report. If you have questions, comments or would like to subscribe, please email us at [feedback@pymnts.com](mailto:feedback@pymnts.com).

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