

Falling Behind: Defaulted Customers

Why customers default, what their experiences are, what it costs them, and how companies can respond



Photo: Kat Harrison



Photo: Kat Harrison

About 60 Decibels

60 Decibels is a global, tech-enabled impact measurement company that brings speed and repeatability to social impact measurement and customer insights. We provide benchmarks of impact performance, enabling sectors to see progress, funders to set performance targets. and organisations to understand impact relative to peers to take action.

We have a network of 1,600+ researchers in 95+ countries and have worked with more than 1,000 of the world’s leading impact investors, companies, foundations, corporations, NGOs, and public sector organisations. 60 Decibels makes it easy to listen to the people who matter most.

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Thank You

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We’d also like to show our appreciation to the enterprises who enabled us to listen to their customers – past and present. These organisations have demonstrated a commitment to listening to the customers they serve—to hear their experiences and identify ways to improve.

Most importantly, we thank the customers who shared their time and experiences with us. Your voice and your experience matters, and we hope we’ve represented it well in this report.

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Report Overview

This report examines the experiences of defaulted customers—those who lost access to their energy products due to repossession, locking, return, or other factors.

It delves into four key areas of exploration:

- Who:** Profiling defaulted customers by analysing demographics, socioeconomic factors, and their prior access to energy and consumer financing.
- Experience:** Assessing fairness, transparency, and the challenges faced by defaulted customers, using the 60 Decibels Consumer Protection Score.
- Why:** Identifying the reasons for lapsed payments and understanding how customers came to have their product locked or repossessed.
- Impact:** Understanding the current energy access status of defaulted customers and whether they have switched to alternative energy sources or are unserved.

The analysis is based on data collected from listening to 1,403 past customers of 11 off-grid energy companies in five countries. Interviews were conducted between October and December 2024 by 60 Decibels trained Research Assistants in local languages.

60 Decibels previously conducted research with 2,367 active customers of the same 11 participating companies in 2023.

To provide deeper context, this report compares insights between defaulted and active customers, highlighting key differences in engagement, repayment behaviour, and service experience.

The analysis has been conducted at the respondent level for both customer groups i.e. no weighting was used as we did not see differences by relevant segments.

We explored patterns and correlations across a variety of metrics, including demographic factors such as gender, education level, location (rural, peri-urban, urban), and income level.

Additionally, we conducted segmented analysis by two product categories: Solar Home System (SHS) and Appliances (e.g., Solar Water Pumps, Off-Grid Refrigerators, Solar TVs) —as well as by company. Where notable differences emerged, we have highlighted them throughout the report.

To maintain confidentiality, company results have been anonymised and randomly assigned labels (Company 1 to 9). While 11 companies participated, we disaggregated results for only 9 due to smaller sample sizes for two companies.

Who Did We Talk To?

1,400+
respondents

5
countries

11
organisations

Participating companies

Ashdam Solar	Nigeria
Baobab+	Cote d’Ivoire
d.light	Kenya
d.light	Nigeria
Easy Solar	Sierra Leone
Mwangaza Light	Kenya
RECAPO Solar Systems	Malawi
SunCulture	Kenya
SureChill	Kenya
VITALITE	Malawi
Yellow Solar	Malawi

Sub-sector	Sample size	Organisations
Solar Home System	1,109	8
Appliance	294	3

“The experience was a sad one because I needed [the energy product] badly at that time they took it away. But even when they came to pick up after the phone call, I could not make the payment. Maybe if I was able to pay at that time, they would not have taken it away.

Female, 40

1

Who are defaulting customers, and how do they compare to active customers?

Defaulted and active customers share similar characteristics in terms of gender, age, location (rural, peri-urban, urban), and household size. However, defaulted customers are less likely to live below the poverty line (42%) than active customers (52%), which might be opposite to what you would expect. This may be because people living in poverty are having to make harder financial decisions to sign up for consumer financing and are more committed to making it work, and it could be that higher income households have correspondingly higher expenses and other commitments.

Defaulted customers are more likely to be first-time users of modern energy products, but they access credit for the first time at similar rates as active customers. This suggests that unfamiliarity with financial agreements is not a predictor of default. Instead, defaulted customers face a significantly higher payment burden, with many reporting that they had to cut back on essential expenses—such as food—to keep up with payments before ultimately defaulting. These insights show the complicated interplay between income-level and affordability.

Additionally, customer challenges shape default; 56% of defaulted customers had experienced an issue with their energy product/service compared to 36% of active customers. Crucially, 88% of defaulted customers had unresolved issues before losing access to their products, whereas active customers experienced a 61% issue resolution rate. These findings suggest that product functionality issues, particularly if not addressed, contribute to a higher likelihood of default.

Unsurprisingly, defaulted customers were also less satisfied, with a significantly lower Net Promoter Score® (NPS) of -3 compared to 59 for active customers. A high proportion of defaulted customers were Detractors, meaning they may actively negatively talk about the company, the product/service, and their experience to their network which could have a detrimental effect on future sales and uptake. Dissatisfaction with customer service, miscommunication, and perceived financial loss further contributed to their negative experiences.

Key takeaway: Customer profile does not seem to shape likelihood to default, but customer experience—specifically ease of use (absence of challenges) and customer service (issue resolution)—does. Strengthening upfront product guidance and improving issue resolution practices could help mitigate defaults.

2

How well do customers understand their contracts and payment terms?

A critical aspect of Consumer Protection is ensuring that customers fully understand their financial obligations before purchase. Compared to active customers, defaulted customers are less likely to have had—or to recall having had—a company-led comprehension check of key payment terms (69% vs 88%). This gap is especially pronounced in the Appliance category, where 55% of defaulted customers recall receiving a comprehension check, compared to 92% of active customers. Appliances are often more expensive products, so this is likely even more key for this access.

When it comes to awareness of non-payment consequences, differences between defaulted and active customers are less pronounced, but still, 16% of defaulted customers were unaware of what would happen if they missed payments. Defaulted customers were less likely to have been informed about potential price or payment plan changes—only 50% reported receiving this information, compared to 79% of active customers. This suggests that limited awareness of changes to financial commitments may increase the risk of default.

Additionally, nearly 2 in 5 defaulted customers did not fully understand their sales agreements, and the same proportion felt the company did not support them in assessing their ability to pay during sign-up. Rural defaulted customers, in particular, were the least likely to be aware of key contract terms, possibly due to lower education levels and financial literacy in rural households. This may also be shaped by sales agent training and monitoring in last-mile locations.

Key takeaway: Defaulted customers face poorer Consumer Protection experiences than their active counterparts, with companies less likely to check their comprehension of terms,, resulting in lower awareness of key conditions and potential price or payment plan changes. Reviewing sales staff/agent training and performance, as well as customer onboarding processes (e.g., check-ins, callbacks) may provide insights in how to improve these outcomes for customers, potentially improving portfolio quality and payment rates.



3

What processes did companies undertake during product removal, and how did customers experience it?

For 88% of defaulted customers, products were either repossessed or locked while still in their possession. In nearly two-thirds of repossession cases, the company initiated the process, while over a third of customers voluntarily returned the product. So, repossession is primarily company-driven rather than a proactive choice by customers, but there’s not an insignificant group that decide for themselves.

While 75% of defaulted customers say they were informed of the reason for repossession or product locking, nearly 2 in 5 did not receive multiple engagement steps before losing access. Rural customers were even less likely to experience these steps, pointing to potential differences in processes in practice in more remote areas, perhaps due to cost for company and/or agent training and monitoring.

The repossession process was widely viewed as unfair—nearly three-quarters of defaulted customers felt this way. The experience was often marked by emotional distress, a sense of financial loss, and dissatisfaction with customer service. Additionally, 11% of defaulted customers reported mistreatment by staff, including verbal aggression, intimidation, and discrimination.

Affordability challenges, product-related issues, and unexpected financial emergencies were the most common reasons for falling behind on payments.

Key takeaway: Most customers perceive repossession as unfair, and 1 in 10 report experiencing mistreatment. Strengthening sales agent training, monitoring performance, and improving communication processes could help address these concerns.

4

What happens after default? What are customers current energy access statuses?

While 70% of defaulted customers have reverted to their previous energy access methods, 4% are in a worse position, relying on more basic or polluting solutions than before their purchase. 26% have found alternative energy solutions and progressed up the energy ladder; they are in a better position than pre-purchase.

Notably, 0% reported being completely without energy access, suggesting that while default disrupts a customer’s energy journey, it did not leave them without options. However, financial distress is evident among defaulted customers. Many defaulted customers report experiencing emotional distress and a sense of financial loss following product removal. This, combined with dissatisfaction with customer service and miscommunication during the repossession process, further exacerbates the negative impact of default.

Key takeaway: The majority of customers are at the same level on the energy ladder as before access, but they experienced financial and emotional distress through the experience of accessing consumer financing and modern energy. Improving targeting, selection, approval, and communications processes for customers is crucial to minimizing negative impacts.

Snapshot

Defaulted customers are more likely to be first-time users of a SHS or Appliance and are more likely to have experienced a challenge which was not resolved. Relatedly, they are less satisfied, and their Consumer Protection experience was worse.

Benchmarks

We have compared results to 60 Decibels Energy Benchmarks here and throughout this report, where relevant. 60 Decibels has collected impact data since 2015. By asking the same questions across multiple projects, we’ve been able to develop benchmarks. These benchmarks are the median performance of all our projects, providing context and insights on sector, portfolio, and company impact, and areas for focus. The 60 Decibels Energy Benchmark is a benchmark of the performance of 115 energy companies, across 27 countries, from 143 Lean Data projects, listening to over 34,000+ customers in the last 3 years.

Metric	Defaulted Customers (2024) (n = 1,403)		Active Customers (2023) (n = 2,367)	60 Decibels Energy Benchmark
Consumer Protection Score Average of 9 Consumer Protection indicators	51%	<	65%	62%
Customer Satisfaction Net Promoter Score®, -100 to 100	-3%	<	58%	49%
Ease of Use % not experiencing challenges	44%	<	64%	72%
Issue Resolution % issues resolved, of those experiencing challenges	12%	<	34%	29%
First Access % accessing product category for the first time	90%	>	80%	81%
First Access to Credit % accessing consumer financing for the first time	80%	=	76%	93%

01

Customer Profile

- > Demographics
- > Poverty Reach
- > First Access
- > Access to Credit
- > Sources of Energy
- > Reasons for Non-Payment

“

I did not follow the agreement to pay on the scheduled date as I had agreed, due to certain reasons. I am a bike rider, and I can only pay when I ride my bike... The bike was faulty and required significant maintenance. During this process, I failed to make my payment, and the products were collected from me.

Male, 28

Customer Demographics

Among the defaulted customers we spoke to, 72% were male, with an average age of 40 years, typically living in rural areas with six household members. Gender distribution is consistent across geographical regions, but women make up only 28% of respondents, with some companies reporting an even lower share.

There are no significant demographic differences between defaulted and active customers, for indicators we have data on. So, there are no predictors here to help us understand why a customer might default.

The poverty reach for the defaulted customer group is lower (42%) than the active customer group (52%) i.e. defaulted customers, on the whole, are less likely to live in poverty than active customers. Defaulted customers in rural areas are the most likely to live below the national poverty lines (50%) compared to those in peri-urban (24%) and urban areas (22%). This financial vulnerability may contribute to higher repossession rates and lower contract awareness that we highlight in the later parts of the report.

Customer Profile

Household Size

6.1 Defaulted customers

6.0 Active customers

Average Age

40 Defaulted customers

42 Active customers

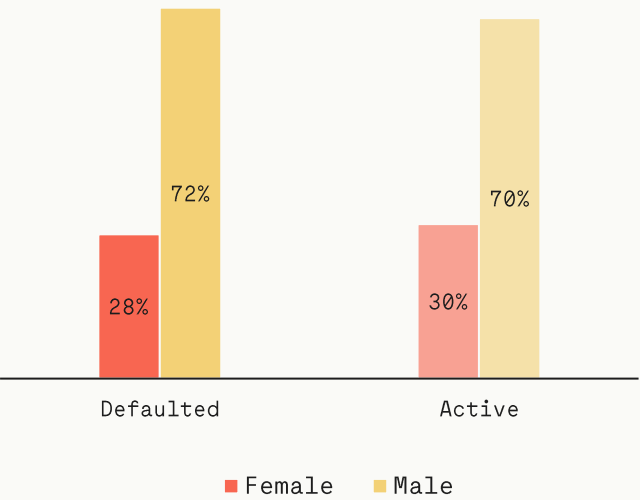
Poverty Reach

42% Defaulted customers

52% Active customers

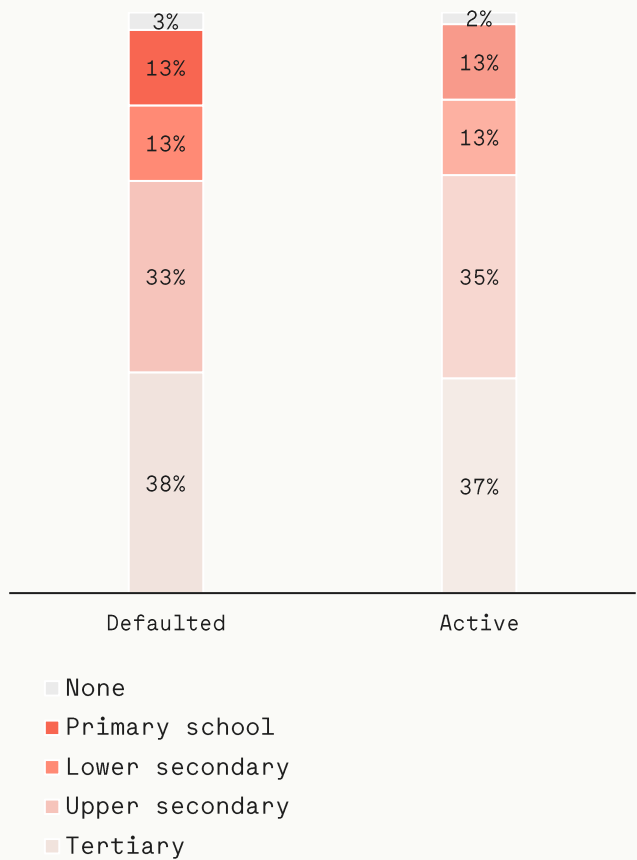
Gender

Q: Respondent gender (n = 1,403)



Household Education

Q: What is the highest level of education anyone in your household has completed? (n = 1,403)



First Access

A higher proportion of defaulted customers were accessing the product category they purchased for the first time, compared to active customers.

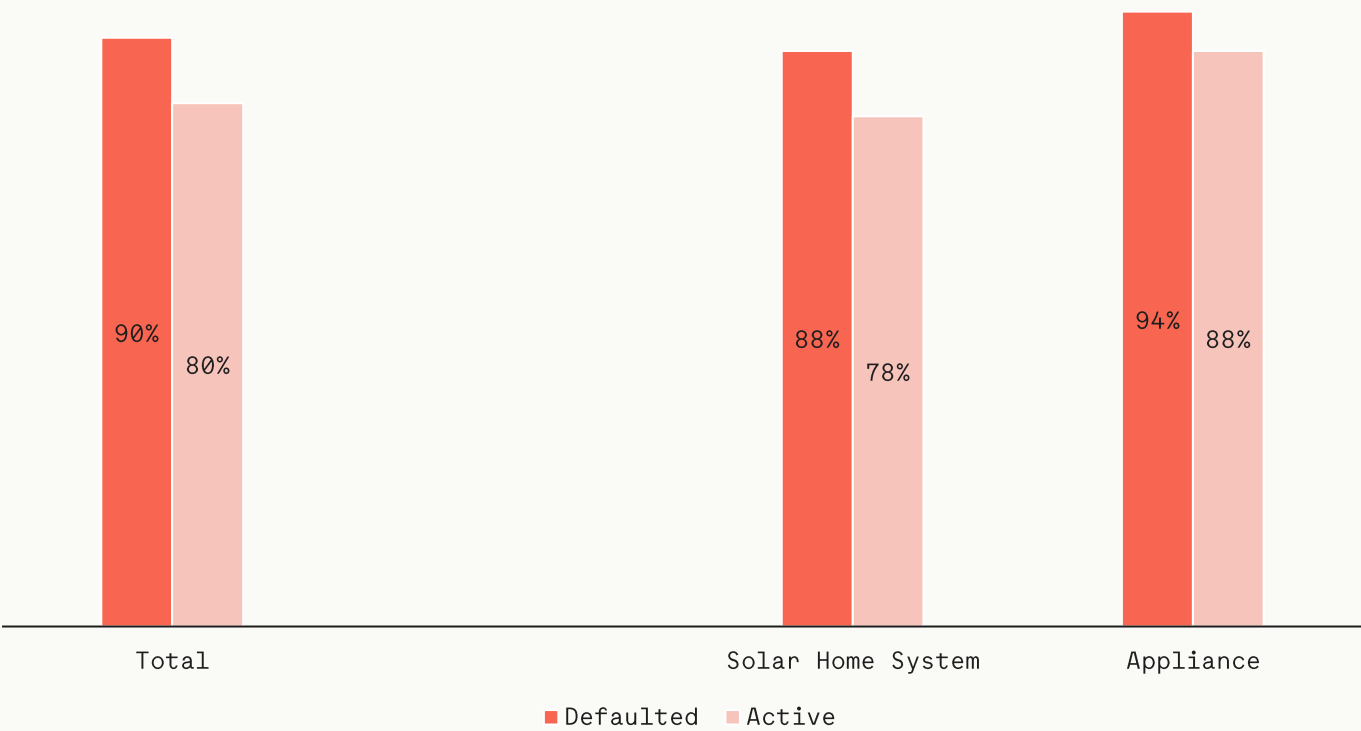
The First Access indicator provides us with insight into the degree to which companies are reaching previously unserved populations.

A higher proportion of defaulted customers were first-time modern energy users, compared to active customers. This difference may indicate varying levels of familiarity with product use, expectations, or service engagement between the two groups.

The high proportion of customers accessing energy products for the first time indicates that companies are initially reaching underserved populations, expanding energy access, and contributing to energy inclusion.

First Access by Sub-Sector

Q: Before [Company], did you have access to a [product/service] like this before? (n = 1,403), % No (First Access)



Access to Credit

A similar proportion of defaulted customers were accessing credit for the first time through their energy product purchase, compared to active customers.

Understanding whether respondents were first-time financing users helps uncover potential links between inexperience and repayment struggles.

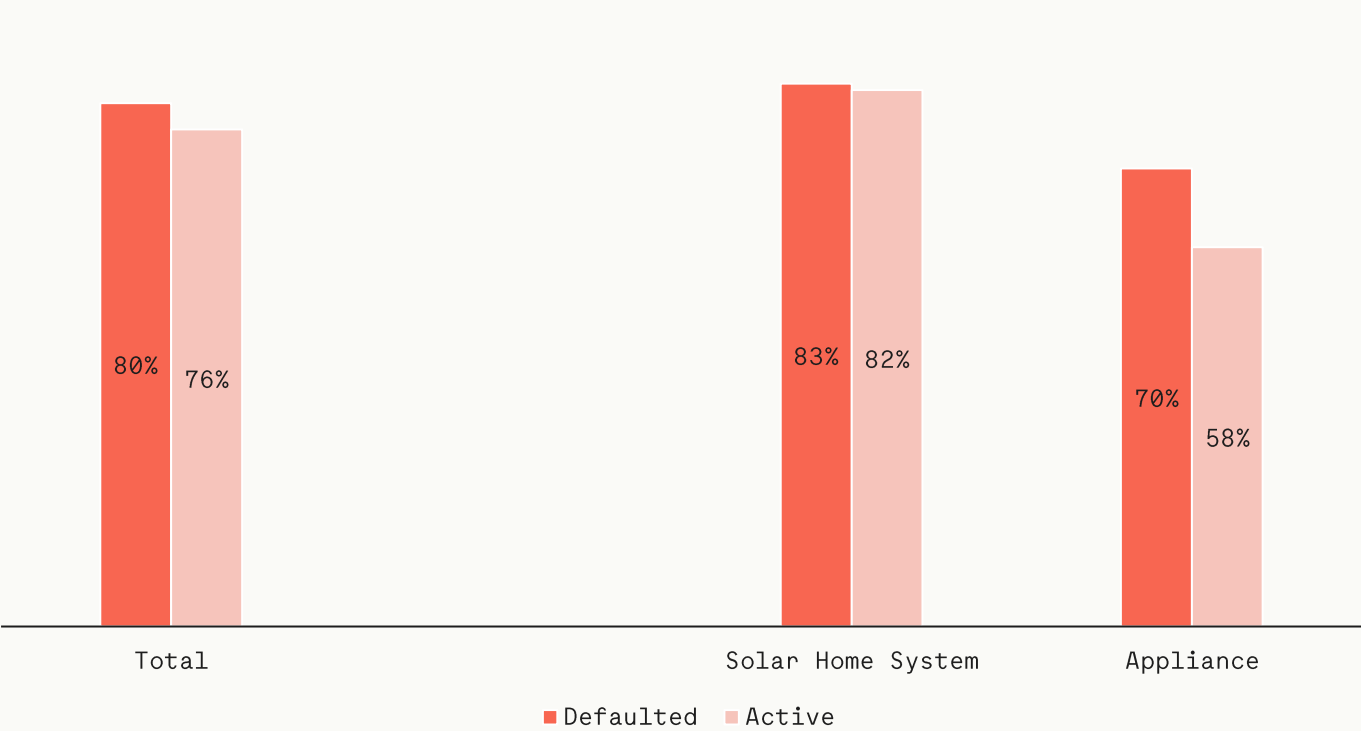
If many had no prior borrowing history, defaulting may stem from lack of financial literacy and familiarity with payment agreements, as well as financial planning.

Interestingly, this doesn't appear to be a predictor of likelihood to default.

By product category, defaulted Appliance customers were much more likely to have been accessing financing for the first time. Appliances are often higher value, so it may be that at higher payment levels the experience of credit processes and household budgeting does play a role.

Access to Credit by Sub-Sector

Q: Was this [product/service] your first access to credit? (n = 1,403), % Yes, first access to credit



Sources of Energy: SHS Customers

The majority of defaulted customers are back to pre-purchase energy access levels.

Learning about defaulted customers energy access status is important for understanding the impact of repossession. Once an energy product is taken away, do customers revert back to baseline and/or traditional sources or have they found alternative or even better solutions?

Changes in energy access after default shows mixed outcomes:

70% of defaulted customers are on the same level as before their energy product/service purchase i.e., they are back to previous methods for energy access.

4% have found themselves in a worse position, using energy access solutions lower down the energy ladder than pre-purchase.

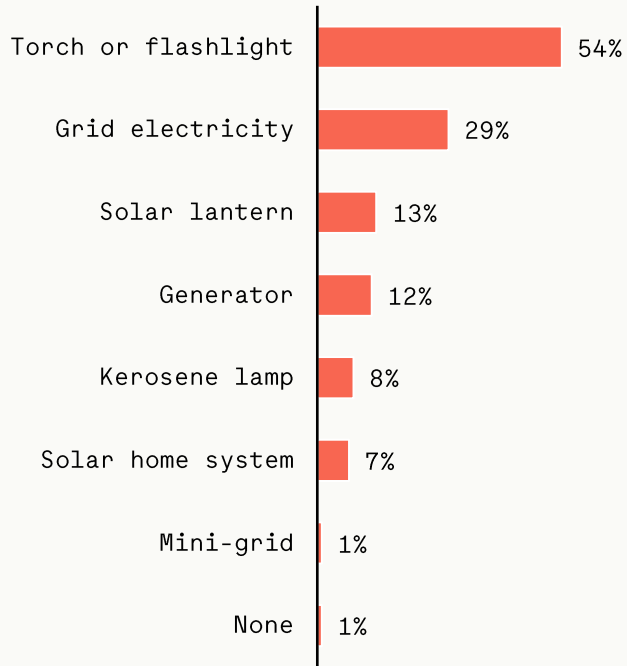
26% are better off than before; they have found alternative solutions and progressed up the energy ladder post-repossession.

In particular, solar home system usage grew from 7% pre-purchase to 20% post-repossession, suggesting 13% have acquired SHS through other means and suggesting it was not the technology that caused the default but other experiences around using it or paying for it.

Grid electricity use increased from 29% to 39%, and this could be a reason for default/return of energy products due to access and/or affordability though we didn't hear particular mention of this in open-ended question responses.

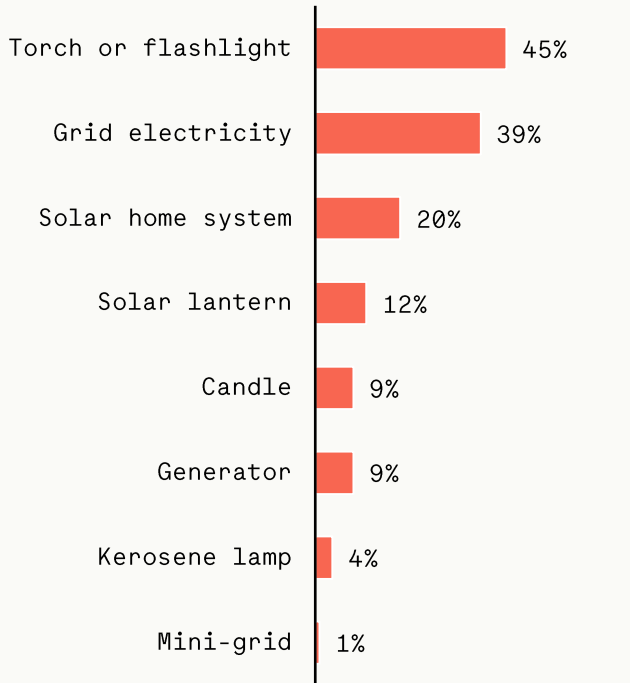
Previous Sources of Energy

Q: What were you using for lighting and/or energy prior to accessing the [company] [product/service]? (n = 1,109)



Current Sources of Energy

Q: What are you currently using for lighting and/or energy? (n = 1,109)



Reasons for Non-Payment & Request for Repossession

Defaulted customers talk of affordability issues, product-related challenges, and unexpected financial emergencies as the main reasons for failing to keep up with payments.

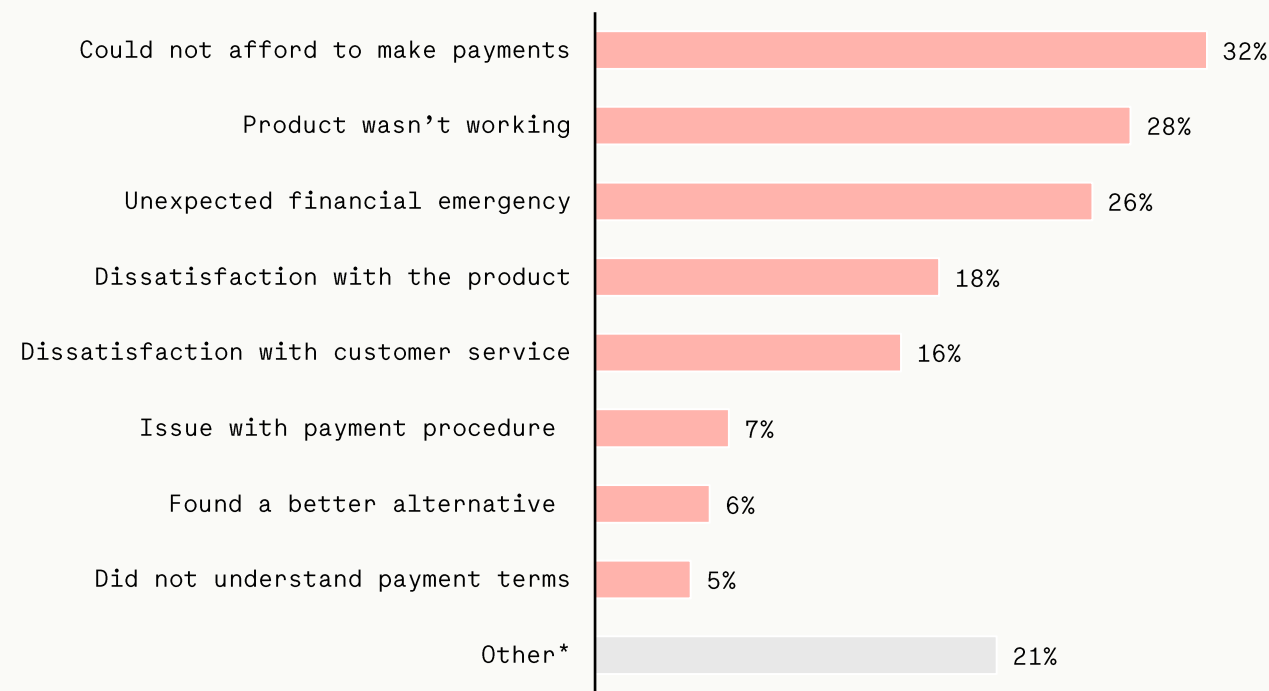
We asked defaulted customers why they missed payments and also asked them to identify the most important reason.

While affordability was the most common issue and most likely reason to be selected as most important, product malfunctions and unexpected financial emergencies also played a significant role.

Dissatisfaction with the product or customer service influenced some customers' decisions, while a smaller group pointed to payment process issues or a lack of understanding of the terms.

Reasons for Non-Payment/Voluntary Removal of Product

Q: We understand from [company] that during the payment period, you fell behind on one or more payments. Which of the following reasons contributed to why you didn't make a payment or requested the company to take the [product] back? (n = 1,403)



*Other: includes absence/travel/relocation, and theft/loss of product.

“We had financial emergencies in our home, which led us to cut down on expenses, including payments for the solar system.”

Female, 41

Photo: Kat Harrison

02

Repossession

- > Access Status
- > Decision-making for Repossession
- > Awareness of Reason for Repossession
- > Company Process Before Repossession
- > Experience with Repossession

“

[The company] did not call me to inform me that they would come to take the [product]; I just saw them come into my compound, and they started taking the [product]. They refused to listen to me. I felt really bad because I had paid more than [X] and there were a few months left, and I would have finished paying.

Female, 45

Access Status

The majority of defaulted customers lost access to their energy products due to repossession but over a third still have their product; it is locked and not usable.

The rates of repossession and locking vary by product category; Appliance customers are more likely to have had their product repossessed than SHS customers.

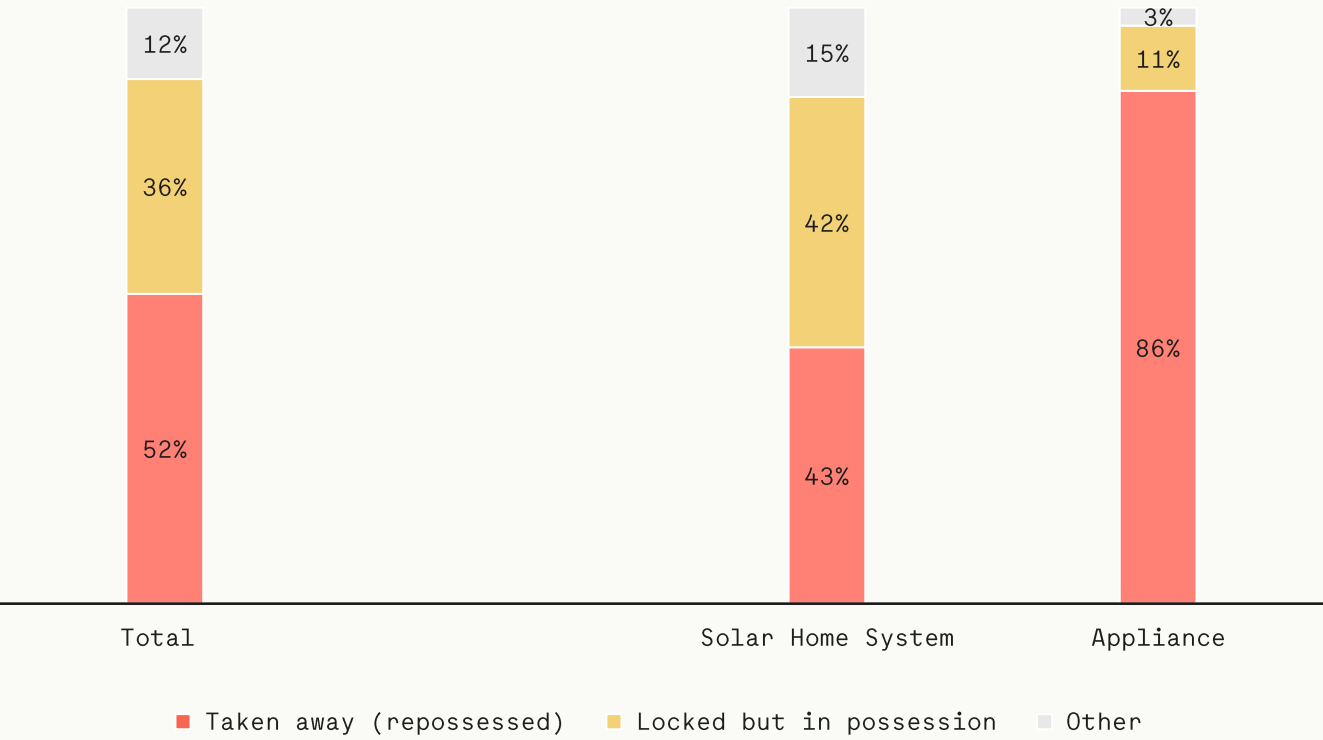
Customers in rural areas were most likely to have their products repossessed by the company (67%), compared to those in peri-urban areas (59%) and urban areas (55%).

The higher repossession rate in rural areas may be linked to income levels, as rural customers are most likely to live below the national poverty line.

Among those reporting 'Other' as a reason for loss, factors included product malfunction and external incidents such as theft.

Access Status by Sub-Sector

Q: Was the [product] locked or was it taken away (repossessed) or something else? (n = 1,403)



Decision-making of Repossession

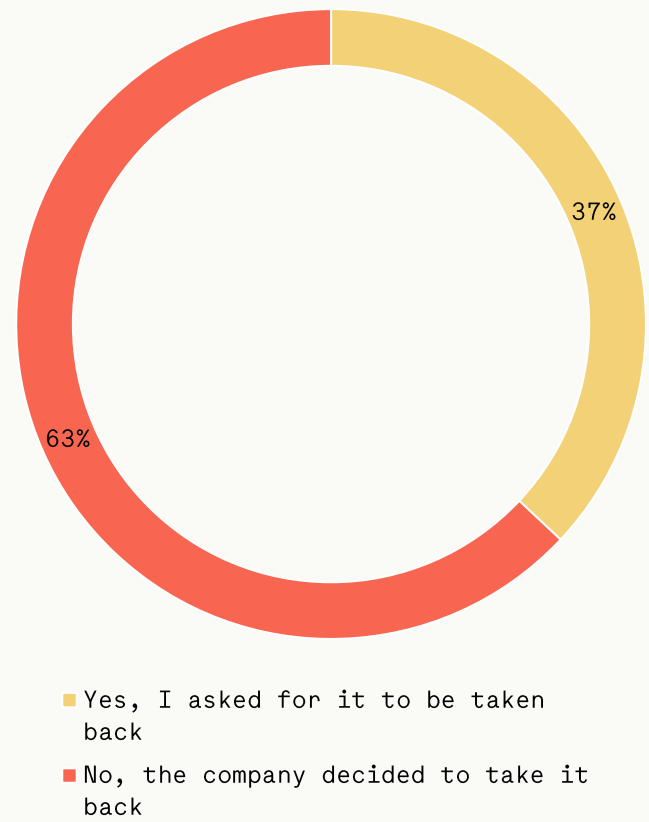
Over a third of customers say they asked for the company to take back their product.

In two-thirds of repossessions, the company made the decision, while one-third of defaulted customers voluntarily returned the product.

The next pages share common reasons for customers choosing to return the product.

Decision-Making on Product Return

[If repossessed] Q: Did you ask for the [product] to be taken back by the [company] or did the [company] decide to? (n = 732)



“ I have noticed that they don't have good salespeople who make you understand fully. I didn't have all the necessary information on this product.

Male, 40

Reasons for Product Removal Request

Voluntary repossession requests were primarily driven by product performance issues, financial constraints, and poor customer service.

Performance issues were the most common reason for requesting product removal, with customers of nearly all companies mentioning this.

Financial constraints were also a major factor, with respondents indicating difficulties in maintaining payments.

Additionally, some respondents mentioned customer support issues, suggesting that service quality influences their decision to return products.

“The battery was not working, and they did not fix the issue even after calling them...so I got tired.”

Male, 51

Reasons for Product Removal Request

Q: Why did you ask for [product] to be taken back? (n = 458). Open-ended, coded by 60 Decibels.

Company	Overall	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Product performance issues	63%	40%	84%	67%	70%	65%	37%	61%	53%	88%
Financial constraints	23%	30%	18%		35%		50%	43%	29%	
Customer support & service issues	16%	20%		24%	25%	23%		25%		25%

Awareness of Reason for Product Removal

27% of customers whose products were locked or repossessed at the decision of the company say the company did not make it clear why this was happening.

In almost a third of repossessions, customers were not clear on why the company locked or repossessed their products.

According to Consumer Protection principles, the company should make the reasons clear to the customer for this decision.

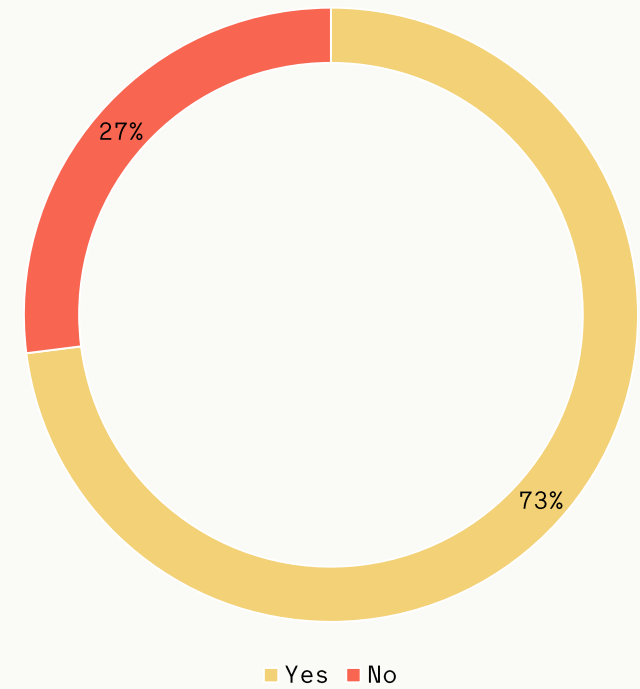
“I do understand it's the company's policy to repossess their product once repayments are not done as per the agreement policy. I was not happy that they could not understand my case since it was an emergency hence unpredicted.”

Male, 42

Awareness of Reason for Removal: Company Decision

[If locked but in possession] Q: Did [company] make it clear to you why they were locking the product?

[If taken away/repossessed] Q: Did [company] make it clear to you why this was happening? (n = 954)



Reasons for Product Locking
& Forced Repossession

Defaulted customers for whom the company decided on repossession believe the reasons the product was taken back was because of payment defaults and product malfunctions.

The most common reason given by defaulted customers on the reason they believe repossession happened was payment default.

Product malfunctions also contribute significantly, with multiple respondents attributing repossession to faulty products.

Communication issues and external factors emerge in several cases, indicating that misunderstandings or uncontrollable circumstances also play a role. And in some cases, customers acted in a way they knew would result in repossession as they were not getting the service they expected—see quotation.

“

When I was using [the product], it developed issues 4 months after purchase. I called to complain, but they did not come. They kept promising to come, but they never did, so I decided to stop paying. That was when they came to take it away.

Male, 51

Reasons for Forced Repossession by Company

Q: Why do you think the [product] was taken back? (n = 274). Open-ended, coded by 60 Decibels.

Company	Overall	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Payment Defaults	57%	90%	41%	53%	35%	88%	80%	72%	57%	1 customer
Product Malfunction	15%	3%	59%	15%	30%		11%	15%	3%	
Miscommunication	15%	3%	18%	19%	25%	10%	2%	2%	17%	
Emergencies (Absence/Travel/Health)	7%	4%				18%	7%	11%	23%	

60 __decibels

Company Process Before Repossession

2 in 5 defaulted customers did not experience multiple engagement steps before product removal, and those living in rural areas were even less likely to. Nearly three-quarters of customers felt the final outcome was unfair.

There were mixed experiences and memories on whether companies engaged them through phone calls, house visits, or other steps prior to product removal.

This process was less common in rural areas, where only 57% of customers received these steps, compared to 65% in peri-urban areas and 68% in urban areas, highlighting potential communication gaps or differences in processes.

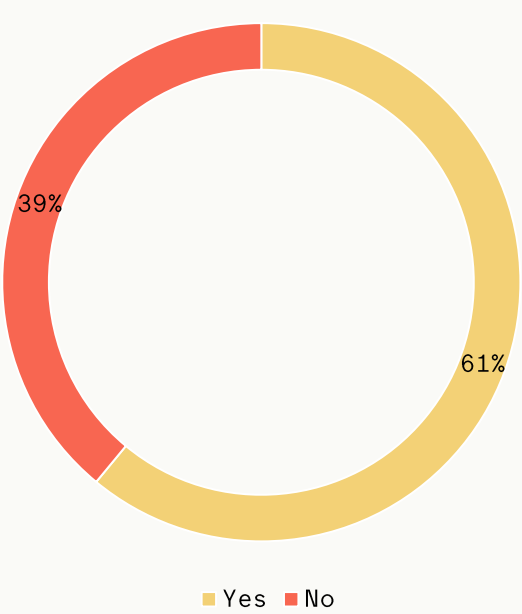
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To tell the truth I did not accept the fact that they had locked [the product] because I was not given a warning that it will be.

Male, 56

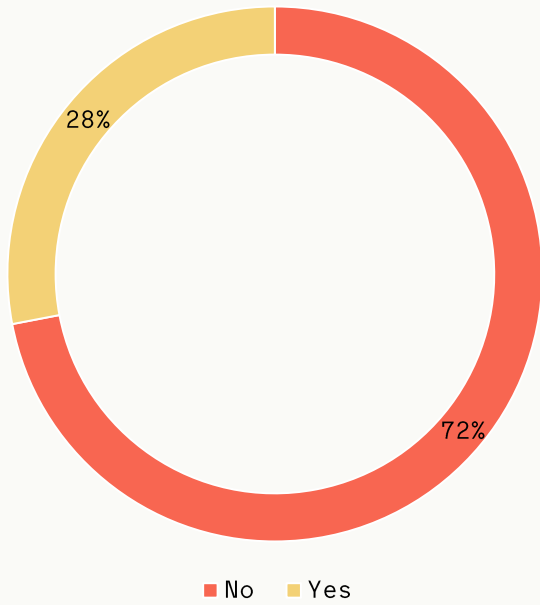
Process Before Product Removal

Q: Were there multiple steps before [product repossession] happened? For example, phone calls and house visits. (n = 1,286)



Customer Perception of the Situation

Q: Do you feel the outcome was fair? (n = 1,288)



Experience with Product Removal

The experience of product removal or loss of access was frequently associated with emotional distress, financial loss, and dissatisfaction with the process.

Many customers said they experienced emotional distress, with rates varying across companies, reaching as high as 57% in some cases.

Dissatisfaction with the process or customer service was also common, reported by 89% of customers at one company.

Many also report financial loss, particularly those who had nearly completed their payments and now have nothing to show for it.

While some customers understood the process, gaps in communication and transparency contributed to negative experiences, highlighting the need for improved customer engagement.

Interestingly, there are no differences here between voluntary and forced repossession. Customers who asked for the product to be taken back still expressed feelings of disappointment, feeling let down by product or service interactions, and experiencing financial loss as some were expecting to be refunded.

Experience with Product Removal

Q: What was your experience of this [locking/repossession] process? (n = 1,290). Open-ended, coded by 60 Decibels.

Company	Overall	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Emotional Distress	31%	44%	23%	37%		57%	26%	43%	51%	
Dissatisfaction with Process/Customer Service	32%		23%	23%	25%	32%		31%	89%	62%
Sense of Financial Loss	12%	21%				29%	28%	27%		
Confusion/Lack of Clarity	14%	63%			14%		45%			
Miscommunication	8%		30%	21%	22%					

60 — decibels



Photo: Kat Harrison

03

Consumer Protection

- > Awareness of Key Contract Terms
- > Ability to Pay
- > Ease of Use (included in Section 04 Experience)

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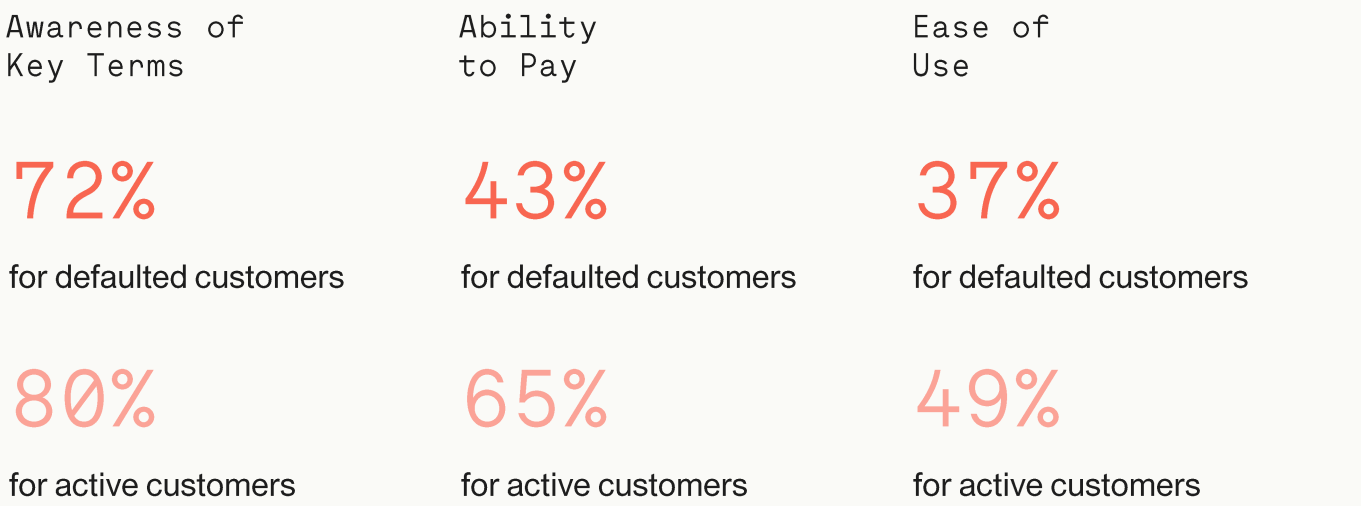
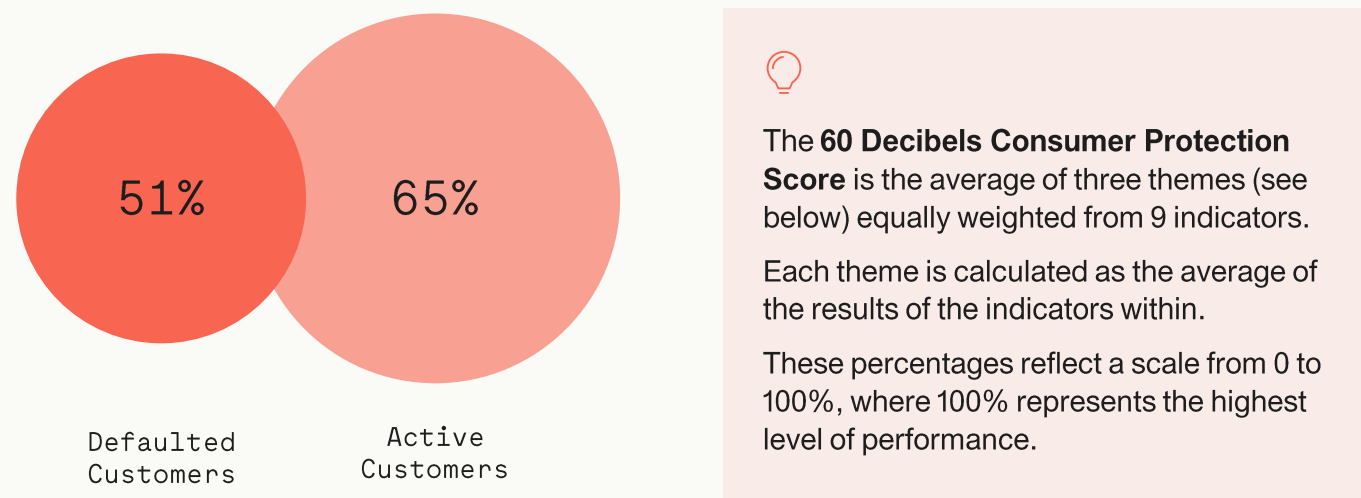
They asked me to sign a contract agreeing that they would keep the product for two weeks to fix it.

However, a month passed without any updates. When I called to follow up on the situation, they started shouting at me and even threatened to sue me because I had agreed to their terms.

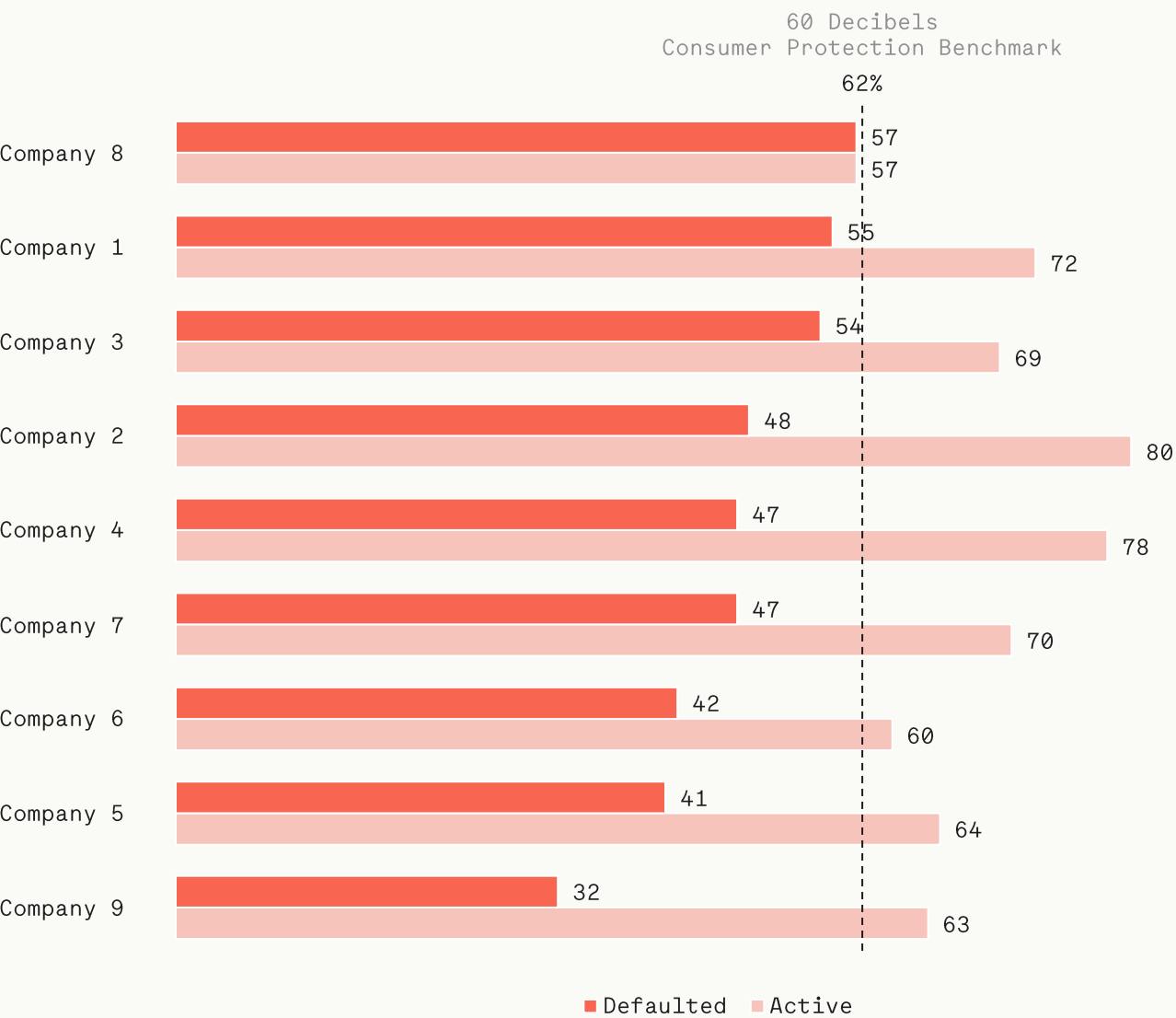
Female, 19

Consumer Protection Score

Defaulted customers’ Consumer Protection experiences are worse than their active counterparts. There is lower awareness of key terms, less ability to pay, and higher challenge rates.



Consumer Protection Score Ranking by Company



“I'm the one that called the agent to come and get the solar system after effortful appeals. It was a terrible experience because I tried reaching out to [company] through their agent to please try and fix or at least replace my solar system with a working product, but my issue was left unresolved only for the company to keep pushing for the payments instead of resolving my issue by providing me with another solar system that actually works.

Female, 37

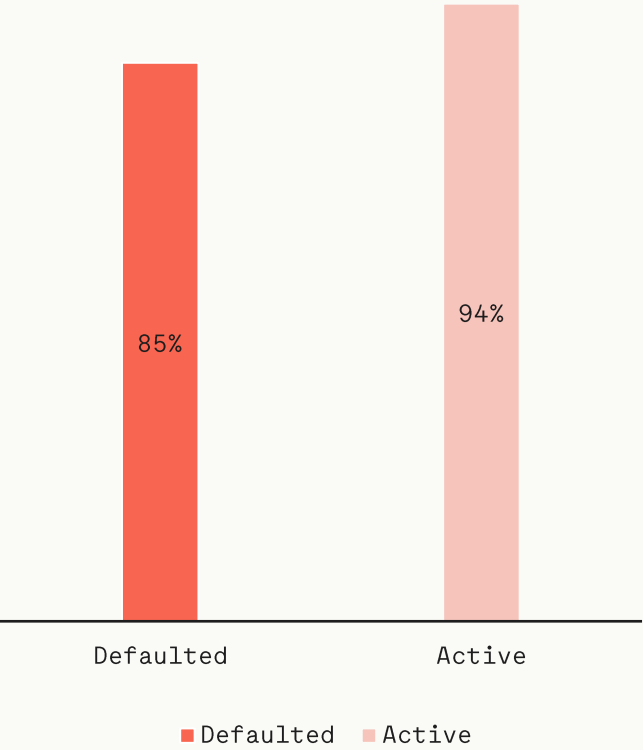
Awareness of Contract Length

Defaulted customers had lower awareness of their contract length compared to active customers. 15% did not know how long the full contract was for at time of purchase.

A key measure of transparency is whether customers know the full length of their contract at the time of purchase. This reflects how effectively a company communicates key information and checks customer understanding.

Rural defaulted customers show the highest lack of contract length awareness, with 18% unaware, compared to 11% in peri-urban, and 13% in urban areas. Education levels may play a role. Rural households are significantly less likely to have a member with upper secondary schooling or higher (60%) compared to peri-urban (84%) and urban households (80%). Another factor could be fewer comprehension checks in rural areas – details on the right.

Awareness of Contract Length
Q: Did you know how long the full contract or sales agreement was for at time of purchase? i.e., entire contract length when you first purchased, not what is remaining now. (n =1,391) % Yes.



Check of Understanding of Key Terms

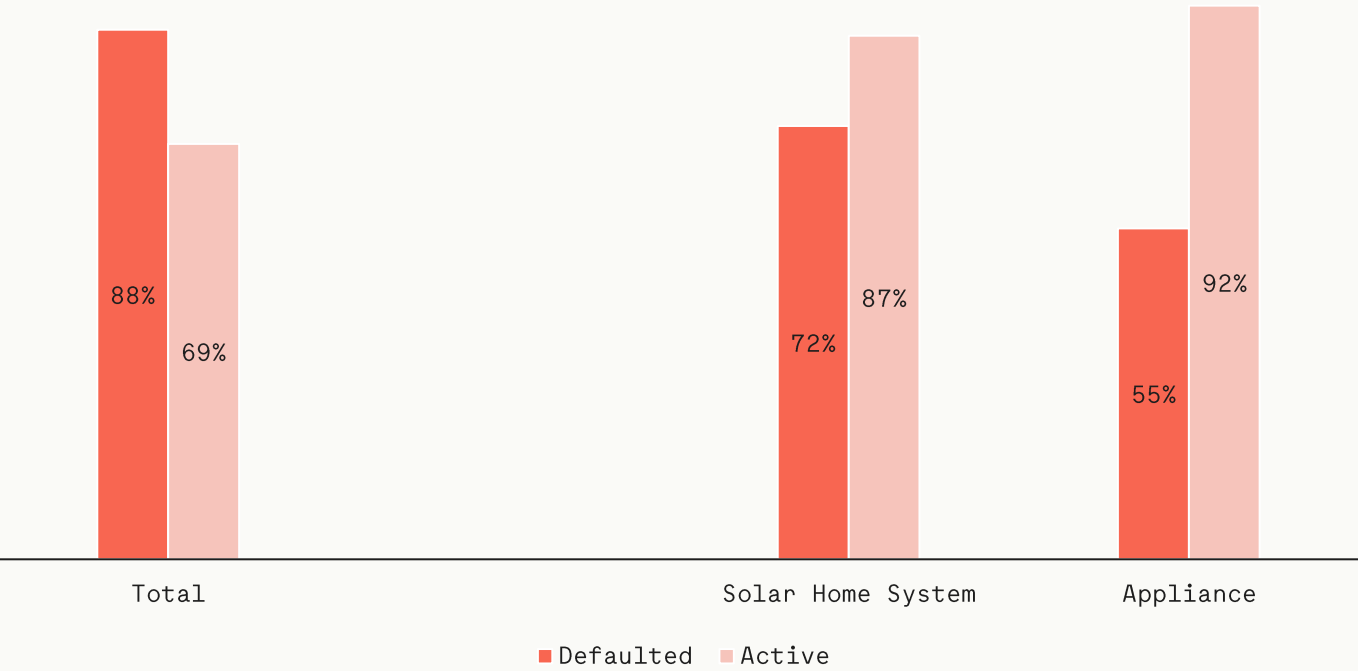
Defaulted customers are less likely to have had—or to recall having had—the company check their understanding of key contract terms and conditions.

This gap is particularly pronounced in the Appliance category, where only 55% of defaulted customers recall a comprehension check compared to 92% of active customers.

Rural customers are the least likely to have received one, with only 64% reporting a check, compared to 73% in peri-urban and 76% in urban areas. This could be related to different processes and/or training across different areas.

Across all products, 69% of defaulted customers report having received a check, versus 80% of active customers.

Check Understanding of Key Terms Check: By Product Category
Q: Did [company] check to ensure you understood the key terms and conditions of the payment plan? This might have been in-person, via a phone call, or through an automated system. (n =1,389) % Yes.



Information on Plan Changes Shared

Defaulted customers are less likely to have received information about potential payment plan changes compared to active customers.

Ensuring customers understand the factors that may change their price or payment plan length is key to preventing financial surprises and promoting informed decision-making, ultimately leading to reduced defaults and better payment behaviour.

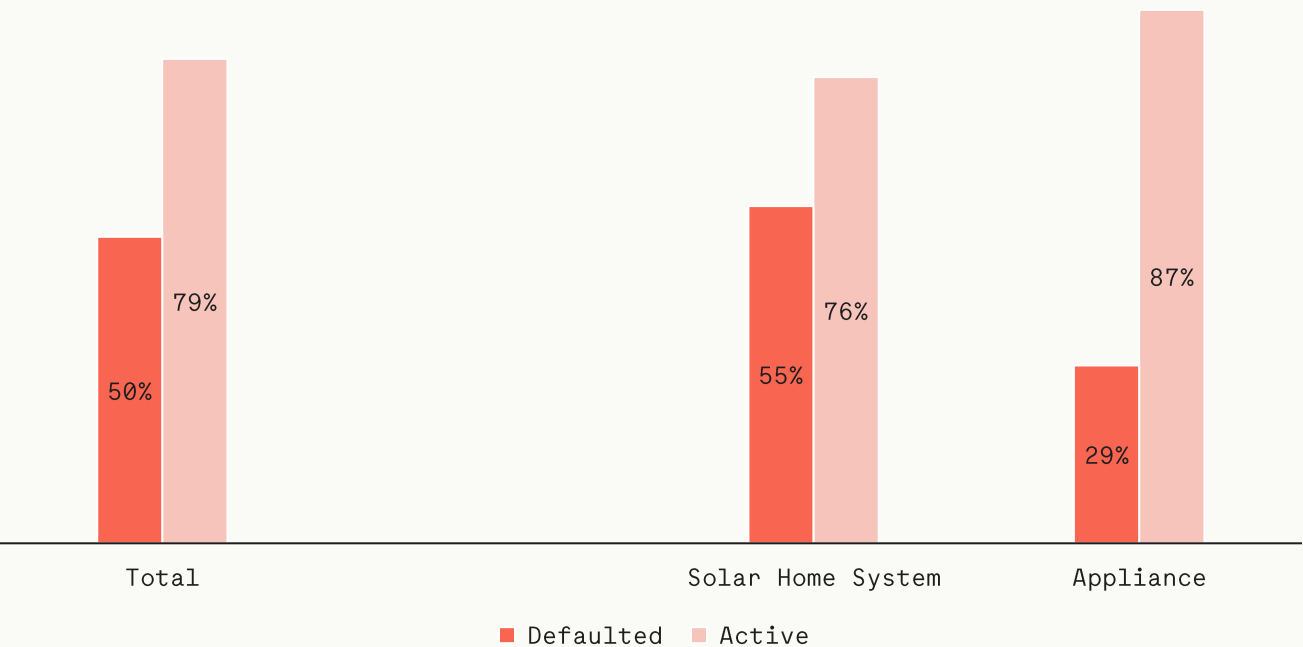
50% of defaulted customers say they were informed of circumstances that could change the price or length of their payment plan compared to 76% of active customers. This suggests that those who are less informed on

their payment terms are more likely to default. This difference is even more marked for Appliance customers.

Defaulted customers in rural areas had least awareness on plan or payment variations (42%) compared to those in peri-urban (56%) and urban regions (61%). Overall, rural customers appear to have had the worst experience, so it is worth companies assessing their last-mile training and processes to ensure everyone gets the same quality experience.

Information on Potential Price or Payment Plan Changes Shared: By Product Category

Q: Did the [agent/sales staff] share with you any circumstances that may result in a change of price of payment plan length? (n=1,390) % Yes.



Awareness of Non-Payment Consequences

There were no significant differences between defaulted and active customers in awareness of what would happen if a customer made no, or late, payments. ~16% were not aware.

Ensuring that all customers are informed about these consequences is crucial for maintaining transparency and helping customers make informed decisions about their finances.

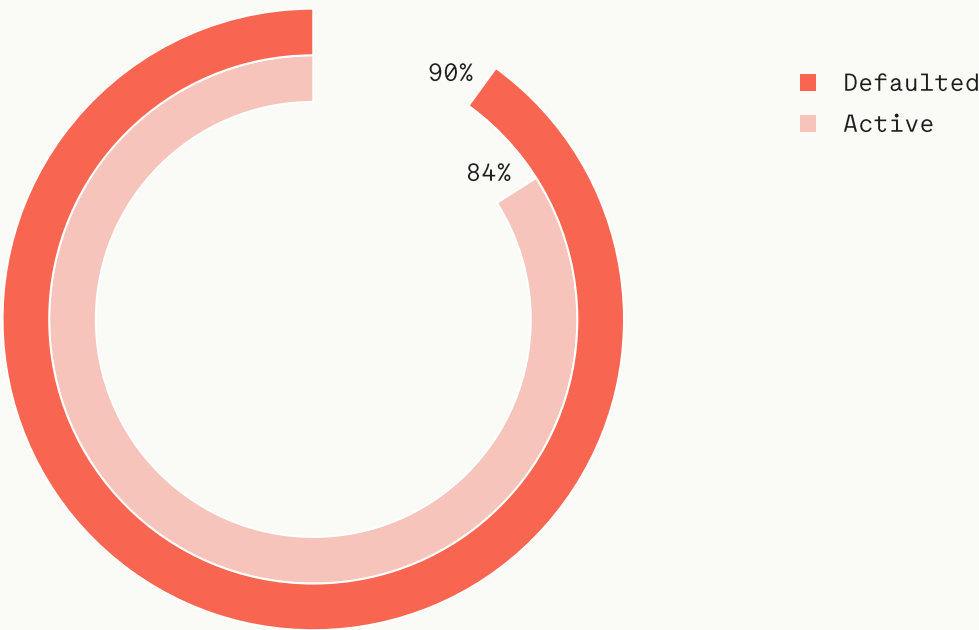
Among defaulted customers, rural respondents show the lowest awareness, with 80% saying they knew the consequences of non-payment, compared to 88% in both peri-urban and urban areas. The lower education levels in rural areas may contribute to weaker financial literacy, making it harder to fully grasp repayment risks. Training and

performance monitoring of sales staff/agents could also help.

Additionally, rural customers were less likely to receive affordability checks (see next page), which may have provided an opportunity to reinforce repayment obligations.

Awareness of Non-Payment Consequences

Q: Did you know what would happen if you made no, or late, payments? (n=1,403) % 'Yes



Understanding of Sales Agreement

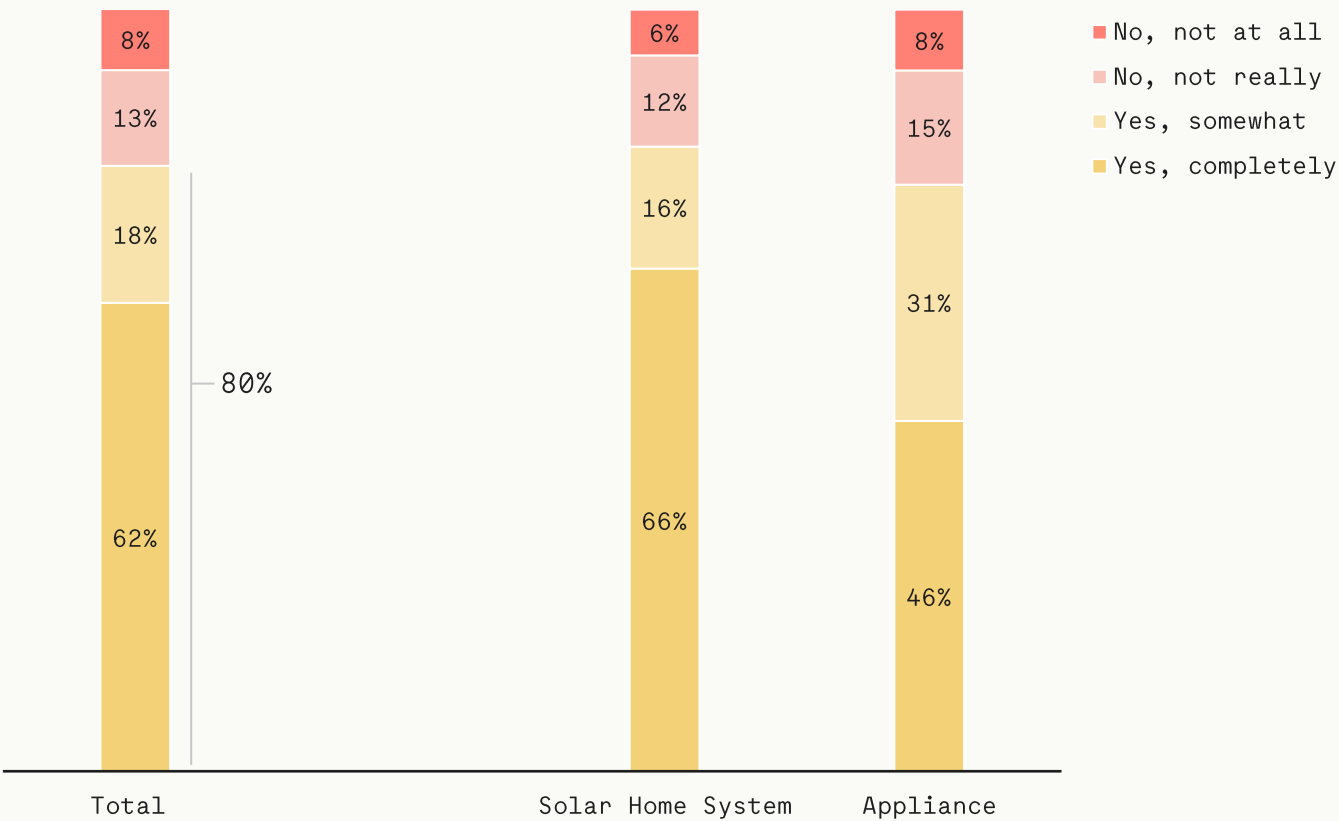
2 in 5 defaulted customers did not completely understand their sales agreement based on the language, complexity, and materials provided.

While 80% of respondents say they completely or partially understood their sales agreements, 8% say they had no understanding at all, and 13% struggled with clarity.

Customers in rural areas are least likely to say they had complete understanding of the sales agreement (55%) compared to those in peri-urban (66%) and urban areas (76%). See discussion on other pages on why rural customers are not experiencing the same outcomes.

Degree of Understanding Sales Agreement from Materials Provided: By Product Category

Q: In terms of communication, did you feel the language, complexity, and any materials provided enabled you to clearly understand the contract or sales agreement? Would you say: ? (n=1,400)



Check of Ability to Pay

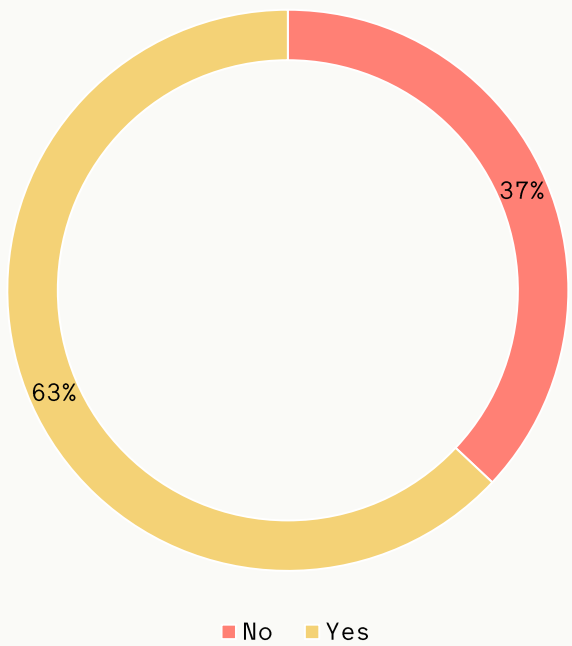
Nearly 2 in 5 customers say the company did not support them to work out their ability to pay for the product during the sign-up process.

Male respondents are more likely to say they did not receive the necessary support (38%) compared to female customers (33%).

Rural customers are the most likely to report a lack of support, with 41% saying they were not assisted, compared to 33% in peri-urban areas and 29% in urban areas.

Company Check of Ability to Pay

Q: During the sign-up process, did [company] support you to work out your ability to pay for the [product]? (n = 1,392)



“I did not make payment for some weeks. I am a businesswoman, and I had some challenges at the time which made it difficult for me to keep up with my payment. I even explained to them why I could not keep up, but they still decided to take it away; saying they had already explained to me what would happen if I did not meet up with my payment.

Female, 40

04

Experience

- > Treatment
- > Impact
- > Customer Challenges
- > Customer Satisfaction

“

I was so surprised to receive calls saying they wanted to come collect my product. It really caught me off guard because I had asked if there was any issue, and the agent told me they wanted to fix it and return it back to me. Up until now, I haven't heard from them again. It's really frustrating not knowing what's going on.

Male, 45

Treatment of Customers

11% of customers believe they were mistreated through the process of locking and/or repossession.

Ensuring professionalism and respectful treatment plus clear communication during customer interactions could improve overall satisfaction.

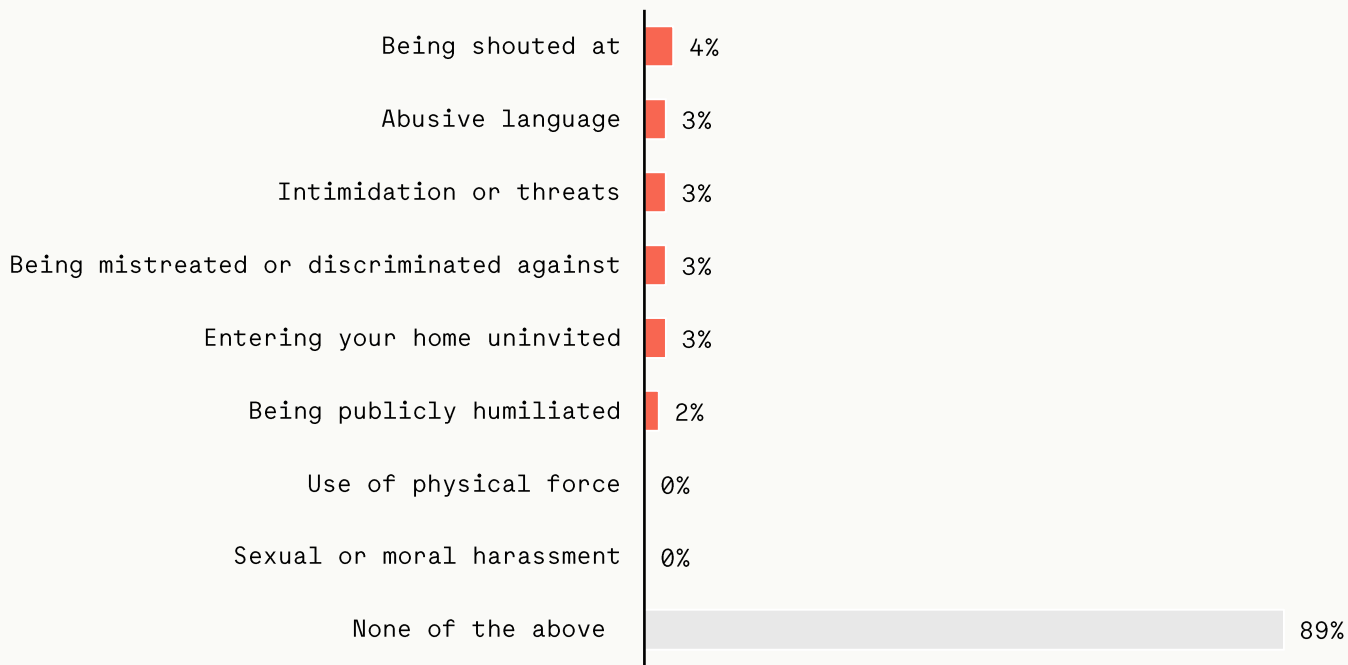
“

When I called to say that [the product] was not charging well, [staff] told me to observe it again carefully. When I reached out to say it was not still charging properly, he fired back rudely and called me ‘dull’. It was at that moment I made a decision to return it to avoid further insults.

Female, 43

Staff Treatment

Q: Have you experienced any of the following from [company] staff or sales agents? (n = 1,403)



Repayment Burden

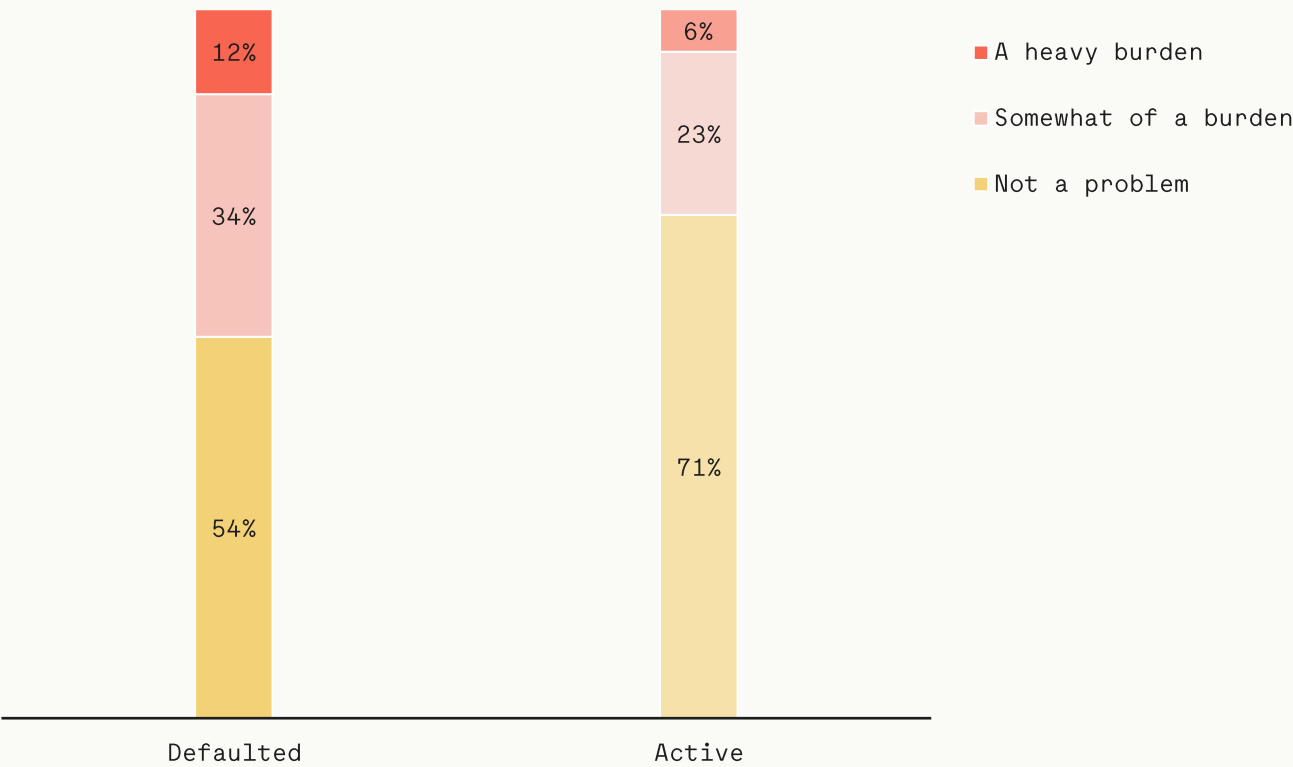
Payment burden was significantly higher for defaulted customers compared to active ones.

Repayment strain is a reality for a significant portion of customers.

46% of defaulted customers say their payments were a burden compared to 29% of active customers. And it's a significant burden for twice as many defaulted customers as active.

Payment Burden

Q: Thinking about your household's repayments for this [product], were they: (n = 1,402)



Financial Strain

Defaulted customers were more likely than active customers to cut back on household food consumption—a sign of financial distress—to initially keep up with repayments.

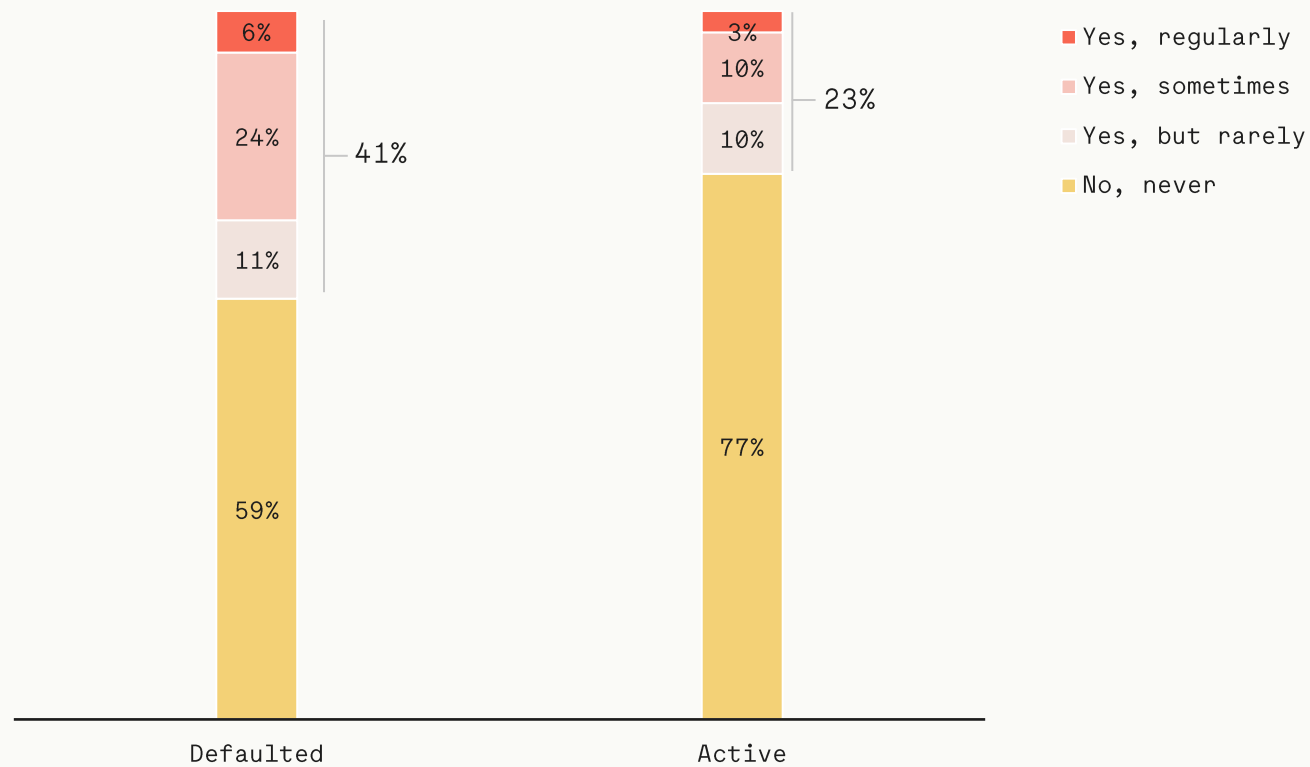
Some customers having to reduce household food consumption highlights potential gaps in affordability assessments, which may not fully capture the financial trade-offs made to keep up with payments.

41% of defaulted customers reported cutting back on household consumption to meet repayment obligations at some point, with 6% doing so regularly and 24% sometimes. This indicates that for a significant portion of customers, repayment impacts daily financial decisions and health.

The higher incidence of reduced consumption among defaulted customers compared to active customers suggests greater financial strain within this group.

Household Consumption vs Repayments

Q: Did you have to cut back on household food consumption anywhere to make repayments for this product where you didn't have to before? Would you say: (n = 1,403)



Product-Related Challenges

More than half of defaulted customers experienced challenges with their product, with many experiencing no resolution before access was removed.

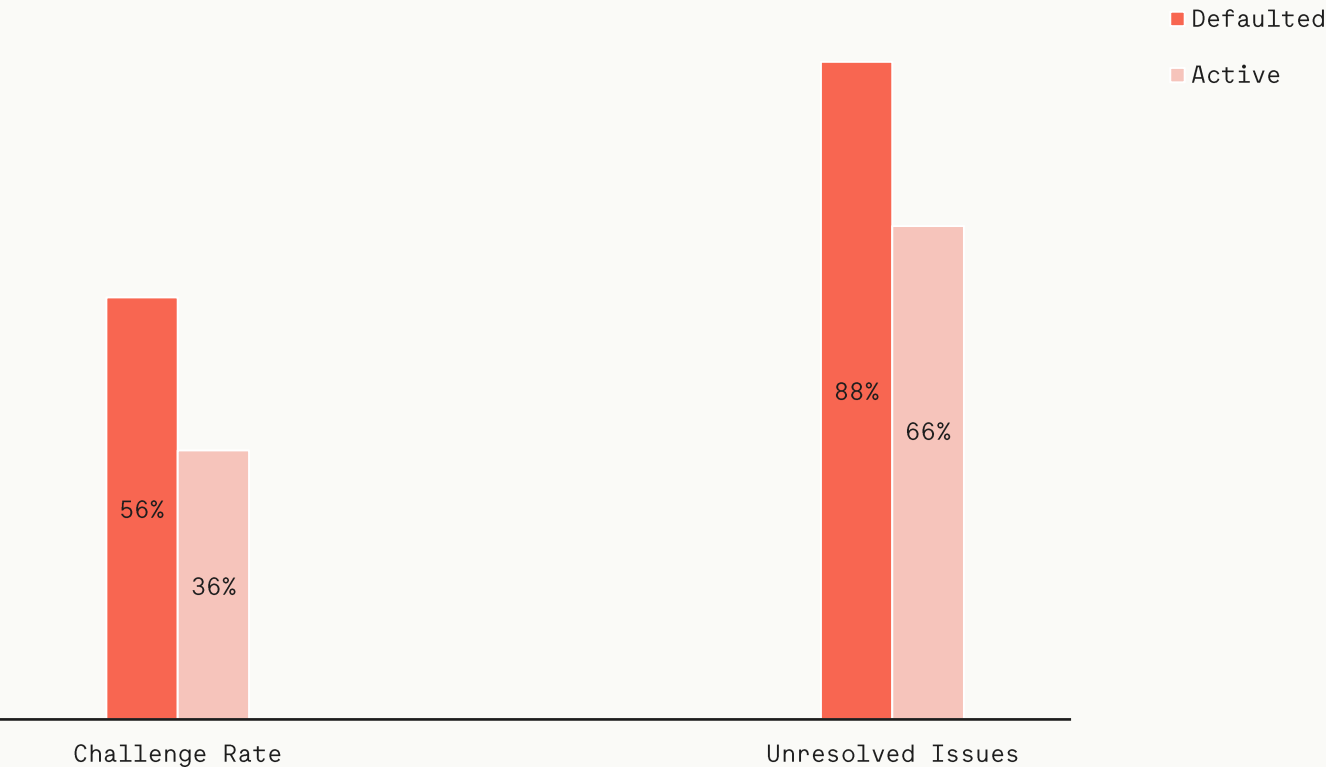
Product-related challenges was one of the top reasons customers said they defaulted on payments, highlighting the link between usability issues and payment difficulties or willingness.

56% of defaulted customers say they faced challenges using the product, unrelated to payment issues. 88% of those who experienced issues say their challenge remained unresolved before the product was locked or repossessed, highlighting gaps in customer support and product reliability.

70% of customers who did not experience challenges using their energy product or service say that their payments are 'not a problem', compared to 42% of those who faced challenges.

Customer Challenge Rate & Issue Resolution

Q: Did you experience any challenges using the [product] itself— not related to any payment-related issues? (n = 1,403)



Ease of Following Payment Procedures

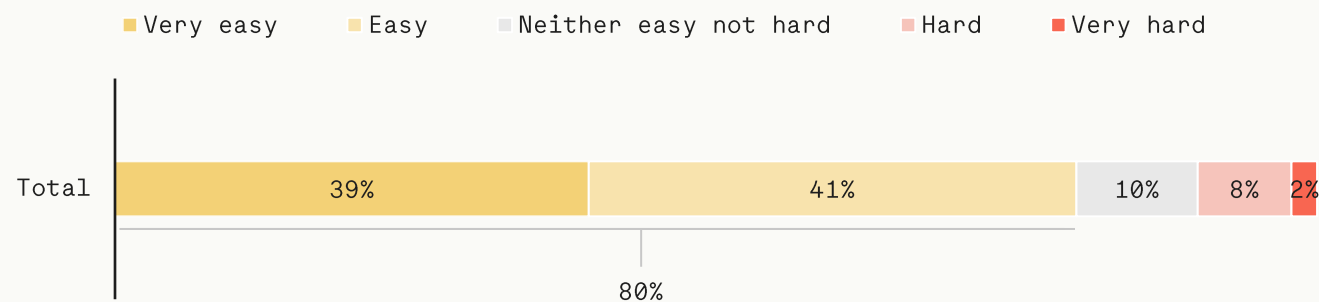
4 in 5 customers found payment procedures easy, but some struggled.

10% found the payment procedures hard or very hard to follow.

7% of defaulted customers said one of the reasons they defaulted on payments was related to payment procedure issues.

Ease of Following Payment Procedures

Q: How hard or easy were the payment procedures to follow? Would you say: (n = 1,398)



Customer Satisfaction

Defaulted customers are unsurprisingly less satisfied than their active customer peers and customers in the 60 Decibels Energy Benchmark.

The Net Promoter Score® is a gauge of customer satisfaction and loyalty. A score above 50 is considered good, a negative score is poor.

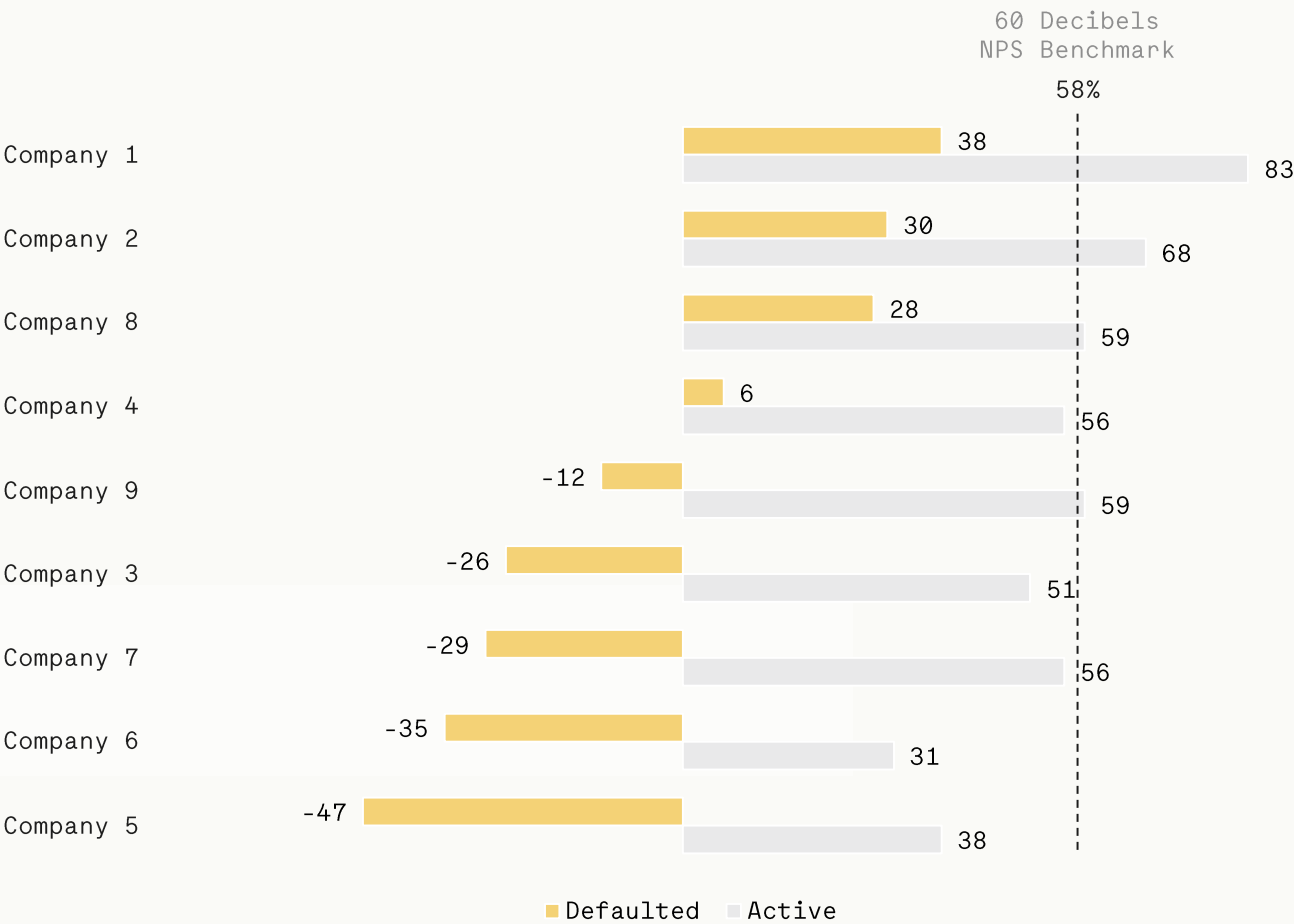
The average NPS for defaulted customers is -3, for active customers of the same companies, it's 59.

The widespread negative NPS results for defaulted customers are not wholly surprising, but importantly, 38% of customers are Detractors – they may actively negatively talk about the company, the product/service, and their experience to their network which could have a detrimental effect on future sales and uptake.

The next pages explore correlations to customer satisfaction and other indicators.

Net Promoter Score® by Company

Q: On a scale of 0-10, how likely is it that you would recommend the [company] [product/service] to a friend or family member, where 0 is not at all likely and 10 is extremely likely? (n = 1,403)

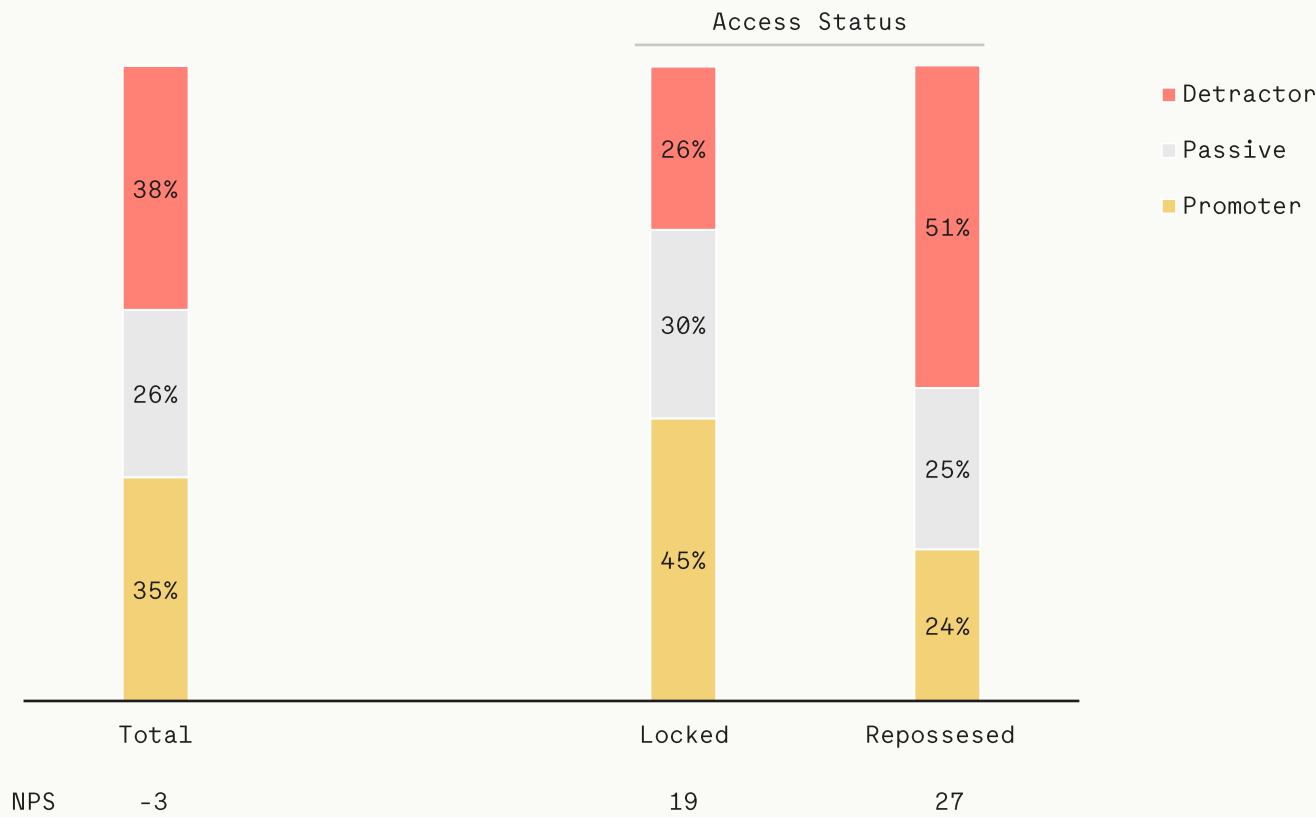


Customer Satisfaction:
by Access Status

Customers whose products have been repossessed are much more likely to be dissatisfied than those who have only had them locked.

This trend may be due to experience of repossession and communication around this. It may also be because those with locked systems in their possession have some hope or plans to reinstate their access.

Net Promoter Score® by Access Status



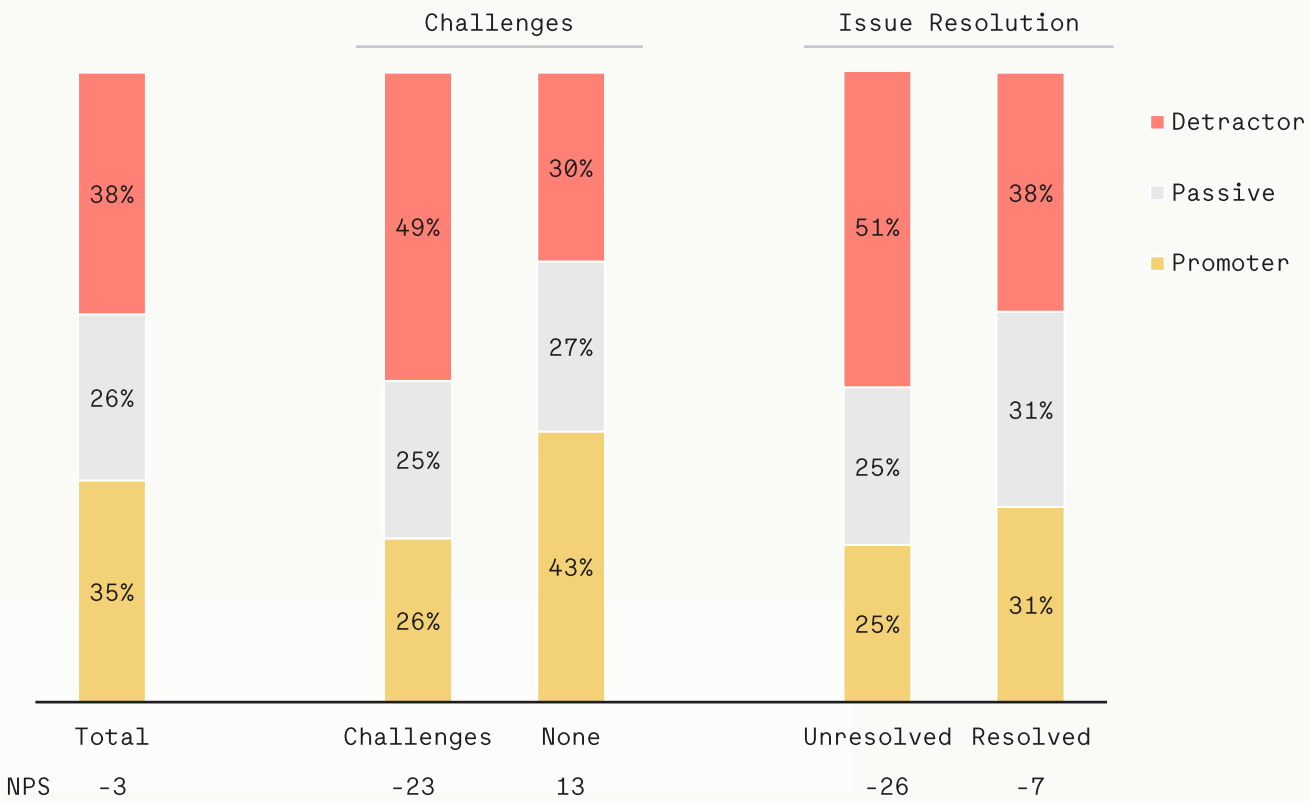
Customer Satisfaction: by Challenge Rate

As we see across all our work in Energy at 60 Decibels, customer challenges and issue resolution significantly impact customer satisfaction.

The NPS for customers who encountered product-related challenges is significantly lower (-23) than those who faced no challenges (13).

Customers whose issues were resolved before their product was locked or repossessed gave a higher satisfaction rating than those whose issues remained unresolved; so even after repossession, issue resolution plays a part in customer satisfaction.

Net Promoter Score® by Challenges



05

Wrap Up

“

This wasn't what I had planned, but I had no choice than to give it back. Three months after using the solar system, the financial burden started increasing. Given the financial emergencies at home that required my immediate attention, paying for the solar system became a strain, so I decided to return it.

Male, 31

Conclusion

The findings of this report reveal that while defaulted customers often regain access to modern energy through alternative means, their overall experience is marked by financial distress, emotional strain, and dissatisfaction with company processes. A significant number of defaulted customers struggle with high payment burdens, unresolved product issues, and limited comprehension of their financial commitments. Many feel that repossession processes are unfair, and some report instances of mistreatment. These factors not only contribute to negative customer sentiment but also have broader implications for company reputation and future customer acquisition.

Importantly, the research suggests that default is not necessarily driven by a lack of financial awareness or an unwillingness to pay, but rather by external financial shocks, product challenges, and inadequate customer support. Addressing these underlying issues presents an opportunity for companies to reduce default rates while improving customer trust and retention. A proactive approach to affordability, communication, and service quality could strengthen long-term relationships between customers and off-grid energy providers.

Here are some ideas for action:

1

Strengthen customer onboarding and financial literacy support

Many defaulted customers did not fully understand their sales agreements or repayment terms. It would be valuable for companies to review existing processes and training, and actively implement standardised comprehension checks for all customers, ensuring they—and the staff/agents explaining the terms to them—fully understand key financial obligations and non-payment consequences. This is especially critical for rural customers and Appliance users, who reported lower awareness. Simplified, plain-language contracts and multilingual support can further enhance clarity and accessibility.

2

Refine repossession processes and improve customer interactions

The repossession process was widely viewed as unfair, with 2 in 5 customers reporting that they did not receive adequate engagement before losing access. Companies may wish to review current policies and work to standardise multi-step engagement procedures—and training of key sales staff, plus monitoring that these steps are taken—to ensure customers are provided with multiple opportunities to resolve their payment issues before repossession. Rural customers, who face higher engagement gaps, may require adapted outreach strategies to ensure equitable experience. Additionally, strengthening training and oversight of repossession staff is critical to eliminating reports of intimidation, discrimination, and other forms of mistreatment.

3

Improve affordability measures and payment flexibility

A major driver of default is financial distress, often caused by unexpected income fluctuations. Companies could consider temporary relief periods (payment holidays), flexible repayment plans, and tailored restructuring options to support customers facing short-term financial hardships. Providing advance notifications of price or payment plan changes—alongside clear payment status information for customers—will also help customers better plan their finances and avoid default.

4

Enhance product reliability and after-sales support

A significant number of defaulted customers cited product issues as a contributing factor. Ensuring robust technical support and faster issue resolution—especially for customers in remote areas—can reduce frustration and improve repayment rates—particularly for productive users who rely on the income generated through the product use to make the payments. Proactive product performance monitoring and customer follow-ups can help identify potential challenges before they lead to non-payment.

5

Develop responsible post-default recovery pathways

While some defaulted customers find alternative energy solutions, others struggle financially and remain dissatisfied with their experience. Companies could explore structured re-engagement options, such as modified repayment plans for lower spec products, product trade-in programs, or transition pathways to lower-cost energy solutions. For the sector, monitoring long-term customer outcomes post-default will also provide valuable insights into how repossession affects financial stability and energy access, informing future consumer protection strategies.

Further Reading

You may find the following two related reports helpful for understanding the Consumer Protection experience of active customers—there are plenty of opportunities to improve for this group too.

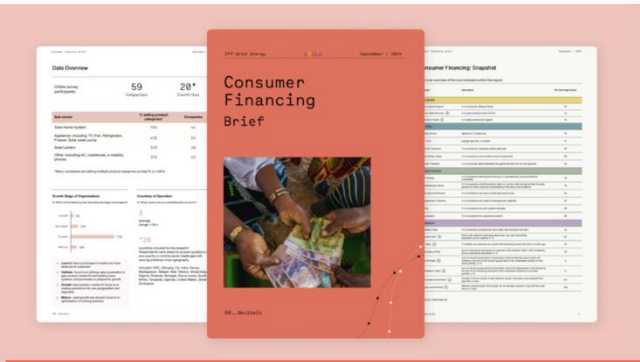


Consumer Protection Report

In this report in partnership with GOGLA, we examine data and analysis on our Consumer Protection Score collected from talking to 12k+ customers of 40+ companies offering solar energy solutions: Solar Home Systems, Solar Lanterns, and Appliances. Our goal is to provide insights and actionable recommendations for improving Consumer Protection practices to enhance customer experience and ensure consumer rights are protected.

See More

And our Consumer Financing Brief which outlines the difference models and practices that energy companies employ.



Consumer Financing Brief

This Brief provides a summary of consumer financing models and practices within the off-grid energy sector. In collaboration with GOGLA and with funding from the Consumer Protection Programme, 60 Decibels designed and distributed an online survey targeting off-grid energy companies that offer consumer financing. We want to deliver valuable insights to the industry by providing insights on key practices. The insights are based on data from 59 participating companies.

See More



Photo: Kat Harrison

I couldn't continue paying for something I couldn't use.

It was helpful for my business, but the payments were a struggle.

About 60 Decibels

60 Decibels is a global, tech-country and data-driven impact measurement company that brings speed and repeatability to social impact measurement and customer insights. We provide benchmarks of impact performance, enabling organizations to understand impact relative to peers and set performance targets. We have a network of 1,200+ researchers in 90+ countries and have worked with more than 1,000 of the world's leading impact investors, companies, foundations, corporations, NGOs, and public sector organizations. 60 Decibels makes it easy to listen to the people who matter most.

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It wouldn't charge properly,
even in the sun,
so I asked them to
take it back.