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Economy

Clock watching

23 January 2026

Key takeaways

- The pandemic ushered in significant economic changes. Working from home went from being a fringe activity to the norm for many. At the same time, the upward trend in online spending accelerated.
- How have these changes impacted the pattern of spending throughout the day? Using Bank of America internal data we find a tendency towards fewer transactions being made in the afternoon. And there is a slight rise in retail transactions made over the working week versus the weekend. So perhaps greater flexibility in daily routines means consumers are carving out some shopping time in the mornings.
- Around lunchtime, it appears that people are substituting buying lunch out with grabbing something from the grocery store. While these trends are fairly subtle, there is little doubt the consumer landscape will continue to evolve.

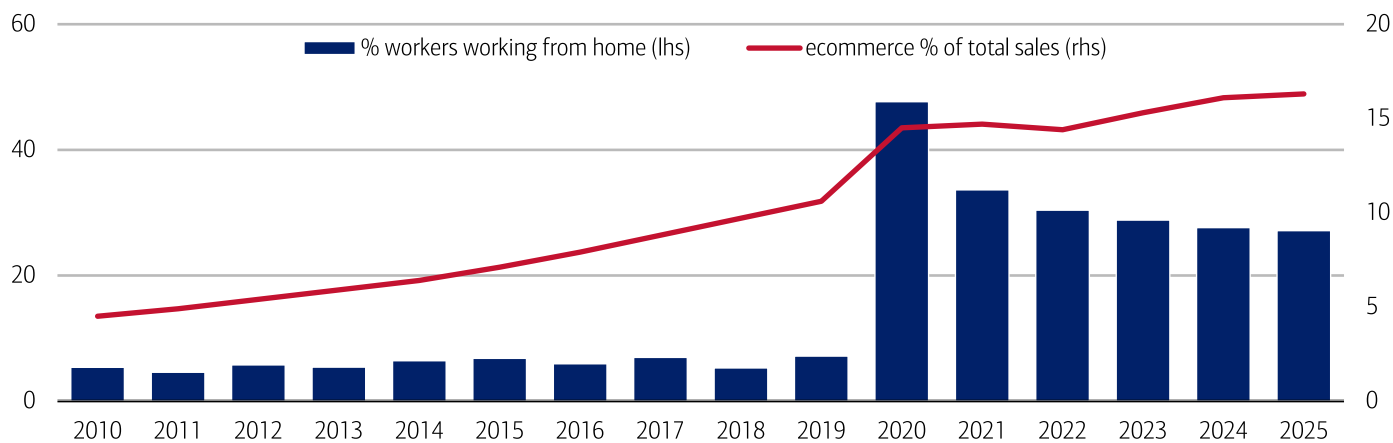
The pandemic changed the economic landscape

The COVID-19 pandemic produced and accelerated several changes in how the economy functions. One of the most striking was the sharp increase in people working from home (WFH) (Exhibit 1). Previously limited to only a small segment of workers, this practice rose to nearly half at the peak. Additionally, consumer spending online increased greatly compared to in-person – having already started to rise before the pandemic.

And today, both trends have persisted. While WFH has receded from its 2020 peak, when social distancing and shelter in place mandates were prevalent, around 27% of full-time workers worked at home in 2025 – much higher than the 7% in 2019. And, the share of retail sales online continues to rise, standing around 16% in 2025.

Exhibit 1: The pandemic saw a huge shift in WFH and exacerbated the trend towards online retail

The percentage of full-time workers' workdays spent working from home (left-hand side (lhs), annual, %) and e-commerce retail sales as a % of total retail sales (right-hand side (rhs), annual, %)



Source: Barrero, Jose Maria, Nicholas Bloom, and Steven J. Davis, 2021. "Why working from home will stick," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 28731; Census Bureau (2025 figure is average of available quarters)

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When are people doing their shopping?

Given the shift to more remote work and an uptick in online spending, an interesting question is whether there have been changes to when people do their in-person shopping during the day. For example, has WFH facilitated a more even distribution of in-person spending given the greater ease for people to run to the store?

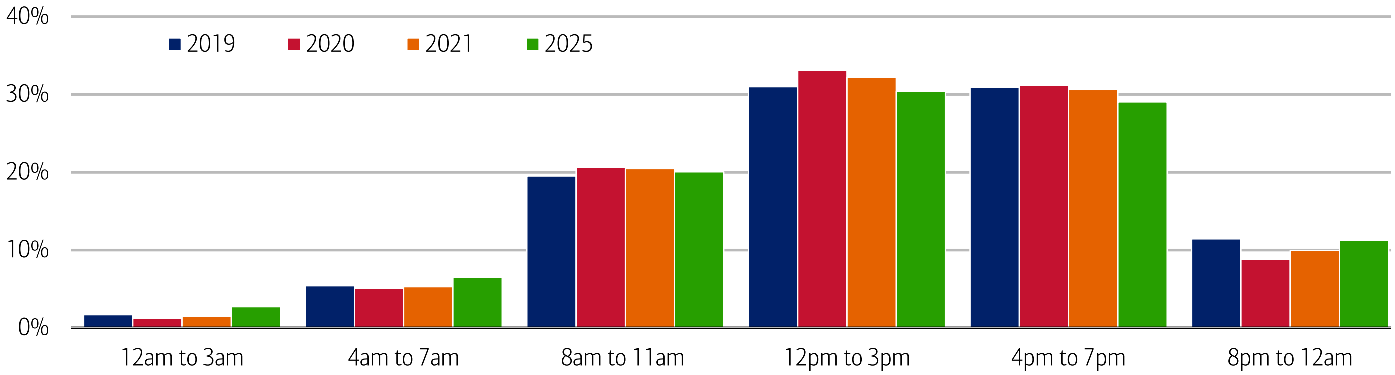
Here we look at in-person debit card transactions using “time-stamped” Bank of America internal data to identify changes in the times of day that people shop.

More overall spending was done in the morning in 2025 than in 2019

First, looking at debit card transactions across all categories of in-person spending, most spending is done during daytime hours, particularly from 8am to 7pm (Exhibit 2). During the peak pandemic years (2020/21) the share of these transactions made in the afternoon (12pm to 7pm) was higher than in 2019. However, by 2025, this trend had reversed and the share of transactions between 12pm and 7pm was lower than in 2019. Conversely, more transactions were made in the morning (4am to 11am) in 2025 than in 2019 and the pandemic years.

Exhibit 2: In 2025, the share of transactions made in the morning was higher than in 2019, 2020 and 2021

The share of in-person total debit card transactions by time of day (%, annual average)



Source: Bank of America internal data

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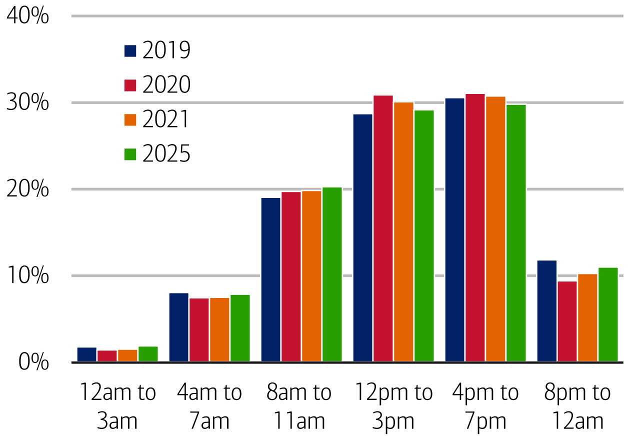
What’s behind these changes? We dig into the data by category of spending and by weekdays versus weekends.

Exhibit 3: Around 30% of retail transactions were made in the morning in 2025 during weekdays....

The share of in-person debit card transactions on non-food retail categories (excluding groceries and food services and drink) by time of day during weekdays (%, annual average of weekdays)



Source: Bank of America internal data

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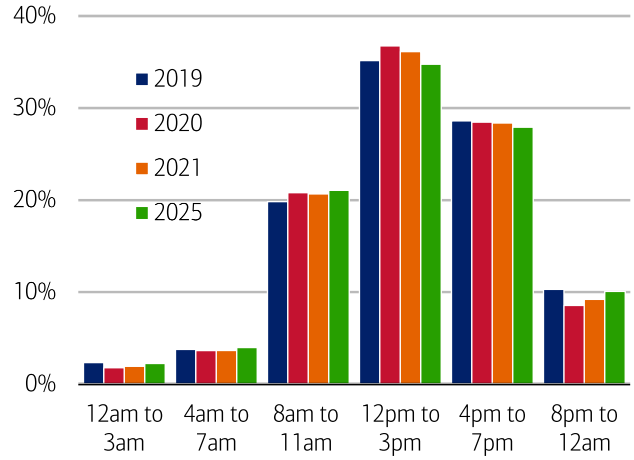
Exhibit 4: ...and a similar 30% of retail transactions were made in the morning in 2025 during weekends

The share of in-person debit card transactions on non-food retail categories (excluding groceries and food services and drink) by time of day during weekdays (%, annual average of weekends)



Source: Bank of America internal data

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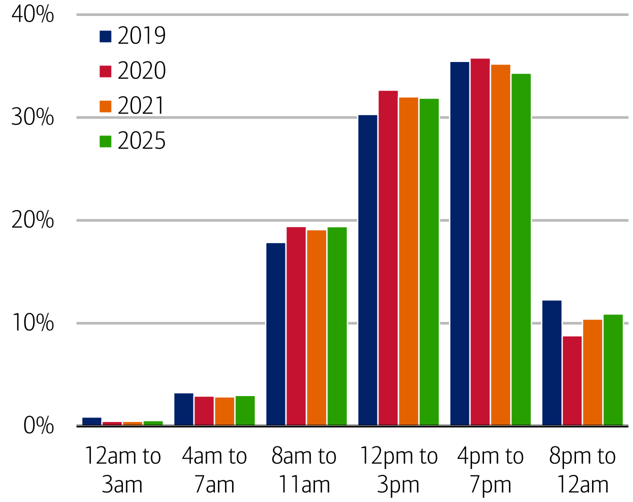
When we examine non-food retail transactions (excluding groceries and food services/drink), we see fairly similar behavioral changes across weekdays and weekends (Exhibit 3 and Exhibit 4). Notably, on both weekdays and weekends, a slightly larger share of retail transactions took place in the morning in 2025 compared with 2019-2021. This suggests that shifts in spending time are not limited to food purchases. Instead, greater flexibility in daily routines – and perhaps not being restricted to on-site work – may be allowing consumers to fit in some occasional morning shopping, while school runs and deadlines may make this harder later in the day.

Is the grocery store becoming a substitute for restaurants at lunchtimes?

When we look at transactions for groceries, it seems people may still be making the most of WFH flexibility to shop for food over the lunchtime (12pm to 3pm) hours – as the share of transactions here is above 2019 levels (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5: For groceries, the share of transactions made during the time period 12pm to 3pm was up in 2025 from 2019…
The share of in-person debit card transactions on groceries by time of day during weekdays (%, annual average of weekdays)



Source: Bank of America internal data

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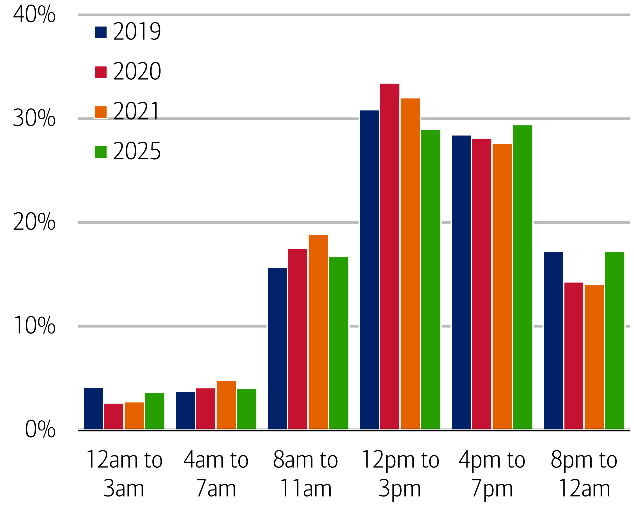
Exhibit 6: …while for food services, the share of transactions made during the lunchtime period in 2025 was notably lower
The share of in-person debit card transactions on food services and drink by time of day during weekdays (%, annual average of weekdays)



Source: Bank of America internal data

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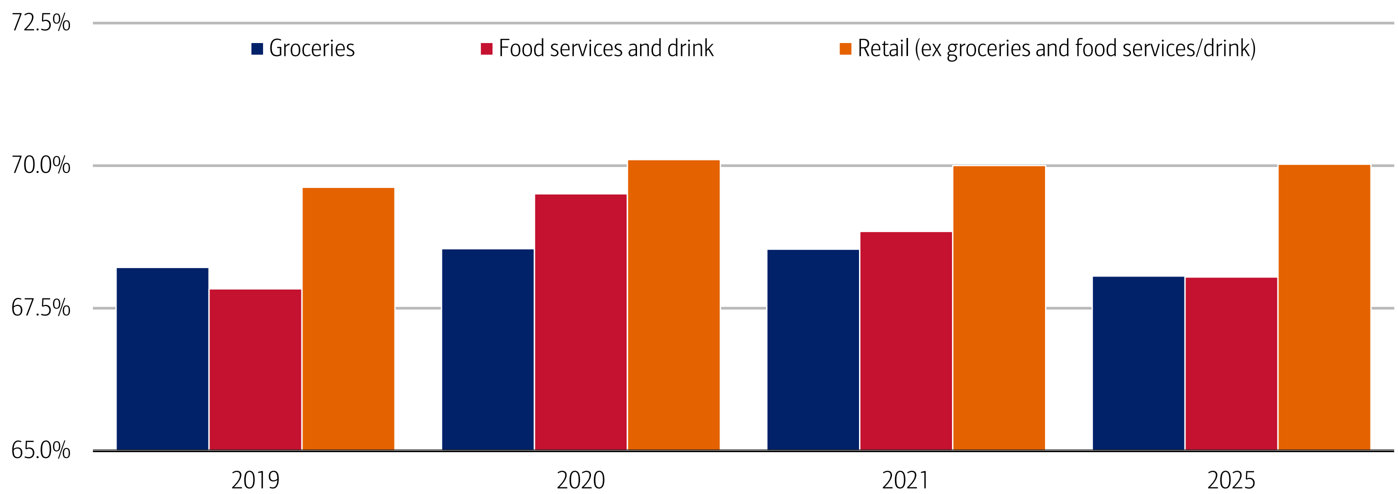
The *quid pro quo* is that the share of transactions on food services and drink (restaurants, coffee shops and bars) over the lunchtime period was down in 2025 compared to 2019 levels. Perhaps, the prevalence of working from home means that "doing lunch" is harder to organize these days, given people are often away from the office at different times, meaning the grocery store is benefiting from higher footfall at the expense of restaurants (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 7: There is little change in the share of transactions made over the week as opposed to weekends, though there was some increase in non-food retail spending during the weekday
Share of debit card transactions by category made over weekdays (%, annual)



Source: Bank of America internal data

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One thing that hasn't changed much despite the big shifts in working from home and the rise in online spending is the split between in-person spending done during the week versus the weekend (Exhibit 7). Most spending – over two-thirds – is done during the week, even though the average spend per day is higher at the weekend. At the margin, though, it does appear that consumers had a little more appetite for non-food retail spending during the week versus the weekend in 2025.

Small changes could add up to larger challenges

Structural changes in the economy like WFH and online shopping are likely not the only reasons for changing consumer behavior. For example, the price of food away from home has risen faster than for food at home since 2019, according to the Consumer Price Index from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Many of the changes we observed in spending patterns are subtle, but we can likely expect them to continue: the rise in online retail spending continues and new possibilities are arising from the use of AI in both how people buy and how stores sell. So, retailers and policymakers will likely need to be responsive to changing consumer patterns and preferences, particularly if we are to keep our downtowns and city centers flourishing.

Methodology

Selected Bank of America transaction data is used to inform the macroeconomic views expressed in this report and should be considered in the context of other economic indicators and publicly available information. In certain instances, the data may provide directional and/or predictive value. The data used is not comprehensive; it is based on **aggregated and anonymized** selections of Bank of America data and may reflect a degree of selection bias and limitations on the data available.

Any payments data represents aggregated spend from US Retail, Preferred, Small Business and Wealth Management clients with a deposit account or credit card. Aggregated spend include total credit card, debit card, ACH, wires, bill pay, business/peer-to-peer, cash, and checks.

Any **Small Business** payments data represents aggregate spend from Small Business clients with a deposit account or a Small Business credit card. Payroll payments data include channels such as ACH (automated clearing house), bill pay, checks and wire. Bank of America per Small Business client data represents activity spending from active Small Business clients with a deposit account or a Small Business credit card and at least one transaction in each month. Small businesses in this report include business clients within Bank of America and generally defined as under $5mm in annual sales revenue.

Unless otherwise stated, data is not adjusted for seasonality, processing days or portfolio changes, and may be subject to periodic revisions.

The differences between the total and per household card spending growth rate (if discussed) can be explained by the following reasons:

1. Overall total card spending growth is partially boosted by the growth in the number of active cardholders in our sample. This could be due to an increasing customer base or inactive customers using their cards more frequently.

2. Per household card spending growth only looks at households that complete at least five transactions with Bank of America cards in the month. Per household spending growth isolates impacts from a changing sample size, which could be unrelated to underlying economic momentum, and potential spending volatility from less active users.

3. Overall total card spending includes small business card spending while per household card spending does not.

4. Differences due to using processing dates (total card spending) versus transaction date (per household card spending).

5. Other differences including household formations due to young adults moving in and out of their parent's houses during COVID.

Any household consumer deposit data based on Bank of America internal data is derived by anonymizing and aggregating data from Bank of America consumer deposit accounts in the US and analyzing that data at a highly aggregated level. Whenever median household savings and checking balances are quoted, the data is based on a fixed cohort of households that had a consumer deposit account (checking and/or savings account) for all months from January 2019 through the most current month of data shown.

Bank of America aggregated credit/debit card spending per household includes spending from active US households only. Only consumer card holders making a minimum of five transactions a month are included in the dataset. Spending from corporate cards are excluded. Data regarding merchants who receive payments are identified and classified by the Merchant Categorization Code (MCC) defined by financial services companies. The data are mapped using proprietary methods from the MCCs to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), which is also used by the Census Bureau, in order to classify spending data by subsector. Spending data may also be classified by other proprietary methods not using MCCs.

We consider a measure of services necessity spending that includes but is not limited to childcare, rent, insurance, insurance, public transportation, and tax payments. Discretionary services includes but is not limited to charitable donations, leisure travel, entertainment, and professional/consumer services. Holiday spending is defined as items in which spending in the November-December period is usually at least 20% of total annual spending on the category.

Durables spending is defined as spending on electronics, building materials, auto and furniture. Premium durables spending is based on a selection of retailers who are judged to sell relatively higher value products. Conversely, value durables spending is based on a selection of retailers who are judged to sell relatively lower value products.

Lower, middle and higher household income cuts in Bank of America credit and debit card spending per household, and consumer deposit account data are based on quantitative estimates of each households' income. These quantitative estimates are bucketed according to terciles, with a third of households placed in each tercile periodically. The lowest tercile represents 'lower income', the middle tercile represents 'middle income' and the highest tercile 'higher income'. The income thresholds between these terciles will move over time, reflecting any number of factors that impact income, including general wage inflation, changes in social security payments and individual households' income. The income and tercile in which a household is categorised are periodically re-assessed.

Major grocery categories include sugar and sweets, juices and other non-alcoholic beverages, bakery products, processed fruits and vegetables, fresh fruit and vegetables, coffee and tea, fats and oils, milk, cereal and cereal products, other, cheese, and meats, poultry and fish, Other includes soups, snacks, frozen and freeze-dried prepared foods, and spices, seasonings, and condiments.

Generations, if discussed, are defined as follows:

1. Gen Z, born after 1995
2. Younger Millennials: born between 1989-1995
3. Older Millennials: born between 1978-1988
4. Gen Xers: born between 1965-1977
5. Baby Boomer: 1946-1964
6. Traditionalists: pre-1946

Any reference to card spending per household on gasoline includes all purchases at gasoline stations and might include purchases of non-gas items.

In-person debit transactions utilized to analyze time-of-day spending considers debit card transactions where a personal identification number is input to complete the transaction.

Additional information about the methodology used to aggregate the data is available upon request

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Disclosures

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