

State of the CISO

2026 Benchmark Snapshot Report



Executive Summary

The cybersecurity function continues to rise in prominence, expand in scope and gain visibility. Consequently, CISOs are increasingly expected to serve not just as technical leaders, but as enterprise-wide strategists. Their rise to the executive ranks brings greater influence but also greater demands, including wider accountability, more cross-functional engagement, and intensified expectations and oversight from senior leadership and boards.

This report offers a deep dive into the current state of the CISO role, covering its position within the organizational hierarchy, reporting relationships, functional responsibilities and collaboration with senior leadership. Additionally, it traces the CISO career journey from prior cross-sector experience to future CISO roles and post-CISO career ambitions.

For this research, IANS and Artico Search conducted their sixth annual CISO Compensation and Budget Research Study. Data collection for this research took place from April to November 2025. To date, we have gathered data from 662 CISOs.

The data and insights in this report allow CISOs to benchmark their own role against their peers, advocate for the right level of authority, strengthen organizational relationships and chart their future career path.

Key findings

Executive CISO titles and leveling dominate across all company sizes

Over the past five years, the CISO role has steadily elevated in seniority. For the first time, executive-level CISO titles and leveling now account for a larger share of the market than VP- or director-leveling and titles.

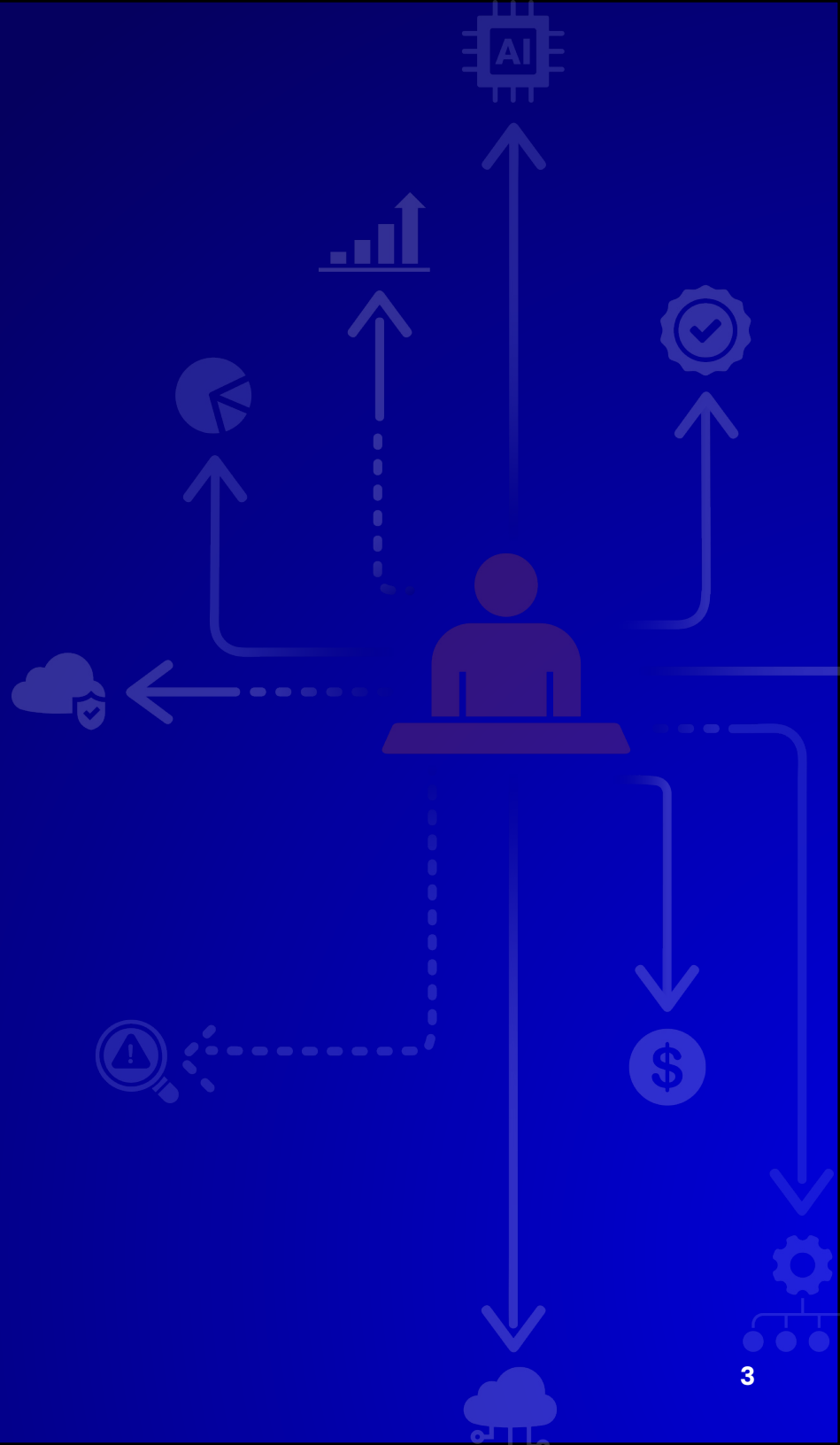
In the large enterprise segment (over \$1 billion in revenue), more organizations have elevated the role to the executive ranks—a 14-point increase from 33% in 2023 to 47% this year. Among large publicly traded companies, that shift is even more pronounced, with a 21-point increase over the same period and fewer VP- and director-level CISOs. In contrast, small and midsize organizations (under \$1 billion in revenue) show mostly steady executive-level CISO representation, and a third of CISOs still hold director-level titles.

There is a bifurcation of security into a strategic risk function vs. an IT subdivision

As in prior years, most CISOs (64%) report into IT—typically, the CIO or chief technology officer (CTO)—and 36% report to non-IT leaders such as the CEO, COO, general counsel/ chief legal officer or chief risk officer (CRO). Reporting structures vary significantly by CISO level—executive-level CISOs are twice as likely to report to business roles than VP-level CISOs and three times more likely than director-level CISOs.

The CISO leveling and reporting trends reveal a bifurcation in how organizations position security:

- Elevating security into a core business risk function, led by an executive-level CISO who is strongly aligned with—and often reports to—the business; or
- Embedding security as an IT subdivision, typically overseen by a director-level CISO who most often reports into IT.



CISOs warn of downstream impact from scope-resource imbalances

Given the CISO role's continued expansion across new functional domains and enterprise-wide responsibilities, more than half (52%) of CISOs reported their scope is no longer fully manageable.

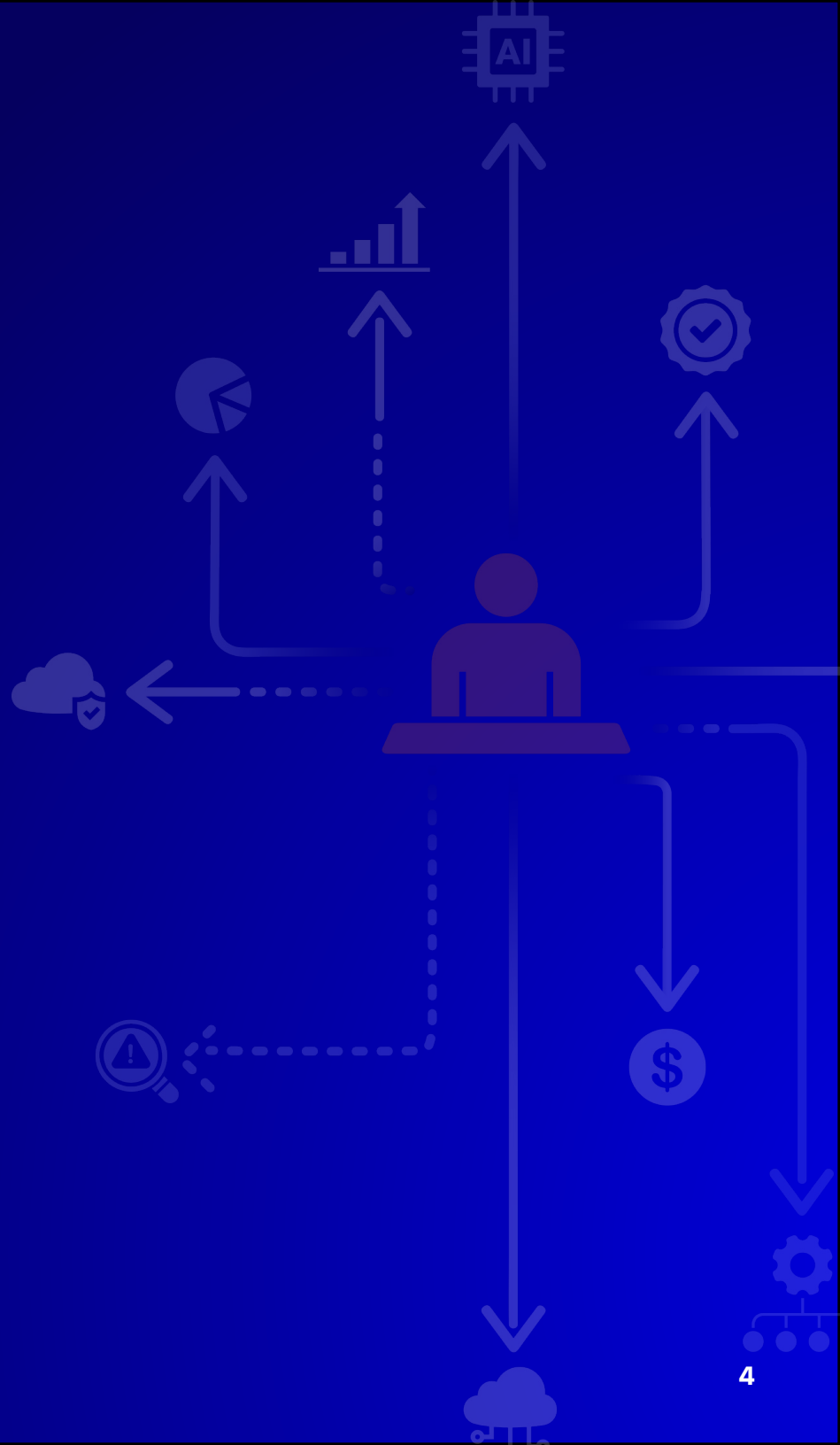
Manageability challenges are most pronounced in smaller organizations and industries such as education, manufacturing and retail, where security teams tend to be leaner. In contrast, large enterprise CISOs—particularly in financial services and insurance—feel less pressure, as they are often supported by more-mature security functions and deeper resourcing.

CISOs warn scope-resource imbalances may have far-reaching consequences including delays in strategic priorities, erosion of long-term resilience and reactive security operations with diminishing quality.

CISOs' careers are often shaped by multi-industry paths

CISOs reported an average tenure of nine years, with 70% having served as CISO at multiple companies and 62% having CISO experience in more than one industry. For example, when excluding first-time CISOs, 40% have CISO experience only within financial services companies, 28% have held CISO positions in tech, 19% in healthcare and 13% in government. This cross-sector mobility reflects both the demand for seasoned cybersecurity leaders and the transferability of CISO expertise across different business contexts.

Most CISOs (69%) are open to making a career move within the next year, often targeting CISO roles at a larger company or in a different industry, but also other (non-CISO) roles such as CTO, CIO, board member or a second-in-command security leadership role at a larger company.



The complete 2026 State of the CISO Report is a 37-page report that provides high-level insights and detailed data on the CISO role. It is available to IANS clients through the IANS Portal or to non-clients upon request.

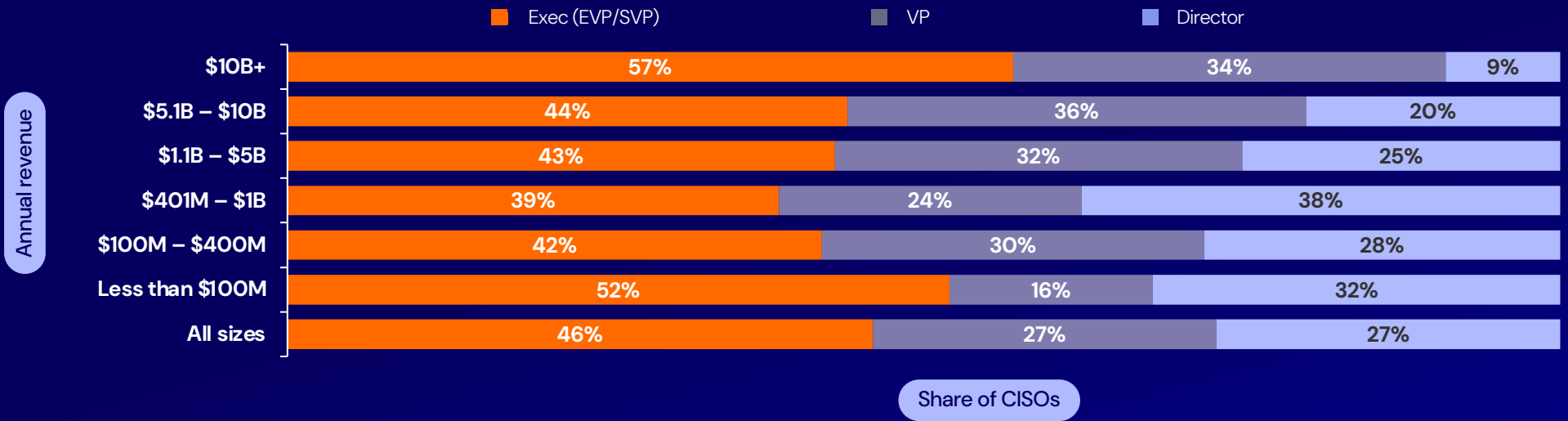
To receive a copy of the full report, contact us at info@iansresearch.com.

FIGURE 1

Source: IANS & Artico Search

Executive-Level CISO Titles Dominate in Every Size Segment

The organizational level of the CISO, by size of the organization in annual revenue (USD)



What CISOs Will Find in This Report

The data and insights in this report provide CISOs with the latest trends around the CISO role and enable them to benchmark their situation against peers—empowering them to consider their current situation and future career steps.

The 2026 State of the CISO report includes:



CISO role characteristics

You will find self-reported data on key traits of the CISO role, including title levels and scope of responsibility. The analysis spotlights the types of companies at which CISOs have advanced their strategic influence and identifies areas where opportunity for further progress remains.



Practitioner and expert perspectives

Executives at Artico Search offer their insights, in particular Steve Martano, IANS Faculty member and partner in Artico Search's cyber practice, and Matt Comyns, Artico Search's co-founder and president.



CISO job scope

The report describes how CISO scope has evolved over the years and how job scope differs among organizations of different sizes. Additionally, the report gives insight into the manageability of current scope given available resources.



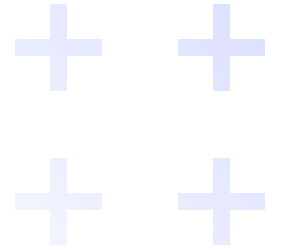
Objective and vendor-free research

Findings are solely based on independent data analysis and industry trends, without influence from commercial interests or sponsorships.



CISO background and aspirations

Including a data-informed illustration of the career journey for CISOs in financial services, tech and manufacturing showing the prior industries these CISOs worked in and the roles they are targeting for their next career stage.



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This publication is created in partnership between IANS and Artico Search.

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Founded in 2021, Artico Search's team of executive recruiters focuses on a "grow and protect" model, recruiting senior go-to-market and security executives in growth venture, private equity and public companies. Artico's dedicated security practice delivers CISOs and other senior-level information security professionals for a diverse set of clients.

