



PRIMERICA AND CHANGE RESEARCH RELEASE

## Q1 U.S. MIDDLE-INCOME FINANCIAL SECURITY MONITOR™ (FSM™) SURVEY MARCH 2026

# A QUARTERLY TRACKING POLL OF MIDDLE-INCOME AMERICANS' FINANCIAL MOOD

Primerica's first quarter 2026 Middle-Income Financial Security Monitor™ (FSM™) survey finds that families are no longer just adjusting their purchasing habits, they're increasingly deferring major spending decisions. The survey reveals 65% of middle-income Americans say their income is falling behind the cost of living, a figure that has remained stable since 2023.

### HOW ARE FAMILIES FEELING ABOUT THE OVERALL ECONOMY?

- **Families' economic outlook has leveled off.** A majority (56%) of middle-income Americans expect the U.S. economy to be worse off in the next year, while 25% expect it to improve and 12% expect it to remain the same – data that has remained largely steady since the previous survey.
- **Rising costs continue to shape financial outlook.** A strong majority of middle-income Americans expect prices to keep climbing, with 80% anticipating higher gas prices in the next few months (up from 57% in the previous survey). In addition, 75% expect grocery prices to rise and 78% expect utility costs to increase.



## HOW ARE FAMILIES DOING AND FEELING FINANCIALLY?

- **Many feel financially behind and unable to save.** Two-thirds (66%) of middle-income Americans say they feel behind where they expected to be at this stage of life. At the same time, 69% rate their ability to save for the future negatively, and 61% do not believe they are saving enough for retirement.
- **Debt continues to weigh on household finances.** More than half (56%) of middle-income Americans are currently paying down credit card debt, and the same share report that they typically carry a balance rather than paying it off in full each month.

## WHAT ARE MIDDLE-INCOME FAMILIES DOING TO SECURE THEIR FINANCIAL FUTURES?

- **Deferring major expenses is becoming the norm.** Nearly two-thirds (65%) of middle-income households say they delayed a major purchase or expense in the past year, signaling a shift from short-term budgeting to longer-term deferral of critical needs.
- **Households are postponing essential needs.** Among those who delayed expenses, more than half (53%) postponed home repairs or improvements, 43% delayed non-emergency medical or dental procedures, and 39% put off buying or replacing a vehicle.
- **Tax refunds may present a critical financial lifeline.** More than half (57%) of respondents expect to receive a tax refund this year. Among those who do, 38% plan to use it to pay down debt, 32% to build savings and 30% to cover bills, highlighting how refunds are often used to stabilize day-to-day finances rather than on discretionary spending.

## ARE FAMILIES EQUIPPED WITH THE FINANCIAL INFORMATION THEY NEED?

- **Majority grasp financial basics but not complexities.** About three-quarters (76%) of middle-income families feel confident in making sound financial decisions without outside help, particularly when it comes to fundamentals like building good credit (85% confident), paying down credit card debt (83%), and creating and following a financial budget (79%). However, they continue to express less confidence when it comes to more complex matters, including setting up a retirement account (63% confident), buying life insurance (56%), and investing in stocks, bonds or mutual funds (47%).

# TOPLINE TRENDS DATA:



	MAR 2026	DEC 2025	SEPT 2025	JUN 2025	MAR 2025	DEC 2024	SEPT 2024	JUN 2024	MAR 2024
How would you rate the condition of your personal finances?									
Share reporting "Excellent" or "Good."	48%	45%	46%	46%	48%	45%	44%	49%	50%
<b>Analysis: Respondents' assessments of their personal finances have remained the same over the past year.</b>									
Overall, would you say your income is...?									
Share reporting "Falling behind the cost of living."	65%	68%	69%	65%	69%	65%	68%	66%	67%
Share reporting "Stayed about even with the cost of living."	25%	22%	24%	23%	29%	24%	26%	25%	24%
<b>Analysis: Concern about meeting the increased cost of living has decreased slightly over the past year.</b>									
And in the next year, do you think the American economy will be...?									
Share reporting "Worse off than it is now."	56%	59%	63%	61%	76%	55%	25%	40%	46%
Share reporting "Uncertain."	7%	6%	6%	4%	4%	9%	34%	19%	18%
<b>Analysis: The share of respondents expecting the economy to worsen has declined significantly over the past year.</b>									
Do you have an emergency fund that would cover an expense of \$1,000 or more (for example, if your car broke down or you had a large medical bill)?									
Reporting "Yes" responses.	62%	62%	58%	60%	64%	59%	61%	63%	62%
<b>Analysis: The percentage of Americans who have an emergency fund that would cover an expense of \$1,000 or more has remained about the same over the past year.</b>									
How would you rate the economic health of your community?									
Reporting "Not so good" and "Poor" responses.	59%	63%	59%	59%	66%	63%	63%	58%	60%
<b>Analysis: Respondents' rating of the economic health of their communities has improved over the past year.</b>									
How would you rate your ability to save for the future?									
Reporting "Not so good" and "Poor" responses.	69%	70%	73%	71%	71%	71%	73%	68%	67%
<b>Analysis: A significant majority continue to feel it is difficult to save for the future.</b>									
In the past three months, has your credit card debt...?									
Reporting "Increased" responses.	31%	31%	34%	31%	31%	34%	35%	30%	34%
<b>Analysis: Credit card debt has remained the same over the past year.</b>									

Learn more at [www.primerica.com/public/our-impact.html](http://www.primerica.com/public/our-impact.html)

### About Primerica's U.S. Middle-Income Financial Security Monitor™ Survey

Polling was conducted online from March 6-11, 2026. Using Dynamic Online Sampling, Change Research polled 1,021 adults nationwide with incomes between \$30,000 and \$130,000. Post-stratification weights were made on gender, age, race, education and Census region to reflect the population of these adults based on the five-year averages in the 2024 American Community Survey, published by the U.S. Census. The margin of error is 3.4%.