



PRIMERICA AND CHANGE RESEARCH RELEASE

Q3 U.S. MIDDLE-INCOME FINANCIAL SECURITY MONITOR™ (FSM™) SURVEY SEPTEMBER 2026

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

Primerica's third quarter 2026 Middle-Income Financial Security Monitor™ (FSM™) survey finds that while most measures of household financial health have remained relatively consistent in recent quarters, many families continue to feel stretched financially.

HOW ARE FAMILIES DOING AND FEELING FINANCIALLY?

- **Household budgets remain tight:** More than two-thirds (68%) report having little or no flexibility in their monthly budgets after covering household expenses, while 69% say their income has fallen behind the cost of living.
- **Saving for the future remains difficult:** Nearly three-quarters (71%) rate their ability to save for the future negatively, while nearly two-thirds (62%) do not believe they are saving enough to retire comfortably. Half (50%) say they have cut back or paused saving as their income has stayed even with or fallen behind the cost of living.



HOW ARE FAMILIES MANAGING DEBT AND UNEXPECTED EXPENSES?

- **Credit card pressure is building:** Just one-quarter (26%) say they typically pay their monthly credit card statement in full – the lowest share in the survey's history. More than one-third (35%) say their credit card debt increased during the past three months. Among those carrying debt, nearly half (45%) are more concerned about it than they were a year ago – the highest level since tracking began in March 2023.
- **Emergency savings are providing a lifeline:** While more than half (57%) have an emergency fund that could cover an expense of \$1,000 or more, a majority (58%) have tapped it during the past year. Among those without an emergency fund, nearly one-third (31%) say they would go without what they need if faced with an unexpected expense.

HOW ARE FAMILIES MANAGING AN EXPANDING MIX OF PAYMENT OPTIONS?

- **Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) use rises:** BNPL use rose sharply over the past year, with 44% saying they have used BNPL services, up from 28% in September 2025. Clothing, shoes or accessories (34%), electronics (28%), furniture, appliances or home goods (26%) and gifts (26%) were the most common purchases. Another 22% have used BNPL for groceries or household essentials, underscoring its use for both discretionary purchases and everyday needs.
- **Subscription spending is now a regular part of household budgets:** An overwhelming 81% of middle-income Americans subscribe to a streaming service, while 60% pay for two or more. One-third (33%) spend at least \$50 each month on such services and 19% spend \$100 or more, highlighting how recurring payments can accumulate across multiple services and accounts.

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

- **Families are reducing spending and delaying maintenance:** Nearly three-quarters (73%) are cutting back on nonessential purchases, 50% have cut back or paused saving for the future and 46% have delayed regular maintenance, such as home or car repairs.
- **Major expenses are still being postponed:** Nearly three-quarters (72%) have delayed a major purchase or expense in the past year, up from 67% in June. Medical or dental procedures and home repairs or improvements top the list, each cited by 47%.

TOPLINE TRENDS DATA:



	SEPT 2026	JUN 2026	MAR 2026	DEC 2025	SEPT 2025	JUN 2025	MAR 2025	DEC 2024	SEPT 2024
How would you rate the condition of your personal finances?									
Share reporting "Excellent" or "Good."	44%	43%	48%	45%	46%	46%	48%	45%	44%
Analysis: Respondents' assessments of their personal finances have remained about the same over the past year.									
Overall, would you say your income is...?									
Share reporting "Falling behind the cost of living."	69%	71%	65%	68%	69%	65%	69%	65%	68%
Share reporting "Stayed about even with the cost of living."	22%	22%	25%	22%	22%	24%	23%	29%	24%
Analysis: Concern about meeting the increased cost of living has remained the same over the past year.									
And in the next year, do you think the American economy will be...?									
Share reporting "Worse off than it is now."	58%	59%	56%	59%	63%	61%	76%	55%	25%
Share reporting "Uncertain."	7%	8%	7%	6%	6%	4%	4%	9%	34%
Analysis: The share of respondents expecting the economy to worsen over the next year has declined over the past year.									
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.	57%	58%	62%	62%	58%	60%	64%	59%	61%
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.									
How would you rate the economic health of your community?									
Reporting "Not so good" and "Poor" responses.	61%	64%	59%	63%	61%	59%	66%	63%	63%
Analysis: Respondents' rating of the economic health of their communities has remained the same over the past year.									
How would you rate your ability to save for the future?									
Reporting "Not so good" and "Poor" responses.	71%	74%	69%	70%	73%	71%	71%	71%	73%
Analysis: A significant majority continue to feel it is difficult to save for the future.									
In the past three months, has your credit card debt...?									
Reporting "Increased" responses.	35%	32%	31%	31%	34%	31%	31%	34%	35%
Analysis: Credit card debt has remained about the same over the past year.									

About Primerica’s U.S. Middle-Income Financial Security Monitor™ survey
Polling was conducted online from Sept. 1-7, 2026. Using Dynamic Online Sampling, Change Research polled 1,329 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 2.8%.
Learn more at [Primerica.com/public/financial-security-monitor.html](https://www.primerica.com/public/financial-security-monitor.html)