



Nearly 2 in 5 Americans Expect to Rely on Credit to Manage Expenses as Inflation Hits 3.7%, NerdWallet's Consumer Financial Resilience Index Finds

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Parents and younger adults are among the most likely to rely on credit this month, and another Fed rate hike anticipated before year-end could raise borrowing costs

SAN FRANCISCO--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Oct. 20, 2026-- [NerdWallet Inc.](#) (Nasdaq: NRDS), which provides trustworthy financial guidance to consumers and small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs), today published its October 2026 [Consumer Financial Resilience Index](#), a monthly score, out of 100, that tracks how financially prepared Americans are to handle economic instability. While more Americans feel in control of their day-to-day finances in October (78%, up from 73% in September), nearly four in 10 (38%) say they'll need to rely on credit for at least some expenses, including more than half of parents of children under 18 (54%), Gen Zers (53%) and millennials (51%).

The survey was conducted shortly before the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) reported consumer prices rose 3.7% year over year in September, up from 3.4% in August, driven largely by gasoline. And prices have [risen faster](#) than average hourly earnings on a year-over-year basis for at least three consecutive months as of September. With at least one more Federal Reserve hike likely before year-end, balances on variable-rate debt like credit cards could get costlier to carry.

Additional key findings:

- **Parents lean harder on credit:** 54% of parents of minor children expect to rely on credit this month, up from 44% in September, and well above the 30% of Americans who aren't parents of kids under 18.
- **Generational divide:** More than half of Gen Z (53%) and millennials (51%) say they'll need to rely on credit this month, versus 37% of Gen X and 17% of baby boomers. Baby boomers are most likely to feel in control of their day-to-day finances (86%) and confident about paying bills on time this month (89%), compared with Gen Z (68% and 66%, respectively).
- **Sense of control rebounds:** 78% of Americans feel in control of their day-to-day finances, up from 73% in September. Households earning \$100,000+ drove some of this gain, jumping from 81% to 89% month-over-month.
- **Recession worries remain elevated:** 65% of Americans believe the U.S. economy will enter a recession in the next 12 months, near the 66% recorded when the Index started six months ago.
- **Income divide in cash buffers:** 67% of Americans say they have enough cash to cover an unexpected \$1,000 expense. 81% of households earning \$100,000+ could cover a surprise \$1,000 expense, compared with just 39% of those with household incomes under \$50,000.
- **Persistent gender gap:** Men are more likely than women to feel in control of their day-to-day finances (84% vs. 74%), be confident about paying all of their bills on time this month (81% vs. 75%) and have a \$1,000 cash buffer (71% vs. 63%).

"Turning to credit to get through the month isn't unusual when prices are climbing, but it gets more expensive when rates are rising too," said Kimberly Palmer, NerdWallet's personal finance expert. "If you're carrying a balance, put extra payments toward the card with the highest APR first, and ask your issuer about a lower rate or look into a 0% balance transfer offer. Even small steps now can save real money if the Fed hikes again."

More Americans Feel in Control of Their Day-to-Day Finances – NerdWallet's Consumer Financial Resilience Index, October 2026, <https://www.nerdwallet.com/finance/studies/financial-resilience-index>

Measure	October 2026	September 2026	August 2026
Financial Resilience Index Score	61.6	61.5	62.1
Feel in control of their day-to-day finances	78%	73%	75%
Confident in their ability to pay all of their bills on time this month	78%	78%	79%
Will rely on credit to manage at least some expenses	38%	35%	36%
Have enough cash on hand to cover an unexpected \$1,000 expense this month	67%	63%	67%

Believe the U.S. economy will enter a recession in the next 12 months

65%

61%

64%

Younger Generations More Likely to Rely on Credit – NerdWallet's Consumer Financial Resilience Index, October 2026,
<https://www.nerdwallet.com/finance/studies/financial-resilience-index>

Generation	FRI Score	Feel in Control	Confident Paying Bills	Rely on Credit
Baby Boomers	72.7	86%	89%	17%
Gen Xers	58.5	77%	74%	37%
Millennials	57.9	78%	77%	51%
Gen Zers	52.5	68%	66%	53%

What We're Watching

Next month's Index will offer a snapshot of household finances following September's higher inflation reading and the Fed's October decision, as holiday gifts and heating bills add to seasonal expenses. We'll watch whether credit reliance among parents and younger adults remains elevated or rises further, and whether October's improvement in financial control extends to households earning less than \$100,000.

Methodology

The Consumer Financial Resilience Index survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of NerdWallet from Oct. 6-8, 2026, among 2,020 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within +/- 2.7 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact press@nerdwallet.com.

All five questions across this survey are weighted equally to develop a composite score with a maximum value of 100.

About NerdWallet

NerdWallet (Nasdaq: NRDS) is on a mission to provide clarity for all of life's financial decisions. As a personal finance website and app, NerdWallet provides consumers with trustworthy and knowledgeable financial information so they can make smart money moves. From finding the best credit card to buying a house, NerdWallet is there to help consumers make financial decisions with confidence. Consumers have free access to our expert content and comparison shopping marketplaces, plus a data-driven app, which helps them stay on top of their finances and save time and money, giving them the freedom to do more. NerdWallet is available for consumers in the U.S. and Canada.

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