Americans' Reliance on Credit to Manage Monthly Expenses Rises 6 Percentage Points Since September, NerdWallet's Consumer Financial Resilience Index Finds

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Holiday spending could add to existing credit needs, while an anticipated December rate hike could make balances costlier to carry

SAN FRANCISCO--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Nov. 17, 2026-- NerdWallet Inc. (Nasdaq: NRDS), which provides trustworthy financial guidance to consumers and small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs), today published its November 2026 Consumer Financial Resilience Index, a monthly score, out of 100, that tracks how financially prepared Americans are to handle economic instability. This month, 41% of Americans say they will have to rely on credit to manage at least some November expenses, up from 35% in September – a statistically significant six-percentage-point rise as households head into peak holiday shopping season.

The survey, conducted November 5-9, offers an early post-election snapshot of Americans' economic outlook. And the latest economic data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics adds context to the findings: average hourly wages only kept pace with inflation in October, with wages and consumer prices both rising 0.4%, leaving purchasing power unchanged. Grocery, housing and energy costs continued to rise. Markets are anticipating a December rate hike, which could increase the cost of carrying variable-rate debt such as credit cards.

Additional key findings:

- **Credit reliance varies by generation.** More than half of millennials (57%) and Gen Z adults (52%) expect to need credit for at least some November expenses, compared with 39% of Gen Xers and 21% of baby boomers.
- **Parents also remain particularly likely to expect to need credit.** Fifty-eight percent of parents of children under 18 expect to rely on credit this month, compared with 34% of Americans without minor children.
- **Emergency cash cushions vary widely by income.** Two-thirds of Americans (66%) have enough cash to cover an unexpected $1,000 expense should one arise this month. Fewer than half of Americans in households earning under $50,000 (46%) have this cash buffer, compared with 81% of those in households earning $100,000 or more.
- **Financial confidence coexists with economic concerns.** Seventy-seven percent of Americans feel in control of their day-to-day finances, and the same share are confident they can pay all their bills on time this month. Meanwhile, 63% believe the U.S. economy will enter a recession in the next 12 months. This is true for 59% of Gen Zers, 73% of millennials, 69% of Gen Xers and 52% of baby boomers.

"When credit is already helping cover monthly expenses, holiday purchases can affect a household's budget well into the new year," said Kimberly Palmer, NerdWallet's personal finance expert. "Before shopping, protect the money you need for regular bills and unexpected costs, then set a limit for gifts, travel and celebrations. Make a repayment plan based on today's borrowing costs rather than counting on rates to fall before the end of the year, which as of right now seems unlikely."

About One-Third Lack Enough Cash to Cover $1,000 Expense – NerdWallet's Consumer Financial Resilience Index, November 2026, https://www.nerdwallet.com/finance/studies/financial-resilience-index

Measure	November 2026	October 2026	September 2026
Financial Resilience Index score	60.9	61.6	61.5
% of Americans who feel in control of their day-to-day finances	77%	78%	73%
% of Americans who feel confident in their ability to pay all of their bills on time this month	77%	78%	78%
% of Americans who will have to rely on credit to manage at least some expenses	41%	38%	35%
% of Americans who have enough cash on hand to cover an unexpected $1,000 expense, should one arise this month	66%	67%	63%
% of Americans who believe the U.S. economy will enter a recession in the next 12 months	63%	65%	61%

30+ Percentage-Point Difference Between Oldest and Youngest Generations' Credit Reliance – NerdWallet's Consumer Financial Resilience

Index, November 2026, https://www.nerdwallet.com/finance/studies/financial-resilience-index

Generation	FRI Score	Feel in Control	$1,000 Cash on Hand	Rely on Credit	Recession
Baby Boomers	72	83%	77%	21%	52%
Gen Xers	58.6	75%	59%	39%	69%
Millennials	54.9	74%	65%	57%	73%
Gen Zers	55.5	73%	61%	52%	59%

What We're Watching

December will test how households manage seasonal expenses when many already expect to need credit. NerdWallet will watch whether Americans' expected credit reliance remains elevated, particularly among younger adults and parents, and whether emergency cash cushions and confidence in paying bills hold steady as the holiday shopping season continues. The Federal Reserve's December 9 decision will be particularly relevant for households carrying variable-rate balances: A hike could make those debts costlier to repay. New jobs, inflation and wage reports next month will also help show whether household purchasing power is improving heading into 2027.

Methodology

The Consumer Financial Resilience Index survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of NerdWallet from November 5-9, 2026, among 2,090 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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press@nerdwallet.com

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