

CONSUMER FINANCIAL RESEARCH

America's Emergency Savings Report 2026

Original research from a national survey of 3,000 U.S. adults

A clear look at emergency savings, borrowing, financial security and the ways Americans are adjusting to financial pressure.

44%

report no emergency
savings

37%

borrowed for essential
expenses

69%

say security is harder
today

42%

cut back on groceries

RESEARCH SPONSOR

Cashback Loans

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SURVEY POPULATION

3,000 U.S. adults

GEOGRAPHY

United States

PUBLICATION YEAR

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Consumer Financial Research

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About this edition

This report presents the survey findings supplied in the 2026 research content. It distinguishes reported survey results from editorial interpretation and consumer guidance. Percentages shown in the borrowing section are percentages among respondents who reported borrowing money for essential living expenses.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America's Financial Safety Net Is Under Pressure

Financial emergencies rarely arrive at convenient times. An unexpected medical bill, a major car repair, a delayed paycheck or a broken appliance can become a serious financial problem when a household has little or no money set aside.

To better understand how prepared Americans are for these situations, Cashback Loans commissioned a national survey of 3,000 U.S. adults conducted by 3Gem Research & Insights. The research examines emergency savings, financial security, rising living costs and borrowing during periods of financial stress.

The findings show both resilience and vulnerability. Many respondents report making adjustments, including 42% who cut back on groceries in the past 12 months. At the same time, substantial shares report having little or no emergency savings, borrowing for essential expenses and feeling that financial security is harder to achieve than it was five years ago.

44%

report no emergency savings

37%

borrowed for essential living expenses

69%

say financial security is harder today

51%

 selected \$200,000 or less as the annual income
they need to feel financially secure

Source: Cashback Loans, America's Emergency Savings Report 2026. Online survey of 3,000 nationally representative U.S. adults conducted July 16–27, 2026, by 3Gem Research & Insights.

What the findings suggest

- Emergency savings remain difficult to build for a large share of households.
- Borrowing for essential expenses is common enough to be a significant part of the financial picture.
- Financial security is increasingly perceived as difficult to achieve, even beyond the question of income.
- Many households are adjusting everyday spending, including groceries, to manage their finances.
- Consumers use a range of resources when unexpected expenses occur; no single source dominates.

KEY FINDINGS

The Numbers at a Glance

44%

No emergency savings

37%

Borrowed for essential living expenses

69%

Financial security harder today

42%

Cut back on groceries in the past 12 months to manage their finances

22%

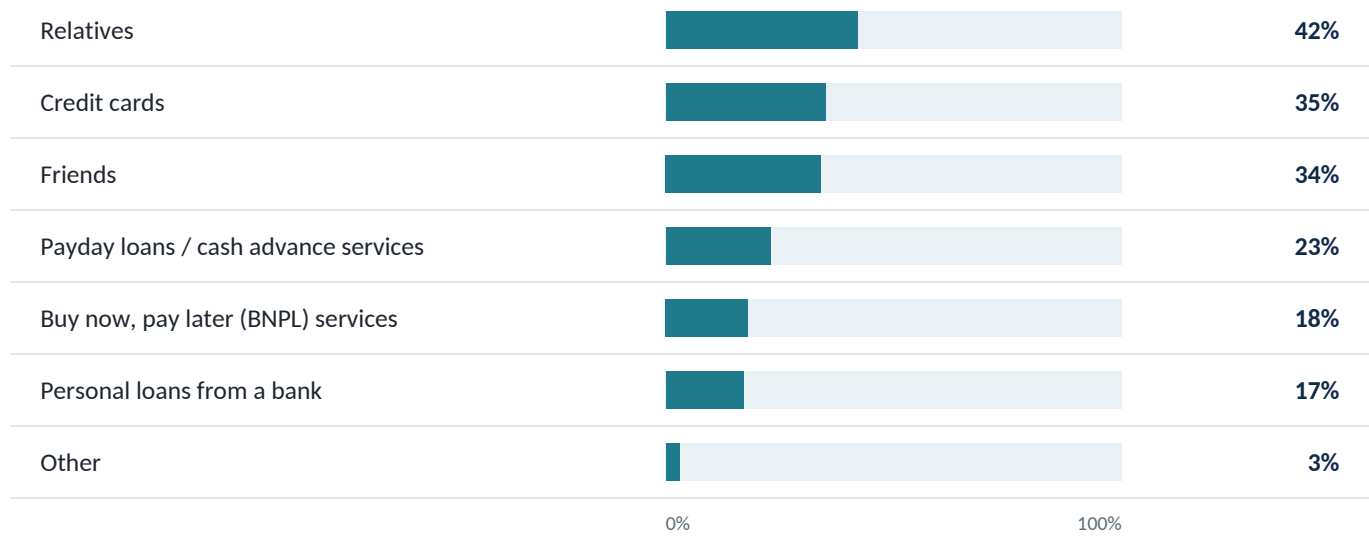
Do not expect to feel financially secure

51%

Selected \$200,000 or less as the annual income needed to feel financially secure

Borrowing sources among respondents who borrowed

Share of the 1,110 respondents who borrowed for essential living expenses. Respondents could select more than one source.



Source: Cashback Loans, America's Emergency Savings Report 2026. Online survey of 3,000 nationally representative U.S. adults conducted July 16–27, 2026, by 3Gem Research & Insights. Borrowing-source percentages apply to the 1,110 respondents who reported borrowing for essential living expenses. Because respondents could select multiple sources, percentages total more than 100%.

FINDING 1

44% of Americans Report Having No Emergency Savings

44%

of respondents report having no emergency savings

What the survey found

Forty-four percent of respondents said they currently have no emergency savings. Among respondents who do have emergency savings, 17% reported having less than \$1,000 saved, equal to roughly one in ten of all respondents. Together, these responses point to a limited financial cushion for a substantial share of households.

Why it matters

Emergency savings can give households more flexibility when an unexpected expense occurs. Without savings, consumers may need to delay a purchase, seek help from family or friends, use available credit, or consider other financial resources depending on their circumstances.

The survey does not establish why an individual household has little or no savings. The responses do, however, show that building an emergency fund remains difficult for many Americans.

What consumers can take from the finding

- Start with an amount that is realistic for your budget rather than waiting until you can save a large sum.
- Make contributions consistently when possible.
- Think ahead about common emergencies such as vehicle repairs, medical expenses, home maintenance, childcare or a temporary income interruption.
- Know what resources are available before an emergency occurs, including savings, insurance, employer benefits and borrowing options.

BOTTOM LINE

Nearly half of surveyed adults report having no emergency savings, which leaves many households with little room to absorb an unexpected expense.

FINDING 2

37% Borrowed Money for Essential Living Expenses

37%

borrowed money for essential living expenses during the past year

What the survey found

Thirty-seven percent of respondents reported borrowing money to cover essential living expenses during the previous 12 months. Among those who borrowed, sources included relatives (42%), credit cards (35%), friends (34%), payday loans or cash advance services (23%), BNPL services (18%) and personal bank loans (17%); respondents could select more than one.

The survey did not ask respondents to identify the specific expense the borrowed money covered. In this report, essential expenses include examples such as housing, utilities, groceries, transportation needed for work, medical expenses, childcare, insurance premiums and emergency home or vehicle repairs.

What this tells us

Borrowing is not limited to discretionary purchases. For a significant portion of respondents, borrowing was used in the context of everyday financial obligations. The survey cannot determine whether borrowing was a positive or negative decision, nor does it establish a cause-and-effect relationship between limited savings and borrowing.

BORROWING SOURCE	SHARE OF BORROWERS
Relatives	42%
Credit cards	35%
Friends	34%
Payday loans / cash advance services	23%
Buy now, pay later (BNPL) services	18%
Personal loans from a bank	17%
Other	3%

Source: Cashback Loans, America's Emergency Savings Report 2026. Online survey of 3,000 nationally representative U.S. adults conducted July 16–27, 2026, by 3Gem Research & Insights.

Responsible borrowing

When borrowing becomes necessary, consumers should compare total repayment costs, repayment timing, fees, eligibility, flexibility and the potential consequences of non-payment. No financial product is appropriate for every consumer or every situation.

BOTTOM LINE

More than one in three surveyed adults say they borrowed money for essential living expenses. The range of borrowing sources underscores that households use different resources depending on what is available to them.

FINDING 3

69% Say Financial Security Is Harder to Achieve Today

69%

say achieving financial security is harder today than five years ago

What the survey found

Sixty-nine percent of respondents said they believe achieving financial security is harder today than it was five years ago. The survey also found that many respondents have limited emergency savings, have borrowed for essential expenses or have cut back on groceries to manage their finances.

Perception matters

This finding measures how people perceive their financial prospects rather than an objective financial threshold. Those perceptions can influence choices about spending, saving, major purchases, retirement planning and other financial commitments.

The survey does not identify a single reason why respondents feel this way. Viewed alongside the other findings, however, the results point to a broader environment in which household costs, savings capacity and unexpected expenses all affect financial confidence.

Financial security is more than income

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ■ Monthly housing and living costs | ■ Family size and responsibilities |
| ■ Healthcare expenses | ■ Debt obligations |
| ■ Emergency savings | ■ Local cost of living |
| ■ Long-term financial goals | |

Two households with similar incomes can experience very different levels of financial security because their obligations and financial priorities are different.

BOTTOM LINE

Nearly seven in ten respondents believe the path to financial security has become more difficult. The finding reflects how people perceive their financial prospects, not an objective measure of income or wealth.

FINDING 4

What Income Would Make Americans Feel Financially Secure?

Respondents selected an annual household income range they believed would allow them to feel financially secure. Answers ranged from \$20,000–\$50,000 to \$900,001–\$1,000,000, but 51% selected \$200,000 or less.

ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME	SHARE
\$20,000–\$50,000	18%
\$50,001–\$100,000	17%
\$100,001–\$150,000	10%
\$150,001–\$200,000	6%
\$200,001–\$300,000	11%
\$300,001–\$400,000	6%
\$400,001–\$500,000	6%
\$500,001–\$600,000	9%
\$600,001–\$700,000	7%
\$700,001–\$800,000	5%
\$800,001–\$900,000	3%
\$900,001–\$1,000,000	3%

51%

selected \$200,000 or less as the amount of annual income they need to feel financially secure



Source: Cashback Loans, America's Emergency Savings Report 2026. Online survey of 3,000 nationally representative U.S. adults conducted July 16–27, 2026, by 3Gem Research & Insights.

How to read the number

Thirty-five percent of respondents selected an income of \$100,000 or less, while 51% selected \$200,000 or less. The wide spread of responses means no single figure should be treated as a universal income target. Instead, the results reflect a highly varied set of perceptions.

Financial security is relative

For one household, financial security may mean comfortably paying monthly bills and maintaining a modest emergency fund. For another, it may also include retirement savings, home ownership, children's education, healthcare costs, support for family members or maintaining a particular lifestyle.

BOTTOM LINE

The most useful finding is the range of responses. Americans do not share one income level that defines financial security; they evaluate security in the context of their own expenses, responsibilities and goals.

FINDING 5

42% Cut Back on Groceries to Manage Their Finances

42%

cut back on groceries in the past 12 months to manage their finances

What the survey found

Forty-two percent of respondents said they cut back on groceries in the past 12 months to manage their finances. The question did not mention inflation, so this result describes a reported change in household behavior, not its cause.

Why groceries matter

Groceries are a routine and essential household expense. When consumers cut back in this category, it suggests that financial pressure is reaching day-to-day budgeting decisions, not only discretionary purchases.

The survey did not determine whether respondents bought fewer groceries, changed brands, used more coupons, shopped at different stores or made other specific changes. Those possibilities should therefore be treated as examples rather than survey conclusions.

Connection to the other findings

The grocery finding sits alongside the results on emergency savings, borrowing and financial security. Taken together, the findings suggest that many households are making trade-offs in their budgets while still trying to maintain savings and meet unexpected expenses.

Consumer considerations

- Review household spending regularly when prices change.
- Prioritize essential expenses and identify areas where spending can be adjusted.
- Continue building emergency savings when the household budget allows.
- Revisit financial plans as household costs and circumstances change.

BOTTOM LINE

Many households are making adjustments in an everyday place: the grocery budget. In the past 12 months, 42% of respondents cut back on groceries to manage their finances.

FINDING 6

Where Americans Turn When They Need Emergency Money

Among respondents who said they borrowed money for essential living expenses, the survey found a range of borrowing sources. No single source was used by a majority of borrowers.

SOURCE	SHARE OF BORROWERS
Relatives	42%
Credit cards	35%
Friends	34%
Payday loans / cash advance services	23%
Buy now, pay later (BNPL) services	18%
Personal loans from a bank	17%
Other	3%

Source: Cashback Loans, America's Emergency Savings Report 2026. Online survey of 3,000 nationally representative U.S. adults conducted July 16–27, 2026, by 3Gem Research & Insights.

What the survey found

Relatives were the most commonly reported source at 42%, followed by credit cards (35%), friends (34%), payday loans or cash advance services (23%), BNPL services (18%) and personal loans from a bank (17%). Because respondents could select more than one source, the percentages total more than 100% and should not be added together.

What the survey cannot tell us

The survey measured where respondents obtained borrowed money. It did not ask why a particular source was selected, whether respondents considered other options, or which source was ultimately the least or most expensive for them.

Questions consumers should consider

- How quickly are funds needed?
- What total repayment amount can realistically be afforded?
- What fees, interest or other costs apply?
- When is repayment due?
- What happens if repayment is late or cannot be made?
- How will the decision affect the household's longer-term finances?

BOTTOM LINE

Emergency borrowing is not one-size-fits-all. Americans report using personal relationships, existing credit and formal financial products depending on their circumstances and available resources.

WHAT THE FINDINGS MEAN

Looking Beyond Individual Statistics

Each statistic tells part of the story. Taken together, the survey results describe households balancing immediate needs with longer-term financial goals.

Financial resilience is being tested.

Nearly half of respondents report no emergency savings, more than one-third borrowed for essential living expenses, and 42% cut back on groceries to manage their finances. These results point to households using a combination of savings, budgeting adjustments and outside resources to manage financial pressure.

Financial security is about confidence as well as income.

Half of respondents (51%) said an annual income of \$200,000 or less would make them feel financially secure, though answers ranged widely. People define financial security according to their own income, expenses, responsibilities and goals. The 69% result reinforces that many respondents feel the path to that security has become harder.

Consumers continue to adapt.

The survey shows people responding to changing conditions rather than remaining passive. Cutting back on groceries is one measured example. Other responses discussed in the report—such as revising budgets or delaying purchases—are possible behaviors, but were not all directly measured by the survey.

Financial flexibility matters.

Households with several available resources may have more choices when an unexpected expense occurs. Emergency savings, insurance, employer benefits, family support and available credit can all be part of a household's broader financial resources, depending on the individual situation.

Financial education remains important.

Understanding budgeting, emergency savings, borrowing costs and repayment obligations can help consumers evaluate their choices when unexpected expenses arise. The report does not recommend a single financial product or strategy.

FOR CONSUMERS

Practical Financial Takeaways

The survey is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Every household has different income, expenses, obligations and access to financial resources. The following general practices are consistent with the themes in the research.

1 Build savings gradually.

An emergency fund does not have to begin with thousands of dollars. A modest reserve can provide some flexibility when a smaller unexpected expense occurs. Consistent contributions can be more realistic than waiting for a large amount of money to become available.

2 Know your essential monthly expenses.

Housing, utilities, food, transportation, healthcare, insurance and other recurring obligations provide a useful picture of the minimum cash flow a household needs.

3 Have a plan before an emergency happens.

Consider which savings, insurance, employer benefits, family support or other resources could be available if an unexpected expense occurs.

4 Compare borrowing options carefully.

Look beyond speed. Consider total cost, fees, repayment schedule, eligibility, flexibility and the consequences of missed payments.

5 Revisit the budget when costs change.

Inflation and other changes in household expenses can make an old budget less useful. Regular reviews can help identify where spending can be adjusted while preserving important financial goals.

6 Measure financial security by your own circumstances.

Instead of focusing only on a national income figure, consider whether you can meet monthly obligations, build savings, manage debt, absorb an unexpected expense and make progress toward long-term goals.

FOR JOURNALISTS AND READERS

How to Interpret the Research

RESEARCH SPONSOR

Cashback Loans

RESEARCH PARTNER

3Gem Research & Insights

SAMPLE

3,000 U.S. adults

GEOGRAPHY

United States

PUBLICATION YEAR

2026

FIELDWORK DATES

July 16–27, 2026

Percentage denominator matters.

The 44%, 37%, 69% and 42% figures refer to the survey population as described in the report. The borrowing-source figures refer only to the 1,110 respondents who borrowed for essential living expenses; because respondents could select more than one source, they total more than 100%. The 35% and 51% figures reflect the income ranges respondents selected.

Half of respondents selected \$200,000 or less.

The survey responses span income ranges from \$20,000–\$50,000 through \$900,001–\$1,000,000. Because answers vary so widely, the share selecting \$200,000 or less (51%) is a more representative summary than an average.

Survey findings and editorial interpretation are different.

Statements about what the survey measured should be kept separate from broader interpretations about inflation, household behavior or financial resilience. The report's interpretations are presented as analysis and should not be treated as additional survey results.

Methodology

America's Emergency Savings Report 2026 is based on an online survey of 3,000 U.S. adults conducted July 16–27, 2026, by 3Gem Research & Insights on behalf of Cashback Loans. Respondents were drawn from 3Gem's in-house panel of double opt-in members. Quotas were set on gender, age and region so that the sample is nationally representative of U.S. adults on those characteristics. The margin of error for the full sample is ± 2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level; figures for subgroups, such as respondents who borrowed for essential expenses, carry a wider margin of error.

The survey was conducted in compliance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. Percentages are rounded and may not total 100. Questions about the past 12 months refer to the year before the fieldwork dates.

Suggested citation language

"According to America's Emergency Savings Report 2026, a nationally representative survey of 3,000 U.S. adults conducted July 16–27, 2026, by 3Gem Research & Insights for Cashback Loans..."

CONCLUSION

Financial Resilience Is More Than a Single Number

The 2026 Emergency Savings Survey presents a consistent picture: many Americans are working to maintain financial stability while facing limited savings, higher everyday costs and unexpected expenses.

Forty-four percent report having no emergency savings. Thirty-seven percent say they borrowed money for essential living expenses during the past year. Sixty-nine percent believe financial security is harder to achieve than it was five years ago, and 42% cut back on groceries in the past 12 months to manage their finances.

At the same time, the research shows adaptation. Consumers are making spending decisions, using different financial resources and continuing to pursue financial security in an environment they often perceive as more difficult.

The survey does not point to one solution for every household. Instead, it underscores the value of preparation, financial flexibility, informed decision-making and access to understandable information.

Looking ahead, the report is intended to serve as an annual benchmark for tracking changes in consumer financial attitudes and behaviors. Future editions can provide a longer-term view of how emergency savings, borrowing, financial confidence and household financial resilience change over time.

SOURCE

Cashback Loans, America's Emergency Savings Report 2026. Online survey of 3,000 nationally representative U.S. adults conducted July 16–27, 2026, by 3Gem Research & Insights.