The Financial Shock Mindset

Evaluating how prepared households feel for unexpected financial expenses and how they approach long-term stability.

About this research

This survey was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of CC Services from June 29th to July 13th, 2026. The target audience included a nationally representative sample of 2,400 U.S. adults aged 21 and over, including 500 nationally representative respondents and 1,900 state-level respondents of key COUNTRY Financial markets. **For the purposes of this research, "financial shock" is defined as unexpected economic disruptions such as job loss, medical emergency, major repairs, economic downturn, etc.**

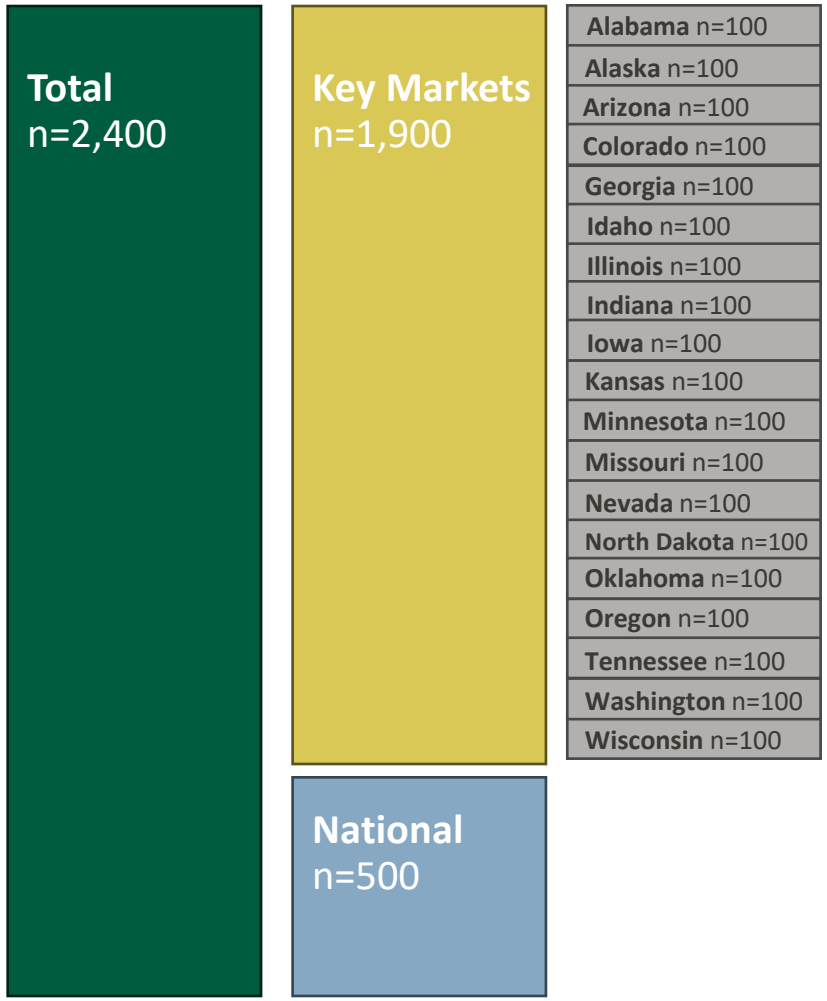
Data are weighted where necessary by age by gender, race / ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, employment, household income to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

There are regional and subregional callouts throughout the report. Regions and subregions group individual states as shown in the full regional list footnoted below.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who agreed to participate in our surveys.

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 ±3.1 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.



Executive Summary

01. Financial Stability Has Been Redefined

With 74% of Americans redefining what financial stability means and 45% having less than three months of financial runway, financial stability is increasingly measured by the ability to withstand disruption rather than the ability to avoid it.

02. Financial Fragility is the Norm

100% of Americans have experienced at least one financial shock in the past year, making financial uncertainty a common part of everyday life, particularly for younger generations facing more frequent, affordability-driven setbacks.

03. Recovery is Part of the Financial Journey

For many Americans, financial recovery extends well beyond the initial setback, yet younger generations are among the most optimistic about their ability to bounce back after a financial shock.

04. Affordability Fuels Financial Stability

When asked what would most improve their financial stability, Americans prioritize reducing everyday affordability pressures; reinforcing that rising costs remain one of the biggest barriers to feeling financially secure.

05. Preparation is Daily Financial Management

Rather than reacting after financial setbacks occur, 88% of Americans have taken at least one step towards building financial resilience through budgeting, saving, reducing debt, and adjusting everyday spending habits.

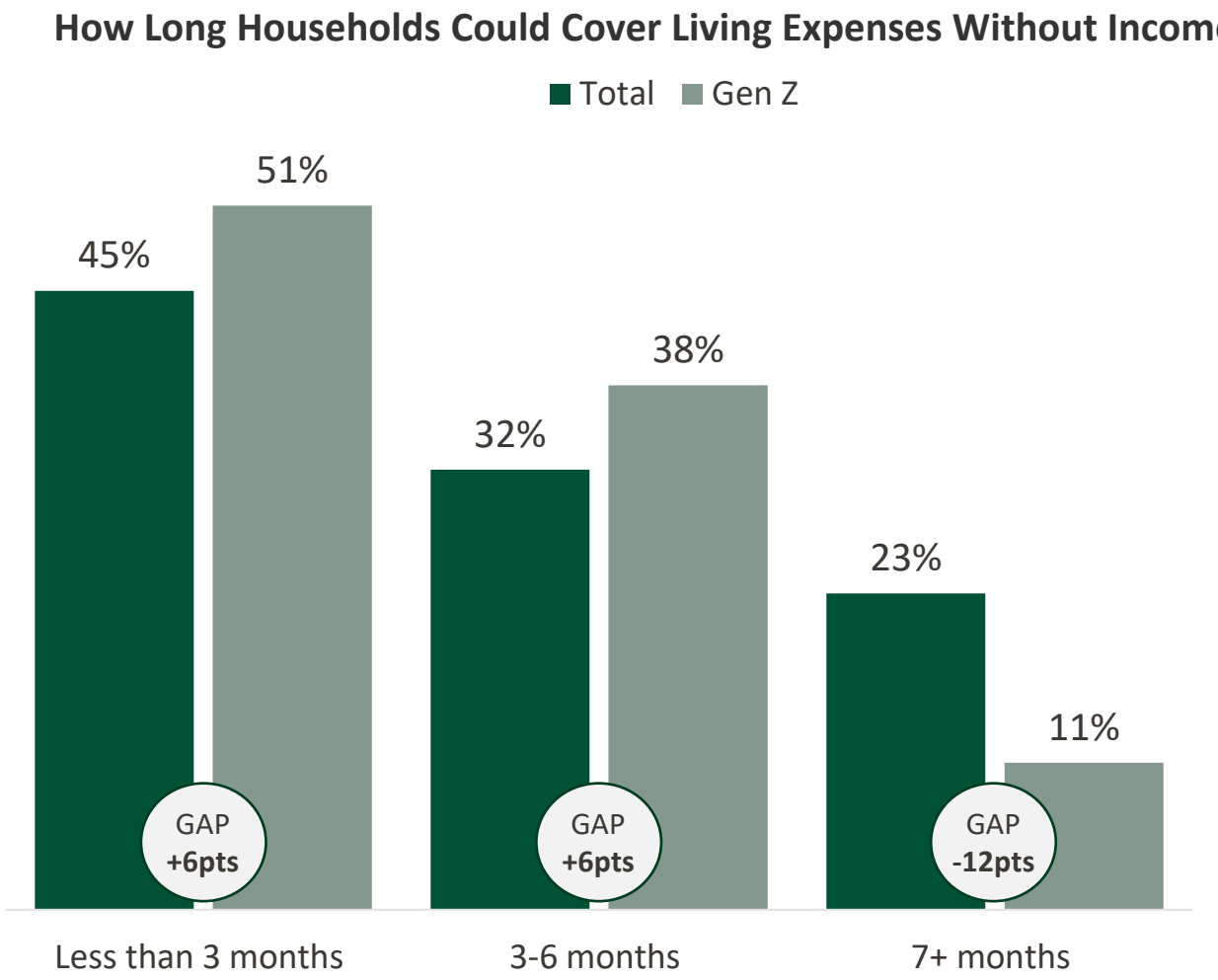
06. Resilience is the Measure of Stability

As Americans face financial uncertainty, many are viewing financial stability as an ongoing process of adapting, preparing for future challenges, and recovering from setbacks, regardless of how those financial shocks arise.

The New Financial Reality

How financially secure are Americans today?

Nearly half of American households, and a majority of Gen Z, would run out of money in 3 months if income stopped



Financial resilience isn't just limited; it's uneven:

15% of households say they could sustain themselves with essentials for a year without income, and an equal share say they couldn't cover one month of essentials.

84% of American households lack the financial resilience to weather a serious financial shock

Which of the following statements best describes your household right now?

84% of households could not absorb a shock without financial harm



My household could absorb a serious financial shock without major financial harm | **16%**

One serious financial shock would create real short-term strain, but we could recover within a few months | **44%**

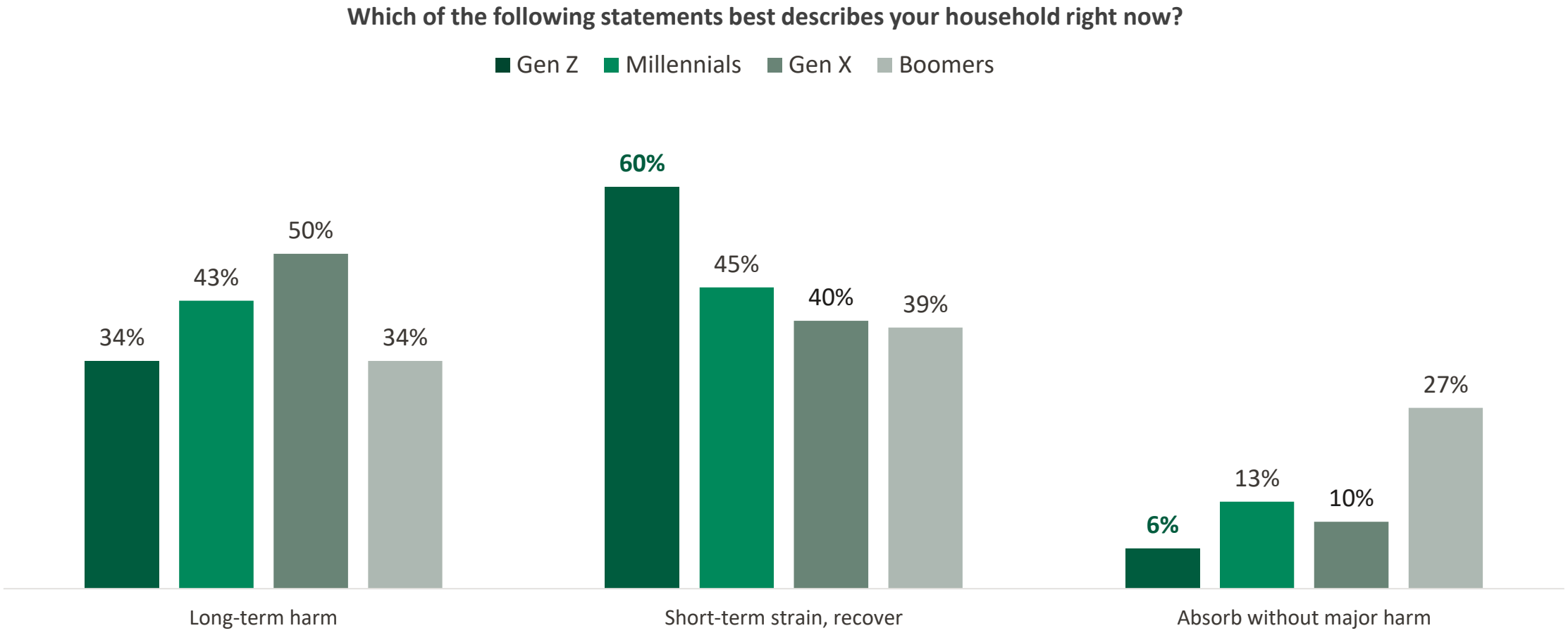
One serious financial shock would cause long-term financial harm for my household| **41%**

OVERINDEXED MARKETS

(Selected "One serious financial shock would cause long-term financial harm for my HH")

- Idaho **(+10pts)**
- Nevada **(+8pts)**
- Alabama **(+7pts)**

Gen Z is the least likely generation to believe they could absorb a major financial shock, but the most likely to believe they could recover from one



Access to credit has become nearly as important as emergency savings in weathering financial shocks

Likely Financial Shock Coping Strategies

Emergency savings or cash on hand	**38%**
Credit card	**37%**
Personal loan or home equity line of credit	**22%**
Borrow from friends or family	**21%**
Payment plan with a provider or service company	**21%**
Insurance payout, after deduction	**18%**
Tap retirement savings	**18%**
Government or nonprofit assistance	**15%**
Sell investments or other assets	**13%**
High-cost loan or payday loan	**12%**

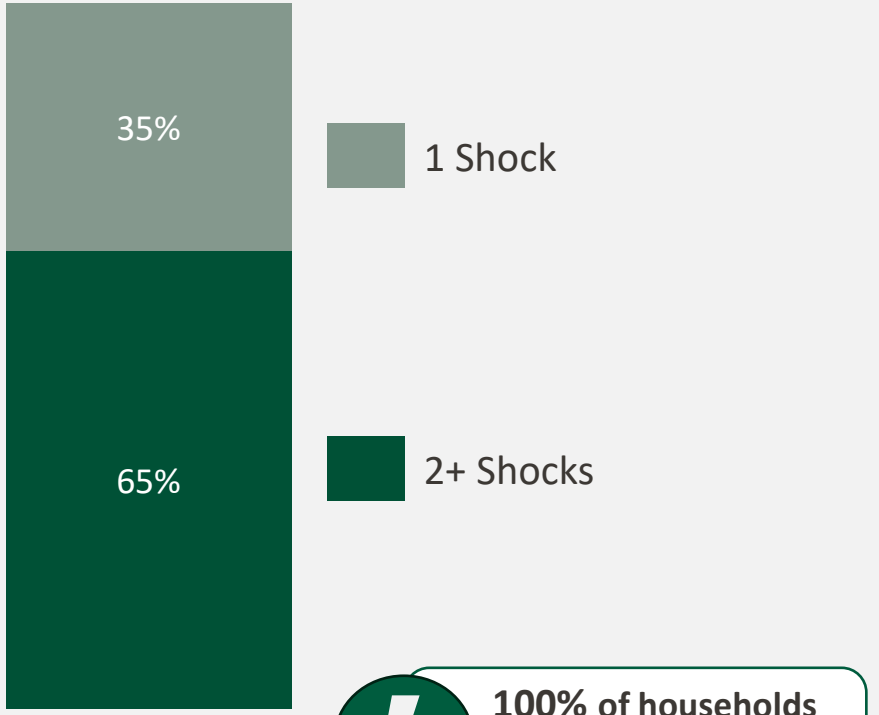
Americans are nearly as **likely to rely on credit cards as emergency savings** to finance disaster or shock recovery.

When Life Happens

How are financial shocks shaping the household financial experience?

Every American household faced a financial shock in the past year, and two-thirds dealt with multiple crises

Number of Financial Shocks Experienced in the Past 12 Months



100% of households experienced a financial shock in the past year.

Most Common Financial Shocks Experienced in the Past 12 Months

- **35%** A sudden or major increase in grocery or household essentials costs
- **29%** A major car repair or transportation expense
- **27%** A job loss, reduction in hours, or loss of income
- **26%** A medical, dental, or mental health expense that was difficult to afford
- **25%** A sudden utility bill increase that strained your budget

Financial shocks are cumulative rather than rare, with **65% of affected households experiencing multiple financial shocks** in the past year.

The financial shocks Americans are experiencing today are not defined solely by emergencies, reflecting the rising cost of everyday life

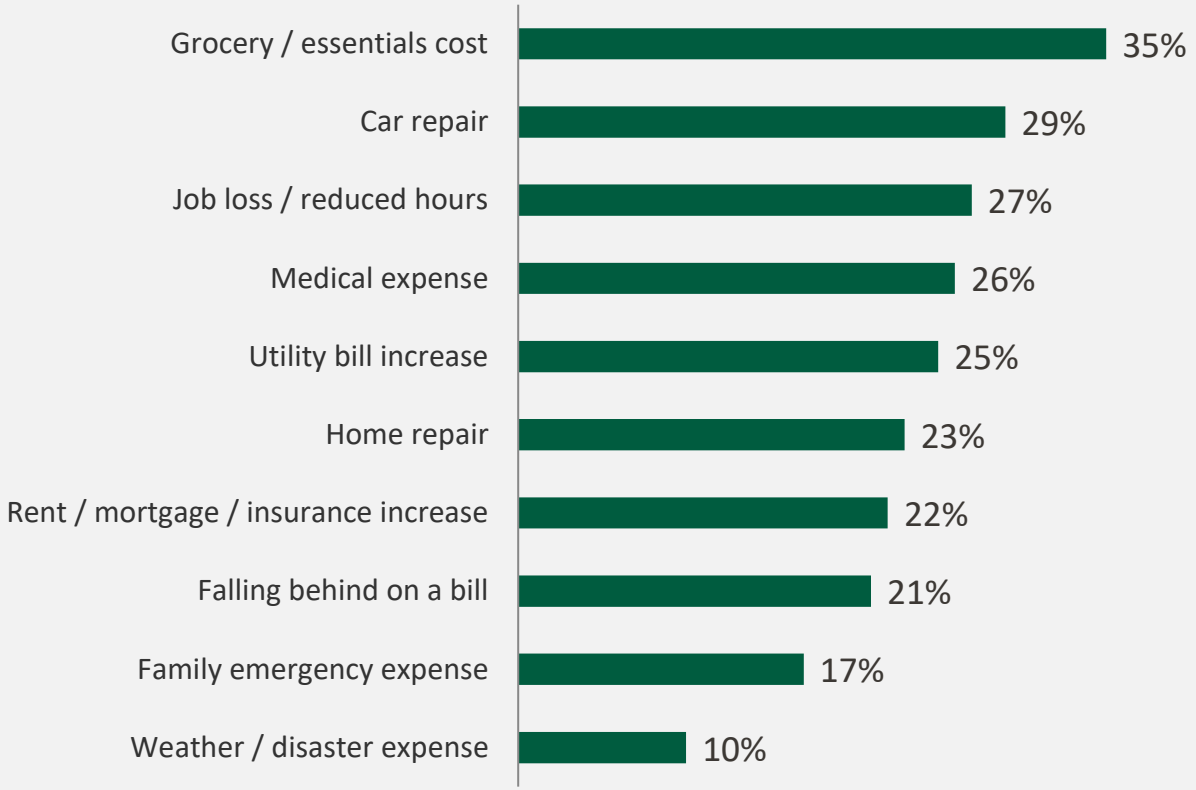
Everyday Cost Pressures – 73% NET

- Grocery / household essentials
- Utility increases
- Housing costs
- Job loss / reduced hours
- Major bills / payments

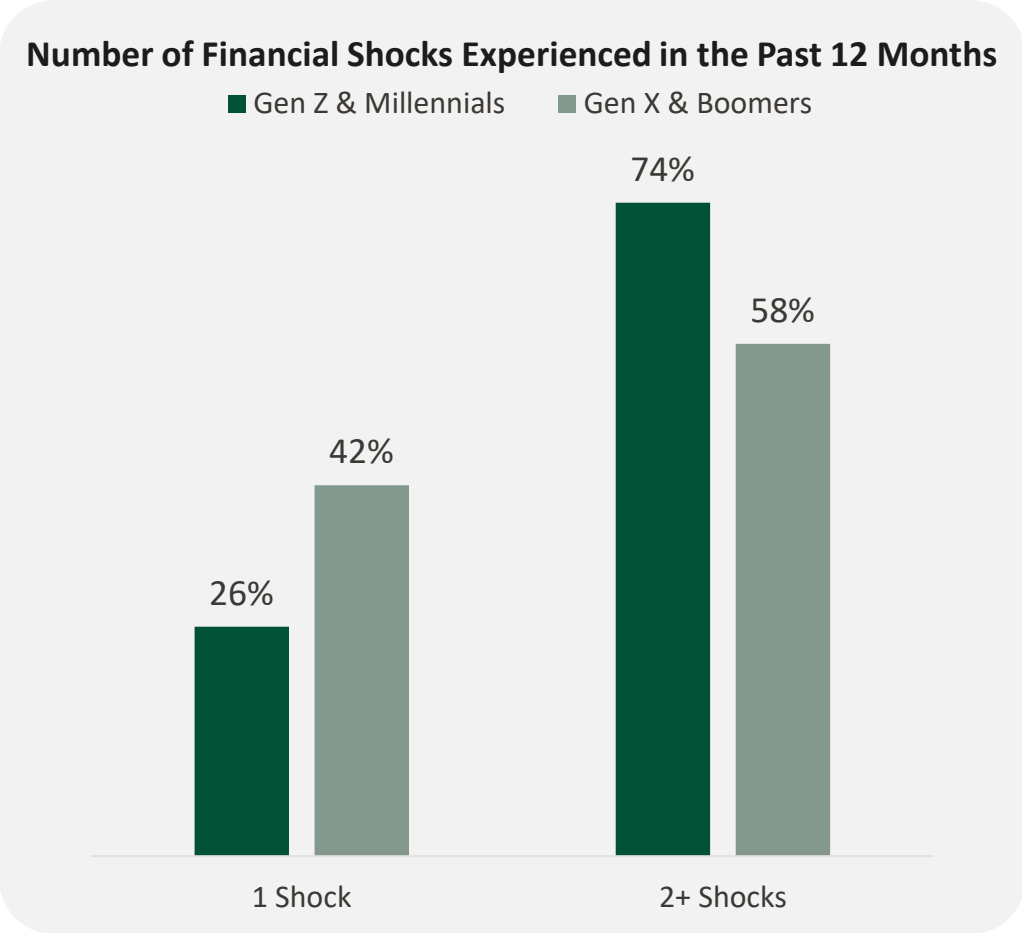
Unexpected Expenses – 69% NET

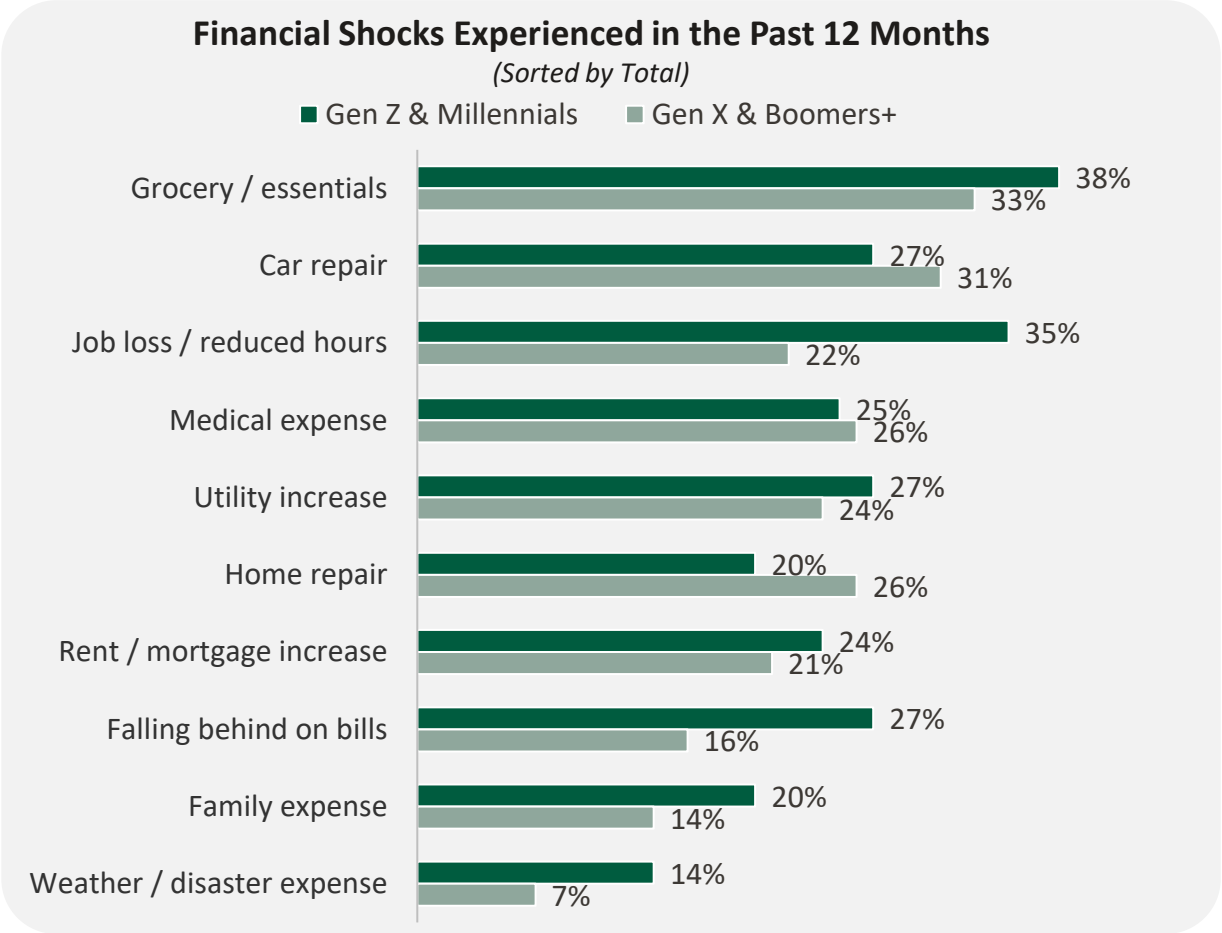
- Car repair
- Medical expense
- Home repair
- Family expense
- Weather / disaster-related expense

Financial Shocks Experienced in the Past 12 Months



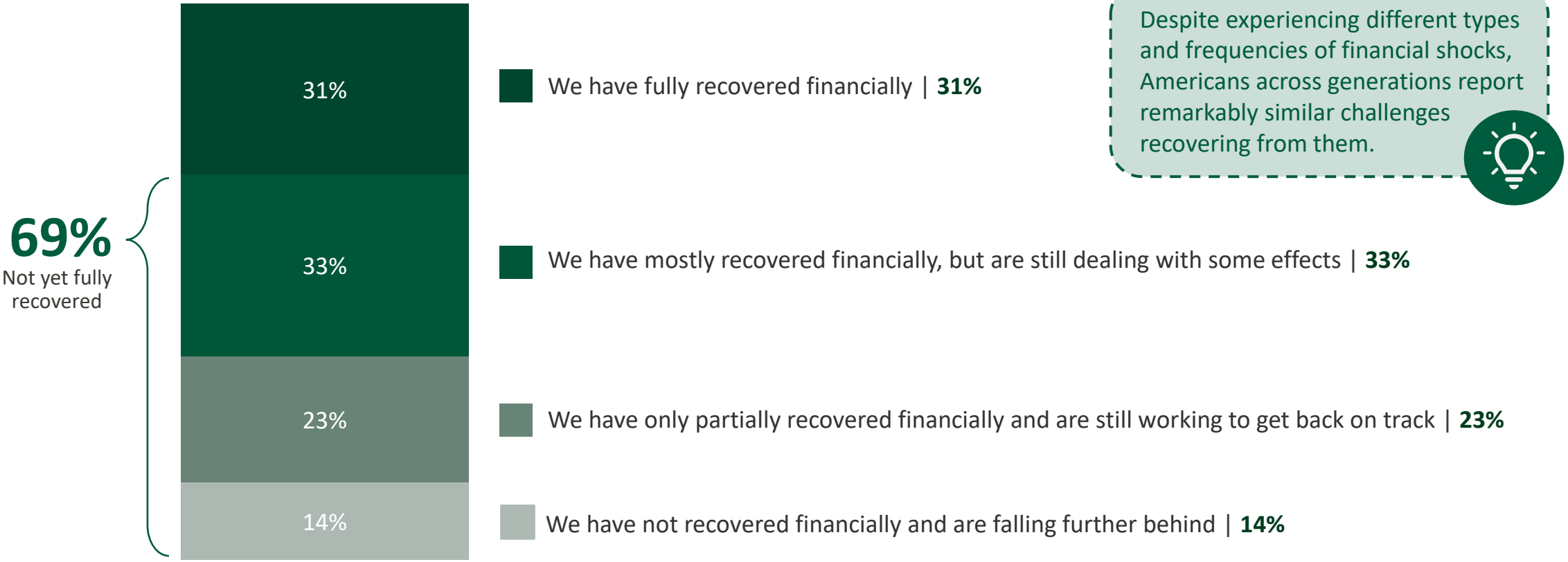
Younger households experience a different financial shock reality than older generations





While financial shocks may be common, recovering from them is far from guaranteed, as seven in 10 households are still in recovery mode

Current Financial Recovery Status Following Recent Financial Shocks

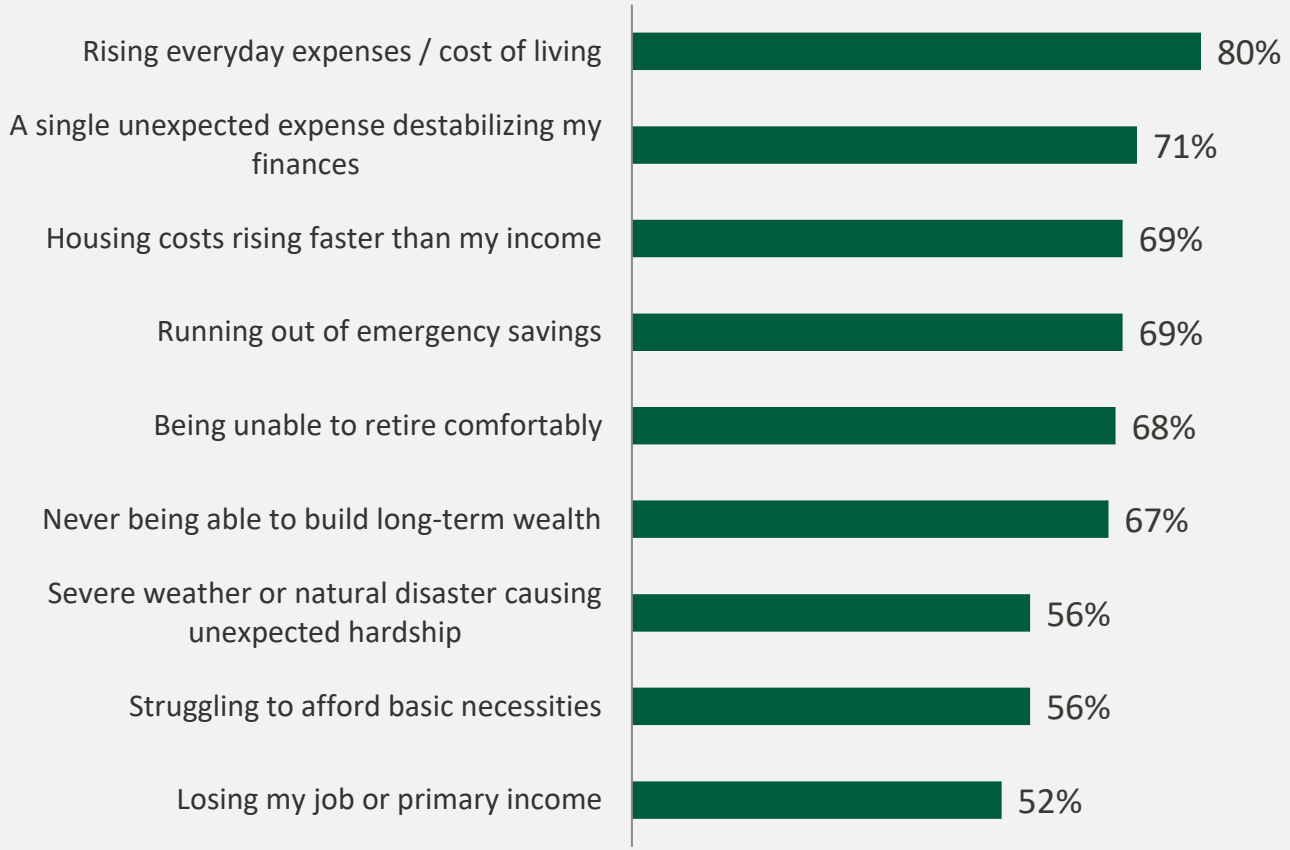


Despite experiencing different types and frequencies of financial shocks, Americans across generations report remarkably similar challenges recovering from them.

The experience of repeated financial shocks has shaped what households are worrying about most today

Top Financial Concerns

(Summary of "Very worried / Somewhat worried")



Immediate Financial Pressures

- Cost of living
- Unexpected expense
- Housing costs
- Emergency savings
- Unexpected weather hardship

Long-Term Security Concerns

- Retirement
- Building wealth
- Job loss

*People are most worried about rising everyday costs, but they also fear a single unexpected expense or running out of savings – **so both steady pressures and sudden shocks fuel anxiety**.*

Redefining Financial Stability

How have American redefined "financial stability" to reflect modern household experiences?

After years of rising costs, repeated shocks, and prolonged recoveries, most Americans believe that financial stability no longer means what it once did

74%

of Americans agree,

"I have had to redefine what it means to be financially stable."

80% Gen Z & Millennials

Financial stability today feels elusive and temporary, even during periods of financial security

83%

of Americans say,
"Even when I am financially stable, I worry it could change quickly."

79%

of Americans say,
"Feeling financially prepared today feels more like a luxury than a reality."

77%

of Americans say,
"I feel like one unexpected expense could undo months of financial progress."
(82% Gen Z & Millennials)

75%

of Americans say,
"I feel exhausted trying to keep up with the rising costs of everyday life."
(80% Gen Z & Millennials)

Americans believe greater financial stability starts with making everyday life more affordable, not just managing money differently

Tools to Improve Financial Stability and Preparedness Today

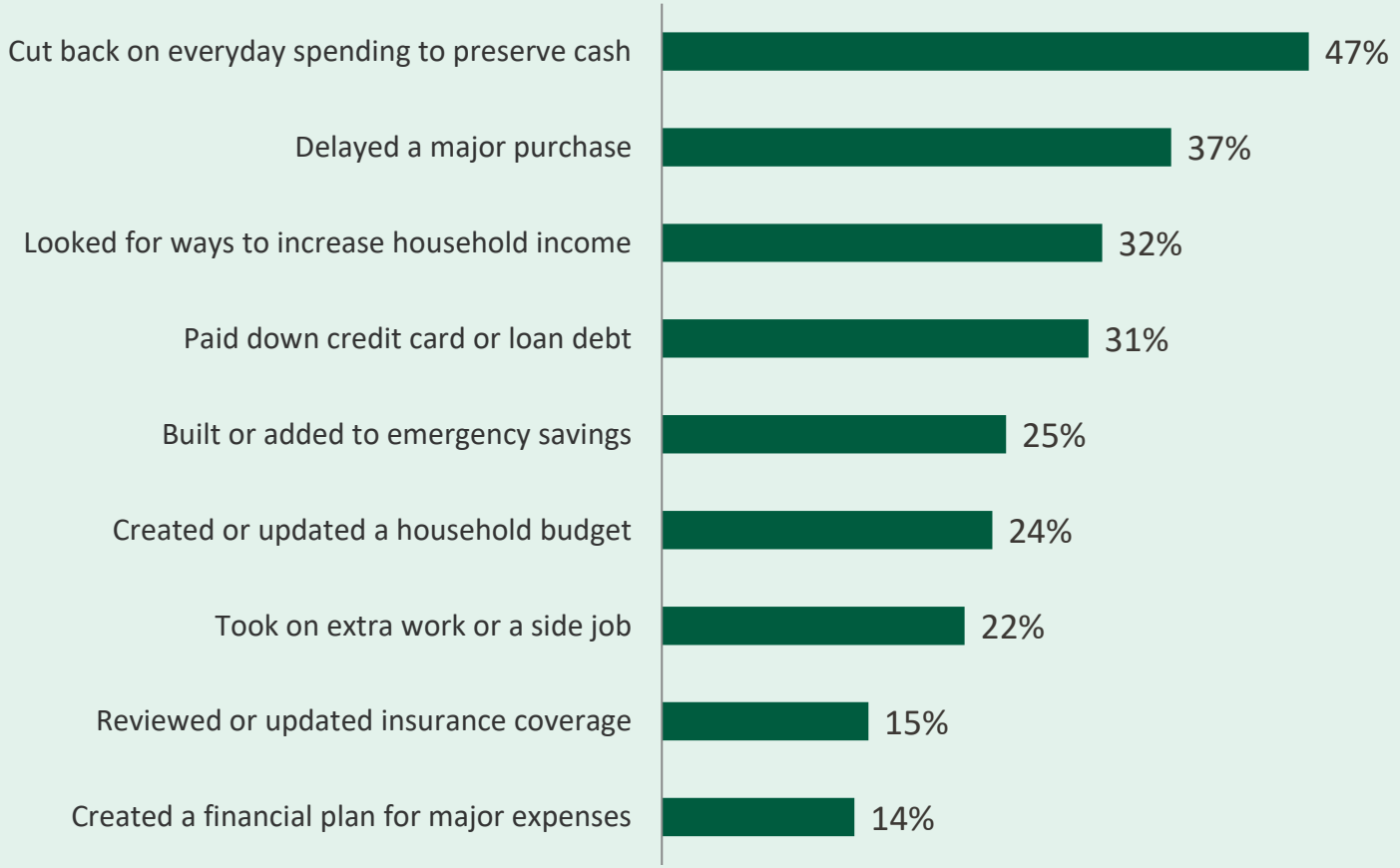
Lower everyday costs, such as groceries, gas, or utilities	**63%**
More money left over after paying monthly bills	**53%**
Higher household income	**51%**
Lower housing costs (rent, mortgage, insurance, property taxes)	**49%**
More emergency savings	**47%**
Less credit card or loan debt	**32%**
Better health insurance or lower out-of-pocket medical costs	**30%**
A more stable job or source of income	**27%**
More predictable monthly expenses	**26%**
Better home, auto, or weather/natural disaster insurance coverage	**21%**
Access to financial guidance or planning support	**14%**

In addition to affordability, **younger generations** are more likely to see financial guidance as an important contributor to stability.

(23% Gen Z & Millennials vs. 8% Gen X & Boomers)

Americans are getting ahead of financial shocks, as 88% take active steps to prepare

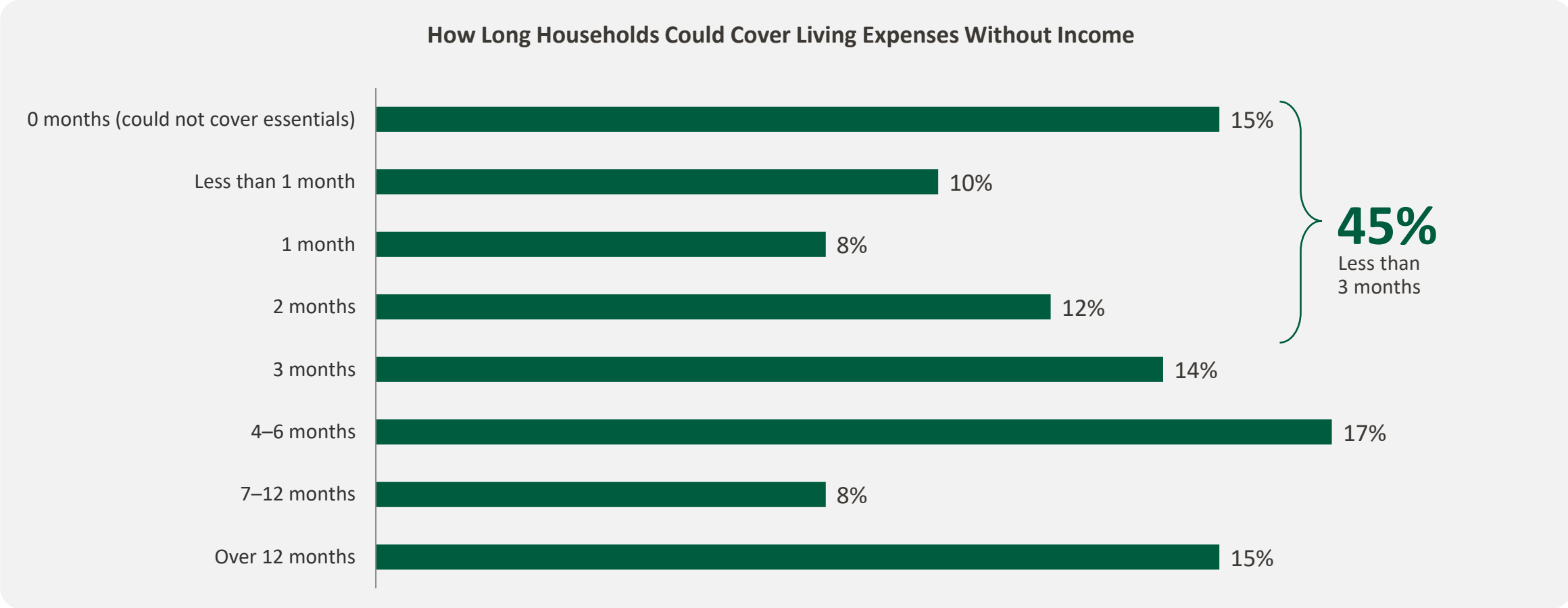
Steps Households Have Taken to Prepare for Potential Financial Shocks



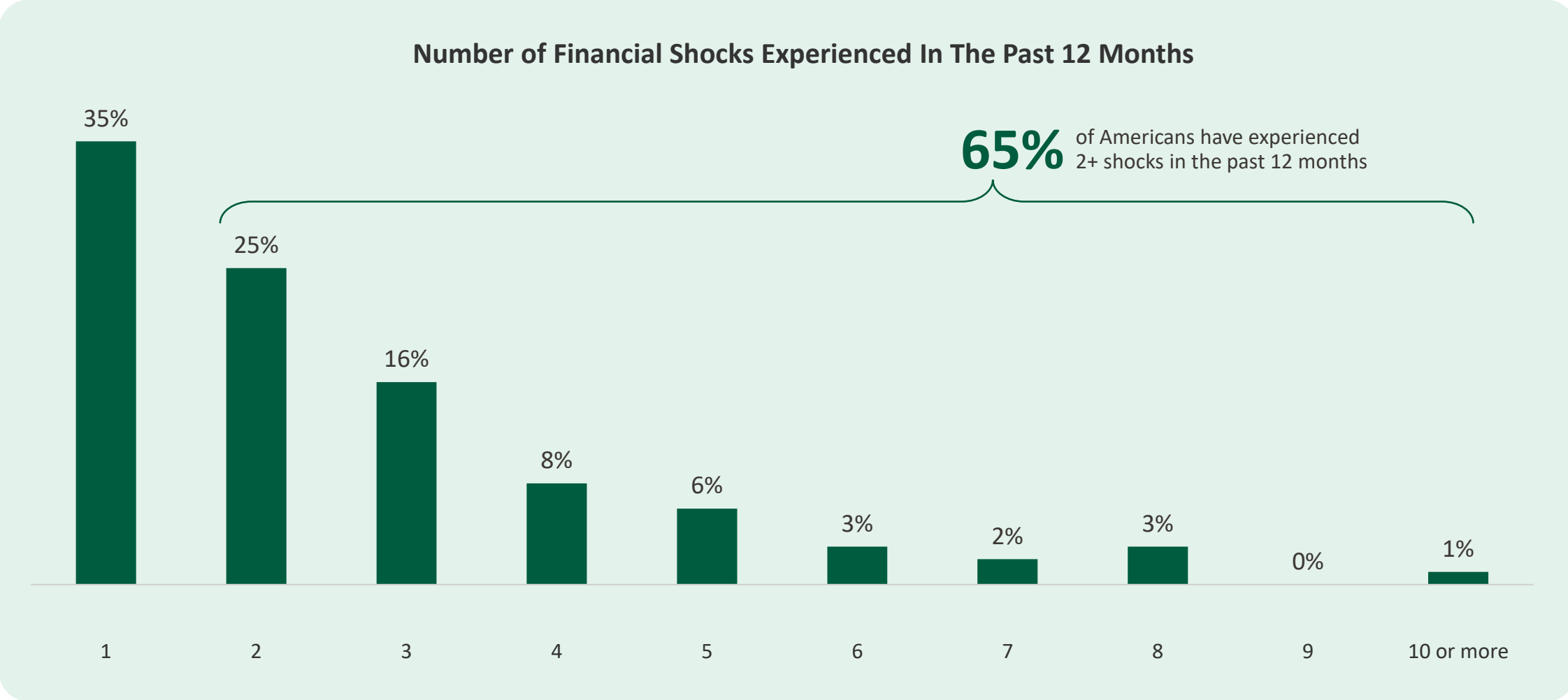
Nearly nine in 10 households (88%) have taken at least one step to prepare for a future financial shock, showing that Americans are **actively preparing for rather than reacting to financial uncertainty**.

Appendix

Financial resilience is unevenly distributed, with nearly half of Americans unable to support themselves without income for more than three months



Nearly two-thirds of Americans have experienced multiple financial shocks over the past year





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