

HOPE INSIDER

An initiative of  OPERATION
HOPE

Bringing you our research, analysis, and
insights into the world of financial inclusion

Year-Over-Year Survey Results: Hope Prevails Through Uncertain Times

Operation HOPE marks the first-year anniversary of its most comprehensive nationwide survey – *The HOPE Insider* – providing a larger view of year-over-year data and trends. Ultimately, the cost of everyday goods played an increasing role in financial stress over the year, with credit card debt remaining the most burdensome. Optimism for personal financial well-being has trended downward, but remains high overall.

In the fourth-quarter results of the survey, nearly 2,000 clients shared their sentiments on general economic conditions and their financial situations, as well as optimism based on the election results. Key findings from this fourth quarter show that, despite feeling the daily strain in their wallets, as well as concern over economic factors in the new year, Operation HOPE clients remain hopeful for the one aspect they can control: their financial well-being.

Here are five key findings:

1. Optimism based on this year's election results is low across all categories

When asked how respondents feel based on the results of the election:

- 53% believe the results will not increase job growth in their community (26% believe it will)
- 51% are less optimistic about housing affordability (26% are more optimistic)
- 48% are less optimistic about the economy, including inflation and the cost of everyday goods (32% are more optimistic)
- 45% believe it will not be easier to start or grow a small business (29% believe it will)
- 39% are less optimistic about their personal financial situation (34% are more optimistic)

2. Hope for increased personal financial well-being remains high, but is lower than this time last year

More than three-fourths of respondents said this quarter that they are hopeful that their financial well-being will increase over the next year (77%). This, however, is an eight percent decrease year-over-year, which coincides with the household economic strain from persistent high prices and other factors in 2024. Looking into a new year, almost half of respondents (46%) said they are “unsure” if we’ll have good times or bad times financially.



I work two jobs to be able to live and cover all my bills. It's hard to do when you barely get enough sleep and the cost of living and everything else (gas, groceries, etc.) increases my work hours and less time with family. But I am hopeful.



If you have saved or are putting savings away, that is what will help you more financially than who is in office. Inflation has driven up the cost of daily goods, which can really impact people's savings. Now is the time to evaluate your budget.



Regarding debt, I've implemented a strategic plan to manage it better, and I'm seeing progress. The steps I've taken toward budgeting and prioritizing repayment have made me feel more in control.

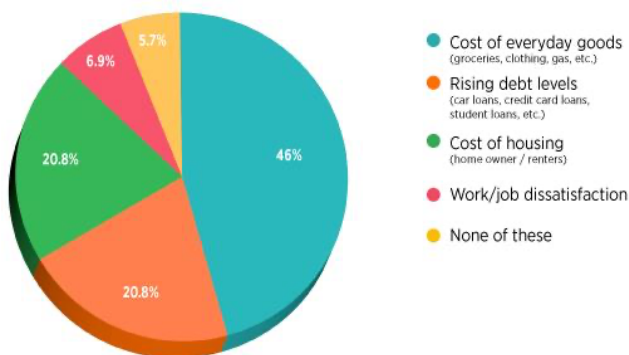
3. Most respondents are still living paycheck-to-paycheck

Almost three-fourths of participants (72%) report living paycheck-to-paycheck, and nearly half (48%) say their personal debt levels have increased over the last three months. Of the debt they currently have, credit cards are the most financially burdensome type, at 35% – this has remained consistent over the course of the year. Student loans are the second-most stressful, at 17%, followed by mortgages and auto loans, tied at 12% each.

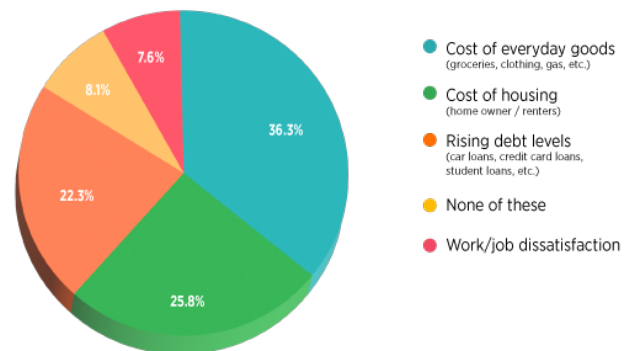
4. Cost of everyday goods remains the most impactful financial burden

Cost of everyday goods (groceries, clothing, gas, etc.) has consistently impacted clients' lives the most since the second quarter of this year. 46% of respondents this quarter said that the cost of everyday goods was the factor most impacting their lives this year – a nearly 10-percent increase from last quarter (37.5%) and a significant jump from last year when 27.5% said inflation (a measure of the rising costs of everyday goods) was the most impactful financial burden. We saw a significant increase in respondents reporting cost of everyday goods as the most worrisome factor in the near future – from 25% last year to 36% this year.

Factor that most impacted life in last 3 months



Factor most worried about in next 3 months



5. Employment satisfaction has decreased

The percent of respondents who are overall satisfied with their current employment has decreased to 62% this quarter from 75% in the fourth quarter last year. Although nearly 47% of respondents are still “very” hopeful that their work/career will improve over the next year, this metric has decreased from 54% last quarter and 53% this time last year. Despite almost 69% of respondents describing the current economy as “difficult” to start or grow as an entrepreneur, the majority of respondents (61%) remain hopeful that small business growth in their community will increase over the next year.