

# 2026 Planning & Progress Study

Financial Independence

# Background & Methodology

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## **Background**

The 2026 Planning & Progress Study, a research series from Northwestern Mutual, explores US adults' attitudes and behaviors toward money, financial decision-making, and the broader issues impacting people's long-term financial security.

## **Methodology**

The Harris Poll conducted a total of 4,375 online interviews among the general U.S. adult (18+) population between January 5<sup>th</sup> and January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2026. Included in this overall total is a sample of 816 High-Net-Worth individuals (those with total household investable assets, excluding pensions, retirement plans and property, greater than \$1,000,000).

Data for the general U.S. population (including the High Net Worth oversample) were weighted to Census targets for education, age, gender, race/ethnicity, region and household income. A full methodology is available.

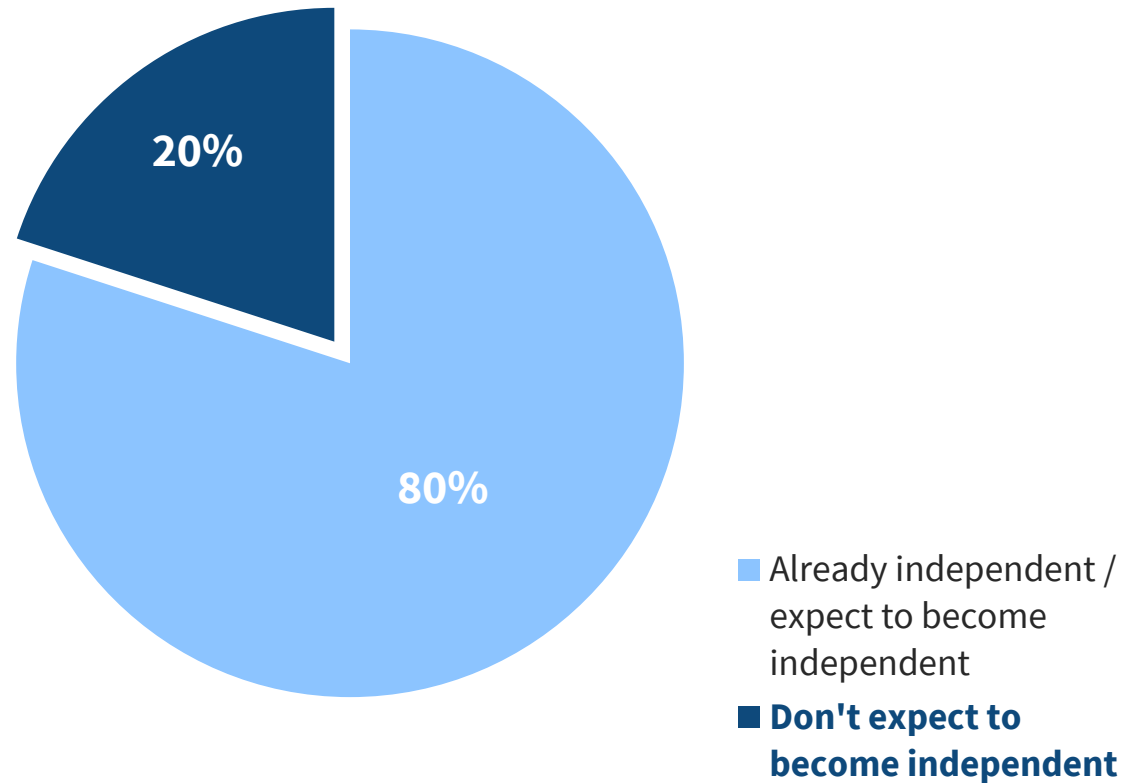
# 42% of U.S. adults continue to rely on previous generations for financial support in some capacity. One-third of Gen X, more than half of Millennials and nearly 3 in 4 Gen Z'ers agree.

**How financially independent you currently feel from your parents  
(meaning you could support yourself without them if needed)**

	Fully Independent	Dependent	Not Applicable
<b>U.S. Adults</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>42%</b>	14%
<b>Gen Z</b>	24%	<b>72%</b>	4%
<b>Millennials</b>	40%	<b>53%</b>	7%
<b>Gen X</b>	55%	<b>33%</b>	12%
<b>Boomers+</b>	53%	17%	30%

# 20% of U.S. adults believe they will never be financially independent.

**% of Americans who are currently or expect to become financially independent**



**BASE: ALL QUALIFIED RESPONDENTS (n=4,375)**

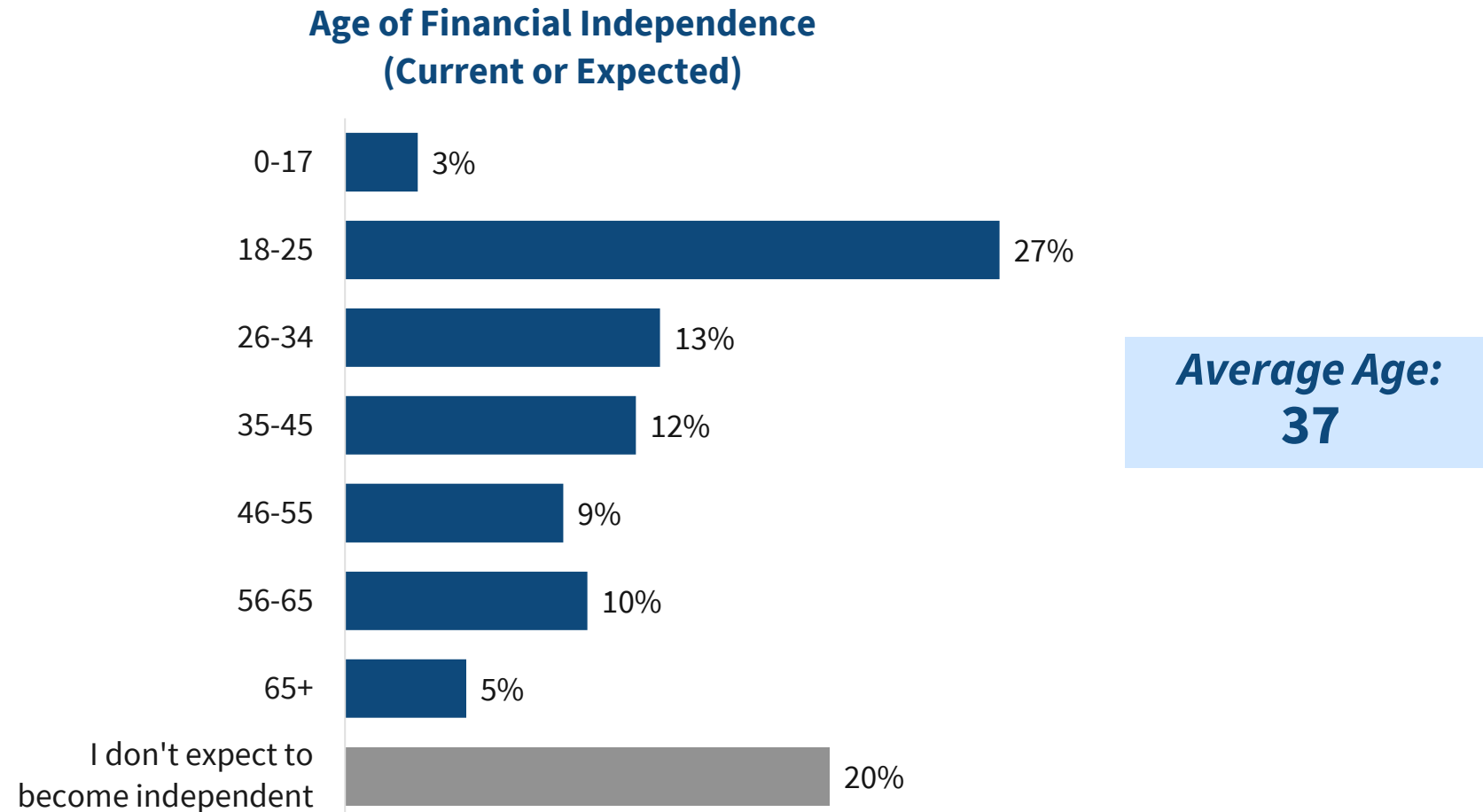
**Q2632.** At what age did you become or do you expect to become financially independent?

# While significant differences exist across generations, about 1 in 5 of each believe they will never be financially independent.

**% that do not expect to become financially independent**

U.S. Adults	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers+
20%	20%	17%	22%	22%

# The average age Americans say they achieved – or expect to achieve – financial independence is 37, nearly 20 years after the average American graduates from high school.



**BASE: ALL QUALIFIED RESPONDENTS (n=4,375)**

**Q2632.** At what age did you become or do you expect to become financially independent?

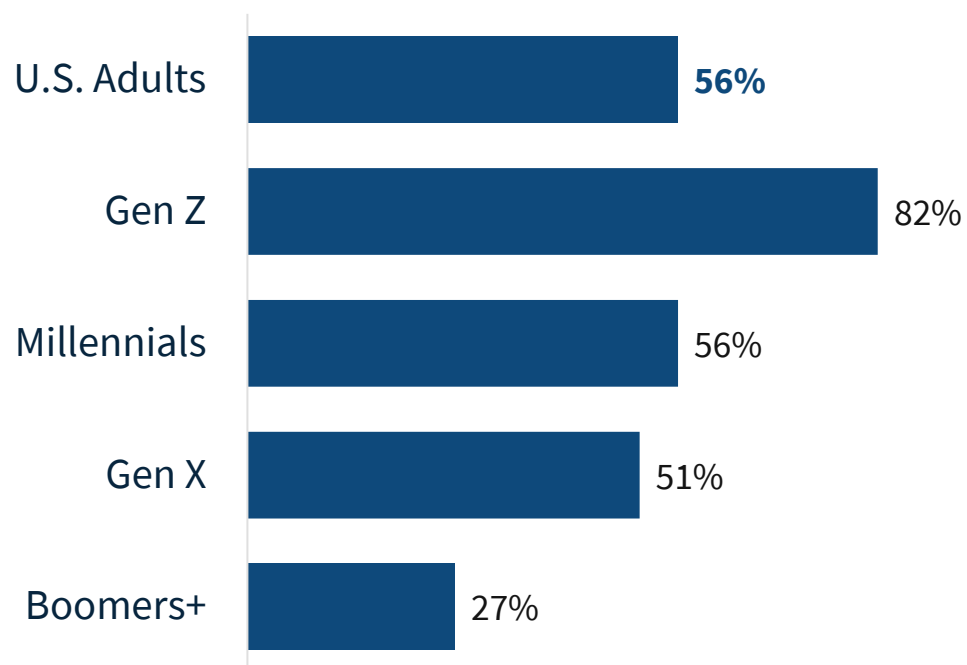
More than half (56%) of all U.S. adults say it is somewhat or much harder to achieve financial independence today than it was for previous generations. This sentiment is strongly echoed by older Americans, with two-thirds (66%) of Boomers+ agreeing.

Do you believe achieving financial independence is easier or harder today than it was for previous generations?

	U.S. Adults	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers+
<b>Easier</b>	20%	31%	25%	15%	11%
<b>Harder</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>66%</b>
<b>About the Same</b>	24%	22%	24%	26%	23%

Among those who are still financially dependent, more than 8 in 10 (82%) Gen Z'ers believe they will be self-sufficient someday. Only 56% of Millennials and 51% of Gen X'ers who feel financially dependent agree.

**% Confident They'll Become Financially Independent**  
*Among Those Not Financially Independent*



**BASE: NOT FINANCIALLY INDEPENDENT (n=1,164)**

**Q2631.** How confident are you that you will become financially independent someday?