

**DON'T  
FALL FOR IT**

**GUARDING  
AGAINST  
FINANCIAL  
FRAUD**

**A SURVEY ABOUT  
AMERICANS' EXPERIENCES  
WITH FINANCIAL FRAUD**

### **Without a strong financial foundation, improving one's financial well-being can feel out of reach. Financial fraud, scams and exploitation threaten to derail Americans' financial security and, ultimately, their confidence in achieving their long-term financial goals.**

This problem is not going away; it is accelerating. The nature of financial fraud is also changing rapidly, making it harder than ever to detect. Today, scammers are deploying Artificial Intelligence generated voice fraud to impersonate family members and government officials, deepfake videos to fabricate trusted faces, and highly personalized phishing messages that bypass the telltale signs people typically spot.

As Americans face a relentless barrage of financial fraud attempts, detecting scams on a timely basis can be challenging. Regarding internet fraud alone, the FBI reports receiving more than one million online financial crime complaints in 2025, with losses totaling almost \$20.9 billion — a 26% increase from 2024.<sup>1</sup> Americans worry not only that they might be targets of financial fraud but also that their loved ones and vulnerable groups, such as children and the elderly, might become victims. When fraud occurs, uncertainty, shame or fear can delay action or prevent individuals from seeking help altogether. To make matters worse, victims who are scammed out of their life savings are sometimes forced to pay federal and state taxes on money they no longer have.



1. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internet Crime Report 2025. April 2026: <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/cryptocurrency-and-ai-scams-bilk-americans-of-billions>. Experts widely agree that these numbers are underestimated due to underreporting and data gaps.

Understanding how Americans experience and respond to financial fraud can inform and strengthen fraud detection and prevention efforts, as well as bolster support systems for victims. These widespread experiences also highlight the important role that a competent, ethical financial professional, such as a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER® professional, can play in helping clients defend against and navigate around difficult situations involving financial fraud, scams and exploitation.

CFP Board sought to better understand Americans' experience with financial fraud and how they might manage the impacts when they are targeted. With this goal in mind, CFP Board conducted a survey from April 8-13, 2026, that generated 1,218 responses from a cross-section of Americans. The survey data form the basis of this report.



## Don't Fall For It: **Guarding Against Financial Fraud**



**Only 37% of Americans** are confident they would identify all forms of financial fraud.

Conversely, **3 in 10 Americans** (29%) are unsure they can detect any financial fraud attempt.



**55% of Americans** expect they or someone close to them will be targeted in the next 12 months.



Americans worry about their children, parents and grandparents **protecting themselves from financial fraud.**



**62% of Americans** have either encountered financial fraud or know someone who has in the past 3 years.



**1 in 4 Americans** who were victimized by a financial scam but did not contact law enforcement stayed silent due to embarrassment or shame.

## Confidence in the Face of Financial Fraud

Financial fraud can take many forms, including:

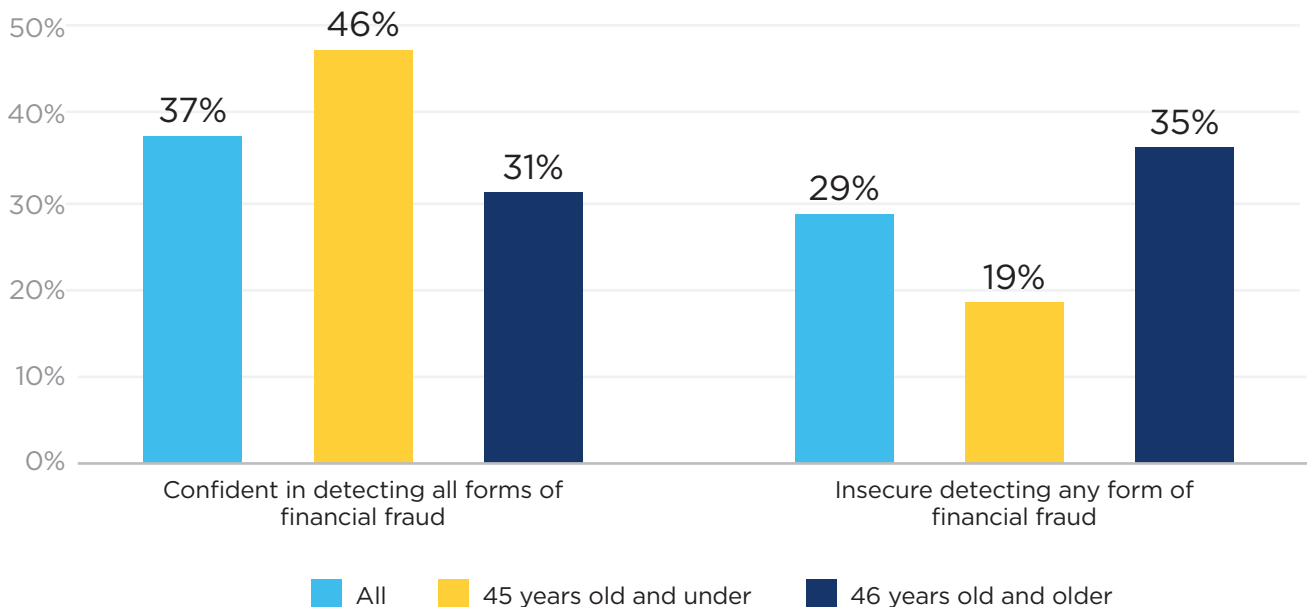
- **A phone call or voicemail using an AI-generated voice** to impersonate someone you know (e.g., a family member, a bank or a government official)
- **A video call or video message using AI** to make someone appear to be a trusted person (i.e., a “deepfake”)
- **A text message or email** personalized with a victim’s real name, account details or recent activity to appear legitimate
- **A social media post or online ad** promoting an investment opportunity from someone who appears to be a celebrity or financial expert
- **A traditional phone or email scam** (e.g., IRS impersonation or phishing email)

Thirty-seven percent of Americans believe they would identify each of these forms of financial fraud. But this is not true for everyone. In fact, three in 10 Americans (29%) are unsure about their ability to detect any attempt at financial fraud in a timely way.

Younger Americans are confident in their own ability to detect electronic financial fraud attempts — whether it is warranted or not. Older Americans are less so. Forty-six percent of survey respondents 45 years old or under believe that they would successfully identify financial fraud targeted at them, compared with 31% of those age 46 or older. Conversely, 35% of older Americans doubt their ability to detect any form of digital financial fraud, versus 19% of younger Americans.

### Only 37% of Americans Are Confident in Their Ability to Identify All Forms of Financial Fraud

(Percent of Respondents)



This confidence varies by the fraud delivery method. In particular, Americans are confident in their ability to detect fraud attempts delivered through traditional channels, such as phone and email phishing (71%).

Even as scams evolve online, two-thirds of Americans feel confident they can spot a social media post or online ad scam that promotes an investment opportunity from someone who appears to be a celebrity or financial expert. A similar share believes they could recognize a phone call or voicemail using a voice generated by artificial intelligence (AI) to impersonate someone they know (64%).

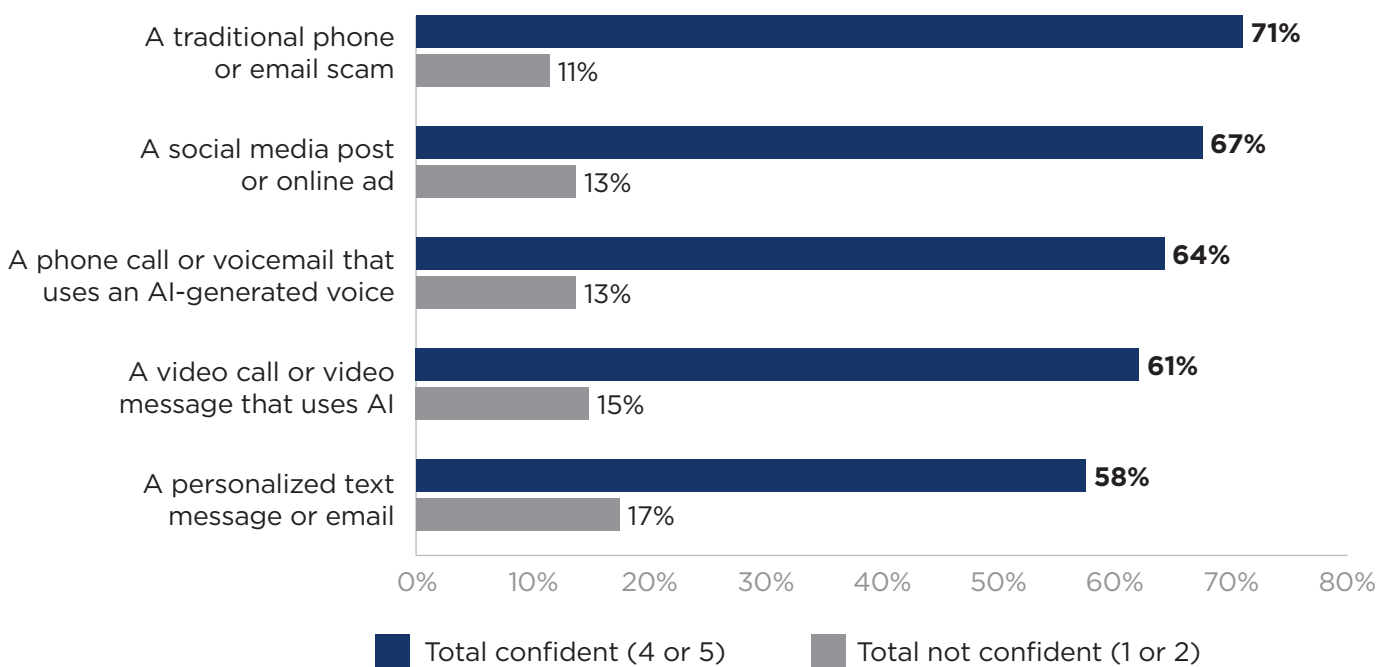
Smaller percentages of Americans feel confident identifying fraud that is more technologically sophisticated and personalized. Three in 5 Americans are certain they would detect financial fraud in a video call or message that uses AI to make someone appear to be a person they trust (61%) and in identifying a personalized text or email scam that is customized with their real name or account details (58%).

About three-quarters of younger Americans are confident in their ability to recognize fraud in a phone call or voicemail using an AI-generated voice to impersonate someone they know compared to older Americans (78% vs. 55%) and in a video call or message that uses AI to make someone appear to be a person they trust (73% vs. 53%). Over two-thirds are certain that they can identify a personalized text or email scam that uses their real name or account details (69% vs. 51%).

And of course, someone’s belief that they will recognize fraud does not necessarily translate into an ability to do so when it actually occurs.

## Americans Are Most Confident in Recognizing “Traditional” Forms of Financial Fraud

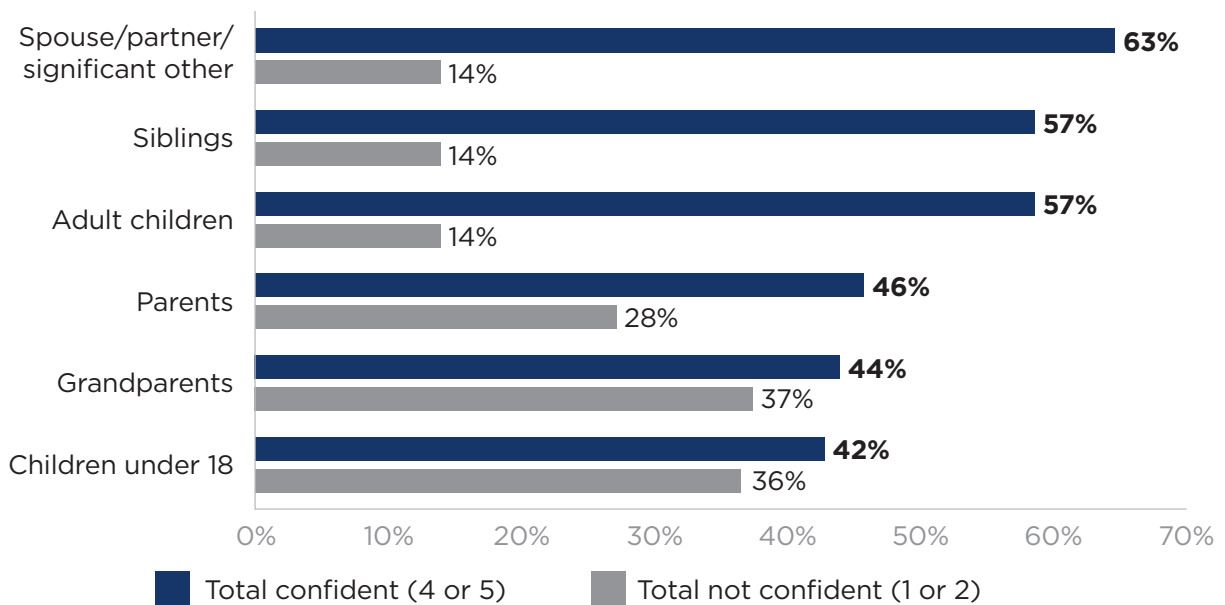
(Percentage Distribution of the Confidence Level in Recognizing Type of Scam Based on a 5-Point Scale)



Even if one believes in their own ability to identify a financial fraud attempt, they are not as sure about some of the people close to them. Sixty-three percent of survey respondents believe their spouse, partner or significant other would detect a financial fraud attempt aimed at them. Similarly, a majority of Americans have faith that their siblings and adult children would recognize a financial fraud attempt when it happens. However, they are less sure about other family members who are older and younger than them. Only two in five Americans believe that their parents (46%), grandparents (44%) and children under 18 (42%) would be able to detect financial fraud, scams and exploitation aimed at them. Nearly the same percentages are concerned that either their grandparents (37%) or their children under 18 (36%) would identify a financial fraud attempt.

## Most Americans Are Confident in Their Spouse Detecting Financial Fraud, But Not in Their Underage Children, Parents and Grandparents

(Percentage Distribution of Confidence Level Based on a 5-Point Scale)

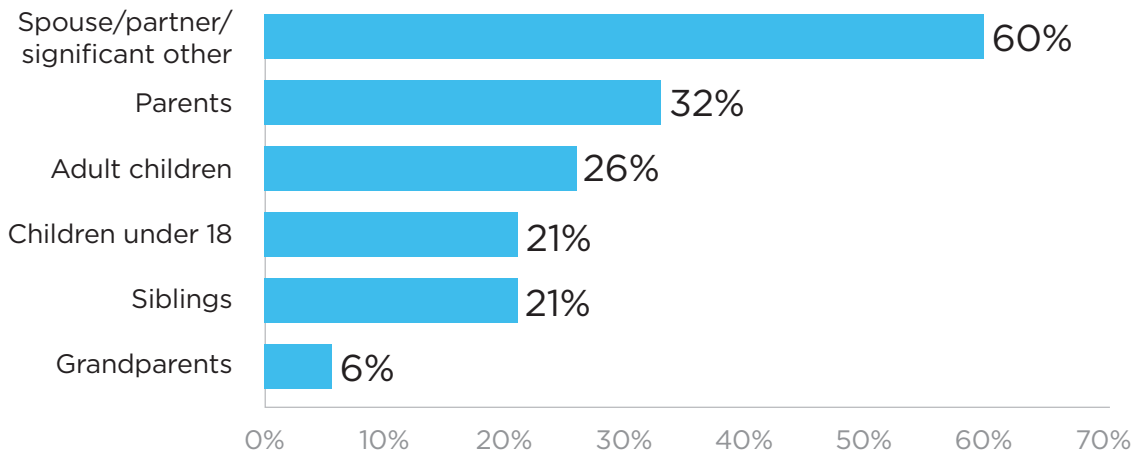


Given Americans' varying confidence in their loved ones' abilities to identify financial fraud, more conversations on the topic can help raise awareness and promote fraud avoidance. Three in 5 Americans report having had specific conversations with their spouses or significant others in the past year about financial fraud.

Those conversations are less common with others. Fewer than one-third of Americans have discussed financial fraud with their parents in the past year. Only a quarter have had conversations with their adult children, and 1 in 5 with their young children and siblings. Only 6% of Americans say they have spoken to their grandparents over the past year about recognizing or avoiding financial fraud, scams or exploitation.

### Three in Five Americans Had Conversations With Their Spouses About Recognizing Financial Fraud in the Past Year, But Fewer Had Conversations With Other Loved Ones

(Percent of Respondents)



## Expectations for Financial Fraud Over the Next Year

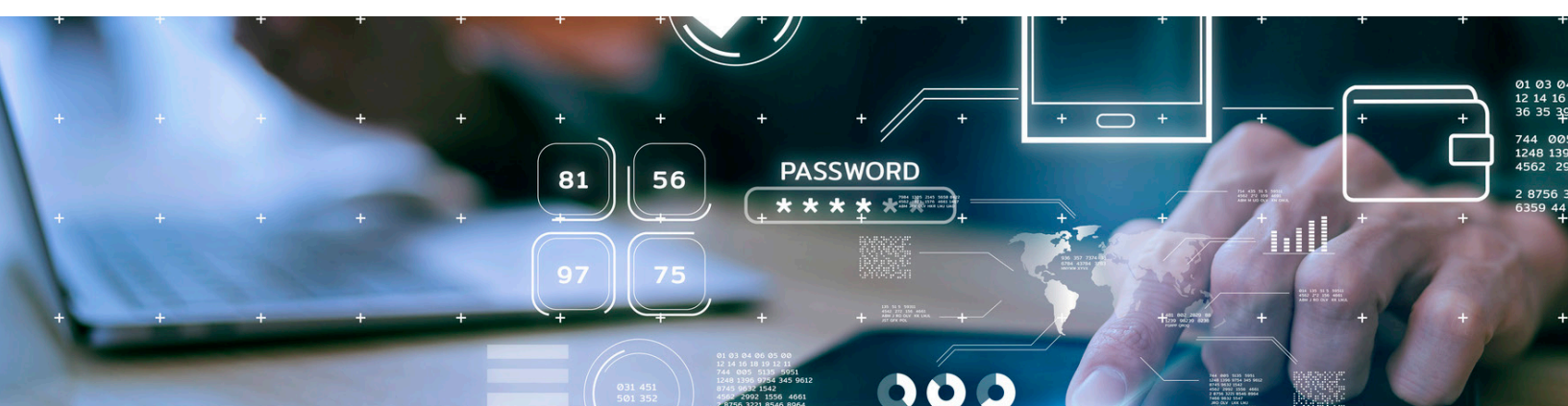
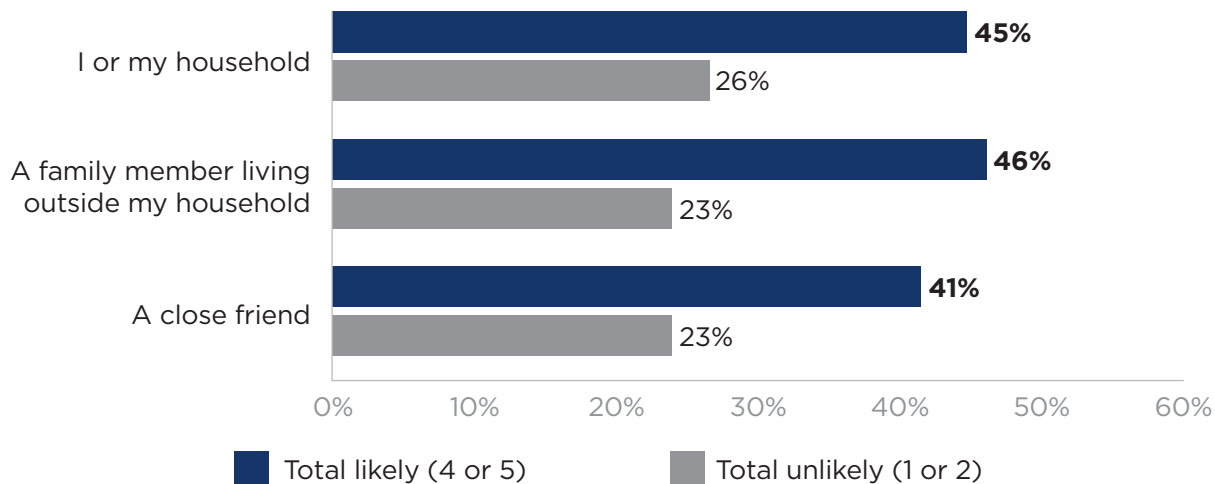
Most people expect financial fraud, or the risk of it, to affect their lives. In fact, 55% of Americans expect that they, an immediate family member or a close friend will be the target of financial fraud or a scam over the next 12 months. Nearly half of Americans (46%) believe it is likely that an extended family member will be the target of a financial fraud attempt in the next year, while a similar proportion (45%) believe they or their immediate household will be. About 2 in 5 expect that a close friend could be the target of financial fraud in the next year.

Wealthier Americans earning at least \$75,000 are more likely than those with lower household incomes to expect their circle to be targeted by financial fraud in the next 12 months:

- Themselves or their household (51% vs. 41%).
- A family member living outside their household (52% vs. 40%).
- A close friend (47% vs. 36%).

### 55% of Americans Expect They or Someone Close to Them Will Be a Financial Fraud Target in the Next 12 Months

(Percentage Distribution of Likelihood Level Based on a 5-Point Scale)



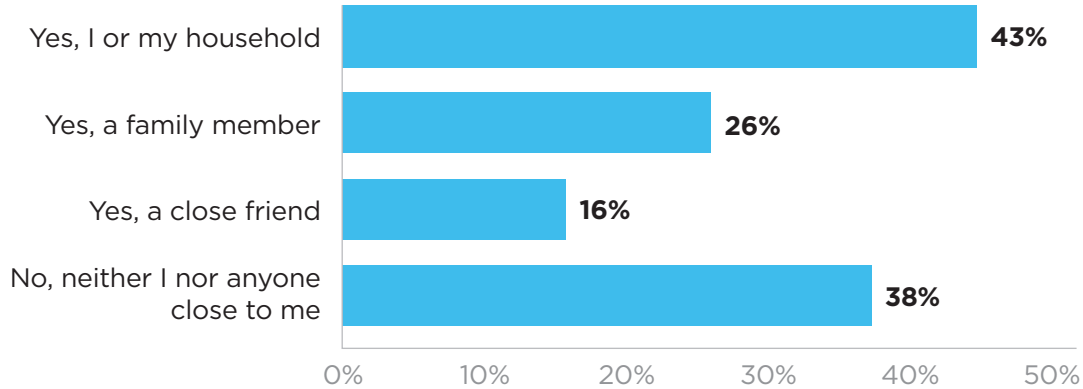
## Engaging With Financial Fraud

Financial fraud is pervasive in America, but it can feel like a distant concern until it happens to you or someone you know. And the number of people affected by fraud is growing.

Three in 5 Americans say they or someone they know has confronted financial fraud at least once over the past three years. This includes 43% of survey respondents who report that they or a household member was targeted for financial fraud. About a quarter of Americans report that a family member has encountered suspected financial fraud in the past three years, while 16% know of a friend who has experienced it.

Conversely, fewer than 2 in 5 Americans (38%) say neither they nor anyone close to them has encountered suspected financial fraud, scams or exploitation in the past three years.

**3 in 5 Americans Have Confronted Financial Fraud in the Past 3 Years or Know Someone Who Has**  
(Percent of Respondents)



## Financial fraud can take one of many forms:

- **Imposter scams** involve someone posing as a trusted organization, such as the IRS, a bank or tech support.
- **Investment fraud** involves deceptive offers, including for real estate, stocks or cryptocurrencies.
- **Lottery or sweepstakes scams** tell the victim they have won a prize or inheritance but must first pay taxes or a processing fee.
- **Phishing or smishing** typically involves fraudulent emails or texts that appear to come from a legitimate source, such as a streaming account or package delivery.
- **Relationship scams** establish a relationship with the victim through an online profile and then request money for an expense.
- **Vulnerable adult exploitation** involves accessing a vulnerable adult's funds through theft or coercion.

Among survey respondents who reported either having personally encountered financial fraud or having it happen to someone close to them over the past three years, the two most prevalent forms were:

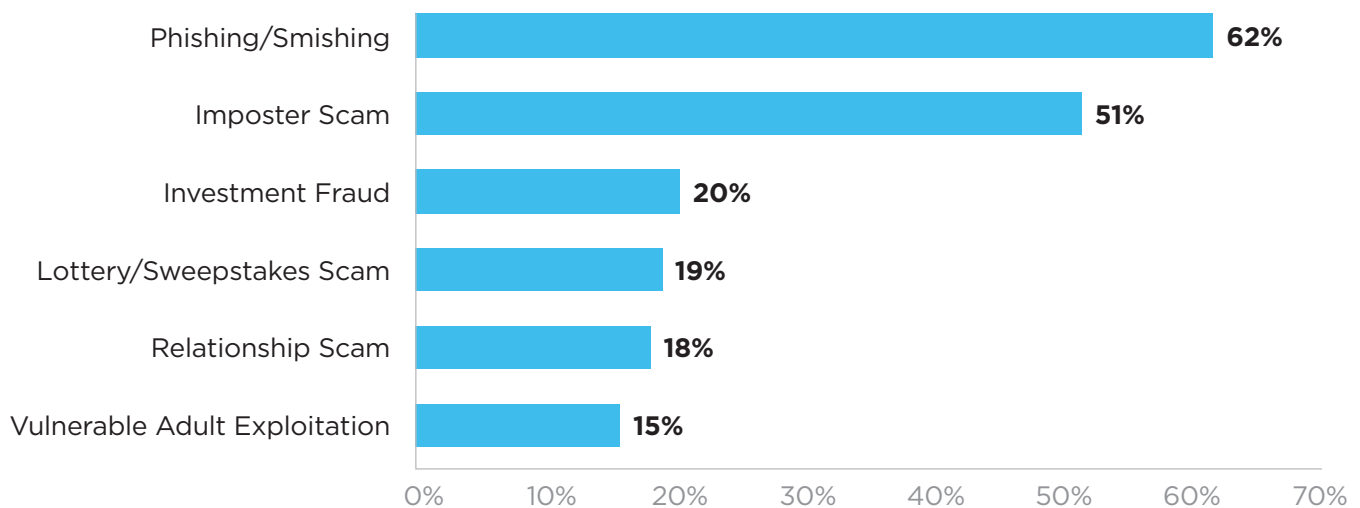
- Phishing/smishing (62%).
- Imposter scam (51%).

Less common financial scams included investment fraud (20%), lottery/sweepstakes scams (19%), relationship scams (18%) and vulnerable adult exploitation (15%).

Over the past three years, Americans over age 45 report encountering phishing or smishing at higher rates than those 45 and under (68% vs. 55%). Younger Americans report experiencing investment scams more often than older Americans (29% vs. 14%).

### Phishing/Smishing and Imposter Scams Are the Most Prevalent Types of Financial Fraud

(Percent of Respondents That Either Were Targeted for Fraud or Know Someone Who Was in the Past Three Years)



Fraudsters target their intended victims through a variety of delivery mechanisms. Whether through traditional methods such as regular mail or newer modes like social media, Americans need to remain vigilant.

More than half of Americans report receiving suspected attempts of financial fraud, scam or exploitation in the past three years via text messages (57%), email (55%) or phone calls (54%). Most of these communication methods are accessible on smartphones or computers. Fewer Americans report encountering financial fraud via social media (20%) or physical mail (10%).

Younger Americans, ages 45 and under, report encountering financial fraud on social media in the past three years at higher rates than older Americans over 45 (32% vs. 15%).

Americans report regularly experiencing attempts at financial fraud. Some of the most common examples of financial fraud that survey respondents reported include:

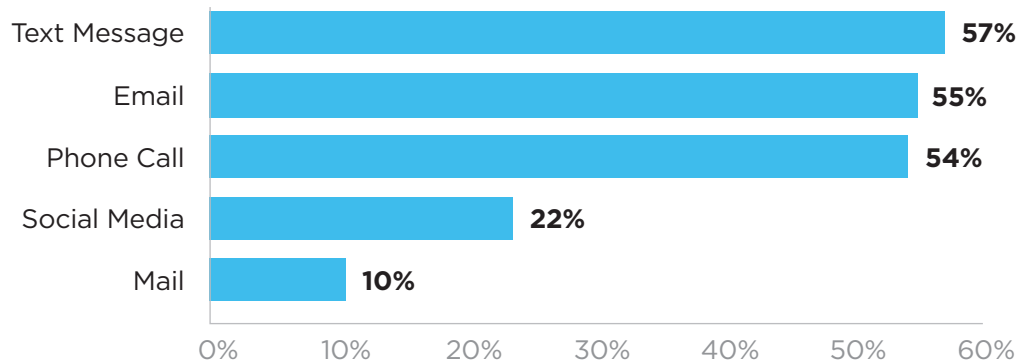
- Phone calls or emails claiming to be from financial institutions or government agencies.
- Text messages about tolls, package deliveries or account issues.

Other examples of interactions with financial fraud include:

- Spam emails and phone calls urging quick action.
- Fraudulent charges on credit or debit cards.
- Hacked accounts.

### Financial Fraud Most Commonly Delivered Through Text Messages, Emails and Phone Calls

(Percent of Respondents That Either Were Targeted for Fraud or Know Someone Who Was in the Past Three Years)



## Managing Encounters With Financial Fraud

While many Americans report being targeted by attempted financial fraud, most did not engage. More than half of Americans (54%) report that they have completely avoided engaging with suspected financial fraud, scams or exploitation attempts in the past three years. Another 21% say that they were close to becoming a victim of financial fraud but, at the last moment, decided not to engage. Younger Americans, ages 45 and under, are more likely than those over 45 years old to report that they have suffered a loss over the past three years resulting from financial fraud (32% vs. 20%).

But not everyone successfully avoided being a victim. Over half of those who suffered a loss due to financial fraud in the past three years lost \$500 or more. A quarter of Americans say they were victims of a financial fraud scheme and lost money in the process.

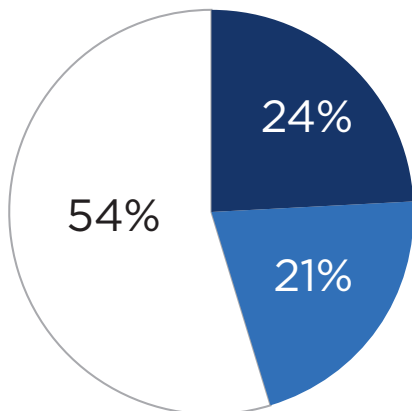
Notably, 76% of respondents were unaware that Americans generally cannot deduct financial losses resulting from fraud on their federal income taxes. In fact, taxpayers who are victims of scams may claim a theft loss deduction only if their situation meets specific conditions:

- The loss must result from criminal conduct classified as theft under applicable state law;
- The taxpayer must have no reasonable prospect of recovering the stolen funds; and
- The loss must arise from a transaction entered into for profit.

Those who lose money through personal scams — such as romance scams — often do not qualify for the deduction under current law.<sup>2</sup>

### Most, But Not All, Americans Do Not Engage With Financial Fraud Attempts

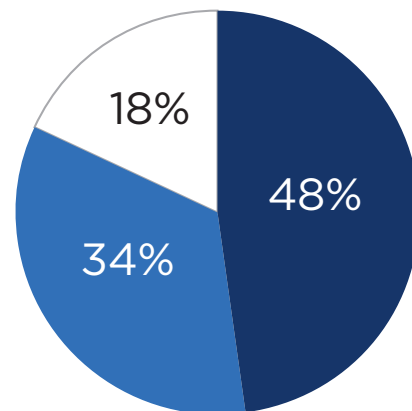
(Percentage Distribution of Survey Respondents Targeted With Attempted Financial Fraud)



- Engaged with the fraud attempt
- Almost (but did not) engage with the fraud attempt
- Did not engage with the fraud attempt

### Financial Fraud Losses Tend to Be Small

(Percentage Distribution of Survey Respondents Who Engaged With a Financial Fraud Attempt)



- Suffered financial loss of less than \$500
- Suffered financial loss of between \$500-\$2,500
- Suffered financial loss greater than \$2,500

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

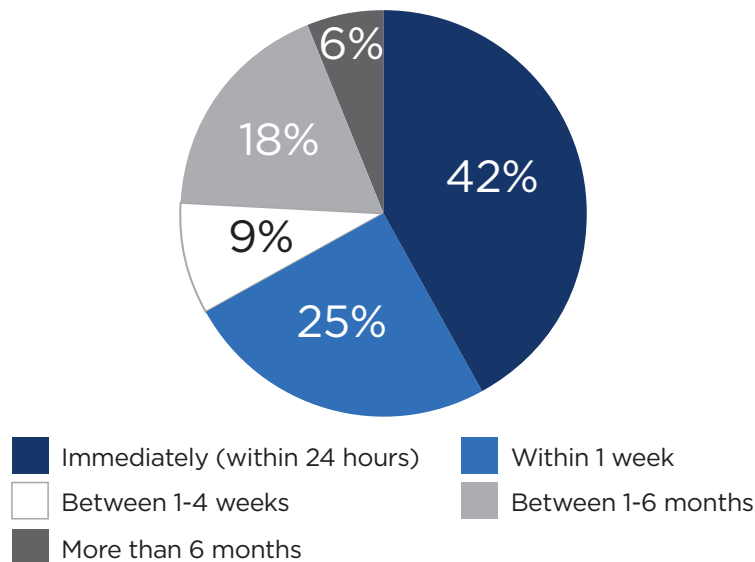
2. IRS Chief Counsel Memorandum (No. 202511015), <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-wd/202511015.pdf>.

Time is of the essence when one is a victim of successful financial fraud. Quickly recognizing that one has been a victim can limit financial losses and increase the likelihood of recovering any loss.

Most financial fraud victims know instantly or very quickly after the fact that they were a victim. Regarding their most recent fraud event, over 2 in 5 Americans (42%) say they found out they were a victim within 24 hours of the event. This can critically affect other decisions and consequences related to the fraud event. Another 25% discovered that they were a victim of financial fraud within a week of the event. However, one quarter (24%) took more than one month to realize that they were victims of financial fraud.

## 2 in 5 Americans Discovered They Fell Victim to Fraud Almost Immediately, For Nearly All Others It Took Weeks or Months

(Percentage Distribution of Survey Respondents Who Engaged With a Financial Fraud Attempt)



*Note: Figures may not total to 100% due to rounding.*



It can take time to realize you have been the victim of fraud, and the realization can come in many ways. Sometimes, the victim realizes that something about the transaction was improper. One-third of victims say they ultimately figured it out on their own. In other cases, it takes hearing from someone else that they were a fraud victim.

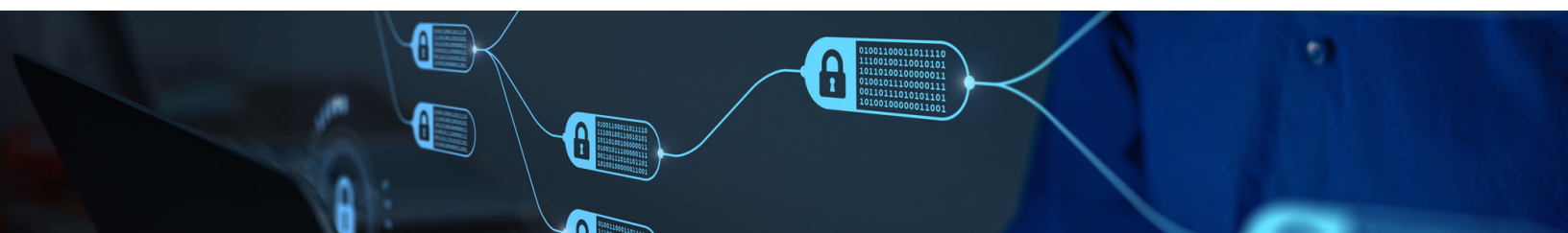
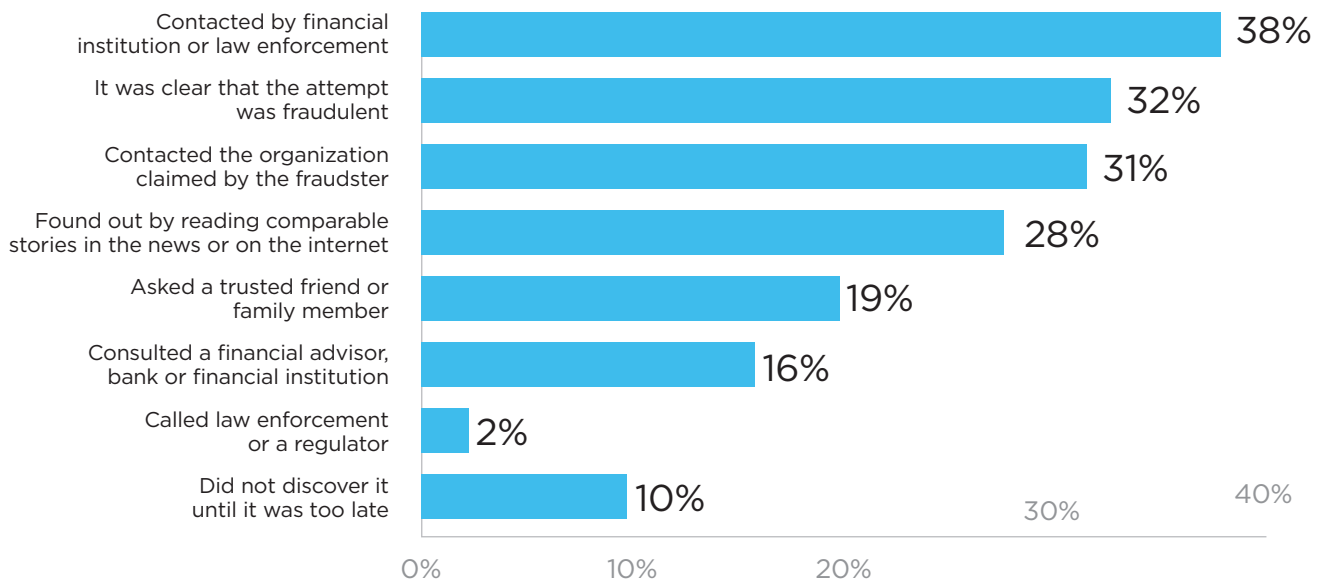
Nearly 2 in 5 Americans (38%) who have experienced financial fraud in the past three years learned they were victims after being contacted by someone who said something was amiss. These contacts came from a bank, financial institution or law enforcement, perhaps as a result of a “report and hold” law. These laws allow banks to delay or hold transactions if they suspect financial fraud or exploitation.

In other cases, financial fraud victims discover the scam through their own actions. Some of the more common ways victims took initiative were to call the organization the fraudster claimed to be part of (31%) or to read comparable stories in the news, or online (28%). Still others asked for help from a trusted friend, or family member (19%), a financial advisor, or bank (16%) or law enforcement (2%).

Younger victims of financial fraud, ages 45 and under, are more likely to say they were contacted by an authority figure (47%) and that they discovered they were a victim by reading about similar stories in the news or online (41%).

## Nearly 2 in 5 Victims of Financial Fraud Report They Discovered It Because Someone Contacted Them

(Percent of Survey Respondents Who Engaged With a Financial Fraud Attempt)



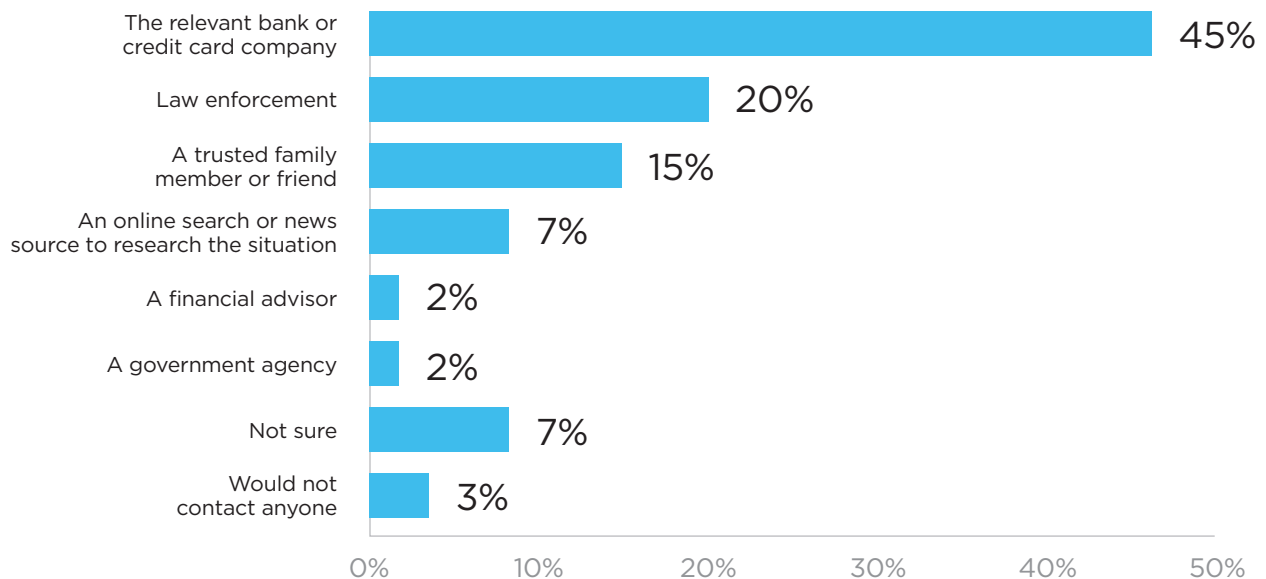
Once you know you are a victim of financial fraud, it is important to know what to do next. Who do you report financial fraud to? What resources are available to you? Who do you talk to? Who can help you? These are just some of the critical questions victims might ask as they grapple with what to do after discovering they were the target of a financial fraud attempt.

Nearly half of Americans (45%) indicate that their *first* call, if they suspect they are a victim of financial fraud, would be to the corresponding financial institution, bank or credit card company. Some Americans report they would first contact law enforcement (20%) or a trusted family member or friend (15%). Younger Americans, ages 45 and under, are more likely to report that they would first contact a trusted family member or friend than their older counterparts over age 45 (23% vs. 9%).

Yet 1 in 10 Americans say they would either not immediately contact anyone (3%) or are unsure who to contact (7%).

### In the Face of a Financial Fraud Attempt, Nearly Half of Americans Would First Contact Their Bank or Credit Card Company

(Percentage Distribution)



## Lessons Learned From Financial Fraud

As previously noted, not everyone who is a victim of financial fraud or a scam reaches out to an authority figure or institution. Specifically, 1 in 3 Americans victimized by financial fraud in the past three years did not contact the relevant bank or credit card company, law enforcement or government agency.

In many cases, these people were unsure who to contact or how to reach out for assistance:

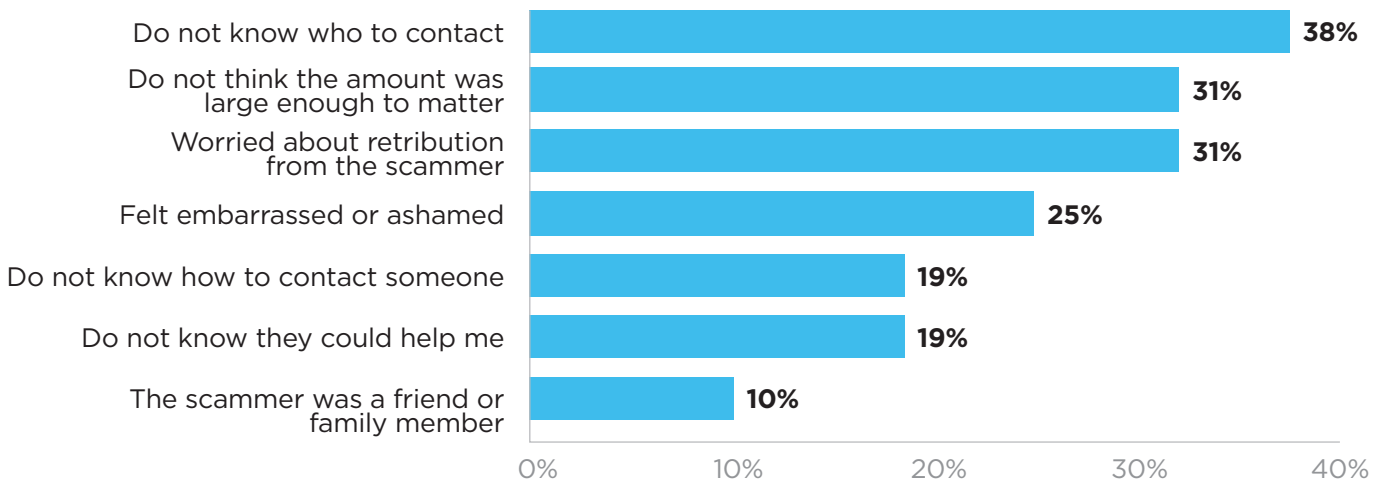
- Did not know *who* to contact (38%).
- Did not know *how* to contact (19%).
- Did not know they would receive help (19%).

Many people also stay quiet because of shame. One in 4 Americans victimized by financial fraud in the past three years did not contact the proper authorities because they felt embarrassed or ashamed. In other cases, the victim felt it was not worth the effort to report the fraud because the financial losses were relatively small (31%).

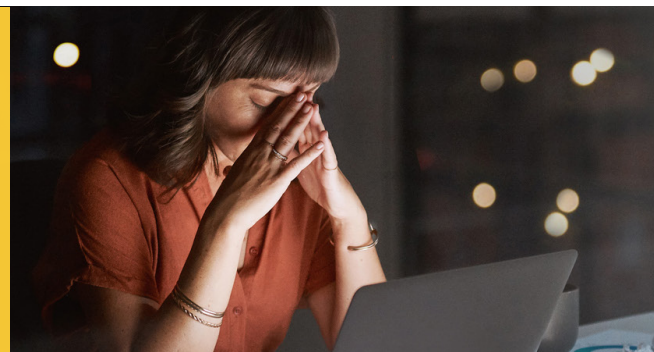
Also, fear of retribution keeps some victims from reaching out to a relevant financial institution, law enforcement or government agency, whether it was a concern that the scammer would try to get back at them (31%) or that the scammer was someone they knew (10%).

### The Top Reason for Not Contacting Someone After Experiencing Financial Fraud Is Not Knowing Who to Contact

(Percent of Respondents)



**1 in 4 Americans** who were victimized by a financial scam but did not contact law enforcement stayed silent due to **embarrassment or shame.**





Financial fraud is not a distant or abstract threat for most Americans. Over the past three years, 3 in 5 Americans have either personally encountered financial fraud or know someone who has. Older Americans are less confident than younger Americans in their ability to detect fraud, highlighting the critical need for protections for seniors, “report and hold” laws and identifying trusted contacts. Furthermore, more than half expect they or someone close to them will be a target at some point over the next year. As fraud tactics grow more sophisticated, fueled by AI-generated voices, deepfakes and highly personalized phishing attempts, navigating today’s threat landscape increasingly demands more than individual vigilance alone.

These widespread experiences underscore the critical role a trusted partner can play in helping clients navigate difficult situations involving financial fraud, scams and exploitation. A financial advisor, such as a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER® professional, serves as a knowledgeable, accessible first point of contact during moments



of uncertainty. Beyond crisis response, advisors can help clients proactively identify red flags, evaluate suspicious investment opportunities and build financial awareness that makes fraud harder to commit. A competent, ethical advisor can also serve as a partner who helps people worried about vulnerable loved ones to become more vigilant against fraud.

The stakes are too high to navigate this crisis alone. Nearly a quarter of Americans who encountered fraud lost money. One in 3 victims never reported the incident to a bank, law enforcement or a government agency because of shame, confusion or fear. A trusted financial advisor can help break through those barriers, providing not only technical guidance but also practical next steps that help fraud victims act quickly and decisively. Speed matters: More than 2 in 5 victims discovered the fraud within 24 hours, and those who act fast are more likely to limit losses and pursue recovery.

Working with a CFP® professional offers Americans vital support in an environment where fraud is growing more sophisticated by the day. CFP® professionals are bound by a fiduciary standard, meaning they are obligated to act in their clients' best interests — a stark contrast to the deceptive actors behind today's scams. By proactively discussing fraud risks, facilitating important conversations within families and providing clear guidance if something goes amiss, CFP® professionals serve as a safeguard for their clients' long-term financial security and peace of mind.



CFP Board’s research team sent a 14-question survey from April 8-13, 2026, to randomly selected Americans ages 25 to 64 nationwide, sourced through online survey provider Alchemer. The panel ensures the data collected reflects a reliable demographic and geographic representation of the U.S. population. The survey received 1,218 responses, the data from which are subject to a sampling error of +/- 2.8% at the 95% confidence interval. The survey data form the basis of this report.



CFP Board is the professional body for personal financial planners in the U.S. CFP Board consists of two affiliated organizations focused on advancing the financial planning profession for the public's benefit. **CFP Board of Standards** sets and upholds standards for financial planning and administers the prestigious CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER® certification — widely recognized by the public, advisors and firms as the *standard* for financial planners — so that the public has access to the benefits of competent and ethical financial planning. CFP® certification is held by more than 109,000 people in the U.S. **CFP Board Center for Financial Planning** addresses diversity and workforce development challenges and conducts and publishes research that adds to the financial planning profession's body of knowledge.

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