

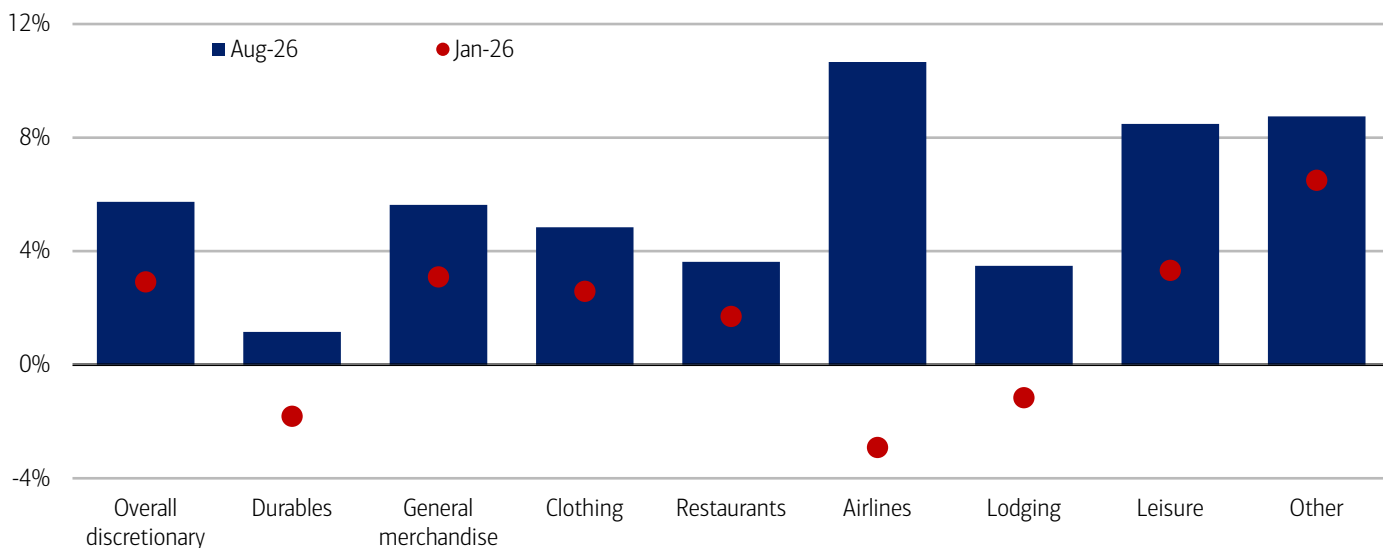
Daily Insights

Spending and transactions tell a nuanced consumer story

15 September 2026

Discretionary spending growth has improved across most categories since the start of the year

Card spending per household across select discretionary categories (three-month moving average, year-over-year %, seasonally adjusted)



Source: Bank of America internal data

BANK OF AMERICA INSTITUTE

Not all discretionary spending categories tell the same story, but most have improved since the beginning of the year. According to Bank of America internal data, travel has seen some of the biggest gains, with spending on hotels and flights receiving a boost. Higher oil prices have likely pushed up travel costs too.

However, transaction volumes tell a slightly different story. Airline transactions have dropped relative to a year ago, and durable goods purchases continue to decline. Meanwhile, restaurant transactions continue to grow, suggesting consumers are increasing the quantity of their purchases, not just paying higher prices.

Read our publication: [Consumer Checkpoint: Still sizzling.](#)

Methodology

Selected Bank of America transaction data is used to inform the macroeconomic views expressed in this report and should be considered in the context of other economic indicators and publicly available information. In certain instances, the data may provide directional and/or predictive value. The data used is not comprehensive; it is based on **aggregated and anonymized** selections of Bank of America data and may reflect a degree of selection bias and limitations on the data available.

Any payments data represents aggregated spend from US Retail, Preferred, Small Business and Wealth Management clients with a deposit account or credit card. Aggregated spend include total credit card, debit card, ACH, wires, bill pay, business/peer-to-peer, cash, and checks.

Any **Small Business** payments data represents aggregate spend from Small Business clients with a deposit account or a Small Business credit card. Payroll payments data include channels such as ACH (automated clearing house), bill pay, checks and wire. Bank of America per Small Business client data represents activity spending from active Small Business clients with a deposit account or a Small Business credit card and at least one transaction in each month. Small businesses in this report include business clients within Bank of America and generally defined as under \$5mm in annual sales revenue.

Unless otherwise stated, data is not adjusted for seasonality, processing days or portfolio changes, and may be subject to periodic revisions.

The differences between the total and per household card spending growth rate (if discussed) can be explained by the following reasons:

1. Overall total card spending growth is partially boosted by the growth in the number of active cardholders in our sample. This could be due to an increasing customer base or inactive customers using their cards more frequently.
2. Per household card spending growth only looks at households that complete at least five transactions with Bank of America cards in the month. Per household spending growth isolates impacts from a changing sample size, which could be unrelated to underlying economic momentum, and potential spending volatility from less active users.
3. Overall total card spending includes small business card spending while per household card spending does not.
4. Differences due to using processing dates (total card spending) versus transaction date (per household card spending).
5. Other differences including household formations due to young adults moving in and out of their parent's houses during COVID.

Any household consumer deposit data based on Bank of America internal data is derived by anonymizing and aggregating data from Bank of America consumer deposit accounts in the US and analyzing that data at a highly aggregated level. Whenever median household savings and checking balances are quoted, the data is based on a fixed cohort of households that had a consumer deposit account (checking and/or savings account) for all months from January 2019 through the most current month of data shown.

Bank of America aggregated credit/debit card spending per household includes spending from active US households only. Only consumer card holders making a minimum of five transactions a month are included in the dataset. Spending from corporate cards are excluded. Data regarding merchants who receive payments are identified and classified by the Merchant Categorization Code (MCC) defined by financial services companies. The data are mapped using proprietary methods from the MCCs to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), which is also used by the Census Bureau, in order to classify spending data by subsector. Spending data may also be classified by other proprietary methods not using MCCs.

We consider a measure of services necessity spending that includes but is not limited to groceries, utilities, and gasoline. Discretionary services includes but is not limited to charitable donations, leisure travel, entertainment, and professional/consumer services. Discretionary retail includes but is not limited to general merchandise, miscellaneous, clothing, electronics and furniture. It excludes categories like groceries and gasoline. Holiday spending is defined as items in which spending in the November-December period is usually at least 20% of total annual spending on the category. Value and premium grocers are determined judgmentally on a proprietary analysis of merchants by equity analysts.

Durables spending is defined as spending on electronics, building materials, auto-related spending and furniture. Premium durables spending is based on a selection of retailers who are judged to sell relatively higher value products. Conversely, value durables spending is based on a selection of retailers who are judged to sell relatively lower value products.

Lower, middle and higher household income cuts in Bank of America credit and debit card spending per household, and consumer deposit account data are based on quantitative estimates of each households' income. These quantitative estimates are bucketed according to terciles, with a third of households placed in each tercile periodically. The lowest tercile represents 'lower income', the middle tercile represents 'middle income' and the highest tercile 'higher income'. The income thresholds between these terciles will move over time, reflecting any number of factors that impact income, including general wage inflation, changes in social security payments and individual households' income. The income and tercile in which a household is categorised are periodically re-assessed.

Generations, if discussed, are defined as follows: Gen Z, born after 1995; Younger Millennials: born between 1989-1995; Older Millennials: born between 1978-1988; Gen Xers: born between 1965-1977; Baby Boomer: 1946-1964; Traditionalists: pre-1946.

Any reference to card spending per household on gasoline includes all purchases at gasoline stations and might include purchases of non-gas items.

Additional information about the methodology used to aggregate the data is available upon request.

Contributors

Liz Everett Krisberg

Head of Bank of America Institute

David Michael Tinsley

Senior Economist, Bank of America Institute

Disclosures

These materials have been prepared by Bank of America Institute and are provided to you for general information purposes only. To the extent these materials reference Bank of America data, such materials are not intended to be reflective or indicative of, and should not be relied upon as, the results of operations, financial conditions or performance of Bank of America. Bank of America Institute is a think tank dedicated to uncovering powerful insights that move business and society forward. Drawing on data and resources from across the bank and the world, the Institute delivers important, original perspectives on the economy, sustainability and global transformation. Unless otherwise specifically stated, any views or opinions expressed herein are solely those of Bank of America Institute and any individual authors listed, and are not the product of the BofA Global Research department or any other department of Bank of America Corporation or its affiliates and/or subsidiaries (collectively Bank of America). The views in these materials may differ from the views and opinions expressed by the BofA Global Research department or other departments or divisions of Bank of America. Information has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable, but Bank of America does not warrant its completeness or accuracy. These materials do not make any claim regarding the sustainability of any product or service. Any discussion of sustainability is limited as set out herein. Views and estimates constitute our judgment as of the date of these materials and are subject to change without notice. The views expressed herein should not be construed as individual investment advice for any particular person and are not intended as recommendations of particular securities, financial instruments, strategies or banking services for a particular person. This material does not constitute an offer or an invitation by or on behalf of Bank of America to any person to buy or sell any security or financial instrument or engage in any banking service. Nothing in these materials constitutes investment, legal, accounting or tax advice. Copyright 2026 Bank of America Corporation. All rights reserved.