

Bank of America

Institute Insights

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Fall has arrived, and there's more on the lineup than football and pumpkin spice. This week, we tackle small and mid-sized business health, consumer spending, America's changing consumer landscape, hobbies and nuclear energy.

The Institute is turning over a new leaf with the introduction of [Business Checkpoint](#), the next evolution of Small Business Checkpoint. Our coverage expands from firms with less than \$5 million in annual revenue to those with less than \$50 million, capturing mid-sized firms that generate more than double the share of revenue of smaller firms. Since May, small business profitability growth has outpaced mid-sized firms, while hiring-related payments have improved. In August, mid-sized firms saw stronger payroll growth despite weaker employment gains, and AI-related spending growth was around 20% year-over-year (YoY) across both small and mid-sized businesses. Read publication: [Business Checkpoint: Bigger and better](#).

Consumers are carrying solid momentum into the cooler months. Bank of America aggregated credit and debit card spending per household rose 6.2% YoY in September, or 5.1% excluding gasoline, both the third strongest growth rates over the past four years. Growth was broad across discretionary retail and services and income cohorts. Holiday spending is also off to a solid start, while buy now, pay later (BNPL) usage continues to rise, though not at an overly concerning rate. Meanwhile, lower-income households continue to see the strongest wage growth, despite easing slightly to 4.5% YoY in September. Read publications: [Consumer Checkpoint: Strength in numbers](#) and [The Institute Employment Report: September 2026](#).

Autumn is a season of transition, and America's changing age profile is reshaping the consumer landscape in important ways. The share of Americans over 60 rose nearly 10 percentage points from 1995 to 2025 and is projected to approach 30% by 2055. Adults over the age of 65 years old spend about 2.5 fewer hours working and two more hours on leisure each day than adults overall, while allocating relatively more card spending to groceries and travel. Read publication: [Entering the age of the older consumer](#).

From crisp weekends outdoors to favorite year-round pastimes, hobby spending is gaining momentum. Hobby spending rose 7.9% YoY in August, more than twice the pace of transaction growth, suggesting a return of "funflation," according to Bank of America card data. Older Millennials are the biggest hobby spenders, despite having the least leisure time, potentially reflecting spending on themselves and their children. Gen Z hobby purchases have slowed sharply, but gaming remains significant, with more than a quarter spending on online or video games. Read publication: [The hobby economy and the price of fun](#).

As temperatures begin to dip, another source of power is heating up: nuclear energy. The industry now spans a range of technologies designed for different markets, uses and deployment models. Proven large-scale reactors continue to support utility-scale generation, while small modular reactors and microreactors are being developed for more flexible applications. Future deployment will depend on more than reactor design: supply chains, fuel availability and regulatory approvals remain key challenges. Read publication: [Nuclear energy: One industry, many reactors](#).

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