



Consumer Financial
Protection Bureau

An official U.S. Government agency

A Survey of Consumer Views on Debt

QUESTIONS?

For more information about this survey, please call 1-855-246-9457
or go to www.consumerfinance.gov/debtsurvey.html

For more information about the CFPB, visit www.consumerfinance.gov

Esta encuesta está disponible en español en Internet.
Ver la parte posterior del cuestionario para obtener instrucciones.

Consumer Views on Debt

What is the CFPB?

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) is a Federal agency created in 2010 to make mortgage, credit card, automobile, and other consumer loans work better and ensure that these markets are fair, transparent, and competitive and that the costs and risks are clear.

Who should complete this survey?

It is important that this survey is only completed by the person named on the enclosed letter.

What is the Survey of Consumer Views on Debt?

Most people have credit or debt at one time or another. This survey is about your experiences with credit and debt and the process of paying debts. This information will help shape federal policies to ensure that consumers are treated fairly and respectfully when creditors seek to collect money they are owed.

Who will see my responses, and how will my responses be used?

Your responses will be used by researchers at the CFPB and elsewhere to understand consumers' experiences with debt and debt collection. Your responses will be kept confidential. Participation in the survey will not affect your credit.

How was I selected for this survey?

Survey recipients were selected at random from across the United States. The survey results will give a better picture of consumers' experiences with debt collection. People's experiences can vary widely, so it is important that the study reflects the perspectives of all types of consumers.

How long will it take?

We expect the survey will take about 10–20 minutes, but it may vary based on your experiences.

Privacy Act Statement: This collection of information is authorized by Pub. L. No. 111-203, Title X, Sections 1013 and 1022, codified at 12 U.S.C. §§ 5493 and 5512. Participation in this study is voluntary and there are no penalties for refusing to answer any question. However, your participation is extremely important to ensure the accuracy of the statistical results.

The information you provide will be used to help the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau ("CFPB") understand consumers' experiences with debt and debt collection. You were randomly selected for this survey as part of a sample that is representative of consumers. Your responses will be combined with other data that we have collected to understand conditions in consumer credit markets in a way that you cannot be identified.

Routine uses which may be made of the collected information can be found in the CFPB's System of Records Notice, CFPB.022 –Market and Consumer Research Records, 77 FR 67802. The CFPB may make an anonymous version of the survey data publicly available in accordance with applicable federal law.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 3170-0047. It expires on 05/31/2015. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average approximately 20 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing any instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The obligation to respond to this collection of information is voluntary. Comments regarding this collection of information, including the estimated response time, suggestions for improving the usefulness of the information, or suggestions for reducing the burden to respond to this collection should be submitted to the Bureau at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (Attention: PRA Office), 1700 G Street NW, Washington, DC 20552, or by email to PRA@cfpb.gov.

A. Your General Financial Situation and Experiences

1. Would you say that you are better off or worse off financially than you were a year ago?

- ☐ Better now
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ Worse

2. Now looking ahead—do you think that a year from now you will be better off financially, or worse off, or just about the same as now?

- ☐ Will be better off
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ Will be worse off

3. Have you applied for any type of credit or loan in the past five years?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

→ 3a. In the past five years, have you been either turned down for credit or not given as much credit as you applied for?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No → If No, please skip to Question 4

3b. Thinking about the most recent time this happened, were you later able to get a loan or obtain the full amount you requested from that lender or somewhere else?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Did not reapply

↓
4. At any time in the past five years, did you think of applying for credit or a loan but changed your mind because you thought you might be turned down?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

For the purposes of this survey, a **debt** is any money you owe. A debt could be a bank loan, student loan, financing from a store or dealer, amounts remaining on credit cards after your last payment, or bills or payments that are past due.

Do not include business loans or loans from a family member or from a friend.

5. Do you currently have each of these kinds of debt?

Loans	Yes	No
A charge card or credit card balance remaining after your last payment	☐	☐
Mortgage or home equity loan	☐	☐
Home equity line of credit (HELOC) that you owe money on	☐	☐
A loan for an automobile or other type of vehicle (such as a motorcycle or boat)	☐	☐
Student loan	☐	☐
Payday loan	☐	☐
Automobile title loan	☐	☐
Other consumer or personal loan or line of credit	☐	☐
If Other, please specify:		

Past-due Bills, Payments, or Other Debt	Yes	No
Past-due taxes	☐	☐
Past-due medical bill(s)	☐	☐
Past-due rent	☐	☐
Past-due phone, cable, internet, or other telecommunications bill(s)	☐	☐
Past-due utility bill(s) (gas, electric, water, etc.)	☐	☐
Legal judgment or legal expenses (child support, attorneys' fees, etc.)	☐	☐
Other type of debt	☐	☐
If Other, please specify:		



B. Your Debt Collection Experiences in the Past Year

In this section, we are interested in any instances in the past year that a creditor or debt collector tried to collect a debt from you—whether or not you owed this debt.

- **Debt collection** occurs when a creditor or debt collector contacts you to seek payment for a debt that is past due. This does not include contact in the course of making on-time payments.
- A **creditor** is the original person or company that lent you money (for example, a bank or credit card company) or that sold you something on credit (for example, a store, hospital, or landlord). Creditors may collect debts through their internal collections departments.
- A **debt collector** is a person or company other than the creditor that tries to collect on a debt, such as an attorney, a debt collection firm, or other third party.

6. In the past year, since January 2014, have you been contacted by a creditor or debt collector trying to collect a past-due debt from you? Include instances when you were contacted about debts that you believed you did not owe or someone else's debt. Do not include instances when a creditor or debt collector contacted you by mistake and had the wrong phone number or address.

☐ Yes

☐ No —————→ If No, please skip to Section F

7. In the past year, since January 2014, how many different debts have creditors or debt collectors tried to collect from you?

☐ 1 debt

☐ 2–4 debts

☐ 5–9 debts

☐ 10 or more debts

8. Were any of these debts that you have been contacted about since January 2014...

	Yes	No
A debt that you did not owe?	☐	☐
A debt you owed but the amount the collector was seeking was wrong?	☐	☐
A debt for which you were a co-signer?	☐	☐
A debt owed by a family member that you did not co-sign?	☐	☐
A debt owed by a deceased family member?	☐	☐



9. Thinking about all of the debts that you have been contacted about since January 2014, were you contacted about any of the following types of debt?

Loans	Yes	No
A charge card or credit card balance remaining after your last payment	☐	☐
Mortgage or home equity loan	☐	☐
Home equity line of credit (HELOC) that you owed money on	☐	☐
A loan for an automobile or other type of vehicle (such as a motorcycle or boat)	☐	☐
Student loan	☐	☐
Payday loan	☐	☐
Automobile title loan	☐	☐
Other consumer or personal loan or line of credit	☐	☐

If Other, please specify:

Past-due Bills, Payments, or Other Debt	Yes	No
Past-due taxes	☐	☐
Past-due medical bill(s)	☐	☐
Past-due rent	☐	☐
Past-due phone, cable, internet, or other telecommunications bill(s)	☐	☐
Past-due utility bill(s) (gas, electric, water, etc.)	☐	☐
Legal judgment or legal expenses (child support, attorneys' fees, etc.)	☐	☐
Other type of debt	☐	☐

If Other, please specify:

10. Since January 2014, have you ever paid part or all of a debt after being contacted by a creditor or debt collector about that debt?

☐ Yes

☐ No

10a. Thinking about the most recent debt you paid after being contacted, which is the single most important reason why you paid this debt? Please mark one reason.

- ☐ I thought it would improve my credit score or credit rating
- ☐ I wanted the creditor or debt collector to stop contacting me
- ☐ I wanted the creditor or debt collector to stop contacting friends, co-workers, or others
- ☐ I had forgotten or not known about the debt and collection efforts led me to pay
- ☐ I thought I might be sued if I did not pay
- ☐ I thought it might affect my job or I could lose my job if I did not pay
- ☐ My financial situation changed and I was able to pay the debt
- ☐ I paid it because it was the right thing to do
- ☐ I paid it because it was a small amount
- ☐ I needed to pay it off to qualify for a new loan
- ☐ Other reason:

10b. People may pay a debt that they are unsure is theirs. Which of the following best describes how sure you were about whether this debt was yours?

- ☐ I was reasonably sure the debt was mine
- ☐ I was reasonably sure the debt was not mine
- ☐ I was unsure whether the debt was mine

Skip to
Question 11



11. Since January 2014, have you ever not paid a debt even after being contacted by a creditor or debt collector about the debt?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

→ 11a. Thinking of the most recent instance when you did not pay a debt despite being contacted by a creditor or debt collector, which is the single most important reason why you did not pay the debt? Please mark one reason.

- ☐ I was not sure the debt was mine or was legitimate
☐ The amount of the debt was wrong
☐ I had already paid the debt
☐ I did not know who to pay
☐ I did not have enough money
☐ I thought nothing bad would happen
☐ I was (or am) planning to file for bankruptcy
☐ I did not want to pay
☐ I plan to pay but have not yet done so
☐ Other reason:

12. In the past year, since January 2014, have you ever asked a creditor or debt collector to stop contacting you?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

→ 12a. Thinking about the most recent time you requested that a creditor or debt collector stop contacting you, how did you make your request? Please mark one response.

- ☐ Over the phone or in person
☐ By letter or fax
☐ By email, text, or internet

12b. Did the creditor or debt collector stop contacting you after this request?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

13. Think about the last time you were contacted by a creditor or debt collector about a debt. How helpful would the following information have been in figuring out whether you owed the debt?

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not at all helpful
Original account number	☐	☐	☐
Name of the original creditor (at the time the debt was taken out)	☐	☐	☐
Itemization of the amount owed (such as principal, interest, and fees)	☐	☐	☐
Social Security Number of the person who owes the debt	☐	☐	☐
Type of debt (credit cards, medical bills, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Name and address of the person who owes the debt	☐	☐	☐
Name and address of joint borrowers (if any)	☐	☐	☐
Date and amount of the last payment made	☐	☐	☐
Copy of the last billing statement	☐	☐	☐
Copy of the contract or original invoice	☐	☐	☐



C. Your Most Recent Debt Collection

This section asks about the most recent debt that a creditor or debt collector contacted you about—even if you believe that this debt is not yours, the amount is wrong, or you already paid this debt.

Please do not include instances when a creditor or debt collector contacted you by mistake.

14. In the past year, since January 2014, how many different creditors or debt collectors have contacted you trying to collect a debt?

☐ One creditor or debt collector → Please skip to Question 15

☐ Two or more
☐ Don't know

14a. Which of the following best describes the type of debt that a creditor or debt collector most recently contacted you about? Please mark one type of debt.

Loans

- ☐ A charge card or credit card balance remaining after your last payment
- ☐ Mortgage or home equity loan
- ☐ Home equity line of credit (HELOC) that you owe money on
- ☐ A loan for an automobile or other type of vehicle (such as a motorcycle or boat)
- ☐ Student loan
- ☐ Payday loan
- ☐ Automobile title loan
- ☐ Other consumer or personal loan or line of credit:

Past-due Bills, Payments, or Other Debt

- ☐ Past-due taxes
- ☐ Past-due medical bill(s)
- ☐ Past-due rent
- ☐ Past-due phone, cable, internet, or other telecommunications bill(s)
- ☐ Past-due utility bill(s) (gas, electric, water, etc.)
- ☐ Legal judgment or legal expenses (child support, attorneys' fees, etc.)
- ☐ Other type of past-due bill or payment:

14b. When this creditor or debt collector first contacted you about this particular debt, did you believe that you owed some or all of the debt?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I was uncertain

14c. When this creditor or debt collector first contacted you, did you believe that the amount being sought was correct?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I was uncertain



15. When did a creditor or debt collector most recently contact you about this debt?

- ☐ Less than a month ago
- ☐ 1 to 3 months ago
- ☐ 4 to 6 months ago
- ☐ 7 to 12 months ago

16. How long has any creditor or debt collector been contacting you about this debt?

- ☐ Less than 3 months
- ☐ 4 to 6 months
- ☐ 7 to 12 months
- ☐ More than 12 months

17. Think about the person or company that contacted you most recently about this debt. Was this person or company the creditor or a debt collector? *Please mark one response.*

- ☐ The creditor (for example, the original lender, store, hospital, or landlord)
- ☐ A debt collector (for example, a law firm, debt collection company, or other third party trying to collect the debt)
- ☐ Don't know

18. How often did this creditor or debt collector usually try to reach you each week, including times they did not reach you?

- ☐ Less than once per week
- ☐ 1 to 3 times per week
- ☐ 4 to 7 times per week
- ☐ 8 to 14 times per week
- ☐ 15 to 21 times per week
- ☐ More than 21 times per week

19. How did this creditor or debt collector try to reach you (including times they were not able to reach you)? Did they try to reach you...

	Yes	No
In person?	☐	☐
By phone?	☐	☐
By voicemail or answering machine message?	☐	☐
By letter?	☐	☐
By email?	☐	☐
By text message?	☐	☐
By social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)?	☐	☐
In some other way?	☐	☐
<i>Please specify:</i>		



20. Think about the creditor or debt collector that most recently contacted you about this debt. Did they...

	Yes	No
Provide accurate information?	☐	☐
Contact you too often?	☐	☐
Provide options to pay the debt?	☐	☐
Call before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m.?	☐	☐
Communicate with you in your preferred language?	☐	☐
State that the reason for contacting you was to collect a debt?	☐	☐
Address your questions about this debt clearly and accurately?	☐	☐
Treat you politely?	☐	☐
Threaten you?	☐	☐

21. Did you contact each of the following about your experience with this creditor or debt collector?

	Yes	No
An attorney or legal aid organization	☐	☐
A Federal or state government agency (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Federal Trade Commission, state Attorney General, etc.)	☐	☐
A Better Business Bureau or other industry group	☐	☐

22. To your knowledge, has this creditor or debt collector ever contacted someone other than your spouse, your attorney, or a co-signer (for example, contacted a friend, coworker, or family member)?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

23. Did you pay off some or all of this debt after this creditor or debt collector contacted you?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No



D. Disputing a Debt in Collection in the Past Year

This section asks about debt you disputed in the past year. People may dispute a debt by telling the creditor or debt collector, for example, that the debt is not theirs, that the amount is wrong, or that something else about the debt is incorrect.

24. In the past year, since January 2014, have you disputed a debt with a creditor or debt collector?

☐ Yes

☐ No → If No, please skip to Section E

25. Is the debt that you most recently disputed the same one as the most recent debt you were contacted about (that you described in Section C)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

In questions 26–31, answer based on your most recent experience in which you disputed a debt.

26. Did you dispute the following?

	Yes	No
Whether it was your debt	☐	☐
Whether the amount of the debt was correct	☐	☐
Whether the debt had already been paid	☐	☐
Whether the creditor or debt collector had the right to collect the debt	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐
If Other, please specify:		

27. Who did you dispute this debt with? Please mark one response.

☐ The creditor (for example, the original lender, store, hospital, or landlord)

☐ A debt collector (for example, a law firm, debt collection company, or other third party trying to collect the debt)

☐ Don't know

28. Was this the first time you had disputed this debt?

☐ Yes, this was the first time I disputed the debt

☐ No, I had previously disputed the debt with the creditor or with a different debt collector

29. Thinking about the most recent dispute, how did you dispute the debt? Please mark one response.

☐ Over the phone or in person

☐ By letter or fax

☐ By email, text, or internet

30. In response to this dispute, did the creditor or debt collector...

	Yes	No
Reduce the amount of debt?	☐	☐
Cease efforts to collect the debt?	☐	☐
Make other payment arrangements?	☐	☐
Ignore the dispute and continue to contact you?	☐	☐



31. Did the creditor or debt collector provide additional information in response to your dispute?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

↓
*Skip to
Section E*

31a. Did the creditor or debt collector provide the following in response to your dispute?

	Yes	No
Original account number	☐	☐
Name of the original creditor	☐	☐
Itemization of the amount owed (e.g., principal, interest, and fees)	☐	☐
Social Security Number of the person who owes the debt	☐	☐
Type of debt (credit cards, medical bills, etc.)	☐	☐
Name and address of the person who owes the debt	☐	☐
Name and address of other borrowers	☐	☐
Date and amount of the last payment made	☐	☐
Copy of the last billing statement	☐	☐
Copy of the contract or original invoice	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐
<i>If Other, please specify:</i>		

31b. Did this information allow you to determine if you owed the amount that the creditor or debt collector was seeking?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

E. Lawsuits to Collect on Debts in the Past Year

32. In the past year, since January 2014, have you been sued by someone trying to collect a debt (for example, you received or were served with a complaint)?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

↓
*Skip to
Section F*

32a. Did you attend the court hearing for the most recent lawsuit?

- ☐ Yes → *If Yes, please skip to Section F*
☐ No

32b. People may want to attend a court hearing but then are unable to or do not. Which one of the following best describes the most important reason you did not attend the hearing? Mark one reason.

- ☐ I owed the debt or had no defense
☐ I did not owe the debt but thought it would not matter whether I appeared
☐ I did not know that a lawsuit had been filed
☐ I did not know when or where the hearing was held
☐ I did not have an attorney
☐ It was too difficult or expensive to attend
☐ Other
If Other, please specify:
☐ The claim was settled or the suit was dropped



F. Your Preferences for Communications about Debts

To understand how consumers interact with creditors and debt collectors, this section asks for your opinion about being contacted through various methods and the content of messages a creditor or debt collector might leave.

33. Please indicate ways that you can be reached.

	Yes	No
a. In-person	☐	☐
b. Home phone	☐	☐
c. Cell phone	☐	☐
d. Work phone	☐	☐
e. Voicemail or answering machine	☐	☐
f. Letter	☐	☐
g. Email	☐	☐
h. Text message	☐	☐
i. Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	☐	☐

34. Of the ways you said you can be reached, which one would you most prefer a creditor or debt collector to use to contact you about a debt? Please provide one response.

35. Of the ways you said you can be reached, which one would you least prefer a creditor or debt collector to use to contact you about a debt? Please provide one response.

36. How important is it to you that others do not hear or see a message from a creditor or debt collector?

- ☐ Very important
☐ Somewhat important
☐ Not at all important

37. If a creditor or debt collector left you a voicemail or answering machine message, would you want the information below included or not included?

	Included	Not included
The creditor's or debt collector's name	☐	☐
That the creditor or debt collector is attempting to collect a debt	☐	☐
That the communication is an attempt to collect a debt and any information obtained will be used for that purpose	☐	☐



G. You and Your Household

38. What is your sex?

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

39. What is your age as of your last birthday?

- ☐ Less than 25 years
☐ 25–34 years
☐ 35–44 years
☐ 45–54 years
☐ 55–64 years
☐ 65 years or older

40. What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Less than a high school degree
☐ High school degree
☐ Some college (excluding technical or vocational schools)
☐ College degree
☐ Postgraduate degree (for example, MA, PhD, JD, MBA, MD)

41. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

42. What is your race? *Mark all that apply.*

- ☐ White
☐ Black or African American
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Asian
☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

43. Is English your preferred language?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

44. Do you have a mobile phone?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No —————> *Please skip to Question 46*

45. Would you be charged extra (on top of any regular monthly fees) to receive the following on your mobile phone?

	Yes	No
A call	☐	☐
A text message	☐	☐

46. Which of these ways do you use to access the Internet on a regular basis?

	Yes	No
Your phone	☐	☐
A computer at home	☐	☐
A computer at work	☐	☐
A tablet or similar portable device	☐	☐
Other (for example, library or a relative's home)	☐	☐

47. What is your current marital status?

- ☐ Married
☐ Living with a partner
☐ Never married
☐ Separated
☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed

Please answer the following questions for you and your spouse or partner, if you have one.

48. Current work status: *Mark all that apply.*

	You	Spouse/ Partner
Self-employed	☐	☐
Work full time	☐	☐
Work part time	☐	☐
Retired	☐	☐
Temporarily laid off or on leave	☐	☐
Unemployed	☐	☐
Not doing any work for pay (homemaker, student, disabled, etc.)	☐	☐

49. Recent active duty military service and veteran status. *Active duty includes service in U.S. Armed Forces as well as activation from the Reserves or National Guard.*

	You	Spouse/ Partner
On active duty at any time since January 2014	☐	☐
Veteran but not on active duty since January 2014	☐	☐
No military service	☐	☐



50. Is your current residence owned, rented, or something else?

- ☐ Owned or being bought by you, your spouse or partner, or someone else who lives there
☐ Rented
☐ Neither owned nor rented

51. Approximately how much was your total annual household income in 2014 from all sources (wages, salaries, tips, interest, child support, alimony, investment or rental income, retirement, Social Security, government benefits such as TANF)?

- ☐ Less than \$20,000
☐ \$20,000 to \$39,999
☐ \$40,000 to \$69,999
☐ \$70,000 to \$99,999
☐ \$100,000 or more

52. How did this total annual household income last year compare to what you would expect in a "normal" year?

- ☐ Higher than normal
☐ Normal
☐ Lower than normal

53. Have any of the following happened to you since January 2014?

	Yes	No
Separation or divorce	☐	☐
Marriage or moving in with a new partner	☐	☐
Death of a household member	☐	☐
Birth, adoption, or other addition to your household	☐	☐
Person leaving your household	☐	☐
Promotion or starting a new job for you or for your spouse or partner	☐	☐
Loss of significant income for you or for your spouse or partner	☐	☐
Retirement for you or for your spouse or partner	☐	☐
Disability or serious illness of any one in your household	☐	☐
Identity theft of personal information belonging to you or your spouse or partner	☐	☐
Natural disaster affecting your home	☐	☐
Move within the state where you currently live	☐	☐
Move from a different state	☐	☐
Move to the U.S. from another country	☐	☐



We have provided the space below if you wish to share additional comments or further explain any of your responses. Please do not put your name or address on the questionnaire.

Thank you for completing our survey!

Please use the enclosed business reply envelope to return your completed questionnaire to:

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

1600 Research Blvd., RC B16

Rockville MD 20850

If you would prefer to complete the survey online in English or Spanish, follow the instructions below. Web responses are processed more quickly, so taking the survey online makes it less likely that you will receive follow-up contacts.

Web Survey Instructions

1

Go to the website **www.CFPBDebtSurvey.com**

*Visite al sitio web **www.CFPBDebtSurvey.com***

2

Log in and enter your unique survey PIN number and 5-digit zip code

*found in the accompanying letter. **Inicie la sesión con su número PIN único de la encuesta y el código postal de 5 dígitos que se encuentra en la carta adjunta.***

Questions?

If you have any technical difficulties, including problems with the website or any questions about the survey, please call 1-855-246-9457.

