Markets Flat in November, but Still Poised to Finish the Year Strong

Although the financial markets wobbled temporarily in November, ending the month about flat, they remain in a good position to finish the year strong. Could that change? And what does January hold in store? We'll get to those questions, but first, let's review.

When November started, there was a lot of concern over the government shutdown. Now that the government has reopened, we're finally getting fresh economic data again. And overall, the numbers look surprisingly solid.

Holiday shopping seems to be off to a strong start. According to preliminary reports, Black Friday spending was up about 9% from last year, and Cyber Monday was up about 4%.[1] That suggests consumers are still spending, even though you may hear stories in the news about people feeling squeezed by the effects of high inflation.

Inflation is now just under 3%, which is historically close to normal. Of course, that doesn't erase the higher prices we've all lived through lately, but it does mean things are stabilizing. Companies are also absorbing a lot of costs behind the scenes (including tariff-related costs), which helps keep everyday prices steadier. The bottom line is that the overall economic picture appears stable, and spending remains strong.

The Markets

November was a relatively subdued month for the markets. As mentioned, Wall Street finished about flat with the S&P 500 and the Dow Jones Industrial Average eking out modest gains, and the Nasdaq closing slightly in the red for the first time in seven months.[2]

Interestingly, the stock market barely reacted to the government shutdown, which shows how accustomed investors have become to these temporary disruptions. It was only after the shutdown ended that stocks pulled back a bit, and mostly because some of the tech and AI names that have been running hot are starting to look overvalued.

We talked last month about brewing concerns of a potential tech bubble. But there's a big difference between today's situation and the tech bubble of the late 1990s, which is that most of the big companies driving the market today are actually making money. So, while valuations may be high, the underlying businesses are stronger than they were in the dot-com era.

Your Portfolios

Despite the markets tapping the brakes in November, they remain in great shape for the year, with the S&P 500 up by about 16%. By comparison, our leading high-dividend yielding stock strategy is up approximately 13% year-to-date, while our most conservative dividend portfolio is up about 7% – both, of course, with more meaningful income.

With our dividend strategies, we are intentionally not chasing speculative growth areas of the market like the tech sector. As with our fixed-income portfolios, our priority remains income first, growth second.

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Markets Stay Strong

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As for our fixed-income accounts, while every strategy is different, on average, our most conservative portfolio of individual bonds and bond-like instruments is still up about 5.5% for the year, depending on your individual holdings. That keeps us on track to meet our targeted annual return of about 6%. If December follows historical patterns, we should finish the year very close to that goal.

Looking Ahead

Only time will tell how December and January set the tone for 2026. The good news is that, from an economic standpoint, there seems to be no major red flags currently. The biggest uncertainties to watch are geopolitical rather than financial, like ongoing conflicts abroad, shipping disruptions, and the occasional resurfacing of tariff concerns.

So far, U.S. companies appear to be absorbing most tariff-related costs rather than passing them along to consumers, which has helped keep inflation contained. All things considered, it's a largely positive backdrop heading into the new year.

Naturally, we will continue monitoring the markets closely and keep you informed of any major developments. In the meantime, if you have questions, want to review your strategy, or need help with any year-end financial issues, please reach out. We're here for you throughout the holiday season, aside from a few standard office closures.

Enjoy the holidays, and good luck with your shopping — here's hoping you find some great deals! ▮|||

1 *https://www.cnbc.com/2025/12/02/black-friday-cyber-monday-shopping-turnout-nrf.html*

2 *https://www.investopedia.com/dow-jones-today-11282025-11858559*

Use Conservative Estimates

How can you ensure you'll have sufficient funds to last your entire retirement? So many of the variables used to calculate this amount seem uncertain. What is a reasonable rate of return for your investments over the long term? How long will you live, knowing life expectancies are increasing? How much can you count on from Social Security and pension plans? Some tips to consider include:

- **Assume your retirement income needs to be at least 100% of your current income.** Most rules of thumb indicate you'll need between 70% and 100%, but figure on at least 100% to be safe. Nowadays, retirees want to travel, pursue hobbies, and live an active lifestyle, which generally means you'll need the higher end of these estimates.
- **Add a few years to your life expectancy.** You should probably plan on living until at least age 85 or 90. If your family has a history of longevity, add a few more years to these figures. While you may find it hard to believe you'll live that long, you don't want to reach age 75 or 80 and find out you've run out of money. At that point, you might not be able to return to work.
- **Reduce your estimates of Social Security benefits.** While Social Security is currently in sound financial condition, that is expected to change after all the baby boomers retire. To be safe, count on benefits that are somewhat less than the Social Security Administration is estimating, and don't plan on adjustments for inflation.
- **Cut back on living expenses now.** This has a two-fold impact on your retirement. First, it frees up money to set aside for retirement. Second, you get used to a lower standard of living, which should also reduce your expected lifestyle for retirement.
- **Reach retirement with no debt.** Mortgage and consumer debt payments consume a significant portion of most people's income. Pay off all those debts by retirement and you significantly reduce your cost of living.
- **Forget about early retirement.** Saving enough to last from age 65 to age 85 or 90 is a difficult task. Trying to retire at age 55 or 60 is just not practical for most individuals, unless you're willing to significantly reduce your lifestyle. Working a few more years can go a long way in helping to fund your retirement. Those years are typically your highest earning years, so hopefully you'll save significant sums during that period. Also, every year you work is one year you don't have to support yourself with your retirement savings.
- **Consider working during retirement.** Especially during the early years of retirement, you should consider working at least on a part-time basis. Even modest earnings can help significantly with retirement expenses.
- **Plan on taking conservative withdrawals from your retirement assets.** Don't plan on taking out more than 3% to 4% of your balance annually. Your funds should last for decades with that level of withdrawal.

If you'd like to review your retirement plans in more detail, please call.

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Who We Are:

Empowerment Resources **International** Corp., (A+ Rated and Complaint Free, per the Better Business Bureau, MBE Certified with the City of Chicago and Cook County Government), Independent Advisors Offering Insurance and Financial Planning Services. Based in the West Loop Gate District of Chicago, We Proudly Service Individuals and Families Across the Country with a Mission to Build Long-Term Financial Security. Eric K. Williams is the President of ERI and a Member of the National Association of Insurance & Financial Advisors (NAIFA). He is a **Qualifying Life Member** with **Honor Roll** & **Top of the Table** Status in the Million Dollar Round Table, MDRT, the Premier Global Association of Financial Professionals®.

What We Do:

We Provide Solutions to Address the Systemic Root Causes of Inadequate Financial Freedom in America (Taxation, Interest Payments, Unknown Excessive Fee-Structure).

Using Our Knowledge along with our Combined Experience and Proprietary Technology, We Help Our Clients Achieve Their Goals. Those Goals Include: **Creating** their Own Bank, Directing their Dollar to Accomplish at least Two Jobs Instead of One; Eliminating **ALL** Debt including their Mortgage and Student Loans, in 9 Years or Less; & Self-Finance Purchases.

We Teach Our Clients to Use Time Committed Vehicles that Eliminate Risk & Fee Structure; Thus, Replacing Retirement Risk, Fees & Losses with **Guarantees & Lifetime Income**.

UNIQUE PROBLEMS SOLVED FOR OUR CLIENTS:

- Avg. Family Pays $155k in Hidden Wall Street Fees,(Frontline "The Retirement Gamble" 4/13), (ABC World News, 5/12)
- The real Interest on Mortgages and Student Loans is 60-100%, not the advertised rate 2-7% that we're misled to be paying
- U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that 74 cents out of every dollar coming into the Household goes to Interest & Taxes.

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