# Nearly a quarter of UK retail investors sell at a loss amid market fears



In the current climate of financial uncertainty, recent data reveals that nearly a quarter of retail investors have sold investments at a loss over the last year. This trend arises amid ongoing market volatility, largely attributed to external economic pressures and policy changes. According to exclusive figures from Alliance Witan, fears over further declines remain the primary motivation for these losses, with 36 per cent of respondents expressing concern that their holdings would continue to diminish in value.

This phenomenon is particularly striking when juxtaposed with the conventional wisdom that asserts investors should maintain their positions over a longer horizon—ideally five years or more—to weather the inherent fluctuations of the market. Alliance Witan surveyed 1,000 UK adults who possess at least £10,000 in investable assets, underscoring that the emotional toll of market downturns can lead to rash decisions.

Recent months have been tumultuous for global markets, exacerbated by political turbulence, such as tariff announcements that resulted in widespread panic selling. This turmoil led many to liquidate investments in a bid to preserve what little value they had left. Although selling at a loss can sometimes be unavoidable, Mark Atkinson, senior director of client management at WTW, cautions against impulsive reactions. He notes that “knee-jerk decisions based on short-term market volatility can backfire on returns," suggesting that a temperate approach yields greater long-term benefits.

Interestingly, the emotional aspect of investing is not unique to the UK. Data from the United States reveals that retail investors sold off stocks at the fastest pace in years last October, with a staggering $15.64 billion in stocks liquidated—the most significant monthly outflow since 2021. This trend reflects a clear shift from previous factors that had driven retail investment, such as no-fee trading and pandemic stimulus. Institutional investors mirrored these moves, albeit to a lesser degree, selling $18.66 billion in the same period.

The statistics paint a broad picture of investor behaviour during volatile times. A significant portion, approximately 29 per cent of those surveyed, indicated they sold at a loss due to financial emergencies, while 20 per cent needed funds for specific life events. Financial advisors generally recommend that individuals should only invest money they can afford to lose and should create emergency savings sufficient to cover three to six months’ worth of living expenses. This practice not only mitigates the pressure to sell during downturns but also allows investments to mature and grow, as historical trends often demonstrate significant long-term returns.

Atkinson reinforces that while the current market conditions can cause discomfort, patience is a vital virtue in investing. He cites a previous analysis by Alliance Witan, which indicated that investors who remained invested through periods of uncertainty frequently enjoyed better long-term returns than those who reacted hastily. The message is simple yet profound: those choosing to ride out market storms are likely to reap the benefits in the future.

As retail investors navigate this challenging landscape, it is critical to maintain a disciplined investment strategy. Experts advocate practices such as reassessing asset allocation and incorporating diversification, which can be instrumental in insulating portfolios from volatility. For those approaching retirement, a shift towards more stable assets, like bonds, may offer additional protection against sudden market dips.

In conclusion, today’s volatile market conditions serve as a stark reminder of the importance of emotional discipline in investing. While short-term fluctuations can incite fear and prompt impulsive decision-making, history suggests that maintaining a long-term perspective is more likely to lead to favourable outcomes.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/investing/article-14756929/Have-YOU-lost-money-investments-One-four-sold-loss-past-year.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/4-investing-moves-to-make-instead-of-panicking-about-volatile-markets)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/investing/article-14756929/Have-YOU-lost-money-investments-One-four-sold-loss-past-year.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.spglobal.com/market-intelligence/en/news-insights/articles/2023/11/retail-investors-sell-off-us-stocks-at-fastest-pace-in-years-during-october-78276259), [[5]](https://www.centralbank.ie/consumer-hub/consumer-notices/investor-warning-retail-investors-at-risk-when-trading-in-volatile-markets)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/investing/article-14756929/Have-YOU-lost-money-investments-One-four-sold-loss-past-year.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.troweprice.com/financial-intermediary/us/en/insights/articles/2024/q3/how-to-help-protect-your-investment-portfolio-during-stock-market-volatility.html), [[6]](https://www.blackrock.com/us/financial-professionals/investments/preparing-portfolios/managing-volatility)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/investing/article-14756929/Have-YOU-lost-money-investments-One-four-sold-loss-past-year.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.bankrate.com/investing/why-you-should-avoid-panic-selling-during-volatility/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.blackrock.com/us/financial-professionals/investments/preparing-portfolios/managing-volatility)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.spglobal.com/market-intelligence/en/news-insights/articles/2023/11/retail-investors-sell-off-us-stocks-at-fastest-pace-in-years-during-october-78276259), [[3]](https://www.troweprice.com/financial-intermediary/us/en/insights/articles/2024/q3/how-to-help-protect-your-investment-portfolio-during-stock-market-volatility.html)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/investing/article-14756929/Have-YOU-lost-money-investments-One-four-sold-loss-past-year.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/4-investing-moves-to-make-instead-of-panicking-about-volatile-markets)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/investing/article-14756929/Have-YOU-lost-money-investments-One-four-sold-loss-past-year.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.spglobal.com/market-intelligence/en/news-insights/articles/2023/11/retail-investors-sell-off-us-stocks-at-fastest-pace-in-years-during-october-78276259> - In October 2023, retail investors sold off US stocks at the fastest pace in years, with nearly $15.64 billion in stocks sold, marking the largest monthly outflow since 2021. This trend reflects a shift from the factors that previously drove retail investment, such as no-fee trading and stimulus payments during the early pandemic. The selling was widespread across sectors, with materials stocks being sold more than any other sector. Institutional investors also continued outflows, selling over $18.66 billion in October, though at a slower pace than in previous months. Hedge funds, in contrast, increased their buying, purchasing $5.56 billion in October, up from the 12-month average of $2.88 billion in monthly inflows. This suggests a divergence in investment strategies amid market volatility.
3. <https://www.troweprice.com/financial-intermediary/us/en/insights/articles/2024/q3/how-to-help-protect-your-investment-portfolio-during-stock-market-volatility.html> - This article provides strategies for protecting investment portfolios during periods of stock market volatility. It emphasizes the importance of reassessing asset allocation to reduce investment risk, suggesting that investors closer to retirement should introduce more bonds into their portfolios to buffer short-term market fluctuations. The piece also advises investors to consider how their asset allocation impacts their lifestyle, particularly if a significant drop in portfolio value would affect their current living situation. The key message is to maintain a disciplined investment approach and avoid impulsive decisions during market downturns.
4. <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/4-investing-moves-to-make-instead-of-panicking-about-volatile-markets> - This article outlines four investment strategies to consider during market volatility, focusing on rebalancing portfolios to ensure alignment with risk tolerance and time horizon. It highlights the benefits of diversification, suggesting that a well-diversified portfolio can help investors weather market downturns. The piece also discusses the importance of staying invested through market volatility, noting that the worst and best market days often occur in close proximity, and missing out on the best days can significantly impact long-term returns. The overall advice is to maintain a long-term perspective and avoid making impulsive investment decisions during periods of market uncertainty.
5. <https://www.centralbank.ie/consumer-hub/consumer-notices/investor-warning-retail-investors-at-risk-when-trading-in-volatile-markets> - The Central Bank of Ireland warns retail investors about the increased risks of trading during periods of market volatility, which can lead to significant financial losses. An analysis of retail investment activity during the COVID-19 pandemic found a significant increase in the number of retail accounts and daily trades, with all firms reporting an increase in the percentage of retail clients losing money during this period. The warning highlights the particular risks associated with trading in Contracts for Difference (CFDs), noting that a majority of retail investors lose money when investing in CFDs even under normal market conditions. Investors are advised to carefully consider their investment objectives, level of experience, and risk appetite before trading, and to ensure they do not invest money they cannot afford to lose.
6. <https://www.blackrock.com/us/financial-professionals/investments/preparing-portfolios/managing-volatility> - BlackRock provides guidance on managing investment portfolios during periods of market volatility, emphasizing the importance of staying invested to benefit from potential long-term growth. The article discusses strategies for managing volatility, including reducing risk in portfolios while maintaining a steady asset allocation, and diversifying with bonds and alternative investments. It also highlights the benefits of staying invested through market volatility, noting that the worst and best market days often occur in close proximity, and missing out on the best days can significantly impact long-term returns. The overall message is to maintain a long-term perspective and avoid making impulsive investment decisions during periods of market uncertainty.
7. <https://www.bankrate.com/investing/why-you-should-avoid-panic-selling-during-volatility/> - This article discusses the importance of avoiding panic selling during market volatility, highlighting that the stock market's best days often follow its worst days. It explains that selling investments in a panic can lead to missing out on potential rebounds and may result in locking in losses. The piece also discusses the potential tax implications of selling investments, noting that selling winning stocks can generate a tax bill on capital gains. The overall advice is to maintain a long-term perspective, avoid making impulsive investment decisions during market downturns, and consult with financial advisors to navigate periods of market volatility effectively.