

Consumer Confidence Takes a Little Breather

Consumer confidence took its first breather of the year this week, slipping a notch from last week's record high, the latest ABC News/Money magazine poll has found.

Confidence still is soaring: Seventy-two percent of Americans rate the economy positively, tying last week's record. Sixty-one percent say their finances are in good shape. And 49 percent call it a good time to spend money.

INDEX - The ABC/Money Consumer Comfort Index, based on these three gauges, stands at +21 on its scale of +100 to -100, down one point. It had set record highs in each of the previous four weeks, as it surged from +11 at New Year's to +22 last week.

Regardless of this week's dip, consumer confidence is absolutely flying. Ratings of the economy are 39 points better than their average since this weekly poll began in late 1985. Ratings of the buying climate are 14 points better than average; ratings of personal finances, six points better.

	Positive Ratings	
	Today	12-yr. avg.
National Economy	72%	33
Personal Finances	61	55
Buying Climate	49	35
ABC/Money Index	+21	-18

Confidence has been surging just when Bill Clinton needed it, helping to boost his approval rating despite the White House sex scandal. The ABC/Money index is far above its lifetime average, -18. Credit the nirvana economy, with its growing wages, high employment and low inflation.

	ABC/Money Index	
Today	+21	
Last week	+22	Record high
1997 average	+5	Best year
1992 average	-44	Worst year
Feb. 9, 1992	-50	Record low
Lifetime average	-18	

GROUPS - Confidence usually is much lower among women than men, but it's moved closer - now an eight-point gap in the index, compared to an average of 19 points over the last 12 months.

	Index Among		
	Women	Men	Gap
Today	+17	+25	8 points
12-month avg.	-2	+17	19 points

Confidence continues to lag in other economically vulnerable groups. The index is +28 among whites but -21 among blacks; +62 in higher-income households but -28 in the lowest; and +36 among people who've attended college but -13 among high school dropouts.

IRS - A wildcard question in this poll measures the level of public antipathy toward the Internal Revenue Service, and finds it considerable. Sixty-one percent of Americans say the IRS is "too harsh on average people" in enforcing the nation's tax laws; that's about twice the number who say its enforcement is "about right." And only four percent say the IRS is not tough enough on average taxpayers.

IRS is...	2/17/98
Too harsh	61%
About right	29
Not tough enough	4

Here's a closer look at the three components of the ABC/Money index:

NATIONAL ECONOMY- A record-tying 72 percent rate the economy positively, unchanged this week. The worst was 93 percent negative in late 1991 and early 1992.

PERSONAL FINANCES - Sixty-one percent rate their finances positively, down one point. The best was 64 percent positive Aug. 3; the worst, 58 percent negative March 14, 1993.

BUYING CLIMATE - Forty-nine percent call this a good time to buy things, unchanged. The best was 52 percent May 11, 1986; the worst, 80 percent negative Nov. 2 and Oct. 28, 1990.

	Positive ratings for...		
	National Economy	Personal Finances	Buying Climate
This week	72%	61	49
Full average	33	55	35
Best	72	64	52
Worst	7	42	20

METHODOLOGY - The ABC News/Money magazine Consumer Comfort Index represents a rolling average based on telephone interviews with about 1,000 adults nationwide each month. This week's results are based on 1,016 interviews in the month ending Feb. 15 and have an error margin of plus or minus three percentage points.

The ABC/Money index is derived as follows: The negative response to each index question is subtracted from the positive response to that question. The three resulting numbers are then added and divided by three. The index can range from +100 (everyone positive on all three measures) to -100 (all negative on all three measures). The survey began in December 1985.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

For details contact the ABC News Polling Unit, (212) 456-2621. ABC News polls are available on America Online (keyword "ABC Polls") and at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet.

02/15/98			This	Last	4 Wks	3 Mo.	1 Yr.	12
Mo	12 Mo	12 Mo	Week	Week	Ago	Ago	Ago	
High	Low	Avg						

Group								
GENERAL POPULATION:								
Overall Index	22	-8	7	21	22	16	9	-3
State of Economy	44	-8	13	44	44	28	18	0
Personal Finances	28	10	21	22	24	26	22	18
Buying Climate	0	-26	-12	-2	-2	-6	-12	-26

DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS			OVERALL INDEX BY					
Sex:								
Men	28	4	17	25	24	18	17	5
Women	20	-19	-2	17	20	14	3	-9
Age:								

18 - 34	9	12	3	3	-7
17 -10 3					
35 - 44	26	21	28	10	-4
28 -8 7					
45 - 54	26	29	25	11	-9
29 -12 8					
55 - 64	19	18	20	18	15
28 -10 10					
65 +	31	32	10	14	6
35 -10 13					
Income:					
Under \$15K	-28	-22	-29	-33	-44
-18 -56 -36					
\$15K To \$24.9K	4	2	-23	-6	-12
7 -34 -15					
\$25K To \$39.9K	7	8	20	7	-8
20 -8 6					
\$40K To \$49.9K	34	33	26	27	9
35 -4 15					
Over \$50K	62	61	52	33	37
62 25 42					
Region:					
Northeast	21	18	4	6	0
21 -16 4					
Midwest	29	32	25	11	-2
33 -8 12					
South	25	24	20	12	-4
25 -13 6					
West	6	10	9	7	-3
21 -10 7					
Race:					
White	28	28	20	15	2
28 -3 12					
Black	-21	-9	-10	-27	-16
0 -42 -21					
Politics:					
Republican	32	35	33	27	11
41 0 21					
Democrat	19	24	10	4	1
24 -10 4					
Independent	15	9	9	7	-13
16 -16 2					
Education:					

< High School	-13	-8	-10	-21	-30
-2 -41 -22					
High Sch. Grad.	16	17	8	4	-7
17 -16 -1					
College +	36	36	30	25	11
36 10 23					
Home:					
Own	30	31	25	20	6
31 2 15					
Rent	0	-2	-11	-13	-22
2 -27 -12					
Marital Status:					
Single	16	16	-2	-5	-6
16 -11 1					
Married	26	27	24	21	5
27 0 14					
Sep/Wid/Div	8	8	1	-17	-28
8 -29 -14					
Employ. Status:					
Full-Time	30	29	23	15	4
30 -1 15					
Part-Time	9	10	6	5	-3
15 -17 0					
Not Employed	13	17	9	3	-10
17 -17 -2					