

Confidence Holds Steady, Curbing Recent Decline

Consumer confidence held steady this week, halting a four-week decline from its all-time high in mid-January.

Though it's down somewhat from last month's highs, confidence remains quite strong. Seventy-five percent of Americans say the national economy is in good shape, 66 percent rate their own finances positively, and 52 percent call it a good time to buy things. All of these ratings are within five points of their record highs and well above their 14-year averages in the ABC News/Money magazine survey.

Positive ratings:	----- Since 12/85 -----			
	Today	Highest	Lowest	Average
National Economy	75%	80	7	39
Personal Finances	66	70	42	56
Buying Climate	52	57	20	38

INDEX - The ABC/Money Consumer Comfort Index, based on these ratings, stands at +29 on its scale of +100 to -100, nine points below the all-time record set last month. The index has averaged +33 so far this year (five points above its 1999 average), and -11 since late 1985, stunted by dismal levels in the early '90s.

	ABC/Money Index	
Today	+29	
Last week	+28	
Jan. 16, 2000	+38	Record High
2000 average	+33	
1999 average	+28	Best full year
1992 average	-44	Worst full year
Feb. 9, 1992	-50	Record low
Average since 12/85	-11	

Confidence has been very strong for two years, lifted by rising incomes, low inflation, low interest rates and the strong job market. Strong confidence in turn has boosted consumer spending, fueling the economy through its long growth cycle.

Call the ABC News Polling Unit, ext. 2621, for a chart tracking the ABC/Money index over time.

GROUPS - As usual, confidence is higher among better-off Americans: The index is +59 in higher-income households compared to -22 in the lowest; +49 among college

graduates but +4 among high-school dropouts; +34 among whites but -5 among blacks; and +38 among men compared to +18 among women.

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

NATIONAL ECONOMY- The poll asks: Would you describe the state of the nation's economy these days as excellent, good, not so good or poor? Seventy-five percent say excellent or good, the same as last week. The record, 80 percent, was set on Jan. 16, 2000. The worst rating was seven percent in late 1991 and early 1992.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	75%	15	60	25	21	4
Avg. since 12/85	39	3	36	61	40	21

PERSONAL FINANCES - The poll asks: Would you describe the state of your own personal finances these days as excellent, good, not so good or poor? Sixty-six percent say excellent or good, the same as last week. The record, 70 percent, was originally set Aug. 30, 1998 and last matched in Jan. 2000. The worst was 42 percent on March 14, 1993.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	66%	6	60	34	24	10
Avg. since 12/85	56	5	52	44	31	13

BUYING CLIMATE - The poll asks: Considering the cost of things today and your own personal finances, would you say now is an excellent time, a good time, a not so good time or a poor time to buy the things you want and need? Fifty-two percent say excellent or good, up one point from last week. The record, 57 percent, was set on Jan. 16, 2000. The worst rating, 20 percent, was set in Fall 1990.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. net	Not good	Poor
This week	52%	3	49	48	31	17
Avg. since 12/85	38	3	35	62	41	21

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 1,035 interviews in the month ending Feb. 20 and have an error margin of plus or minus three percentage points. Fieldwork by ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

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 Dalia Sussman.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet, at:
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/PollVault/PollVault.html>

02/20/00	This Week	Last Week	4 Wks Ago	3 Mo. Ago	1 Yr. Ago	12 Mo High	12 Mo Low	12 Mo Avg

Group	-----							
GENERAL POPULATION:								
Overall Index	29	28	35	27	30	38	22	29
State of Economy	50	50	56	42	48	60	38	47
Personal Finances	32	32	40	32	36	40	28	34
Buying Climate	4	2	10	8	6	14	-4	5

OVERALL INDEX BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS								
Sex:								
Men	38	35	42	35	34	45	30	37
Women	18	20	29	19	24	30	11	20
Age:								
18 - 34	27	21	32	19	28	37	16	26
35 - 44	27	28	36	30	32	40	13	30
45 - 54	11	14	37	30	19	45	11	28
55 - 64	29	37	48	30	36	48	13	29
65 +	45	44	28	26	31	45	17	28
Income:								
Under \$15K	-22	-21	-19	-31	-17	-11	-42	-24
\$15K To \$24.9K	-6	-1	26	8	5	26	-15	2
\$25K To \$39.9K	27	17	16	24	22	38	8	25
\$40K To \$49.9K	40	41	55	34	46	56	27	43
Over \$50K	59	59	66	60	62	68	53	60
Region:								
Northeast	27	33	48	29	29	48	21	32
Midwest	34	27	32	37	35	41	20	31
South	17	19	28	27	23	31	14	24
West	40	37	38	15	34	43	13	29
Race:								
White	34	33	40	31	32	43	26	33
Black	-5	-4	6	-1	16	20	-11	2
Politics:								
Republican	48	49	47	41	38	55	32	42
Democrat	28	28	37	33	27	38	15	27
Independent	16	17	24	16	30	34	13	23
Education:								
< High School	4	-1	-2	-6	-10	9	-27	-9
High Sch. Grad.	8	11	27	17	25	32	8	21
College +	49	48	52	44	46	53	38	45
Home:								
Own	37	36	42	37	35	44	28	35
Rent	7	7	16	5	16	22	-3	10
Marital Status:								
Single	27	25	32	27	21	36	8	24
Married	33	34	41	31	36	44	27	35
Sep/Wid/Div	6	5	13	6	7	18	-9	7
Employ. Status:								
Full-Time	31	31	43	36	33	44	30	36
Part-Time	18	20	33	25	21	38	7	23

Not Employed	27	25	24	14	25	28	8	18
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