

Consumer Confidence Shifts into Hyperspeed

Consumer confidence shifted into hyperspeed this week, rocketing to a new record - its fifth of the year - in more than 12 years of weekly ABC News/Money magazine polls.

Seventy-six percent of Americans now say the economy is in good shape, not only the most ever but an astonishing 42 points above the 12-year average. Near-record numbers also rate their own finances and the buying climate positively, though these aren't as far above the norm.

	Positive Ratings		
	Today	12-yr. avg.	
National Economy	76%	34	Record high
Personal Finances	62	55	2 from record
Buying Climate	49	35	3 from record
ABC/Money Index	+25	-18	Record high

The ABC/Money Consumer Comfort Index, based on these three gauges, rose four points this week to +25 on its scale of +100 to -100. It's soared from +11 at the start of this year, after averaging +5 in all of 1997 - its best full year ever.

The index has averaged -18 since this poll began in late 1985; it peaked at +8 in 1986 and rarely saw positive numbers again, until this summer. Since then it's been flying on the wings of low inflation, low unemployment and growing personal incomes. The index hit a record of +14 last September, matched it this Jan. 11 and has gone on from there, setting new highs in five of the last six weeks.

	ABC/Money Index	
Today	+25	Record high
Last week	+21	
1997 average	+5	Best year
1992 average	-44	Worst year
Feb. 9, 1992	-50	Record low
Lifetime average	-18	

Consumer confidence has done wonders for Bill Clinton's popularity. In an ABC News/Washington Post poll last week he scored a near-record job approval rating of 67 percent, and 80 percent said he's done "a good job keeping the economy strong." Even 67 percent of Republicans said so.

Positive ratings of the national economy have grown by 15 points this year alone, just in time to help shield Clinton from the White House sex scandal.

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

	Index Among		
	Women	Men	Gap
Today	+20	+29	8 points
12-month avg.	-1	+18	19 points

Confidence continues to lag in other economically vulnerable groups. The index is +32 among whites but -16 among blacks; +58 in higher-income households but -28 in the lowest; and +39 among people who've attended college but -4 among high school dropouts.

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

NATIONAL ECONOMY- A record 76 percent rate the economy positively, up four points this week. The worst was 93 percent negative in late 1991 and early 1992.

PERSONAL FINANCES - Sixty-two percent rate their finances positively, up 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	76%	62	49
Full average	34	55	35
Best	76	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 1,019 interviews in the month ending Feb. 22 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.

02/22/98	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	25	21	19	9	-4	25	-8	8
State of Economy	52	44	32	16	-2	52	-8	14
Personal Finances	24	22	26	22	16	28	10	21
Buying Climate	-2	-2	-2	-10	-26	0	-26	-12

OVERALL INDEX BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS								
Sex:								
Men	29	25	24	14	4	29	4	18
Women	20	17	12	5	-11	20	-19	-1
Age:								
18 - 34	15	9	6	5	-9	17	-10	4
35 - 44	31	26	24	5	3	31	-8	8
45 - 54	25	26	29	9	-10	29	-12	9
55 - 64	20	19	19	20	9	28	-10	10
65 +	30	31	18	16	-2	35	-10	13
Income:								
Under \$15K	-28	-28	-25	-35	-48	-18	-56	-36
\$15K To \$24.9K	7	4	-13	-10	-15	7	-34	-15
\$25K To \$39.9K	13	7	16	10	-4	20	-6	6
\$40K To \$49.9K	40	34	34	20	7	40	-4	16
Over \$50K	58	62	54	36	34	62	25	43
Region:								
Northeast	22	21	10	8	-4	22	-16	4
Midwest	25	29	33	12	-3	33	-8	13
South	29	25	22	8	-4	29	-13	6
West	17	6	2	10	-3	21	-10	8
Race:								
White	32	28	24	15	1	32	-3	13
Black	-16	-21	-15	-22	-19	0	-42	-21
Politics:								
Republican	30	32	40	27	9	41	0	21
Democrat	25	19	9	7	1	25	-10	5
Independent	17	15	14	0	-16	17	-16	3
Education:								
< High School	-4	-13	-10	-27	-37	-2	-41	-22
High Sch. Grad.	17	16	14	3	-9	17	-16	-1
College +	39	36	31	27	12	39	10	24
Home:								
Own	32	30	28	17	5	32	2	15
Rent	7	0	-8	-8	-24	7	-27	-11
Marital Status:								
Single	18	16	1	-4	-6	18	-11	2
Married	28	26	27	22	3	28	0	15
Sep/Wid/Div	18	8	0	-22	-28	18	-29	-13
Employ. Status:								
Full-Time	31	30	26	14	2	31	-1	15
Part-Time	11	9	9	6	-4	15	-17	1
Not Employed	20	13	10	3	-13	20	-17	-1

