

Another Record High for Consumer Confidence

Consumer confidence leapt to a new high this week in a broad-based advance. A record number of Americans rate their own finances positively, and for the first time since 1986 a majority calls this a good time to buy things.

Sixty-five percent of Americans in the latest ABC News/Money magazine poll say their own finances are in excellent or good shape, the most in more than 12 years of weekly polls. Fifty-one percent also call it a good time to spend money, one point short of the record set in May 1986.

And, in the highest-flying measure of consumer confidence, 73 percent say the national economy is in good shape - down a few points from the record two weeks ago, but a huge 39 points more than average over the last 12 years.

	Today	Positive Ratings	
		Record high	12-yr. avg.
National Economy	73%	76	34
Personal Finances	65	65	55
Buying Climate	51	52	35

INDEX - The ABC/Money Consumer Comfort Index, based on these three gauges, rose three points this week to a record +26 on its scale of +100 to -100. It has soared from +11 at the start of this year, setting six new highs in the last eight weeks.

The index has been flying since last summer on the wings of low inflation, low unemployment and growing personal incomes. Compare its current level to its lifetime average, just -18.

	ABC/Money Index	
Today	+26	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; after narrowing earlier this year, that gap has widened again: The index now stands at +34 among men, compared to +19 among women.

Confidence also lags in other economically vulnerable groups. The index is +33 among whites but -9 among blacks; +59 in higher-income households but -26 in the lowest; and +41 among people who've attended college but -1 among high school dropouts.

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

NATIONAL ECONOMY- Seventy-three percent rate the economy positively, unchanged this week. The best was 76 percent the week before last; the worst, 93 percent negative in late 1991 and early 1992.

PERSONAL FINANCES - A record 65 percent rate their finances positively, up three points this week. The worst was 58 percent negative March 14, 1993.

BUYING CLIMATE - Fifty-one percent call this a good time to buy things, up two points. 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	73%	65	51
Full average	34	55	35
Best	76	65	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 1,024 interviews in the month ending March 8 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.

03/08/98			This	Last	4 Wks	3 Mo.	1 Yr.	12
High	Low	Avg	Week	Week	Ago	Ago	Ago	
Mo	12 Mo	12 Mo						

GENERAL POPULATION:					
Overall Index	26	23	22	13	-8
26 -8 9					
State of Economy	46	46	44	22	-8
52 -8 16					
Personal Finances	30	24	24	24	10
30 10 21					
Buying Climate	2	-2	-2	-8	-26
2 -26 -11					

OVERALL INDEX BY					
DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS					
Sex:					
Men	34	26	24	23	6
34 6 19					
Women	19	20	20	3	-19
20 -19 0					
Age:					
18 - 34	24	17	12	11	-10
24 -10 5					
35 - 44	30	29	21	6	-8
31 -8 9					
45 - 54	19	18	29	9	-7
29 -10 10					
55 - 64	30	21	18	20	-3
30 -10 11					
65 +	31	31	32	23	-1
35 -10 14					
Income:					
Under \$15K	-26	-30	-22	-27	-56
-18 -56 -35					
\$15K To \$24.9K	9	8	2	-2	-21
9 -34 -14					
\$25K To \$39.9K	22	14	8	14	-5
22 -6 7					
\$40K To \$49.9K	45	44	33	15	-3
45 -4 17					

Over \$50K	59	56	61	39	33
62 25 44					
Region:					
Northeast	15	17	18	13	-16
22 -16 5					
Midwest	30	25	32	13	-7
33 -7 14					
South	28	28	24	12	-8
29 -13 7					
West	30	18	10	15	4
30 -10 9					
Race:					
White	33	30	28	17	-3
33 -3 14					
Black	-9	-14	-9	-18	-27
0 -42 -20					
Politics:					
Republican	32	28	35	26	0
41 0 22					
Democrat	20	21	24	10	-4
25 -10 6					
Independent	29	19	9	7	-14
29 -14 4					
Education:					
< High School	-1	-7	-8	-30	-41
-1 -41 -20					
High Sch. Grad.	19	16	17	14	-14
19 -16 0					
College +	41	39	36	27	11
41 10 25					
Home:					
Own	35	31	31	18	2
35 2 16					
Rent	7	5	-2	-1	-27
7 -27 -10					
Marital Status:					
Single	21	17	16	3	-11
21 -11 3					
Married	32	28	27	23	0
32 0 16					
Sep/Wid/Div	10	11	8	-12	-28
18 -28 -11					
Employ. Status:					

	Full-Time	32	30	29	17	-1
32	-1 16					
	Part-Time	20	9	10	6	-16
20	-17 1					
	Not Employed	21	19	17	8	-12
21	-17 0					