

## More Leaps and Bounds in Consumer Confidence

Public ratings of the buying climate broke a nearly 12-year-old record this week and Americans also gave record-high ratings to their personal finances, pushing consumer confidence to another all-time high in the ABC News/Money magazine poll.

Fifty-four percent now call this good time to buy things they want and need, surpassing the previous record of 52 percent set in May 1986 and matched last week. A remarkable 68 percent say their own finances are in good shape, up two points. And 71 percent rate the national economy positively, down from its record high, 76 percent last month.

	Positive Ratings		
	Today	Record high	12-yr. avg.
National Economy	71%	76	34
Personal Finances	68	68	55
Buying Climate	54	54	35

INDEX - The ABC/Money Consumer Comfort Index, based on these three gauges, stands at +29 on its scale of +100 to -100, the highest ever in weekly polls dating to December 1985. The index has been rocketing all year, setting records in eight of the last 10 weeks.

Confidence is not only at a record; it's never even been close to these levels before. The ABC/Money index reached a then-high +8 in May 1986 that was untouched for 11 years, until late last spring. Since then it's soared, boosted by low inflation, low unemployment and growing personal income. Compare today's level to the index's lifetime average, -17, or even its previous best year, an average of +5 last year.

This burst in economic confidence has come along just in time to shield Bill Clinton's job approval rating from the storms of the White House sex scandal.

	ABC/Money Index	
Today	+29	Record high
1998 average (to date)	+21	
1997 average	+5	Best year
1992 average	-44	Worst year
Feb. 9, 1992	-50	Record low
Lifetime average	-17	

GROUPS - Confidence still does lag in economically vulnerable groups. The index is +37 among men compared to +20 among women, +33 among whites but -8 among

blacks, +63 in higher-income households but -26 in the lowest and +48 among people who've attended college but -14 among high school dropouts.

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

**NATIONAL ECONOMY**- Seventy-one percent rate the economy positively, down two points this week. The best was 76 percent last month; the worst, 93 percent negative in late 1991 and early 1992.

**PERSONAL FINANCES** - A record 68 percent rate their finances positively, up two point this week. The worst was 58 percent negative March 14, 1993.

**BUYING CLIMATE** - A record 54 percent call this a good time to buy things, up two points. The worst was 80 percent negative Nov. 2 and Oct. 28, 1990.

	Positive ratings for...		
	National Economy	Personal Finances	Buying Climate
This week	71%	68	54
Full average	34	55	35
Best	76	68	54
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 1,035 interviews in the month ending March 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.

03/22/98			This	Last	4 Wks	3 Mo.	1 Yr.	12
Mo	12 Mo	12 Mo	Week	Week	Ago	Ago	Ago	
High	Low	Avg	-----					
Group			-----					

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GENERAL POPULATION:

Overall Index	29	27	25	12	-4
29    -4    10					
State of Economy	42	46	52	24	-8
52    -8    18					
Personal Finances	36	32	24	22	16
36    14    22					
Buying Climate	8	4	-2	-10	-20
8    -22    -9					

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OVERALL INDEX BY

DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

Sex:

Men	37	37	29	28	8
37    8    20					
Women	20	18	20	-4	-14
20    -17    1					

Age:

18 - 34	27	27	15	11	-4
27    -6    6					
35 - 44	37	29	31	11	2
37    -4    10					
45 - 54	18	23	25	14	-9
29    -10    11					
55 - 64	28	24	20	18	0
30    -10    12					
65 +	29	28	30	6	-2
35    -10    15					

Income:

Under \$15K	-26	-22	-28	-27	-49
-18    -50    -34					
\$15K To \$24.9K	12	8	7	-9	-23
12    -34    -12					
\$25K To \$39.9K	24	20	13	9	2
24    -6    8					
\$40K To \$49.9K	54	54	40	24	3
54    -4    19					
Over \$50K	63	59	58	45	36
63    25    45					

Region:

	Northeast	15	13	22	13	-8
22	-8 6					
	Midwest	34	29	25	19	4
34	2 15					
	South	25	27	29	4	-13
29	-13 9					
	West	40	38	17	14	8
40	-10 10					
	Race:					
	White	33	33	32	16	1
33	-1 15					
	Black	-8	-11	-16	-19	-28
0	-42 -20					
	Politics:					
	Republican	34	32	30	24	3
41	3 23					
	Democrat	25	23	25	7	-4
25	-10 7					
	Independent	30	28	17	13	-6
30	-9 6					
	Education:					
	< High School	-14	-4	-4	-26	-33
-1	-38 -19					
	High Sch. Grad.	22	19	17	11	-16
22	-16 2					
	College +	48	44	39	24	17
48	10 26					
	Home:					
	Own	36	35	32	18	4
36	2 18					
	Rent	9	9	7	-3	-21
9	-24 -9					
	Marital Status:					
	Single	30	23	18	8	1
30	-8 4					
	Married	36	34	28	19	2
36	2 17					
	Sep/Wid/Div	2	8	18	-13	-25
18	-25 -10					
	Employ. Status:					
	Full-Time	35	32	31	24	7
35	6 18					

23	Part-Time	23	15	11	-5	-15
	-16					
	3					
25	Not Employed	20	25	20	-2	-14
	-17					
	2					