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ABC NEWS/MONEY CONSUMER INDEX - 3/31/96

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CONFIDENCE INCHES UP  
BUT STILL OFF ITS OATS

Consumer confidence inched ahead this week on slightly less-grumpy views of the national economy, but still remains off its pace of 1994 and 1995, the latest ABC News/Money magazine poll shows.

Sixty-four percent of Americans now rate the economy negatively - the least since Dec. 17, and well below the 1990-93 average of 85 percent. But it's still not back to its pre-recession level, 59 percent from 1986-1990.

Sixty-four percent also call it a bad time to buy things. And 54 percent give a satisfactory rating to their own finances, the one positive gauge of the three.

INDEX - Together these form the ABC/Money Consumer Comfort Index, which rose one point this week to -16 on its scale of +100 to -100.

The index averaged -9 in the late 1980s, then plunged to a dismal -39 from 1990-93. This is the first year since 1992, when confidence hit its recession-inspired bottom, that it's failed to improve.

	ABC/Money Index
Today	-16
Last week	-17
1996 average	-17
1995	-15
1994	-19
1993	-37
1992	-44
1990-93	-39
1986-90	-9

INDICES - While ratings of buying climate as well as the economy seem gloomy, both are far better than their lows during the last recession and its hangover. But neither has regained its pre-recession levels.

	Today	1990-93	1986-90
Negative on national economy	64	85	59
Negative on buying climate	64	74	61
Positive on personal finances	54	49	57

GROUPS - Confidence lags in economically vulnerable groups, including women, blacks, the poor and the less-educated. The index is -7 among men but -23 among women; +22 in higher-income households but -56 in the lowest; -14 among whites but -30 among blacks; and +2 among people who have attended college but -47 among high school dropouts.

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

NATIONAL ECONOMY- Sixty-four percent rate the economy negatively, down a point

this week. It's averaged 67 percent this year and 65 percent last year, compared to 85 percent from 1990-93 and 59 percent from 1986-1990. The worst, 93 percent, was in late 1991 and early 1992; the best, 50-50, was April 27, 1986. The average for the life of the index is 69 percent negative.

PERSONAL FINANCES - Fifty-four percent rate their finances positively, unchanged this week. It's averaged 56 percent this year and last year alike, compared to 49 percent in the 1990-93 slump and 57 percent before the recession. The worst was 58 percent negative March 14, 1993; the best, 62 percent positive Dec. 20, 1987. The full average is 54 percent positive.

BUYING CLIMATE - Sixty-four percent call this a bad time to buy things, unchanged this week. It's averaged 65 percent this year and 63 percent last year, compared to 74 percent during the 1990-93 slump and 61 percent before the recession. The worst is 80 percent negative Nov. 2 and Oct. 28, 1990; the best, 52 percent positive May 11, 1986. The full average is 66 percent negative.

	National Economy	Personal Finances	Buying Climate
This week	64% neg	54% Pos	64% neg
1996 Average	67% neg	56% pos	65% neg
Recession Average (mid-1990 to 1993)	85% neg	51% neg	74% neg
Pre-Recession Avg. (1986 to mid-1990)	59% neg	57% pos	61% neg
Full Average (1986-1995)	69% neg	54% pos	66% neg
Worst	93% neg	58% neg	80% neg
Best	50% pos	62% pos	52% pos

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. Interviewing is done by ICR/AUS Consultants of Media, Pa. This week's results are based on 1,040 interviews in the month ending March 31 and have an error margin of plus or minus 3.5 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.

ABC polls are available in the ABC News area of America Online.

Analysis by Gary Langer. For details contact the ABC News Polling Unit, (212) 456-2621.

03/31/96	This Week	Last Week	4 Wks Ago	3 Mo. Ago	1 Yr. Ago	12 Mo High	12 Mo Low	12 Mo Avg
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Group

GENERAL POPULATION:

Overall Index	-16	-17	-16	-17	-16	-9	-21	-15
State of Economy	-28	-30	-34	-32	-32	-26	-38	-31
Personal Finances	8	8	14	10	12	22	4	13
Buying Climate	-28	-28	-28	-28	-28	-20	-36	-27

OVERALL INDEX BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

Sex:

Men	-7	-6	-3	2	-7	4	-13	-3
Women	-23	-26	-27	-32	-23	-19	-33	-26

Age:

18 - 34	-10	-13	-10	-13	-15	-4	-19	-11
35 - 44	-19	-18	-18	-19	-16	4	-26	-15
45 - 54	-24	-22	-13	-23	-15	-3	-36	-17
55 - 64	-17	-13	-20	-10	-3	-2	-40	-17
65 +	-11	-12	-22	-20	-26	2	-34	-18

Income:

Under \$15K	-56	-56	-46	-52	-54	-41	-61	-52
\$15K To \$24.9K	-39	-36	-29	-41	-34	-15	-48	-33
\$25K To \$39.9K	-9	-13	-22	-16	-8	-2	-29	-15
\$40K To \$49.9K	-3	-1	-4	-3	3	8	-31	-4
Over \$50K	22	21	18	26	14	32	12	21

Region:

Northeast	-16	-18	-21	-18	-25	-13	-34	-22
Midwest	-5	-5	-5	-11	-2	11	-21	-6
South	-20	-23	-24	-18	-15	-9	-25	-17
West	-19	-16	-7	-15	-21	0	-23	-14

Race:

White	-14	-13	-12	-11	-10	-5	-15	-11
Black	-30	-27	-37	-49	-47	-23	-56	-41

Politics:

Republican	-1	-1	-3	-5	-1	6	-10	-2
Democrat	-20	-20	-23	-20	-19	-11	-28	-20
Independent	-21	-23	-15	-18	-22	-11	-26	-18

Education:

< High School	-47	-41	-39	-36	-47	-30	-53	-43
High Sch. Grad.	-23	-24	-24	-29	-20	-15	-30	-23
College +	2	-1	0	2	0	7	-6	2

Home:

Own	-10	-11	-9	-11	-10	-2	-15	-9
Rent	-29	-29	-28	-29	-32	-19	-38	-30

Marital Status:

Single	-19	-17	-10	-9	-15	3	-19	-10
Married	-9	-9	-11	-12	-10	-4	-18	-10
Sep/Wid/Div	-37	-40	-35	-41	-35	-21	-45	-37

Employ. Status:

Full-Time	-8	-9	-8	-4	-6	3	-14	-6
Part-Time	-17	-23	-12	-19	-32	-4	-35	-20
Not Employed	-25	-24	-26	-30	-23	-18	-35	-27