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ABC NEWS/MONEY CONSUMER INDEX - 4/21/96

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CONFIDENCE BLINKS

Consumer confidence blinked this week, timidly stepping back from the verge of a post-recession high. It was the third time this decade it's reached for the ring - and missed.

The ABC News/Money magazine Consumer Comfort Index lost two points to -11 on its scale of +100 to -100. That takes the shine off last week's six-point advance, which tied the second-best one-week gain in 10 years.

Last week's advance had lifted the index to its pre-recession average, -9, for only the third time since January 1990. But after touching that benchmark last Sept. 24 and June 6, the index fell back - as it now has again.

INDEX - The index is based on views of the economy, buying climate and personal finances. It averaged -9 in the late 1980s, then plunged to a dismal -39 from 1990-93. It's been off to its slowest start this year since 1992, when it hit its recession-inspired bottom. Its 1996 average is -16.

	ABC/Money Index
Today	-11
Last week	-9
1996 average	-16
1995	-15
1994	-19
1993	-37
1992	-44
1990-93	-39
1986-90	-9

MOVEMENT - The ABC/Money poll is based on a four-week rolling average, which tends to smooth out sudden changes. But last week a strongly negative week rolled out and an unusually positive one rolled in, creating a big positive swing. This week change was negative, albeit more moderately.

Ratings of the economy took the biggest hit: Sixty-two percent now say the economy is in bad shape, up from 59 percent (a six-year low) last week. That's still much better than the 1990-93 average, 85 percent negative.

Negative ratings of the buying climate gained a point this week, to 62 percent. Fifty-seven percent rate their finances positively, unchanged. These, too, are far better than their worst during the last recession and its hangover.

	Today	1990-93	1986-90
Negative on national economy	62	85	59
Negative on buying climate	62	74	61
Positive on personal finances	57	49	57

GROUPS - As usual, confidence lags in economically vulnerable groups, including

women, blacks, the poor and the less-educated. The index is 0 among men but -20 among women; +21 in higher-income households but -48 in the lowest; -5 among whites but -47 among blacks; and +4 among people who have attended college but -41 among high school dropouts.

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

NATIONAL ECONOMY- Sixty-two percent rate the economy negatively, up three points this week. It's averaged 66 percent this 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-seven percent rate their finances positively, unchanged. It's averaged 56 percent this year, 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-two percent call this a bad time to buy things, up a point this week. It's averaged 64 percent this 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	62% neg	57% pos	62% neg
1996 Average	66% neg	56% pos	64% 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 1,046 interviews in the month ending April 21 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.

04/21/96	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	-11	-9	-17	-21	-14	-9	-21	-15
State of Economy	-24	-18	-30	-38	-30	-18	-38	-31
Personal Finances	14	14	8	12	14	22	4	13
Buying Climate	-24	-22	-28	-36	-26	-20	-36	-27

OVERALL INDEX BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS								
Sex:								
Men	0	4	-6	-9	-2	4	-13	-3
Women	-20	-19	-26	-31	-24	-19	-33	-25
Age:								
18 - 34	-13	-5	-13	-17	-11	-4	-19	-11
35 - 44	-7	-5	-18	-23	-14	4	-26	-15
45 - 54	-12	-21	-22	-35	-20	-3	-36	-17
55 - 64	-9	-13	-13	-12	-14	-2	-40	-18
65 +	-11	-2	-12	-19	-11	2	-34	-17
Income:								
Under \$15K	-48	-50	-56	-61	-51	-41	-61	-52
\$15K To \$24.9K	-33	-35	-36	-25	-26	-15	-48	-33
\$25K To \$39.9K	-12	-5	-13	-17	-12	-2	-29	-15
\$40K To \$49.9K	21	11	-1	-31	-9	21	-31	-3
Over \$50K	21	25	21	12	21	32	12	22
Region:								
Northeast	-17	-15	-18	-29	-21	-13	-34	-22
Midwest	5	8	-5	-10	-1	11	-21	-6
South	-13	-12	-23	-22	-15	-9	-25	-17
West	-19	-13	-16	-22	-19	0	-23	-14
Race:								
White	-5	-4	-13	-15	-9	-4	-15	-11
Black	-47	-41	-27	-54	-36	-23	-56	-41
Politics:								
Republican	5	9	-1	-6	0	9	-10	-1
Democrat	-12	-12	-20	-28	-11	-11	-28	-20
Independent	-18	-14	-23	-26	-22	-11	-26	-18
Education:								
< High School	-41	-39	-41	-49	-32	-30	-53	-42
High Sch. Grad.	-15	-10	-24	-27	-25	-10	-30	-23
College +	4	5	-1	-6	3	7	-6	2
Home:								
Own	-5	-3	-11	-15	-8	-2	-15	-9
Rent	-27	-22	-29	-34	-30	-19	-38	-30
Marital Status:								
Single	-13	-4	-17	-16	-2	3	-19	-10
Married	-5	-3	-9	-18	-12	-3	-18	-10

Sep/Wid/Div	-33	-32	-40	-37	-32	-21	-45	-36
Employ. Status:								
Full-Time	0	2	-9	-13	-5	3	-14	-6
Part-Time	-12	-19	-23	-22	-25	-4	-35	-19
Not Employed	-24	-17	-24	-31	-21	-17	-35	-27