

A Job in the Ribs For Consumer Confidence

Consumer confidence took a job in the ribs this week, slipping to its lowest level since early August. Confidence still is far better than usual, but down from the more than 12-year high it set Aug. 30 in the weekly ABC News/Money magazine poll.

Ratings of the buying climate lost three points to their lowest since Aug. 2; ratings of the national economy and personal finances each lost a point. Compare them, however, to their 12-year averages:

Positive Ratings	Today	Record high	Record low	12-year avg.
National Economy	71%	76	7	35
Personal Finances	67	70	42	55
Buying Climate	50	55	20	36

Time may tell why confidence in current economic conditions lost ground this week. As reported last week, expectations for the economy's future declined somewhat this summer, and that could have an effect on views of current conditions.

INDEX - The ABC/Money Consumer Comfort Index, based on these ratings, stands at +25 on its scale of +100 to -100, down four points this week and five points below the record it set Aug. 30. Still, it's been the best year by far for consumer confidence since this survey began in December 1985: The index has averaged +23 in 1998, compared to a previous best of +5 last year, and a lifetime average of just -16.

	ABC/Money Index	
Today	+25	
Aug. 30	+30	
1998 average (to date)	+23	
1997 average	+5	Best full year
1992 average	-44	Worst full year
Feb. 9, 1992	-50	Record low
Average since 12/85	-16	

Call the ABC News Polling Unit, ext. 2621, for a chart tracking the ABC/Money index over time.

GROUPS - Confidence continues to lag in economically vulnerable groups. The index is +30 among men compared to +20 among women, +29 among whites compared to +0

among blacks, +62 in higher-income households but -18 in the lowest and +45 among people who've attended college compared to -13 among high school dropouts.

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

NATIONAL ECONOMY- The poll asks: Would you describe the state of the nation's economy these days as excellent, good, not so good or poor? Seventy-one percent say excellent or good, down one point this week. The best was 76 percent Feb. 22; the worst, seven percent in late 1991 and early 1992.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	71	9	62	29	22	7
Avg. since 12/85	35	2	33	65	42	22

PERSONAL FINANCES - The poll asks: Would you describe the state of your own personal finances these days as excellent, good, not so good or poor? Sixty-seven percent say excellent or good, down one point this week. The record was 70 percent Aug. 30; the worst, 42 percent March 14, 1993.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	67	6	61	33	23	10
Avg. since 12/85	55	4	51	45	32	13

BUYING CLIMATE - The poll asks: Considering the cost of things today and your own personal finances, would you say now is an excellent time, a good time, a not so good time or a poor time to buy the things you want and need? Fifty percent say excellent or good, down three points. The record was 55 percent Aug. 30; the worst, 20 percent in fall 1990.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. net	Not good	Poor
This week	50	3	47	50	34	16
Avg. since 12/85	36	2	34	64	42	22

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 1,036 interviews in the month ending Sept. 20 and have an error margin of plus or minus three percentage points. Field work by ICR Survey Research of Media, Pa.

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.

ABC News polls are available at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet, at the World Wide Web address http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/polnation_poll/index.html; and on America Online (keyword "ABC Polls").

09/20/98

Group	This Week	Last Week	4 Wks Ago	3 Mo. Ago	1 Yr. Ago	12 Mo High	12 Mo Low	12 Mo Avg
GENERAL POPULATION:								
Overall Index	25	29	29	25	11	31	5	19
State of Economy	42	44	42	38	20	52	8	32
Personal Finances	34	36	36	30	22	40	14	27
Buying Climate	0	6	8	6	-10	10	-14	-2
OVERALL INDEX BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS								
Sex:								
Men	30	36	39	36	23	40	13	28
Women	20	21	18	14	0	21	-6	10
Age:								
18 - 34	19	26	25	21	8	29	-2	14
35 - 44	27	32	29	31	13	37	5	20
45 - 54	37	38	25	19	7	38	2	20
55 - 64	21	21	37	34	12	47	-5	24
65 +	25	25	29	19	18	35	-2	21
Income:								
Under \$15K	-18	-17	-15	-36	-34	-6	-46	-29
\$15K To \$24.9K	8	16	2	-4	-3	16	-28	-4
\$25K To \$39.9K	5	10	15	20	12	25	0	14
\$40K To \$49.9K	46	51	46	50	28	60	6	35
Over \$50K	62	62	61	63	39	66	33	54
Region:								
Northeast	20	25	26	26	9	37	-4	17
Midwest	36	35	37	36	18	38	6	25
South	21	24	21	18	7	29	-6	16
West	23	30	31	22	10	40	2	18
Race:								
White	29	31	29	29	17	33	10	24
Black	0	12	13	-15	-24	15	-34	-10
Politics:								
Republican	42	43	40	46	24	46	16	33
Democrat	26	28	29	19	4	35	-2	17
Independent	14	20	16	19	10	30	0	14
Education:								
< High School	-13	-8	-1	-10	-13	14	-38	-15
High Sch. Grad.	16	21	24	9	-1	27	-4	11
College +	45	46	40	46	27	48	22	36
Home:								
Own	32	34	34	31	17	39	12	26
Rent	7	15	13	9	-3	15	-18	1
Marital Status:								
Single	15	25	28	31	1	34	-7	14
Married	34	35	32	26	19	36	13	26
Sep/Wid/Div	4	8	11	10	-11	18	-22	-2
Employ. Status:								
Full-Time	34	37	33	36	17	37	10	27
Part-Time	23	25	17	8	10	27	-5	12
Not Employed	10	14	22	12	1	25	-8	10