

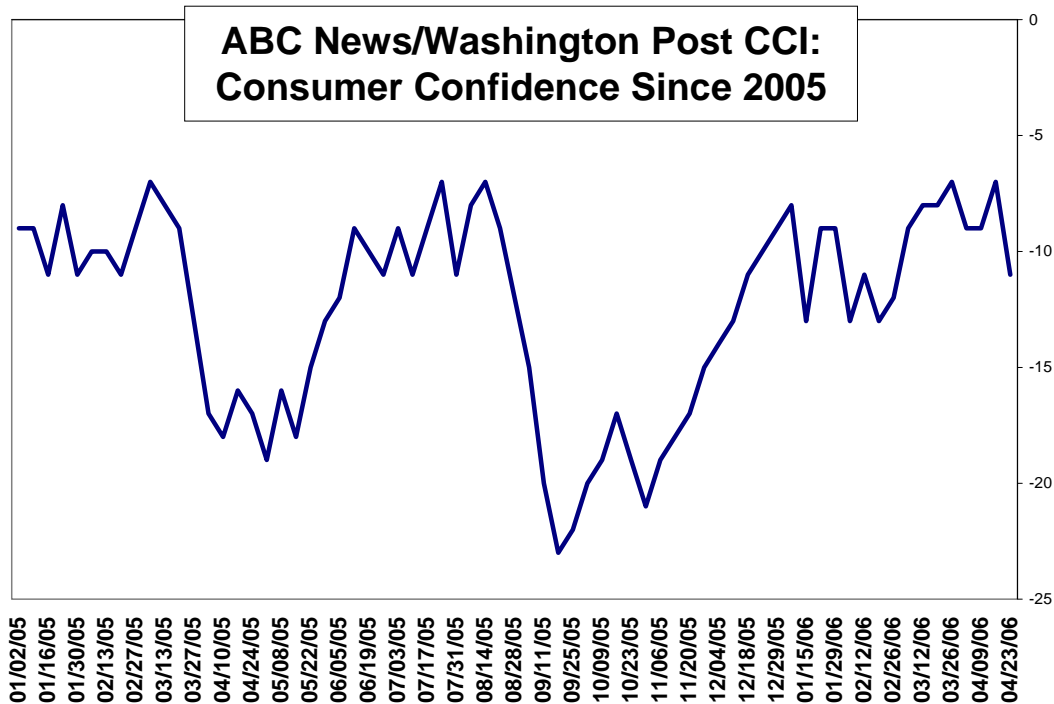
## **Confidence Takes a Hit as Gas Prices Keep Soaring**

Spiking prices at the pump appear to be taking a toll on consumer confidence: The ABC News/Washington Post Consumer Comfort Index sustained an unusual drop this week, falling to its lowest level in two months.

The index lost four points to -11 on its scale of +100 to -100; it's fallen this far in a single week just four other times in the past year and just 70 times in more than 20 years of weekly polls. Last week, before this drop, it had matched its best level since late 2004.

Consumer confidence historically has been sensitive to high gas prices, and they're high now, averaging \$2.91 a gallon, up 67 cents in the last two months and 33 cents in just the last three weeks, according to federal government data. The last time gas prices jumped this fast, late last summer, the ABC/Post index lost 16 points in five weeks.

Given its history, the index bears watching, both for economic reasons and, in a midterm election year, political ones. While gas prices are a strong negative, other factors – including employment and incomes – are more positive ones, and the ABC/Post CCI remains near its long-term average, -9 in weekly polls since late 1985. Still, if it were to go south steeply, incumbents in general, and the in-party in particular, could pay a price.

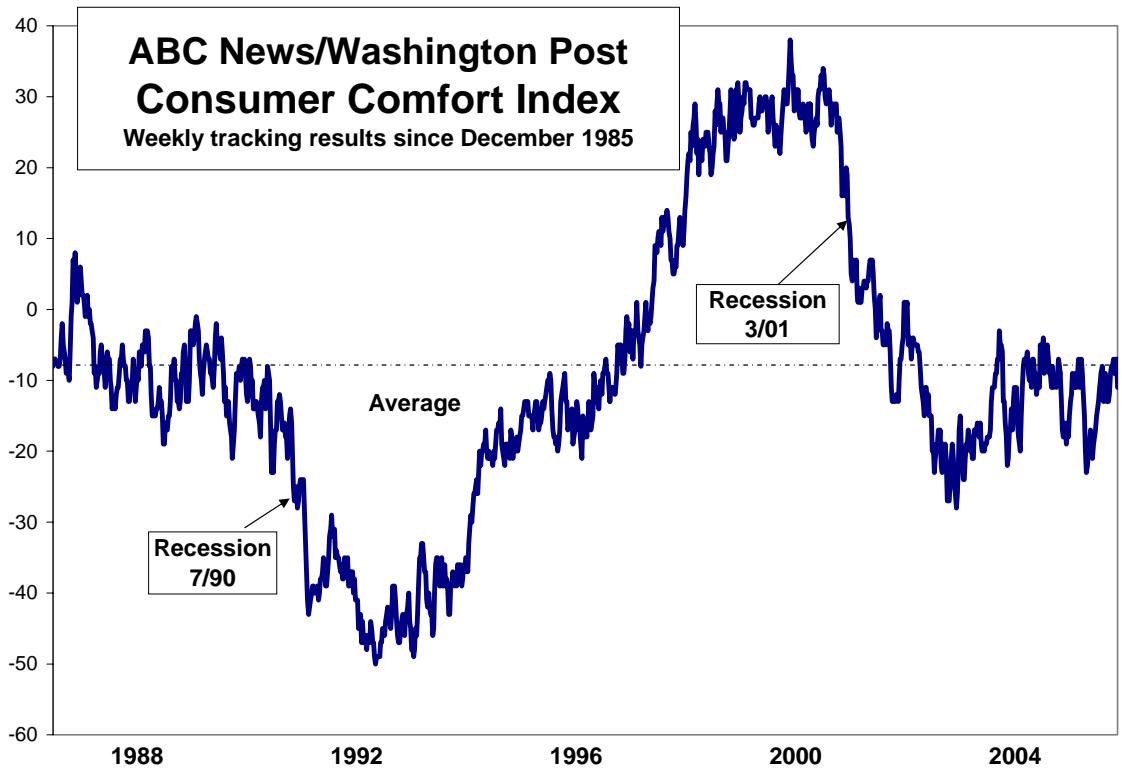


Gasoline prices are George W. Bush's single weakest issue – three in four Americans in an ABC/Post poll earlier this month disapproved of how he's handling them. Bush today announced measures including an investigation of gasoline pricing and a temporary halt in deposits to the country's strategic petroleum reserve.

INDEX – The weekly CCI is based on Americans' ratings of the national economy, the buying climate and personal finances. This week 39 percent rate the economy positively and 36 percent call it a good time to buy things. As usual, more, 59 percent, say their own finances are in good shape.

	ABC News/Washington Post CCI			
Positive ratings of:	This week	Last week	2006 avg.	20-yr. avg.
National economy	39%	41	40	40
Buying climate	36	37	37	38
Personal finances	59	61	58	57
Consumer Comfort Index	-11	-7	-10	-9

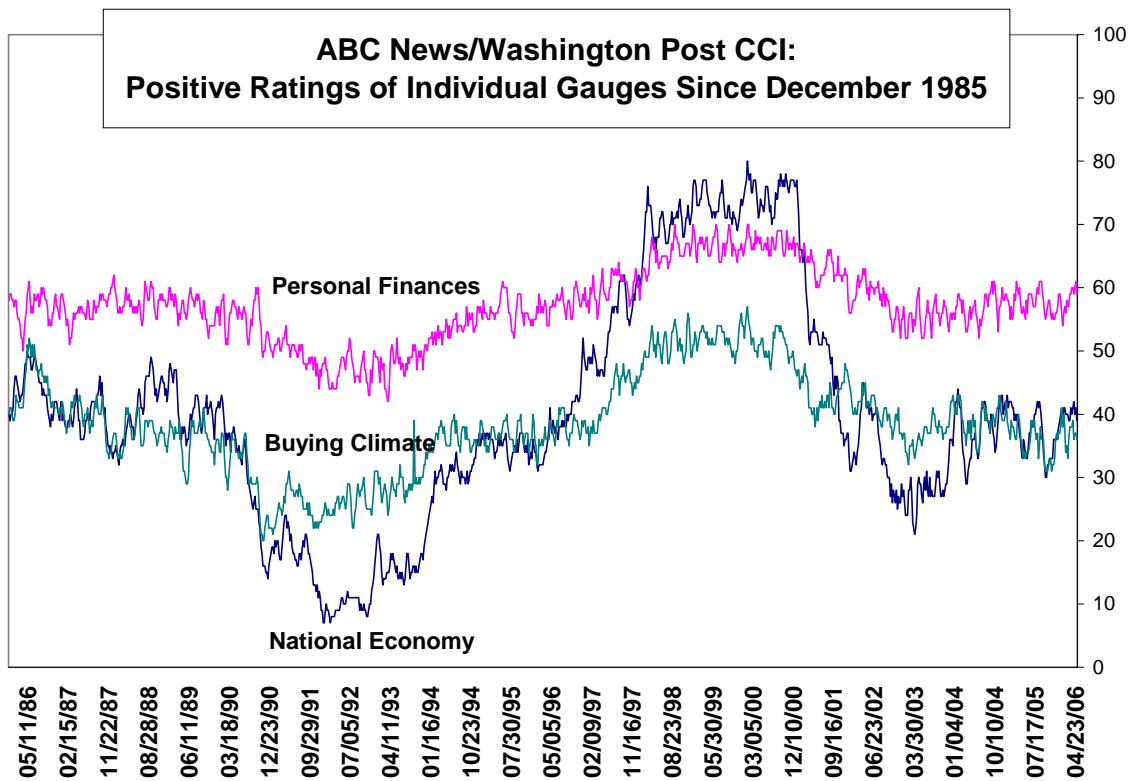
TREND – The index is close to its low this year of -13 on three dates in January and February. It's been as high as +7, as recently as last week, and has averaged -10 this year, about the same as its -9 average since December 1985. Its all-time high was +38 in January 2000; its all-time low, -50 in February 1992.



	ABC/Post	CCI
Today	-11	
Last week	-7	
2006 high	-7	April 16, March 26
2006 low	-13	Feb. 19, Feb. 5, Jan. 15
2006 average	-10	
2005 average	-13	
2004 average	-11	
2003 average	-19	
2000 average	+29	Best full year
1992 average	-44	Worst full year
Jan. 16, 2000	+38	Record high
Feb. 9, 1992	-50	Record low
Average since 12/85	-9	

GROUPS – As usual, the CCI is higher in better-off groups. It's +35 among higher-income Americans while -50 among those with the lowest incomes, +1 among college graduates while -34 among those who haven't finished high school, -5 among whites but -51 among blacks and +3 among men while -22 among women.

Regionally, the index is best in the West (+1) and lowest in the Northeast (-19). And huge partisan splits remain. The CCI is +30 among Republicans, but -21 among independents and -35 among Democrats.



Here's a closer look at the three components of the ABC/Post CCI:

**NATIONAL ECONOMY** – Thirty-nine percent of Americans rate the economy as excellent or good; it was 41 percent last week. The highest was 80 percent on Jan. 16, 2000. The lowest was seven percent in late 1991 and early 1992.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	39	6	33	61	36	25
Avg. since 12/85	40	3	37	60	40	20

**PERSONAL FINANCES** – Fifty-nine percent say their own finances are excellent or good; it was 61 percent last week. The best was 70 percent on Aug. 30, 1998, matched in January 2000. The worst was 42 percent on March 14, 1993.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	59	7	52	41	28	13
Avg. since 12/85	57	5	52	43	30	13

**BUYING CLIMATE** – Thirty-six percent say it's an excellent or good time to buy things; it was 37 percent last week. The best was 57 percent on Jan. 16, 2000. The worst was 20 percent in fall 1990.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. net	Not good	Poor
This week	36	2	34	64	44	20
Avg. since 12/85	38	3	36	62	41	21

**METHODOLOGY** – Interviews for the ABC News/Washington Post Consumer Comfort Index are reported in a four-week rolling average. This week's results are based on telephone interviews among a random national sample of 1,000 adults in the four weeks ending April 23, 2006. The results have a three-point error margin. Field work by ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

The index is derived by subtracting the negative response to each index question from the positive response to that question. The three resulting numbers are 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 Dalia Sussman.

ABC News polls can be found online at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

04/23/06	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

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GENERAL POPULATION:

Overall Index	-11	-7	-7	-9	-17	-7	-23	-13
State of Economy	-22	-18	-18	-18	-30	-16	-40	-25
Personal Finances	18	22	20	12	12	22	8	15
Buying Climate	-28	-26	-22	-20	-32	-18	-38	-29

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OVERALL INDEX BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

Sex:								
Men	3	7	-1	-1	-14	9	-14	-2
Women	-22	-20	-11	-16	-19	-11	-36	-22
Age:								
18 - 34	-2	-4	1	-17	-11	1	-28	-11
35 - 44	-9	0	-3	5	-12	5	-27	-9
45 - 54	-20	-17	-14	-10	-20	-5	-34	-17
55 - 64	-5	-1	-10	-9	-22	0	-36	-13
65+	-20	-16	-12	-8	-32	-1	-32	-15
Income:								
Under \$15K	-50	-51	-51	-62	-75	-33	-75	-54
\$15K To \$24.9K	-47	-30	-35	-41	-42	-28	-65	-44
\$25K To \$39.9K	-16	-24	-19	-31	-30	-12	-44	-28
\$40K To \$49.9K	-9	-5	10	3	-21	26	-40	-8
Over \$50K	20	20	19	24	16	26	4	17
\$50K To \$74.9K	10	9	-1	15	3	17	-14	3
\$75K To \$99.9K	16	22	28	20	5	37	-1	18
Over \$100K	35	30	39	40	42	50	18	35
Region:								
Northeast	-19	-17	-10	-18	-23	-5	-41	-18
Midwest	-16	-15	-12	-6	-16	-3	-27	-15
South	-8	-3	-9	-15	-14	3	-27	-11
West	1	4	6	5	-15	7	-20	-7
Race:								
White	-5	-1	-1	-3	-13	-1	-18	-8
Black	-51	-48	-41	-50	-55	-25	-57	-43
Politics:								
Republican	30	38	36	30	19	38	9	27
Democrat	-35	-32	-33	-32	-40	-27	-46	-36
Independent	-21	-23	-13	-12	-22	-10	-31	-19
Education:								
< High School	-34	-26	-36	-31	-55	-23	-63	-41
High Sch. Grad.	-16	-14	-19	-25	-20	-13	-35	-23
College +	1	4	12	9	-3	12	-9	2
Home:								
Own	-4	0	2	2	-9	4	-17	-4
Rent	-26	-29	-33	-37	-36	-20	-49	-34
Marital Status:								
Single	-18	-17	-17	-28	-22	-8	-31	-18
Married	6	8	6	7	0	8	-14	-1
Sep/Wid/Div	-40	-30	-22	-29	-49	-22	-49	-34
Employ. Status:								
Full-Time	0	6	5	-1	-7	6	-13	-3
Part-Time	-13	-18	-1	-15	-31	-1	-31	-16
Not Employed	-25	-21	-25	-18	-24	-15	-43	-24

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