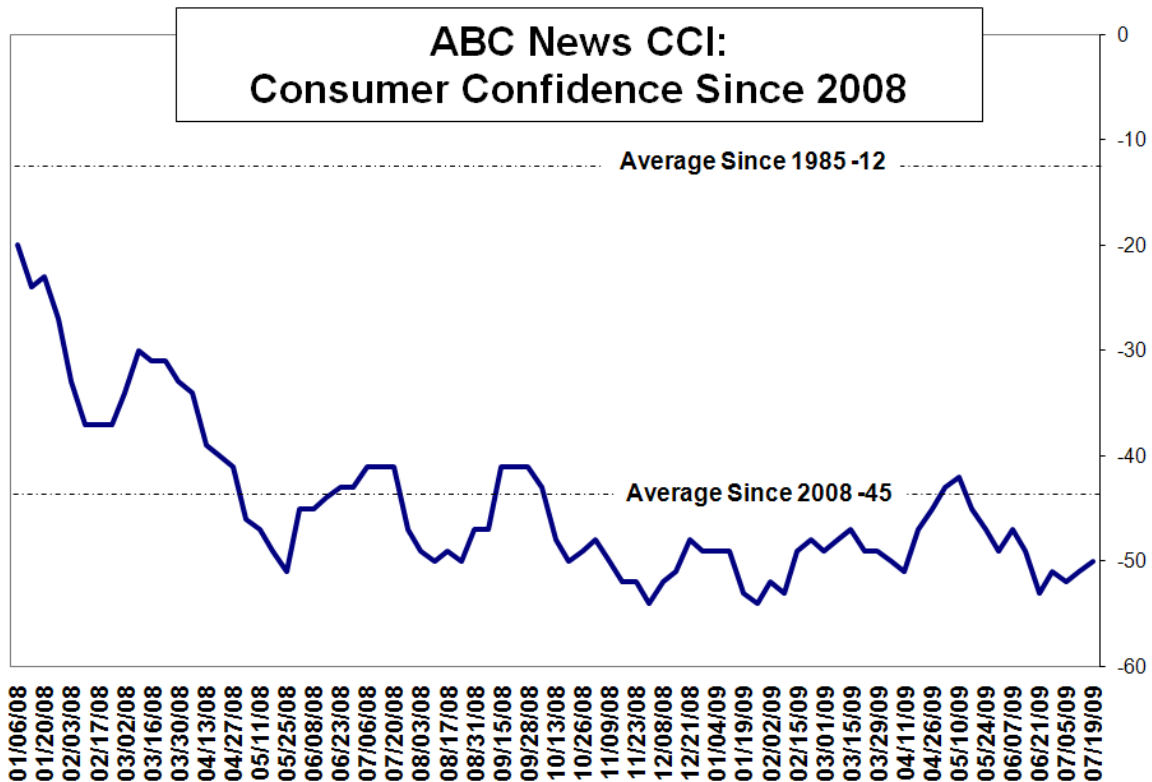


Consumers to Bernanke: Huh?

Ben Bernanke may be cautiously upbeat, but ordinary consumers didn't get the memo.

The Fed chairman testified Tuesday that the pace of the economy's decline "appears to have slowed significantly," with "tentative signs of stabilization." But he also noted that job insecurity, falling home values and tight credit remain significant problems.

Consumers seem focused on the second part of that message. The ABC News Consumer Comfort Index stands at -50 on its scale of +100 to -100. It's been this low for five weeks straight, and just 22 times in more than 1,200 weekly polls – half of them, this year.



The CCI's just 4 points off its record low in polling since late 1985, -54 six months ago. And one of its components echoes Bernanke's warnings about consumer spending: Just 22 percent of Americans say it's a good time to buy things they want and need, tying the 2009 low for the third week running.

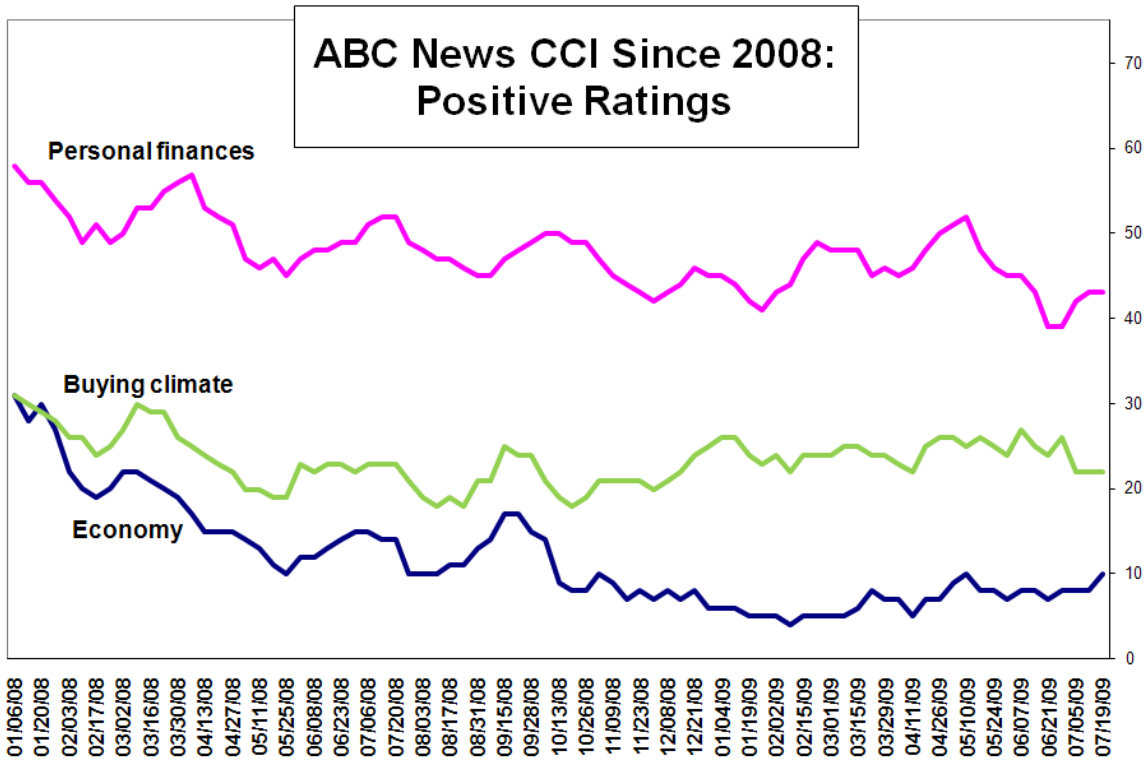
In a separate ABC News/Washington Post poll released this week, 77 percent of Americans said they're worried about the economy's direction in the coming years; 63

percent expressed worry about their own family's financial situation; confidence in President Obama's recovery plan fell to 56 percent, from 72 percent in January; and Obama's overall approval rating slipped to 59 percent, 10 points from its peak.

One chief culprit is unemployment, 9.5 percent, its highest in 26 years – and Bernanke noted that the labor market has continued to weaken. There's also the record trillion-dollar deficit; people who are concerned about it are especially likely to worry about the economy's future overall.

INDEX – The CCI is based on ratings of the economy and personal finances, as well as the buying climate. Today 43 percent of Americans say their own finances are in excellent or good shape, well below the long-term average, 57 percent, and within sight of their record low, 39 percent late last month. They'd reached 52 percent positive in May before stumbling this summer.

Far fewer, just 10 percent, rate the national economy positively, continuing an extremely bleak stretch; it's been this low or lower for 41 weeks straight, a record span. Positive ratings of the economy are 28 points off their long-term average.



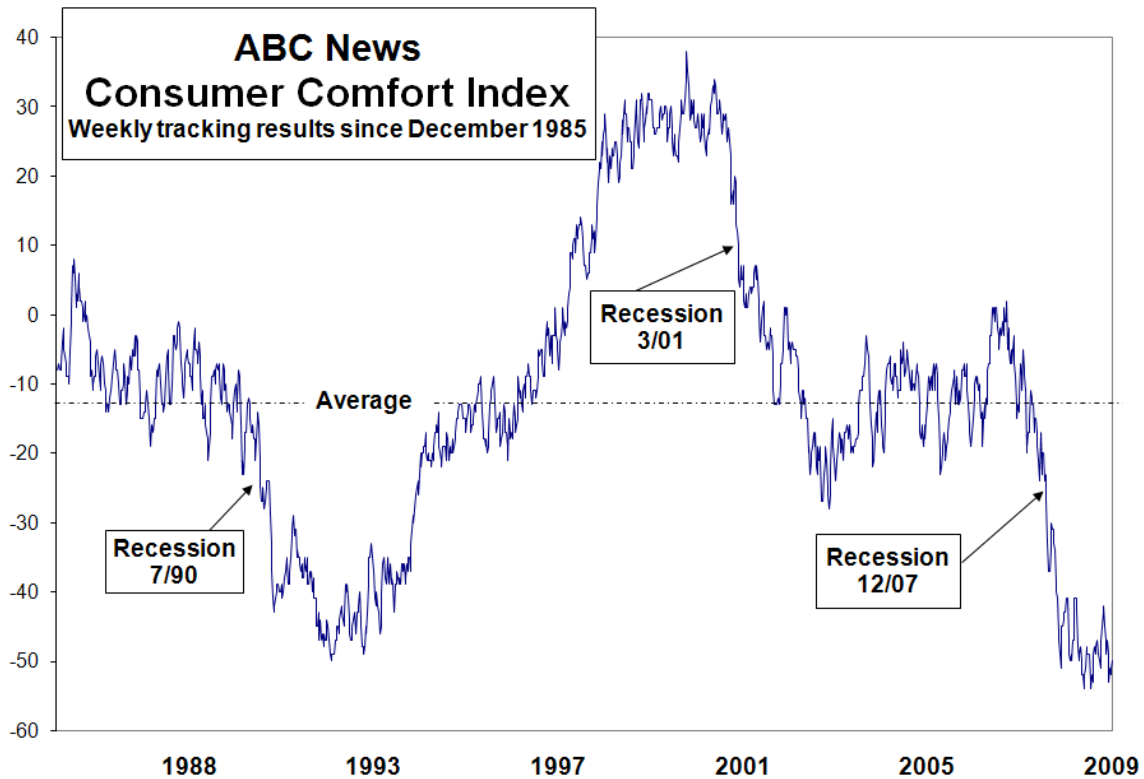
At 22 percent, positive ratings of the buying climate are 15 points below the long-term average.

ABC News CCI			Averages	
Positive ratings of:	This week	Last week	2009	'85-'09
National economy	10%	8	7	38

Buying climate	22	22	24	37
Personal finances	43	43	45	57
Consumer Comfort Index	-50	-51	-49	-12

TREND – The spring saw some signs of life for consumer confidence, with the index moving out of a 28-week run below -45 from mid-October to mid-April. But it topped out at -42 in mid-May and then headed back down, now below -45 since late May.

The CCI is on pace for its worst year ever. It has averaged -49 so far in 2009, 37 points below the long term average of -12 and 5 points below its average of -44 in 1992, the worst full year to date. It's been below -40 for a record 65 straight weeks and hasn't seen positive territory since March 2007.



	ABC News CCI	
This week	-50	
Last week	-51	
2009 high	-42	May 10
2009 low	-54	Jan. 25, record low
2009 average	-49	
2000 average	+29	Best full year
1992 average	-44	Worst full year
Jan. 16, 2000	+38	Record high
Average since 12/85	-12	

GROUPS – The index is higher as usual among better-off Americans, but negative across the board for the 21st straight week, and all but two weeks this year.

It's -25 among those with the highest incomes but -57 among those with the lowest (the best since December), -39 among those who've attended college vs. -63 among high school dropouts, -39 among men while -59 among women (a point from last week's low), and -45 among homeowners compared with -60 among renters.

This week's racial gap is most unusual, with an index of -42 among blacks (its best since February 2008) and -49 among whites. Only four times in data since 1990 (including last week) has the CCI been numerically higher among blacks than whites. And the racial gap has averaged 10 points this year, compared with a long-term average of 28 points.

Partisan differences remain, but are narrower than usual: The CCI is -34 among Republicans, -54 among Democrats and -55 among independents. That 20-point Republican-Democratic gap compares with 41 points last year and 32 points long-term.

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

NATIONAL ECONOMY – Ten percent of Americans rate the economy as excellent or good; it was 8 percent last week. The highest was 80 percent Jan. 16, 2000. The worst was 4 percent Feb. 8, 2009.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	10	1	9	90	38	52
Avg. since 12/85	38	3	35	62	40	22

PERSONAL FINANCES – Forty-three percent say their own finances are excellent or good, the same as last week. The best was 70 percent, last reached in January 2000. The worst was 39 percent, reached two weeks ago.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	43	4	39	57	37	20
Avg. since 12/85	57	5	52	43	30	13

BUYING CLIMATE – Twenty-two percent say it's an excellent or good time to buy things, the same as last week. The best was 57 percent on Jan. 16, 2000. The worst was 18 percent, last reached Oct. 19, 2008.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	22	3	19	78	46	32
Avg. since 12/85	37	3	35	63	41	21

METHODOLOGY – Interviews for the ABC News 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 July

19, 2009. The results have a 3-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 Giovanni Russonello.

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

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

07/19/09	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	-50	-51	-53	-47	-41	-41	-54	-48
State of Economy	-80	-84	-86	-86	-72	-66	-92	-83
Personal Finances	-14	-14	-22	-4	4	4	-22	-8
Buying Climate	-56	-56	-52	-50	-54	-46	-64	-54

OVERALL INDEX BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS								
Sex:								
Men	-39	-40	-47	-42	-37	-28	-49	-42
Women	-59	-60	-58	-50	-45	-45	-60	-53
Age:								
18 - 34	-49	-51	-61	-36	-44	-32	-61	-47
35 - 44	-53	-50	-54	-54	-27	-27	-62	-48
45 - 54	-46	-50	-42	-42	-46	-31	-61	-48
55 - 64	-52	-54	-52	-53	-42	-40	-65	-51
65+	-48	-48	-48	-55	-45	-34	-56	-47
Income:								
Under \$15K	-57	-63	-76	-66	-76	-51	-84	-73
\$15K To \$24.9K	-81	-74	-71	-67	-52	-41	-83	-68
\$25K To \$39.9K	-66	-69	-63	-68	-50	-47	-73	-60
\$40K To \$49.9K	-48	-41	-38	-38	-40	-27	-68	-49
Over \$50K	-27	-30	-35	-28	-19	-19	-41	-29
\$50K To \$74.9K	-29	-35	-43	-42	-29	-24	-54	-39
\$75K To \$99.9K	-25	-32	-42	-24	-20	-14	-52	-33
Over \$100K	-25	-22	-19	-16	-8	5	-34	-15
Region:								
Northeast	-48	-47	-49	-45	-47	-40	-62	-52
Midwest	-49	-54	-57	-54	-43	-31	-58	-48
South	-45	-48	-54	-45	-43	-39	-59	-49
West	-58	-54	-48	-41	-31	-19	-58	-43
Race:								
White	-49	-50	-52	-46	-39	-35	-52	-46
Black	-42	-47	-59	-53	-62	-42	-81	-61
Politics:								
Republican	-34	-34	-40	-42	-19	-10	-42	-30

Democrat	-54	-55	-58	-46	-56	-43	-70	-58
Independent	-55	-56	-52	-49	-39	-39	-56	-49
Education:								
< High School	-63	-64	-71	-70	-54	-51	-76	-64
High Sch. Grad.	-63	-64	-61	-60	-44	-38	-65	-54
College +	-39	-40	-44	-33	-35	-30	-50	-40
Home:								
Own	-45	-45	-44	-44	-38	-36	-49	-43
Rent	-60	-64	-69	-54	-51	-48	-80	-62
Marital Status:								
Single	-62	-66	-62	-44	-51	-34	-69	-53
Married	-38	-39	-47	-42	-26	-26	-47	-40
Sep/Wid/Div	-60	-57	-54	-62	-64	-52	-70	-62
Employ. Status:								
Full-Time	-38	-38	-45	-40	-33	-29	-47	-39
Part-Time	-63	-67	-59	-56	-53	-31	-67	-51
Not Employed	-59	-60	-57	-49	-47	-47	-66	-57

END