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Bloomberg ® Consumer Comfort Index™ Weekly Analysis

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The Bloomberg Consumer Comfort Index reached its best in a month on the strength of improvements in Americans' views of their personal finances.

At 44.2 on its scale of 0-100, the overall CCI is its best since mid-February, after having dropped to its 2015 low of 42.7 three weeks ago. The index now essentially is even with its 2015 average and 2.6 points better than its average in weekly data back to late 1985.

After a strong last quarter of 2014 and a great start to the New Year, topping out at a seven-and-a-half-year high of 47.3 at the end of January, the index has backed off, ranging between 42.7 and 45.5 in the last seven weeks. Despite solid employment numbers, wages are stagnant, and recent reports show retail sales, manufacturing and housing starts all struggled in February.

In a separate monthly measure of expectations about the direction of the economy, Americans are the least optimistic since the beginning of the year, views that likely are related to this slowdown in current economic sentiment.

Following two consecutive months in which positive expectations significantly outpaced negative views by 7 and 9 percentage points, respectively, only 30 percent say the economy's getting better, vs. 27 percent who think it's getting worse, a non-significant gap. (The rest, a plurality, think it'll stay the same.) Economic optimism is down 6 points from January – what had been a two-year high – to its lowest since November.

The overall CCI, produced by [Langer Research Associates](#), is based on Americans' weekly ratings of the current national economy, their personal finances and whether or not they see this as a good time to spend money.

With the national economy and buying climate subindices standing pat, the personal finances subindex is the sole reason for the overall index's four-week high. It's gained 2.3 points in the last week to land at 57.1, its best in five weeks. This subindex has only seen a one-week jump that big or bigger 84 times in more than 1,500 weeks of continuous polling. It's now 1.9 points better than its long-term average.

By contrast, at 37.2, the national economy subindex has been essentially stable for three weeks straight, while at 38.3, the buying climate subindex is right in the middle of its range beginning in December, 37.2 to 39.9. They're each 3.1 and 2.6 points better than their long-term averages, respectively.

Among groups, it's a mixed bag, with some at recent lows and others at highs. In terms of income, the CCI is 34.3 among those with household incomes of less than \$50,000, its best since late January. Among those who earn \$50,000 or more the index is 57.9, much higher, but still its second worst of the year, resulting in the smallest gap between the two groups since early November.

The index is now at recent highs among most age groups, including its best since mid-November among seniors, 44.3, and its highest since all the way back to early October 2007 among 35- to 44-year olds, 51.2. Headed in the other direction, at 38.8, the CCI's at its lowest since early December among 55- to 64-year olds.

At 39.1, the index is its worst since early November among Northeasterners, lowest among regions, while it's its highest since late September 2007 among Southerners, 45.7. And the CCI among blacks (40.6) is its lowest since the first week of the year. (It's 43.6 among whites.)

The 6-point drop in economic optimism occurred disproportionately among Northeasterners and Southerners, Republicans, those who are employed, women, 18- to 34-year olds, those who've attended college and those earning less than \$50,000 a year.

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