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Bloomberg ® Consumer Comfort Index™ Weekly Analysis

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Consumer sentiment has slipped further from its 2014 high two weeks ago, with retrenchment in Americans' ratings of their personal finances and the national economy alike. Gas prices are one likely factor; political partisanship, another.

Now -31.5 on its scale of -100 to +100, the CCI has lost 3.9 points from its best-of-the-year -27.6 two weeks ago. That pushes the index back out of its recovery zone, the -20s, where it had held, albeit narrowly, for the previous four weeks.

The cost of gasoline may well be one reason: Consumer sentiment customarily drops when gas prices rise sharply, and unleaded regular has jumped by 26 cents in the past seven weeks to \$3.55 per gallon, its highest since early September.

But political views also can influence consumer attitudes, particularly when economic conditions are unsettled enough to leave room for partisan predispositions to assert themselves. The CCI is -12.4 among Democrats, implicitly endorsing the president, vs. -42.6 among Republicans, implicitly criticizing him. That's the largest gap by which the CCI among Democrats has exceeded its level among Republicans in available data since mid-1990.

Further, in a sign of trouble for Democratic candidates, the index is -37.3 among political independents, almost as low as it is among Republicans. Economic frustration can damage incumbents generally, but also may be directed particularly against the incumbent president's party in a midterm election year.

The weekly CCI, produced by [Langer Research Associates](#), is based on Americans' ratings of the current national economy (consistently the weakest of the three measures), their personal finances (consistently the strongest) and the buying climate.

The economy subindex, after improving by 12.1 points in two months, has given back 5.3 points in two weeks to -53.3, its worst since the second week of February. The personal finances subindex, for its part, has lost 7.4 points in the last three weeks, dropping to -2.3, below zero for the first time in four months.

The buying climate subindex, measuring whether Americans think it's a good time to spend money, has held steadier, relatively stable in the past two months. It's -39.0 this week.

Each is off its long-term average by double-digit margins – 10.4 points for the buying climate subindex, 12.9 points for personal finances and 21.8 points for the national economy subindex. That leaves the overall index 15.0 points from its average in weekly polling since late 1985.

As noted, the most prominent result among groups this week is by partisanship. The CCI is its best in seven months among Democrats, up 8.7 points in the past two weeks. Yet it's at a 13-month low among Republicans, down 16.2 points in the past month. And it's at a four-month low among independents.

The historical norm is for the index to be higher among Republicans, who tend to be better-off financially, than among Democrats. That's changed dramatically since Barack Obama took office. The CCI has been higher among Democrats than Republicans 127 times in the 270 weeks of Obama's presidency. That happened just eight times in the previous 971 weeks.

Put another way, the index among Republicans is a vast 42.8 points off its long-term average of +0.2 (and 15.7 points off its average among independents), while among Democrats it's 13.2 points better than its historical average, -25.6.

Among other groups, the index has dropped by 10.0 points among men in two weeks to -29.4, while among women it's -33.6, its best in three months. Similarly, at -31.3, the CCI's its worst since early February among whites, but its best among blacks, -37.7, since the start of the year.

The index also is at lows since November among full-time workers (-23.7), homeowners (-26.6) and Midwesterners (-33.8). It remains positive among the highest-income earners, +10.6 in \$100,000-plus households, but that's pulled back from +20.5 early this month, a high since August and near the high since late 2007.

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