

## US: Confidence takes a hit

Plunging consumer expectations reflect anxiety over a pick-up in Covid-19 cases, reversal of reopening strategies and worries over the financial implications of the conclusion of the \$600 a week Federal unemployment payment. It reinforces our fears of negative consumer spending/retail sales in August



### Things had been going so well...

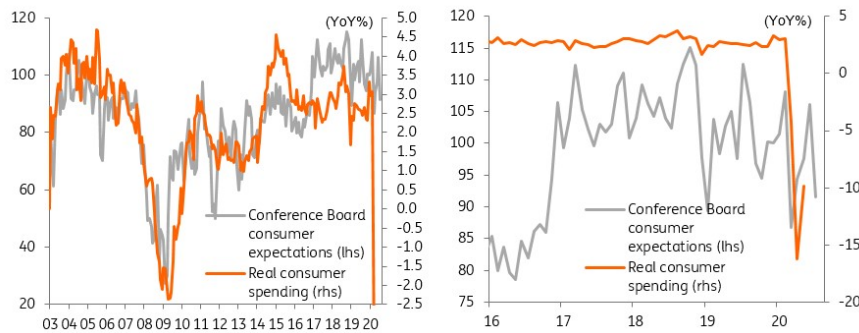
The Conference Board measure of consumer confidence has fallen more than expected to 92.6 from 98.3 (consensus 95.0). The details show the present situation index actually rose to 94.2 from 86.7, but the far more important expectations component plunged 14.6 points to 91.5, casting further doubt on how vigorous the economic recovery will be in the third quarter.

To explain the rise in the present conditions component we can point to the fact that stock prices are virtually back at the highs of February and the Nasdaq is well above. This positive wealth effect is a key factor explaining why overall confidence has proved to be far more resilient than in previous recessions.

The expansion of unemployment benefits has also helped with the \$600 a week Federal boost meaning the [majority](#) of recipients have higher incomes than when they were working. The CARES Act also included legislation that eased fears of foreclosure and eviction, which has also helped to

support overall confidence.

## Confidence & spending: Relationship breakdown



Source: Macrobond, ING

## But the consumer is facing renewed challenges

Consumer spending has historically been better correlated with the expectations component and this is the series we should really focus on. The expectations component has also proved to be incredibly resilient for the same reasons as the present situation, but spending took a massive hit due to enforced closures relating to Covid-19 containment measures. So even if households felt happy to spend, they couldn't physically do it.

Today's report seems to suggest we are in the second stage of the crisis. The spike in Covid-19 cases is leading to state Governors taking the decision to reverse course on the reopening plans, which is shuttering businesses and leading to another wave of job losses. At the same time, the implications for the health of the population is seemingly making households a little more anxious. Then there is the ending of the \$600 a week Federal boost to unemployment benefits, which is going to make the 30 million people who had been receiving it very worried.

## Recovery is a long and bumpy road

Indeed, states that are experiencing the biggest resurgence of Covid-19 were the states that saw the biggest declines in confidence. For example, California expectations fell 25 points, Texas fell 32 points, Florida fell 27 points and Michigan fell 53.3 points! In contrast, New York saw a RISE in expectations given the rapid fall in cases in the state.

Taking this altogether, the return of economic dislocations from Covid-19 makes us increasingly cautious on the prospects for the 3Q economic revival. Currently, the consensus for July non-farm payrolls (7 August release) is for a gain of two million. We think this looks optimistic given the high frequency jobs newsflow from Homebase and the reversal of state reopenings and wouldn't rule out a negative reading. We are even more nervous about the prospect for retail sales and consumer spending in August given the declines in income from the cuts to unemployment benefits for 30 million people. The recovery is going to be a bumpy ride.

## Author

**James Knightley**

Chief International Economist, US

[james.knightley@ing.com](mailto:james.knightley@ing.com)

## Disclaimer

This publication has been prepared by the Economic and Financial Analysis Division of ING Bank N.V. (“ING”) solely for information purposes without regard to any particular user’s investment objectives, financial situation, or means. *ING forms part of ING Group (being for this purpose ING Group N.V. and its subsidiary and affiliated companies)*. The information in the publication is not an investment recommendation and it is not investment, legal or tax advice or an offer or solicitation to purchase or sell any financial instrument. Reasonable care has been taken to ensure that this publication is not untrue or misleading when published, but ING does not represent that it is accurate or complete. ING does not accept any liability for any direct, indirect or consequential loss arising from any use of this publication. Unless otherwise stated, any views, forecasts, or estimates are solely those of the author(s), as of the date of the publication and are subject to change without notice.

The distribution of this publication may be restricted by law or regulation in different jurisdictions and persons into whose possession this publication comes should inform themselves about, and observe, such restrictions.

Copyright and database rights protection exists in this report and it may not be reproduced, distributed or published by any person for any purpose without the prior express consent of ING. All rights are reserved. ING Bank N.V. is authorised by the Dutch Central Bank and supervised by the European Central Bank (ECB), the Dutch Central Bank (DNB) and the Dutch Authority for the Financial Markets (AFM). ING Bank N.V. is incorporated in the Netherlands (Trade Register no. 33031431 Amsterdam). In the United Kingdom this information is approved and/or communicated by ING Bank N.V., London Branch. ING Bank N.V., London Branch is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and is subject to regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority and limited regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority. ING Bank N.V., London branch is registered in England (Registration number BR000341) at 8-10 Moorgate, London EC2 6DA. For US Investors: Any person wishing to discuss this report or effect transactions in any security discussed herein should contact ING Financial Markets LLC, which is a member of the NYSE, FINRA and SIPC and part of ING, and which has accepted responsibility for the distribution of this report in the United States under applicable requirements.

Additional information is available on request. For more information about ING Group, please visit <http://www.ing.com>.