

News Release

Embargoed for release:
8:30 am Eastern Time
7:30 am Central Time
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What is the National Activity Index?

The index is a weighted average of 85 indicators of national economic activity drawn from four broad categories of data: 1) production and income; 2) employment, unemployment, and hours; 3) personal consumption and housing; and 4) sales, orders, and inventories.

A zero value for the index indicates that the national economy is expanding at its historical trend rate of growth; negative values indicate below-average growth; and positive values indicate above-average growth.

Why are there three index values?

Each month, we provide a monthly index, its three-month moving average, and a diffusion index. Month-to-month movements can be volatile, so the monthly index's three-month moving average, the CFNAI-MA3, provides a more consistent picture of national economic growth. The CFNAI Diffusion Index captures the degree to which a change in the monthly index is spread out among its 85 indicators, averaged over a three-month period.

What do the numbers mean?

When the CFNAI-MA3 value moves below -0.70 following a period of economic expansion, there is an increasing likelihood that a recession has begun. Conversely, when the CFNAI-MA3 value moves above -0.70 following a period of economic contraction, there is an increasing likelihood that a recession has ended.

When the CFNAI-MA3 value moves above $+0.70$ more than two years into an economic expansion, there is an increasing likelihood that a period of sustained increasing inflation has begun.

The next CFNAI will be released:
July 21, 2016
8:30 am Eastern Time
7:30 am Central Time

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Chicago Fed National Activity Index

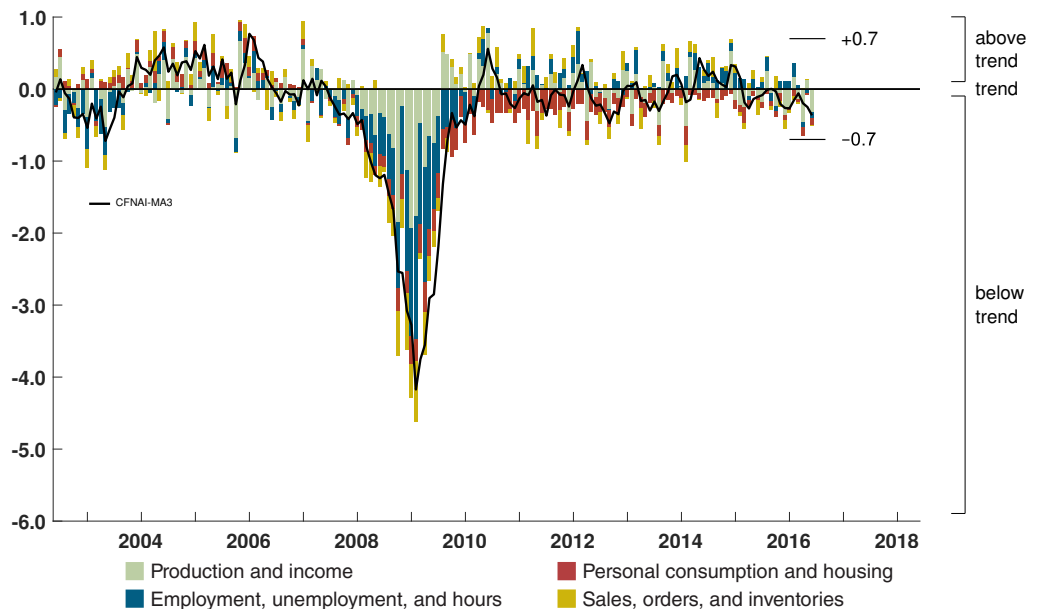
Index shows economic growth slowed in May

Led by declines in production-related indicators, the Chicago Fed National Activity Index (CFNAI) fell to -0.51 in May from $+0.05$ in April. All four broad categories of indicators that make up the index decreased from April, and all four categories made negative contributions to the index in May.

The index's three-month moving average, CFNAI-MA3, decreased to -0.36 in May from -0.25 in April. May's CFNAI-MA3 suggests that growth in national economic activity was somewhat below its historical trend. The economic growth reflected in this level of the CFNAI-MA3 suggests subdued inflationary pressure from economic activity over the coming year.

The CFNAI Diffusion Index, which is also a three-month moving average, moved down to -0.30 in May from -0.23 in April. Twenty-eight of the 85 individual indicators made positive contributions to the CFNAI in May, while 57 made negative contributions. Twenty-eight indicators improved from April to May, while 56 indicators deteriorated and one was unchanged. Of the indicators that improved, 12 made negative contributions.

Chicago Fed National Activity Index, by Categories, and CFNAI-MA3



CFNAI, CFNAI-MA3, and CFNAI Diffusion for the Latest Six Months and Year-Ago Month

	May '16	Apr '16	Mar '16	Feb '16	Jan '16	Dec '15	May '15
CFNAI							
Current	-0.51	+0.05	-0.64	-0.16	+0.21	-0.23	-0.33
Previous	N/A	+0.10	-0.55	-0.20	+0.21	-0.24	-0.32
CFNAI-MA3							
Current	-0.36	-0.25	-0.20	-0.06	-0.15	-0.27	-0.11
Previous	N/A	-0.22	-0.18	-0.08	-0.16	-0.28	-0.11
CFNAI Diffusion							
Current	-0.30	-0.23	-0.23	-0.11	-0.11	-0.15	-0.07
Previous	N/A	-0.17	-0.22	-0.12	-0.12	-0.16	-0.07

Current and Previous values reflect index values as of the June 23, 2016, release and May 19, 2016, release, respectively. N/A indicates not applicable.

The contribution from production-related indicators to the CFNAI fell to -0.32 in May from $+0.13$ in April. Manufacturing industrial production declined by 0.4 percent in May after increasing by 0.2 percent in April, and manufacturing capacity utilization declined to 74.8 percent in May from 75.2 percent in the previous month. In contrast, the sales, orders, and inventories category made a contribution of -0.01 to the CFNAI in May, down only slightly from a neutral contribution in April.

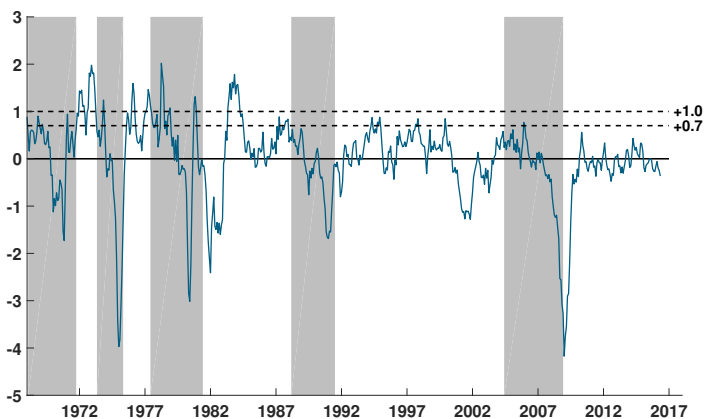
The contribution from employment-related indicators to the CFNAI edged down to -0.09 in May from -0.06 in April. Nonfarm payrolls increased by only 38,000 in May after rising by 123,000 in the previous month. However, the civilian unemployment rate fell to 4.7 percent in May from 5.0 percent in April.

The contribution of the personal consumption and housing category to the CFNAI decreased to -0.09 in May from -0.02 in April.

Housing starts moved down to 1,164,000 annualized units in May from 1,167,000 in April, but housing permits moved up to 1,138,000 annualized units in May from 1,130,000 in the previous month.

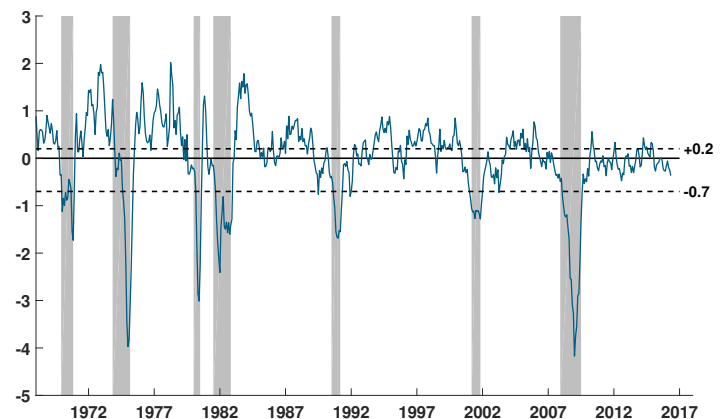
The CFNAI was constructed using data available as of June 17, 2016. At that time, May data for 50 of the 85 indicators had been published. For all missing data, estimates were used in constructing the index. The April monthly index value was revised to $+0.05$ from an initial estimate of $+0.10$, and the March monthly index value was revised to -0.64 from last month's estimate of -0.55 . Revisions to the monthly index value can be attributed to two main factors: revisions in previously published data and differences between the estimates of previously unavailable data and subsequently published data. The revisions to both the April and March monthly index values were due primarily to the former.

CFNAI-MA3 and Inflation Cycles



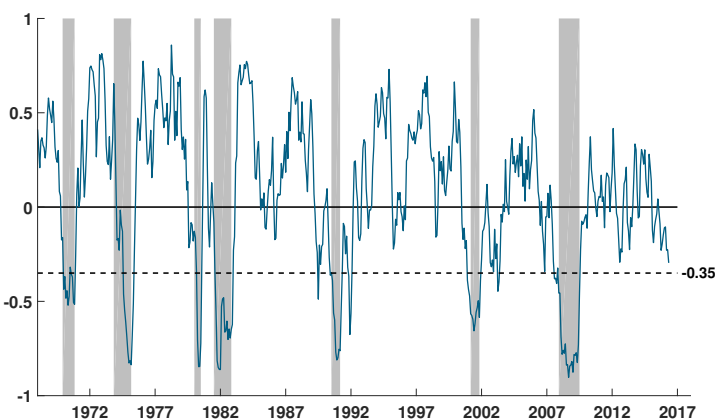
Notes: Shading represents periods of substantial inflation increases. A CFNAI-MA3 value above $+0.70$ more than two years into an economic expansion indicates an increasing likelihood that a period of sustained increasing inflation has begun. A CFNAI-MA3 value above $+1.00$ more than two years into an economic expansion indicates a substantial likelihood that a period of sustained increasing inflation has begun.

CFNAI-MA3 and Business Cycles



Notes: Shading indicates official periods of recession as identified by the National Bureau of Economic Research. A CFNAI-MA3 value below -0.70 following a period of economic expansion indicates an increasing likelihood that a recession has begun. A CFNAI-MA3 value above -0.70 following a period of economic contraction indicates an increasing likelihood that a recession has ended. A CFNAI-MA3 value above $+0.20$ following a period of economic contraction indicates a significant likelihood that a recession has ended.

CFNAI Diffusion Index, Three-Month Moving Average



Notes: Shading indicates official periods of recession as identified by the National Bureau of Economic Research. The CFNAI Diffusion Index represents the sum of the absolute values of the weights for the underlying indicators whose contribution to the CFNAI is positive in a given month less the sum of the absolute values of the weights for those indicators whose contribution is negative or neutral in a given month. Periods of economic expansion have historically been associated with values of the three-month moving average of the CFNAI Diffusion Index above -0.35 .

CFNAI, Monthly Index

