

# COVID-19 CONSUMER RESEARCH WAVE 13 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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May 29-31, 2020

**MDC** and **The Harris Poll** have partnered to conduct research regarding the impact of the **COVID-19** pandemic on the American consumer. The executive summaries on the pages that follow provide insight into current consumer attitudes and behavior and can be used to help navigate the next several weeks.

We hope this information proves useful to you and your team as you pivot in real time. We are sending our very best wishes to you during this time.

As always, we are here to help. Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions you may have.

Positively,

**Ryan Linder + The MDC Family**  
Global Chief Marketing Officer, EVP



# WAVE 13

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## WAVE 13 INTRODUCTION

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The following research was conducted between **May 29–31, 2020** by The Harris Poll on the coronavirus outbreak. Fielded among a nationally representative sample of **1,965** U.S adults, the newest research demonstrates how consumers' perceptions are rapidly shifting as new developments emerge.

Section:

# 01

**Topic:**

## AMERICA ADDS A THIRD CRISIS

**Introduction:**

As rioting engulfed Ferguson, MO on August 10, 2014, the day after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by police, Americans ‘got it’, but only kind of. [In a Harris Poll](#) which explored changes – and lack thereof – in perceived discrimination toward African Americans in the U.S., 59% of all citizens said the Black Community is discriminated against [in the way they are treated by police](#). This, compared to 85% of Black citizens versus 55% of White citizens. The gulf was even wider between Republicans (39%) and Democrats (77%). And yet, this represented more than a twofold increase among the general population (up 34 points) and nearly a threefold increase among whites (up 36 points).

Fast-forward to 2020 that has been overwhelmingly disastrous for people of color. **The coronavirus crisis has disproportionately affected black** and Latino Americans, who became sick and died of COVID-19 at higher rates than whites and they [lost more jobs](#). But where does this leave us with last week’s crisis? Now we have **health, economic, and social dislocation back at the forefront**. And [could protests set off a second viral wave?](#)

- **Fear of the virus itself is fading:** Fear of dying from COVID-19 peaked at 56% on April 3rd and has since gone down and has evened out at just below half (49%). Over the weekend we saw the fear of returning to normal activity drop five percentage points from 74% to 69%.
- Meanwhile, **economic inequality has hit new homes;** the fear of global recession is up to three percentage points from 74% to 77% as inequality hits home for more Americans, 31% have lost income partially due to the pandemic.

- **Economic hardship worsens racial inequities:** 61% of African Americans and 62% of Hispanics are concerned they will lose their job due to the coronavirus outbreak vs. 50% of White Americans. And 47% of African-Americans have been seeking new sources of income vs. 31% of White Americans. And by a two-to-one margin, 39% of African Americans have missed/will soon miss bill payments vs. 20% of Whites.
- **COVID’s stress on structural inequities:** Despite some describing C-19 as ‘the great equalizer,’ over 6 in 10 say the pandemic has exacerbated poverty (65%), job creation (64%), hunger (62%) and nearly a third say it has made racial inequality worse (30%). Polarizing emotions can have an alienating effect: Today, overall 40% of Americans feel lonely, especially Gen Z/Millennials (49%) vs. older generations (Gen X 41%, Boomers 34%, and Seniors 34%).
- Though a large majority of both Whites (76%) and African-Americans (85%) say racial equality is important, over three-fifths (63%) of African-Americans say racial equality is **very** important compared to only 41% of Whites.
- [NPR examines](#) how the COVID-19 crisis is making racial inequality worse.
- The vulnerability of African Americans to the coronavirus is a national emergency, according to [The Economist](#).

**Implication:**

Nearly 8 in 10 (77%) of Americans say **racial equality** will be an important issue to them personally moving forward. But these profound gaps require more than a national conversation. As America yearns to return back to ‘normal,’ these statistics remind us that systemic racism, indignity, and inequality are what’s ‘normal’ for many Americans of color.

Section:

# 02

Topic:

## THE CLASS OF COVID-19

Introduction:

As schools like Notre Dame and others announce their opening this Fall, we asked American students what would make them feel safe to return to campus post C-19? What's interesting here is that **most students want the college experience replicated**, meaning social participation whether in classes, dorms, or movement around campus is a priority:

- While older Americans portray Gen Z to be reckless and ambivalent about public health, as [our data from May 15](#) found that three quarters (75%) say young people act as if social distancing restrictions don't apply to them, **students here seem prudent** in their desire for safety: those in college or applying say they want a guarantee of hygienic cleaning of shared spaces (53%); mandatory testing or vaccine for all staff and students (49%); mandatory face masks for all staff/students (46%); and limited capacity at school events (45%). After schools [reopened in Israel](#), several schools were again quickly closed following outbreaks of students and staff.
- As Inside Higher Ed [says](#): It's not so much when colleges reopen - it's also how they reopen. And Axios [takes a closer look at how colleges can reopen](#). [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#) goes behind-the-scenes to the decision making that went into one local college's decision to reopen in the fall.
- [WSJ](#) dives into the ramifications of **fewer students applying for college financial aid**: "The decline is troubling to colleges and high-school counselors because it indicates some teens may have erased college entirely from their fall plans, assuming it is out of reach during the health and resultant economic crisis."

- **The public stands with colleges and universities suspending SAT/ACT test requirements from college applications**: Over 8 in 10 (82%) American students currently enrolled or applying to college and 66% of gen pop **support colleges and universities suspending SAT/ACT test requirements** for undergraduate applicants through at least 2024. **Calling into question the efficacy of standardized tests**: 6 in 10 Americans are skeptical (36% say they are not a fair assessment of a college applicant's aptitude and knowledge and 24% are not at all sure).
- **Is it time to say goodbye to the SAT/ACT for good? Maybe**: More than half of American students currently enrolled or applying to college (55%) **believe SAT/ACT test scores should be permanently suspended**, including 2 in 5 parents (41%). But Americans overall are more split, 38% of gen pop believe SAT/ACT test scores should be permanently suspended from college applications, 32% say they shouldn't and 27% are not at all sure.
- **The future of college applications might include custom entrance exams**: 7 in 10 American students who are either enrolled or applying to college and 58% of all Americans think **colleges and universities should create their own entrance exams** that are **customized to the university's expectations** of applicants' knowledge and align with university values.
- The Washington Post [states](#), "**The testing giants are reeling at a time** when scores of colleges and universities have said they will not require an SAT or ACT score for students applying to enter in Fall 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic — and the influential University of California system just decided to start to phase out their use."

Implication:

There have long been cries of bias in standardized survey tests that a pandemic accelerated and Black Lives Matter movement will likely topple. Universities need students on campuses to keep their business models afloat. This might be the gap year of all gap years.

[Read More](#)

Section:

# 03

Topic:

## THE MISINFORMATION PANDEMIC

Introduction:

It is hard not to imagine both the C-19 pandemic and racial protests through the lens of social media. At a time of historic social and political unrest, social media faces its existential question of what it means to keep us informed and connected. [FiveThirtyEight](#) asks, “how bad is the COVID-19 misinformation epidemic?” And [The New York Times](#) looks into a surge in misinformation around George Floyd on social media. And in our new Harris data we see deepening division:

- **Americans are divided on what is being posted on their feeds:** Just over half (53%) say people on their feeds are mostly posting misleading information, while 47% say they are mostly posting facts.
- After Twitter posted a warning label on a Tweet from President Trump claiming it was misleading about vote-by-mail, the President [signed an executive order](#) “to curtail the legal protections that shield social media companies from liability for what gets posted on their platforms.”
- While Twitter intervened to inform its users of what they deem to be misleading information, **Facebook will remain neutral:** [according to Zuckerberg](#), “We’ve been pretty clear on our policy that we think that it wouldn’t be right for us to do fact checks for politicians.” In response, its employees are staging [virtual walk-outs](#).

- Support is high (75%) for social media platforms to monitor whether what is said on its platform is true or false.
- And two-thirds (64%) say **social media companies should censor false or misleading information**. Despite the president’s executive order, more than half (57%) of Republicans support censorship; though less than 7 in 10 (70%) of Democrats.
- [Fast Company](#) looks into the coming collision between C-19 misinformation on social media with the November election.

Implication:

Our Harris data shows Americans moving to facts, science, and straight talk. From the CDC, to hospitals, healthcare, Governors, and other authorities, there is a renewed respect for institutions and authorities. But with that comes trust. Will Twitter ‘pivot’ from Facebook? Or will social media stick to the same playbook of turning a blind eye to deception and division? With three crises and an election on the horizon, that’s a pretty big gamble indeed.

[Read More](#)

# Questions?

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