

COVID-19 CONSUMER RESEARCH SPECIAL REPORT SIX MONTHS THAT CHANGED AMERICA

March - August 2020

MDC and **The Harris Poll** began partnering in March, 2020, to conduct research to monitor the pulse of the American Consumer.

The pages that follow are a special report of all research from March through present day. We examine how consumer attitudes and behavior have evolved in an effort to strategize for what's to come and how these factors could impact our lives in the long term.

We hope this information proves useful to you and your team as you address these changes in real time and strategize for your next moves. 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

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Special thanks to Tawny Saez, Andrew Higham, Emily Morton, Sean Groman, Logan Dobson, Bri Close, Matthew Fieder, Annie Prunsky, Charmaine Wiggins and the entire Harris team for their temerity and effort in this project.

METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll over the following dates among a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults:

Axios-Harris Poll 100, July 2020

American Psychological Association-Harris Poll APA Surveys

- APA Stress in America 2020: Stress in The Time of COVID-19 by The Harris Poll Volume Two, June 2020
- APA Civil Unrest Survey by The Harris Poll, June 2020
- APA Annual Stress in America Survey by The Harris Poll, 2019
- APA Annual Stress in America Survey by The Harris Poll, 2018
- APA Annual Stress in America Survey by The Harris Poll, 2017

Harris Poll Weekly COVID-19 Tracker

- Wave 2, March 14-15, 2020
- Wave 3, March 17-18, 2020
- Wave 4, March 21-23, 2020
- Wave 5, March 28-30, 2020
- Wave 6, April 3-5, 2020
- Wave 7, April 11-13, 2020
- Wave 8, April 18-20, 2020
- Wave 9, April 25-27, 2020
- Wave 10, May 1-3, 2020
- Wave 11, May 8-10, 2020
- Wave 12, May 15-17, 2020
- Wave 13, May 27-28, 2020
- Wave 14, May 29-31, 2020
- Wave 15, June 6-8, 2020
- Wave 16, June 13-15, 2020
- Wave 17, June 18-20, 2020
- Wave 18, June 26-29, 2020
- Wave 19, July 2-4, 2020
- Wave 20, July 10-12, 2020
- Wave 21, July 17-19, 2020
- Wave 22, July 24-26, 2020
- Wave 23, July 31 – Aug 2, 2020
- Wave 24, Aug 7-9, 2020
- Wave 25, Aug 14-16, 2020
- Wave 26, Aug 21-23, 2020

Harvard CAPS/Harris Poll

- March 2020
- May 2020
- July 2020

Harris Poll Alienation Index, July 2020 (has run since 1966)

Yahoo Finance-Harris Poll Investor Index, July 2020

This report summarizes the key findings of the research. For more information about these surveys, contact CEO John Gerzema jgerzema@harrisinsights.com or CEO Will Johnson wjohnson@harrisinsights.com.

Reflections on Cv19's dislocation from The Harris Poll.

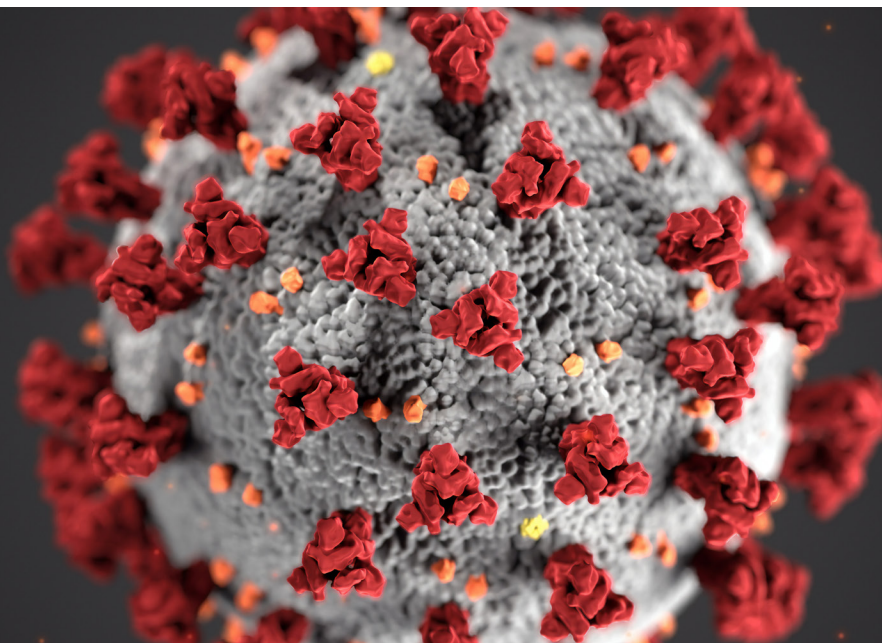
The Harris Poll COVID-19 Tracker (Week 26) fielded August 21-23, 2020 **marks six months since we began tracking public sentiment on the pandemic.** At this milestone, we are taking a look back to examine 1.) how the American lifestyle has adapted, 2.) how opinion and attitudes have shifted and 3.) how this might impact the way we live, moving forward.

This report is also a special new presentation that can be shared or presented as requested.

As a public service, our team has curated key insights to help leaders navigate COVID-19. Full survey results, tables, and weekly summaries **can be accessed for free** at [The Harris Poll COVID-19 Portal](#). We will continue to actively field on a regular cadence to track the shifts in sentiment and behaviors as the news and guidelines evolve.

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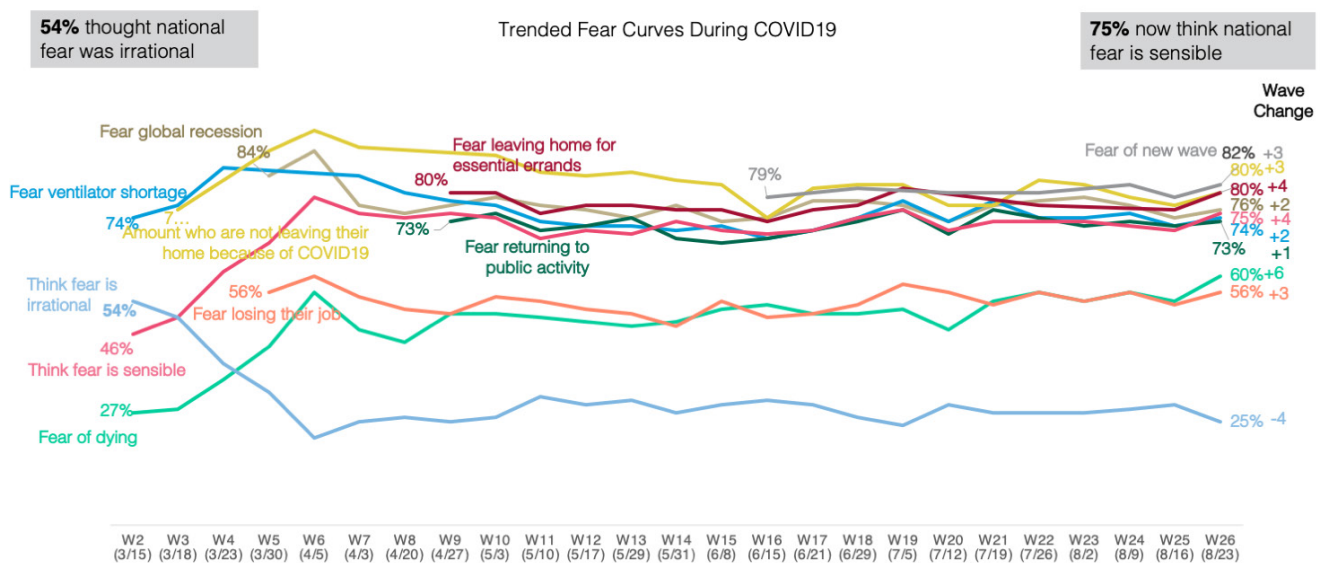


The Curtain of Fear

When we turned our attention to COVID mid-March, America was in shock and disbelief. Two days earlier President Trump had declared a national emergency and states were shutting down. The mysterious virus offered no clues on how it spread, witnessed in the fact that The CDC issued its first guidance to limit congregations of more than fifty people. But then [Rudy Gobert](#), who had playfully touched all the microphones in a post-game interview, became the first NBA player to contract coronavirus. In turn, the NBA, then the NHL, MLB were suspended as most other rituals and routines of Spring in America.

Over that cold weekend (March 14th and 15th) we first went into the field to gauge America's reaction. At the time, there was yet to be a widespread infection. The novel coronavirus was just taking hold in Washington state and New York. This explains why, as the chart below shows, fear was initially mixed with confusion and incredulity. That weekend, (54%) of **Americans thought the national fear was irrational**. America's main concern was for hospitals, PPE, and ventilators. In fact (84%) that weekend feared a global recession more than (27%) the virus itself.

The Task for Communicators: Lifting the Curtain of Fear



That soon changed. As [Axios highlighted](#), Americans began losing their sense of invincibility toward the coronavirus and anxiety very quickly escalated in late March and early-April. [The USNS Comfort](#) arrived in New York to relieve distressed area hospitals. Boris Johnson was hospitalized in the U.K. By April 2nd, the pandemic had sickened more than one million people in 171 countries across six continents, killing over 50,000. And by mid-April **(95%) of Americans were afraid to leave their homes because of Cv-19**. Opinions quickly changed: **(79%) now felt the fear was sensible** while the naysayers declined precipitously.

By mid-April **(56%) feared dying of the virus**, only to be eclipsed by **(60%) feared losing their job**. As the chart shows, these first two stats would coil together like snakes to symbolize **a forced choice between your job or your life**, which persists to this day. As of this weekend, fears of both dying (60%) and losing one's job (56%) are up six and three percentage points respectively. According to our data in [USA Today, 3 in 10 Americans had also already lost income](#) due to COVID at this point.

As the virus spread and fear grew, Americans moved to become more cautious and comfortable with necessary efforts to control the virus. Our Harris data in Wall Street Journal's article, [Americans Favor Aggressive Coronavirus Measures, Poll Finds](#), "The poll also finds that (71%) of Americans would be willing to share their own mobile location data with authorities to receive alerts about their potential exposure to the virus—for example, if they were near a suspected or known coronavirus carrier."

We would soon learn this fear that blanketed the country would not subside. Amid shortages, contradictory messaging and leadership largely left to the states, confusion reigned. As the global death toll surpassed 200,000 by the end of April, only then airlines first announced mask requirements. With no spring break, [Americans were working and learning from home](#) and getting used to the idea that life was going to be anything but normal, anytime soon.



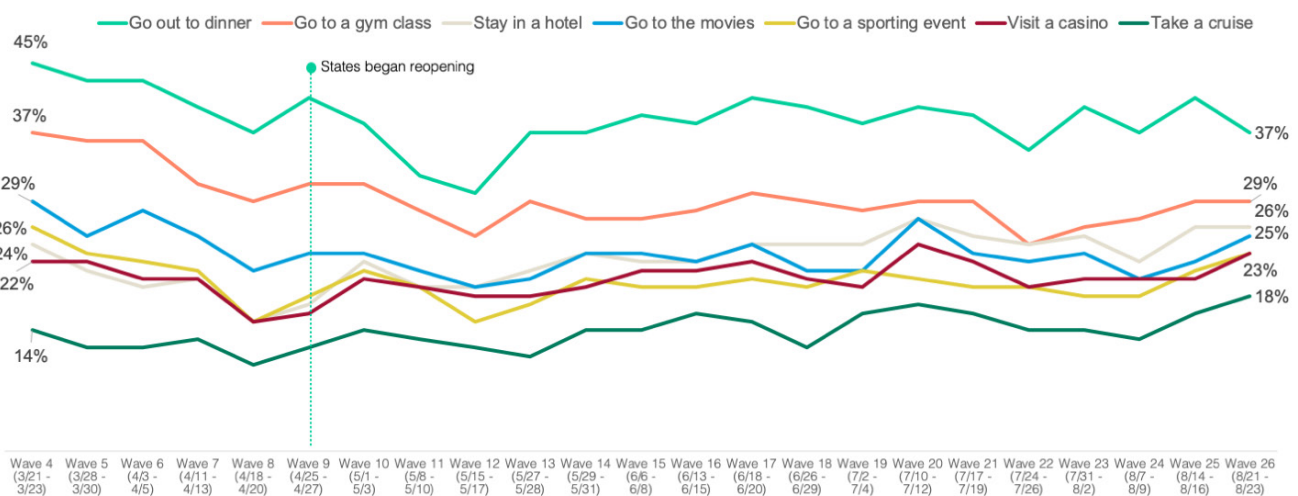
Life Interrupted

The composite picture of activities the nation thought it would resume soon shows a roller coaster of expectation and frustration. March despair followed by a bounce in hope as states re-opened in late April. Then again as the virus followed the path of the reopening, despair returned again in May. [On May 27th, coronavirus deaths in the U.S. passed 100,000](#) sending many Americans back home again.

Venturing back out soon into daily life was largely underestimated. When asked what they would resume within a month, Americans said dining out (45%) which is only (37%) today. Worse off were gyms, movie theaters, [hotels](#), and [sporting events](#). The activities of the last resort were casinos and cruise ships. In mid-March (14%) of Americans said they would take a cruise within 30 days of the curve flattening while (22%) felt the same way about visiting a casino. Today that's (18%) and (23%) respectively. As mentioned by [Forbes, a record-shattering 95% of Americans said they were staying home for Memorial Day](#) in 2020.

Returning To Entertainment Activities Within 30 Days Fluctuates with Hope and Concern

Once the government provides information that the spread of the virus is flattening how long will it take you to do each of the following?
(Summary of within 30 days)



Travel and leisure was decimated with most Americans saying it would take six months or longer to go back to resuming these activities. In the height of summer travel season, [only 3 in 10 \(29%\) planned a leisure trip](#) between June and September. [Cruise lines are already canceling sailings into 2021.](#)

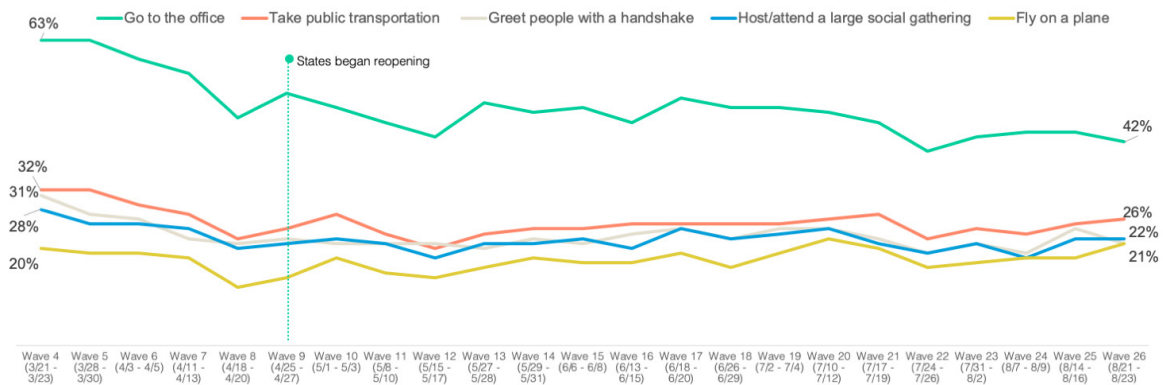
Risky Business

If life at home was tedious, Americans felt safe. The same could not be said for office life, however. Initially, almost two-thirds of Americans (63%) were bullish on getting back to work within a month, but it's (42%) today. And the knock-on effect on both the rituals of business and its supporting industries were,

and remain battered. One in five Americans (20%) said they'd fly on a plane in March and that's up only one percentage point six months later. Roughly one third (31%) said they'd take public transportation and now it's one quarter (26%).

Americans Remain Cautious to Return to Work Within 30 Days

Once the government provides information that the spread of the virus is flattening how long will it take you to do each of the following?
(Summary of within 30 days)



Handshakes, conferences, and meetings have been digitally disrupted and zoomed into distress. But what this chart also conveys is a **rebalancing of office and #wfh life** that may become permanent. This was reflected in a May 24th [Forbes article "Fast-Moving Trends Will Radically Reshape The Way Americans Work And Where We Live."](#) Since the beginning of the pandemic, Jack Kelly wrote, "According to a new [Harris Poll, over \(30%\) of Americans are considering moving to more suburban, less densely populated areas to escape the pandemic.](#) This move foreshadows falling real estate sales and declining home prices."

While newer Harris data [shows some of that fear to have abided](#), **Americans say they will not return to work until they feel safe.** (83%) say they should be allowed to work from home during the pandemic until they feel comfortable to return. And this insistence makes sense. [A recent survey by Korn Ferry](#) found that **64% of workers feel that they're more productive at home.** This has also led Americans to rethink the traditional workweek, [and the New York Post reported](#) that a vast majority (82%) of employed Americans would prefer a 4-day workweek even if it meant working longer hours.

Missing You

It was clear from the outset, **Americans missed going out and socializing**. Nearly three quarters (74%) missed gathering with friends and family which has held steady. Another (67%) longed for in person celebrations like holidays, birthdays and weddings. Without them, (47%) of people feel lonely and cut off from the traditional outlets for human connection. For instance, (52%) miss going to church, or (47%) my local coffee shop. All these feelings are more greatly pronounced by American teens and children.

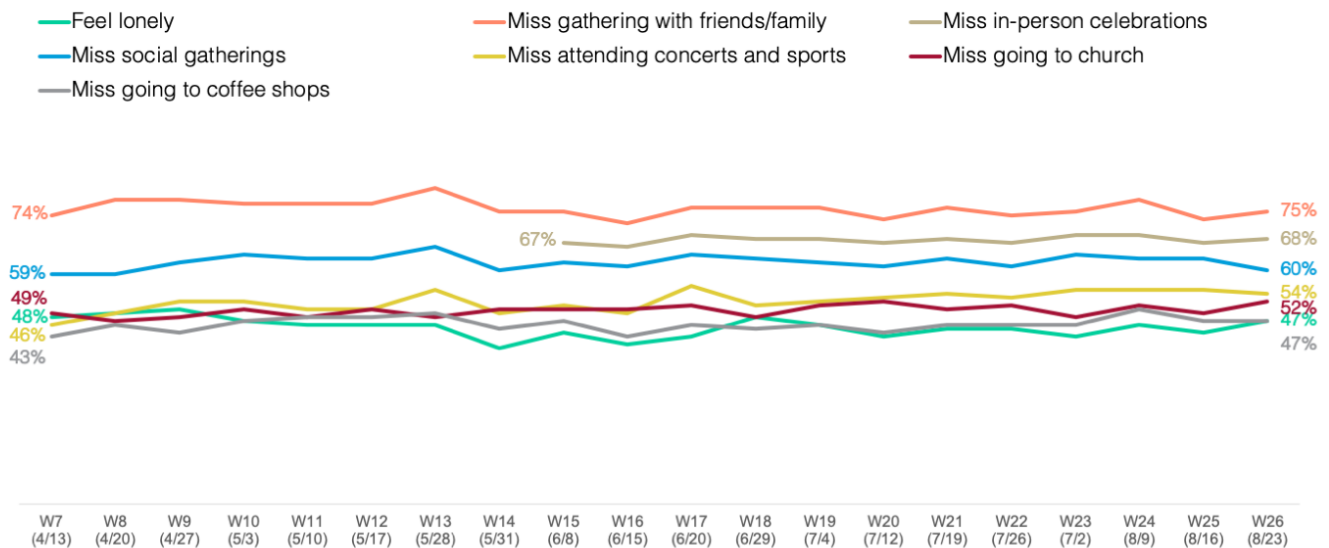
Then as Spring turned to Summer, Americans began traveling. We saw pent up demand for cars rise, and people saying that certain

leisure trips were essential like graduations and weddings (48%), while for business people – especially sales –(72%) said business meetings with prospective clients meant taking the risk.

Janeen Christoff wrote in [Travel Pulse](#) on this pent up demand to travel again, “The survey found that 31 percent are planning to “go on vacation/travel when things return to normal.” This is up 7 percent from last week.”

In the below chart we see that **the marketplace has become a fight between fear and desire**. In daily life, Americans continue to calculate risk and reward, making **safety as a customer journey** of paramount importance.

Americans Are Feeling Lonely as They Miss Social Activity



Source: Harris Poll COVID19 Tracker Wave 5-26
 BASE: GENERAL PUBLIC
 Q9 Do you think your income in 2020 will be lower, higher or about the same as it was in 2019?

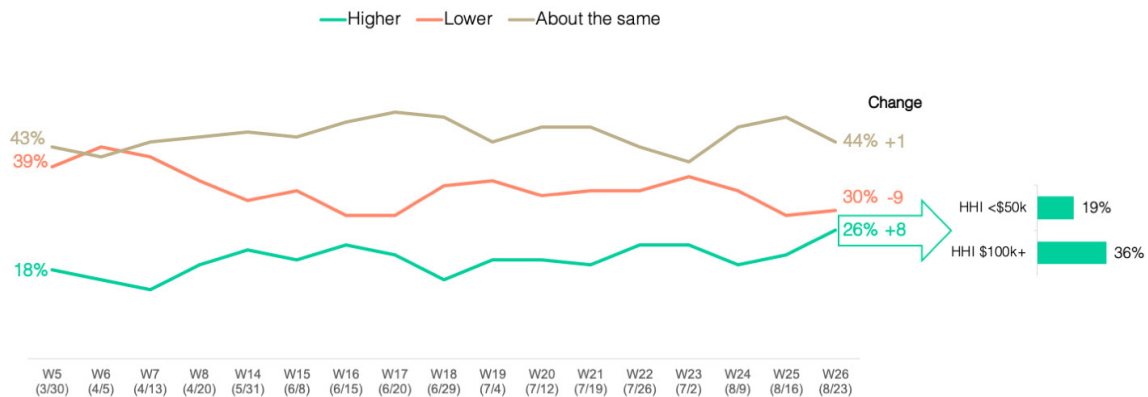
Two COVID Economies

By early May, [the country had lost 20.6 million jobs](#) since mid-March, resulting in an unemployment rate of 14.7%, **a level not seen since the Great Depression.**

But concealed in that sobering data is that [younger people, people of color, and lower household incomes are bearing the brunt of the pandemic.](#) While (85%) of Americans said they were impacted financially, **the virus exacerbated the income divide in America.** We asked Americans, do you think your income in 2020 will be lower, higher, or about the same as it was in 2019? And a stark picture emerges of the have and have-nots. (36%) of Americans HHI +\$100K felt their income would be higher this year vs. (19%) of Americans earning under \$100K.

A Tale of Two Economic Realities

Do you think your income in 2020 will be lower, higher or about the same as it was in 2019?



Source: Harris Poll COVID19 Tracker Wave 5-26
 BASE: GENERAL PUBLIC
 Q9 Do you think your income in 2020 will be lower, higher or about the same as it was in 2019?

Lower-income households are more pessimistic about both the economy and their personal finances over the coming months: (25%) of Household Income <\$50k say the economy will be doing worse in the months to come after unemployment benefits expire (vs 36% of Household Income \$100k+). Personal finances: 48% HHI <\$50K better vs 58% HHI \$100k+. And by a two to one margin (63%) of lower-income Americans said the long-term effects of COVID financially would impact them more than (37%) the virus itself, whereas those earning more were less concerned by the financial impact and more on the health threat of the virus.

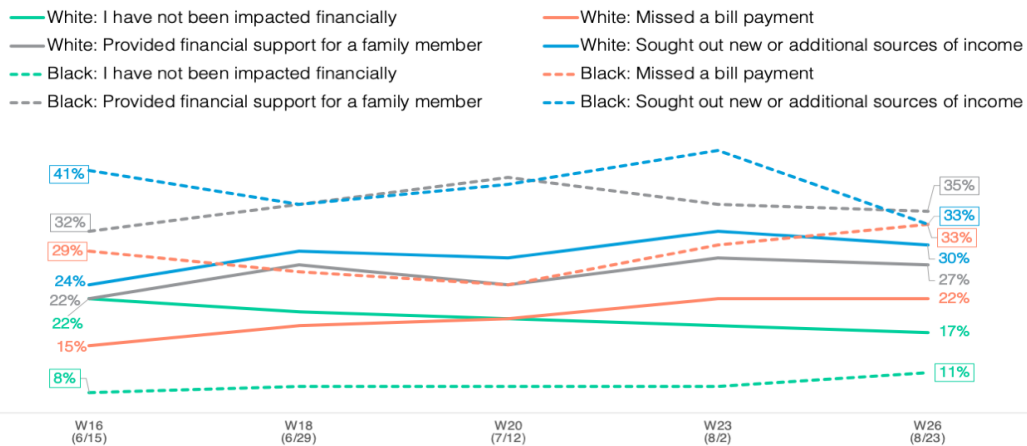
But the same goes for younger Americans and people of color. **Gen Z/Millennials were nearly two times more likely to have stopped or cut back on savings compared to Boomers** (43% vs 23% respectively) as well as to have missed (or will soon miss) a bill payment (38% vs 17% respectively).

What's more, is that younger people were also the ones most likely to be lending out a helping hand to others; **Gen Z/Millennials were nearly three times more likely to have provided financial support for a family member or friend compared to Boomers** (31% vs 11% respectively).

Black Americans were especially impacted economically by the pandemic, in fact only (11%) say they haven't been impacted financially at all as a result of the pandemic. Over a third (33%) however have missed a bill payment (vs only 22% of white Americans) and the same amount have sought out new or additional sources of income (33%):

Black Americans Are Especially Impacted Economically by the Pandemic

As a result of the current pandemic, have you or your household been impacted financially in any of the following ways?



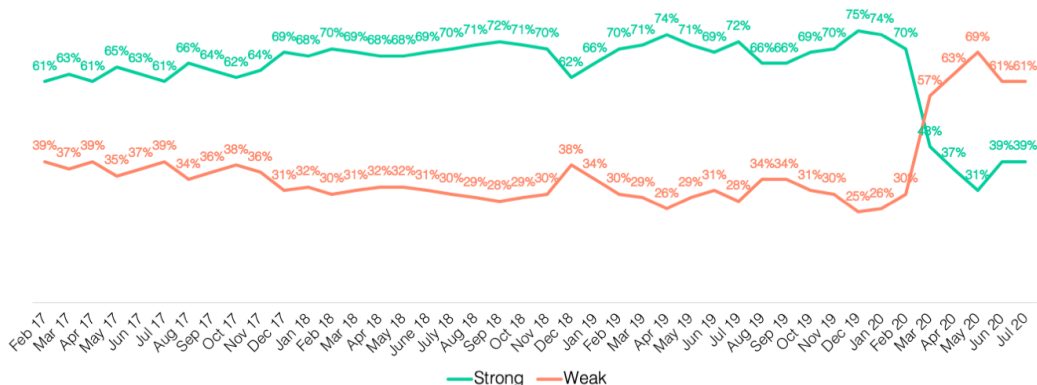
Source: Harris Poll COVID19 Tracker Wave 26

While lower-income Americans and those hit hardest by the pandemic face a harsh new reality, the 'haves' are bullish on their future: (63%) of the public with investable assets expect returns of 5% or more over the next 5 years. The number is even higher (69%) among institutional investors.

Overall, Americans think the economy is headed in the wrong direction. In our latest Harvard CAPS/Harris Poll, we find a dramatic flip in voter sentiment.

Over Two-thirds of Voters Say US Economy Is Weak: A Stunning 4 Month Symmetrical Flip in Attitudes

How strong do you think the U.S. economy is today?



BASE: AGES 18+
Source: Harvard CAPS Harris Poll, July 2020

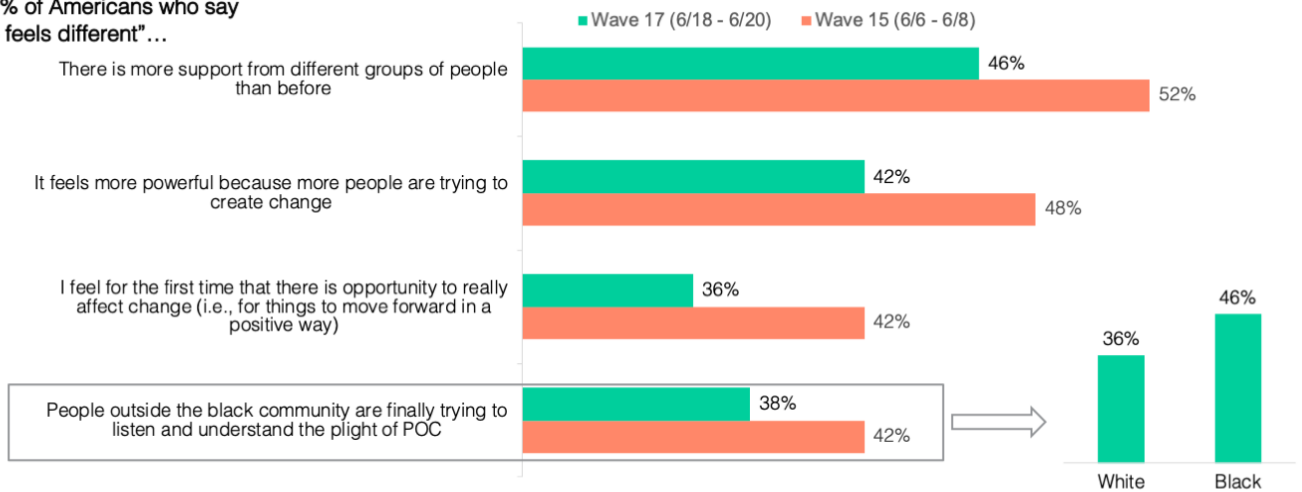
The Great Awakening

The third crisis to hit the country came on Memorial Day with the killing of George Floyd. Protests radiated out of Minneapolis across the nation, bringing with it a broader coalition of intersectional, multi-generational, and multi-cultural support. Perhaps for this reason, Americans in our surveys felt this time might be different:

This Time Feels Different: More Support From Different Groups of People Than Before

Which of the following describes why you feel this moment in the racial equality movement "feels different"?

Of the 77% of Americans who say "this time feels different"...

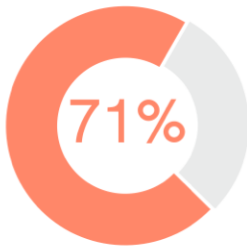


BASE: AGES 18+
Source: Harris Poll COVID-19 Tracker Wave 17, June 18-20, 2020

Curious, we went back to our Harris Poll questions asked in 2014 after the protests and rioting in Ferguson over the killing of Michael Floyd. And in asking the questions again this summer, we could see noted increases in empathy among the public toward the plight of Black people and greater acceptance of systemic racism in America.

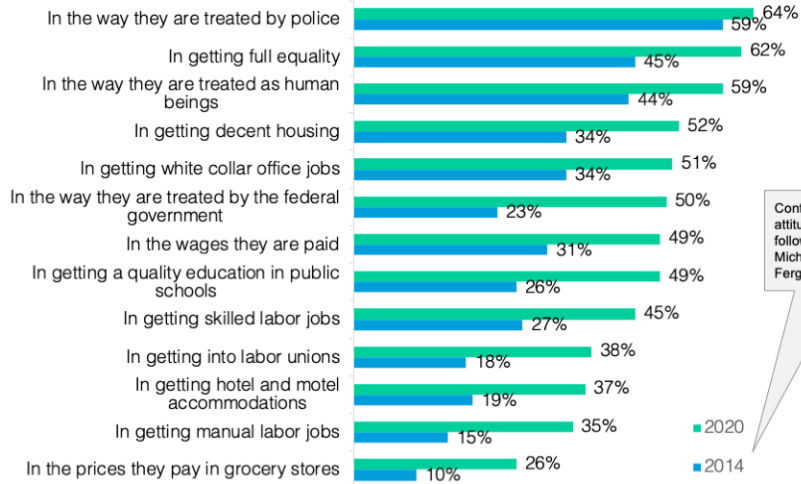
Americans Are Becoming More Empathetic Toward The Black Community Since Ferguson in 2014

Do you believe there is systematic racism in America?
% Yes



BASE: AGES 18+
Source: Harris Poll COVID-19 Tracker Wave 17, June 18-20, 2020

For each of the following, please indicate if you think black people are discriminated against in that area or not.



Contrasted with American attitudes immediately following the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson Mo in 2014

BASE: AGES 18+
Source: Harris Poll COVID-19 Tracker Wave 17, June 18-20, 2020

On the cusp of pressing national tensions and awakening around race, we conducted polling to find how Americans felt about the NFL's treatment of Colin Kaepernick. Forbes' Kurt Badenhausen wrote in [Poll: 61% Of Americans Say Roger Goodell Owes Colin Kaepernick An Apology](#), "The global protests that started recently after George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis have helped shift the perception of Kaepernick and the brands that do business with him."



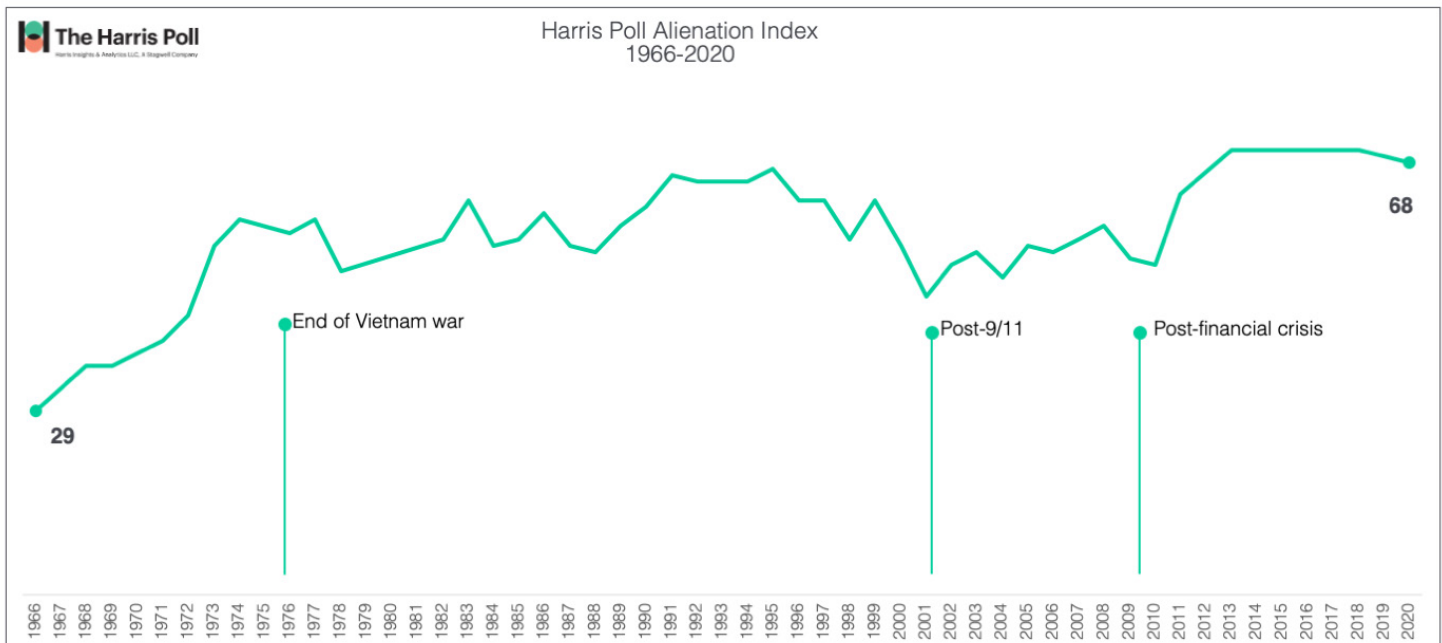
A Country Facing Its Nadir

As the three crises became part of our daily lives, [a heightened sense of uncertainty blanketed America](#); nearly 6 in 10 (58%) reported higher stress than normal (pre-COVID-19) with (83%) pointing to the future of our nation as a significant source of stress (vs. 66% in 2019). And with no way out in sight, (72%) of Americans reported that this is **the lowest point in history they can remember** (up from 59% in 2017). A gathering pessimism emerged where (65%) say the country is on the wrong track.

Grappling for control in a constant state of fear and anxiety, and without leadership to unify, **Americans appear to be growing more isolated and estranged from each other**. Only (25%) of Americans said they often consume content from others who have different values than their own, and (41%) say they feel confused and (26%) feel angry when they read content from people whose beliefs and values they disagree with.

In our Harris Poll Alienation Index that we've been running each year since 1966, we find today, **(68%) of Americans feel alienated, which is up from (52%) less than a decade ago after the financial crisis**. Typically, every period of turmoil begins with isolation and ends in greater unity. We saw alienation nearly double in one decade from (29%) to (59%) in years of turmoil begins with isolation and ends in greater unity. We saw alienation nearly double in one decade from (29%) to (59%) in years from 1966 to 1977 during the Vietnam war only to fall 9 percentage points in one year following the end of the war from 1977-1978 (59% to 51%). Similarly, alienation dropped to its lowest point in three decades at (47%) right after 9/11 when communities came together (index dropped from 62% in 1999). Unfortunately however as the below chart shows, **COVID alienation is higher than it was at the height of the Vietnam war with no unity on the horizon**.

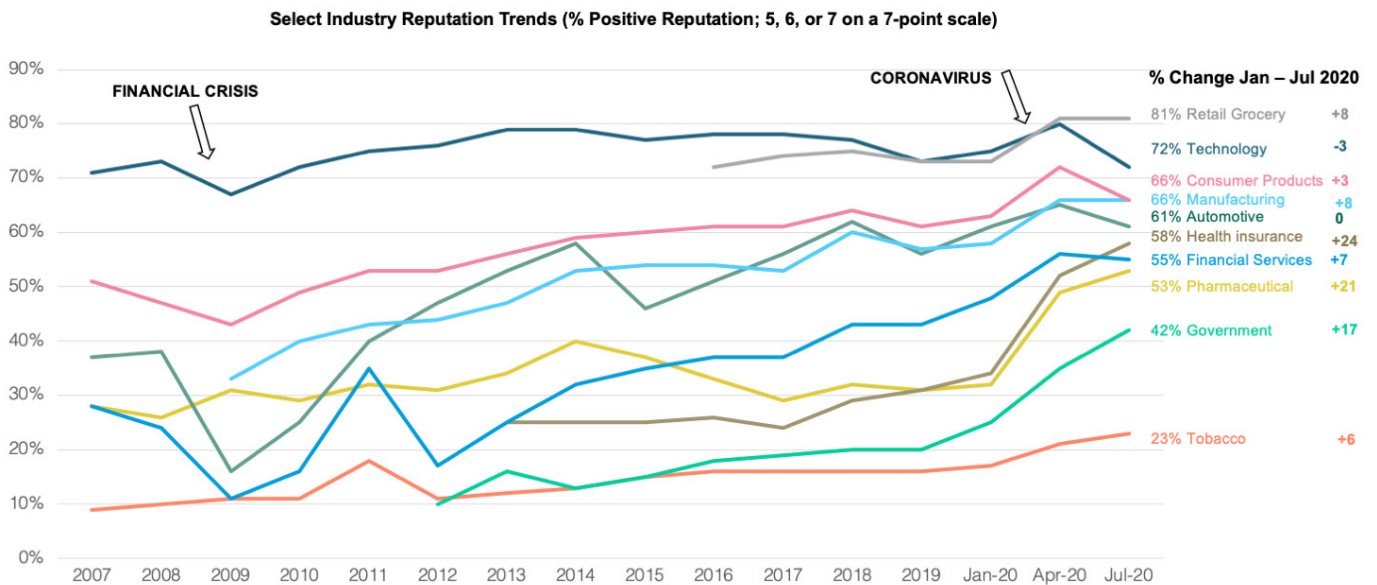
Together-ness is needed now more than ever.



The Calling to Business

So, who will unite America?... The public says business. In previous crises, companies were part of the problem. This time they are part of the solution. In our [Axios-Harris Poll study of corporate reputation](#) which surveyed over thirty-four thousand Americans, (72%) said **“I trust companies more than the Federal government to help find solutions** to issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and racial equality movement.” Amid a vacuum of leadership, Americans turned to corporations—especially large ones—as vital leaders in solving the pandemic and restoring the American way of life. (81%) said **“large companies with resources, infrastructure, advanced logistics, are even more vital now to America’s future than before the pandemic.”**

In This Crisis, Companies Are Seen As Part Of The Solution Rather Than The Problem



And as America’s needs became more essential and urgent, consumers turned to big companies that represented safety and reassurance. This signaled a flight from fancy, where popular industries heavily used that provided luxury and influence (e.g., hotels, retail/fashion) took a backseat to the industries that served the essential needs of Americans in crisis mode (Clorox was number 1 this year). In fact, (76%) of Americans said, **“companies were more reliable than the federal government in keeping America running during COVID-19.”**

But perhaps most importantly, many led with their values as they demonstrated ethics, accountability, and leadership to the public during a time of profound anxiety and crisis. This is the year of servant leadership and today, being a values-led company means speaking out against injustice and leading by example. **For consumers, no action means no values.**

Americans Clamor For Stability, Direction, and Turning to Companies With Purpose and Ethics

Large companies asked to step into the void of leadership



Agree that large companies with resources, infrastructure, advanced logistics are **even more vital now to America's future** than before the pandemic.

BASE: AGES 18+
Source: Harris Poll RQ

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Corporate America more trustworthy/reliable than gov't



Trust companies more than the federal government to find solution on COVID-19 and racial equality.



Say companies were more reliable than the federal government in keeping America running during the COVID-19 pandemic and related shutdown.

Consumers look to companies to speak out on social issues

79% Feel a company's vision of the world is more important now than in past

79% Expect a company's leadership to respond to COVID-19 and racial inequality

81% Feel even if a company stumbles it's **important to see how they think** and what their intentions are

82% Would forgive a company for a least trying to help, even if they don't get it right (when speaking out)

72% Is living up to their internal values (when speaking out)

While the public praised Corporate America for addressing COVID19, fewer feel they have adequately addressed racial injustice; (63%) know a great deal/fair amount about large companies responding to the pandemic vs racial injustice (51%). We see a bigger gap between the number of Americans who think companies are on the right track in addressing the pandemic (65%) vs racial injustice (49%). **Corporate America proved itself capable leaders in addressing COVID-19 and now the public is holding them to similar standards in the fight for racial justice and equality.**

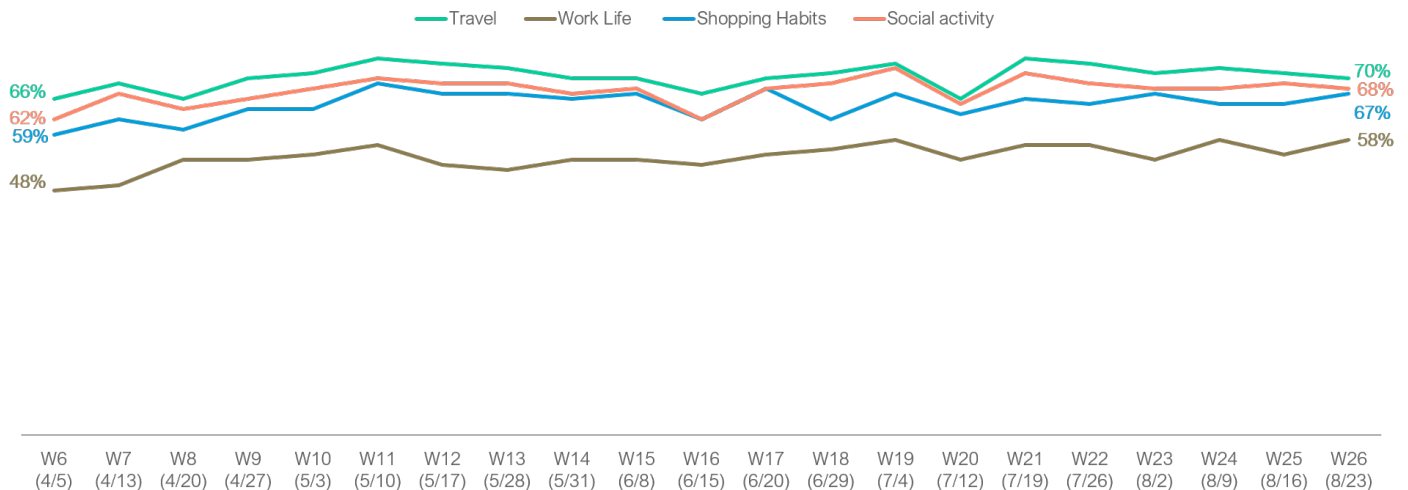
A New (Not) Normal Ahead

An unfathomable spring and summer are now giving way to an uncertain fall and winter. Now with COVID flash-points closing up America's universities and canceling Fall sports, Americans have grown less certain of any return to normalcy. In fact, in a Harris survey covered for USATODAY, nearly two-thirds (62%) of American parents believed their kids will be learning from home. The near same number (61%) said they'd be working from home. More than half (56%) of Americans intend to vote by mail and strongly support the Post Office. Only (42%) believe we'll have an NFL season. Still, fewer believe MLB will finish to completion while (29%) believe there will be a CFB season.

As summer closes into Fall, Americans are as wary as when we began. Six months into the pandemic, only one-in-five (22%) told us they'd fly in a plane this Fall. Only (28%) would stay in a hotel or travel for the holidays. Americans see short term dislocation becoming long-term change evident when asking them what in life has changed as they contemplate the future. Seven out of ten Americans perceive travel, socializing, and commerce/shopping as permanently changed; nearly six in ten (56%) believe the same of working.

Returning to Life As it Was Before Feels Less and Less Realistic; COVID-19 Is Changing 'Normal'

Once the pandemic is over, what do you think will be very different, somewhat different or mostly the same?
(% saying 'very/somewhat different' after COVID-19)



Changed Lives; Changing Demand

Not surprisingly, an uncertain America has translated into marketplace turmoil. Sectors have both thrived and been fated by this pandemic. But by and large, **the inside has beaten the outside**. In place of going out to movies, concerts, bars, and eating out, in-home entertainment has reigned supreme. [In our survey with The Wall Street Journal](#), (56%) of American families started spending more time streaming than before the pandemic. The near same number started virtual happy hours (57%), gaming (43%), podcasts (23%), and wellness apps (23%). And with live sports canceled and other out of home activities suspended, nearly a fifth of households reported watching four additional hours of streaming content a day.

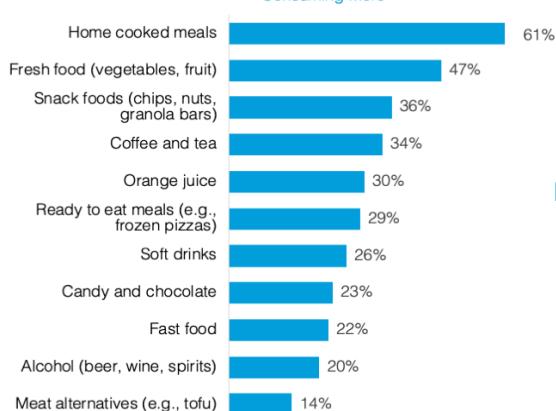
As life came inside, half of the American parents (51%) admitted to giving in to more screen time to preoccupy kids. Beginning in March, nearly half (49%) bought a new Netflix subscription spent \$60 a month for streaming services—well above the general population (\$37/month on average).

Things lost in the outside also dislocated a myriad of supporting industries. Barron’s estimates that remote learning — which means no cafeterias, no garbage pickup, etc. — [“could cost the economy \\$700 billion](#) in lost revenue and productivity. So too are delis, convenience/gas stations, dry-cleaners, and a plethora of urban supporting retail for office workers. So far this year, (16%) of all retail industry loans are delinquent, according to statistics tracked by the data firm Trepp. Major retailers, including J.C. Penney, Neiman Marcus, and Modell’s Sporting Goods, have filed for bankruptcy, and new tenant demand for mall space has never been weaker, leading to Carl Ichan’s [Big Short 2.0](#) of American malls.

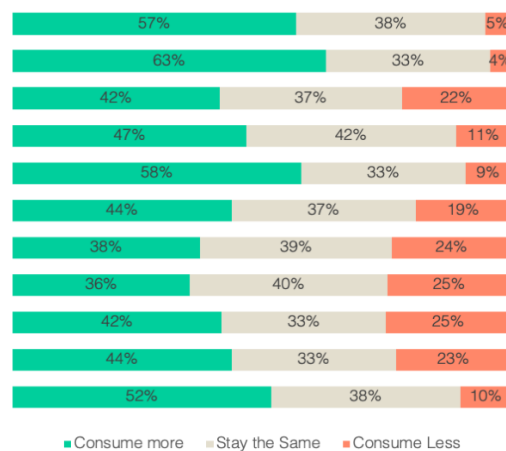
The **American-at home palette changed**. On one hand, juice, home-cooked meals, and fresh food consumption grew, but so too did candy, snacking, fast food, and alcohol. Packaging forms changed too as single-portions for commuters were replaced by family-sized SKU’s consumed at home. And according to their intentions, any eating habits as the below chart shows might be imprinted, especially healthier/family-style eating.

Eating Habits Are Changing During COVID

Since the coronavirus outbreak are you consuming more or less of the following?



Do you plan on maintaining these consumption habits?



BASE: AGES 21+
Source: Harris Poll COVID-19 Tracker Wave 22, July 24-26, 2020

More home-cooked and less ready-to-eat meals suggest **Americans intend to continue working from home** at least in some fashion. This tracks with our data on home remodeling, landscaping, bicycle purchasing, laptop, and technology upgrading and other investments in a living/working lifestyle. Meanwhile, spacious

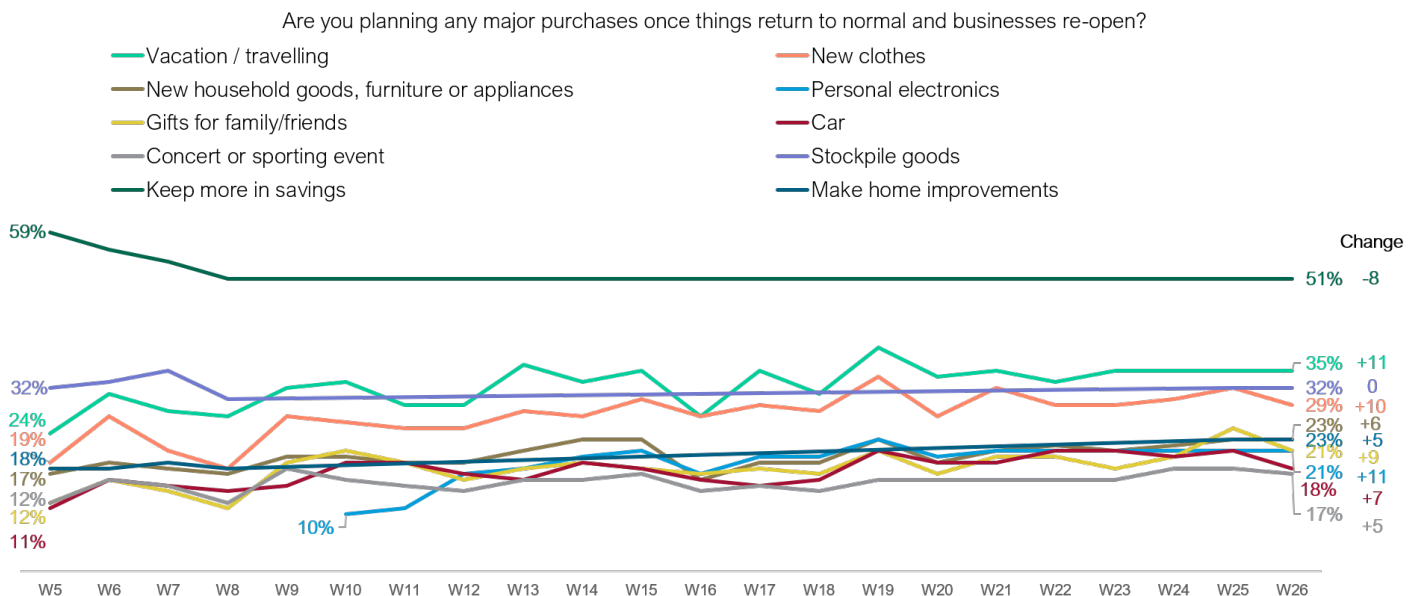
single-family homes in suburbs and exurbs are in hot demand, while rents are falling in Manhattan, where landlords are offering deals. Also, existing-home sales rose 20.7% in June over May, and median housing prices rose in every region of the country, according to the National Association of Realtors.

Cautious Demand

Consumer demand wasn't just changing, it was also growing in some parts of the economy. For those whom the economic situation was not depressing their spending, interest in traveling, new clothes, cars, personal electronics all became priorities. But note how the biggest enemy against consumption is

savings. At the outset of the crisis, (59%) of Americans set aside savings while nearly one-third (32%) stockpiled essential goods. While spending has cut into savings slightly (down eight percentage points today), the majority of Americans (51%) are saving before spending while stockpiling remains the same.

"Revenge Spending" Continues to Build; Though Half Are Building Their Savings



A Two-Speed Recovery

That vacations and new clothes are the top two purchase intentions, suggests the two-speed recovery in store for America. While wealthier citizens have so far emerged largely unscathed financially from the pandemic, many on low incomes have not. Domestic consumption — which accounted for (68%) America's GDP in 2019 will suffer if the rich-and-poor gap that widened following the virus outbreak cannot be narrowed. Marketers must not only plan on these income gaps in their forecasting demand, but businesses must also assume overall consumption recovery will lag as America's low-income spenders far outnumber high-income ones.

Of course, government policy has many means to stimulate economic recovery, but it can't control how much average households want to spend. Our recent [USA TODAY/Harris Poll survey](#) demonstrates the stark pain that millions of out-of-work Americans are facing over the renewal of Unemployment Insurance. Over eight in ten (82%) Americans believe the expiration of the \$600 unemployment bonus will have an adverse effect on the U.S. economy, and nearly three-fourths (72%) think economic growth will be a lot worse in the months to come.

Without correction, an uneven recovery in spending highlights what is already a growing income gap. Most high-income Americans managed to keep their jobs or businesses by working from home during the pandemic. These households also benefited from credit easing policies that sent their equity and housing soaring. In contrast, income growth has stalled or even turned negative among the hundreds of millions in the low to middle-income population as the pandemic took a toll on the jobs market. The shopping spree by the rich will not offset the spending cuts by the rest of the population. Looking ahead, we worry about per capita consumption unless we can ease the suffering of ordinary Americans. A strong housing and stock market has hidden their pain.

Digitally-Accelerated Consumerism

Another reality business must face is the hyper-acceleration of digital consumerism. Looking ahead, nearly 6 in 10 (58%) say **they will either spend the same or more this winter holiday season compared to last year** (36% and 22% respectively), and only a third (32%) say they will spend less. But how will they choose to spend? The threat of the pandemic remains high and many consumers have already become digital natives after being forced to go all virtual during the virus-related shutdowns.

For instance, (40%) of consumers relied on curbside pick up for groceries during the pandemic, (23%) for home goods and (22%) for both personal care and medical products. These numbers skew higher for Gen Z/ Millennials and Gen X where nearly half use curbside pickup for groceries (47% and 49%),

nearly a third for home goods (29% and 31%) and personal care products (31% and 32%).

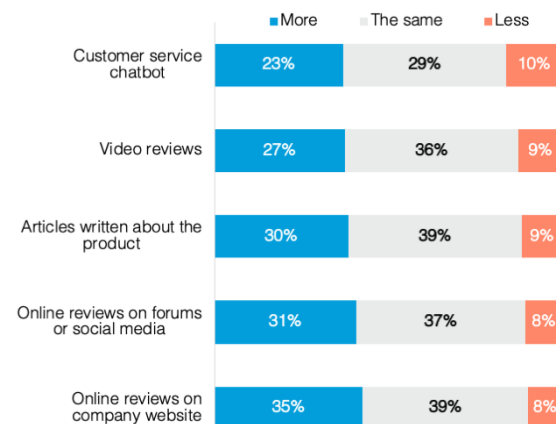
Our data also indicates **some of these digital tendencies are here to stay for the long term.** Post COVID-19 when the curve is flattened, more consumers said they would get take out (54%) over dining in a restaurant (46%) and nearly 6 in 10 (57%) said they would be **more likely to do a virtual happy hour over doing happy hour at a bar/restaurant** (43%).

And, while many say they miss the experience of shopping (47%), nearly 8 in 10 (77%) say they have been **satisfied with online shopping for things they used to do in-store.** What's more, is that consumers are becoming accustomed to the convenience of using digital resources before buying online:

While Americans Miss the Experience of Shopping, They're Becoming Reliant on Digital



Relative to before the pandemic, have you been relying more or less on each of the following ways to evaluate a product online before buying?



Retailers hoping to get consumers back into their stores this winter will have to instill confidence and safety as (56%) **will shop**

in-store only if they know the store has taken steps to protect their employees and customers from the spread of infection.

Where To From Here?

When are things going to get back to normal? Despite stock market gains and COVID cases easing across the country, but for rural communities and universities mostly, the majority of Americans who express fear and uncertainty will likely suppress consumer demand (in aggregate) until there's a vaccine. COVID has become so intertwined with restaurants, shopping, traveling, it essentially controls the economy in the near term. Only a vaccine can change that.

Barring that, Americans are willing to wear masks, socially distance, and lockdown. Last week, (50%) of Americans believed there would be another lockdown in their state and (42%) within their community. The majority also empower a chain of command from federal to governors to mayors to make the call to control the outbreak. Over the summer, (80%) of Americans felt the lockdowns were effective and only (25%) would oppose another lockdown. And now the majority are seeing this virus, not unlike a forest fire, where testing, rapid shutdowns, and containment can stop embers from igniting again.

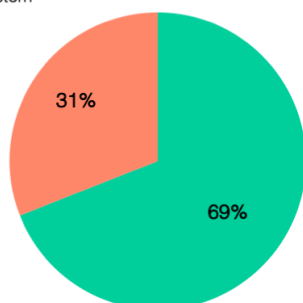
And when it comes to that silver bullet, Americans want to prioritize accuracy (91%) over speed (83%) in approving a vaccine. [In an exclusive Harris Poll with Axios](#) (69%) of Americans said they'd support a priority system for distributing a vaccine within the U.S. and (73%) said health care workers should get priority access followed by seniors (71%), people with compromised immune systems (68%) and essential workers (60%).

"This sort of structured, risk-based allocation would be a lot different from what most Americans are used to, in a health care system that typically allocates resources based on patients' ability to pay". But this egalitarianism is American in name only: We also found that (66%) of Americans said that if the U.S. develops the vaccine, it should only be made available abroad after all U.S. orders have been filled; just (34%) said it should be made available overseas immediately.

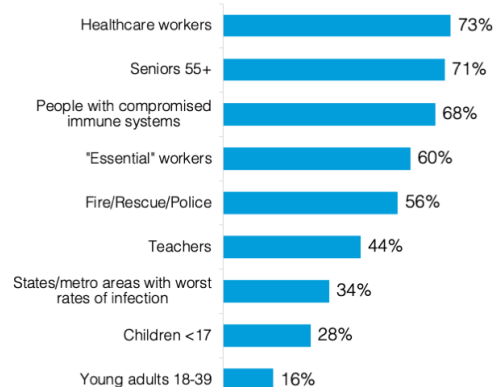
Americans Support a Priority System, With Healthcare Workers and Seniors Being Top Priority

Do you support a priority system for vaccinations, or should it be first come/first serve?

■ Support a priority system
■ First come/first serve



Which of the following groups, if any, should receive priority when a COVID-19 vaccine is available in the USA?



Source: Harris Poll COVID19 Tracker Wave 25
BASE: GENERAL PUBLIC W25 (1/8/21)
VAX02 Do you support a priority system for vaccinations, or should it be first come/first serve?
VAX03 Which of the following groups, if any, should receive priority when a COVID-19 vaccine is available in the USA?

The Recovery is The Vaccine

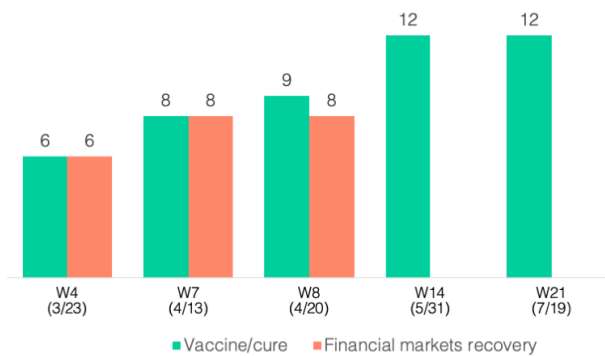
While the prospects for a number of vaccine trials appear promising, Americans – the consumers who drive the economy – see things getting better only when there is one. Most believe this will happen within a year and the majority intended to get vaccinated as the below chart shows.

Americans See a Vaccine, Financial Recovery Within a Year, Though Not All Will Get Vaccinated

How long do you think it will take for us to find a vaccine/cure for the coronavirus?

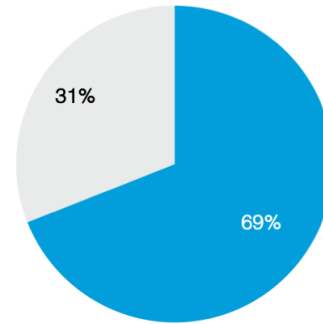
How long do you believe it will take for financial markets to recover once the outbreak under control?

Median (Months)



How likely are you to get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it becomes available?

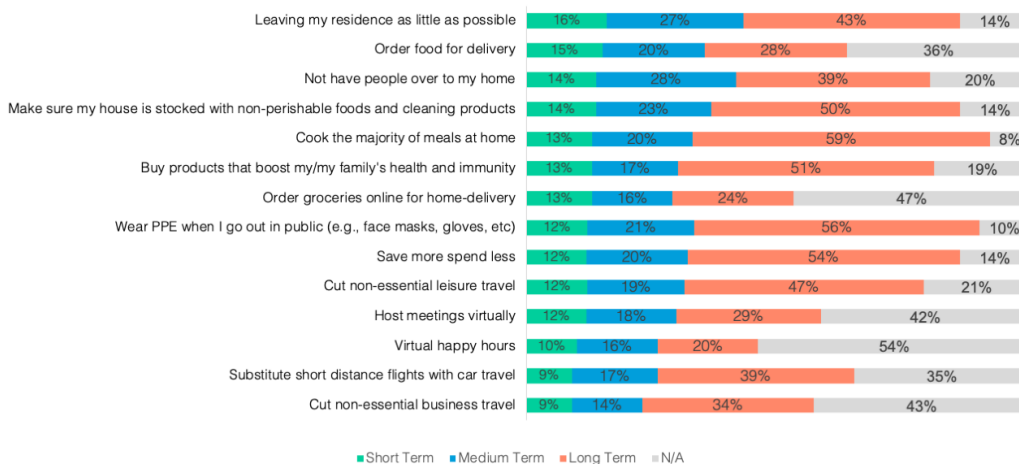
■ Likely
■ Not likely



Until that happens, Americans are taking it day-by-day. Settled into the new national pastime: isolation. Notably many behaviors are centered on home and safety, even as frustration mounts over online education and the fear of kids falling behind.

Until Then, They Are Planning On Taking Their Own Safety Precautions

Activities Planned on Doing



This is six months in America. Let's hope the next six will be better.

There are ample opportunities for firms to capture revenge spending and grow their brand equity.

- 1 Mitigate Consumer Fears:** As of our latest wave, America's fear of dying and losing their job has remained tightly wound at (60%) and (56%) respectively. In turn, this high-level of fear has trickled down in behavior with major cutbacks on domestic consumption affecting nearly (68%) of US GDP. Retailers hoping to get consumers back into their stores this winter will have to instill confidence and safety as (56%) will shop in-store only if they know the store has taken steps to protect their employees and customers from the spread of infection.
- 2 Leverage Positive Messaging:** When asked about their emotional responses to the pandemic, consumers overwhelmingly feel thankful (72%), appreciative (71%), and compassionate (70%) commanding an 18 percentage point lead over the next emotion, anger. This insight has led to a clear communication whitespace for marketers and advertisers to capture revenge spending.
- 3 Part of the Solution:** In our most recent Axios - Harris Poll 100, our team found an overwhelming support and trust for Corporate America with (76%) of Americans claiming, "companies were more reliable than the federal government in keeping America running during COVID-19". Broad support has achieved, however, for consumers, no action on COVID-19, racial justice, and equality now equate to no values.
- 4 Understand the Two Speed Recovery:** While wealthier citizens have so far emerged largely unscathed financially from the pandemic, many on low incomes have not. Marketers must not only plan on these income gaps in their forecasting demand, but businesses must also assume overall consumption recovery will lag as America's low-income spenders far outnumber high-income ones. consumers as thankful.
- 5 Accelerate Digital Strategies:** Looking ahead, nearly 6 in 10 (58%) say they will either spend the same or more this winter holiday season compared to last year. But how will they choose to spend? For instance, (40%) of consumers relied on curbside pick-up for groceries during the pandemic, (23%) for home goods and (22%) for both personal care and medical products. It will become necessary for strategies to begin closing the gap in experience to win the e-commerce battle.

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About The Harris Poll

The Harris Poll is one of the longest-running surveys in the U.S., tracking public opinion, motivations and social sentiment since 1963. It is now part of Harris Insights & Analytics, a global consulting and market research firm that strives to reveal the authentic values of modern society to inspire leaders to create a better tomorrow. We work with clients in three primary areas; building twenty-first-century corporate reputation, crafting brand strategy and performance tracking, and earning organic media through public relations research. Our mission is to provide insights and advisory to help leaders make the best decisions possible.

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