

THE EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN IDENTITY

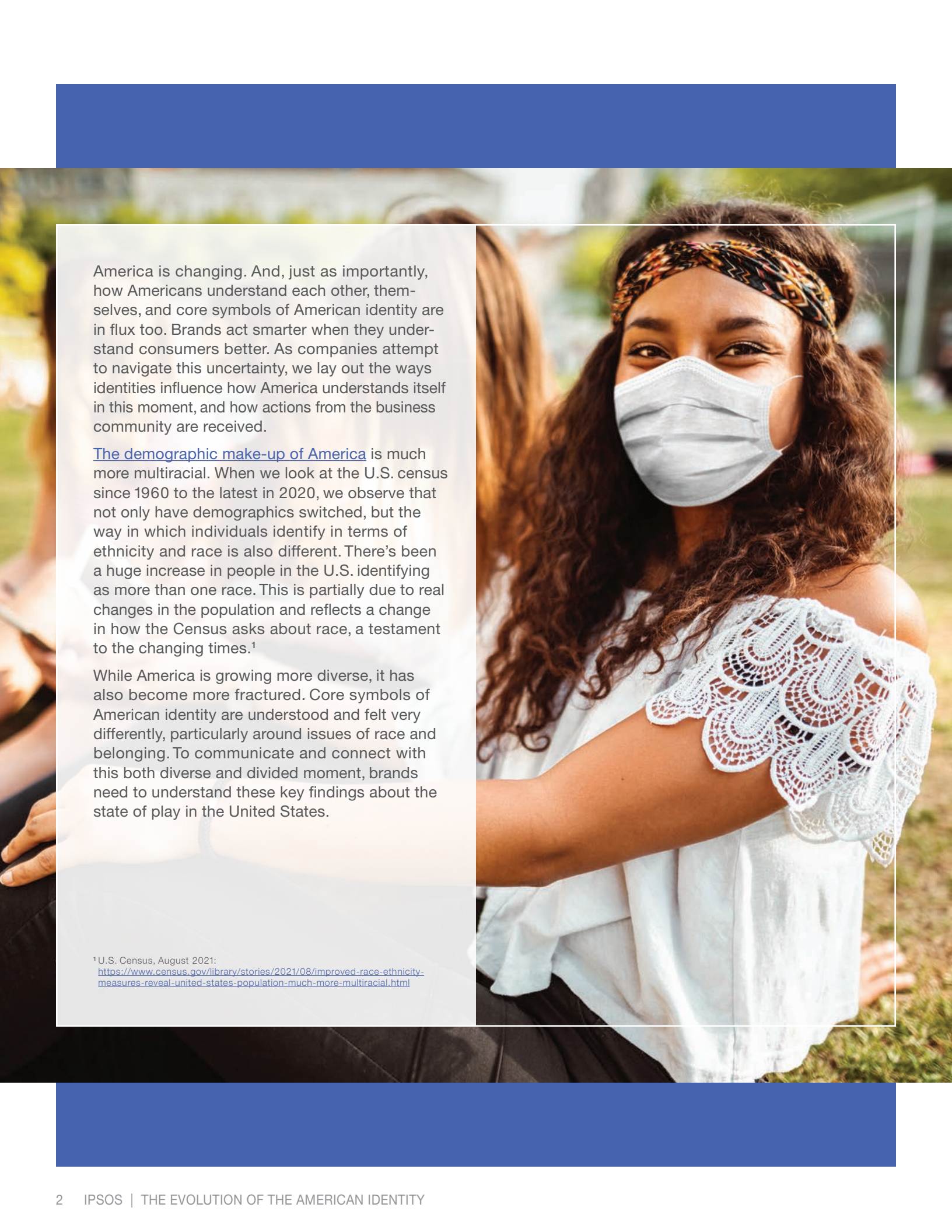
Implications for Brand Strategy

An Ipsos POV in Diversity & Inclusion

Authors: Manuel Garcia-Garcia, Sarah Feldman

GAME CHANGERS





America is changing. And, just as importantly, how Americans understand each other, themselves, and core symbols of American identity are in flux too. Brands act smarter when they understand consumers better. As companies attempt to navigate this uncertainty, we lay out the ways identities influence how America understands itself in this moment, and how actions from the business community are received.

[The demographic make-up of America](#) is much more multiracial. When we look at the U.S. census since 1960 to the latest in 2020, we observe that not only have demographics switched, but the way in which individuals identify in terms of ethnicity and race is also different. There's been a huge increase in people in the U.S. identifying as more than one race. This is partially due to real changes in the population and reflects a change in how the Census asks about race, a testament to the changing times.¹

While America is growing more diverse, it has also become more fractured. Core symbols of American identity are understood and felt very differently, particularly around issues of race and belonging. To communicate and connect with this both diverse and divided moment, brands need to understand these key findings about the state of play in the United States.

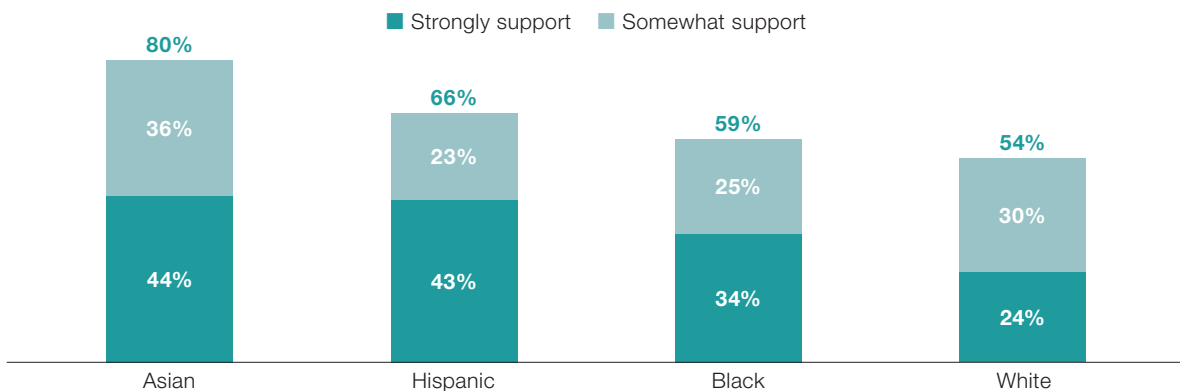
¹ U.S. Census, August 2021:
<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/improved-race-ethnicity-measures-reveal-united-states-population-much-more-multiracial.html>

Immigration central to American identity

Immigration is central to the American zeitgeist, though how immigrants fit into the public's conception of American-ness has changed in recent years. Compared to four years ago, fewer Americans now feel that immigrants are an important part of American identity (75% in 2018 vs. 62% now). Most recently, some groups of Americans hold immigrants as an important part of American identity more than others. Hispanic (66%) and Asian Americans (80%) are more likely than Black and white Americans to feel that immigrants are an important part of American identity, [NPR/Ipsos](#) polling finds. While this is true, Black (34%), Hispanic (43%), and Asian Americans (44%) are more likely than white Americans (24%) to strongly agree that immigrants are an important part of our American identity.

Asian, Hispanic people more likely to view immigrants as an important part of American identity

Percent who agree with the following statement: Immigrants are an important part of our American identity



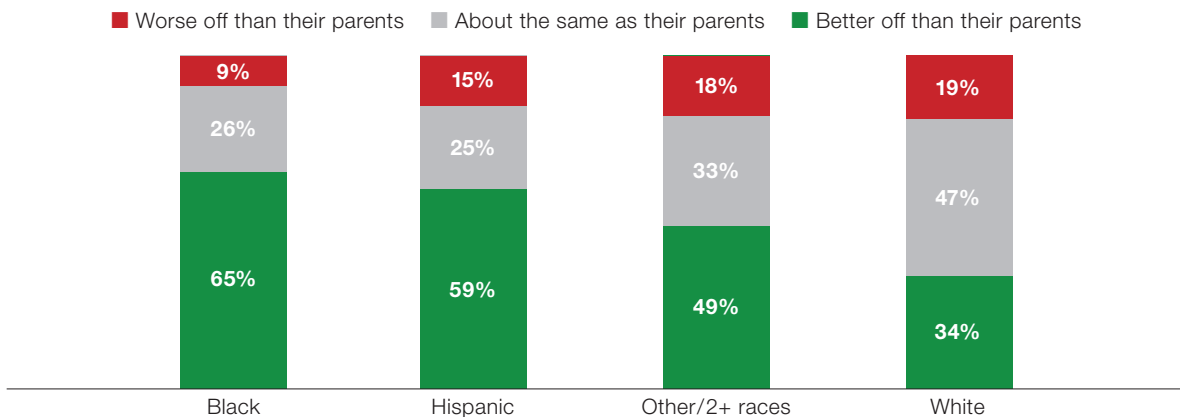
Source: NPR/Ipsos polling

The American dream: Doing better than your parents

An enduring symbol of America is the belief that you can do better than your parents. Though, testing this concept among various subsets of the public finds that not everyone believes in this idea. Black (65%), Hispanic (59%), and teens who identify with more than one race (49%) are much more likely to feel that they will do better than their parents compared to white teens (34%). Most white teens expect to do about the same or worse than their parents.

Non-white Americans more optimistic about their ability to succeed in life compared to their parents' generation

Percent who believe that compared to their parents' generation their opportunities to succeed in life are...



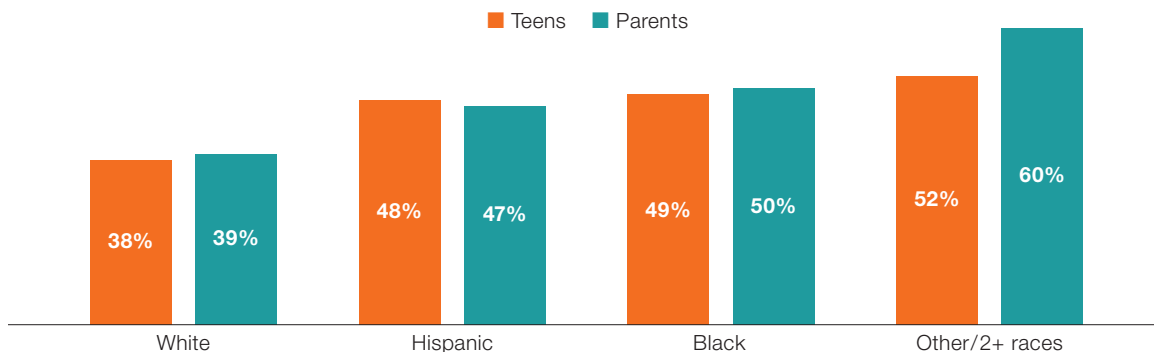
Source: Washington Post/Ipsos polling

Is the country doing better than before?

Connected to this concept of doing better than your parents is the hope that the United States is a place with a bright future. Here, too, important differences in how people understand the promise of America emerges based on race. People of color—both parents and teens—feel more confident about the future of the United States and feel like the country’s best days are ahead. Though, both white parents and teens are more concerned that the country’s best days are behind us.

White Americans least likely to feel that the country’s best years are ahead of it

Percent who are confident that the country’s best years are still ahead of us



Source: Washington Post/Ipsos polling

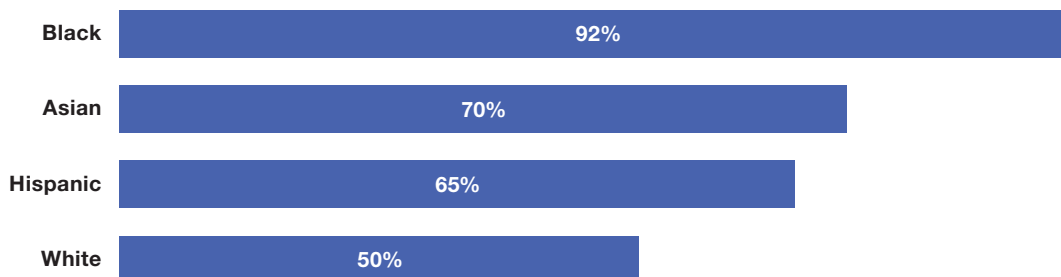
Race, America, and the past

Americans are divided on how to make sense of it’s past, present, and future relationship with racism, particularly the country’s deep-seeded, violent legacy of anti-Black racism. White Americans are divided on whether the country needs to continue making changes to give Black Americans equal rights with white Americans, [recent Ipsos polling with Axios finds](#). Majorities of Black (92%), Hispanic (65%), and Asian (70%) Americans agree that the country needs to continue making changes to give Black Americans equal rights with white Americans.

White Americans least likely to feel that the nation needs to continue to make changes to give Black Americans equal rights with white

Which statement comes closer to your own view if neither is exactly right?

Our country needs to continue making changes to give Black Americans equal rights with white Americans



Source: Axios/Ipsos Hard Truth Civil Rights & Social Justice survey of 1,875 Americans, conducted April 28–May 4, 2021

This diverging understanding of who America was and what it still needs to work towards extends to racial differences among teenagers. Racial discrimination and gun violence are the top issues for non-white teens. For white teens, the biggest problem they feel their generation is facing includes political division and the cost of healthcare, Washington Post/Ipsos polling finds.

Brand activism

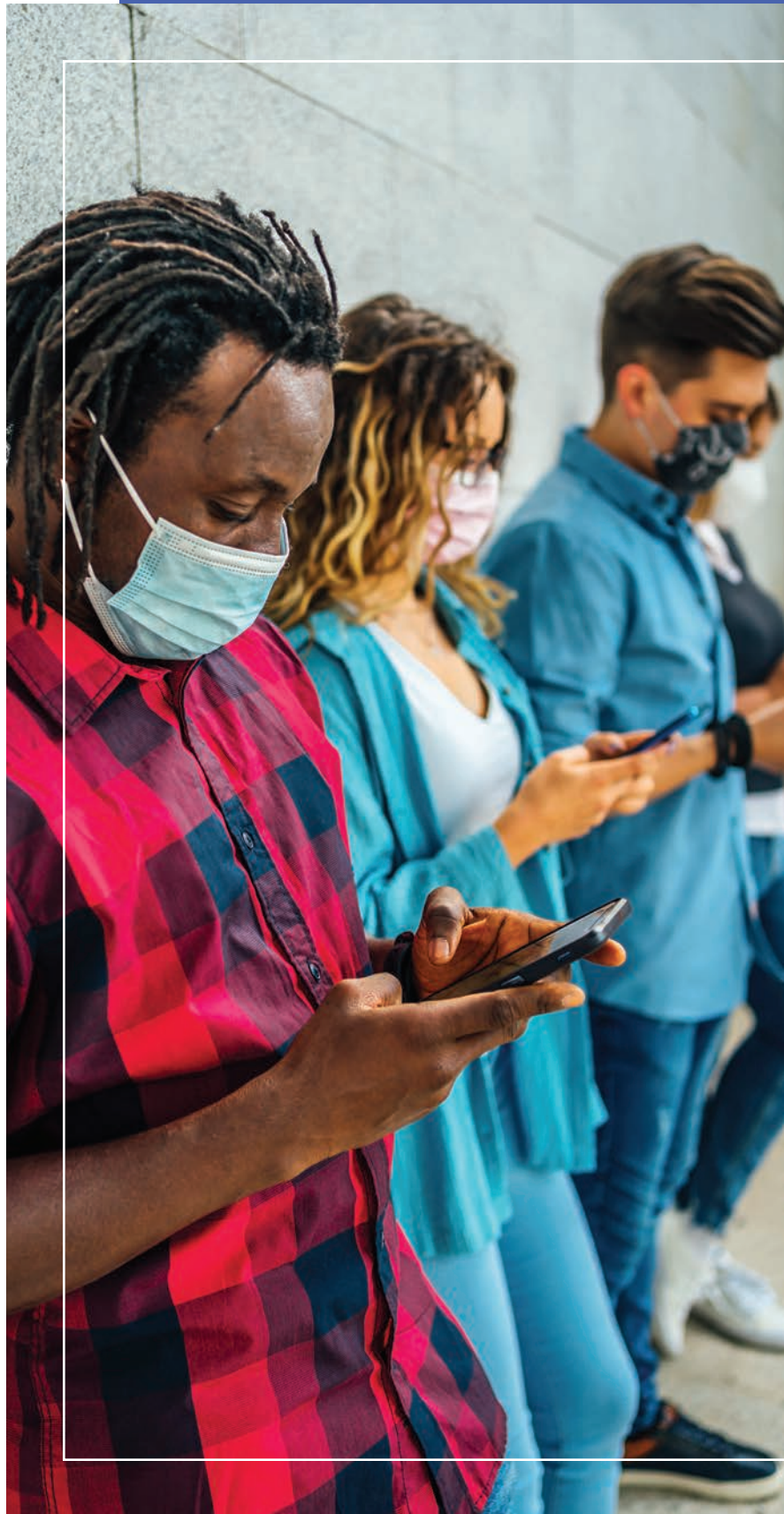
Because of the political and racial history of the U.S., symbols of American identity are understood very differently depending on someone's race: while non-white Americans are more pessimistic about the state of play in the country currently, they are more optimistic about the future of the U.S. In addition, perspectives on immigration, long a core part of American identity and ethos, is now only valued and seen as essential to American identity for certain segments of the population.

Given these deep, important undercurrents in American society, business leaders are increasingly speaking out on charged, politicized issues, such as racial justice or immigration, something that is largely seen as a positive by communities of color but divides white Americans.

As discussed above, perceptions on how Americans understand these issues vary widely based on who they are. This translates into how Americans understand the ways brands and figures in the public sphere communicate on these issues, particularly around race.

Overall, Americans are more receptive to business leaders or CEOs speaking out on issues around racial inequality than other figureheads, like politicians, [Axios/Ipsos polling finds](#). In particular, Black (70%), Asian (67%), and Hispanic (61%) people feel the communication coming from business leaders or CEOs on racial inequality is generally positive, while this splits white Americans, with 48% viewing this positively.

Much in the same way, Americans split on issues of where America has been and where the country is going. Here, too, people of different races approach company communication around racial justice in different ways. Black (54%), Hispanic (53%), and Asian (45%) Americans are more likely to purchase something from a company that's taken a stand on racial justice issues, while only 33% of white Americans would do the same. Conversely, white Americans are much more likely to feel that companies should remain neutral on political or social issues.





WHAT'S NEXT

1. As America's demographics change, it's important to understand how Americans think about their past, present, and future. These views frame how they think about brand communication around race.
2. Non-white Americans hold fast to many core American symbols, such as hope for doing better than their parents, and the belief that the country's best days are ahead.
3. Perhaps, because of their belief that America's future is brighter than its past, they also understand that America still has a lot of work to do on anti-Black racism, believing this is the case more than white Americans do.
4. The way Americans understand the legacy of racism influences how they view corporate communication and action around the issue. Brands communicating around racial justice and political issues need to understand the importance these issues hold, and the way corporate action (or inaction) can sway buying behavior.

The Authors

Manuel Garcia-Garcia

Global Lead of Neuroscience,
Global Science Organization, Ipsos
manuel.garcia-garcia@ipsos.com

Sarah Feldman

Data Journalist, Public Affairs
sarah.feldman@ipsos.com

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