

THE DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RACE/ETHNICITY IN AMERICA

An Ipsos Point of View
on Diversity & Inclusion

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GAME CHANGERS



For Americans, March marks the one-year anniversary of when COVID-19 really took hold of the national psyche, but its origins date back to January 2020. On January 9, China reported the first death attributed to COVID-19. Less than two weeks later, the U.S. identified its first case in Washington State. In late February, former New York Times health and science reporter, Donald G. McNeil Jr., predicted “some big chunk of the country” would likely get the virus, an early indication of the damage to come. Around this time, Ipsos began conducting regular surveys to track Americans’ experiences with and perceptions of the virus. By late March 2020, one in 10 people personally knew someone in the U.S. who had tested positive. At the end of the year, three in four did.

EARLY ON, COVID-19 WAS DUBBED THE GREAT EQUALIZER

As the pandemic continued, it became obvious that was false.

- COVID-19 has had a disproportionate effect on Black and Hispanic Americans compared to White Americans.
- Leveraging the data we have collected throughout the year, we wanted to provide insight into the disparities we uncovered. Here’s what we found.

COVID Health Perceptions

Extremely/Very/Somewhat concerned — Getting Sick



Concern over contracting the virus is the reality for a majority of Americans, regardless of their race/ethnicity. Although concern levels ebbed and flowed moderately throughout the year, one pattern remained constant — Black and Hispanic Americans continuously felt more concerned about getting sick.

Source: Ipsos-Axios Coronavirus Index

During the prelude to the pandemic (March 13–16), the Ipsos-Axios tracker began asking Americans what activities they had done in the past week. Half of White respondents (51%) reported visiting friends/relatives and 60% had gone out to eat. Hispanic Americans were the next most active, with 44% having visited friends/relatives and 57% having gone out to eat. Black Americans were a bit more cautious, with 38% visiting relatives/friends and 45% eating out. However, through the shock of late March (March 20–30) and bunkering of April (April 3–20), each group reported steep declines in these activities.



Black and Hispanic respondents have reported higher levels of risk for non-essential activities, such as attending in-person gatherings with friends/family and dining in at restaurants. This heightened sense of concern translates into real behavioral differences.

- As people began to adapt to their new reality (April 24–May 18), the narrative shifts. White, Black, and Hispanic Americans begin to reengage with their friends and family, although to different extents.
- In the coming weeks, from May 29 to June 8, White Americans were more likely to have visited friends/relatives and gone out to eat compared to Black and Hispanic Americans.

Job Security

1. COVID-19 has had disastrous implications for personal finances nationwide.
2. Starting in late March 2020, 74% of Hispanic Americans expressed concern over their job security, as did 52% of Black Americans and 43% of White Americans.
3. Throughout April, this concern grew more severely among Black respondents (+6%) than White respondents (+2%), while Hispanic respondents' concern remained extraordinarily high—70%.
4. By late May–early June, Hispanic and Black Americans were similarly concerned over their job security (58% and 57%, respectively), compared to 37% of White Americans.
5. The summer spike in cases renewed concerns over lock downs and job losses, peaking at 65% among Hispanic Americans, 62% for Black Americans, and 39% for White Americans.
6. From September through early February 2021, this disparity remained true, with the majority of Black and Hispanic Americans reporting concerns over their job security, compared to roughly one in three White Americans.

ACCORDING TO ANALYSIS BY GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, AT THE END OF MAY 2020, 50% OF HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCED LOST EMPLOYMENT INCOME

However, the same analysis, conducted by the University's Center on Education and the Workforce, showed income loss hitting Hispanic Americans hardest (65%), followed by Black Americans (57%) and finally, White Americans (46%). This aligns with what we found in national surveys throughout the year.





Lost wages and job insecurity created negative consequences for personal finances

Surveys conducted May 29–June 8 show 36% of Hispanic and 29% of Black Americans described the state of their personal finances as poor compared to 18% of White Americans.

This disparity reached its peak from July 10–August 24, 2020

More than twice as many Hispanic and Black Americans considered their finances in poor shape compared to White Americans (43%, 45%, and 21%, respectively).

Contributing to this pessimistic outlook on personal finances is the ability to pay bills

During the initial shock (March 20–30), 73% of Hispanic respondents expressed concern over their ability to pay bills, compared to 60% of Black and 44% of White Americans. This concern steadily declined among White Americans over the course of 2020, down to roughly one in three by the end of the year, while the majority of Black and Hispanic Americans remained concerned.

Another critical piece is the ability to afford housing

In surveys conducted March 20–30, 29% of Hispanic, 22% of Black, and 14% of White Americans indicated their ability to pay rent or their mortgage had become worse compared to the preceding weeks. Throughout 2020, this rate decreased across demographics, but remained more pronounced among communities of color. As of January 22–February 8 of this year, 18% of Hispanics, 16% of Blacks and 8% of Whites indicated their ability to pay rent or their mortgage had gotten worse in the last few weeks.



Efforts to combat the virus' spread and its financial ramifications must take into consideration the unequal experience of Black and Hispanic Americans.

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This article was produced by the Ipsos' Employee Resource Group for Anti-Racism, BRIDGE, created with the mission of active involvement and support for racial equality.

1. Americans suffered immensely throughout 2020 due to COVID-19—physically, socially, and financially.
2. For now, the threat remains real. However, some semblance of optimism is emerging.
3. The Ipsos-Axios Coronavirus Index found that, nearly a third of Americans think their physical health (32%) and personal finances (31%) will be much/somewhat better in 2021.
4. Efforts to combat the virus' spread and its financial ramifications must take into consideration the unequal experience of Black and Hispanic Americans.
5. Our hope is that by highlighting COVID-19's impact on these communities, we can help decision-makers start to bridge the divide.

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