

# SIGNALS

Understanding the  
coronavirus crisis

Sixth Edition

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May 2020

# INTRODUCTION – SIGNALS EDITION #6

The defining event of 2020 is the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) across the world. Things have moved quickly: the progression from outbreak to pandemic, the imposition of lockdowns around the world and, now, the gradual easing of restrictions.

The crisis sees governments, companies and individuals all having to respond to an unprecedented set of challenges, as they grapple with the implications of this “once in a century” event.

There are so many topics to watch and monitor over the coming weeks and months. Governments are under pressure to lead and inform. Businesses – large and small – have to make the right decisions for their employees and their customers. Meanwhile, people’s behaviours will be changing, in ways which may have longer-term implications beyond the immediate circumstances of the crisis.

Ipsos is committed to helping our clients navigate with confidence our world of rapid change, and this digest has been prepared to help us all better understand the dynamics of the current outbreak.

This sixth edition sees us bring together our latest research on coronavirus, drawing on the analysis of our teams around the world. We have sought to highlight our key learnings so far and started to identify how attitudes and behaviours around the world may be changing. For these reasons, we have adopted *Signals* as our title. You can download previous editions from the [Ipsos COVID-19 home page](#); please email [IKC@ipsos.com](mailto:IKC@ipsos.com) if you would like to subscribe to future editions.

You can keep in touch with our latest research on the Ipsos website and via our social media channels; your regular Ipsos contacts are on hand to discuss how we can support you to better understand coronavirus and its implications for us all.

# IN THIS EDITION:

## GLOBAL CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

Ipsos' index falls to lowest in ten years

Our latest monthly report finds economic optimism to be on the decline around the world as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Confidence levels are now the lowest recorded since our series started in 2010.

## FORECASTING IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Robust business planning remains key

Recent weeks have seen changes in what we buy, where we buy, when we buy, how we buy and who we buy for, even *why* we buy. We examine what this means for innovation in the consumer goods sector.

## AFFLUENT CONSUMERS DURING COVID-19

Moving on to a new stage in the journey?

The latest Affluent Consumer Survey research in the US finds people more optimistic and less anxious than those on lower incomes. It points the way to exploring where there are opportunities to capitalise on pent-up demand.

## MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Viewing and advertising patterns

With many more people around the world spending more time at home and out of their usual routines, coronavirus has changed media habits – both for news and entertainment. We look at reports from the UK, MENA and Italy.

## SPOTLIGHT ON TURKEY

Understanding society and consumers

Coronavirus is the greatest public concern in Turkey, with one in two reporting feeling anxious in the past few days. Our new report on society and the economy describes the latest changes in consumer behaviour.

## SPOTLIGHT ON RUSSIA

A longer-term view of what crises teach consumers

Any crisis is damaging economically and emotionally, but it also has a significant educational effect. New research from our team in Russia outlines five lessons we can learn from times of crisis.

## SPOTLIGHT ON CHINA

Optimism and anxiety – Wave 2

The domestic epidemic is gradually coming under control in China and 70% of the public expect it to be over by June. This second wave of our consumer research shows the latest developments.

## ITALY IN TIMES OF CORONAVIRUS

The latest public opinion research

The threat of coronavirus is gradually diminishing in Italy, but we find some hesitance and uncertainty as restrictions are eased. New analysis presents six issues to watch as Italy emerges from the immediate crisis.

# GLOBAL CONSUMER CONFIDENCE INDEX

Ipsos' index falls to the lowest point in its 10-year history.

Our latest monthly report finds economic optimism to be on the decline around the world. At 41.3, May's Ipsos Global Consumer Confidence Index is down 3.1 points from last month and 7.4 points compared to its pre-pandemic level of January. This marks the lowest level recorded at any time since its creation in March 2010.

From last month, 20 of the 24 countries have seen a drop of at least 1.5 points in their National Index. And seven countries experience a decline of 5 points or more: the US (-6.0), India, Poland and Spain (-5.5), Brazil (-5.3), Mexico (-5.1), and Canada (5.0). Only in mainland China (+1.4) and South Korea (+1.1) does consumer sentiment show some improvement.

Looking at these latest scores compared to January, every single country's National Index is down – and this fall has been particularly marked in the US, Israel, Mexico, Canada, Australia, and Poland.

See the consolidated economic indicators in our [interactive portal](#).

Meanwhile, the latest wave of our regular [coronavirus tracker](#) finds a majority in 9 out of the 16 countries comfortable with the prospect of returning to workplace. In contrast, only two countries are comfortable with children returning to school.

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# FORECASTING IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Considerations and actions before, during and after the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 has had a profound effect on the lives of people who have never before known scarcity or been subject to restrictions in freedom of movement. We have experienced changes in what we buy, where we buy, when we buy, how we buy and who we buy for, even *why* we buy.

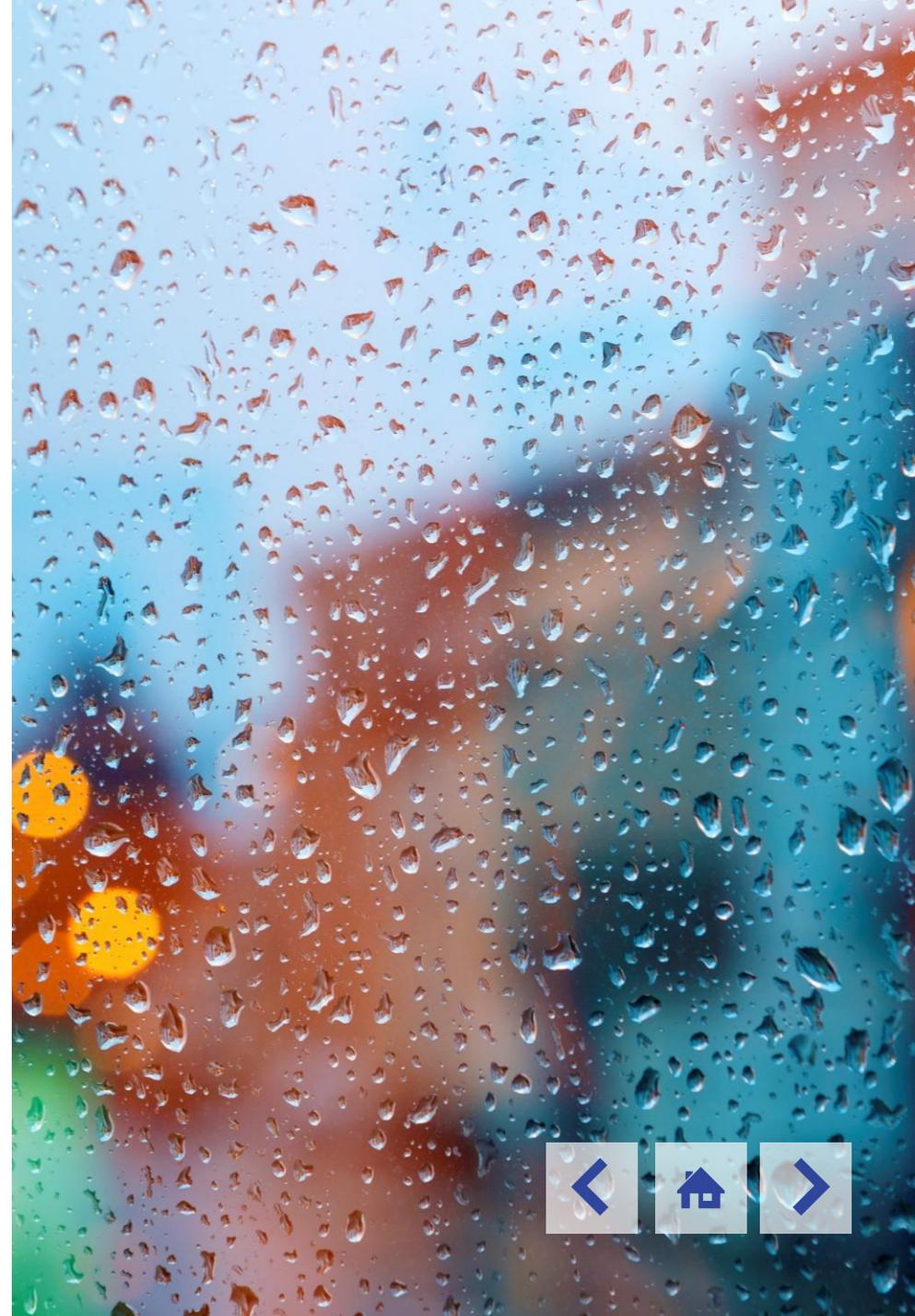
But what does this mean for marketers and researchers involved in innovation? In this paper we highlight some key lessons for forecasting, specifically for consumer-packaged goods, during coronavirus:

- Forecasting is as important as ever as in challenging times, robust business planning remains key.
- Review your forecast through new behaviour such as channel preference for eCommerce, new fulfilment models such as delivery and pick up, delayed purchase cycle, and lower consumer confidence.
- Always forecast multiple scenarios and be prepared to iterate and update, providing simulation capabilities for scenario planning using external variables beyond a marketer's control.

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# AFFLUENT CONSUMERS DURING COVID-19

How brands can fulfil their “pent-up demand”.

Affluent consumers can be more insulated from economic crises and among the first to rebound post-crisis, as the US Census and our Ipsos Affluent Survey data indicates.

The majority of this “crisis-proof” group are remaining calm and exhibiting lower levels of anxiety than non-affluent consumers. An overwhelming majority (80%) say they can weather the pandemic/come out unscathed, compared to just 50% of non-affluent consumers. In addition, Affluents are significantly more likely to describe themselves as cautiously optimistic/well prepared, exhibiting less anxiousness than those with lower incomes.

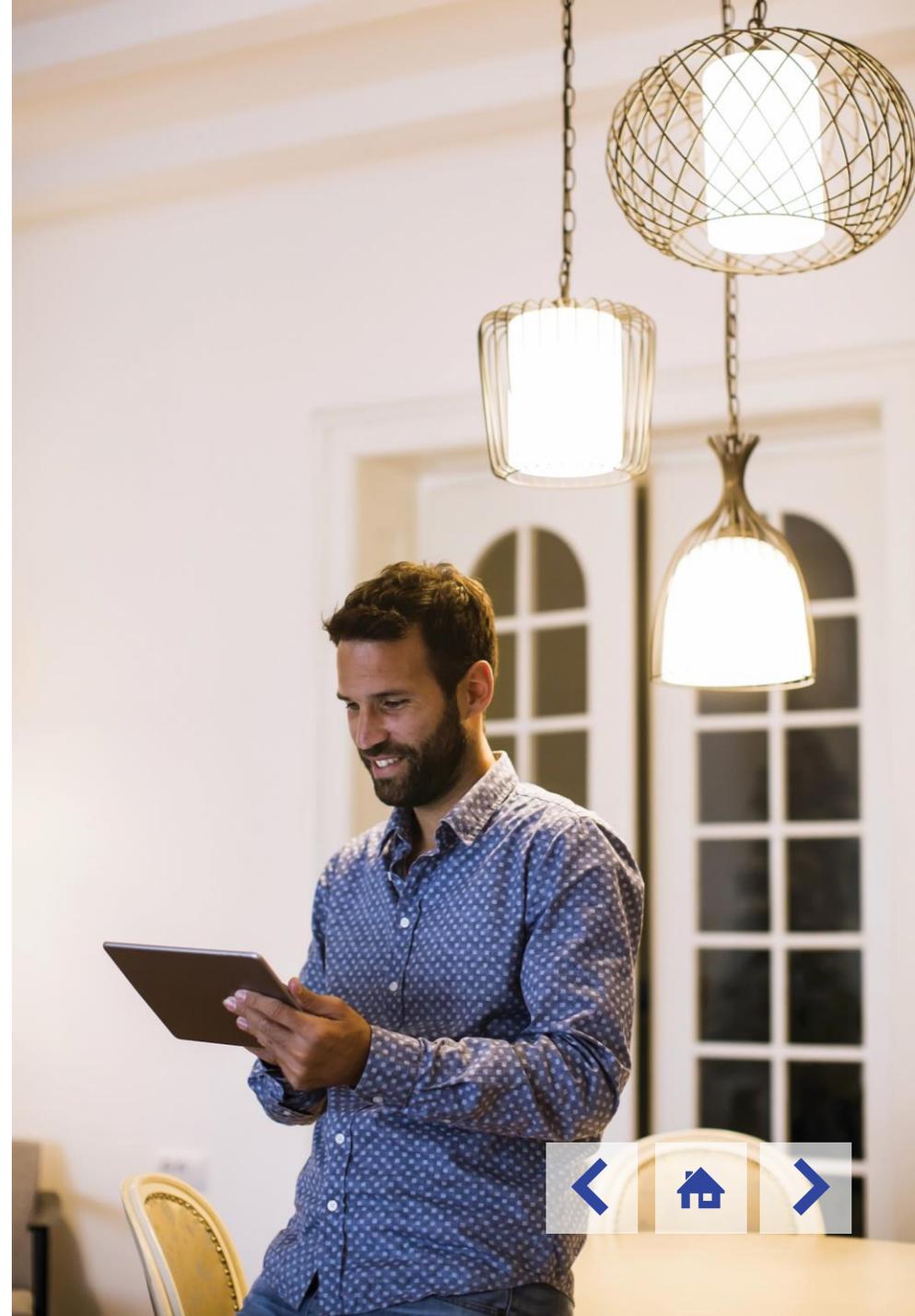
This research shows there are is a “pent-up demand”, with the intent to purchase increasing due to a current inability to buy. This is prevalent in multiple categories where we can see meaningful increases in potential demand compared to before the crisis. This includes intent to purchase a new car or truck, home goods and services, and apparel.

The next stage will be to explore where affluent consumers have moved into a more progressed stage of the COVID emotional journey – beyond initial stages of grappling with and settling into new routines and moving on to anticipating what’s next.

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# MEDIA CONSUMPTION

A look at viewing and advertising patterns during coronavirus.

As people stay home and TV viewing soars, a study of the first weeks of lockdown in the UK reveals how the pandemic is changing how and why we watch TV. To help understand these new behaviours, this [Ipsos MORI/Thinkbox real-time study](#) has been following 12 households as their routines, needs and viewing habits change week by week. Findings show TV is still a key source of comfort and a valued facilitator of family time. The report also reveals an increased appetite for more variation in TV creative – as long as brands are sensitive to the current context.

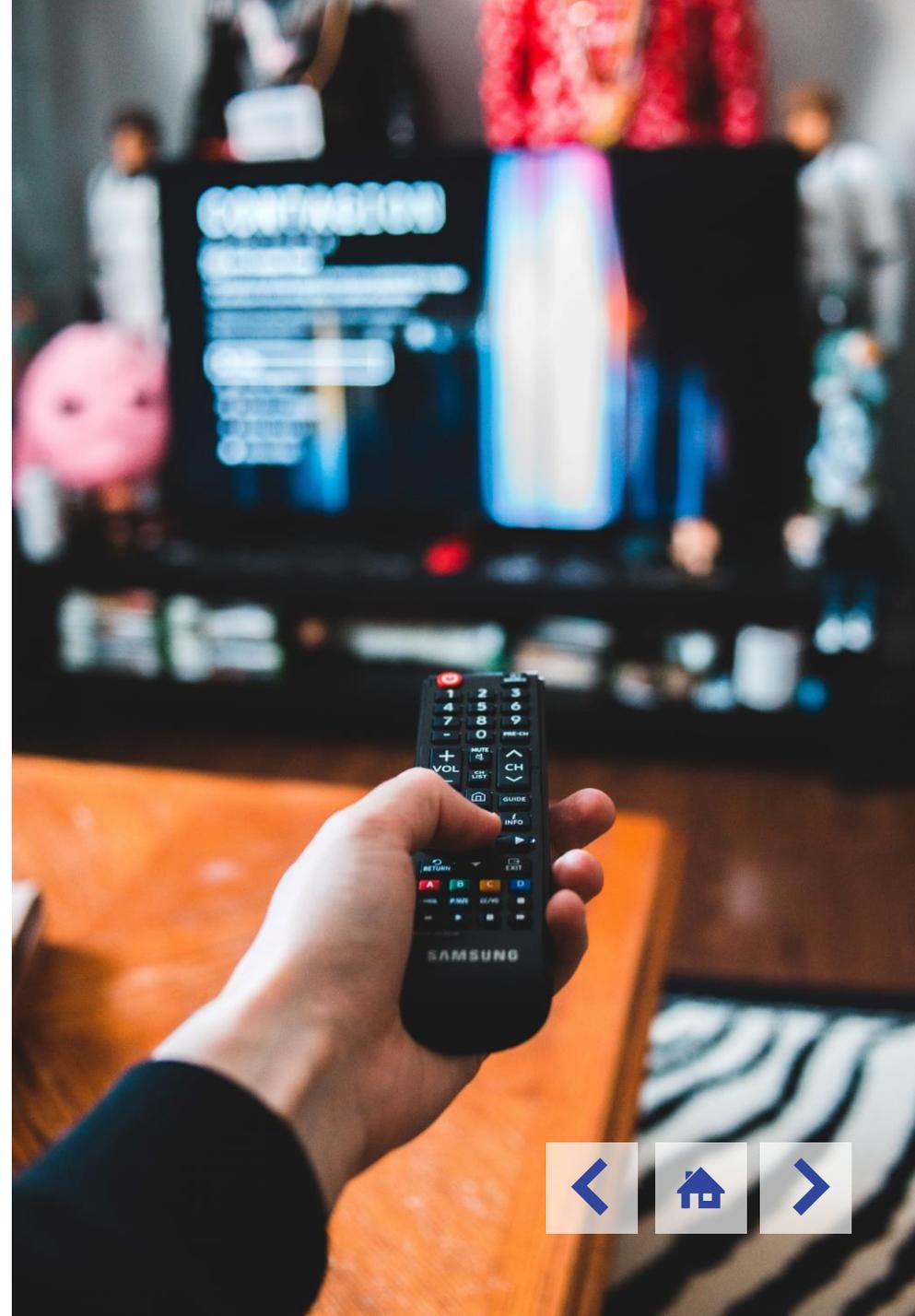
Meanwhile, in MENA, [our report](#) looks at the impact that evolving media consumption during the pandemic has had on the media advertising industry across 11 markets in the region. It includes a focus on the impacts on different industries, the shift from radio, print and outdoor advertising to TV and digital, and weekly trend comparisons of 2019 vs 2020 data.

And in Italy, we present an [overview of the media and digital landscape](#) in the country in the wake of the pandemic, including the role of social media in helping people to follow the news, share stories, and mobilise groups during the crisis. The report also examines the changing role for media brands, suggesting that the strongest ones will not only connect with audiences through content during these challenging times, but also demonstrate their continued relevance and ability to fulfil more enduring needs.

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# SPOTLIGHT ON TURKEY

New research reveals changes to society and consumer behaviour due to COVID-19.

Since the official announcement of the first coronavirus case in Turkey, our local team has been conducting research to understand changes to society as well as consumer behaviour change.

Key findings include:

- Coronavirus has surpassed economic concerns to become the biggest problem in Turkey today in the public view: 73% say the pandemic is the most important issue (down from a high of 84% in late March).
- Almost everyone (92%) is worried about themselves or someone close to them getting infected by coronavirus.
- Although levels of anxiety about the pandemic are decreasing, the latest survey results show that one in two still say they have been feeling anxious in the last few days.
- 42% think it will take over six months to bring coronavirus under control, but only 5% say that they can stand staying home for that long.
- The pandemic has had a drastic impact on households' FMCG spending behaviours, with hygiene products and staple food seeing the highest growth.

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# SPOTLIGHT ON RUSSIA

A longer-term perspective on how crises “train” consumers.

The economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic is the third downturn Russians have faced since 2008. Despite their different causes, these crises bring similar problems including outstanding debts and rising prices.

This analysis looks at how previous crises in 2008 and 2014 have affected consumers in the country and how we can use these learnings to better understand the economic situation in Russia now and going forward.

With each new crisis, shoppers develop new patterns of behaviour which allows them to navigate the disruption. By looking at the long-term data, the research finds that consumers in Russia do not make a complete return to their “previous normal”. Those hardest hit by the crises instead emerge “with a new version” of themselves.

The paper highlights five repeated lessons which we can see through each of the crises in Russia:

1. Stockpiling
2. Spend wisely
3. Re-evaluate
4. The value of health
5. Use new technologies

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# SPOTLIGHT ON CHINA

Greater polarization between optimism and anxieties as the country recovers from COVID-19.

The spread of COVID-19 throughout China has caused a huge downturn in multiple industries and changed consumer behaviour and perceptions. As the domestic epidemic is gradually coming under control – 70% of the public expect it to be over by June – our report shares the latest developments.

Key points include:

- The Chinese public's biggest concern about COVID-19 today is how it will damage the economy. But there is increasing confidence that economic development will resume in the second half of the year.
- COVID-19 has affected the personal incomes of 80% of the population in some way. Over 60% have returned to work (onsite) and nearly 90% are confident about resuming work.
- Consumer activity is likely to increase in the health, diet and education sectors but it is expected that non-essential purchases such as travel, luxury goods, entertainment and electronics will decrease by 60%.
- The public expect businesses to both take care of their employees and resume production.
- Looking beyond their borders, Chinese people support the country providing assistance and support to other countries as they deal with the pandemic, particularly those in Africa.

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# ITALY IN TIMES OF CORONAVIRUS

The latest in public opinion as Italy enters the third phase of easing the national lockdown.

As Italy continues to loosen restrictions and reopen society, the latest from our weekly tracker finds a gradual decline in the perceived threat of COVID-19 from Italians. But levels of concern are still high and only 30% say that the worst is over.

Other key points from the report include:

- There has been a slowdown in opinions favouring the re-opening of all activities in the past week.
- Twice as many Italians are concerned for their health as for the economy.
- Only four in ten say they are clear about what is allowed or prohibited during the latest phase of easing the lockdown.

Italians' trust in national government has grown during the COVID-19 emergency and a majority (six in ten) approve of government measures. But, [a new report](#) identifies six current issues that will affect the relationship between citizens and institutions and influence the politics of the future. These emerging trends, or "fractures", include prioritising public health vs. economic recovery and freedom vs control, in terms of restrictions and tracking apps, for example. They should continue to be monitored as public opinion shifts.

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# SHORTCUTS

## THE FUTURE OF FINANCE

Our US team has been looking at how the future of the finance industry will be impacted by the pandemic, asking experts from inside and outside Ipsos their perspectives.

The three articles look at the future of the sector from three different angles. The stories ask:

- [How will financial services change in the best-case timeline?](#)
- [How will the industry be impacted if not everything in the response goes well?](#)
- [If we fail to meet the challenge of coronavirus, how do you see the future unfolding?](#)

Meanwhile, new [polling from the US](#) finds Americans more willing to participate in essential activities and are less willing to do non-essential things or those that involve large groups of people.

A majority say they would go grocery shopping (91%) or go to work (71%), but only 29% would fly on a plane and 24% would go to a bar.

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## UPDATES FROM THE COUNTRIES

We recap more of the latest research and analysis from our teams in different parts of the world.

The majority of Britons (53%) continue to think the government should [prioritise public health](#) with more restrictions on public events, workplaces and travel, compared to just 11% who favour reducing restrictions in aid of the country's economic health. Hear more responses directly from members of the public in [week 5 of our Covid diaries](#).

A new report from [South Africa](#) outlines behavioural and attitudinal changes observed in the country throughout COVID-19, as well as a focus on retail and brands, social media analysis and a qualitative view based on the experiences of three South African individuals.

The Spanish public are between feelings of relief and fear in their [journey through the pandemic](#). Their greatest concerns are a return to confinement (84%) and a lasting economic crisis (78%).

Meanwhile, [our latest survey in Peru](#) shows the pandemic is having a clear financial impact on its citizens. Two-thirds have had reduced incomes, four in ten are currently not working, and two in ten have permanently lost their jobs.

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## IPSOS WEBINARS ON CORONAVIRUS

We have launched a range of webinars to help our clients gain greater clarity on the moving picture that is the coronavirus pandemic. Visit our [dedicated page of upcoming webinars](#) and catch up on those that have already taken place.

Recent features include [Auto purchase and usage behaviours in the US](#), looking at the impact and change COVID-19 is having on the automotive and mobility plans of consumers.

[Shaping the future – prepare for tomorrow, today](#) saw our team in Italy talk about the need for a forward-looking approach that incorporates the current emotional journey of consumers, new behaviours and new trends, and a look at how these can be used to develop high impact scenarios.

[Empathy and consumer centricity in the time of COVID-19](#) explains why the tenets and beliefs of cognitive empathy are more important than ever and, as brands try to understand what the new normal will look like, authentic cognitive empathy will have to lead the way.

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All the information within this document is in the public domain – and is therefore available to both Ipsos colleagues and clients.

We will be producing further editions of this document over the coming period; please email [IKC@ipsos.com](mailto:IKC@ipsos.com) if you would like to subscribe.

In the meantime our latest research will be shared on Ipsos' websites and social media channels; your regular Ipsos contacts are on hand to discuss how we can support you to better understand coronavirus and its implications for us all.

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