

# Navigating COVID-19

An in-depth conversation with American voters

**There's a lot of public opinion data out there right now about COVID-19, but less qualitative insight into what is behind the polling numbers.**

**The Glover Park Group hosted a conversation with Americans to see how they are feeling and how institutions, specifically brands, can help.**

- The Glover Park Group's Research and Insights practice conducted a 30-minute online caucus on March 23, 2020 among 210 news attentive and civically engaged voters nationwide.
- A caucus session functions similarly to an online focus group at scale, providing a space for in-depth discussion with traditional polling questions to quantify key topics.

# Key Insights



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**Business actions today will shape corporate reputation for years to come.**

**Americans say they will remember who stepped up and made sacrifices for the greater good.**

- Americans expect companies to change from business as usual: whether that's retooling manufacturing lines to make PPE and ventilators, changing what they do to support our most vulnerable neighbors, or increasing paid leave.
- Americans are judging brands based on who does what is right for the nation, even if that involves taking a hit to their bottom line. They want to see actions that show empathy for people up against the wall.

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**Coronavirus has put debates on the social safety net and paid leave front and center.**

**Americans want industries who receive aid to repay that goodwill in how they act and behave.**

- The negative impact already felt by hourly and service sector workers has amplified calls for greater protection, but it remains to be seen if these calls will last beyond the current crisis.
- This concern extends to the distribution of federal aid. Americans want promises to keep workers employed and on the payroll, as well as limits placed on executive pay and share buybacks.

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**Many worry about their health and the economy but prioritize the needs of those on the frontlines.**

**Americans are grateful for services of essential employees and medical professionals and demand we do more to support them.**

- Americans worry about physical health risks, mental health and well-being, and economic repercussions – both for themselves and their loved ones.
- However, Americans also worry about people outside their immediate circle. Medical professionals, retail and grocery workers, and delivery staff are seen as “soldiers” in a war. Americans are grateful for their service and demand we do more to look after them.

**Be deeply empathetic.**

Many Americans are anxious as they worry about loved ones and finances while dealing with the stress of social isolation. Always put yourself in their shoes.

**It's not business as usual, so don't communicate as if it is.**

This is a moment of crisis. Americans want to hear how businesses are doing what they can to protect those on the frontlines and keep their employees safe and secure.

**Identify what relevant capability or area of expertise you can deploy to play your part.**

Americans praise ingenuity and champion businesses that are retooling their supply chains or changing protocol to protect lives.

**Pass the loyalty test.**

Americans will measure you on how well you stick by your employees and customers – and reward those who give people a further hand up in these most challenging of times. Failure to show empathy will reverberate.

**Remember the lessons of 2008.**

Reactions to 2008 drove populism on the left and right. Americans understand the need to pass a major stimulus bill but expect supported industries to figuratively repay that trust in how they act and behave in the coming years.

## **In their own words:**

**“This is your chance to make or break your company. It doesn't matter how successful it's been all this time. If you do the right thing you will be remembered positively, and the business will have the trust of the people after all of this is over.”**

# Detailed Insights



## Americans see coronavirus as a real threat; anxiety is pervasive.

- 65% of Americans feel they are doing a lot to flatten the curve but worry others are not doing the same. This sentiment is more pronounced among Democrats (74%) than Republicans (51%).
- As daily routines are upended, a sense of collective anxiety has set over the nation. People worry about the health and financial security for themselves, loved ones, and workers.

**“I worry about not getting my job back, or not getting it back in time and running out of paid leave. I also worry about getting my elderly parents sick. My dad already had pneumonia a few months ago and almost died. I think he wouldn't make it.”**

Do you think the coronavirus outbreak is a real threat or blown out of proportion?

How do you feel about the response from individual Americans to the coronavirus outbreak?

**72%**

Real threat  
(% 8-10)

**24%**

In between  
(% 3-7)

**3%**

Blown out of proportion  
(% 0-2)

**65%**

Not reacting  
strongly enough

**26%**

Reacting  
appropriately

**9%**

Overreacting



## People shared candid concerns about friends, family.

- Roughly seven-in-ten list the risk of getting sick or losing friends or family as a top concern.

The risk of getting sick or losing a friend or family member to the virus	72%
Damage to the U.S. economy as businesses are forced to shut down	72%
Rising unemployment rates as businesses are forced to shut down	59%
People struggling to make mortgage and rent payments next month	48%
Rising financial insecurity among minimum wage and hourly workers	47%
Limited access to essential medical supplies for physicians	45%
Limited access to basic services and goods at stores	41%
Limited access to testing and medical support for patients	33%
The toll that social isolation will have on Americans' mental health	26%
Rising pressure on workers to balance remote work and childcare	20%

- Most talk about their concerns in the third-person, describing the potential of losing parents and grandparents, or worrying about whether workers who lose their jobs will be able to make ends meet.
- Others worry that the dual stress of social isolation and financial uncertainty will lead to mental health issues for people across the country.

**“My mother is a nurse in her late sixties so I am very concerned about her becoming infected and the health implications that would come with that.”**

**“I am worried about my mental health. I am lucky. I am in a good economic situation. I have health care and a safety net. But staying home is hard. I live alone and my family is 2000+ miles away.”**

## Equal concern over health risks and the economy.

- Anxiety for small businesses, the unemployed and hourly workers also rank high among concerns related to the outbreak.
- Concern for the wellbeing of others, especially the underserved and vulnerable, is particularly top-of-mind as Americans see businesses closing and people around them losing jobs.

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- Fears of long-term economic consequences are real.

**52%** Anticipate an economic **recession**

**30%** Anticipate an economic **depression**

**“I worry about not being able to bounce back financially. I have 3 kids and need to provide for them, and my industry segment is basically shut down.”**

**“I worry the most about hourly employees making minimum wage. They were struggling enough as it was before the virus. Now, their hours have been reduced if not eliminated.”**

## There is consensus that sheltering in place is key to protecting American lives and the economy.

- Americans prioritize human lives over the economy.
- Many also argue that we cannot successfully restart the economy until we contain the virus.
- If we don't shelter in place, it extends the outbreak and worsens the economic impact.

**“We can't restart our economy until we have addressed and overcome the virus. The economy is going to keep hurting if we don't get the coronavirus under control. Other measures can be put in place, though.”**

**“We need to isolate ourselves and slow the spread as much as possible. Look at Italy. It is ranked #2 for healthcare globally! We're ranked #35. So many people will die if we do not slow the spread.”**

**“Sheltering in place is more important. That is going to stop the spread of the virus and save lives. The longer the virus is active, the greater financial impact there will be.”**

**“Shelter in place for now and rebuild later. Money is optional. Lives are not.”**

## Americans share gratitude for workers of all kinds standing on the front lines.

- As the rest of the country stays home, gratitude runs deep for doctors and nurses, grocery store workers, mail and delivery workers, and others that deliver essential services. Essential employees are seen as “soldiers” on the frontlines of a war, putting themselves at risk to support their communities.
- But people worry we are not going far enough to support essential workers in return. Americans call on businesses and the government to ramp up production of medical supplies, N95 masks, and other personal protective equipment (PPE) – terms that are now part of our national vocabulary.

**“The minimum and low wage workers at grocery stores, gas stations, and similar places of work are at higher risk and not getting help. They need financial grants at least.”**

**“The needs of medical workers, our doctors and nurses who are risking everything [are getting overlooked].”**

**“They need masks, hand sanitizer, more breaks to deal with hygiene, support from the supervisors, and just anything that will make having to be on the front lines a little easier.”**

## Americans are paying close attention to worker protections and paid leave.

- Paid leave and worker pay top the list of actions Americans want to see businesses take to ease the crisis, but many support this out of circumstance and it remains to be seen if this support will extend beyond the current crisis.

Provide paid sick leave to their employees	82%
Continue to pay their workers (even if normal operations and business shuts down)	81%
Require all employees who are able to work from home to protect their personal health and help slow the curve	72%
Make immediate payments to suppliers and smaller companies they rely on to maintain operations and supplies	50%
Retool their factories and supply chains to meet new needs like medical masks and ventilators	43%
Give workers cash bonuses	40%
Give customers more time to make large payments	39%
Use their voice in the media and social platforms to educate the public about stopping the spread of coronavirus	27%
Protect profitability for shareholders that own their stock in 401ks and other investment vehicles	16%

**“I think [the paid leave legislation passed by Congress] is a vital step to protect physically and economically vulnerable people in American society. It should be the new standard for our social safety net which has always been inadequate.”**

**“This idea [for paid leave] is fine but only for the COVID-19 crisis. It should not stay if the company did not offer the benefit [before].”**

## Big businesses get a passing grade in how they have responded, but many want to see more.

Credit given for positive changes:

- ✓ Instituting remote work policies and shifting away from business as usual
- ✓ Easing financial stress through paid leave, bonuses, delayed payments, and refunds
- ✓ Retooling manufacturing facilities to make lifesaving medical equipment and supplies for health care workers and hospitals

Biggest concerns include:

- ✓ Refusing to close shop
- ✓ Denying workers paid sick days
- ✓ Financial institutions not offering mortgage, loan or credit relief

Coronavirus response:

**42%**  
give an  
**A or B grade**

**24%**  
give a  
**C grade**

**27%**  
give a  
**D or F grade**

## **Businesses' responses today will shape brand perceptions for years to come.**

- Put people and the nation first. Americans expect big businesses to empathize with the public and contribute to the greater good, even if it means taking temporary hits to their bottom lines.
- Now is seen as a time for unity and sacrifice, not corporate self-interest.
- Americans talk about remembering not only those who step up during times of crisis, but also those who fall short.

**“We are in a time of crisis. What they do now will have long-lasting results for their brand identity. Do not overprice things. Help those as much as you can. You may take a financial hit now, but it will pay off.”**

**“They should work in an altruistic manner, balancing the welfare of their employees and stakeholders with the country as a whole. Economic losses can be recovered from fairly quickly, but a horrendous reputation is very tough to recover from.”**

**“Leverage your economies of scale and do what’s right now. By doing so, you build brand trust which will benefit your business after this is over. You benefit from the community. Now it’s time to give back to those who gave so much to you.”**

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## **Companies are expected to act in a way that serves the greater good.**

Americans recall and praise examples of companies that have stepped up to the plate:

Companies that have retooled manufacturing processes to provide needed supplies

**“The automotive industry is stepping up to produce needed items.”**

Stores that have adjusted hours and are working to keep food on shelves

**“Businesses like supermarket chains and grocery stores have stepped up in keeping their doors open and supplying their community with food and resources.”**

Companies that continue to hire and provide jobs to workers

**“Businesses that provide extra pay for hours worked and are trying to hire temp workers during the crisis are stepping up.”**



## Americans will be sensitive to any perception of companies increasing prices at this time.

- Some voters accept the need for prices to rise so companies can generate revenue and stay in business, but there is a stronger moral objection to profiting off a national crisis.
- With resources pressed, time tight and financial insecurity widespread, Americans look for companies to put people and the country first.
- Corporate messaging that speaks to the need to keep revenue flowing to protect the economy and company profitability has potential to backfire and raise alarm about price gouging. Americans see this as a time to sacrifice and pitch in, not to discuss what is best for your bottom-line.

**“Not everyone has money at this time. Anything essential needs to be minimally priced as it may save lives.”**

**“Keep in mind that everyone is now on a budget and that they aren't making as much. Also keep in mind that people remember which companies gouged and which companies helped.”**

**“Businesses need to avoid price gouging. The priority should be helping save lives and stabilizing the economy, not profit.”**

## Federal government's response falls short, but views vary by political persuasion.

- Americans do not believe the Administration has done enough to shore up the health care system, leaving hospitals without ventilators and beds, and health care professionals without PPE.
- **But the partisan divide endures:** Negative views are predominantly held by Democrats. Republicans express more confidence in the President's staff to guide him to the right decisions and some blame Democrats for blocking the stimulus package.
- Among all Americans, roughly seven-in-ten (69%) want to see the government use its authority to direct businesses to increase production of supplies and resources that are in short supply.

**“The government knew the threat to our country and did the minimal amount to prepare. Now we have PPE shortages and overrun hospitals. We could have changed that.”**

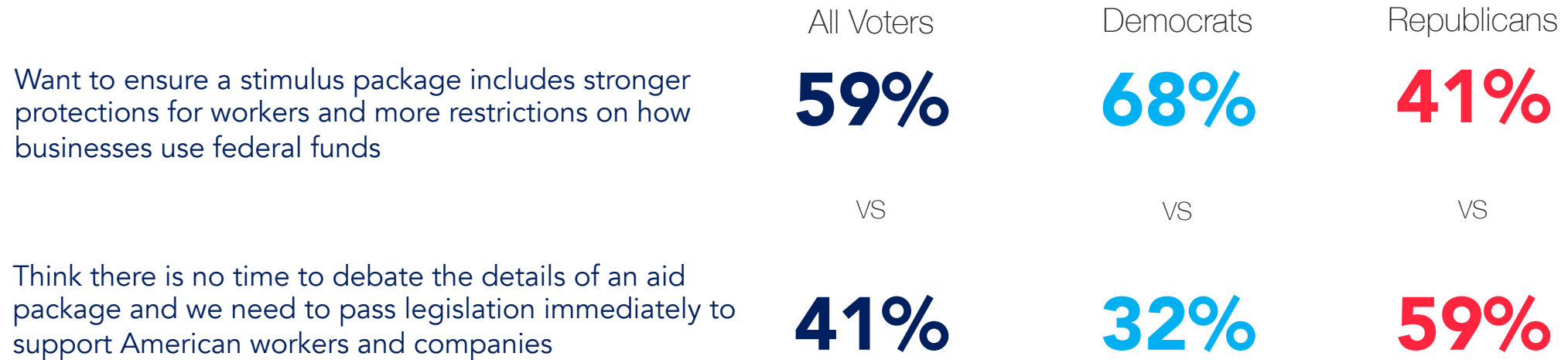
Coronavirus response:

**48%**  
give the federal government a  
**D or F grade**

66% among Democrats  
15% among Republicans

**81%**  
rank supporting  
hospitals and doctors  
as a top priority for  
the government to  
address

## Debates in Congress about the stimulus package are viewed through the prism of 2008 and partisan loyalties.



Despite partisanship, some points of consensus emerge on the details of federal aid:

- A plurality of Democrats and Republicans want to ban buybacks, limit CEO pay, and require businesses to maintain payrolls.
- Both parties also prioritize federal aid for hospitals (78%), small businesses (60%) and restaurants (53%). Airlines are next in line.

## State and local government responses pass the test.

**“The Governor of Kentucky has done a fantastic job. He is calm, decisive and forward-thinking. He has done a great job taking proactive steps to stop the spread compared to surrounding states.”**

**“I think Governor Cuomo is doing a good job being in control of the situation and keeping the citizens informed. My local mayor is also calling daily with updates.”**

**“Governor Mike DeWine has done a great deal of taking action and shutting down schools. He has also released a stay at home order.”**

Coronavirus response:

**63%**  
of **ALL VOTERS** give an  
**A or B grade**

**61%**  
of **DEMOCRATS** give an  
**A or B grade**

**66%**  
of **REPUBLICANS** give an  
**A or B grade**

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## Research reveals emerging issues that could rise in the national agenda.

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### Manufacturing

- The current environment makes some think about increasing our manufacturing presence and American-only supply chains.

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### Education

- Parents express fear about the long-term impact on education and widening the achievement gap.
- School closures shine a light on the important role of technology in education and inequities related to access.

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### Mental health

- As more Americans endure isolation, concerns about mental health and community ties have surfaced.

Email [research@gpg.com](mailto:research@gpg.com) for more insights specific to your organization, company, or industry, or how our Caucus platform can provide a read on Americans' attitudes.



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