



**The Listening
Project**



The Harris Poll



Global Priorities According to Global Citizens

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

Early in the weeks of 2020, The Milken Institute and The Harris Poll launched a research program called The Listening Project to survey the most urgent needs and challenges of people around the world. In February, we asked over ten thousand people in twenty-seven countries “what needs if met, would have the greatest impact in your life and that of your family and community?” We asked people to rank forty-eight different social and economic priorities in the form of everyday challenges in life, from urban congestion and overcrowding to gun violence, internet access and clean drinking water.

And as we were analyzing the findings, the

pandemic arrived. In the ensuing months, as the extent of COVID-19’s dislocation and devastation became apparent, we decided to replicate the fieldwork (see fig 01). In comparing our data from the relatively speaking, ‘halcyon days’ of February 2020, we could see how COVID-19 had changed people’s lives. We surveyed an additional nineteen thousand people in twelve countries from our original study, including a special focus on six nations where the impact of COVID-19 was especially cruel. The resulting study, among a total of nearly thirty-thousand people globally, offers a window into new priorities, intersecting needs and urgent problems that we posit might be approached in new ways.

FIGURE 1

29,125 people in 27 countries

February 2020



	February 2020	September 2020
Audience	10,125 adults	19,000 adults
Number of Countries	27	12

KEY FINDINGS

There is a leadership crisis around the world

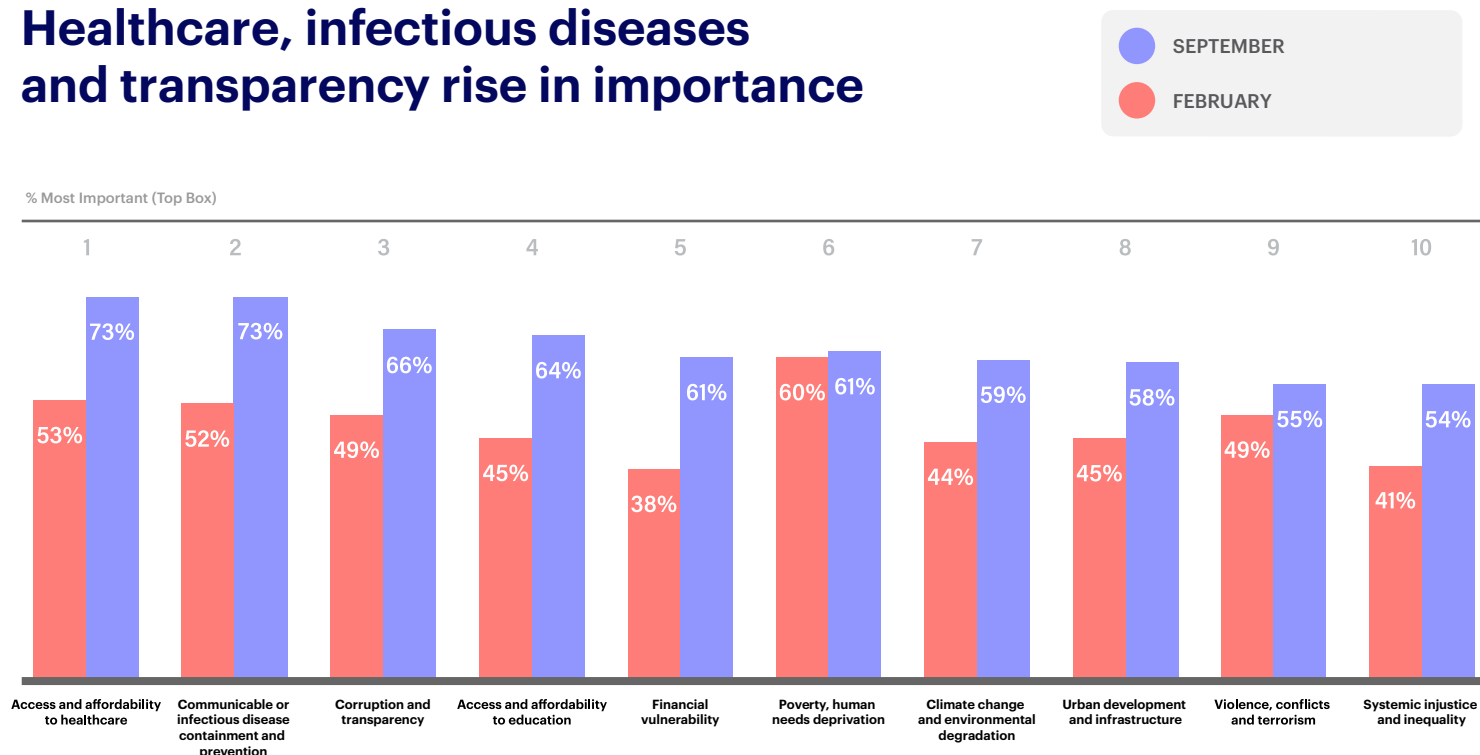
While COVID-19 is not only a virus of public health, it also has been a contagion across many other socio-economic challenges, while weakening the response of many government institutions. In the new priorities from data collected in September (fig 02 below), we see the issue of **corruption and transparency** rise to the third most urgent problem (it was #5 in February), following only the immediate priorities directly related to the global pandemic; **access and affordability to healthcare** and **communicable/infectious disease containment and prevention**, which tied as the top two priorities on the list.

Our findings demonstrate the lack of support for how countries have handled COVID-19 is widespread, as misinformation, incompetence

or indifference marked the performance of several governments in the eyes of their citizens. Countries also burdened by severe economic strain found themselves lacking resources in healthcare, education and food assistance. From poor PPE and contact tracing planning to inconsistent public guidance, more than half of the respondents in nine of the twelve countries surveyed in September did not strongly support their country's handling of the pandemic. Only (29%) strongly support the country's response. Globally, (71%) of respondents said "this is the lowest point in my country's history" and nearly two-thirds of people around the world (63%) say their "leaders are out of touch with the rest of the country," while (62%) say "the people running the country don't really care what happens to me."

FIGURE 2

Healthcare, infectious diseases and transparency rise in importance



Priorities have shifted to reflect these concerns; in February, **poverty and deprivation of human needs** was the number one human issue, yet seven months later, **access and affordability to healthcare** and **communicable/ infectious diseases** are now tied at the top. As a revealer of the lack of basic access and protections that most people face, there seems to be a reckoning that the systems in many countries aren't working to protect the public's health.

The pandemic has also revealed underlying structural problems in society that are creating urgent stress in people's lives. One of the more

vulnerable and contentious issues in how leaders have handled COVID-19 is the impact of countries' mitigation strategies on education. As national lockdowns swept the globe, students and teachers faced an unfamiliar (and often un-accessible) world of virtual learning with little to no guidance. Without a roadmap from leadership to uphold education systems amid a pandemic, we saw **access and affordability to education** increase to #4 (it was #7 in February) with (64%) of people globally agreeing it is an urgent issue to solve for them personally.

Financial vulnerability marks biggest increase in urgency

The biggest increase in urgency is **financial vulnerability**, ranked #5 globally (up from #10 in February). With global economies in flux, financial vulnerability (61%) rose more than 20 percentage points as over eight in ten people (86%) globally now say we are in a global recession and nearly a third (33%) say their country will go into a recession

within six months. And most personal and worrisome is that nearly seven in ten (69%) still fear losing their job due to the pandemic. In every country surveyed, at least two thirds of respondents assessed the economic impacts of the pandemic will have a bigger effect on their lives than the virus itself.

The pandemic amplified all socio-economic challenges

While our collective priorities have been rearranged by the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly every issue has gained intensity from February to September; corruption and transparency (66%, +17 pts), access and affordability to education (64%, +19 pts), poverty and deprivation of human needs (61%, +1 pts), climate change and environmental degradation (59%, +15 pts), urban development and infrastructure (58%, +13 pts), violence conflicts and terrorism (55%, +6 pts), and systemic injustice and inequality (54%, +13 pts).

In addition, our study illustrates the pervasiveness of COVID-19's impact that

elevated these problems to the world's doorstep; nearly 7 in 10 (68%) say the pandemic has changed their life in a major way.

"COVID-19 worsened every socio-economic challenge that we tracked, illustrated by the fact that nearly 7 in 10 (68%) say the pandemic has changed their life in a major way," said John Gerzema, CEO of The Harris Poll.

Examining the Top 5 Socio-Economic Challenges Among Countries Hit Hardest by COVID-19

Using Johns Hopkins statistics, we examined our data among six countries with the highest cases and/or deaths as well as rising new cases of COVID-19. These include Brazil, India, Italy, Mexico, U.K., and U.S. In our study, we observed a notable increase in urgency to address **infectious diseases** (up 12 percentage points or more in importance across all countries) with India marking the largest increase in urgency to address infectious diseases with +26 percentage points from (47%) in February to (73%) today.

India also marked the largest increase in urgency to address **access and affordability of healthcare** with an increase of 27 percentage points from (48%) in February to (75%) today. Mexico also showed a stark increase in importance for **access to healthcare**, rising 24 percentage points from February. Notably, the issue to see the biggest increase in urgency across these six countries is **financial vulnerability**—as we saw COVID-19







exacerbate economic inequalities across the globe. India again marked the largest increase in importance with a 30 percentage point increase followed by Mexico (+28 percentage points) and Brazil (+25 percentage points). This was also the biggest issue to rise in urgency for the U.S. (+16 percentage points).

And as these countries looked to their leaders to guide them, we also saw the issue of **corruption and transparency** rise with Italy and Brazil showing the biggest increase in importance (+22 and +21 percentage points respectively).

“The Listening Project confirms the most urgent global priorities for which we and our partners across corporate, government, and philanthropic sectors must develop solutions,” said Richard Ditizio, President and COO of the Milken Institute.

FIGURE 3

Examining the top 5 issues among countries hit hardest by COVID-19 September 2020

						
Change in % Most Important from February to September	BR	IND	IT	MEX	UK	US
Access and affordability of healthcare	+19%	+27%	+17%	+24%	+15%	+14%
Communicable or infectious disease containment and prevention	+12%	+26%	+17%	+18%	+17%	+13%
Corruption and transparency	+21%	+17%	+22%	+16%	+2%	+13%
Access and affordability to education	+27%	+25%	+20%	+26%	+8%	+11%
Financial vulnerability	+25%	+30%	+20%	+28%	+16%	+16%

Connected Challenges

Within the top five challenges there is another socio-economic theme to emerge; the following graph (fig 04) shows how the personal needs of people around the world first appeared in clusters that range from personal to societal; health-focused to social needs for freedom, recognition and identity. Upon closer

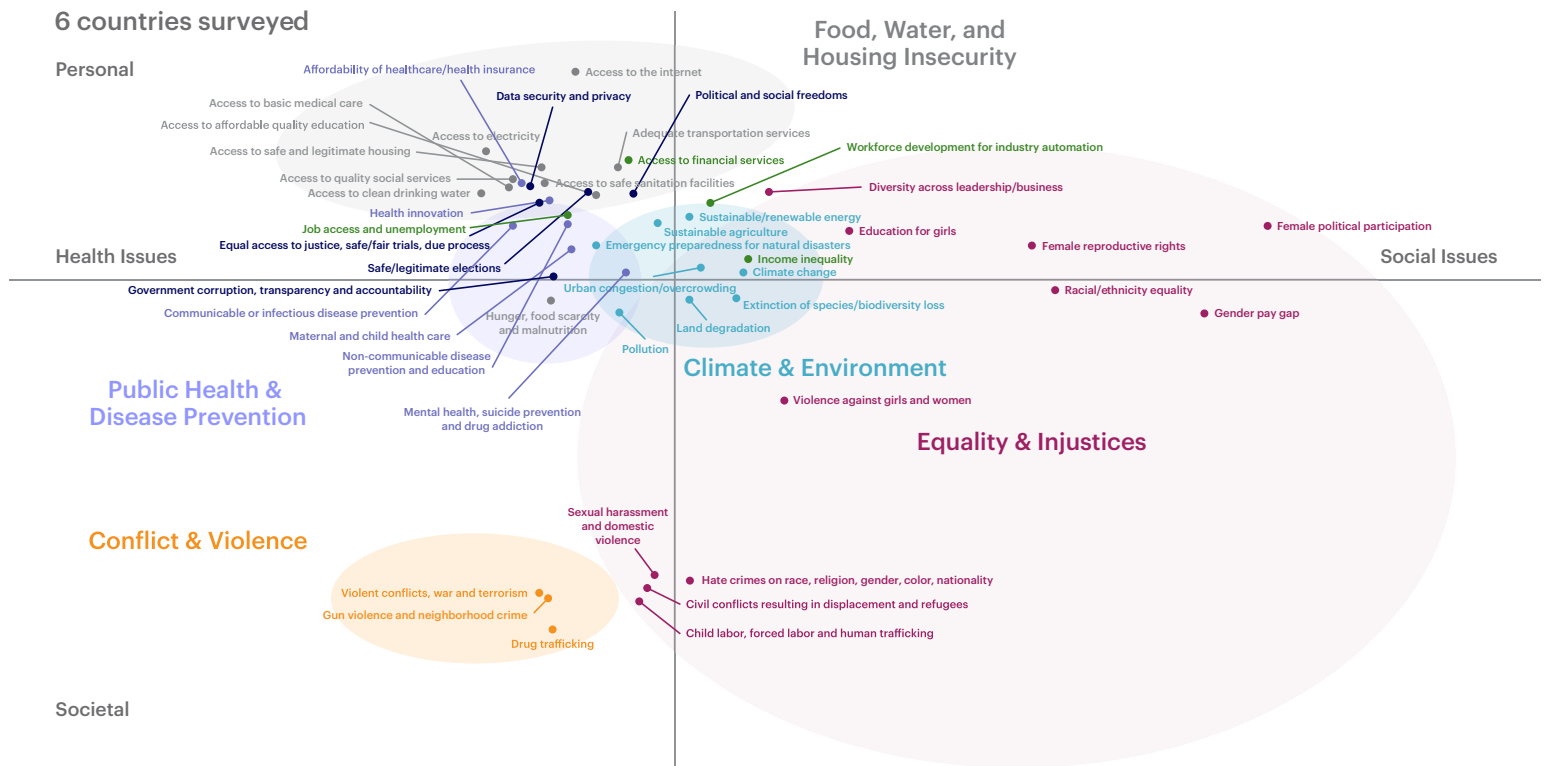
examination (see fig 05) we see that in the most COVID-19 distressed countries the re-focused needs are no longer neatly divided along the lines of macro and micro; but instead we see how COVID-19 connected and amplified crises in economics, health and social identity.

FIGURE 4

Pre-pandemic, issues were more siloed

February 2020

6 countries surveyed



Now disease prevention is more closely linked with affordability of healthcare, and access to education moves closer to access to financial services. Government transparency, a casualty in COVID-19, has ignited the desire for political freedoms and safe and legitimate

elections elevating it from a societal to a personal issue. And equality is blended with financial security, job access education and internet (online) access. The pandemic has set off three challenges at once and people now see them that way as well.

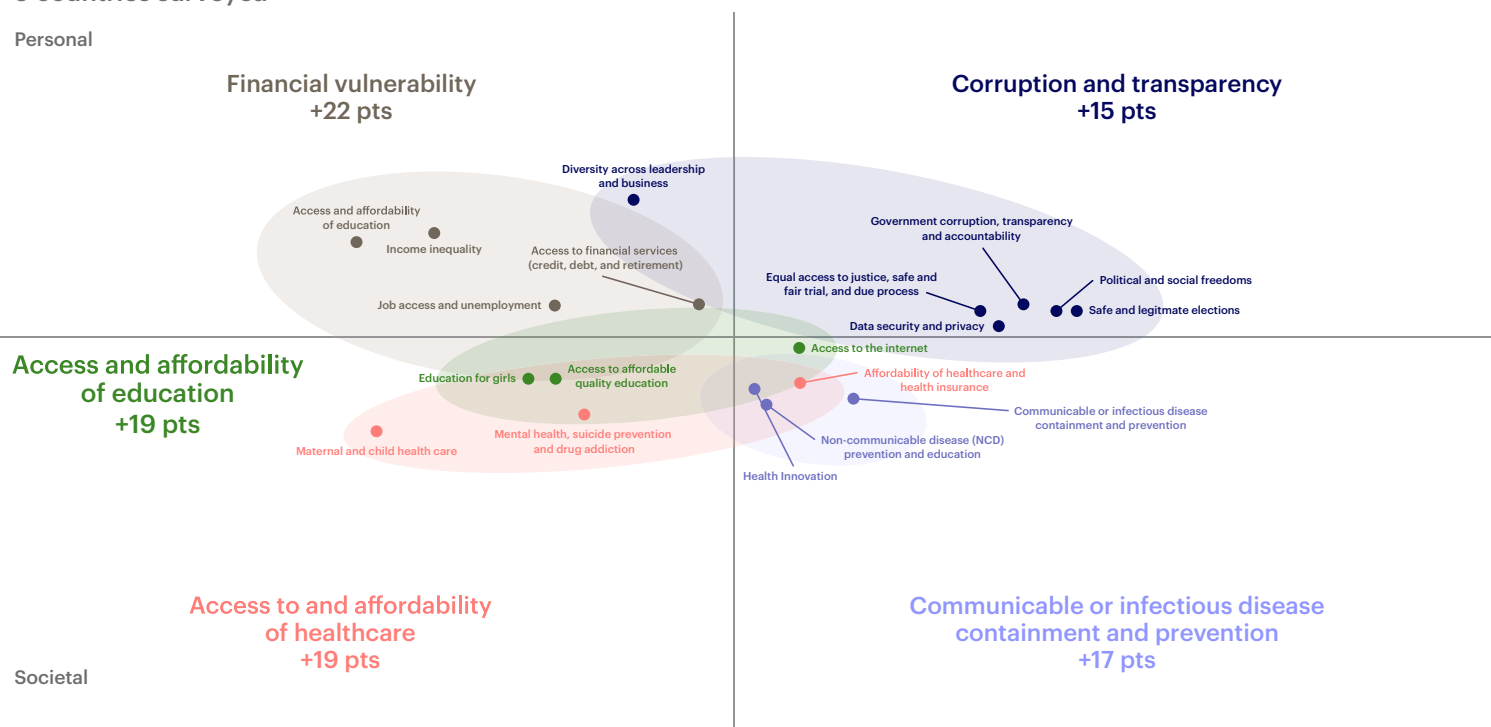
FIGURE 5

Today, issues are more interdependent

September 2020

6 countries surveyed

Personal



IMPLICATIONS

Meeting The Moment: The Listening Project

COVID-19 has wrought death, despair, and economic/social dislocation, while rearranging and intensifying the needs and priorities of people around the world. But many problems have also fused together, offering potential new ways of thinking to solve them.

As leaders and businesses contemplate their role in contributing to address the devastation left in the pandemic's wake, here are four observations based on our data.

1. Abate Near-Term Fears and Restore Confidence

We first must understand the fragility of our society and take steps to restore calm and faith in institutions. As the following chart shows, leaders have failed to lift the curtain of fear that hangs over the everyday lives of people everywhere (see fig 06). In America, Harris Poll weekly surveys since March have tracked fears of losing one's job, leaving the home and even succumbing to the virus; all worries that the majority of citizens express even to this day.

FIGURE 6

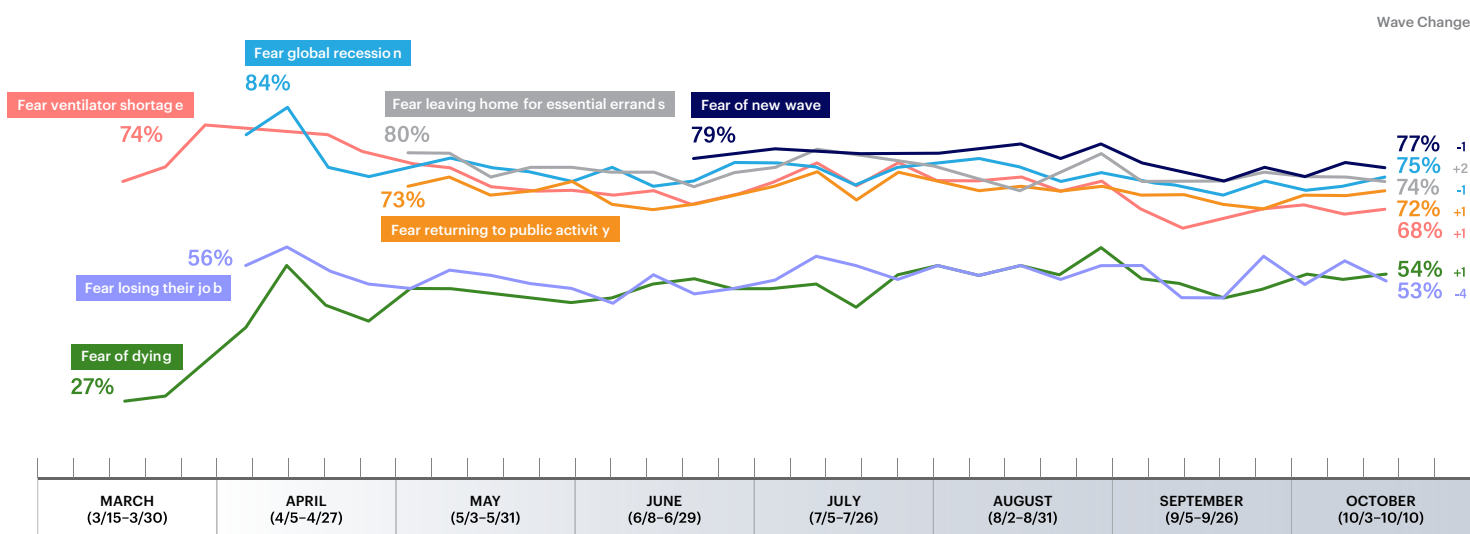
America's curtain of fear

September 2020

54% thought national fear was irrational

33 weeks trended fear curves during COVID19













70% now think national fear is sensible



And across the world the pandemic has amplified anxieties that vary by country. For instance, fears of a global recession are highest in Australia and Japan while Nigeria and the U.K. are worried of local recessions. Brazil and The Philippines lament that their way of life has changed the most, while Malaysians are most pessimistic about their country's future (see fig 07).

FIGURE 7

COVID's fear around the world September 2020

												
	AUS	BR	CH	IND	IT	JP	MAL	MEX	NG	PHIL	UK	US
Fear of a global recession	91%	88%	77%	85%	86%	91%	90%	85%	82%	90%	87%	80%
Country will be in a recession in 6 months	41%	28%	5%	27%	39%	36%	22%	42%	44%	24%	51%	33%
Fear of losing a job	58%	66%	57%	76%	59%	61%	84%	82%	67%	87%	58%	57%
Changed life in a major way	52%	90%	42%	83%	58%	44%	77%	83%	78%	93%	56%	65%
Lowest point in country history	78%	72%	55%	76%	65%	70%	83%	64%	68%	76%	76%	74%
Fearful and anxious	58%	78%	62%	79%	69%	79%	80%	68%	70%	84%	65%	63%

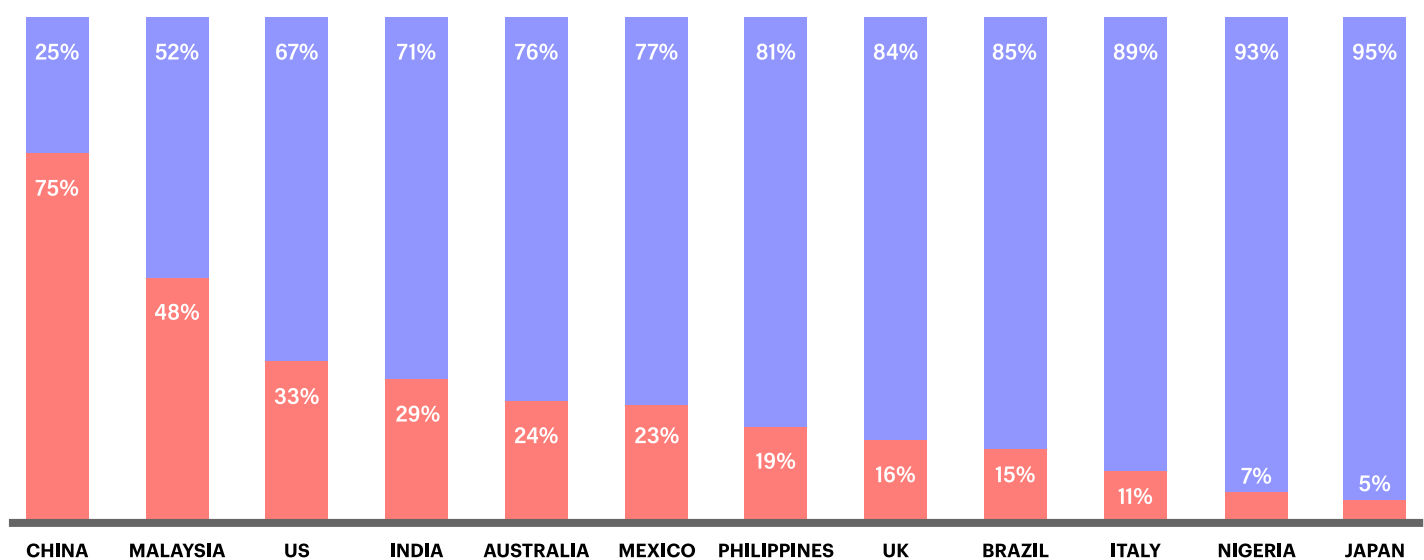
This is noted by the concern for economic growth as observed by citizens around the world. The predominant sentiment is that their own country's economy is significantly weakened (see fig 08). In addition to economic concerns, our data indicates that people globally are experiencing a loss of hope and confidence in their country; (71%) of people globally told us "This is the lowest point in my country's history that I can remember," and without a clear pathway to restore order, people are suffering emotionally; nearly three quarters are experiencing anxiety (71%), and over half (54%) feel lonely.

Combining the feelings of disorder and despair results in an alienated world where (66%) of people globally say "Most people with power try to take advantage of people like me" and nearly six in ten (57%) say, "What I think doesn't count very much anymore." And nearly half (49%) feel they are "left out of things going on around me," which was highest in India (63%), Italy (62%) and the Philippines (61%).

FIGURE 8

Strength of countries' economy September 2020

How weak or strong do you think the economy is today in your country?



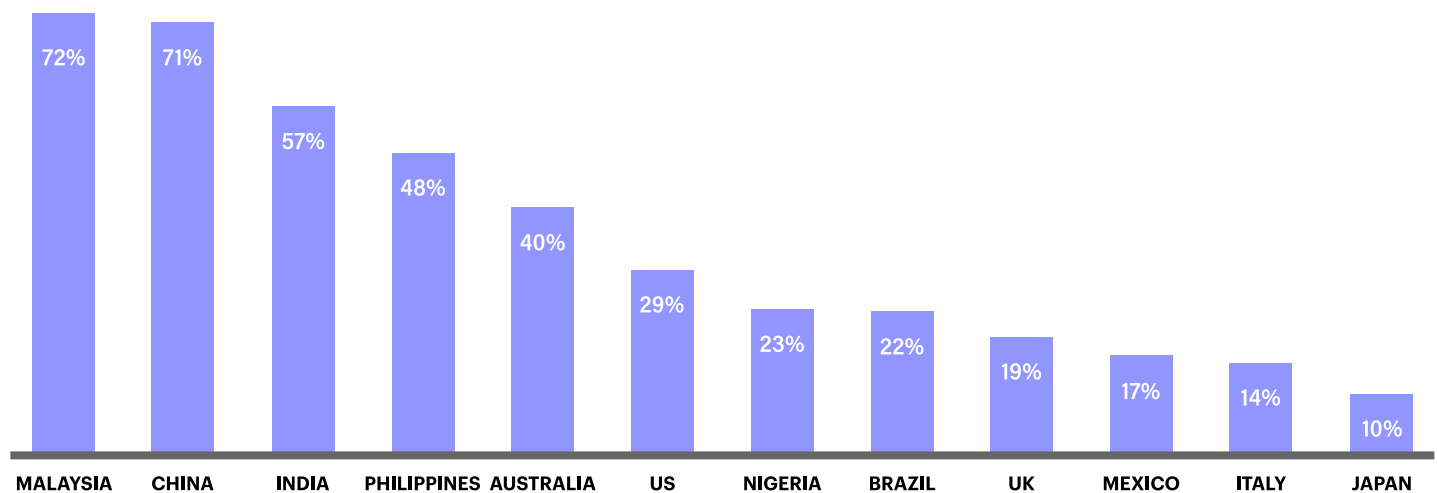
2. Fill the Void of Leadership That COVID-19 Opened

As our data shows, the pandemic revealed structural weaknesses in society whether in healthcare, education or systemic and structural inequalities and discrimination. And as a single issue, COVID-19 exposed the weakness of many governments, regardless of size or resources. In the following chart (see fig 09), support for how countries have handled COVID-19 varies widely with the majority of people in Malaysia (72%) and China (71%) strongly supporting*, while less than a fifth of people in Mexico (17%), Italy (14%) and Japan (10%) believe the same. And when asked what the biggest roadblocks are to solving their most important socio-economic challenges, (44%) of people globally said “There is not enough motivation and support from leadership to effectively address these issues.”

FIGURE 9

There is a leadership crisis around the world September 2020

How much do you support how your country is handling the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic? (%strongly support)



**Due to limitations on personal freedoms there can be some respondent variance in this data*

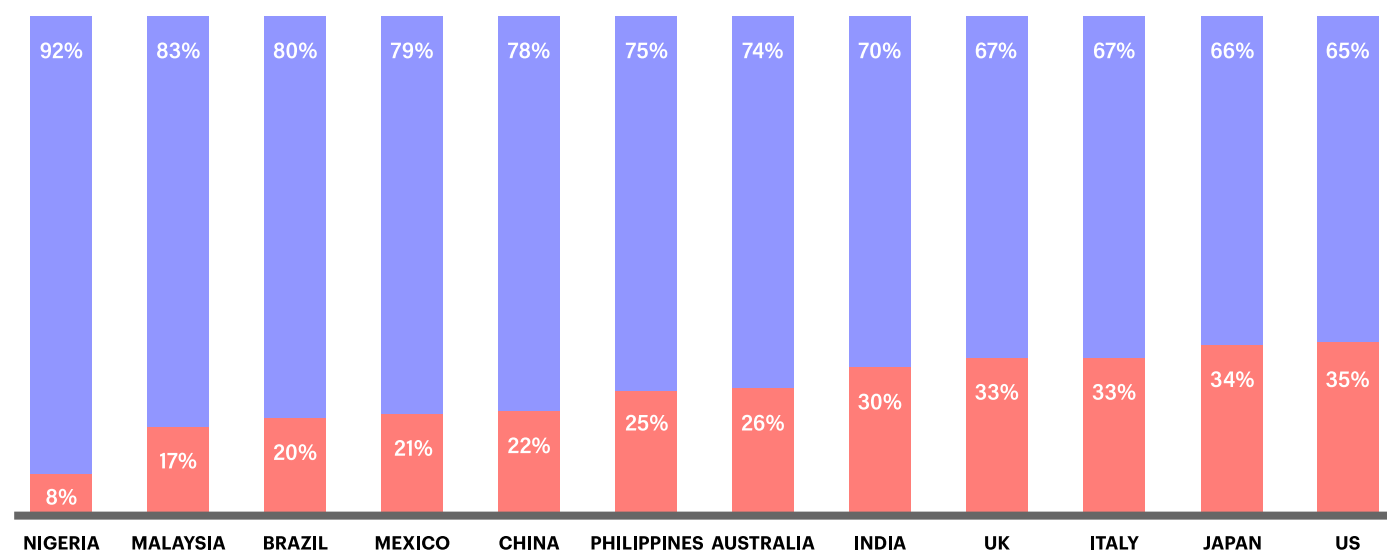
3. Collaborative thinking to address interdependent problems

As we quickly learned, COVID-19 was both a catalyst to (and connector between) public health, economics and social injustices. The citizens polled for The Listening Project seemed to understand this. When asked why these issues are urgent, (40%) of global respondents said “I feel that this would lead to solving other challenges in my community” and over a third (36%) said “This challenge holds back the fundamental changes and progress needed in making my life/our lives better.”

FIGURE 10

Impact of COVID September 2020

Which do you think will have a bigger effect on the life of you and your family?



And as people assessed each of the various needs for relative personal importance, nearly half (49%) said “This issue impacts the most people around the world.” What’s more is that (82%) say “This issue holds back development in my country and hence the prospects for my future and that of my family.” And as (60%) of people globally say “I feel like my community and I are facing this problem alone” they are calling for collaboration across sectors and stakeholders; over a third (34%) said “There is not enough communication and collaboration between my community and those who are developing solutions.”

4. Business: Rising to Meet the Moment

One of the surprising emotions to emerge from the pandemic was reflection and gratitude. In fact, despite the despair from COVID-19, our study found (84%) of people globally feel an understanding of and sympathy for others right now and (73%) say they are thankful. And people globally are calling on leaders to exude those values too; in our survey, (88%) of people globally say “In order to effectively address this problem, we need leaders with empathy and compassion.” Yet when asked what the biggest roadblocks are to solving these problems, (77%) of people globally “I don’t feel like my voice, and that of my community, is being heard in leadership decisions.”

As you will see, people also offer a historical opportunity for businesses to be more involved in making people’s lives better. Empathy means taking time to understand the values and mindsets of others and for businesses that translates to meeting citizens’ ever-changing needs in times of crises, which our data indicates business are outperforming local governments on; (61%) of people globally say “companies have been more reliable than the government in keeping my country running during COVID-19.”

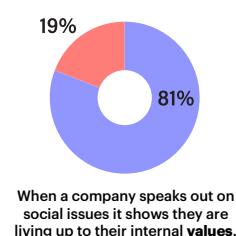
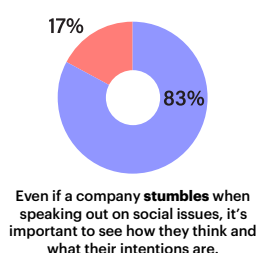
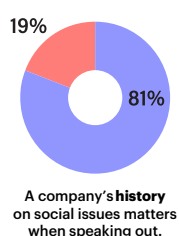
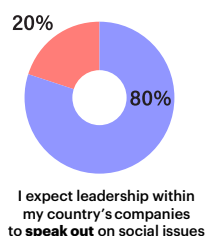
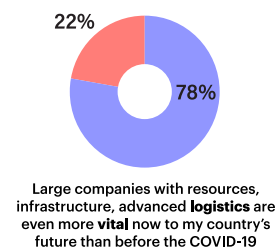
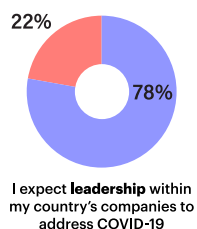
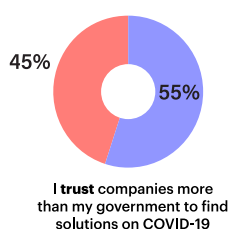
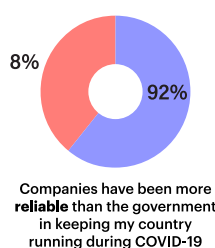
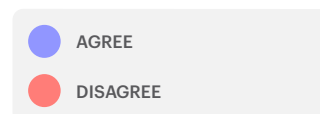
In previous crises, business was often seen as part of the problem. This time they are part of the solution. Across all countries, companies are seen as more reliable and trustworthy than their governments and are given a new charge to speak out and solve social issues (see fig 11).

Those who rose to meet this moment will be remembered by global citizens, (84%) say “I will remember the companies that did the right thing by addressing relevant issues related to the COVID-19” as will those who stood still, (76%) say “I will remember the companies that took missteps in their response to the issues related to the COVID-19.”

FIGURE 11

Business meets the moment September 2020

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

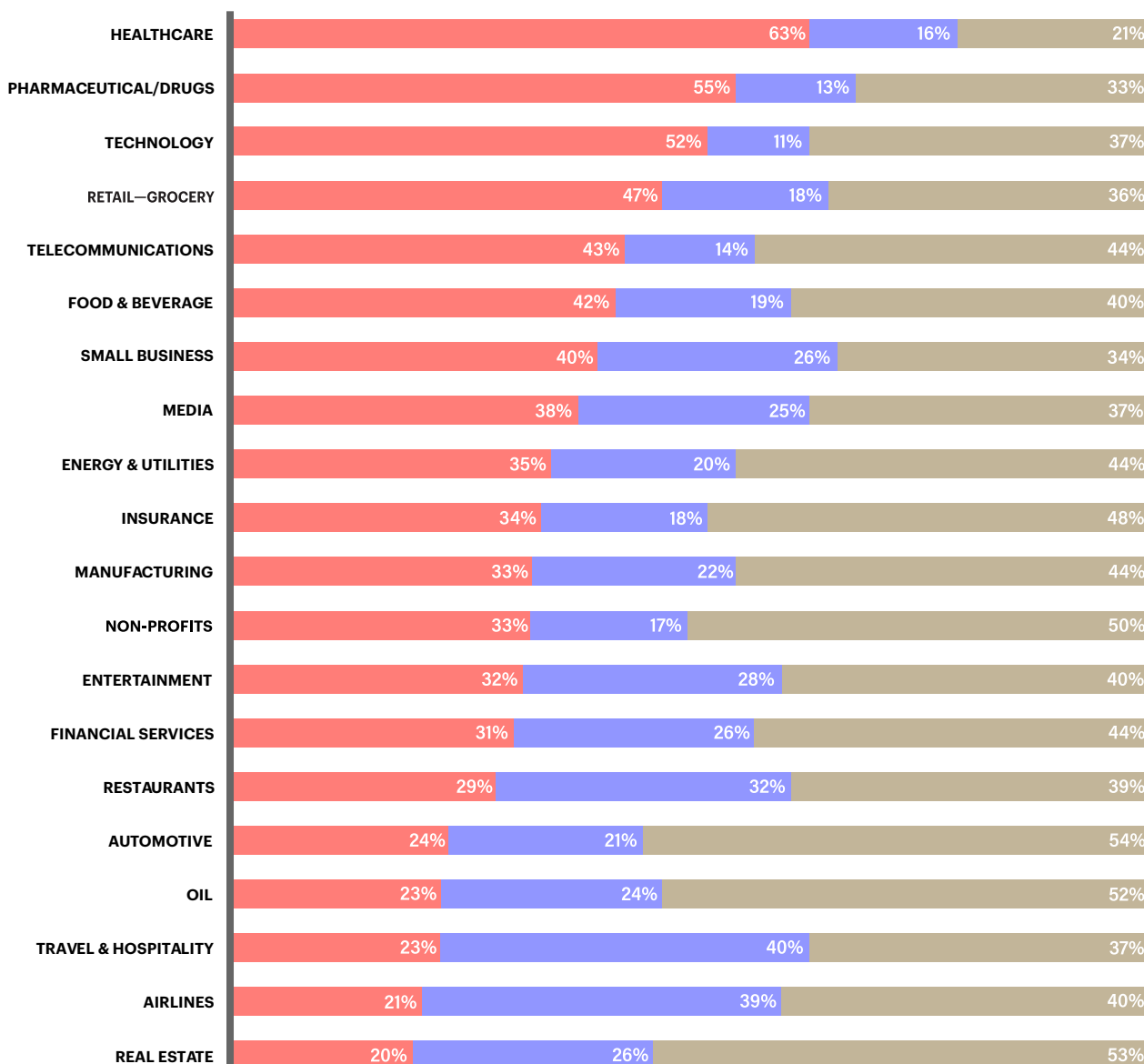
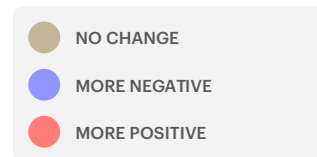


Moreover, corporate reputations have risen across industries around the world. With the exception of battered sectors like airlines, hospitality and real estate, business on a whole is seen as more positive by people in our multi-country survey. The burden of leadership in rising to meet this moment will not be easy. But those who do so should take from this data that there is widespread public willingness and support for new insurgents, new ideas and inventive, intersectional solutions to a pandemic that has reached into literally every arena of our lives. This is a time for business to lead us forward out of the darkness and despair. Corporations can harness this trust to not just build back better, but usher in a more equitable future for all.

FIGURE 12

Global Corporate Reputation September 2020

How has your view of each of the following industries changed since the start of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic?



**Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100*

METHODOLOGY

In February 2020, The Harris Poll fielded a survey among 10,125 adults in 27 countries to understand the importance of 48 different human needs (see fig 13). The importance of these needs were analyzed together as an aggregate to create a ranking of the most urgent socio-economic challenges, calculated by taking the average importance of each personal need comprising the macro socio-economic challenge.

To better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the 10 most important socio-economic challenges, The Harris Poll re-fielded the survey in September 2020 among another 19,000 respondents in 12 countries with various levels of COVID-19 impact. Additionally, The Harris Poll oversampled six countries especially hard-hit by COVID-19 (as determined by deaths per cases) to dig deeper into the top 5 most important socio-economic challenges by measuring importance of the 19 personal needs that fell within the top 5 socio-economic challenges.

Data in each country was weighted to be nationally representative of the country based on standard demographics for each country. Market research in authoritarian countries syndicates many respondents with a “socially desirable answer”, in which respondents tend to overreport their support for their government. As such, China data in this study should be viewed with a lower level of confidence.

Wave 1 was conducted from February 21 to March 11, 2020 among 10,125 adults across 27 countries: France, South Korea, Australia, The United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, The United States, United Arab Emirates, Japan, Russia, Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico, China, India, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Pakistan, Egypt, Nigeria, Philippines, Kenya, Venezuela, Ukraine, Brazil, and Malaysia.

Wave 2 was conducted from September 15 to October 2, 2020 among 19,000 adults across 12 countries (Australia, The United Kingdom, The United States, Japan, Mexico, China, India, Italy, Nigeria, Philippines, Brazil, Malaysia) with an oversample in 6 countries: Brazil, India, Italy, Mexico, The United Kingdom, and The United States.

Surveys were overseen by The Harris Poll: John Gerzema, Will Johnson, Tawny Saez, Andrew Higham, Joanna Allenza, Christina Lojek and Annie Prunsky. Data and graphics by Everything Type Company.

FIGURE 13

48 personal needs surveyed



About the Milken Institute

The Milken Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank that helps people build meaningful lives in which they can experience health and well-being, pursue effective education and gainful employment, and access the resources required to create ever-expanding opportunities for themselves and their broader communities. For more information, visit <https://milkeninstitute.org/>



About The Harris Poll

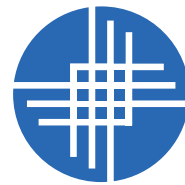
The Harris Poll is one of the longest-running surveys in the U.S., tracking public opinion, motivations and social sentiment since 1963. It is now part of Harris Insights & Analytics, a global consulting and market research firm that strives to reveal the authentic values of modern society to inspire 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. harrispoll.com

The Harris Poll has been conducting weekly polling on the Coronavirus outbreak since March 2020 as a free public service to public health officials, media, policymakers, the business community, and the American public. We believe to now have the single largest consumer dataset around American sentiment and the COVID-19 crisis, all survey results, tables, and weekly summaries can be accessed for free at [The Harris Poll COVID-19 Portal](#).





The Listening Project



MILKEN
INSTITUTE



The Harris Poll