



## **After the Fact | How Is the Coronavirus Affecting Daily Life?**

Originally aired April 15, 2020

**Total runtime: 00:10:42**

### **TRANSCRIPT**

---

**Dan LeDuc, host:** If you've been stuck at home, scrambling to get work done, help your kids with school lessons, and then find the energy to cook dinner, life is bound to feel different. You might be wondering: Is everyone feeling this way? That life has changed?

Well, we're here to tell you they are.

*[Transition music plays]*

**Dan LeDuc:** Welcome to "After the Fact." For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I'm Dan LeDuc. And yes, I'm talking to you from home, and thanks to the ingenuity and creativity of our producers and editors who are also working from home, we're able to bring this podcast to you. And offer you, like we always do, a data point: 44%.

That's the percentage of Americans who told the Pew Research Center that the coronavirus has changed their life in a major way. Another similar-sized percentage say the virus has changed their lives at least a little bit in these past weeks. In all, about 9 in 10 of us are feeling it.

We thought you might want to know what people are thinking about their government and other institutions contending with the virus. How people are getting their news—and what pollsters will be looking at in the coming weeks and months as they gauge how the public is viewing the pandemic.

So, we reached out to Claudia Deane from the Pew Research Center.

**Dan LeDuc:** Claudia Deane, welcome. First and most important question, are you well and is everyone in your house doing OK?

**Claudia Deane, vice president of research, Pew Research Center:** Thank you very much for asking. Yes, we are healthy, and other than being stir crazy with two teenagers in the house, we are making it. I hope the same is true for you.



**Dan LeDuc:** Thank you. Yes, it is. It's a tough time with everyone working from home, but I wanted to ask you—first, we're going to get into some of the findings of survey research from the Pew Research Center so we can get a sense of what everyone's thinking about all of this.

Let's start, though, with how you're able to do surveys at a time like this. Is it easier, because everybody is home?

**Claudia Deane:** Well, in the United States, we've been doing a lot of our polling digitally on the web, and some people are also using telephones. So that really hasn't been impacted by the pandemic.

At the Pew Research Center, we have something called the American Trends Panel, which is about 10,000 Americans who are randomly selected. And we interview them maybe once or twice a month, and so we are going to be tracking these 10,000 people and looking at their experiences as a microcosm of the country.

**Dan LeDuc:** What are some of the initial findings of how Americans are viewing the coronavirus? And how is it affecting their lives?

**Claudia Deane:** What we're finding is that nearly 9 in 10 American adults say their life has changed at least a little bit, including 44% who say their life has changed in a major way. We also are finding that people are pretty concerned about doing some daily tasks that used to be pretty normal for a lot of us, maybe going to a friend's house for a party or eating out at a restaurant. Most people would feel uncomfortable doing that now.

**Dan LeDuc:** And what about the real threat that people face? We're obviously facing an enormous threat to public health, but we're also facing a huge economic downfall because of what's going on. How are people separating out their concerns?

**Claudia Deane:** When we started polling at the very beginning of this outbreak earlier in March, we were finding that the most clearly unifying threat for people was actually the threat to the U.S. economy, that people really saw the virus as potentially a major threat. Maybe 7 in 10 said so. About half thought it would be a threat to the health of the U.S. population. Fewer, maybe closer to 1 in 4, thought it would be a threat to their personal health, and just a little over that to their personal economic health.

Now, that is something that is obviously going to morph over time as the virus moves around to different parts of the country. It's also something that's going to really differ by what your personal work situation is like—if you're a salaried employee or an hourly



employee, what your income level and your education is. And so those are all things that we are closely watching.

**Dan LeDuc:** Can you talk in a little more detail about that? I mean, because it has affected virtually every aspect of day-to-day life. While some of us are able to work from home, a lot of people aren't, and they're out of work. And yet there's approval for a lot of these measures, as you say. So could you detail some of those for us?

**Claudia Deane:** What you see is, in this crisis, as anytime when humans are tested, sort of where you started impacts where we're ending up. So we started with a country which did not have a ton of trust necessarily in the federal government system but has a lot of trust in the state and local government systems. I think, as you're seeing the state-by-state policies rolling out, you are finding people willing to give them the benefit of the doubt.

The other two big-picture sort of planks of public opinion that you see coming into this are a really strong partisan polarization, with Republicans and Democrats agreeing on almost nothing. As the sort of information about these policies rolls out, two of the main information givers are obviously the president and the media. And what we see is massive partisan differences in terms of who people trust to get that information. So obviously Republicans having positive views of the president and his communications during the crisis and skeptical views of the traditional news media, and Democrats almost the polar opposite.

You had touched on something really important, which is economic differences in terms of how people are experiencing this crisis. And again, I feel like the crisis is just going to exacerbate sort of some of the economic differences and challenges in the way people experience day-to-day life. One survey that was a useful reminder—this was actually from the Kaiser Family Foundation. They were looking at employed Americans and sort of reminding people 54% of employed Americans are paid hourly. It's more like 3 in 10 that are salary, and another 14% get paid by the job.

**Dan LeDuc:** And that's what I wanted to get at, too. I mean, one of the Pew Research Center findings that I saw was 4 in 10 adults—working-age adults, we should say—are able to work from home—40% of Americans, but those numbers vary a lot by income bracket. I mean, these are economic realities. Some people have different levels of income. That's showing up in how people are able to contend with this in many ways.

**Claudia Deane:** That's absolutely right, and we've had some of our economists digging into the big government surveys to really look into that issue. What we're finding is about



1 in 4 civilian workers don't have paid sick leave. In other words, if you're sick, you will have to go to work, or you won't get paid. But that is so different by income bracket. If you look at the lowest tenth of civilian workers by sort of pay, 70% don't have sick leave. So most people don't.

We're also finding that there are certain groups of people that are going to be more impacted. We're finding a big and heavy hit among the Latino population right now, for example, in terms of reporting either losing a job or losing some income over this. We find young people who may be starting out earlier in their work careers are more challenged than older folks, as well.

**Dan LeDuc:** We were talking about trust in institutions and government a little earlier. At the federal level and at the national level, there's a lot of disparity on what trust in government means. But in general, is it correct to say that Americans generally trust their local governments more?

**Claudia Deane:** Americans are pro state and local. They have remarkably unified positive views of some of our federal health agencies. For example, the CDC tops the list in terms of how they're handling the crisis with a rating of 80% positive. That would be compared to something closer to half for the media and the president. They also have enormously positive views of their local medical system, their local hospital system. Now, that was early on. We'll be watching what happens as the hospitals have to bear up under this unprecedented load, but as a start, very positive views of our health care system.

**Dan LeDuc:** As you're out there talking to your survey recipients, where are people getting their news these days? Where are they getting their information about what's going on?

**Claudia Deane:** We find people getting their news in a wide variety of places. A quarter get it from sort of a more traditional news website or app. Maybe about 2 in 10 from social media, 15% relying on local TV, and 15% relying on cable TV.

We're also finding that Americans are reporting seeing some misinformation. It's difficult, of course, to know whether what they're seeing was or was not true, but we know that a majority of folks feel like they've seen something that struck them as a bit dodgy. We find the number is higher for people who primarily get their sort of political news through social media, but it's a decent share of folks using other channels, as well.



**Dan LeDuc:** The Pew Research Center does some of the most interesting work on religion and faith in American life, and you've had some interesting findings there, too. Could you talk about some of those?

**Claudia Deane:** We're finding, of course, a lot of people turning to prayer and praying not just for people close to them, but their governments and health care workers. We're finding that a lot of people are experiencing the move to sort of remote joint worship—members of different kinds of congregations that are meeting over the internet. And I think one sort of big-picture question we have which is really coming from more the perspective of a researcher, is there's been in the United States a massive step back from institutionalized religion. It's one of the big public opinion trends, really, probably of our lifetimes—is the sort of decline of affiliation with sort of formal churches. And so a lot of our folks who study religion are very curious about what this stressor being put on society will mean. We haven't experienced a pandemic before. We know that, in times of stress, people may turn to religion or spirituality. Will we see a reversal of those big societal trends? That's obviously not something we can answer in the short term, but just in terms of understanding our society as a whole post-pandemic, that is one of the things we definitely will be studying.

**Dan LeDuc:** Well, Claudia Deane from the Pew Research Center, thank you so much. And stay safe.

**Claudia Deane:** Thanks, Dan. Appreciate it.

**Dan LeDuc:** You can read the surveys Claudia and I were talking about on our website, [pewtrusts.org/after the fact](https://pewtrusts.org/after-the-fact).

In the coming weeks, we'll be bringing you more data and stories behind those numbers that we hope will help you make some sense out of this unsettling time.

In the meantime, please stay safe. Let's all try to come out of this as healthy as when we started.

For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I'm Dan LeDuc.

**Female voice:** "After the Fact" is produced by The Pew Charitable Trusts.