

LIFE BEYOND 2020



GLIMPSING FOUR WAYS FORWARD

After a most challenging year, exploring
the future of life and work through plausible,
divergent scenarios.

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PROLOGUE

When we began developing this report, we were admittedly focused on the Coronavirus above all else—specifically within the United States. In fact, we started crafting these scenarios the moment we were all sent home from work in early March 2020—at the time, for a mere three weeks. Terms like “social distancing” were just being introduced on the news. Temporary shutdowns of restaurants and stores were only talk. Grocery shelves were wiped clean, but nobody was wearing a mask. It was just the beginning. But to most of us, it felt like a long, jolting pause versus the onset of an entirely new way of life.

As the year unfolded, we had to consider more and more major events to shape these plausible future worlds: events like George Floyd’s death in late May, which invigorated the justice movement across the country (and the world). Black Lives Matter became more inflamed as the US Presidential Election moved into its final months.

“2020 (and early 2021) introduced a new velocity of change that we haven’t felt before.”

We entered a tentative time, marked by the spreading of disinformation (an infodemic) and the eventual storming of the Capitol, a day after the Senate runoffs in Georgia and minutes before the Electoral College count to officialize the nation’s next president. More recently, the Biden-Harris administration’s announcement of vaccinations for all by late spring has signaled a new sense of progress. But a sudden pause in Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine rollout and the resurgence of record-setting case rates (most recently in India) has proven that the way out of 2020 and toward “normalcy” is not a straight line.

Developing likely future scenarios is always an intensive and nuanced undertaking, but 2020 (and early 2021) introduced a new velocity of change that we, a group of Trends & Foresight experts with 35 combined years of experience, had never felt before. It also reinforced the immense value of landscape scenario planning and every business’s need for preparedness—not prediction—to navigate the unfolding future.

To develop the four scenarios in the pages ahead, we worked with assumed certainties and uncertainties. Despite the newfound vaccine accessibility in the US, scientists still warn that:

a) Even with widespread vaccination, it will take at least a year to get to herd immunity in the US.

b) We are all connected and therefore continuously vulnerable to the virus and its variants. Until we are able to vaccinate those in the far reaches of the globe, Covid will still circulate and mutate.

Our future scenarios look 15 months into the future, concluding in July 2022. Each introduces a different, plausible version of the virus’s trajectory: there are worlds where Covid is contained and on its way to elimination, and others where it continues to spread, out of our control.

The creation of each scenario begins with a look back to the previous 12 months. Our Trends & Foresight team weaves the events of 2020 into the opening scene, setting the stage for what could unfold over the next 12 to 18 months. From there, we take liberties based on the signals in the landscape, proposing plausible events that could likely come to bear.

What makes these narratives plausible is that we base our creative leaps in existing or fast-emerging technologies, proposed and upcoming legislation, trends taking shape in commerce, and scientific and health breakthroughs—ones that may or may not be commercialized, but show great promise. These “plot points” are the result of imagination and storytelling, but also rooted in reality. In other words: it’s important not to get hung up on the details.

“We must shape future states that might not be desirable or comfortable to envision.”

SCENARIOS ARE NOT MEANT TO SERVE AS PREDICTIONS,

nor should they be judged for accuracy. Instead, the key is to consider the world in its potential future state and to strategize accordingly. In order to craft stories that are both divergent and plausible, we must shape future states that might not be desirable or comfortable to envision; some that consider the pandemic’s potential to become an endemic, plaguing us for years to come. Further, even when the global Covid crisis wanes, there is still the very real possibility that another pandemic is on the horizon. These scenarios paint possibilities that may prove useful to prepare for future, large-scale disruptions. By considering this full range of possible scenarios, you can anticipate potential outcomes and ready yourself—and your business—for whatever is next.

TECHNO HEROES

AT A GLANCE:

Why is the virus controlled? By July of 2022, we've adopted technology to help us track and trace the virus and manage "flare-ups" as they arise.

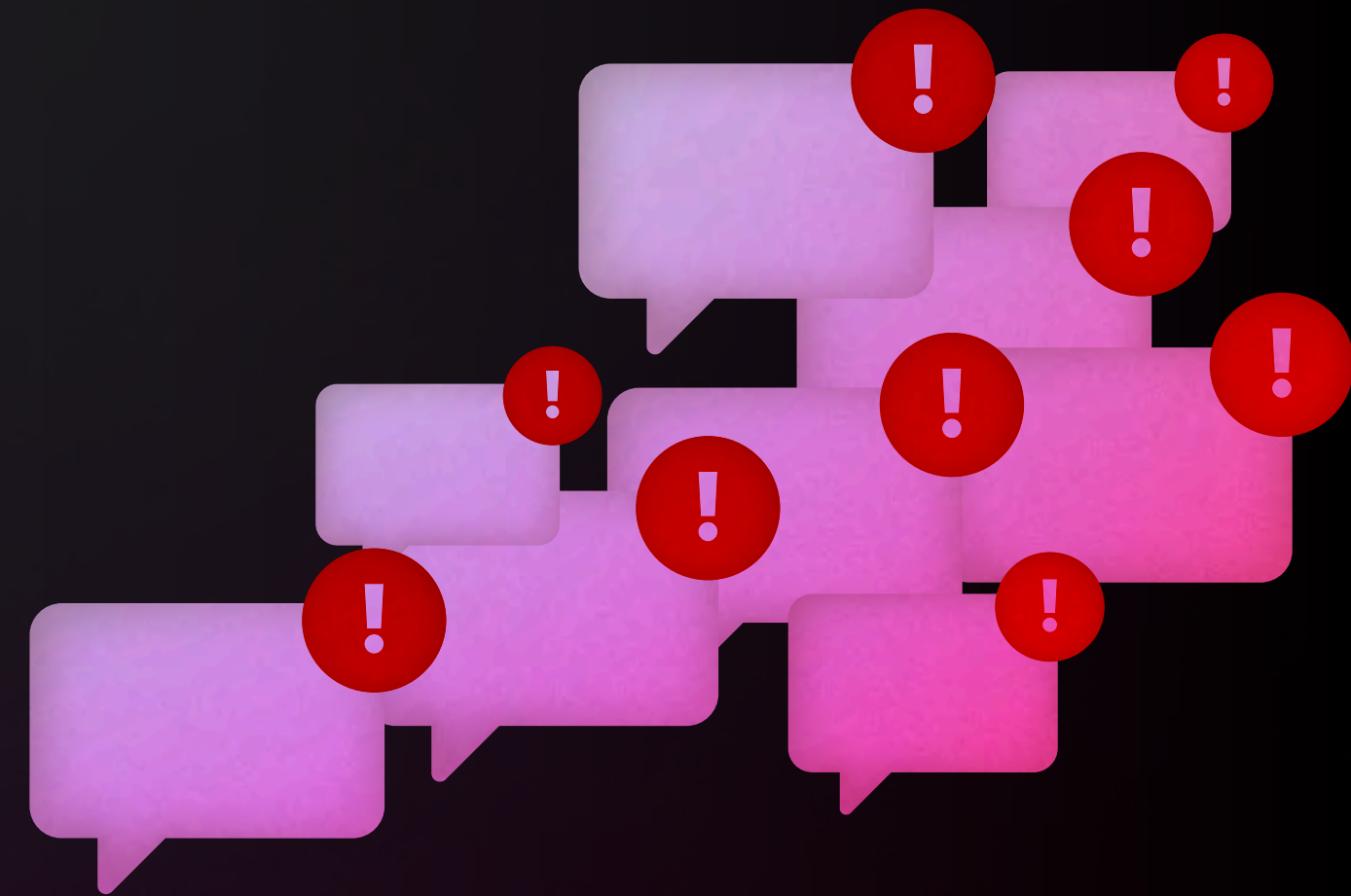
Who is leading the fight? Big Tech

Why them? Big Tech had the means even back in 2020, but adoption was slow and spotty. They stepped up for a number of reasons, including the chance to redeem themselves after it became clear they allowed for election tampering in 2016, then faced additional scrutiny over biased code and anti-trust issues.

What enables this future world? Citizens unify and embrace new technology en masse—from e-commerce to self-driving cars, wearables to track-and-trace software.

What is a barrier to this future world? This world fails without strong and widespread consumer adoption of technology. Ongoing lawsuits and backlash against Big Tech could distract the public and diminish compliance.

In 18 months, this world looks like: A futuristic techno fantasy, where everyday interactions and errands are slick, seamless and tech-enabled.



Could big data and AI eventually save us from the

pandemic? At the start of 2020, Big Tech was in the news for all the wrong reasons: security breaches, data privacy issues, election tampering, general consumer distrust, and the list goes on. But when the pandemic, social unrest, political turbulence, rampant unemployment and more started piling up, global attention shifted away from our technology woes and toward a bigger, far more important fight. Big Tech saw the opportunity to redeem itself and take centerstage in remaking our environments and redefining our everyday experiences.

With the Biden-Harris administration focused on slowing the Covid-19 virus, rebuilding the Department of Justice and investing in racial equity as a driver of economic growth—the push to regulate Big Tech was ongoing, but significantly deprioritized. Instead, the US began investing heavily in technological solutions to fight the pandemic, enable life to return to some sort of normalcy and get ahead of the next public health threat.

Exposure Notifications

In the spring of 2020, Google and Apple announced a partnership to develop their Exposure Notification App, a software that would gather anonymized data in constant, cross-referencing it with testing results, then backtracking to notify individuals who may have been exposed to an infected person. It was the breakthrough we all needed, but testing and rollout nationwide took much longer than anticipated. In the last months of 2020, disease-ravaged Washington state and California launched the app at long last. Promotion and adoption remained at the local and state level, so the app experienced a slow and steady (if uneven) adoption across the country. To drive more signups to the Exposure Notifications system and curb privacy concerns, the federal government partnered with the Gates Foundation and other tech giants in 2021, funding a massive public awareness campaign.

In addition, although ACLU and constitutional scholars protested, the nation witnessed a rare moment of bipartisan support for unprecedented data legislation, which was swiftly written into what some call “The New Patriot Act.” Republicans saw the tech solution as a way to accelerate economic recovery and a full “reopening” (and an end to the great mask debate), while Democrats focused on the public health benefits and potential tech-related job creation. Billed as “virtuous surveillance,” consumers had mixed feelings about opting into the newly established health alert system. But the real-time data tracking ultimately ushered in a modality where viral outbreaks could quickly be quelled and life could return to normalcy—at least for most.

Today, citizens receive multiple governmental emergency alerts on their devices during the course of a day. The new Apple Watch Series 7 has become a form of virtue signaling and status. For some, knowing an alert system is in place is all the reassurance they need. For others, augmented reality devices—like the once-unfashionable and suspect Google’s heads-up visors—are now oddly customary, as people use them to continually monitor their surroundings and receive alerts to potential virus exposure and environmental concerns like poor air quality. And for the small but significant portion of the population that doesn’t have access to a smartphone, largely older or poorer Americans, living outside this system is tense. Their news and contact-tracing comes post-exposure, rather than being able to prevent possible virus contamination.

Big Data / GISAID

In early 2021, the novel coronavirus was morphing and changing at a rate that outpaced the response in terms of vaccines, treatments and diagnostics for variants. Chief scientists at the World Health Organization called for GISAID, the global initiative on sharing all influenza data, to share its information publicly—calling crowdsourcing of such data critical to responding to the greatest health threat of our time. It was becoming increasingly clear: big data might be our only hope.

Now that the GISAID sequencing data has been released, cross-referencing track-and-trace technology promises to inform a global strategy to finally squash this pandemic.

Digital Acceleration in the Workplace

While many jobs were forever lost due to two years of job displacement, government subsidies enabled massive retraining for workers and led to a workplace reshaped by digital transformation. Overall digital acceleration advanced 5–10 years faster than predicted, especially in terms of consumer e-commerce and behind-the-scenes corporate logistics.

Emerging technologies that had struggled to take hold were accelerated in terms of adoption or fast-tracked in terms of development. The pandemic was the tipping point for voice-activated technologies, autonomous vehicles and a flood of new and upgraded wearables that now manage our health and safety.

Helping us navigate to data-certified safe areas, many environments have been redesigned to follow nationalized “touchless” guidelines using UV wands and rigorous adherence to public safety procedures outlined by the Department of Homeland Security. Most businesses, restaurants and schools now operate in two modes—one for heightened threat (a flare) and another mode that for the most part feels like the old days but with a slick, high-tech edge.

Looking Forward

With new hope and armed with data for the collective good, experts say we will get ahead of the virus, its many opportunistic variants and other potential threats to our health and safety. The debates rage on about whether the virtuous surveillance was carried out in earnest or just another ploy by Big Tech to rule our lives and cash in on the surveillance economy. But for many, giving up privacy has been a small price to pay for mobility and a return to measured socializing, community and a re-energized economy. In the end, the irony is that technology has illuminated our interconnectedness, our collective ingenuity and perhaps a broader view of humanity.



THE YEAR *That Woke* THE WORLD

AT A GLANCE:

Why is the virus controlled? Widespread vaccination efforts prove effective, and we continue to develop and discover treatments that lessen the severity of the virus.

Who is leading the fight? Big corporations, especially Pharma

Why them? Pharma comes through to lead inoculation efforts, but we're left with a startling awareness of the fragility of our governmental systems and previous economy. Intent to achieve justice, equity, diversity and inclusion reform, corporations of varied kinds help lead the recovery charge.

What enables this future world? The vaccine proves successful and the US eventually reaches herd immunity. We are also able to mitigate the spread of virus mutations as they arise. Most importantly, people feel fundamentally changed by the events of 2020 and early 2021, intent on a more unified and inclusive society.

What is a barrier to this future world? The pendulum can always swing back. If people revert to their old behaviors, we miss the chance for both societal change and virus mitigation.

In 18 months, this world looks like: A changed country, more diverse, inclusive and egalitarian in its makeup. We are led by the values of Gen Z, who pull back on spending, focus on the environmental and racial reckoning, and rock the economy long-term. Welcome to "Woke Capitalism."

In spite of a surge in cases at the end of 2020 and early 2021, slowly but surely, a number of advancements from scientists, doctors and researchers curtailed the pandemic and its grip on the world. While nothing was at "warp speed," grit and determination enabled people to persevere and help bring the virus under control. Masks, social distancing and reduced large-scale gatherings persisted and eventually became depoliticized as survivors with diminished lung capacity or brain damage became commonplace—walking artifacts of the devastation of 2020. Even as many breathed a sigh of relief as day-to-day life returned to some semblance of normal, most were left picking up the pieces of a broken economy and lingering institutional distrust. The entire ordeal left the public with the aftertaste of incompetence.

Healthcare Investment

In late 2021, to the objection of austerity-minded politicians, it was clear that to turn around the economy, throwing money—and lots of it—at the problem was the only thing to do. While drug producers like Moderna, Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson and Germany's BioNTech made unfathomable profits, so did others in healthcare-related sectors, growing healthcare's share of the Fortune 250 by double digits.

Throughout 2021, it seemed every month brought new discoveries for treatments and diagnostic solutions. Especially exciting were existing over-the-counter solutions that proved effective at lessening the severity of infections as well as those that proved efficacious at prevention. Fueled by government and private investment, Pfizer and AstraZeneca acquired other drug makers to rapidly scale development and production of vaccines and treatments, and breakthroughs quickly gained momentum. In addition, these drug makers introduced "booster" vaccines—a move that further bolstered the success of America's inoculation effort. Globally, the virus continued to circulate for most of 2021, but finally, vaccine distribution delays and debacles became less prevalent, and most people were vaccinated by the end of the year.

Working Families Act

As early research showed, women—especially those of color—experienced disproportionate job losses during the pandemic and were most affected by the crisis, as they made up a majority of the service sector. Women were also most likely to leave the workforce due to their need to support their children's online educations amidst a vast shortage of childcare services. The Biden administration's response was swift. Sweeping legislation was signed, and the Emergency Care Act for Working Families became law. Major structural disruption required rethinking core issues underlying women's roles in economic recovery. As a result of signing the Emergency Care Act for Working Families into law, millions of women were able to return to the workforce. The law subsidized neighborhood-based childcare, enacted universal paid family leave and offered interest-free loans to students pursuing degrees in nursing and education.

Economy & Climate Change

Despite the Biden administration's efforts to address income inequality, the momentum of economic devastation was unavoidable. The pandemic served to widen the financial divide: the rich got a whole lot richer (billionaires especially increased their wealth over a trillion dollars in aggregate) and the poor became even more economically fragile. The impact to marginalized communities, which were hit hardest by the pandemic, revealed a level of economic and social fragility that years of economic expansion had concealed.





This fragility was compounded by the incessant, ever-worsening effects of climate change. From wildfires to ice storms, hurricanes to heat waves, weather disasters ravaged the coastlines with higher frequency, but also affected less-expected regions too. Sub-zero temps in southern states exposed the vulnerability of their response systems, while inclement weather continued to deepen the divide between white-collar WFH-ers and frontline service workers with no choice but to brave the elements.

In reaction, notable climate statistics became massive memes on social media, and the true nature of accelerated weather disasters were front and center. Coupled with the very visible signs from the winter of 2020’s worldwide “lockdown,” people realized that addressing climate change was both possible and critical.

By mid-2022, the US government shapes a New Deal to quell outrage and prioritize further economic recovery. New job creation, unemployment restructuring, climate change reform and a synchronized public health monitoring system with other world powers are introduced—a robust effort that leads to less distrust in the federal government.

Corporate JEDI Initiatives

Corporations continued to deliver on their 2020 promises to address justice, equality, diversity and inclusion (JEDI). Many organizations formalized their use of a nationwide Diversity Index, calculating their representation at every level and using discrepancies to drive more inclusive decision-making. This also ushered in a new leadership paradigm that valued humility and compassion, allowing for far more employee flexibility and autonomy.

America’s retail landscape saw the benefits of a JEDI focus as well. The 15 Percent Pledge, a retail movement which started small with a dozen or so participating brands, soon exploded into a nationwide imperative.

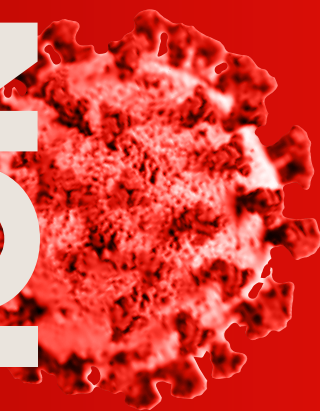
A vast majority of retailers, including Amazon and Walmart, joined the alliance, committing to fill a minimum of 15% of their shelves with black-owned brands—a shift that led many black-owned businesses to see their most profitable years to date. It’s just one way that American wealth began to be diversified and redistributed, empowering marginalized communities in ways far more powerful than previously imagined.

Looking Forward

While the cost seemed high, eventually 2020 became widely accepted as our much-needed wake-up call. For many, it’s hard to be grateful that the desperation of life today is less severe than it could have been. In the aftermath of unimaginable loss and long-fought compromise, both sides of the aisle are quick to take credit for our turnaround. Bittersweet is the notion that while marginalized communities suffered, the economic relief prioritized by Congress clearly lessened the degree of that suffering. Today, economists agree that direct funding was foundational and necessary for reconstruction.

Now, hope resides in a new generation of people highly attuned to the wants and needs, opportunities and injustices of the American people. This era gives way to a new, shared sense of resiliency and optimism, translated into an innovation boom. Forward-thinking minds, especially Gen Z, funnel their energy into rethinking entire industries—from sports to dining, healthcare to hospitality—reshaping them to reflect the world we really want. Gen Z asserts its spending power in new and unprecedented ways, supporting brands that lead with their values, contribute to environmental and social justice causes, and break with the capitalistic norms of the past. We see the start of a corporate leadership paradigm shift—away from top-down control and corporate social responsibility fluff, and toward actionable change and true justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.

ARDUOUS TRANSFORMATION



AT A GLANCE:

Why is the virus uncontrolled? Widespread misinformation (especially via social media), division along political and religious lines, and a slowed, uneven vaccine rollout.

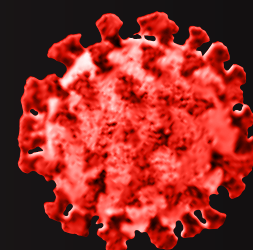
Who is leading the fight? The federal government and large corporations

Why them? The Biden-Harris administration has a platform that can cut through the misinformation and deliver solutions at scale.

What enables this future world? A fast-mutating virus and bungled rollouts—be it supplies that don't match demand, or doses that prove dangerous or expired. However, this world also requires strong social policy, quickly passed and enacted with bi-partisan collaboration.

What is a barrier to this future world? A population on the mend. If the vaccine rollout proves effective and we reach herd immunity in 2022, this world becomes nonviable.

In 18 months, this world looks like: A scene not unlike the past year and a half. While daily life is more open and less anxiety-ridden, virus outbreaks worldwide remind us that we are all connected and continuously in the grip of Covid. The US focuses on undoing the patent protections of its successful vaccines, eager to scale and distribute them to the far reaches of the globe.



Midway into 2021, bold ambitions had yet to sync with the real-world work to be done. Alarming reports of vaccine-related complications and side effects were followed by news of threatening variants. As the months progressed, it became clearer and clearer that a return to anything familiar to pre-Covid days was in fact years away. With each advancement, our timeline seemed to hit a setback. And the more we learned, the farther an end to the crisis was pushed into the future.

The Biden administration tried to take down the systemic barriers to available testing, vaccination and treatment, but struggled to overcome persistent disinformation campaigns and, by proxy, a significant portion of citizens declining to receive vaccines. This growing community of anti-vaxxers, allegiant to a few but mighty religious figures who called upon their congregants to skip the vaccine, held on to the belief that their faith would carry them through. Then, when a few hundred cases of vaccinated patients contracting the virus later ballooned to several thousand, the conditions surrounding these reports raised questions about the vaccine's efficacy against mounting variants. Denialism, disinformation and botched communication plans combined to prolong our already slow path to a functional end of the virus.

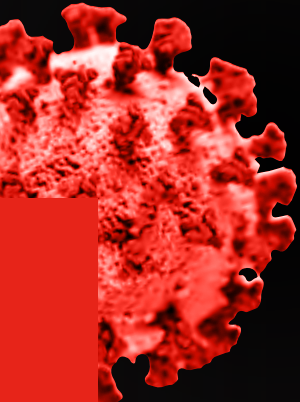
Business

From the early days of the Biden presidency until July of 2022, the markets experienced both saliency and volatility. Ongoing tensions with China combined with unprecedented flooding that shallowed the depths of the Mississippi River and undermined two of its locks, leading to greater raw materials constraints and the delayed production of thousands of consumer goods. The focus of many businesses' procurement efforts shifted in the summer of 2021 from cost reduction to protecting supply chain resilience.

Rethinking Capitalism

Federal Covid strategies continued to be mired in partisan tactics, but the administration forged ahead, committed to reversing the systemic and existential conditions that rooted this crisis. Facing slower-than-anticipated vaccine adoption, most analysts agreed that to reach a functional end or peak immunity, we had to synchronize the complex interplay between a scaled vaccine rollout and a motivating behavior change campaign.

Just as when the nation faced prior disasters, former Presidents Obama, G.W. Bush and Clinton banded together to launch *Project Indivisible*, a coordinated campaign to address the need for across-the-aisle cooperation both at the global and national level. The three exes asked Americans to put aside their differences and campaigned for our citizens' health to be a bipartisan priority. An open letter titled "A Letter on Power and a More Just Capitalism" in the *New York Times*, co-authored by George W. Bush and Barack Obama, argued that corporations fail to recognize that capitalism's success is dependent on inclusive long-term growth and a free-market system that supports the availability of essential goods and services to all Americans. The letter was a stunning bipartisan admission to systemic inequities that the authors themselves had helped create and started a legitimate national conversation about the need to rethink consumerism and embrace stakeholder capitalism as the way forward.



Air Quality

In an unexpected turn, the focus on virus contamination and exposure led to an ever-present awareness of the precariousness of our air quality. The ruthless exposure of the weaknesses of current diagnostic technologies led to a surge of promising, innovative solutions. Bedside AI to test air quality and at-home Covid tests emerged in the market, including inexpensive paper-based pathogen swabs and diagnostic air purifiers that could detect the presence of the virus within an hour. Amidst what sounds like science fiction, the FDA found itself policing thousands of new products falsely promising to mitigate or treat Covid.

At the same time, the climate crisis continued to unfold in the US with devastating storms, wildfires and scorching droughts. In response, the European Environment Agency called upon the Biden administration to accelerate its months-long review of Trump-era environmental legislation and move more swiftly toward reversal. Under mounting criticism, the administration was pressed to make good on Biden's commitment to change the course of what he called "the existential threat of our time." Working with manufacturers to strengthen the restored Clean Air Act, particular focus was given to disadvantaged communities and communities of color that were often located near highways, factories and manufacturing centers.

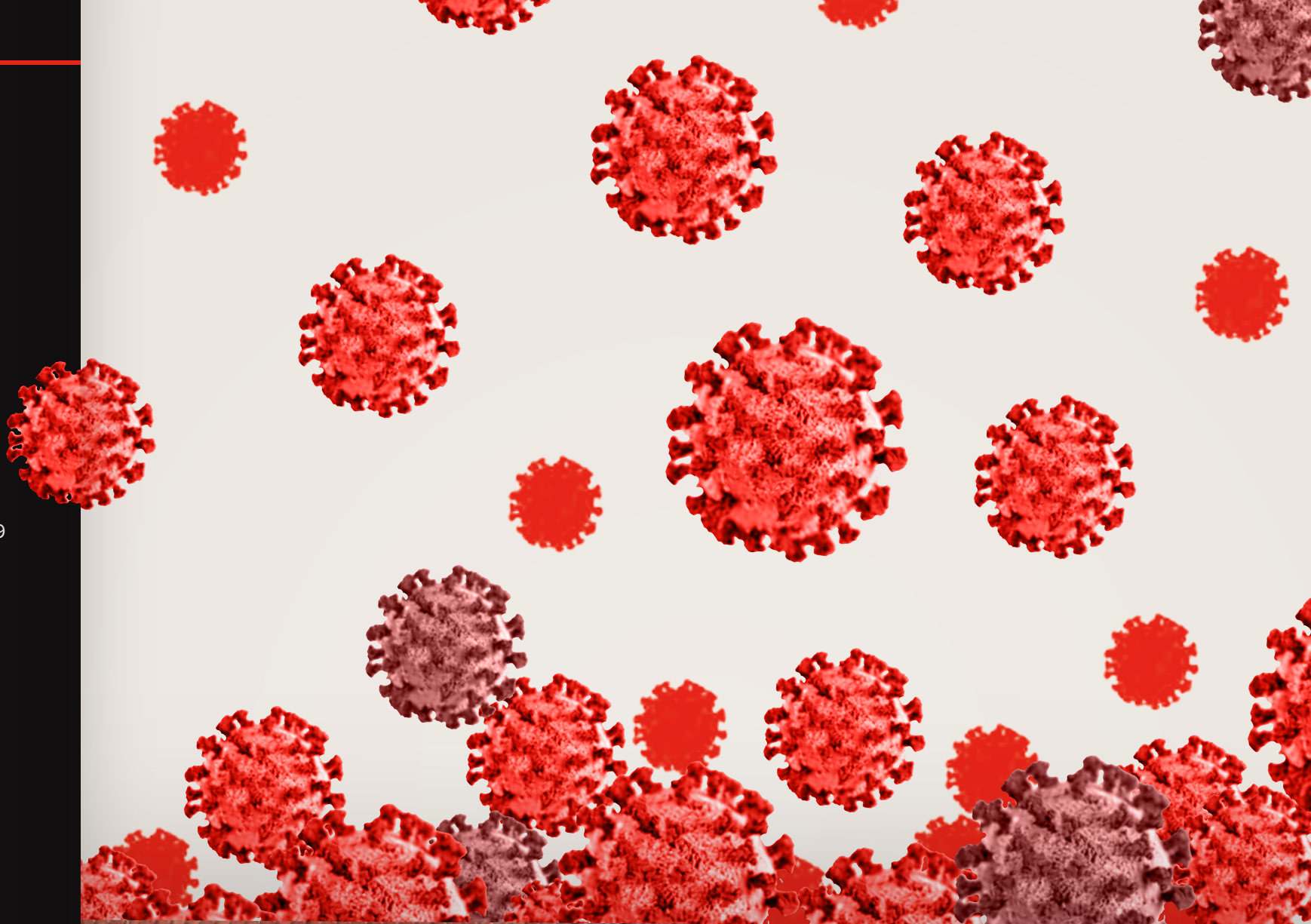
Looking Forward

Despite successful vaccine development, new leadership and renewed optimism, there has been no return to normal. This is our new normal. Today, efforts to motivate the public are increasingly omnipresent as the World Health Organization's Covid-19 Dashboard finds a home as a permanent fixture on Google's homepage and a physical version is installed on Sixth Avenue in NYC, just a block away from Times Square. Regions represented on the dashboard light up first as yellow, then orange to red as the hotspots flare and cool in real time, a visage to the pandemic's impact at a global scale.

Once mocked—now essential, both Amazon and Walmart use drones, now green-flagged by the government to deliver laboratory tests and medical supplies. Approved drones also send emergency aid to natural disaster sites, viral hotspots and assist a flood of D2C platforms. The buzzes and hums overhead are now more commonplace than imaginable.

The European Union and the Biden administration are working to undo the 2020 agreements with drug makers that protected their patent controls. If these suspect agreements are overturned or undone, we might be able to distribute vaccinations to some of the world's most devastated nations and reach a functional end to the pandemic. Moreover, as Africa and a handful of regions lag behind the rest of the world in their ability to scale vaccinations, it becomes clear that their precariousness is a threat shared by the rest of the world.

If we are to turn the page on this crisis, we must get the vaccine to all of mankind—regardless of color, creed or stature. There is a light at the end of this long tunnel. With patience, we'll get there one step at a time.



CHOREO- GRAPHED

Reclamation

AT A GLANCE:

Why is the virus uncontrolled? Simply put, vaccine producers cannot reach scale. Each of the manufacturers have patent agreements with the prior administration.

Who is leading the fight? Average, everyday Americans

Why them? We collectively decide it's up to us; that we are our own best shot at recovery. Realizing innovation, entrepreneurship and closely coordinated efforts to reopen are the solution, citizens take matters into their own hands and stage revitalizations at the city level.

What enables this future world? The persistence of the virus and other systemic issues intersects with the limitations of our best solution efforts. In this world, human beings' innate sense of ingenuity, innovation and survival kicks in. We tap into our civic duty and desire to survive and thrive.

What is a barrier to this future world? When greed and selfishness prevail, we fail to synchronize our efforts for the greater good. If the virus becomes well-controlled in 2022, this world is not viable.

In 18 months, this world looks like: A country still under the constraints of Covid, but much better off societally. While Covid may continue, we possess a new sense of unity, understanding and service to our country.

Knee-deep into 2021, the dust of conflict and crisis began to settle. Vaccination rollout was still uneven, but slowly increasing. Both cases and hospitalizations were down from their highest points. Still, analysts feared that our best efforts may not gain enough foothold to fully contend with the virus's next iteration. Facing the forecast of 4th and 5th waves and a slower-than-promised global response to the virus, citizens realized that their best hope was to cooperate, share in sacrifice and synchronize efforts at the local level. In response, optimism gave way to pragmatism, and gestures of civic responsibility began to replace soundbites.

Healthcare

As Pfizer and AstraZeneca struggled to meet the global demand for vaccines, panic boiled and people called for the pharmaceutical companies to release their patents to other drug makers. Due to contractual deals the government signed at the onset of the crisis, however, these efforts were mired in legal red tape. Choosing hope over hopelessness, Americans realized their salvation wouldn't reside in a syringe, it would be found in sacrifice, coordination and the capacity of human ingenuity.

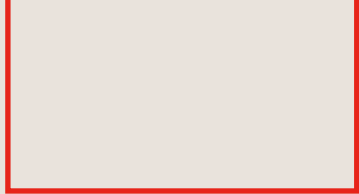
Some of the areas hardest hit, like New York and Seattle, led the way with "Forced Compliance" laws in an effort to find promising success in vigilance. Neighborhood patrols monitored their own communities to ensure people stayed home and to enforce masking and social distancing in public spaces. To ensure everyone stayed home, grassroots nonprofits in rural and impoverished communities organized free home-delivery services for restaurants, grocery stores and other essential businesses for those unable to afford InstaCart or DoorDash costs. Small-town book clubs helped orchestrate mass vaccinations at local clinics.

Due to pressure from public health directors, the newly established National Pandemic Testing Board worked closely with community health departments to coordinate state and local data and to scale testing in an unprecedented example of coordination between national and local levels. Slowly on-shore test manufacturing and laboratory capacity were able to scale faster, creating enough testing and infrastructure to serve a vast majority of the nation, not just priority populations.

Education

Tired of on-again, off-again patterns of distanced learning, the spring of 2022 brought a new breed of community organizers to coordinate and reimagine how we could re-open schools. Basketball courts, school yards and other open-air spaces replaced indoor classrooms. Each morning, masked-up students completed a set of attentive hygiene practices, reminders of respiratory etiquette and social-distancing drills. In already economically disadvantaged districts, the concept of year-round school and an extended school day helped reclaim the educational opportunities lost to Covid, while extending free meals and health and hygiene services.

Faced with the expense of year-round schooling, a rare moment of bipartisan support narrowly passed the Emma Willard Act, named for the women's rights activist who dedicated her life to women's access to education. The Willard Act aimed at meeting communities where they were to remove obstacles to public education and make it as equitable as possible—regardless of sex, race, orientation, nationality or immigration status. This wasn't simply the way forward for the privileged, the Willard Act provided programing and funding for hard-to-reach and high-risk populations.



Businesses

Businesses in every industry were forced to pivot and reimagine logistics, distribution, supply chains and customer interaction—ushering in a new era of entrepreneurial innovation. Warehouse suppliers sold direct-to-consumer for the first time ever. Restaurants pivoted to home delivery and take-and-bake or formed co-ops to reach additional audiences. Originally shuttered completely, performing arts organizations and music venues reopened with outdoor and virtual performances.

Today, instead of relying on volume for sales, restaurants and bars focus on creating unique and exclusive experiences for a limited number of parties. Operations and logistics experts create precisely choreographed and synchronized community events and large-scale gatherings to keep patrons safe and healthy while hiding all complicated machinations behind the curtain (à la Disney). Big chains like Walmart and Home Depot are seeing a decline as people gravitate toward supporting small-town, locally owned businesses whom they view as their neighbors vs. corporate giants, leading to a boom in small businesses nationwide.

Looking Forward

By September 2022, the markets are in steady recovery, and philanthropy is booming. Giving in all forms of service and funding seems to be the new American pastime—a productive way to power through these hard times. With giving at unprecedented highs, funds from both charities and the private sector are being redistributed to those most impacted. People are paying it forward. Many successfully coordinated community efforts focus on the most vulnerable, the homeless, female-headed households, elderly, migrant workers, disabled and socially marginalized communities.

Today, the new contagions are generosity and sacrifice, and they may promise to be our silver bullet in surviving this thing. A nation once waiting in suspension stepped into the fray and onto the frontlines, more attuned to the vital role of self-organizing citizenship. It became clear to most that as civic-minded individuals, we must rise to the moment, give to the greater good and slow the next spread. This is what it means to contribute as a citizen. This is what it means to understand that one American's problem is America's problem—to pull together and behave in ways that sow long-term benefits for all of our communities.

WHAT'S NEXT?

ANTICIPATE & PREPARE
for Tomorrow

UNDERSTANDING THE FUTURE STARTS WITH A DEEP SENSE OF THE NOW:

as you saw in our four scenarios, the emergent socio-cultural forces we're all experiencing now could interplay in a number of ways in the future, shaping what life looks and feels like in the months (and years) ahead. It's why we develop scenarios that are intentionally divergent and equally plausible—allowing you to watch for guideposts that one of these four futures is indeed unfolding, then activating your strategy accordingly.

The power brands of tomorrow are prioritizing the future right now: glimpsing potential scenarios, envisioning their businesses within them, understanding key threats and emerging opportunities, and strategizing their actions accordingly.

At LPK, we call this Future Fluency: the ability to anticipate outcomes and act wisely on behalf of your business. Using the power of foresight, you can learn how to immerse yourself in the future, prepare for what's beyond right now, and turn rapid change into a competitive advantage—no matter what unfolds.

READY TO BECOME FUTURE FLUENT? *Let's Talk.*



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To start a deeper conversation on the contents of this report, reach out to our authors or head to lpk.com.