

ZENO

An Historic Moment: The Values Shift In Pandemic America

ZENO GROUP STRATEGY + PLANNING | APRIL 2020



THE HUMAN PROJECT™

ZENO GROUP



This March our researchers at Zeno Group asked 1,000 Americans, “What **personal values** do you hold in high importance today versus those you held in high regard before the pandemic?”

Generally, core values that drive human behavior do not shift dramatically from year to year.

But like so many other things that have changed in our COVID-19 lives, so have Americans’ views of their most important values – shifting in ways we have not seen since the last time Americans experienced this much economic and social upheaval: The Great Depression of the 1930s.

A new outlook is **emerging**



Audience & Methodology

Who	How Many	When	What	How
US Adults, Gen Pop 18+	n = 1,000	March 27 – 29, 2020	Values Refresh Study [COVID-19]	Online Survey

Margin of Error: +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level

Top Rising Values Amongst Americans

Values that were already a high priority, such as *protecting the family*, *helpfulness*, and *honesty* are becoming even more important for most Americans during this time of crisis.

As financial and material security becomes increasingly unstable due to the economic ramifications of COVID-19, values such as *self-reliance*, *simplicity* and *thrift* are also increasing in importance, as American's begin prioritizing stability for themselves and their families. Values like these have not showed up before 2020 in the top 10 among the general population.

As Americans face more consequences of COVID-19, such as social-distancing, self-quarantining and working from home, this new daily reality has many Americans reassessing the importance of their *stable personal relationships*.

We also see the value of *duty* showing up in the top rising values. This is an interesting shift, especially among the youngest generation, Gen Z, as they already feel the pressure and responsibility to save the planet from many of today's most pressing challenges.

Source: Zeno Group Values Refresh Study [COVID-19], April 2020

Gen Pop's Top Rising Values:

1. protecting the family (73%)
2. self-reliance (69%)
3. thrift (68%)
4. helpfulness (68%)
5. simplicity (67%)
6. honesty (67%)
7. stable personal relationships (66%)
8. duty (65%)

[Top-2 Box, "Much More" or "Somewhat More" important]

In Their Own Words: Why These Values Are Rising

“Considering what is happening around the world with the Covid-19, it is more important to be self-reliant. At the same time, **we should not take tomorrow for granted**. Life is short, and we need to **reevaluate what is really important in our lives.**”

- Gen X Male, Minnesota

“I have been staying safe at home the past 10 days and not being able to go out to eat or a movie can be frustrating, so **freedom has become more important**, the use of the phone and internet has become **more important to connect with family and friends.**”

- Boomer Female, Colorado

“Times and situations in your life cause many things that were once so important to become the least of importance now. In unstable times, **honesty, integrity and caring are more important than ever** and it is NOT all about yourself but important to put others first and **be kind, considerate and compassionate.**”

- Boomer Female, California

“With the coronavirus having the effect on the world that it is, **protecting family and friends is most important**. Superficial things mean less.”

- Millennial Male, Ohio

Top Declining Values Amongst Americans

Aspirational values like *power, status, wealth* and *ambition*, which before COVID-19 were key drivers for many groups, particularly career-focused Millennials and Gen Z, are down. Now, as more Americans begin to face urgent, daily challenges, personal aspirations are taking a back seat.

This also demonstrates an increasing humility and perhaps a sense of gratitude given the top values juxtaposed against these falling values. What is interesting among them, however, is that Gen Z places the value of *ambition* at #1, though it is quickly followed by *working hard, protecting the family, thrift* and *freedom*. We conclude here that the motivation for Ambition is not in the self-interest of these young adults, but rather, is powered by their sense of duty versus self-interest.

In a time of social-distancing and lengthy quarantines, many Americans are forced to shift their focus for fun away from the outside-world, looking inward and indoors for self-fulfillment. As a result, values such as *adventure, romance* and *excitement* are feeling less and less tangible to most Americans.

Americans are becoming keenly aware of the role they play in solving the COVID-19 crisis, understanding the effects of their decisions on others and the dangers of acting in *self-interest*.

Source: Zeno Group Values Refresh Study [COVID-19], April 2020

Gen Pop's Top Declining Values:

1. power (20%)
2. status (20%)
3. wealth (16%)
4. adventure (14%)
5. romance (11%)
6. excitement (10%)
7. ambition (10%)
8. self-interest (10%)

[Bottom-2 Box, "Much Less" or "Somewhat Less" important]

In Their Own Words: Why These Values Are Declining

“During these difficult times I’m more acutely aware of **keeping positive, supportive helpful and considerate of my friends, family, and community**. My self interest, goals and achievement are all put on a back burner while we all focus on **getting through this together.**”

- Millennial Female, Washington

“I had a child less than 3 months ago, **it made me realize how important the people in your life are**, that you should love and protect me, as well as the earth and the environment, so my child has all the support from friends and family that he needs as well as a beautiful world to grow up in.”

- Gen X Male, Minnesota

“In the light of recent events, namely the COVID-19 outbreak, I am more inclined to view my fellow humans as part of a global community. **We all need to work together to beat this thing.**”

- Boomer Female, New Jersey

“Now that I am retired, seen and done a lot of things in my life, I have a chance to really reflect on my life. I have adjusted my feelings, opinions. and outlook on my life... What has become more real and important to me is **how I treat other people regardless of how they treat me, and to keep understanding** (never knowing what other people may have gone through, or are going through), **patience, and love in my heart and spirit.** SO CALMING, AND SATISFYING.”

- Boomer Male, Arizona

A close-up photograph of a person's eye. The iris is a light blue color and contains a reflection of a person in a wheelchair, suggesting a focus on accessibility and social values. The person's skin has freckles, and their dark hair is visible on the right side of the frame. The text "A Value Shift Across Generations" is overlaid on the left side of the image in a white, sans-serif font.

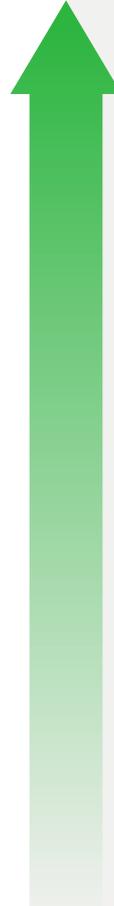
A Value Shift
Across
Generations

Top Rising Values by Generation

When thinking about what values have become more important in the last 6 months, most Americans across all generations say the value of *protecting the family* is a becoming more important.

For Gen Z, values like *ambition*, *working hard*, and *freedom* are rising to the top, while the other generations are focusing more on values like *self-reliance*, *thrift*, *honesty*, and *helpfulness*.

Source: Zeno Group Values Refresh Study [COVID-19], April 2020



Gen Z

1. ambition (74%)
2. working hard (74%)
3. protecting family (73%)
4. thrift (70%)
5. freedom (70%)

Gen X

1. protecting family (72%)
2. simplicity (67%)
3. honesty (66%)
4. self-reliance (65%)
5. thrift (65%)

Millennials

1. protecting family (75%)
2. self-reliance (73%)
3. helpfulness (73%)
4. knowledge (72%)
5. working hard (71%)

Boomers

1. protecting family (72%)
2. thrift (68%)
3. self-reliance (67%)
4. duty (66%)
5. helpfulness (66%)

[Top-2 Box, "Much More" or "Somewhat More" important]

In Their Own Words: Why These Generational Values Are Rising

“These feelings and values have become more important because of this Global Pandemic, not being able to go anywhere or do anything makes you think and realize what is important. I also recently got into a serious relationship so the thought of **putting that person first is now more important to me** as opposed to just taking care of my own thoughts and feelings.”

- Gen Z Female, New York

“I will probably not sweat the small stuff as much. **Minor problems I worried about before seem silly** in the eyes of global health concerns.”

- Millennial Female, Illinois

“**Family is more important** than anything else today.”

- Gen X Male, Indiana

“I am **more thrifty** and aware of environmental impacts.”

- Boomer Female, Pennsylvania

“**Nothing is more important than faith & family**, so I let go of things that may have bothered me before. Keeping in contact with family more - mostly by email. Having things besides necessities are less important & I'm **spending less on nonessentials**.”

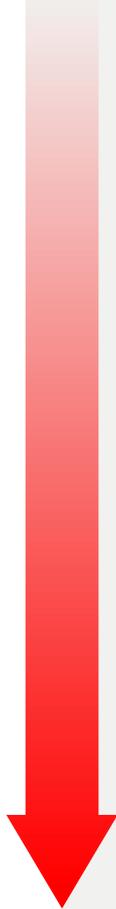
- Gen X Female, Nebraska

Top Declining Values by Generation

When thinking about which values have become less important over the last 6 months, more individualized values like **status**, **power**, and **wealth** have fallen the most.

Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers feel that values like **adventure**, **romance**, and **excitement** are less important, while Gen Z feel their sense of **self-interest**, **belonging**, and **duty** have become less important.

Source: Zeno Group Values Refresh Study [COVID-19], April 2020



Gen Z

1. status (14%)
2. power (12%)
3. self-interest (11%)
4. belonging (11%)
5. duty (10%)

Millennials

1. power (16%)
2. status (16%)
3. wealth (16%)
4. adventure (12%)
5. romance (10%)

Gen X

1. power (25%)
2. status (22%)
3. wealth (19%)
4. adventure (12%)
5. romance (11%)

Boomers

1. status (25%)
2. power (22%)
3. adventure (20%)
4. wealth (17%)
5. excitement (17%)

[Top-2 Box, "Much More" or "Somewhat More" important]

In Their Own Words: Why These Generational Values Are Declining

“You take much less for granted as you try and protect your family and loved ones as well as contribute as best as possible to your communities to stop this virus.”

- Millennial Male, California

“It is less important to be successful and rich, but better to have family who cares for you and to care for your community members.”

- Boomer Female, Maine

“Wealth and physical property don't mean anything if you don't have your loved ones with you.”

- Boomer Female, Wisconsin

“I am being much more careful spending because the economy might be severely effected.”

- Millennial Male, Ohio

“I am trying to be a better family man and trying to spend the time I have right now with my family as much as possible.”

- Gen Z Male, New Jersey

What This Means For Our Clients Today:

Key Points This Research Supports

- **A heightened need for stakeholder listening.** Brands and companies need to be sure their communications and actions are aligned with the control and empowerment their stakeholders seek.
- **A premium on problem-solving and community support.** The public will want employers and brands to act in ways that demonstrate they are on their side and will be wary of overt branding and promotion.
- **A greater sensitivity toward economic pressures.** With more than 20 million Americans unemployed, the public will expect companies and brands to conduct themselves with an appreciation of this new economic reality.
- **A return to simple, classic pleasures.** Depending on how long the economy's slide lasts, and how long its recovery takes, values such as thrift and simplicity may become more central to our lives.

Questions?

Please Contact:

Therese Caruso

MD, Zeno Group Strategy + Planning

Therese.Caruso@zenogroup.com

Christopher Mckinney

Research Analyst, Zeno Group Strategy + Planning

Christopher.McKinney@zenogroup.com