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# PANDENOMICS

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# THE POST-PANDEMIC CONSUMER AT 18 MONTHS: SPENDING NOW, WORRYING LATER



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## PANDENOMICS

This study series measures the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer and merchant behavior and explores the accelerated shift to a digital-first world. Pandenomics is a proprietary research and analytic framework and series of insights that measures the shift away from a primarily physical world toward a digital-first counterpart. This framework makes it possible to accurately profile the characteristics of these digital shifters as consumers prioritize preserving their personal and familial health and safety as they make decisions about doing business in the world.

# INTRODUCTION

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**C**onsumer confidence in the United States economy dropped to its lowest in seven months in September 2021, according to the nonprofit Conference Board. The Board’s Consumer Confidence Index fell 5.9 points in September, with consumers growing less interested in purchasing big-ticket items such as motor vehicles and major household appliances in the coming months and less confident in the state of the U.S. labor market as the delta variant raged across the nation.<sup>1</sup>

This apparent glass-half-empty outlook reflects a broader shift in consumer attitude toward the ongoing crisis. PYMNTS research shows that the economy is now consumers’ top concern regarding the pandemic’s impact on their lives, with 62 percent saying they are “very” or “extremely” worried about the economic effects. Just 48 percent express the same level of worry about their health.

This shift has also had a marked impact on how consumers live their lives — in a way that may help stimulate economic growth. They are growing more eager to reengage with their favorite real-world activities as they grow more comfortable and confident in their physical health and safety. Fifty percent of all consumers now say they plan to shop, travel, dine and attend social events more often in the next three months. Therefore, it is clear that although many consumers are taking big-ticket purchases off their wish lists, they are still making a conscious effort to go out and enjoy the purchases that help them add a little spice to their everyday lives.

These are just a few of the findings we uncovered in PYMNTS’ The Post-Pandemic Consumer At 18 Months: Spending Now, Worrying Later. We surveyed a census-balanced panel of 2,496 U.S. consumers between July 23 and July 28 as part of our ongoing research over the last 18 months into the pandemic’s impact on consumer behavior. During that time, we have fielded 12 studies and surveyed more than 24,000 U.S. consumers to understand what worries them most about the ongoing pandemic and how that will influence how they shop, dine and live in the next three months.

**This is what we learned.**

<sup>1</sup> Mutikani, L. U.S. consumer confidence hits seven-month low as near-term economic outlook dims. Reuters, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/us-goods-trade-deficit-increases-august-2021-09-28/>, Accessed September 2021.

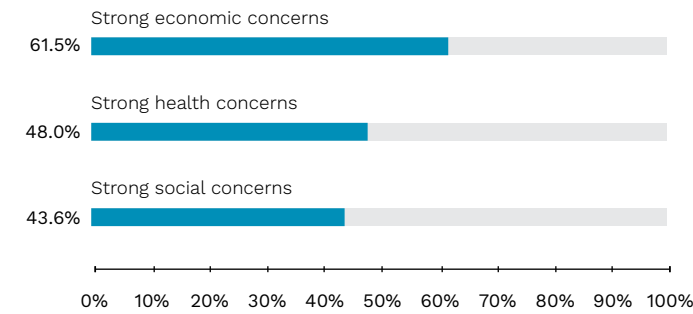
PART I: FADING FEARS

**Consumers are now more worried about how the pandemic will impact the economy than how it will impact their health.**

Twenty-eight percent more consumers cite the economy and not their health as their chief concern.

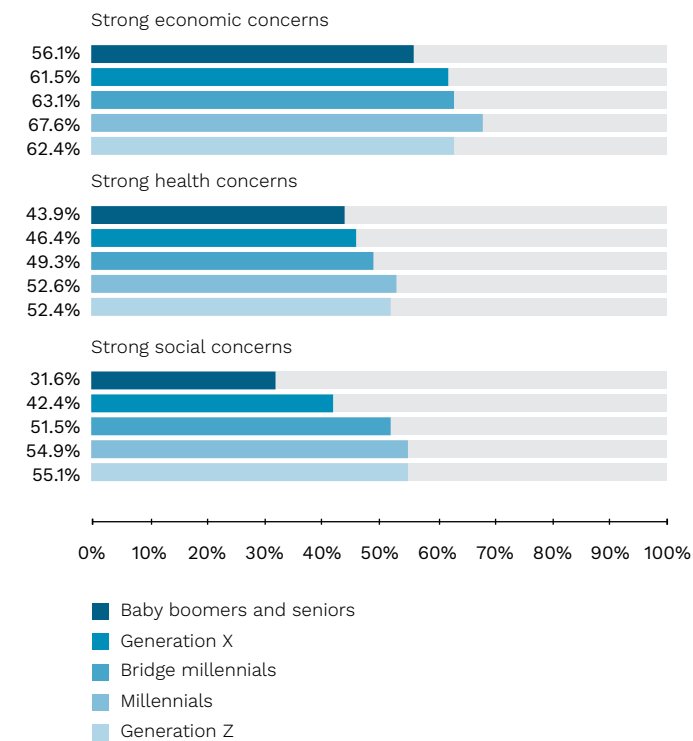
Consumers' pandemic fears have changed a great deal since the initial outbreak. Consumers are no longer as worried about becoming ill as they once were. Sixty-two percent of all consumers now say they are either "very" or "extremely" worried about the pandemic's ongoing impact on the U.S. economy. This compares to 48 percent of consumers who report feeling "very" or "extremely" concerned about how the pandemic might impact their health. Social concerns are third on consumers' minds, with 44 percent saying they are "very" or "extremely" concerned about the pandemic's impact on their social lives.

**FIGURE 1:**  
**WHY CONSUMERS ARE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT THE PANDEMIC**  
1A Share who are "very" or "extremely" worried about select factors



Source: PYMNTS.com

1B Share who are "very" or "extremely" worried about select factors, by generation



Source: PYMNTS.com

Consumers in different age groups also express different concerns, with millennials being the biggest worriers of all. They are the most likely to worry about the pandemic's impact on both the economy (68 percent) and their health (53 percent).

Millennials and Gen Z are equally worried about how the pandemic will keep their social lives on hold. Fifty-five percent of each age group say they are "very" or "extremely" worried that the ongoing pandemic will continue to curtail their social lives.

**62%**  
**OF CONSUMERS ARE "VERY" OR "EXTREMELY" WORRIED ABOUT HOW THE PANDEMIC WILL IMPACT THE ECONOMY.**

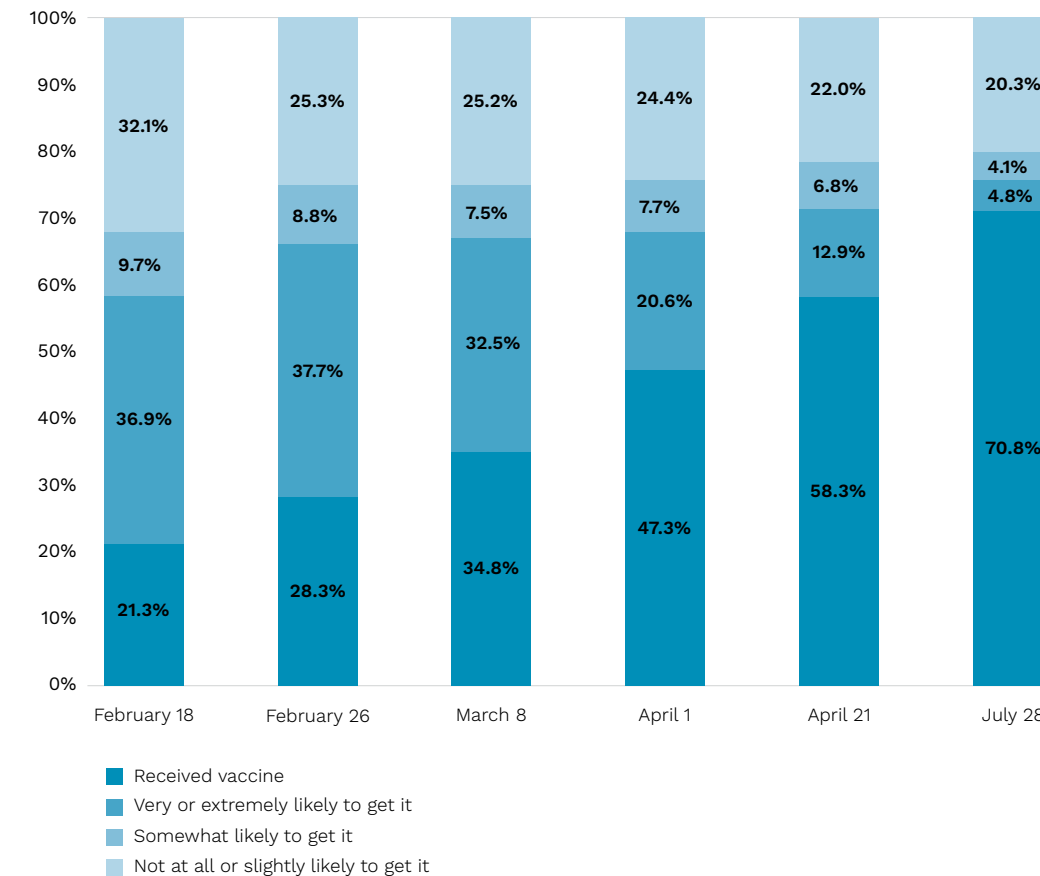
PART I: FADING FEARS

**Higher vaccination rates have helped mitigate consumers' worries about their health.**

Three times as many consumers are now vaccinated compared to the numbers in February, and one-third fewer say they do not plan to get vaccinated at all.

Vaccines have played a key role in alleviating consumers' fears about how the pandemic will impact their health and the health of those around them. As more consumers get vaccinated, the less worried they become about contracting or spreading the virus. Seventy-one percent of all adult U.S. consumers have received at least one inoculation — three times as many as had done so by February 2021.

**FIGURE 2:**  
**HOW VACCINATION RATES HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME**  
Share of consumers who report different levels of vaccination, by date

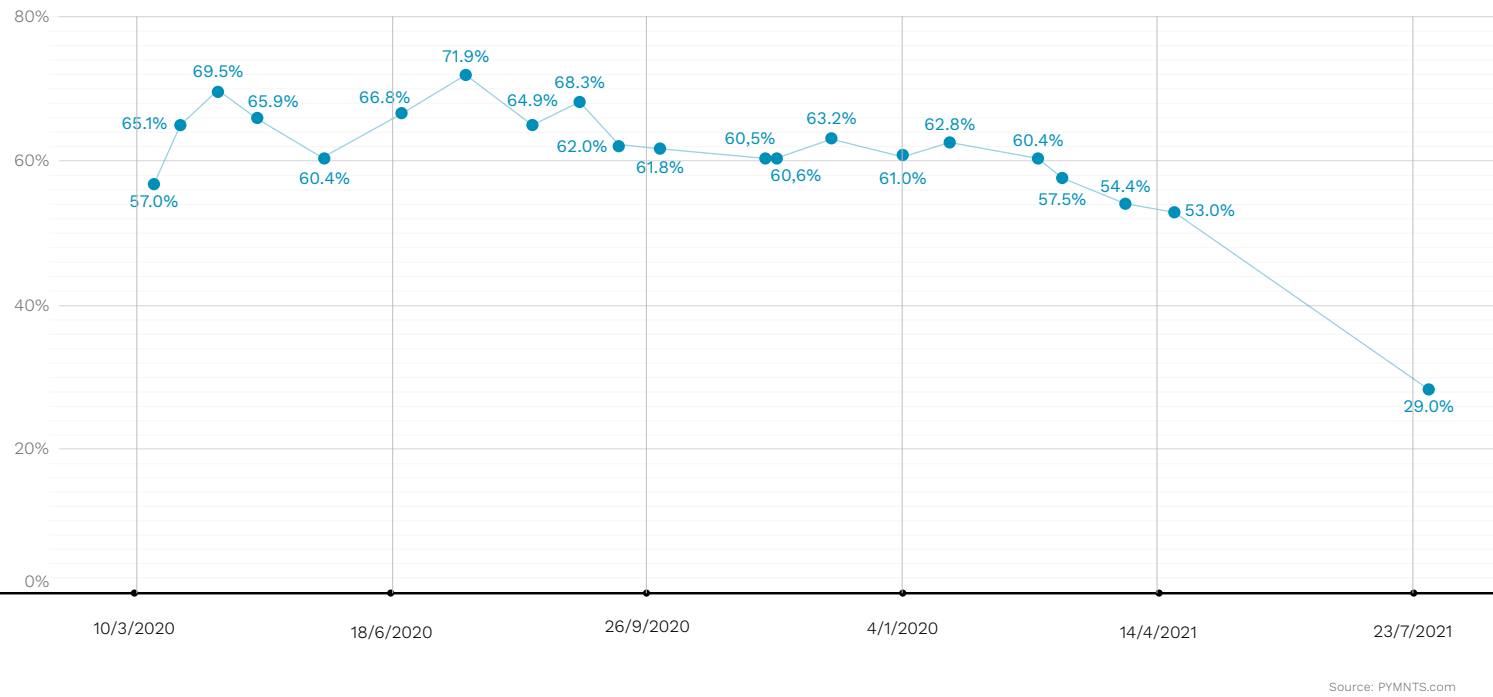


Source: PYMNTS.com

As of July there are far fewer consumers who do not plan to get vaccinated than there were in February. Just 20 percent of adult consumers now say they are not at all or extremely unlikely to get vaccinated, down from 32 percent in February.

Rising vaccination rates and receding vaccine hesitancy have cut consumers' worries of infection in half. Just 29 percent of consumers now say they are "very" or "extremely" worried about contracting COVID-19 — less than half of the 60 percent who said the same in February. These trends strongly indicate that consumers' fears of infection will continue to recede as vaccination rates increase.

**FIGURE 3:**  
**HOW CONSUMERS' WORRIES ABOUT CONTRACTING COVID-19 HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME**  
 Share of consumers who are "very" or "extremely" concerned about contracting COVID-19



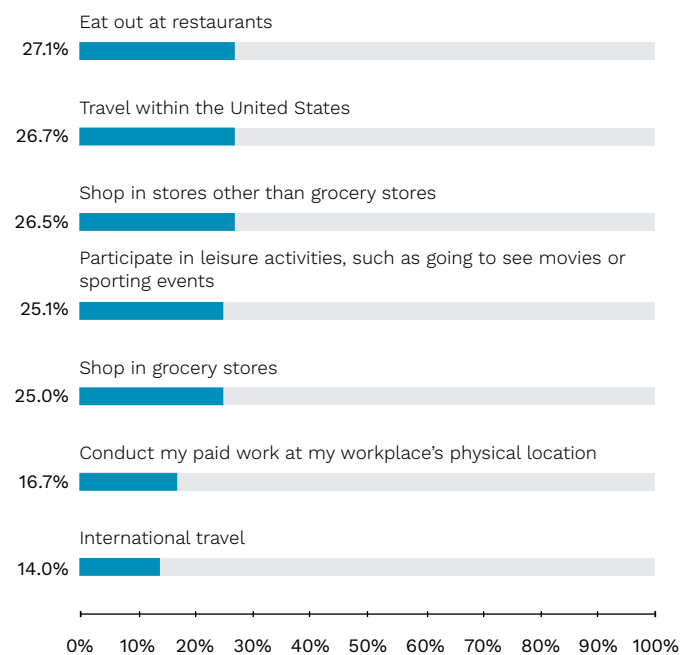
**29%**  
**OF CONSUMERS ARE NOW**  
**“VERY” OR “EXTREMELY”**  
**WORRIED ABOUT**  
**CONTRACTING COVID-19.**

PART II: BACK OUTSIDE AND BEYOND

**With health concerns waning, 50 percent of US consumers plan to resume dining out, traveling, entertainment activities and shopping in stores.**

Dining out at restaurants is the first thing on consumers' "post-pandemic" to-do list, followed closely by leisure traveling within the U.S. Our research shows that 27 percent of all consumers say they plan to dine at more restaurants in the next three months than they do now. Twenty-seven percent of consumers plan to travel more within the U.S., suggesting that the country could soon see a surge in domestic tourism.

**FIGURE 4:**  
**HOW CONSUMERS PLAN TO CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOR GOING FORWARD**  
Share planning to do more of select activities within the next three months



Source: PYMNTS.com

More than one-quarter of consumers also say they plan to shop in more brick-and-mortar retail shops, shop in more grocery stores and engage in leisure activities more often in the next three months.

**CONSUMERS ARE NO LONGER CONTENT TO STAY AT HOME AND ARE GROWING INCREASINGLY EAGER TO REENGAGE IN THE BRICK-AND-MORTAR ECONOMY.**

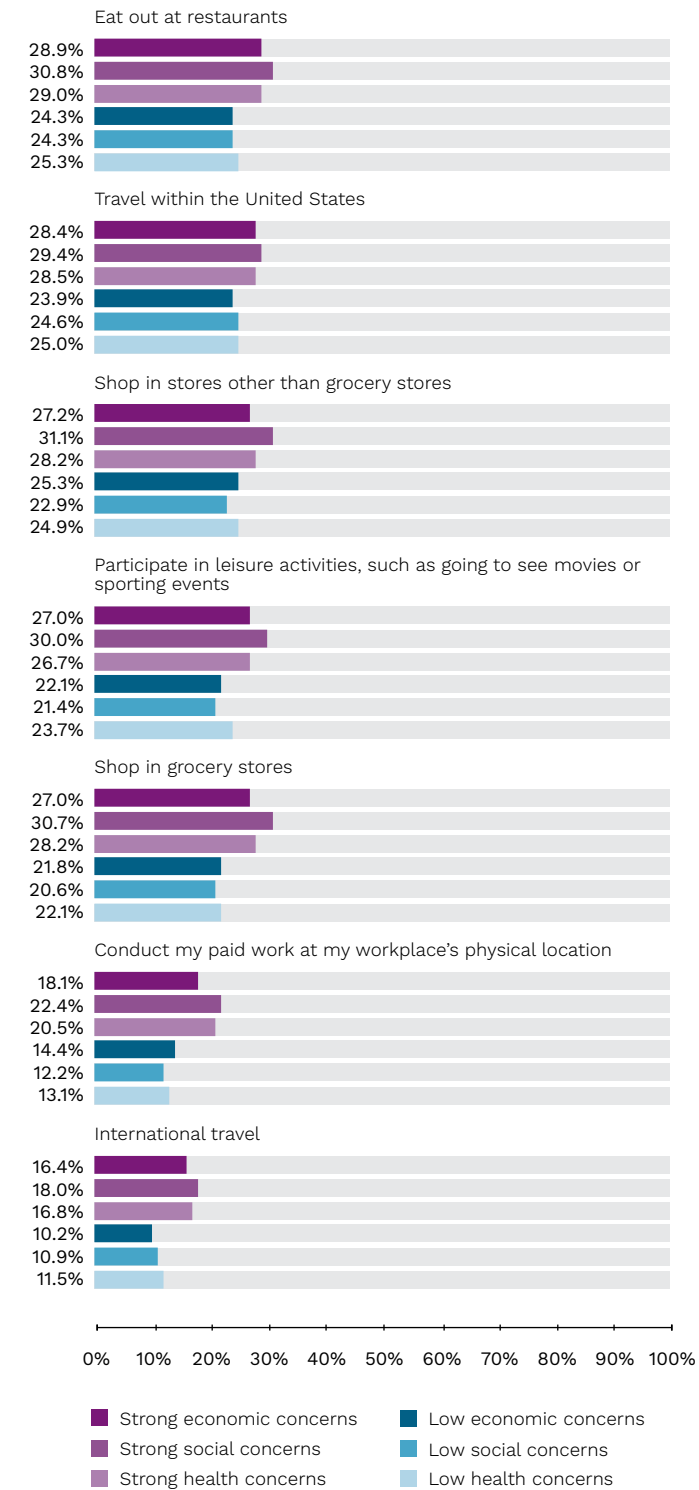


PART II: BACK OUTSIDE AND BEYOND

**Consumers who worry primarily about how the pandemic impacts their social lives are the most eager to travel, shop and dine outside their homes.**

Thirty-one percent of consumers primarily concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their social lives plan to dine out at restaurants, shop in grocery stores and shop in brick-and-mortar retail shops more in the next three months than they do now. Thirty percent of these “socially concerned” consumers plan to participate in more leisurely activities, such as attending concerts, going to movie theaters or attending sporting events. Socially concerned consumers’ interest in resuming in-person commerce activities outpaces the levels of other consumers.

**FIGURE 5:**  
**HOW CONSUMERS WITH DIFFERENT CONCERNS PLAN TO CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOR GOING FORWARD**  
Share planning to do more of select activities within the next three months, by primary pandemic concern



Consumers who are worried chiefly about the pandemic’s impact on their health also plan to engage in more activities outside the house in the coming months, though not quite in the same numbers. Twenty-nine percent of health-concerned consumers plan to dine out more and travel in the U.S. more in the next three months, for example, and 28 percent also plan to shop more in brick-and-mortar retail shops going forward. Therefore, it is clear that even consumers who worry about their health are no longer content to stay at home, preferring to reengage with the physical economy.

Source: PYMNTS.com

## PART III: THE ONLY WORRY

## Consumers are eager to make the most out of the time they have to shop, dine and travel in part because they worry there might be more lockdowns.

Forty-seven percent of all consumers say they are worried the U.S. will go through another round of lockdowns and stay-at-home advisories in the next three months.

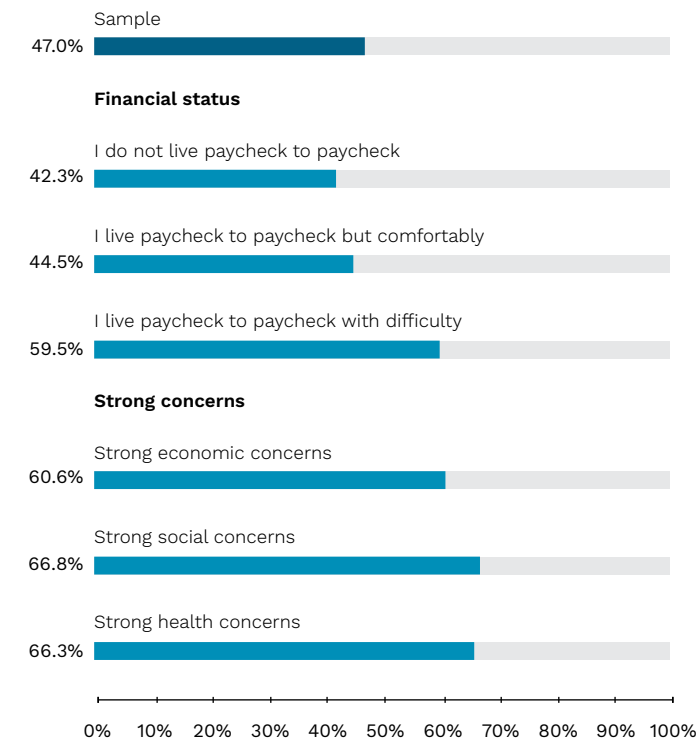
One of the key reasons consumers appear so interested in reengaging with the activities they took part in prior to March 2020 is that many also worry about the possibility of a future shutdown. Forty-seven percent of all consumers say they are “very” or “extremely” concerned that they once again may be asked to shelter in place within the next three months.

Fear of having more shutdowns is highest among consumers living paycheck to paycheck, indicating a financial component to consumers’ concerns about future shutdowns. Sixty percent of consumers living paycheck to paycheck and having difficulty paying their monthly bills also say they are “very” or “extremely” concerned that there may be more shutdowns in the future. This compares to 42 percent of consumers who do not live paycheck to paycheck who share this fear.

FIGURE 6:

### WHICH CONSUMERS ARE THE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT FUTURE SHUTDOWNS

Share who are “very” or “extremely” concerned about experiencing additional shutdowns or restrictions because of the pandemic within the next three months



Source: PYMNTS.com

Consumers who worry about the pandemic’s impact on their social lives also express considerable fear about the possibility of having to go back inside. Sixty-seven percent of those who are “very” or “extremely” worried about the pandemic’s impact on their social lives also say they are “very” or “extremely” worried about additional shutdowns within the next three months. Among consumers worried primarily about the pandemic’s impact on their health or on the economy, 66 percent and 61 percent, respectively, worry about having to go back to sheltering in place or enduring other restrictions on their activities.



# CONCLUSION

**M**ass vaccinations have reshaped the pandemic's impact on consumer behavior. Consumers are beginning to feel more comfortable and confident in their physical health and safety, and they are growing ever-more eager to live the lives they led before the health crisis. They worry less that they might become infected or infect others, but they are more concerned about the effect any future restrictions could have on taking trips to the market, having dinners at their favorite restaurants or attending concerts and sporting events.

## METHODOLOGY

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PYMNTS issued a survey to a census-balanced panel of 2,496 U.S. residents between July 23 and July 28, 2021, as a follow-up to our continuing series of studies examining consumers' behavioral changes following the COVID-19 outbreak. Respondents were 47.3 years old on average. We found that 51.6 percent were female and 33.5 percent held college degrees. We also collected data from inhabitants of every type of residential environment: 20.5 percent of respondents hailed from large urban areas, 32.0 percent lived in cities, 29.8 percent were from towns and 17.7 percent lived in rural areas.

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