



The impact of COVID-19 on The United States of America

Edred Melendez

Department of Mechanical Engineering, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409, Email: edred.melendez@ttu.edu

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Short Letter

While February of 2020 began as a normal month for Americans, the country was not ready for what the end of the month had in store. The SARS-CoV-2 virus finally made landfall in the United States, only 3 months after it was first discovered in Wuhan, China. The U.S., one of the largest superpowers in the world, quickly became the epicenter for the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether Americans know it or not, the virus has affected almost every part of their lives and has exposed many faults in various U.S. systems.

COVID-19 has disrupted every aspect of daily life for Americans. Many lost their jobs not even two months after the United States started to feel the effects of the pandemic. In April of 2020, the unemployment rate hit its peak at 14.7%, a percentage that had not been seen since the Great Depression in 1932 (Falk, et al., 2020 [1]). If someone were fortunate enough to keep their job, they would notice a large change in the way they worked. Many have started working from home or have had to enforce and partake in various mask and social distancing restrictions. The newly created phrase “essential worker” is used to describe the part of the U.S. workforce that has not stopped working during the pandemic, due to them being employed in an industry that is deemed a necessity. Industries like healthcare, grocery stores, and postal services, have not seen any pauses in work during this time. Healthcare workers, specifically, have been put under copious amounts of stress due to the added COVID-19 patients. They also face various supply shortages and even blood shortages due to social distancing and the public’s fear of the virus. The effects of the virus not only change American’s work lives but even what they do in their free time has been affected by the pandemic. Restaurants, bars, movie theatres, gyms, and many other leisure activities were forced to limit capacity or shut down to slow the spread of the virus. While many have been able to get by with hobbies, and other at-home activities, much of the American way of life revolved around social gatherings and time spent with friends and family. This rapid and substantial change in the way they partake in social interactions has played a large part in the negative psychosocial effects many Americans have experienced. The KFF, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that focuses on providing information on health issues, conducted a poll with adults in July of 2020. It was reported that 53% of respondents said their mental health had been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This number was up substantially from a similar poll conducted by the KFF in March of 2020, which showed

that 32% of respondents said their mental health was affected (Panchal, 2020 [2]). These effects will likely play a long-term role in the mental health of Americans, even after the pandemic is considered over.

Near the end of 2019, the International Monetary Fund reported that the global economy had slowed substantially and was on its way to a financial crisis similar to the one that occurred in 2008 (Gopinath, 2019 [3]). COVID-19 then became the catalyst responsible for sending the economy spiraling, and every industry suffered as swift economic shutdowns occurred all over the nation. In mid-September, the National Restaurant Association reported that “over 100,000 restaurants had closed either permanently or long-term” in the first six months of the pandemic. The food-service industry is on track to lose \$240 billion by the end of 2020. This is a substantial loss for the U.S economy as the food-service industry was the second-largest private-sector employer before the pandemic. The National Restaurant Association reports that this loss has directly resulted in the unemployment of over 3 million workers (National Restaurant Association, 2020 [4]).

Another sector severely affected by the pandemic is the oil and gas sector. With the sudden drop in demand for oil, largely due to travel restrictions and shutdowns, the industry saw some of the biggest losses it has seen in decades. According to Rystad Energy, an independent energy research company, the oil and gas industry is forecasted to lose over \$1 trillion in 2020, where \$2.7 trillion was made in 2019 (Turak, 2020 [5]). In a report published by Deloitte, this loss resulted in 107,000 layoffs between March and August of 2020. Deloitte also predicts that 70% of these jobs will not be back by the end of 2021 (Dickson, Tilghman, & Bonny, 2020 [6]). These are just two examples of industries that have felt the impact of the pandemic.

Many more like retail, travel, and tourism are faced with unprecedented conditions that have crippled them. On October 18th, 2020, S&P Global Market Intelligence reported that 527 U.S based companies had filed for bankruptcy, and that, “U.S. bankruptcies are on pace to hit their worst levels in 10 years. (Irum & Hudgins, 2020 [7])” All these losses directly attribute to the Congressional Budget Office’s declining outlook for the future of The United States’ GDP. In May of 2020, the CBO projected a nominal GDP for 2020-2021 that was \$3.9 trillion lower than they had projected in January of the same year (Swagel, 2020 [8]). The difference between these two projections is how COVID-19 affected the economy. Regardless of when a vaccine is developed, the United States will be feeling the effects of the pandemic for years to come. On a global scale, the World Bank reports (2020 [9]), “The COVID-19 recession has seen the fastest, steepest downgrades in consensus growth projections among all global recessions since 1990.” They also predict that all advanced economies will shrink by at least 7 percent, and the emerging and developing economies by 2.5 percent. These emerging and developing economies will be hit the hardest as their growth will be the slowest it has been in sixty years according to the World Bank (2020 [9]). For the global economy to recover, complete cooperation from all nations is required.

The poet Robert Frost once said, “The only way out, is through”, a quote which symbolizes life for Americans fighting to survive the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is not enough to simply survive this pandemic. The United States must learn from this total systemic failure, to be better prepared for other hardships that will undoubtedly arise. With total cooperation between the public, politicians, and professionals, the United States of America will recover.

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About the Author

Edred Melendez is an undergraduate mechanical engineering student at Texas Tech University. He is currently part of a research team that utilizes transdisciplinary engineering design processes to understand how transmission factors of COVID 19 relate to each other.