The New Social Contract:
Resetting the Relationship between Technology, Governments and Citizens in the Post-Pandemic World

APCO Worldwide and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce convened a discussion among leaders from tech and policy communities who were asked to envision a New Social Contract between citizens, government and technology for the post-pandemic world. The June 11, 2020, discussion also unveiled data about how citizens think about technology pre- and post-pandemic. A full recording of the discussion is available here.

Three Takeaways

1   Technology must lead in closing the opportunity gap.

- **Technology must play a critical role in creating fairer and more inclusive societies** that offer equal opportunity to all citizens. Indeed, the COVID-19 lockdown highlighted the vulnerability of people without access to high-speed broadband and digital services, disproportionally denying essential education, employment, health and community services to low-income and rural communities. Where broadband access exists, technology infrastructure enables remarkable efficiencies and social continuity.

- **Underlying disparities require new models for access and innovation** driven by both government action and investment, as well as tech sector entrepreneurialism. Access will be driven by funding, deployment, regulation and new market incentives. Innovation will occur in response to new market demands but can also be stimulated by government financing; fiscal incentives for R&D; regulatory alignment across states and nations; and investment in investment in employee development, education and retraining.

- **Citizens expect technology companies to facilitate universal civic engagement.** A new social contract must prioritize connectivity between citizens, communities and government, enabling universal participation in voting, education and lifelong learnings, employment and healthcare, as well as social services such as driving licenses and tax.

- **Big tech has an obligation to engage diverse leadership** that represent the citizens they are looking to serve. This should include racial, gender and socio-economic diversity at board and executive leadership levels and throughout a company's workforce.

2   Technology is accelerating the transformation of society. Government must catch up.

- **Technology is fueling the radical transformation of legacy sectors**—education, healthcare, finance, restaurants, retail, entertainment and logistics, among others—enabling world-class services to overcome the limits of place and geography. At the same time, online services are allowing entrepreneurs, start-ups and SMEs to find customers, suppliers, investors and partners faster and more efficiently than ever before. Tech has become a tool for inclusion; 'data for good' is creating economic opportunities globally.

- **The right regulatory mix remains a key unanswered question**. New regulations might need to address novel problems, such as content moderation on social platforms or the appropriate use of artificial intelligence. In other cases, outdated regulations may need to adapt for online services, such as the stifling effects of HIPAA on telemedicine.

- **Of the hardware "bugs" exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, none have been fatal.** Security problems, (such as "Zoom bombers") and industry-specific hurdles (like challenges with remote learning) prompted questions about readiness. Many "patches" have already been developed, and consumer demand means other solutions will be forthcoming. However, concerns over data privacy, security and safety have escalated during the pandemic; the so-called "info-demic," fueled by fake news and information bubbles, has demonstrated the grave risks posed by misinformation if left unregulated.

- **Government 'tech incompetence' is a national security vulnerability.** Policies are slow to change, internal processes and systems do not always utilize the latest innovations and staff do not reflect the best and brightest of the field. Government agencies must modernize their infrastructure, skills and workforce resources; elected officials and the judiciary must up-skills themselves to participate fully in conversations about the regulation of technology. This should also involve closer cooperation with the private sector, as well as development of a national data strategy.

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Societies and technology must negotiate the limits of use and trust.

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- **The status of user data and privacy rights and regulations is caught in limbo, and that is stifling innovation.** Few citizens fully understand the trade-off between accessible and affordable (or free) online services and the monetization of data that is required to provide them.

- **Governments, citizens and the tech industry need to develop a consensus**, ideally at a supranational level. Parties must work cooperatively on appropriate use of products, applications and data and agree on their normative uses, such as combatting terrorism, preventing crime or aiding identification. Agreements and policies should consist of a global framework that transcends political parties and profit motives. The model used to counter terrorism, for example, employs a global platform where tech companies can share information to act broadly and in a unified way, relying on a foundation of trust and engagement when crafting policy. Similar models can be used for facial recognition, state-sponsored interference, privacy and cybercrime.

- **Big tech must use its power and sophistication to influence government action,** particularly around emerging and unregulated technologies with the potential to cause harm. Examples include Amazon's action to halt sales of facial recognition technology to U.S. police departments until proper regulation is conceived, or IBM's decision to cease future development of its own facial recognition tech, citing issues of bias, privacy abuses and human rights violations.

- **Citizens must debate the role of tech platforms in facilitating free expression.** Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act protects tech companies from being liable for what their users say online, but expectations are changing for how and what liabilities citizens want tech companies to assume. The harms caused by unlimited speech, including lies and untruths, are mounting. This warrants a discussion about whether to revise Section 230 and narrow the scope of liability protections, potentially creating new types of "neutral" platforms.

- **China offers lessons in using technology to connect government and citizens.** It has aggressively used surveillance tools to control COVID-19. This builds on almost a decade of tight collaboration between China's big tech industry and government agencies, innovating ways to use technology platforms to both deliver valuable services to citizens, while also using citizen data as a tool of social cohesion and control.

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Panelists

Jordan Crenshaw,
Executive Director and Policy Counsel of the Technology Engagement Center at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Susan Molinari,
Former Vice President of Public Policy, Google; Former U.S. Congresswoman, House of Representatives (R-NY)

Brandon Neal,
Sr. Director, APCO, former advisor to Mayor Pete Buttigieg and director at Democratic National Committee
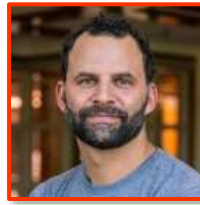
Matt Perault,
Director of the Center on Science & Technology Policy at Duke University; Former director of Public Policy, Facebook
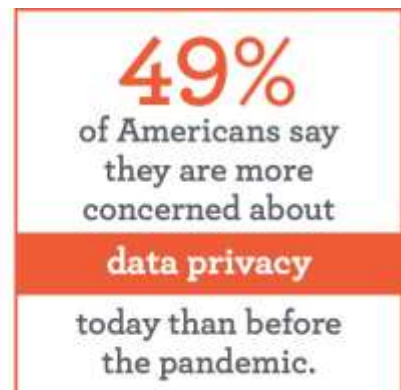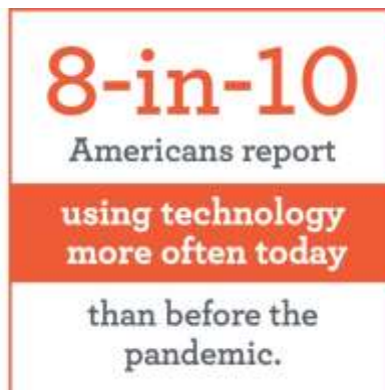
Samm Sacks,
Cybersecurity Policy and China Digital Economy Fellow, New America Foundation and Senior Fellow, Yale Law School

Moderator

James Robinson, lead for APCO Geo-Commerce and expert in corporate sustainability and US-China relations

Public Opinion Data

Get the latest research based on APCO Insight tracking polling around perceptions of pandemic's impact in the United States and additional research from the Middle East. This research is available at APCO's Coronavirus Hub. The specific data below was presented at the beginning of the discussion.

77% of Americans believe the tech industry should bring forward **innovative solutions** to address the pandemic.

8-in-10 Americans report **using technology more often today** than before the pandemic.

49% of Americans say they are more concerned about **data privacy** today than before the pandemic.

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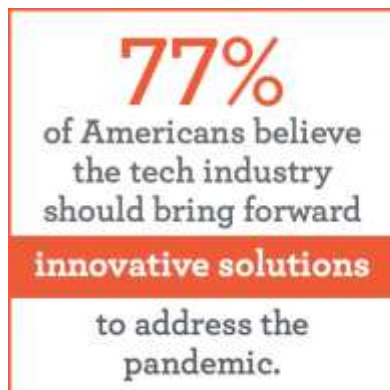
Americans believe governments will have the most meaningful role in helping the United States recover.

Q: Which do you think will play the most meaningful role to help the United States return to what it was like, overall, before the COVID-19 crisis?

(% ranked in top three)

- State and local governments — 40%
- The U.S. federal government — 30%
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) — 28%
- Health care providers, including hospitals and their staff — 28%
- State and local public health authorities — 24%
- Pharmaceutical companies — 17%
- Small- and medium-sized businesses — 15%
- The World Health Organization (WHO) — 14%
- The United Nations — 5%
- Multinational companies — 4%

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Source: APCO Worldwide poll of n=1,000 American adults conducted April 17, 2020. For more information about this poll, or our series Coronavirus Beat, visit www.apcoworldwide.com/coronavirus.

Americans expect government to prioritize health.

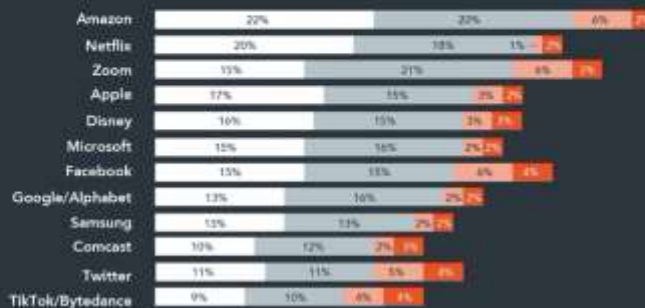Q: How important are these government actions after shelter-in-place restrictions are lifted?

- Invest in research to develop COVID-19 treatments or vaccines — 57%
- Fund widespread COVID-19 testing — 57%
- Provide health benefits to those without employer coverage — 44%
- Delay home evictions — 44%
- Support local law enforcement — 44%
- Support COVID-19 contact tracing — 43%
- Commit to public education resources — 40%
- Provide more stimulus funding to individuals — 39%
- Provide enhanced unemployment benefits — 38%
- Defer loan payments — 35%
- Commit to environmental protection programs — 34%
- Provide more stimulus funding to businesses — 31%
- Act quickly to remove restrictions — 24%
- Focus on the economic recovery first, then health — 22%

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The pandemic has improved Americans' impressions of Big Tech.

Q: For these technology and media companies, how do your impressions today compare to before the pandemic?

Legend: ■ Much more positive ■ Somewhat more positive ■ Somewhat more negative ■ Much more negative

	Much more positive	Somewhat more positive	Somewhat more negative	Much more negative
Amazon	22%	22%	6%	2%
Netflix	20%	18%	1%	2%
Zoom	15%	21%	8%	2%
Apple	17%	15%	3%	2%
Disney	16%	15%	3%	1%
Microsoft	15%	16%	2%	2%
Facebook	15%	15%	6%	4%
Google/Alphabet	13%	16%	2%	2%
Samsung	13%	13%	2%	2%
Comcast	10%	12%	2%	3%
Twitter	11%	11%	5%	4%
TikTok/Bytedance	9%	10%	6%	4%

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