

Organizations Need to Find Better Way to Communicate the Background Screening Process with Minorities



HRO Today Flash Reports are a series of ongoing research initiatives that address today's topics of interest in the HR community. *HRO Today* Flash Reports are focused briefs that can be used to support business decisions and further discussion among industry practitioners and thought leaders. The markets served are North America, EMEA, and APAC. This report covers the North America Region.

This report examines candidate satisfaction with the background screening process, perceptions of fairness, and evaluations of status update procedures. These areas are examined by respondent demographic segments.

This study was sponsored by **Global HR Research.**

Methodology

Between August 30th and September 13th, 2021, email invitations were sent to North American subscribers of *HRO Today Magazine* and *HRO Today* newsletters to take part in an online study on behalf of *HRO Today*. Study respondents were candidates who had applied for a job with a potential new employer within the prior 12 months, and a background screening was conducted.

In total, there were 520 surveys completed. Respondents were not aware of Global HR Research's sponsorship of this study.

Introduction

In an environment where many companies are struggling to find workers, improving the candidate experience has become of paramount importance. Background screening is one of the final steps in the hiring process. Given the resources put into finding, recruiting, and interviewing, it is essential to maintain a great candidate experience throughout the entire recruitment process. In fact, a recent study by Pwc found that nearly one-half (49%) of job seekers say they've turned down an offer because of a bad candidate experience.¹

Job seekers value communication. They like to know what is going on and where they stand. For many job seekers, employment screening is the least understood part of the hiring process.²

Beyond its importance in candidate selection, background screening directly impacts candidate experience. But how do candidates feel about it? Is the communication about what is happening and why it is happening transparent? Do they view the process as timely? This study addresses those concerns.



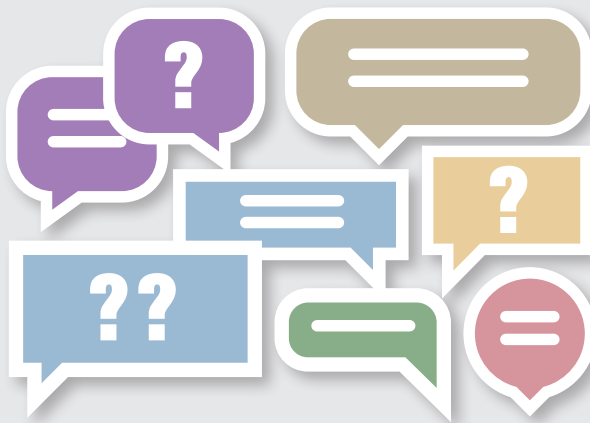


Conclusions

There are significant differences where race and age differ in their opinions about the background screening process. Minorities and the youngest candidates are more likely to believe the background screening process delivered a negative outcome. Minorities were far more inclined than Whites to believe the results negatively impacted them. Younger candidates are much more likely than older candidates to believe that the background screening process result negatively impacted their candidacy.



Only about one-half (51.7%) of candidates felt the background screening process was transparent and easy to understand. The system is lacking for most candidates. Another 41.5% feel they only had a general idea about what's happening during the process, while nearly seven percent were very unclear about the process.



While the background screening process does not adversely impact candidate experience, it still can be improved. While overall, 84.0% were satisfied, less than half (40.0%) were very satisfied. So, while the process isn't leading to a negative experience, for too many it isn't offering the positive experience recruiters want to present.

Candidate status updates are too often lacking. Most candidates feel less than completely updated about status of the screening process. Over one-half (53.7%) did not feel they were completely updated, while the remaining 12.7% did not feel updated at all. The extent and clarity of communication is a key driver of satisfaction with the process.

Candidates feel background screening results are credible. The vast majority (81.9%) felt the background screening process was fair, with over one-half feeling it was completely fair. Further, nearly eight-in-ten of those who did not get favorable results still felt the process was fair.

Candidates feel background screening results are credible. The vast majority (81.9%) felt the background screening process was fair, with over one-half feeling it was completely fair. Further, nearly eight-in-ten of those who did not get favorable results still felt the process was fair.

Smartphones should play a greater role in candidate communications, particularly among younger candidates.

- Device usage during the screening process varies by age. The device used most frequently during the screening process are laptops, as indicated by 36.9% of respondents. Smart phones were close behind with just under one-third (31.3%) using them most frequently. But while those under 45 years of age are about equally as likely to prefer using a laptop or a smart phone, those 45 years old or more are much more likely to use a laptop than a smartphone.
- Email is the primary method used to initiate a candidate's background screening process. Nearly three-quarters (70.9%) of respondents were asked to complete their background screening via email, versus 37.7% who were called directly. Despite high usage of smartphones, only 26.1% noted this method was used to conduct their background check." However, studies show that millennials' preferred way to communicate is text.
- Use of text also low for status updates. The two primary ways candidates were updated about the status of their background screening were by phone (49.3%) and website (44.9%). Only about one-third (35.2%) were updated by text. Given the nearly universal ownership of smart phones, particularly for those under 50 years old, text should become the dominant vehicle for status updates.



Many respondents feel the background screening process takes too long.

The most prevalent suggestion made was to improve the speed of the process, which candidates perceive as taking an average of 2.3 days. But better communication in the form of setting expectations and providing updates and transparency about what is happening can make the perception of a long turnaround feel less onerous.

The perception of length of time varies by demographic segments.

The older the candidate, the longer they believe the background checking process takes Black/African American respondents felt the process was much shorter to complete than other race segments.

Suggestions about ways to improve the process focus on time, better status communication, and greater transparency. Many also suggested providing a copy of the results.

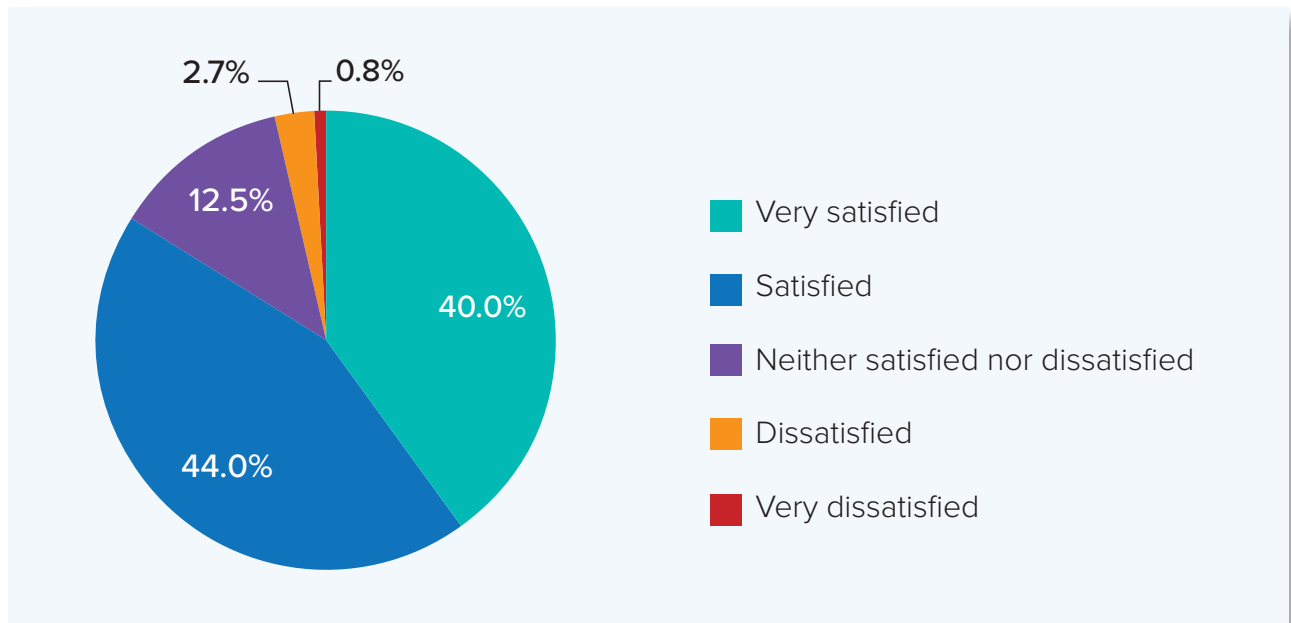
DETAILED FINDINGS:

Overall Satisfaction

Overall, how satisfied were you with the background screening process, regardless of whether you received an offer for the position you interviewed?

Study participants were asked how satisfied they were with the background screening process, regardless of whether they received an offer for the position for which they interviewed. Overall, 84.0% were satisfied, which resulted in an average score of 4.20/5.00.

While those in the youngest age segment (18–24) have the lowest satisfaction (4.06), there is not a significant difference among other age brackets. The youngest generation are much more dependent upon mobile communication than older age segments.



Satisfaction by Age Groups

	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55+
Average Score	4.06	4.16	4.28	4.16	4.24

Candidates Updated on Screening Process Progress

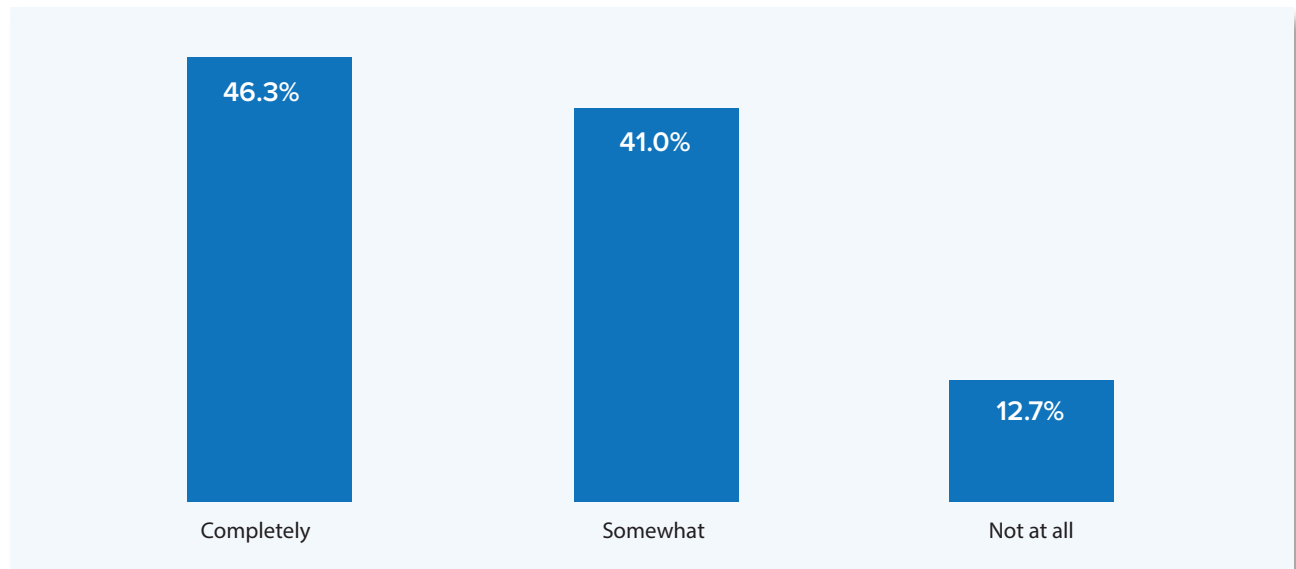
To what extent did you feel you were updated on the status and progress of your screening process while it was being conducted?

Respondents indicated the extent they felt they were updated on the status and progress of their screening process while it was being conducted. Less than one-half (46.3%) felt completely updated, with 41.0% somewhat updated. Only 12.7% felt not updated at all.

Candidates who are over 45 years old are significantly more likely to feel they have not been updated compared to their younger counterparts.

Recruiters take the risk that candidates who are left in the dark about where they stand are more likely to accept another offer during a tight labor market. A lack updates also can lead to a poor candidate experience. Recruiters have invested a lot to get the candidate to the point of needing a background screening. The hiring process should be concluded with strong, consistent, and clear communication.³

Candidate View on Screening Process Progress Updates



Satisfaction by Age Groups

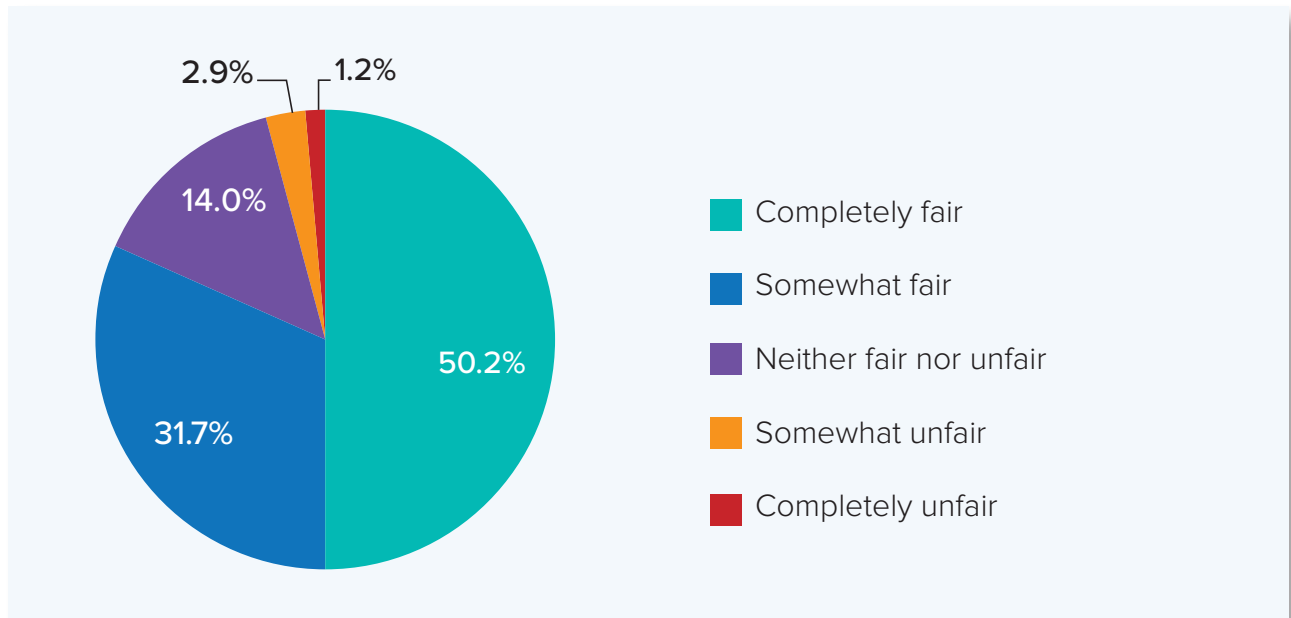
	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55+
Not updated	7.6%	13.0%	6.3%	18.6%	23.1%

Belief in Fairness of Background Screening Process

To what extent did you feel the background screening process was fair?

Study participants were asked to what extent they felt the background screening process was fair. The vast majority (81.9%) felt the process was fair, with over one-half feeling it was completely fair. Interestingly, when one examines the opinions between those that felt the background screening process delivered a result that negatively impacted their potential to be hired, 79.1% still felt the process was fair, compared to 83.5% who did not.

Belief in Fairness of Background Screening Process



Belief in Fairness of Background Screening Process by Screening Result

	Negative Result	Not a Negative Result
Process was Fair (net)	79.1%	83.5%

Device Used Most Frequently During Process

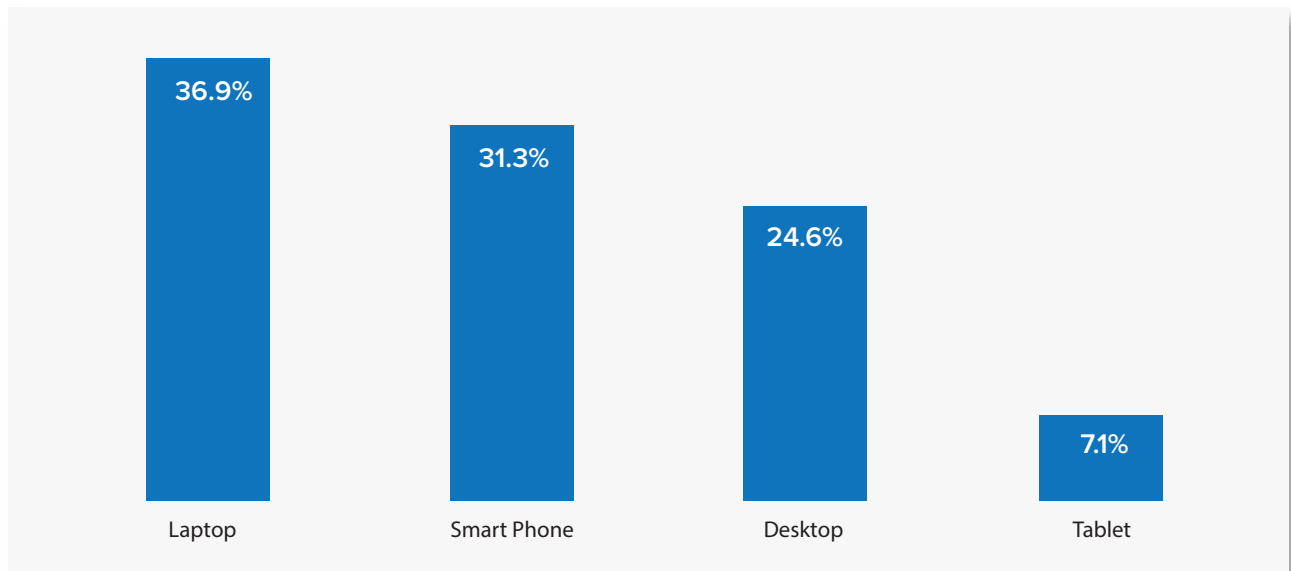
Which device did you use most frequently during the screening process for matters related to the process?

Respondents were asked to select the device they use most frequently during the screening process for matters related to it. While there wasn't one option used by more than one-half of respondents, the device used most frequently was laptops, as indicated by 36.9% of respondents. Smart phones were close behind with just under one-third (31.3%) using them most frequently.

There is a correlation between age and device preference. Those under 45 years of age are about equally as likely to prefer using a laptop or a smart phone. But those 45 years old or more are much more likely to use a laptop than a smartphone, as 42.9% of those between 45–54 used one and 47.4% of those 55 or more vs. 27.1% and 23.1%, respectively.

It's important to use the preferred communication vehicle with recipients to facilitate communication.

Device Used Most Frequently During Process



Device Used Most Frequently During Process by Age

	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55+
Laptop	39.4%	31.5%	31.9%	42.9%	47.4%
Smart Phone	31.8%	34.6%	35.6%	27.1%	23.1%

Method Used to Set Up Background Screening

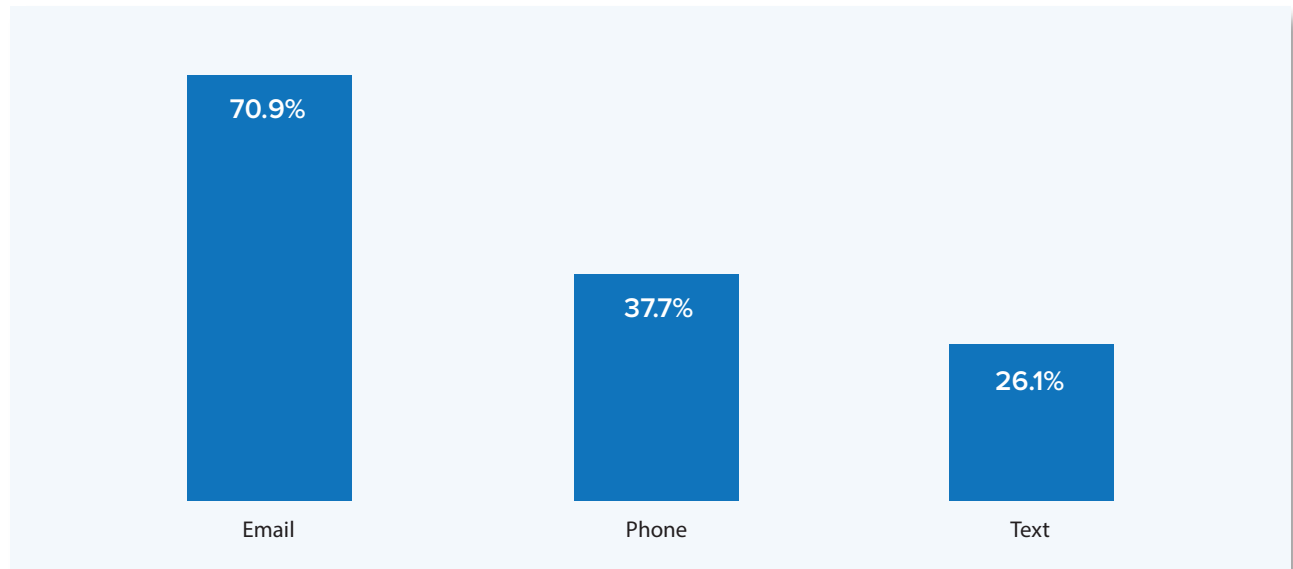
How were you contacted to set up the background screening? Please indicate all that apply.

Study participants were asked to identify the way they were contacted to set up the background screening. Nearly three-quarters (70.9%) of those that recalled were most likely to indicate they were emailed, nearly twice the number that were phoned (37.7%). Despite the high usage of smartphones, only 26.1% indicated text was the method used to set up the background screening.

Going forward, as more Generation Z members enter the workforce, and Millennials comprise the largest segment, the preferred way to communicate will likely be text. In fact, studies show that 74% of Millennials prefer to receive text over calls due to convenience, respect, and control.⁴

The share of Americans that own a smartphone is now 85%, and that figure rises to 96% of those aged between 18–49.⁵ Clearly, there's room to increase the use of text to set up background screening.

Method Used to Set Up Background Screening



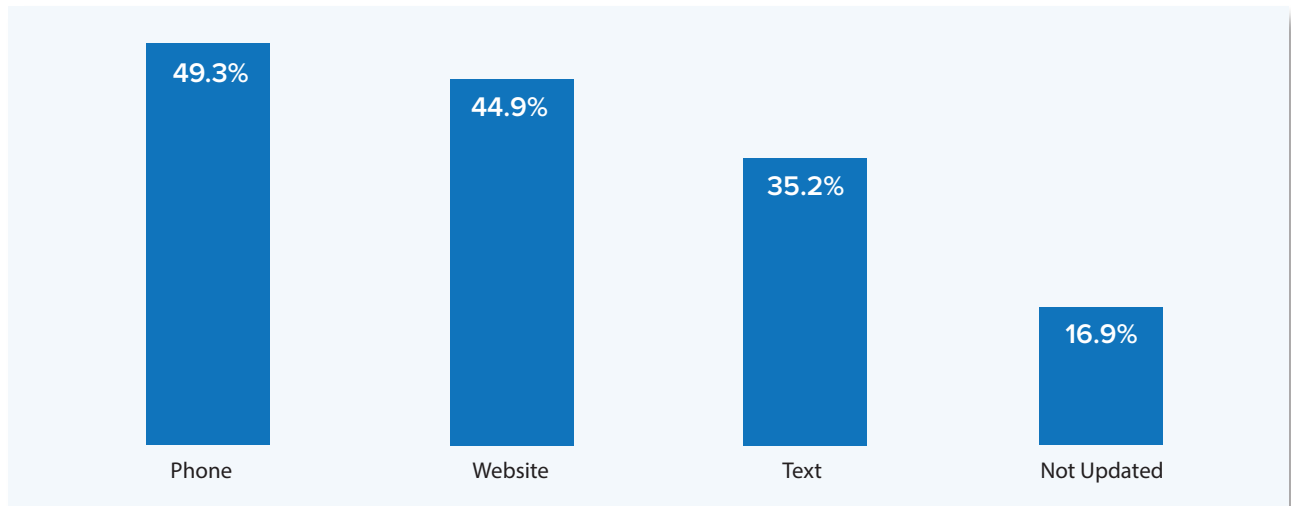
Method Used to Update Background Screening Status

How were you updated about the status of the background screening? Please select all that apply.

Respondents indicated all the ways they were updated about the status of their background screening. The two primary ways were by phone (49.3%) and website (44.9%). Only about one-third (35.2%) were updated by text. Given the nearly universal ownership of smart phones, particularly to those under 45 years old and communication preferences, more use of texting as way to update candidates is highly warranted.

About one-quarter of respondents aged 45 or more indicated they were not updated, more than other age groups. Further, those who did not get a negative result from the screening were more than twice as likely as those with a negative result to feel they were not updated 19.9% vs. 7.9%, respectively.

Method Used to Update Background Screening Status



Method Used to Update Background Screening Status

	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55+
Percentage Not Updated	18.2%	12.3%	13.2%	27.1%	24.4%

Belief in Fairness of Background Screening Process by Screening Result

	Negative Result	Not a Negative Result
Percentage Not Updated	7.9%	19.9%

Length of Time to Complete Screening Process

How long did it take to complete the entire screening process?

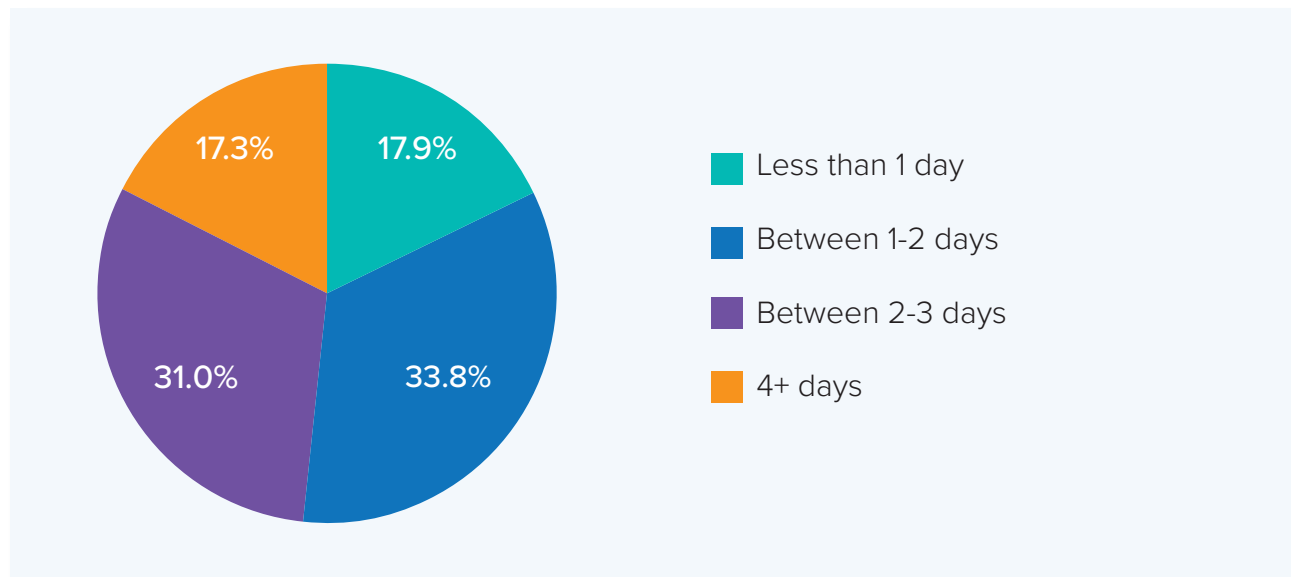
Study participants were asked how long it took to complete the screening process. Just over one-half (51.7%) indicated it took less than two days, with a resulting average of 2.3 days.

The expectations of candidates are consistent with the those of recruiters. In its April 2021 report, “Background Screening Providers: Opportunity for Excellence,” *HRO Today* found nearly one-half (48.0 percent) of recruiters expect background screening results in no more than two days.⁶ For them, an acceptable turnaround time is 2.7 days, consistent with the 2.3 days expressed by candidates in this study.

Rapid turnaround times are paramount to candidates. Even candidates with squeaky-clean records (or perhaps especially such candidates) may grow concerned if their results seem to be taking a long time to come back. They should be aware that high quality background checks are not instant—they may take two to three business days, and in some cases longer.⁷

Given how competitive the talent market is right now, any delays in any part of the interview process can lead to missing out on a candidate as they may accept a position elsewhere.

Length of Time to Complete Screening Process





Length of Time to Complete Screening Process (cont'd)

As the age of a candidate increases, so does the perception of the amount of time it takes to complete the screening process. Those in the 18–24 age segment reported an average of 1.98 days, compared to 2.45 for those 55 and older. This is most likely due to the breadth and comprehensiveness of the screening required—a direct correlation to the increasing level of responsibility as candidates age.

Length of Time to Complete Screening Process by Age

	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55+
Average days	1.98	2.26	2.12	2.32	2.45

There have been no significant differences between races in the attitudes about the background screening process in study results so far. However, Black/African American respondents indicated a much shorter time to complete the process than any other race segment, 1.94 days.

Length of Time to Complete Screening Process by Race

	White	Hispanic or Latino	Black/African-American	Asian
Average days	2.28	2.24	1.94	2.14

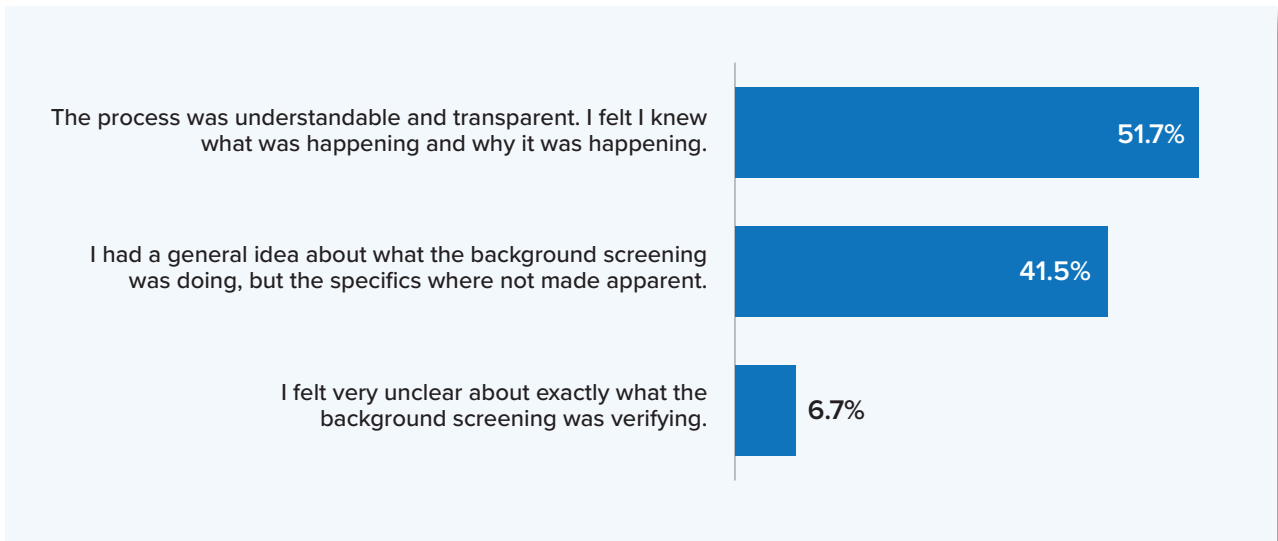
Attitudes about Background Screening Process

Which statement best describes your feelings about the background screening process?

Respondents were asked to select the statement from a list of three that best reflected their experience with the background screening process. Just over one-half (51.7%) felt the process was understandable and transparent, and that they knew what was happening and why it was happening. But that means that the system is lacking for nearly one-half of candidates. In fact, 41.5% feel they only had general idea about what’s happening, while nearly seven percent were very unclear about the process.

Employers need to consider the background screening process as an important part of the candidate experience. According to a recent study by the Human Capital Institute, 60% of job seekers report a negative candidate experience with the employers they engage with and 72% of job seekers report sharing their negative candidate experiences online. The implications of any breakdown in the hiring process are great. Qualified candidates will look elsewhere.⁸

Attitudes about Background Screening Process



Background Screening Results on Job Application

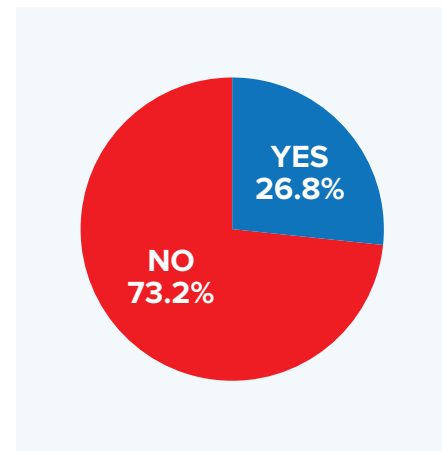
Did the background screening process deliver a result that you felt negatively impacted getting the position for which you applied?

Study respondents were asked if they believed the results from the background screening process negatively impacted their potential hiring. About three-quarters (73.2%) felt the result did not have an adverse impact on their candidacy.

However, minorities were more inclined to believe the results negatively impacted them than Whites, even though there was little difference among races in overall satisfaction or perceptions of fairness of the process.

There is also an adverse relationship between age and the belief that the screening process results in an adverse report. Younger candidates are much more likely to believe that the background screening process result negatively impacts their candidacy than older candidates.

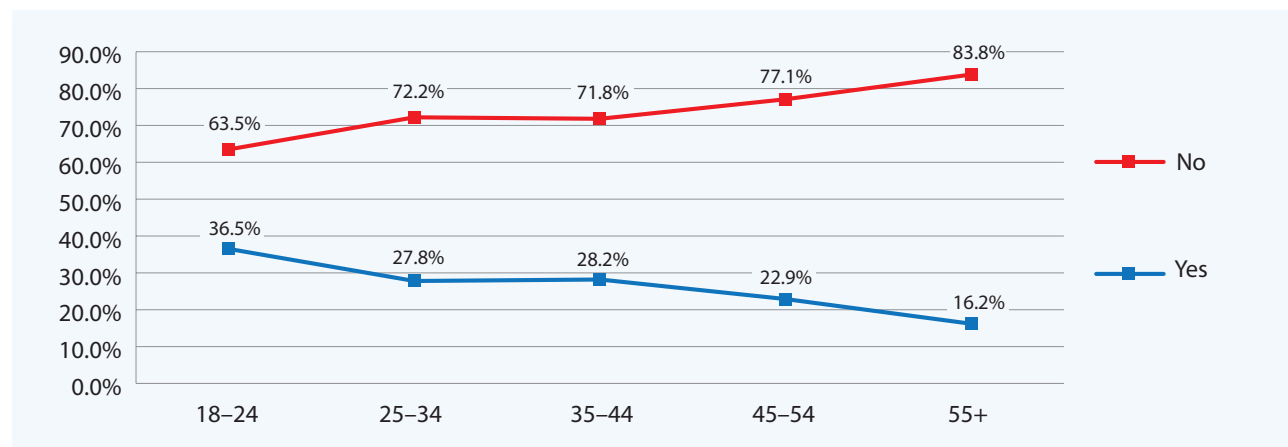
Background Screening Results on Job Application



Background Screening Results on Job Application by Race

	White	Hispanic or Latino	Black/African-American	Asian
Yes	20.2%	44.0%	39.4%	28.6%
No	79.8%	56.0%	60.6%	71.4%

Background Screening Results on Job Application by Age



Comments about Improving the background screening process

Lastly, what about your background screening experience could be improved?

There were 136 comments made that offered suggestions about how to improve the process. The table below summarizes the suggestions made. While the average turnaround time was 2.3 days, over one-third (38.2%) felt speed could be improved. The concern may be addressed by not necessarily increasing the speed of the process, but by better managing expectations with clients at the onset.

One-third (33.1%) cited Better Communication/Updates/Status as areas of improvement. While only 14.7% specifically cited transparency, the area could be considered part of the overall desire for better communication.

An interesting idea is providing a copy of the results to the candidate, as 11% of respondents suggested.

Comment Summary	Total
Speed	38.2%
Better communication/Updates/Status	33.1%
Transparency	14.7%
Give the results	11.0%

A selection of the comments made is below:

“More transparency. Letting the person know what all is checked, such as credit score, criminal background history, and/or social media activity and what, if any, is the reason why you may not have been chosen for the job. Personally, I think you should be told about all those things that were checked about you anyway; even if you get the position you wanted.”

“Let me know what a problem is if there is one.”

“I’d like better communication on what exactly they were digging for in my background.”

“Demystifying the background check process helps alleviate stress and improve candidate experience, both of which improve your chances of attracting and hiring the best candidates. Improving background check procedure is only part of the puzzle. Check out the other ways to improve candidate experience.”

“I feel like these checks should be like credit scores are now. You don’t just get approved or not, you actually get to see what went into the decision.” ■

Notes

1. "The Future of Recruiting," *Pwc*, accessed October 7, 2021. <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/workforce-of-the-future/library/hr-recruiting.html>
2. Tarpey, Matt. "7 Ways to Enhance Candidate Experience Through Background Checks," *CareerBuilder*, accessed October 8, 2021. <https://resources.careerbuilder.com/employment-screening/enhance-background-checks-experience>
3. *ibid*, *CareerBuilder*
4. Munnely, Catherine. "5 Reasons Why Candidates Prefer Messaging Over Calling," *SMARTRECRUITERS BLOG*, February 1, 2021. <https://www.smartrecruiters.com/blog/why-candidates-prefer-messaging/>
5. "Mobile Fact Sheet," *Pew Research Center*, April 7, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>
6. Basinait, Laurence. "Background Screening Providers: Opportunity for Excellence," *HRO Today*, April, 2021. <https://www.hrotoday.com/market-intelligence/research/flash-report-background-screening-providers-opportunity-for-excellence/>
7. *ibid*, *CareerBuilder*
8. "Statistics: Rethink Your Candidate Experience or Ruin Your Brand," *Human Capital Institute*, Oct 1, 2018. <https://www.hci.org/blog/statistics-rethink-your-candidate-experience-or-ruin-your-brand>



About *HRO Today*

HRO Today is the property of SharedXpertise Media and offers the broadest and deepest reach available anywhere into the HR industry. Our magazines, web portals, research, e-newsletters, events and social networks reach over 180,000 senior-level HR decision-makers globally with rich, objective, game-changing content. Our No. 1 strength is our reach. HR leaders rely heavily on the *HRO Today*'s Baker's Dozen rankings across six different categories when selecting an HR service provider.



About Global HR Research

Global HR Research (www.ghrr.com), the home of Clairiti screening technology, combines advanced background screening solutions, data and business analytics to deliver better background screening programs to thousands of customers and their candidates. Serving medium businesses to Fortune 500 companies across the country, Global HR Research—recognized for the past ten years in *HRO Today* Magazine's "Bakers Dozen" List of top national background screening providers and by Workforce Magazine's "Hot List" of top background screening providers for the past seven years—is accredited by the Professional Background Screening Association (PBSA) as recognized by the Background Screening Credentialing Council (BSCC).