

Coronavirus again dominates campaign as Trump struggles to regain political ground

By Matt Viser and Sean Sullivan

Required Annotations	Student-Created Annotations	Summary / Questions / Reflection
Student-created		Required (bold)

President Trump's hospitalization has returned the coronavirus to the forefront of the presidential campaign, with him and Democrat Joe Biden on Tuesday promoting their dramatically **divergent** views on how to handle the deadly pandemic and how to approach the presidency.

In the face of polls that showed a hardening of the presidential contest in Biden's favor and suggested broadening paths for victory for the former vice president, Trump stuck with a months-old message that has found wide support among his loyalists but has turned off other voters he needs to secure a second term.

Even as a coronavirus outbreak extended deeper into his White House staff, Trump continued to play down its deadly nature and, while currently infectious, vowed to attend next week's second debate with Biden. Defying medical experts, he also insisted that the seasonal flu was far more dangerous, and he tweeted that he was "FEELING GREAT!"

"Are we going to close down our Country?" he tweeted of the flu. "No, we have learned to live with it, just like we are learning to live with Covid, in most populations far less lethal!!!"

In a Twitter blast Tuesday afternoon, Trump halted talks with congressional Democrats over a stimulus plan aimed at helping millions who are unemployed as a result of the economic wreckage of the coronavirus. While Trump insisted the plan would wrongly benefit Democrats, his blunt cancellation sent stocks tumbling and raised questions about the future of millions already unemployed, tens of thousands of workers who could soon be laid off and businesses that could soon be **shuttered**.

The general-election battle between Trump and Biden, stilled somewhat during Trump's hospitalization, flared anew late Monday after the president returned from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and, as his first act upon reaching the White House, removed his mask and posed for photographs and videos in proximity to other unmasked aides.

Hours later, Biden's campaign posted a split-screen video of Trump's mask removal and the Democratic nominee donning one. "Masks matter. They save lives," the caption read on Twitter. As of Tuesday afternoon, the three-second video clip had been viewed more than 8 million times.

In contrast with Trump, Biden has repeatedly counseled the use of masks and social distancing, tactics he urged again Tuesday in a speech in Gettysburg, Pa., where he condemned Trump's efforts to sow conflict and expressed optimism that unity would get the country through the pandemic.

“There’s no more fitting place than here today in Gettysburg to talk about the cost of division,” Biden said from the Civil War battlefield site.

While acknowledging “the country is in a dangerous place” and “what we’re experiencing today is neither good nor normal,” Biden urged the nation to “revive the spirit of **bipartisanship**.”

He also implored Americans, regardless of party, to do more to combat the coronavirus and to heed experts, casting it as each person’s patriotic duty.

“Wearing a mask is not a political statement — it’s a scientific recommendation,” Biden said. “Social distancing is not a political statement — it is a scientific recommendation.”

In a direct rebuttal of Trump’s recent rhetoric, Biden added: “The pandemic isn’t a red- or blue-state issue. It affects us all and can take anyone’s life. It’s a virus. It’s not a political weapon.”

Events in the past week — which encompassed the first presidential debate, Trump’s diagnosis and his trips in and out of the hospital — seemed to have **accrued** to Biden’s benefit.

New polling indicated that Biden is extending his lead nationally and in key battleground states, with voters turned off by Trump’s **combative** debate style, worried that he is not doing enough to combat the pandemic and saying that they prefer Biden’s milder temperament.

The week also brought a dramatic shift in campaign resources, with the Biden campaign injecting \$8 million in new ads into key states — with half of that money going into Florida, Arizona and Texas, three states Trump won in 2016. The Lincoln Project, an anti-Trump group, is pumping an additional \$1 million into Texas. Trump’s campaign, meanwhile, cut more than \$4 million in ad spending, the bulk of it from Ohio and Minnesota, according to data from Advertising Analytics. Trump easily won Ohio and narrowly lost Minnesota in 2016, but polls have Ohio tied and Biden leading in Minnesota.

In interviews this week, Biden campaign advisers expressed eagerness to emphasize the contrast between the former vice president’s careful **adherence** to public health guidelines and Trump’s disregard for safety precautions.

One Biden adviser said the plan was for the Democrat to be a “walking PSA” for taking precautions against the virus. He almost always wears a mask until he is distanced from others. As he fielded questions from reporters in Delaware on Monday, Biden’s wife, Jill, pulled him back out of concern that he was getting too close.

John Morgan, a Florida trial lawyer and major Biden donor, said the events of recent days have revealed a **glaring** difference between Trump and Biden that plays to the Democrat’s favor.

“Sanity and security — that’s what he’s offering America,” Morgan said of Biden. “And this episode shows the insanity and the insecurity that America

has.”

Rep. Andy Levin (D-Mich.), who represents a district in the suburbs of Detroit, has urged Biden to highlight his distinction from Trump at every turn.

“I think that what Joe Biden needs to do is continue to demonstrate in every appearance, in every decision, that he will be the public health president,” Levin said. “When you run for president, a lot of it is about the symbolism of what you do.”

Republicans, too, have grown concerned about the contrast, with polls showing Biden leading in key battlegrounds among groups such as seniors, who voted for Trump in 2016 but who are more vulnerable to serious complications from covid-19.

“He needs to shift the discussion away from covid,” said Dan Eberhart, an oil industry executive and Trump donor. “Back to the economy — that’s his best argument.”

“Democrats are using fear to motivate voters,” he added. “Trump is offering something else. He’s telling voters not to be afraid. It’s a stark contrast.”

Still, Trump’s decision to halt stimulus talks — which centered on an infusion of funds for the ailing airline industry — could have significant effects on voter judgments about who is best able to handle the economy, previously Trump’s strongest suit. Major airlines have operations in electorally important areas such as Dallas, Atlanta, Phoenix, Miami and Charlotte.

In one **sobering** development for the Trump campaign, Biden’s lead in Pennsylvania grew to 12 percentage points, 54 percent to 42 percent, among registered voters, according to a new Monmouth University poll that was conducted after last week’s debate and released Tuesday. A Monmouth poll in late August had Biden up by four percentage points.

Trump’s campaign plans to battle back with a range of in-person events built upon the idea of swiftly returning to the pre-pandemic normal. **Notably**, however, its plan was released by campaign manager Bill Stepien, who is in isolation after contracting the coronavirus.

Vice President Pence, who is scheduled to debate the Democratic vice-presidential nominee, Sen. Kamala D. Harris (D-Calif.), on Wednesday in Utah, is planning to continue campaigning in person, acting as a temporary campaign headliner while the president is out of commission.

On Thursday, at least nine Trump surrogates will fan out in key battleground states. Donald Trump Jr. will host an event in Panama City Beach, Fla., while Eric Trump will make two appearances in North Carolina. A “Women for Trump” bus tour — featuring presidential daughter-in-law Lara Trump and campaign aides — will stop in Pennsylvania, near the Ohio border.

When asked what measures “Operation MAGA” would take to keep campaign **surrogates** and attendees safe from the coronavirus, a Trump

campaign official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to reflect the plans said that there would be masks, hand sanitizer and “opportunities to socially distance” at the events — but that attendees would not be required to wear masks or remain at least six feet apart, as federal health guidelines recommend.

“Our campaign has been on the ground, working to safely connect with voters throughout this campaign,” Trump campaign spokeswoman Courtney Parella said. “With only four weeks to go in the most important election of our lifetimes, we’re full speed ahead to November 3rd, taking the president’s message directly to voters.”

Before returning to the White House, President Trump spent much of Sunday and Monday at Walter Reed discussing his reelection campaign with aides, including plans to return to the campaign trail, according to White House officials.

While he remained mostly out of sight Tuesday, Trump sought to connect with his supporters virtually. In one Facebook ad, Trump was featured after his return to the White House on Tuesday. The caption featured a quote from a still-infectious and unmasked Trump saying “Maybe I’m immune — I don’t know.”

In a fundraising pitch to donors, Trump **reiterated** his “Don’t be afraid of Covid” message and foreshadowed a soon-to-come return to the campaign trail. “This is the FINAL STRETCH of the Election and we can’t take any days off,” the pitch said.

The president’s next scheduled event is the second presidential debate, on Oct. 15 in Miami. Biden, who is 77 and like Trump in a higher risk category, has said he would agree to debate as long as it can be done safely. Several infectious-disease experts said that while it was early in Trump’s treatment, there is still a possibility to safely hold a presidential debate next week.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines say those who have had the coronavirus can safely be around other people 10 days after their symptoms first appeared and after 24 hours with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medication.

Joshua M. Sharfstein, vice dean for public health practice and community engagement at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said that the coming days could be critical for determining the course of recovery for Trump and the likelihood of the debate. “It’s probably too early to say,” he said. “You don’t know how the president’s doing. The first question is how is he feeling. If he meets the criteria and is completely better and 10 days have gone by, it should be no problem.”

Required Questions

1. What surprised me?
2. What did the author think I already knew? (You can make a list.)
3. What changed or confirmed what I already knew?