

## **COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Pandemic - Election Day**

**November 3, 2020.** Election Day is finally here and even though I have no idea who will be the winner of the presidential race, I feel a sense of relief. It is my fondest wish that the presidential verdict will be decisive so that the country doesn't go through an extended period of challenges and legal battles. With the election stress out of the way, we now can look forward to the day, hopefully soon, when a vaccine is approved and available.

This election cycle has been like no other in history. For the past 9 months the COVID-19 has dominated the daily news and the candidates have been forced to deal with questions regarding the virus on a non-stop basis. The two parties (Democrats and Republicans) have sharp differences of opinion on where the country is headed and what needs to be done. But unfortunately this election may not be about policy; but rather a referendum on the President's handling of the virus. Polls indicate that approximately two-thirds of Americans disapprove of how the President has dealt with the pandemic. It is no longer a matter of discussion or argument about whether the President has done a good job; public opinion and perception are what matters to voters.

Back in February we first became aware that a very dangerous virus had originated in China and was spreading first to Europe (mainly Italy and Spain). Within a few weeks the virus struck the New York City area with frightening force. In New York, like the rest of the country, medical staff and facilities were totally unprepared to deal with COVID-19. There was a lack of personal protective equipment for healthcare workers, a shortage of respiratory devices, no known effective treatments, and the prospects of a vaccine was at least a year. And the country watched in horror as the daily death tolls in New York began to mount, it was clear that the United States and the rest of the world were in midst of a major crisis.

Anytime this country has been thrust into crisis the American people have rallied around the President regardless of party affiliation. Most recently, President Bush achieved his highest approval ratings in the aftermath of 9/11. In this election year President Trump was handed a layup. All he had to do was listen to his medical advisors and pursue a realistic path. Instead he chose to go into denial and treat the virus like it was an enemy; something that he could easily defeat or wish away. To make matters worse he refused to admit that he was wrong. Instead he the President has double-downed by continuing to make silly assertions (e.g., turning the corner), by continuing to reject advice of medical experts, and continuing to engage in and promote dangerous practices (e.g., not wearing masks) that defy both commonsense and national health norms.

As I am writing this piece early in the morning on election day, I have no knowledge who will be the next President of the United States. Before the virus struck 9 months ago the economy was roaring and I would have predicted President Trump's reelection. No one could blame the President for the onset of the virus but the American people did look to him to provide effective leadership. At a time when the President would prefer to campaign on topics such as the economy, immigration, conservative social issues and violence in cities, the electorate is

focused on the pandemic. If the President loses his reelection bid, it probably won't be about party policy differences, or media coverage, or mail-in ballots, or any other excuses. Instead when matched against a relatively politically weak and elderly opponent, the consensus perception may be that the President failed at a critical time when leadership and compassion mattered most to the American people.