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Fact-checking Trump's closing arguments on covid-19

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In the final days of the campaign, President Trump continues to flood the zone with false and misleading claims about the coronavirus pandemic.

Cases have been spiking across the country, while Trump insists “we’re rounding the turn.” The president continues to assert that U.S. infections are rising “because we do more testing than anybody else,” when experts say the main reason is the spreading disease.

In recent interviews, Trump has responded with denials and attacks when journalists Savannah Guthrie of NBC and Lesley Stahl of CBS fact-checked his claims on camera. The president tells crowds that media coverage of the pandemic is meant to damage him politically and “should be an election law violation.”

Here’s a roundup of several coronavirus claims Trump has been repeating in the closing days of the race.

‘Rounding the turn’

“We have made tremendous progress with the China Virus, but the Fake News refuses to talk about it this close to the Election. COVID, COVID, COVID is being used by them, in total coordination, in order to change our great early election numbers. Should be an election law violation!”

— **Trump tweet, Oct. 26**

“We’re rounding the turn. Even without the vaccines, we’re rounding the turn, it’s going to be over.”

— **Trump, at a campaign rally in Manchester, N.H., Oct. 25**

As of Oct. 28 at 7:50 p.m., the United States has more than 8.8 million reported coronavirus cases and at least 227,000 deaths, according to The Washington Post covid-19 tracker.

The rate of new cases per week began to climb in mid-September and is currently climbing, showing the United States experiencing a third wave of the disease after two earlier surges in 2020. More than 70,000 new cases are reported every day at current levels.

When comparing the 20 countries most affected by the coronavirus, the United States is fifth in deaths per 100,000 people. Only Belgium, Spain, Brazil and Mexico have higher fatality rates, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Swing states

“At some point, we’re turning that corner, and it’s been pretty amazing. Florida had a rough time. Boom. ... It’s all the way down. Texas, all the way down. Arizona, great governors, all the way down.”

— **Trump, at a campaign rally in Omaha, Oct. 27**

“All he [former vice president Joe Biden] does is talk about shutdowns. But forget about him. His Democrat governors: Cuomo in New York, you look at what’s going on in California, you look at Pennsylvania, North Carolina. Democrats — Democrats all. They’re shut down so tight, and they’re dying.”

— **Trump, at the presidential debate in Nashville, Oct. 22**

“In Pennsylvania, you can’t go to church ... can’t go to restaurants.”

— **Trump, at a campaign rally in Martinsburg, Pa., Oct. 26**

Arizona, Florida and Texas are battleground states governed by Republicans. North Carolina and Pennsylvania, run by Democrats, are also possible swing states in this year’s presidential race.

Trump says the “red” states are weathering the virus successfully, while the blue states are “shut down so tight, and they’re dying.”

Arizona peaked at 3,844 new daily cases on July 3 and declined sharply in the following months. The state had slightly less than 400 daily cases in early September, a low point, but the infection rate has been rising since then, and the state is currently recording more than 1,000 new cases per day.

Florida peaked at 11,870 new daily cases on July 14 and declined sharply in the following months. The Sunshine State had slightly more than 2,000 new daily cases on Oct. 7, a low point, but the infection rate has been rising since then, and the state is currently recording more than 3,500 new cases per day.

Texas peaked at 10,572 new daily cases on July 17 and declined steadily in the following months. The state had slightly more than 3,000 new daily cases in early September, a low point, but the infection rate has been rising since then, and the state is currently recording more than 6,000 new cases per day.

North Carolina, Pennsylvania and other states governed by Democrats have lifted stay-at-home orders and many other shutdown measures from the start of the pandemic — yet Trump suggests the opposite is true. For example, Trump’s claim that Pennsylvanians cannot go to restaurants or attend church is false.

Gov. Tom Wolf (D) issued a stay-at-home order in April, and lifted June 4, that exempted religious institutions. Restaurants in Pennsylvania have been allowed to operate at half-capacity.

‘Saved 2 million lives’

“We closed it up, the greatest economy in history, we closed it up, we saved 2 million lives. Remember, it was going to be 2.2 million lives. We saved 2 million lives, and we’re rounding the turn.”

— **Trump, at a campaign rally in Martinsburg, Pa., Oct. 26**

Trump loves to use this statistic. But it’s incredibly misleading.

He is citing a possible death figure that was a worst-case scenario produced by Imperial College London, which assumed that 81 percent of the population became infected — 268 million people — and that 0.9 percent would die.

But this study assumed people took no actions against the coronavirus — imagine if nobody avoided crowded elevators, wore masks, washed their hands more often, or used gloves or hand sanitizer — which the study acknowledged was unrealistic: “It is highly likely that there would be significant spontaneous change in population behavior even in the absence of government-mandated interventions.”

The 1918 flu pandemic is believed to have infected no more than 28 percent of the population, making the 81 percent figure suspect, as Alan Reynolds of the Cato Institute noted.

Trump routinely mentions this 2.2 million figure to suggest he saved that many people from death, even as the actual death toll rises far above many of his earlier predictions. On March 29, Trump said a “very good job” would be if the coronavirus death toll ended between 100,000 and 200,000. The United States is now past both numbers.

Excess mortality

“Our excess mortality rate has been 42 percent less than Europe.”

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— **Trump, at a campaign rally in Omaha, Oct. 27**

Definitive estimates of the excess mortality rate — that is, the rate of deaths caused indirectly by covid-19, the disease caused by the virus, among people who had other ailments — will not be available for some time.

For now, the United States has one of the highest rates of covid-19 deaths per 100,000 people in the world and one of the highest rates of excess all-cause mortality, according to a study published this month by the Journal of the American Medical Association.

The authors, Alyssa Bilinski and Ezekiel J. Emanuel, compared the United States with 18 countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that have populations above 5 million and more than \$25,000 per capita in gross domestic product.

“Compared with other countries, the US experienced high COVID-19-associated mortality and excess all-cause mortality into September 2020. After the first peak in early spring, US death rates from COVID-19 and from all causes remained higher than even countries with high COVID-19 mortality. This may have been a result of several factors, including weak public

health infrastructure and a decentralized, inconsistent US response to the pandemic,” the authors wrote.

“Limitations of this analysis include differences in mortality risk: the US population is younger but has more comorbidities compared with the other countries. In addition, since late August death rates have increased in several countries, and how mortality will compare with the US throughout fall remains unknown.”

We asked the Trump campaign how the president estimated 42 percent less excess mortality than Europe and did not get a response. As [FactCheck.org](#) found, Trump has been making similar comparisons between U.S. and European excess-mortality rates for months, though the numbers keep changing.

Analyzing the available (and incomplete) data, “a few European countries do have worse excess mortality rates than the U.S., including Spain, which has the worst rate in the region,” [FactCheck.org](#) found. “By the end of June, Spain’s mortality was 22.1% higher than normal, or 62% higher than America’s rate. But looking further out, through Aug. 23, Spain’s rate fell to 19.3%, or 42% higher than the U.S. As Spain is the most extreme example, Trump is cherry-picking this number.”

Covid-19 conspiracy

“The China plague. That’s what I tested positive for, but it was amazing and it was actually an experience, and until I came along, you were supposed to have lifetime immunity, right? I said, ‘Well, you know, I’m recovered. I feel great, and I’m immune.’ ... But because it was me, the press said, ‘No, it’s not for a lifetime. It’s only for four months. The immunity is only now for four months.’ They brought it down, right? It was always going to be for a lifetime; now it’s four months.”

— **Trump, at a campaign rally in Omaha, Oct. 27**

News coverage wouldn’t affect immunity to the virus. But Trump is wrong to suggest that reports about immunity suddenly changed because of his covid-19 diagnosis and hospital stay.

Public health experts would note at the start of the outbreak that it was unknown how long a patient would be immune from reinfection after catching the coronavirus. Moreover, few diseases leave people totally immune. The antibodies developed from catching a disease are only one part of the body’s defenses, and they naturally wear off over time.

A recent [study](#) of more than 365,000 randomly selected people in England found a more than 26 percent decline in covid-19 antibodies over three months, but the timing of this research had nothing to do with Trump’s covid-19 diagnosis, and not enough is known yet to determine whether antibodies provide an effective level of immunity from the virus or how long they would prevent reinfection.

The Pinocchio Test

The United States is not “rounding the turn.” Coronavirus cases are spiking across the country.

Trump exaggerates how effectively the disease is being managed in Republican-run states and how strict shutdown measures are in Democratic-run states. He falsely claims to have saved 2.2 million lives, misusing a study that does not make such a finding. His boast that the United States has 42 percent less excess-mortality deaths than Europe is premature at best and shaky in any case, considering the dearth of reliable data. The strength of Trump's antibodies does not depend on his media coverage.

Trump earns Four Pinocchios.