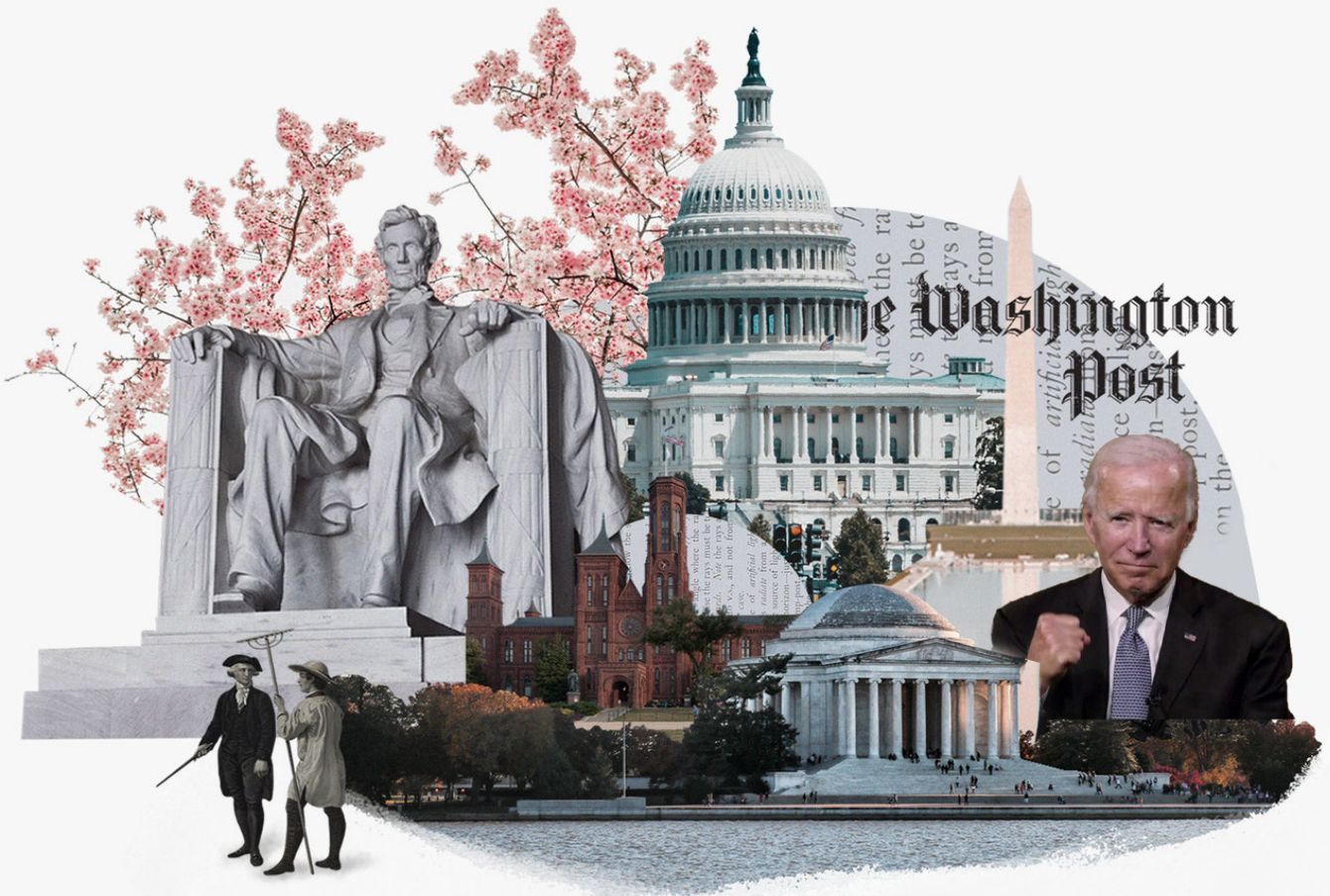


# America Global Politics in the Covid-19 pandemic





**About the author:** Enrico Zanon is an Italian Executive with 15 years in Finance, Planning and Analysis, Real Estate, and HR experience in the wholesale and retail industry. After a Master's Degree in Economics and Finance at the University of Venice in 2005, he started his

career in the Financial, Planning, and Analysis Dept. in Morellato & Sector (a watch and jewelry company) and in Geox (shoe & apparel retailer with more than 1200 stores). Geox promoted him as CFO (Chief Financial Officer) for the US market in 2011. He expanded his responsibilities beyond Finance as COO for Poltrona Frau (a luxury manufacturer of Italian furniture) and finally as CEO for Kiko (an Italian makeup brand) still in the USA. He is a firm believer in democracy. He considers that bringing people together and finding common ground is a rewarding passion.

### What is a pandemic?

A pandemic is a perfect example of an event you cannot fully understand until you see it with your own eyes. The pandemic has had profound consequences on the life of almost every individual on the planet. Changes are always challenging. However, they can usher in new opportunities. But how does a pandemic affect politics, and conversely, what is the role of politics in defeating a pandemic?

First of all, COVID was the most relevant factor that led to Mr. Trump's defeat in 2020. There is now a meaningful chance for a large coalition, one that can span a rather diverse part of the political spectrum – from liberals to socialists – to show how they can lead the country again. Moreover, this pandemic has highlighted various weaknesses in our society: healthcare, job security and work conditions, childcare or lack thereof, environmental protection and education. Despite that, many conservatives, instead of cooperating for a better outcome or even engaging in constructive criticism, are focused on taking power back and support Mr. Trump's claim about an "embezzled election", all while threatening voter rights, especially for minorities.

The pandemic has deepened a fracture which was already present in the US society and that has grown seemingly beyond the will to find the desire to do better. It regularly looks like it will be impossible to find common ground across the aisle. The American society has always been divided – urban vs. rural, educated vs. uneducated (and we can see the effect on the vaccination rate), high income vs. low-income families, to list a few examples. But now more than ever, politics should find a way to heal these divisions and bring people together.

At the beginning of the year, there was great optimism because the solution to defeating COVID was made

available to almost everybody (in the United States). However, that optimism soon disappeared because a significant part of the population wouldn't take the vaccine offering feeble excuses for their lack of civic attitude and common sense. And here we are now, amid the surge of yet another dangerous variant. Politics are contributing; either employing a more aggressive approach (for instance, the vaccination mandate for all indoor activities in New York City) or favoring smaller measures, but it is now clear that politics alone can't solve the equation.

Therefore, the private sector has decided to step up and is now playing a crucial role, which might well be the silver bullet. More and more employers, anxious to close this chapter of uncertainty and to find a new balance, are mandating vaccinations and educating employees and customers, starting with the travel and hospitality industry, along with healthcare, education, and entertainment. It wouldn't be the first time the private sector is leading the way; it has happened before; for instance, during the fight for LGBTQ+ rights.

Another example and crucial challenge of our times is climate change: companies are educating customers in demanding more sustainable products and processes, from adopting raw materials to recycling. Customers also value other ethical aspects: inclusivity, non-discriminatory practices, higher wages, and better care for pregnant people or sick employees. In times of uncertainty and deep political polarization, the private sector can have a fundamental role and fill some of the gaps left behind by politics, even if it is just for self-preservation reasons.

During this pandemic, we are learning a new way of working through the use of digital tools. The indicated has carried out positive consequences such as a smaller carbon footprint, more flexibility and lower commuting times, less business travel, and more time to spend with families. This is where politics should step up: we will need more investments in digital infrastructures and education, which will help bring people together.

The US economy is ready to restart, but it should take place by keeping in mind the following three pillars: helping those left behind, for instance extending unemployment benefits; investing in renewable energy, since there is no point in rebuilding if the planet becomes inhabitable in a few decades; improving physical and digital infrastructures because connecting people is fundamental to ensure a more open, tolerant, inclusive, and fair society.

The path just started, and it will require patience and time, but it will also need people's opinions and criticism. Achieving this means the need for politics to enhance the democratic process and fight efforts to undermine people's participation.