

Good morning. Welcome to NonPolar's fourth newsletter edition! Through this Newsletter, you will be able to hone your critical thinking skills, develop a greater understanding of your own political beliefs, and begin your journey towards helping us (little by little) improve political discourse and trust between opposing parties. It starts with you!

This week we will be covering the national response to vaccine mandates; but first, some tips and tricks to depolarize your conversations.

Tips and Tricks

Reading the news can stress us out. The constant conflict and negativity of news media can and does have an effect on our wellbeing, according to research from [Purdue University](#). Take a look at a few of their wellness tips to learn how to reduce stress and anxiety from your media intake:

1. Focus on specific times to gather news; drill into the facts rather than give in to fear
2. After watching the news, research points to the importance of relaxation rather than distraction (e.g., watching something else)
3. Research also shows that reading newspapers rather than watching the news is associated with less adverse effects
4. Be mindful of focusing on positive events apart from negative ones

Vaccine Mandate: The Fault Line of COVID-19 Discourse

Background

Nineteen months ago, the world changed forever as economies and societies across the world imposed shutdowns to “flatten the curve” of COVID-19 infections. The world has since experienced a whirlwind of political, economic, and social changes as we all try to make sense of how to emerge from this inflection point in our lives. Initial COVID-19 lockdowns sparked feelings of unity and hope in the American people to come together against a common enemy once again. However, as Americans learned more about the pandemic fellow Americans once again became the opposition as economic and social conditions became more tense. Republicans and Democrats quickly aligned themselves along issues such as mask requirements, economic policy/relief, and vaccine mandates. As a result, partisanship is now a [straightforward](#) predictor of one's opinion on just about any issue concerning COVID-19. Now, the primary political fault line lies along vaccine mandates in schools, in the workplace, and in public spaces. Let's examine the current divide on vaccine mandates, and how it affects our politics today.

The Current Discussion

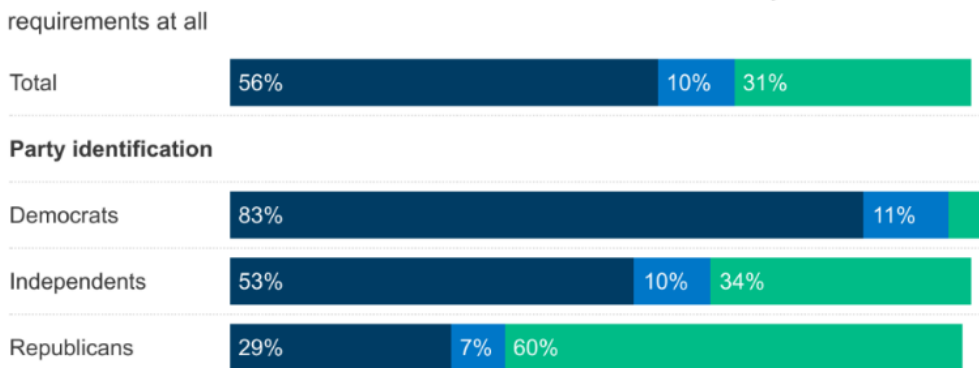
There has been a [serious divide](#) across the political aisle between the resolute stances regarding the vaccine mandate. As a result, the vaccine mandate has become a political statement regarding how exactly public health policy is being handled, mostly depending on which party controls the seat of governor and the state's Congress. For example, in Texas, “Ken Abbott has fined private companies” for having vaccine mandates while many states with Democratic governors have taken varying stances in favor of the mandate as they feel it could help end the pandemic once and for all. Much of the talk for the Republican side has stemmed around the ethics of such a mandate in a country that is supposed to champion the ideas of freedom and prosperity. A mandate would, in their mind, impede these values.

Figure 17

Majority Of The Public Support Mask Mandates In Schools, But Most Republicans Oppose Any Mask Requirement

Do you think K-12 schools...?

■ Should require all students and staff to wear masks ■ Should only require unvaccinated students and staff to wear masks ■ Should not have any mask requirements at all



NOTE: See topline for full question wording.
SOURCE: KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor (September 13-22, 2021)

KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor

This figure from the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) research is one of many that indicate extreme polarization on the issue of vaccine mandates in various areas of public life.

In fact, many have begun to hold protests in areas where mandates have been enacted. In California, where children attending in-person school have been mandated to receive the vaccine, parents decided to stage a walkout to demonstrate what they feel is a breach of their rights. The strategy is part of an effort to use the lack of attendance to fuel a decrease in funding and eventually end the vaccine mandate. Other parents feel as though they are putting their children at risk by sending them to school with unvaccinated children and simply view getting vaccinated for COVID like getting any other vaccine required to attend school. Elsewhere, Boeing employees in Seattle have brought up similar concerns and have protested their company's vaccine mandate in response to Joe Biden's executive order to be vaccinated by December 8th. While some have chosen to seek a religious exemption, this executive order has expanded the amount of people required to get the vaccine and has increased the political divide between those prioritizing personal freedom and those seeking safety.

How We Can Move Forward

Political talking points aside, this pandemic has altered how people perceive themselves, the world, and the government's role in it. COVID-19 changed our customs, routines, and relationships, forcing the American people to reconsider how government can impact our daily lives. COVID-19 has forced the US government to reflect upon itself in a number of ways: where is the balance between personal choice and public safety? What role should the government play in public health? And how can people reconcile with one another to move forward together?

While these questions may seem abstract and beyond any one person's reach, these broader questions of what we want out of our government are just as necessary to the conversation as a discussion around any singular policy decision. Consensus is created from a shared set of values, knowledge, and goals. In a time of radical change, it is important to reassess our fundamental values and beliefs, challenge one another, and come to a common vision of what the United States should be as we emerge from this pandemic. This is how we begin to answer the nitty-gritty questions of vaccines in schools, the workplace, and so much more.

Local News Trend: Surveillance



National Trend

Ever since the Patriot Act was passed in October of 2001, the tools for surveillance of both foreign enemies (and increasingly domestic citizens) has the nature of privacy in government. Many of us are peripherally aware of the capabilities of national bureaus like the NSA, or more recently the [Postal Service](#), to track the location and activities of their targets- however, over the past few years these tools have been extended to multiple state and local authorities.

What is Happening Locally:

- [The Intercept](#): The Software that Michigan State Police Can Use to Watch Your Every Move
 - Michigan State Police have contracted a surveillance software known as "ShadowDragon" to aggregate data from social media and other online sources
- [Amnesty International](#): NYPD can use more than 15,000 cameras to track people using facial recognition in Manhattan, Bronx and Brooklyn
 - The department has reportedly conducted over 22,000 facial recognition searches since the software's implementation in 2017. Many claim the software leads to "racially discriminatory policing."

Subscribe to NonPolar's biweekly newsletter!

SUBSCRIBE NOW



Feedback? Suggestions? Fill out an anonymous survey at the link [here!](#)



Learn more about NonPolar, and follow us on social media!