

Good morning. Welcome to NonPolar's sixth newsletter edition! This week, we will be covering the results and reaction to the Virginia Governor's race, the importance of voting to power our democracy, and some of the more disingenuous headlines covering the election.

But first- do you wish you knew how to handle awkward political conversations with family members around the Thanksgiving feast?

Tips and Tricks

We know it can be hard to have political conversations with your loved ones, especially when you disagree. With the Thanksgiving holiday coming up, here are some recommendations for how to have more productive and civil conversations with your family members, courtesy of [Do Something](#).

1. Acknowledge their opinions: You don't always have to agree, but if you want someone to genuinely listen to your point of view, you should recognize theirs as well.
2. Focus on individual issues and stories: Expressing your point of view through your own perspective is a great way to ensure you do not assume the beliefs of others, while also making your points easier to process.
3. Continue to Have Conversations: While shutting people down increases division, having genuine discourse can build unity. Especially when speaking to your loved ones, it helps to remember that cutting out people who disagree with you eliminates chances to build stronger relationships..

2021 NJ and VA Elections

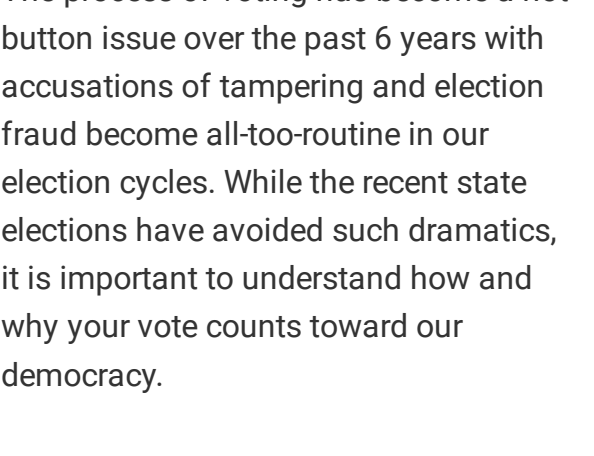
Background

The results of the Virginia and New Jersey state elections have sparked a national conversation: to what extent will the elections reflect the national sentiment, and how predictive will they be of the 2022 midterms? The election of Republicans Glenn Youngkin to Governor of Virginia and Edward Durr to New Jersey State Senate President (beating out 20-year incumbent Steve Sweeney) could be summed up to the natural "pendulum swings" of politics- many Congressional and state seats are won by the opposing party to a newly elected president. However, the natural ebbs and flows of politics cannot solely explain how a State like Virginia, which President Biden won by 10 points last November, could elect a Republican just one year later. Coverage of the election has primarily focused on the candidates' stance on COVID policy in schools, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Youngkin's relationship with the Republican base. Let's take a critical look at how and why Youngkin won Virginia, the ripple effects of these elections, and what we can extrapolate to the 2022 midterms.

The Current Discussion

As usual, democratic incumbents have different takes on what went wrong. Those further to the left blame centrists like Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema for obstructing national Democratic programs like the Infrastructure bill. Others have [argued](#) McAuliffe and democrats in general have dismissed voters' concerns of CRT as ludicrous or imaginary rather than addressing them head on. Additionally, much of McAuliffe's campaign was centered around equating Youngkin to Trump, which was not effective in gaining votes. The conversation around CRT is confusing for many voters, as incumbents struggle to define what the theory is and how it would be applied in classrooms. Youngkin was able to stand solidly in his stance against CRT, while McAuliffe was unable to effectively produce a definition and called resistance against it "[racist dog whistling](#)". Youngkin saw a swing in Republican votes in nearly every county of Virginia, most critically in suburban areas that led Biden to win handily in 2020. Meanwhile, he was even able to [outperform](#) Trump in more conservative counties in the western part of the state.

Another main factor in both the Virginia and New Jersey elections was depressed turnout and enthusiasm from Democratic voters. While presidential approval rating already tends to decrease after the first 100 days in office, Biden's approval with the country has [fallen steadily](#) since August- including a mere [34% approval rating](#) among independent voters. Much of this is associated with the withdrawal from Afghanistan, severe reductions in the Infrastructure and Reconciliation bills, and fears surrounding the supply chain and inflation. At the state level, while some parents were concerned about the introduction of CRT into schools, most were even more concerned about the handling of Virginia's schools during the [pandemic](#): disruptions to class due to quarantines, mass exposures, and mask mandates have parents on either side of aisle upset with the state's education system. To many citizens, the future of the country seems just as uncertain as before Biden took office; a lack of a clear vision on COVID and Build Back Better has led Democratic support to falter within Biden's first year in office

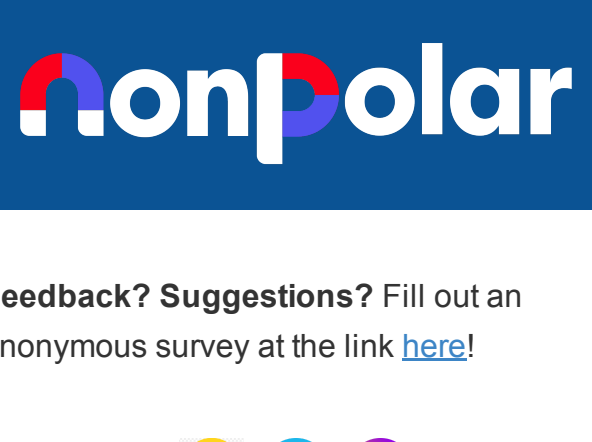


A map of counties in Virginia and the degree to which they shifted left/right from the 2020 presidential election compared to the 2021 state election. Data: AP, Edison Research (2020). Graphic: Sara Chodosh and Matthew Bloch/The New York Times

What Can We Learn from Virginia?

Biden and Democrats are in a bad spot, falling behind leading into midterms. Polling data has continued to be wrong for Republicans, as we saw with Youngkin. Virginia could be an indicator of Americans feeling about the country leading up to midterms. However, it's not a perfect predictor of national dynamics, especially in times as polarized and turbulent as the current political landscape. Elections are one of few outlets for Americans to express their problems, so it's important that our votes are informed by the issues that matter. At times, this can be difficult- the media and politicians have an incentive to divide people into coalitions, cherry picking issues that are divisive to motivate voter bases. It is important for Americans to not only be civically involved, but to think critically about how their voice is influenced by groups unconcerned with the well-being of democracy.

TED Talk: Re-Imagining the Voting System to Prioritize Citizens



Do you think it should be easier to vote?

The process of voting has become a hot-button issue over the past 6 years with accusations of tampering and election fraud become all-too-routine in our election cycles. While the recent state elections have avoided such dramatics, it is important to understand how and why your vote counts toward our democracy.

Learn more about how voting works today- and how it could work more for voters:

- [NBC News](#) has an interactive journey of a citizen's vote, from the Ballot Box to ultimately influencing the outcome of the Presidential election
- [Amber McReynold's TED Talk](#) explores how changes to the current US voting system could "bring accountability, transparency and equity to the outdated and sputtering system that American democracy currently relies on"

Local News Feature

Ann Arbor Ok's Plan to cut down hundreds of trees

Ann Arbor city officials have OK'd a homebuilders plan to cut down hundreds of trees to make way for a 57 luxury home subdivision. Some council members argued it is not in line with the cities current sustainability goals. Click [here](#) to learn more.

A city of Ann Arbor map of the Concord Pines development site off Earhart Road. City of Ann Arbor

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