



Elections and Voting in America

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Outline



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- What is the purpose of elections & why do people vote?
- What is the context for modern elections?
- A health assessment for US democracy
- 2021 Elections in Virginia



Folk Theory

Elections keep politicians accountable

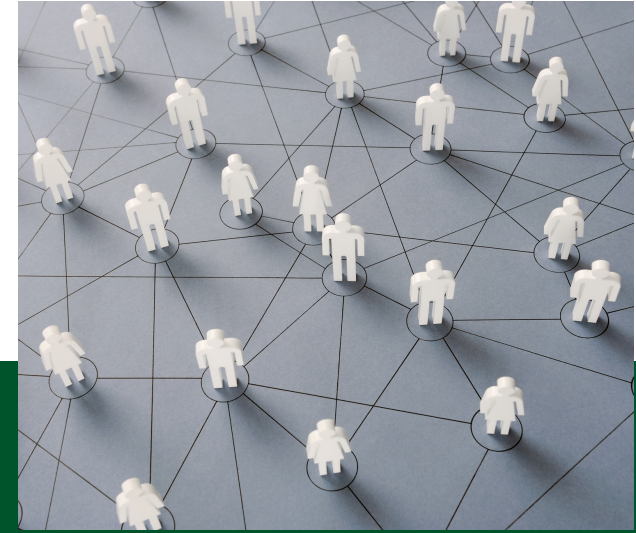
Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. 2017. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. Reprint edition. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.



Spatial Theory

People always vote for the candidate “nearest” them

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. 1st edition. New York: Harper and Row.



Social Theory

People vote based on their social context

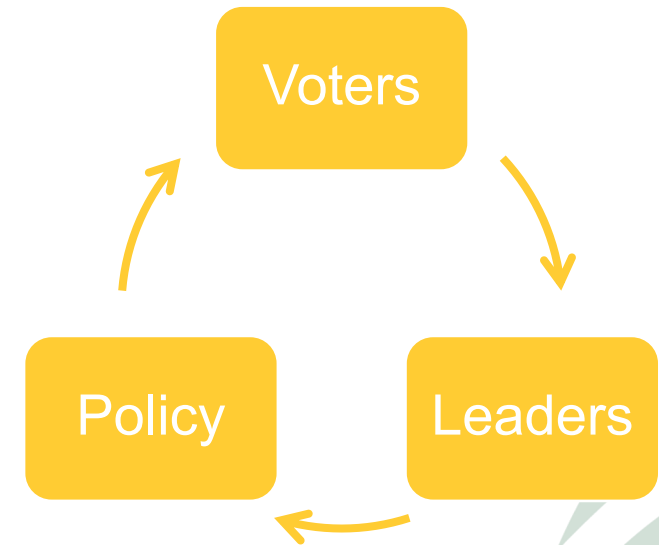
Rolfe, Meredith. 2013. *Voter Turnout: A Social Theory of Political Participation*. Reprint edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Folk Theory

In a democracy, elections serve as a mechanism to keep leaders accountable to the public.

However:

- People don't pay attention to politics
- Voters are overly influence by recent events
- Voting choices are determined by: **partisanship, cognitive biases, identity**

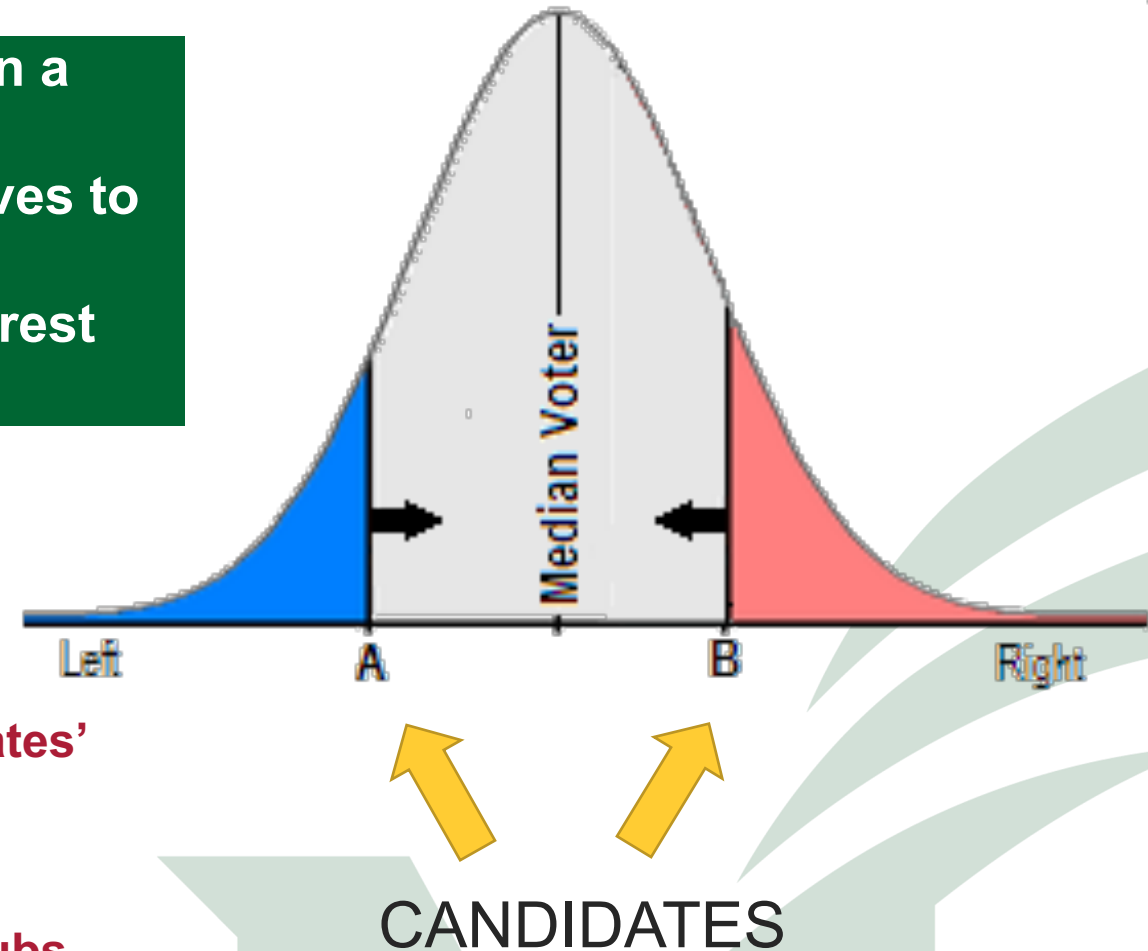


Spatial Theory

- Think of candidates and voters on a one-dimensional spectrum.
- Candidates will position themselves to attract the most voters possible.
- Voters vote for the candidate nearest them.

BUT:

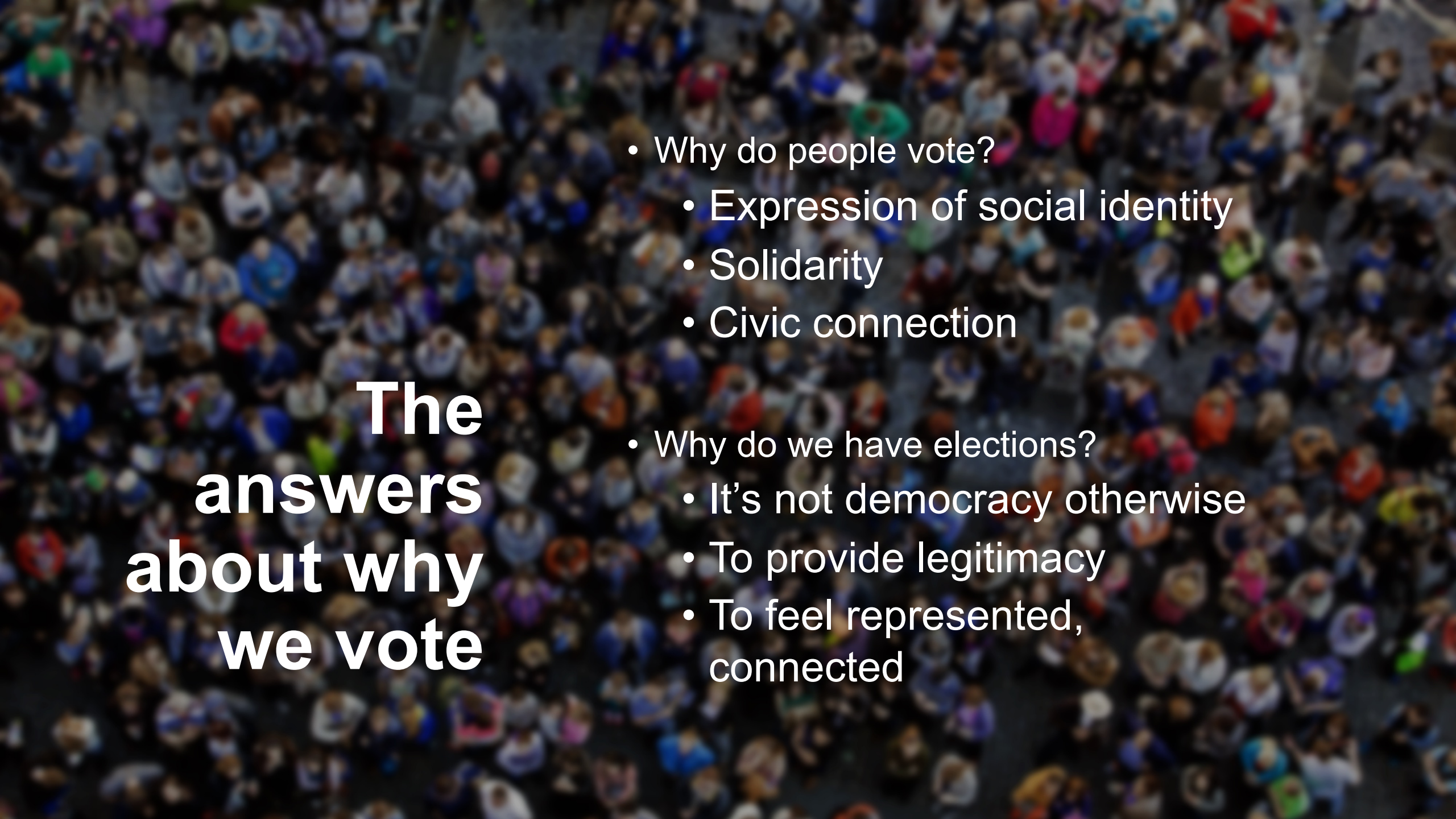
- What if some people don't vote?
- What if voters can't identify candidates' positions?
- What if candidates aren't static?
- What if the candidate nearest you runs the wrong way?



The Social model of voting



- The decision to vote is never made in isolation of others—it's dependent on **social context**.
- Predictors of Voting:
 - Large personal network
 - More education
 - Older
 - Stake in the outcome
 - Community roots
 - Partisans
 - You've been asked to vote
 - White
 - Wealthy



The answers about why we vote

- Why do people vote?
 - Expression of social identity
 - Solidarity
 - Civic connection
- Why do we have elections?
 - It's not democracy otherwise
 - To provide legitimacy
 - To feel represented,
connected

Outline



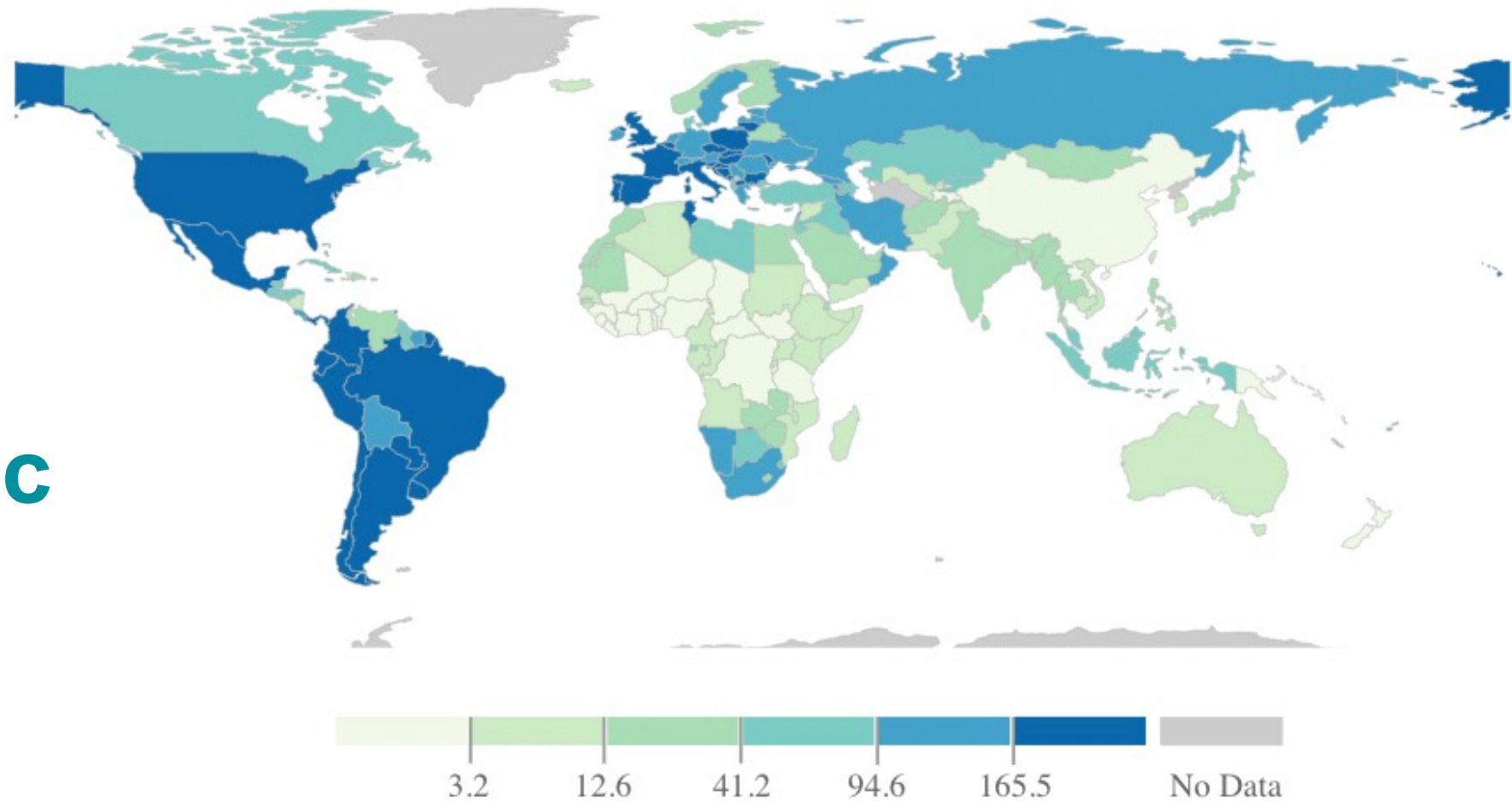
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- 2021 Elections in Virginia

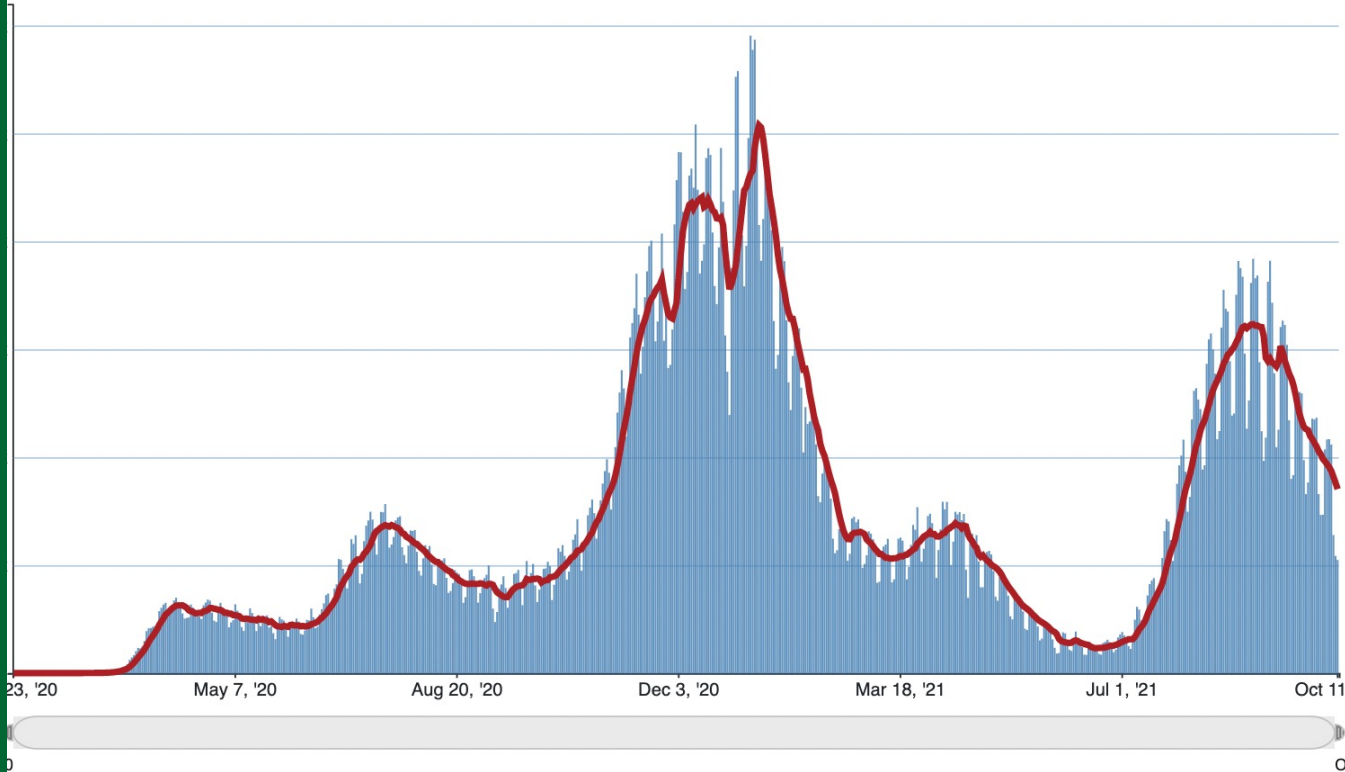
What a time to be alive...

Global cumulative deaths from COVID-19 reported per 100,000 population

Pandemic



Daily Trends in Number of COVID-19 Cases in The United States Reported to CDC



What a time to be alive...

Cases in the US are on the rise, again.

Pandemic



COVID-19 in Virginia: Cases



Dashboard Updated: 10/12/2021
Data entered by 5:00 PM the prior day.

Total Cases*		Total Hospitalizations**		Total Deaths	
895,619		37,514		13,219	
Confirmed†	Probable†	Confirmed†	Probable†	Confirmed†	Probable†
667,908	227,711	35,421	2,093	11,123	2,096

Select Measure
(Affects Map and Bar Chart)

- ☒ Cases
- ☐ Hospitalizations
- ☐ Deaths

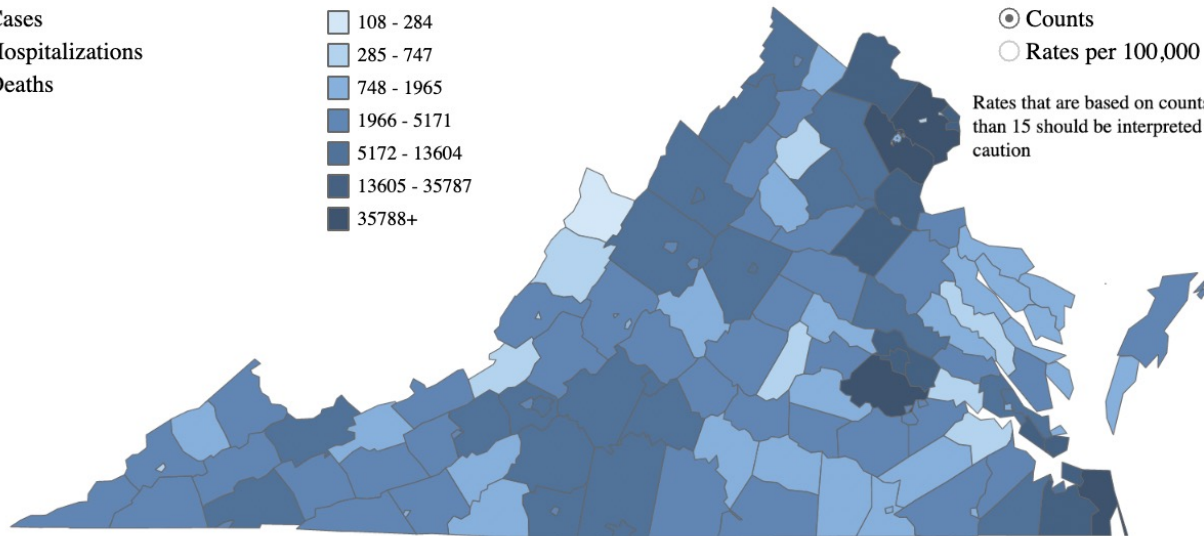
Counts of
Cases

- 108 - 284
- 285 - 747
- 748 - 1965
- 1966 - 5171
- 5172 - 13604
- 13605 - 35787
- 35788+

Select Counts or Rates
(Affects Map)

- ☒ Counts
- ☐ Rates per 100,000

Rates that are based on counts less than 15 should be interpreted with caution



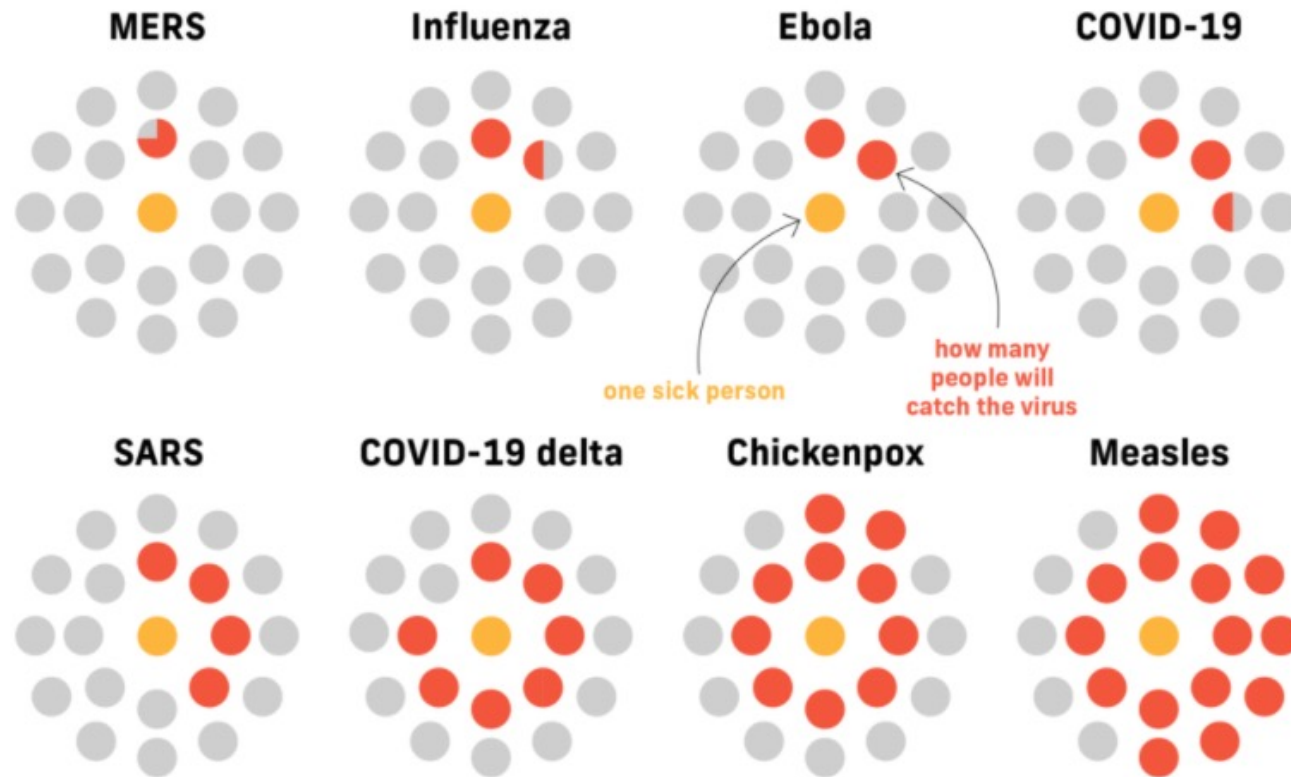
What a time to be alive...

Pandemic

What a time to be alive...

The Delta variant is much more contagious than COVID 1.0.

Pandemic



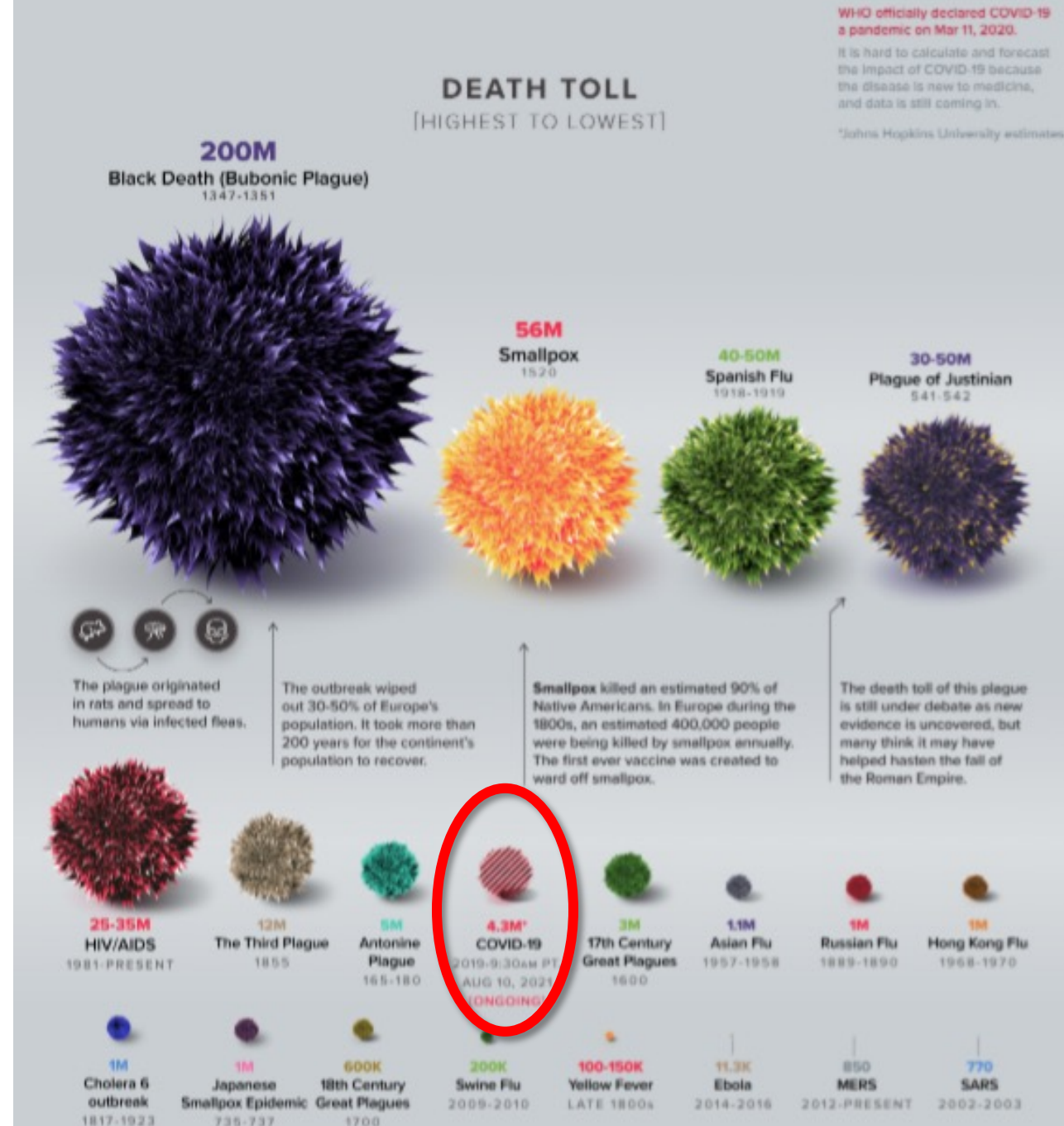
Source: CDC (MERS), The Lancet (SARS, measles), Univ. of Mich (COVID-19, ebola), JHU (chickenpox), NPR/Tom Wenseleers (COVID-19 delta)



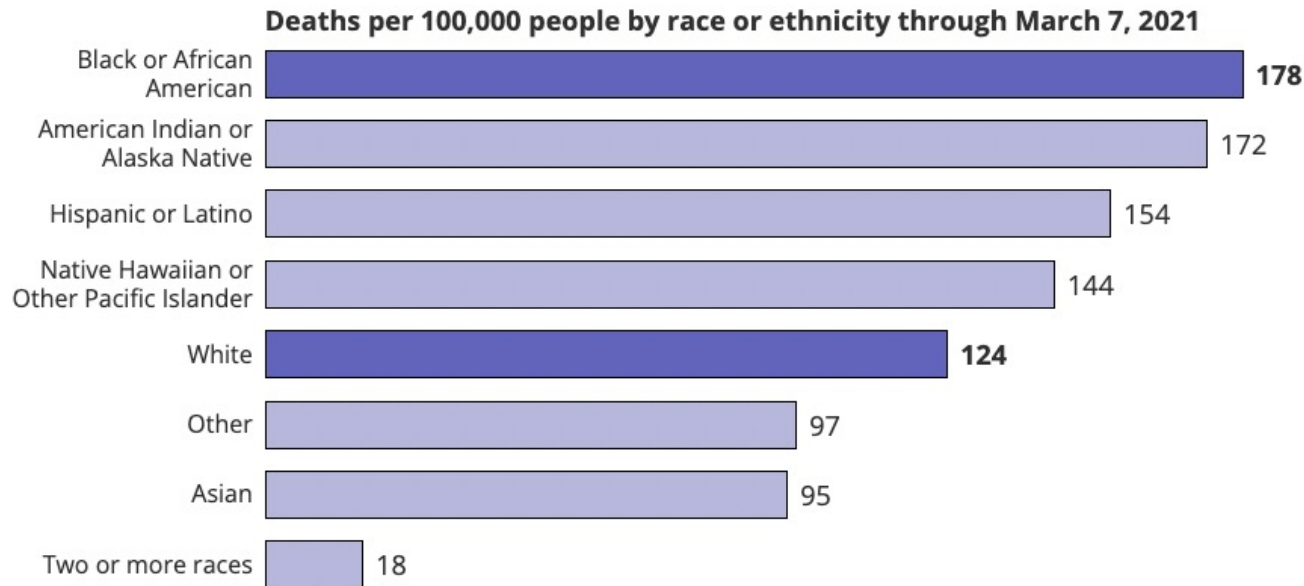
Updated August 2021. Graphic by Sara Chodosh

What a time to be alive...

- COVID-19 is among the top 10 most deadly plagues to have afflicted human in recorded history.



Nationwide, Black people have died at 1.4 times the rate of white people.



Notes ↑

These calculations are based on data from The Covid Racial Data Tracker and the U.S. Census Bureau. Race categories may overlap with Hispanic/Latinx ethnicity. Rates are not age-adjusted and some rates are underestimated due to lack of reporting of race and ethnicity categories for COVID-19 deaths.

What a time to be alive...

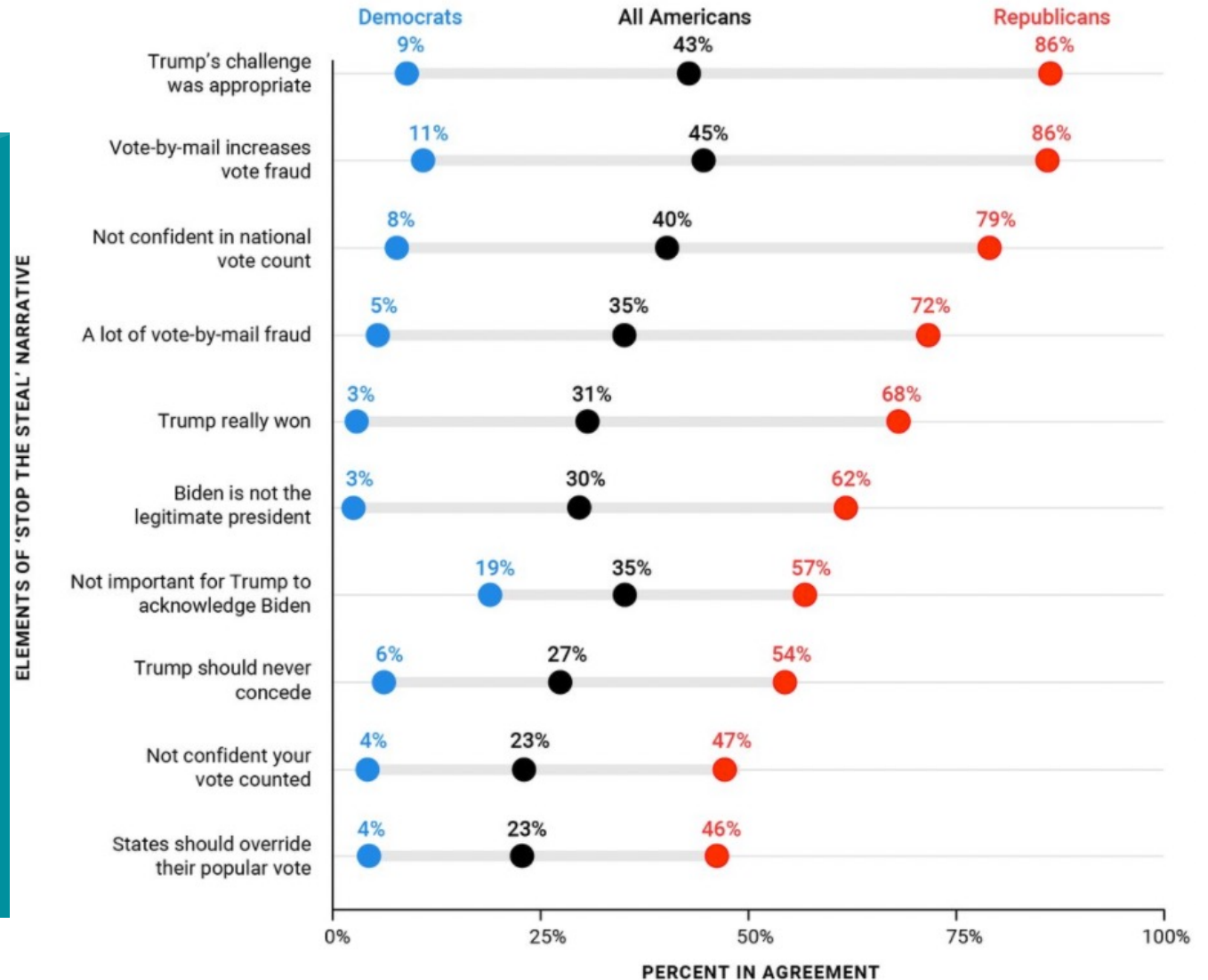
COVID-19 disproportionately affects people of color.

What a time to be alive...

2020 US election was the largest election in US history (66% voter turnout)

Democrats and Republicans do not equally believe the election outcome.

Republican Voters Are Much More Likely to Distrust the Election



Democracy Fund Voter Study Group
Source: VOTER Survey, November 2020

COVID-19 misperceptions by news source

Respondents who said one or more of the following false statements were accurate:

1. The COVID-19 vaccines will alter people's DNA.
2. The COVID-19 vaccines contain microchips that could track people.
3. The COVID-19 vaccines contain the lung tissue of aborted fetuses.
4. The COVID-19 vaccines can cause infertility, making it more difficult to get pregnant.

[Percent among respondents who said they got COVID-related news from each source in the past 24 hours]

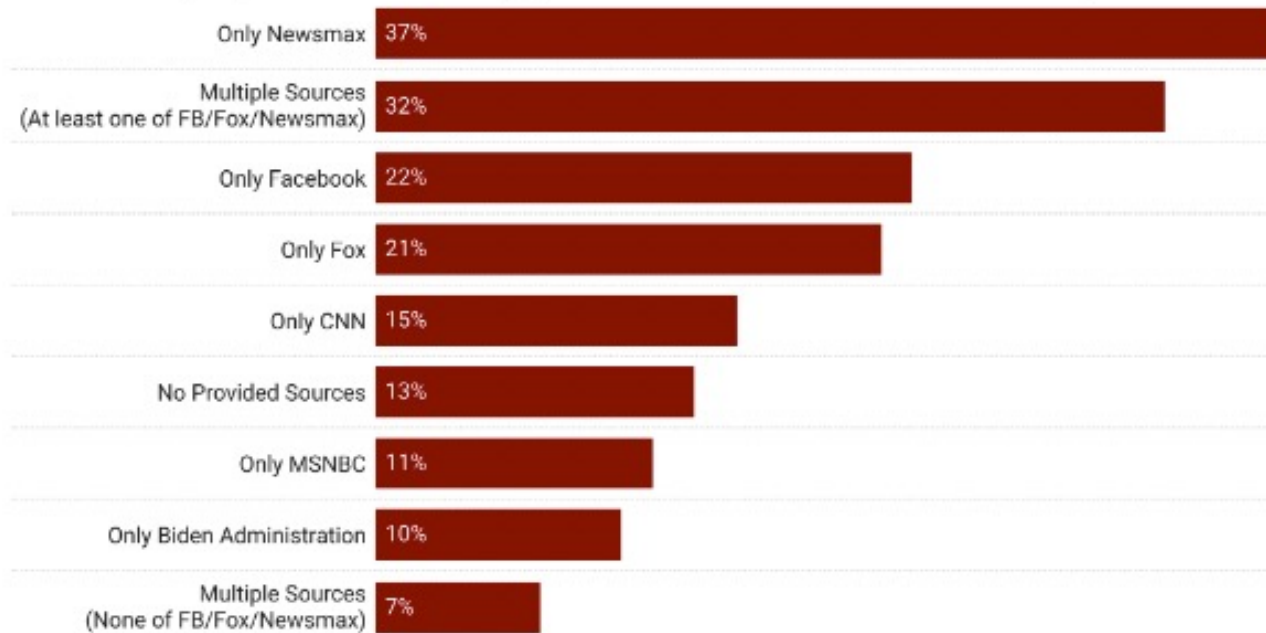


Chart: National sample, N = 20,669, Time period: 06/09/2021-07/07/2021 • Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) www.covidstates.org • Created with Datawrapper

What a time to be alive...

People who get news from conservative news sources and Facebook are more likely to hold false beliefs about COVID-19.

WHAT A TIME TO BE ALIVE...

COVID-19 vaccine status and uncertainty about misinformation

COVID-19 vaccine status among respondents who...

- (1) Identify one or more misinformation statements about COVID-19 vaccines as true
- (2) Do not identify misinformation statements as true, but select "Not sure" at least once
- (3) Correctly identify all misinformation statements about COVID-19 vaccines as false

■ Vaccinated ■ May get vaccinated ■ Vaccine resistant



National sample, N = 16,996, Time period: 06/09/2021-07/07/2021

Source: Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) www.covidstates.org • Created with Datawrapper

Those who hold more misperceptions about COVID-19 are less likely to be vaccinated

WHAT A TIME TO BE ALIVE...

Partisanship is correlated with false beliefs about COVID-19

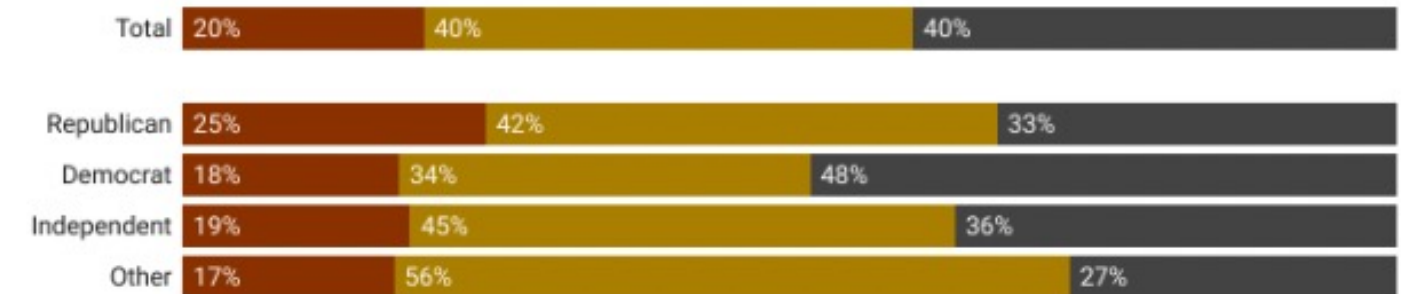
The pandemic has been politicized.

COVID-19 misperceptions by political party

Survey respondents were asked to identify the following four vaccine misinformation items as either true or false. When uncertain, they also had the option of saying "Not sure".

1. The COVID-19 vaccines will alter people's DNA.
2. The COVID-19 vaccines contain microchips that could track people.
3. The COVID-19 vaccines contain the lung tissue of aborted fetuses.
4. The COVID-19 vaccines can cause infertility, making it more difficult to get pregnant.

- Respondents who marked at least one misinformation item as true
- Respondents who marked none as true, but at least one as "not sure"
- Respondents who correctly marked all misinformation items as false



National sample, N = 16,996, Time period: 06/09/2021-07/07/2021

Source: Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) www.covidstates.org • Created with Datawrapper

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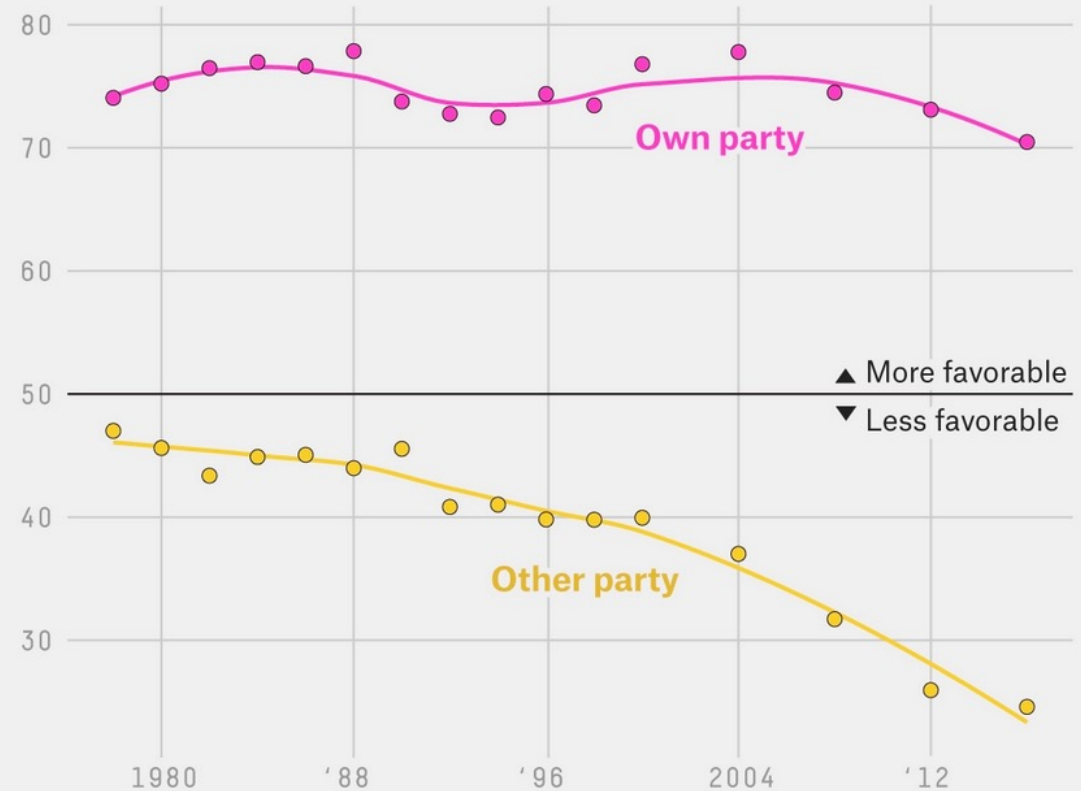
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Negative Partisanship

Partisan identity
is driven by out-
group repulsion

Americans really don't like the other party

How “favorable and warm” respondents rated their feelings toward their own and the other political party, on a scale of 0 to 100



Respondents who identified as members of neither party were not included in the average.

FiveThirtyEight

SOURCES: BOXELL, GENTZKOW, SHAPIRO

city

Five things to know about polarization



The trend of contemporary polarization began in the 1970s



Polarization is driven by elites, and exacerbated by psychology



Polarization is rooted in inequality

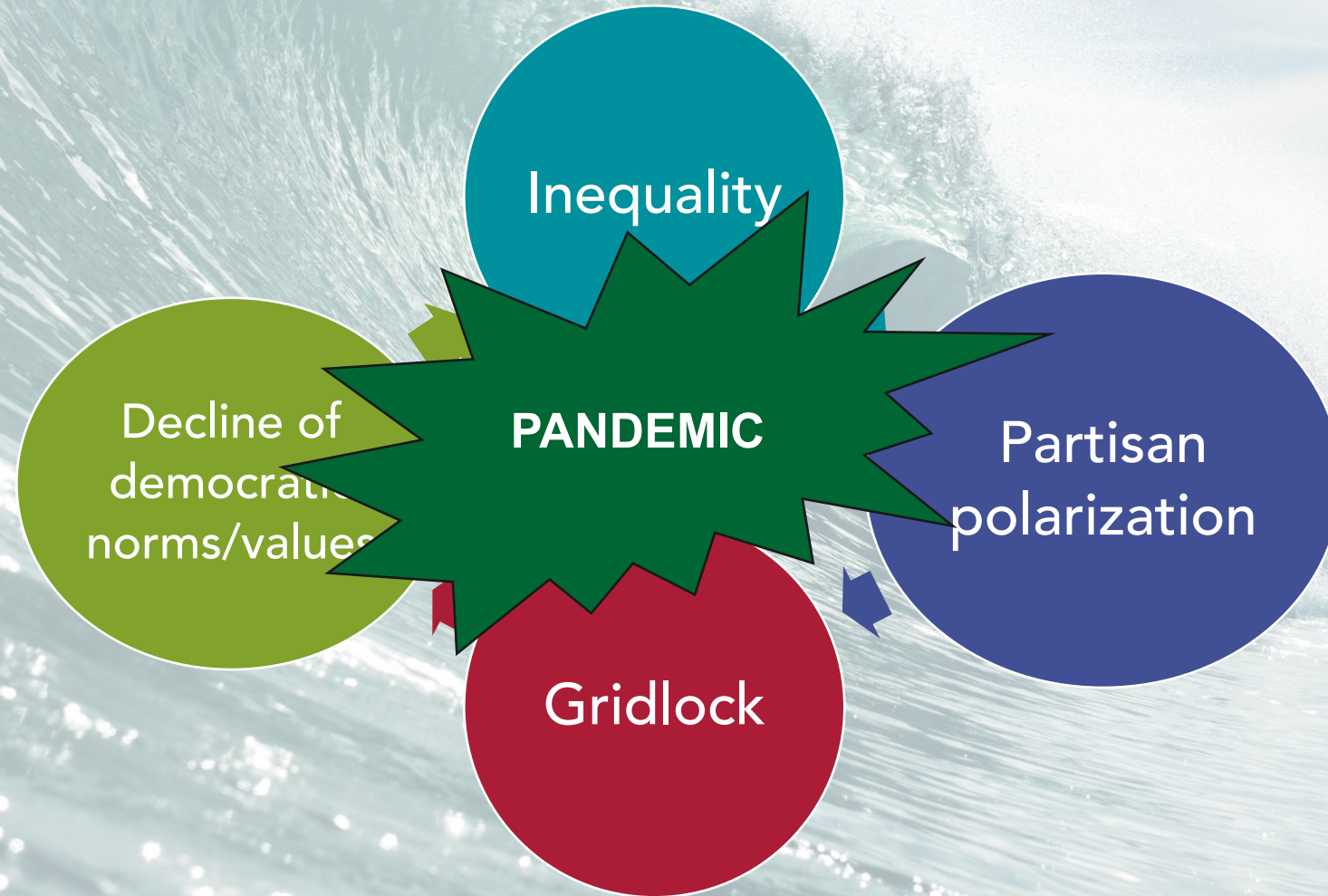


Parties sorted over racial justice as a result of policy progress and white backlash



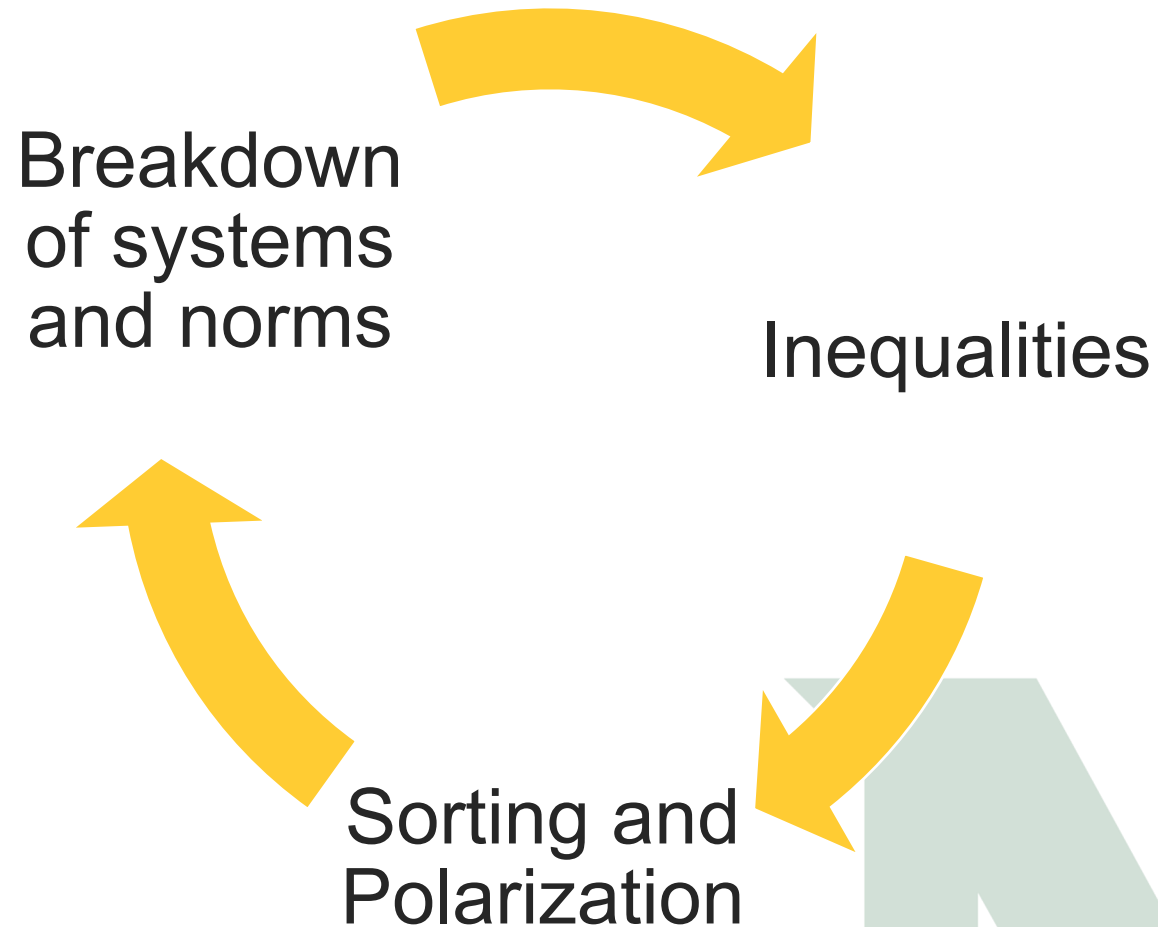
Polarization degrades democratic norms, freedoms, and protections

Diagnosing US Political Dysfunction



Partisan polarization is self-perpetuating

Cycle of democratic degradation



Polarization degrades democracy

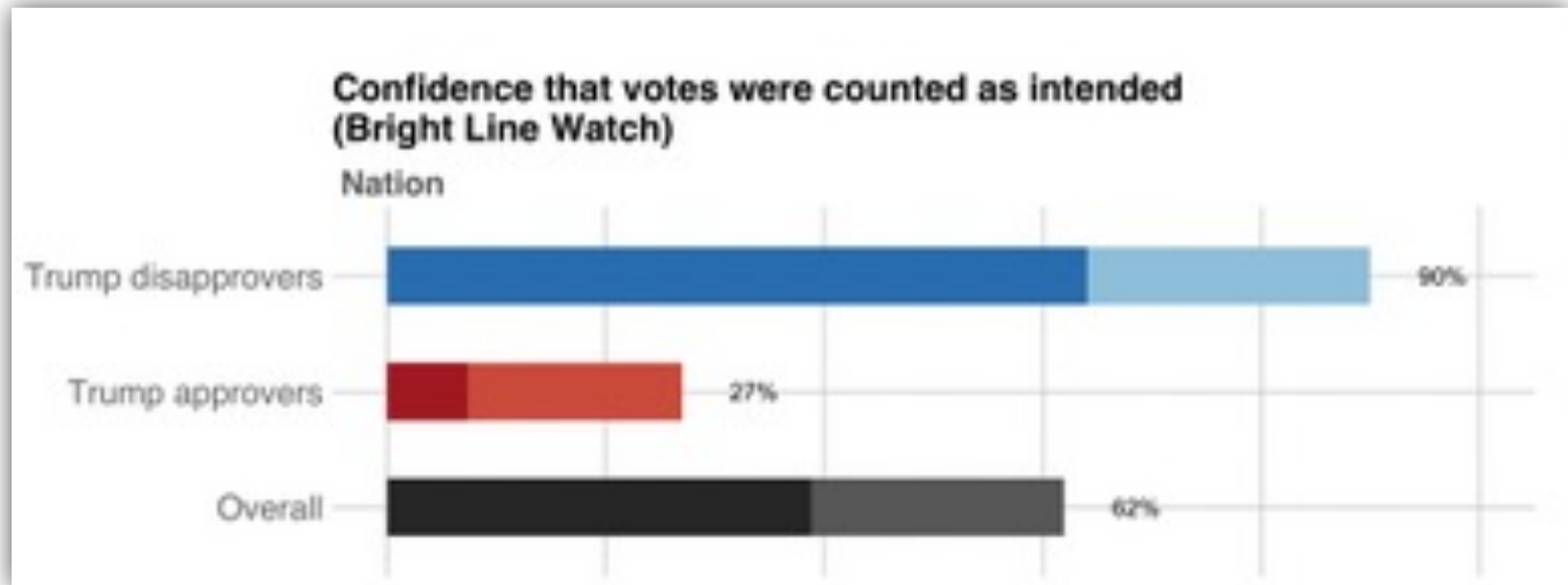
- Democracy is a form of government that protects individual **rights**, **liberties**, and promotes **prosperity**.
- As partisans polarize, people may devalue democratic institutions.
- Democracy requires:
 - Mutual **respect** among political rivals
 - Mutual **restraint**
- There are fewer incentives to be restrained and show respect when rivals view one another as dangerous.



DEMOCRACY

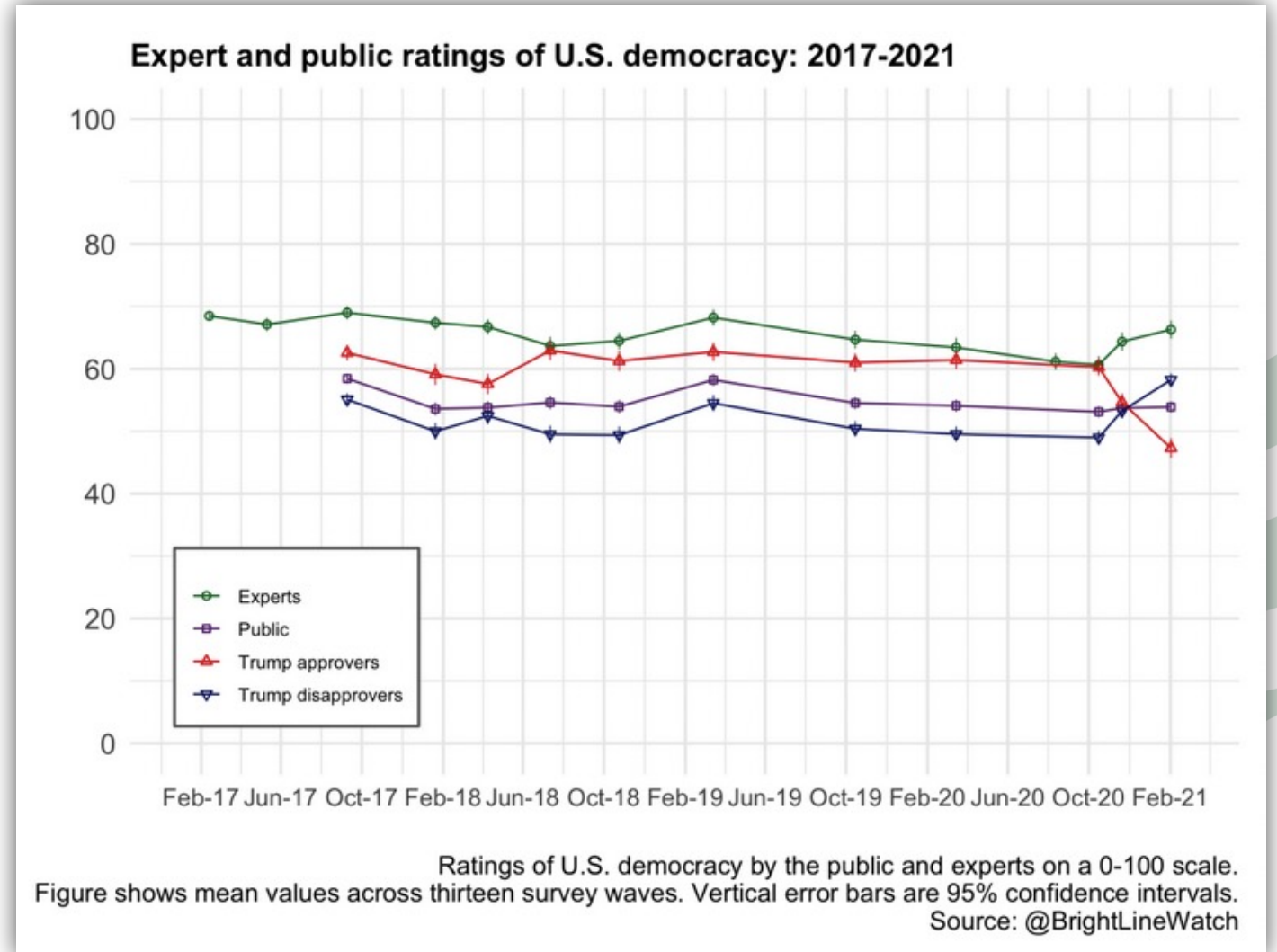
Democrats and Republicans live in different political realities

One-third of Americans do not trust the election outcome

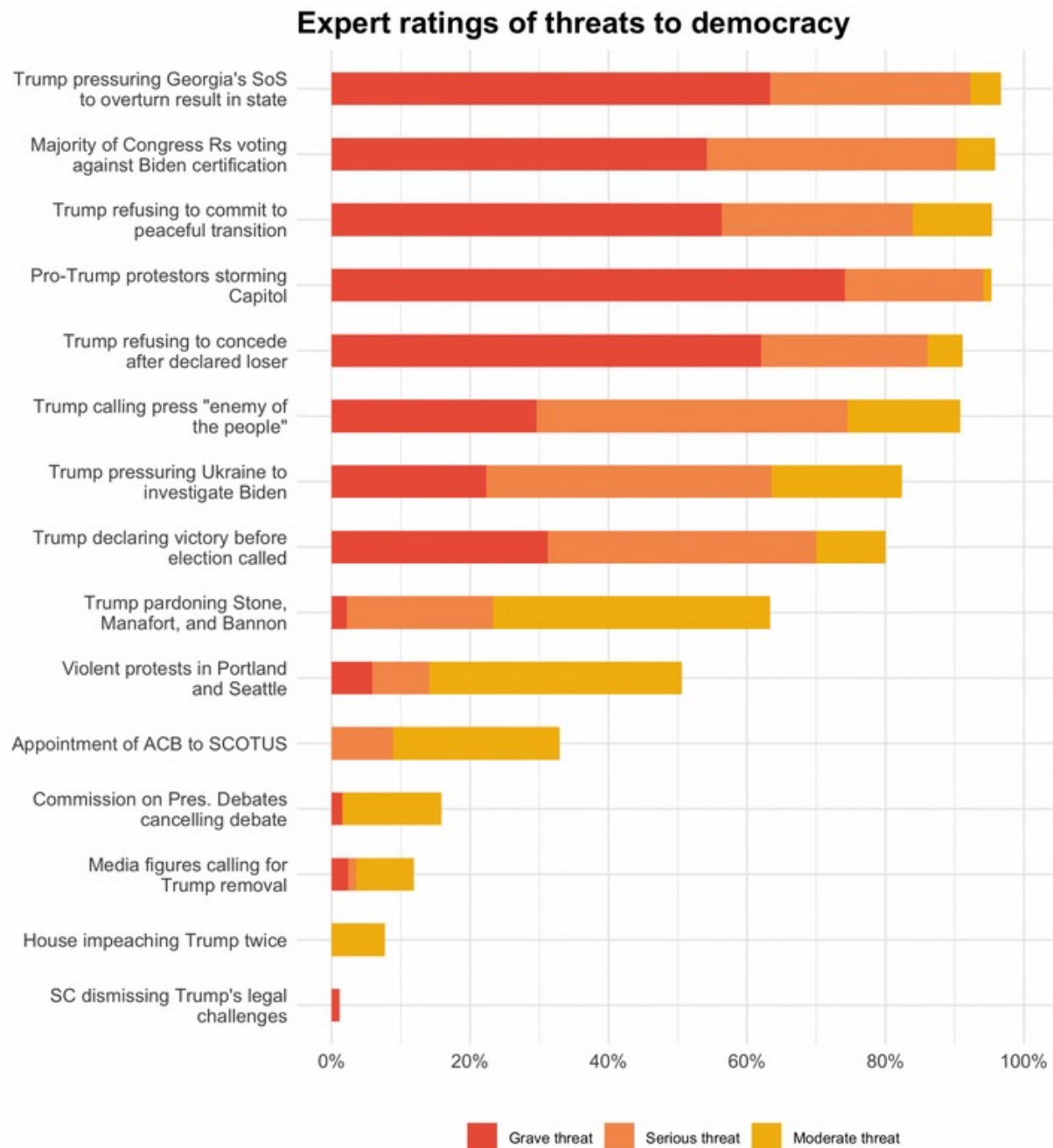


Is US democracy in decline? Depends who you ask

Experts see improvement in democracy since Biden inaugurated, but Trump supporters perceive a sharp decline



Largest threats to US democracy involve election authority



The truncated bars omit the categories "Little threat" and "No threat."
Source: @BrightLineWatch

Which democratic reforms do experts think most important?

Brightline Watch Expert Survey

Near unanimous support

- Campaign finance transparency
- Voting flexibility
- Redistricting commissions

Strong support

- Same day voter registration
- Suffrage for ex-felons
- Election Day national holiday
- Public funding for campaigns
- Pre-register young voters

Majority Support

- National popular vote
- Ranked-choice voting
- 18-year SCOTUS terms
- Eliminate filibuster
- Multi-member districts
- Enlarge House of Representatives

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Virginia Elections 2021

Election Day is Tuesday, November 2

Yesterday was the voter
registration deadline.

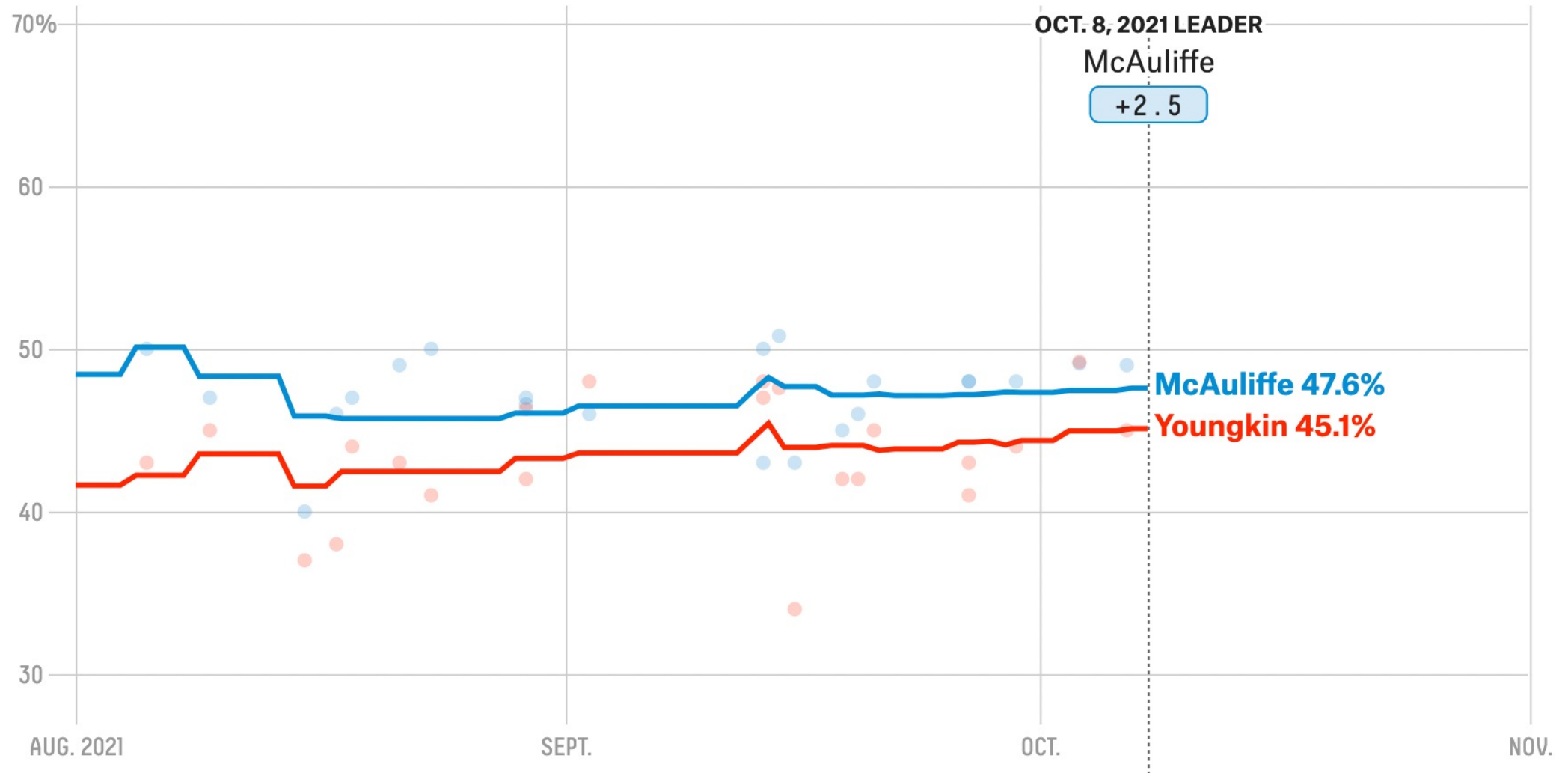
ON THE BALLOT

November 2, 2021 General and Special Elections on the ballot:

- Governor
- Lieutenant Governor
- Attorney General
- Member, House of Delegates
- School Bond Question

Who's ahead in the Virginia governor's race?

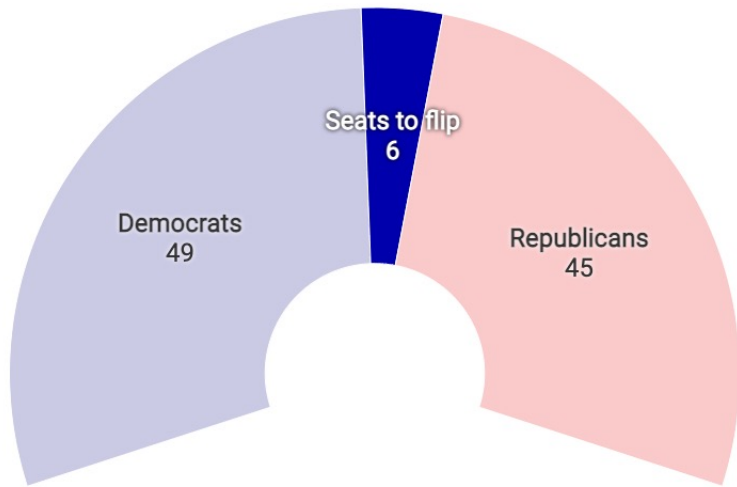
An updating average for each candidate, accounting for each poll's quality, sample size and recency



Average as of Oct. 8, 2021

FiveThirtyEight

Virginia House of Delegates



- All 100 seats up for reelection
- Democrats currently hold a state “trifecta” in controlling branches
- Currently 55 Democrats and 45 Republicans.
- ~22 battleground districts (16 Democrats; 6 Republicans)
- 1993 – 2017 presidential election winner’s party has lost seats in the House of Delegates in 5 of 7 elections.
- Republicans need to flip 6 seats to gain control, which is about the average net seat shift in recent elections.

Virginia redistricting 2021

New congressional districts maps must be approved this year

- Virginia uses a 16-member, bipartisan commission
 - 4 Democratic legislators; 4 Republican legislators
 - 4 Democratic citizens; 4 Republican citizens
- The legislature cannot revise the commission's proposal.
- Virginia has 11 districts, and did not change the size of its congressional delegation as a result of the 2020 census.
- The commission is...not getting along well. Recently lost a quorum. Cannot agree on a map drawing strategy.
- State Supreme Court may wind up drawing the map.

Conclusions

Democracy is not a spectator sport

- If Republicans win Governor or take majority of House of Delegates in Virginia, the state may be seen as “in play” in 2024.
- Nationally, Democrats will struggle to pass major legislation.
- As the number of Americans who do not trust election outcomes increases, democratic stability is gravely threatened.

• VOTE



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