



impactSocial

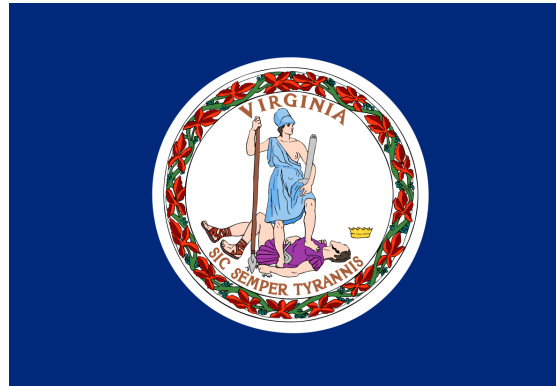
monitoring with algorithms
analysis by people

Virginia Governor Race

Online & Social Media Analysis

October 26 – November 02, 2021

VA



NET SENTIMENT SCORE +6

KEY TAKEOUTS:

A steady finish from team McAuliffe who’s net sentiment score ends at a respectable +6. The period also saw a surge in online posts which jumped from 19.5K to 34.5K, reflecting an appetite among many VA Dems to keep their state Blue.

Alongside the general conversation to get the vote out was a new push by McAuliffe to remind Virginians of his commitment towards education. This was achieved by pointing towards his record when previously in post (and later continued by Gov. Northam) and suggesting that Youngkin will simply undermine the progress made. This effort has been well received by many on the Left which has also served to deflect accusations from the Right regarding the prevention of parental involvement in education.

In addition many Democratic voters lapped up the final tour of McAuliffe’s greatest hits which included, Covid-19, women’s rights, jobs/economy and healthcare. However, this success has been undermined by the Lincoln Project when members stood in front of Youngkin’s campaign bus wearing white shirts, khaki pants and sunglasses in an attempt to evoke an infamous far-right torchlit march at the University of Virginia in August 2017.

With echoes of an infamous LVF ad in the 2017 race - the online discussions showed that this intervention served only to incentivize the Right who found the stunt distasteful. Playing into the MAGA narrative many also suggested that it reflected the Left’s ‘fake news’ agenda and ruthlessness pursuit of power.

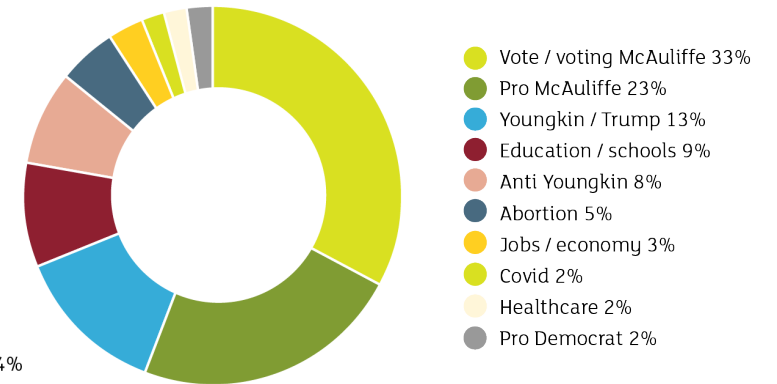
Tellingly, few on the Left chose to defend or even comment on the event.

Notes on the data: The numbers above right show the dataset used for analysis. Impact Social collected publicly available data geo-located to VA, we then exported these conversations taking out randomized, representative samples for our analysts to physically read. The donut chart shows how the discussion is segmented and the topics driving it.

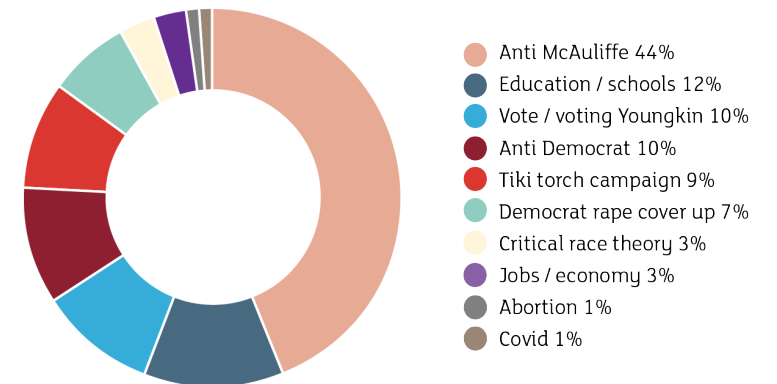
SENTIMENT



POSITIVE DISCUSSION



NEGATIVE DISCUSSION



NET SENTIMENT SCORE + 10

KEY TAKEOUTS:

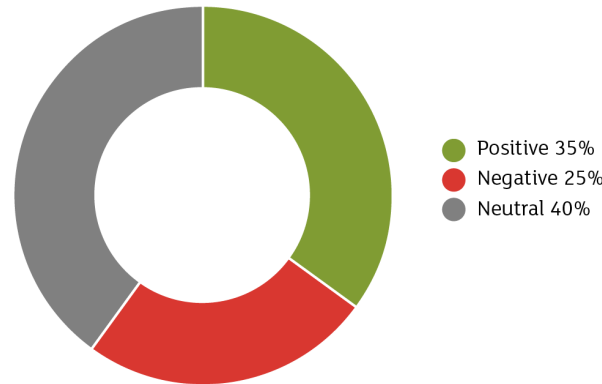
Youngkin’s final week ended with him riding on the wave of his own making with his net sentiment nudging up by 1pt to +10. This was achieved by driving home the issues which he has made his own in recent weeks; in particular parental involvement in education. This, coupled with critical race theory and child protection has his people fired up. Finally, the Tiki Torch stunt is a gift from the campaign gods (see McAuliffe analysis for detail)

As a consequence support for Youngkin is at an all-time high with the volume of posts in his name more than doubling from 18K to 38K - overtaking McAuliffe in this respect for the first time. Many Republicans are clearly excited, they sense blood and call on one another to get out and vote.

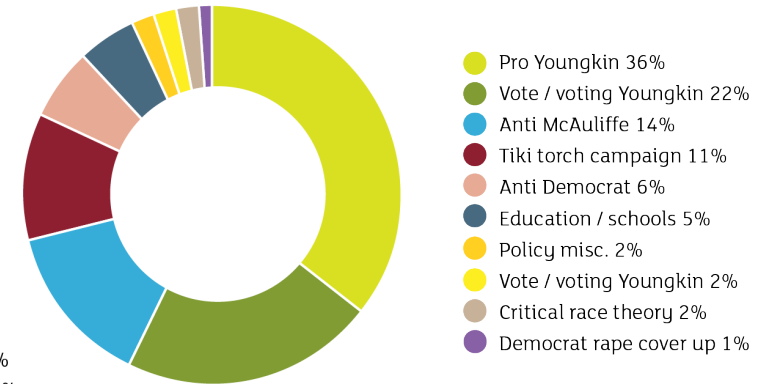
Yet Youngkin is not without injury, sustained in what has been a relentless and bloody fight. He continues to suffer due to the constant association with Trump – which was once again reinforced over the period by the man himself to the delight of McAuliffe and continues to be deliberately linked to the events of Jan 6. This has enabled the Left to label Youngkin as a populist seller of Trumpian hate. Someone happy to pitch neighbour versus neighbour in the interest of power. In addition, his interventions on education have left him open to being branded as an authoritarian book banner.

And yet, given his chances of victory at the outset, Youngkin is no doubt pleased to be in such a close race as he heads into polling day.

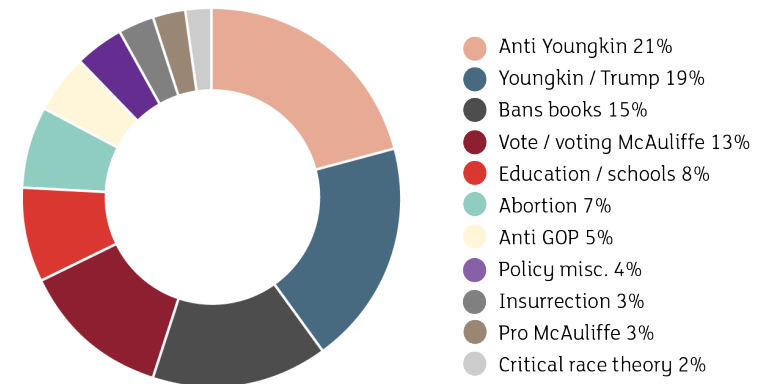
SENTIMENT



POSITIVE DISCUSSION



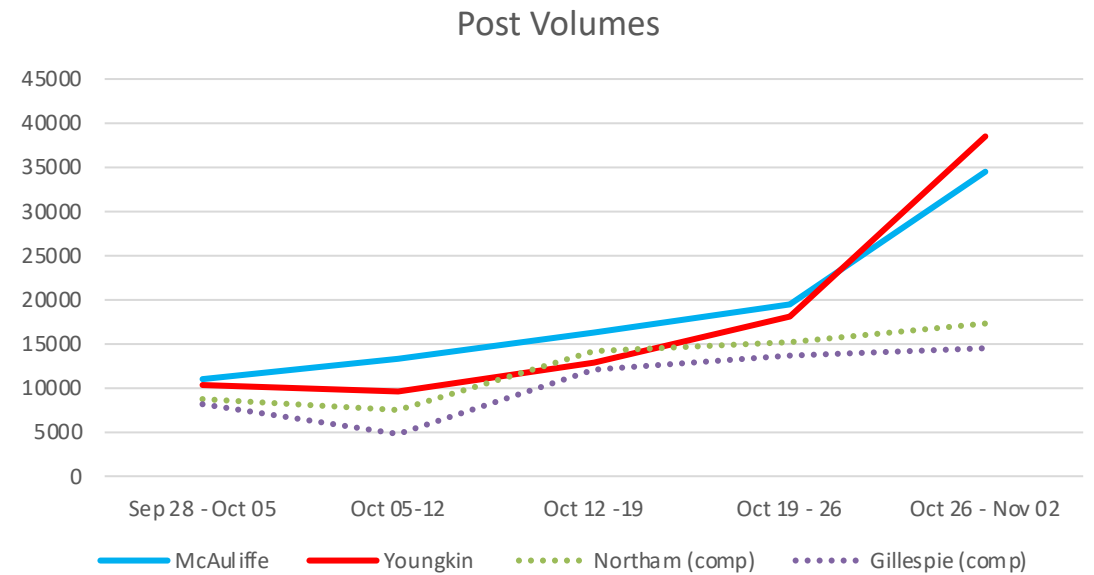
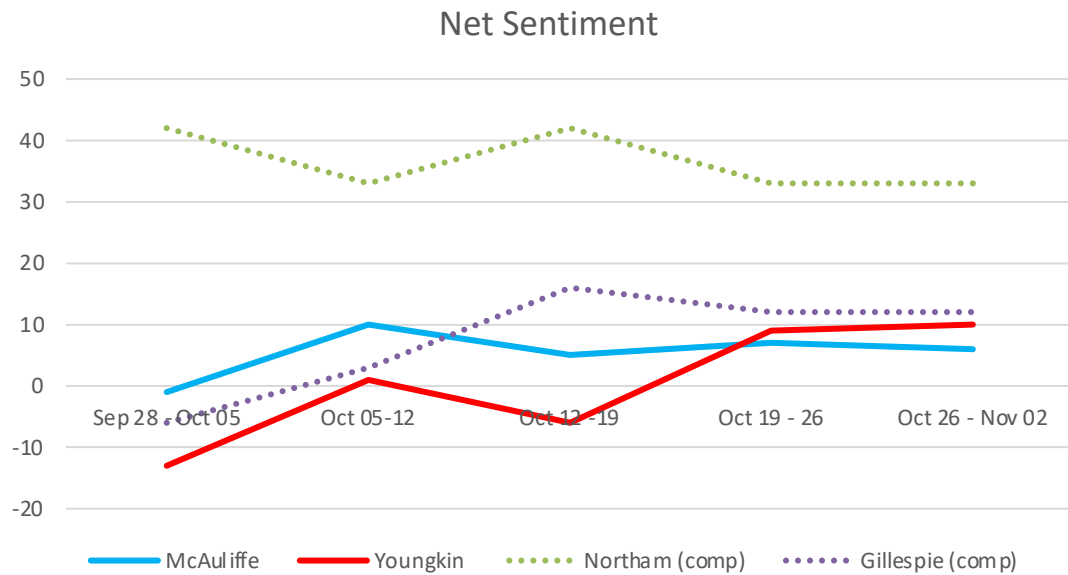
NEGATIVE DISCUSSION



Notes on the data: The numbers above right show the dataset used for analysis. Impact Social collected publicly available data geo-located to VA, we then exported these conversations taking out randomized, representative samples for our analysts to physically read. The donut chart shows how the discussion is segmented and the topics driving it.



NET SENTIMENT AND VOLUME TRACKING 2017 - 2021 COMPARISON



Summary Analysis:

At the beginning of October Terry McAuliffe seemed to be cantering to victory. The race was tight, but he seemed in control and with Trump later reinforcing the thrust of McAuliffe's campaign – that Youngkin was one of the former president's men – the Democrats appeared to have all they needed.

Yet, as our insight series reflected, this seemed to spur on Youngkin who doubled down his attacks on the need for parental control over education and with it the associated links to wokeism within the education system. In relation to the bigger policy issues like abortion and the economy this may seem like small beer. But it served to excite and energize his base who happily went online to express their allegiance to the Youngkin cause and encourage others to do the same.

Overall, judging by the net sentiment and the number of posts recorded in the final few days there is no doubt that Youngkin has finished on top in the head to head.

However, given that mail voting began on September 17 – well before this race got hot – when McAuliffe was seemingly in control it could be assumed that – despite Biden's lessening appeal - McAuliffe could and should have been ahead with 2 weeks left to go. Whether Youngkin has done enough to enthruse more of his people to come out and overcome this initial deficit and also cancel out the walk up Democratic vote in a blue/purple state only time will tell. As shown, he has certainly given it a good shot.

One thing we do know, the parameters the 2022 midterms are set- Trumpism v Wokeism. Regardless of the eventual outcome this race is a wake up call for the Democratic Party

Notes on the data: Northam and Gillespie tracking data is overlaid from IS analysis conducted at the same time in the 2017 VA Gubernatorial election. The above shows the three weeks running into election day with two weeks remaining to go.

