



## [Republican Candidate Glenn Youngkin is Elected as the Next Governor of Virginia](#)

Earlier this week, Republican candidate Glenn Youngkin was elected as the next governor of Virginia, defeating former governor and Democratic candidate Terry McAuliffe in the closely-watched race. The Commonwealth of Virginia holds its gubernatorial elections in the year directly following the U.S. presidential race, and as such, political analysts often use it as the first gauge for measuring the post-presidential electoral climate in the country. Voters in Virginia have a largely consistent history of electing a governor from the political party which lost the most recent presidential race. This trend dates back to the Nixon era, with the one exception of – ironically – 2013, when McAuliffe won the year after President Obama was elected to his second term in office. In general, the political party that occupies the White House normally suffers from an anti-incumbent wave during the midterm elections, and this is also true in the Virginia gubernatorial races as well.

Youngkin's win was a blow to the Democratic Party, who had not lost a statewide race in Virginia since 2009, when the last Republican governor was elected. While the result serves as a warning sign to Democratic candidates in the upcoming midterm elections next year, it is not a surprise to close followers of Virginia political trends since the state tends to vote against the incumbent party in the White House in off-year races. Additionally, many forecasters predicted that McAuliffe may lose to Youngkin, as President Biden's approval ratings in the state have steadily fallen over the past few months. Just last year, Biden won Virginia by around 10 percentage points, partly aided by a strong anti-Trump sentiment which was clearly not as evident this time around, as the 12-point electoral shift saw McAuliffe lose by approximately 2 percentage points to Youngkin.

The 12-point swing in Virginia is due to a few key factors. First, the presidential race last year was unique in that anti-Trump sentiment contributed significantly to Democrats' huge victory in the state. Second, frustration exists over a Democratic White House and Congress which has, in critics' eyes, accomplished very little in terms of tangible policy. The stalled infrastructure bill, among others, has raised questions regarding the ability to accomplish the big plans promised during the 2020 election cycle. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic was a hot-button issue in 2020 which increased the electoral backlash against Trump and resulted in a historic level of voter turnout. While this year's Virginia gubernatorial election had a large turnout as well, in total there were around 1 million less voters than last year's presidential race. Ultimately, unsurprisingly since it's an off-year election, voters did not turn out in the same numbers that they did just 12 months ago.

Although some conclusions can be drawn about the broad national electoral attitude from this week's outcomes, it is important not to use this one race in Virginia as a crystal ball. Virginia is simply following the consistent pattern that has been evident in previous years, which has materialized both during Republican and Democratic White House administrations alike – regardless of popularity. What will be interesting to see however is how the Democratic Party responds to the results this week, as electoral observers highlight that the manner of their reaction will play a key role in whether or not they can bounce back in time for next November's midterm elections.