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A PolitiFact Virginia story hole with "Truth-O-Meter" implications

1 message

Bryan White <zebrafactcheck@gmail.com>
To: truthometer@politifact.com

Sat, Nov 12, 2022 at 8:14 AM

Dear Truth-O-Meter,

A recent fact check from PolitiFact Virginia, [published Nov. 11, 2022](#), features a massive hole in its reporting and reasoning.

Youngkin claimed he won cities no Republican had won before in Virginia.

In assessing Gov. Youngkin's claim, before a crowd of New York Republicans, PolitiFact restricted its fact-checking to "independent cities" without explaining that step to readers.

Why is that important?

First, because the typical reader may possess no awareness that Virginia counts as home to 38 of the United States' 41 independent cities ([paragraph 11](#)). PolitiFact Virginia misreported that number as 35 in its "If your time is short" section, by the way, later reporting it as 38 in the body of the story.

Second, because Youngkin's New York audience may similarly lack awareness of Virginia's distinct hierarchy for incorporation.

Because of those facts, PolitiFact Virginia's fact check should include a strong justification for concluding Youngkin was not using the typical understanding of "city," which may include some or all of Virginia's incorporated towns. That's because Virginia's incorporated towns serve as the functional equivalent of incorporated cities (broad definition) in any other state, [including the state of New York](#). Lacking reasoning to back its narrow interpretation of Youngkin's claim, the fact check should test it using some or all of Virginia's towns.

PolitiFact Virginia may fix the problem by offering its justification for using independent cities as the relevant interpretation of Youngkin's remarks to his New York audience, with an explanation of Virginia's outlier status as home to the great majority of U.S. independent cities.

Alternatively, PolitiFact Virginia may fix the problem by settling on a reasonable and charitable understanding of "city" whose set includes some [or all](#) of Virginia's towns. The latter action may well require a revision of the "Truth-O-Meter" rating.

Thanks for your attention to this matter.

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Sincerely,

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