

Virginia Poll Report

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I. Virginians think public education, health care, illegal immigration, and public safety should be top priorities for General Assembly

Asked to rate the importance of 10 separate issue priorities for the General Assembly, Virginia voters rated ‘public safety’, ‘expanding health coverage’, and ‘public education’ as ‘highest priority’ issues the General Assembly should consider in its next session. However, voters appear uncertain about the priority of putting in place the findings of the panel investigating the Virginia Tech shooting and reducing property tax rates. These findings are from Christopher Newport University’s *Virginia Poll*, a new omnibus survey from the Center for Public Policy at CNU. The poll was conducted September 27- October 1, 2007 with 700 registered voters in Virginia. The margin of error is +/- 3.7% at the 95% confidence level.

“Next I will read you a short list of issues and actions your Virginia State Legislators will be considering in the next session of the General Assembly. Rate how big a priority you feel each should be on a 1 to 5 scale. “5” means HIGHEST PRIORITY, “1” means LOWEST PRIORITY, and “3” is in the middle.” (cells = %)		
Issue Item	Rating as “Highest Importance	Net Rating – Important (4-5) vs. Not Important (1-2)
Ensuring public safety, such as fighting gangs and crime	58	79 – 35
Working to expand health care coverage to more of Virginia’s working families	49	67 – 13
Adequately funding kindergarten through 12 th grade public education	47	63 – 11
Investing in the state’s higher education system including four-year public universities and two-year community colleges	43	67 – 7
Cracking down on illegal immigrants	42	66 – 25
Increasing veterans’ benefits for insurance and health care	39	63 – 12
Reducing property taxes	34	47 – 20
Putting in place the findings from the panel investigating the Virginia Tech shootings about improving the mental health system	29	53 – 17
Limiting abortions	23	31 – 46
Providing tax breaks to businesses to create jobs where they are needed	20	25 – 19

However, when voters were asked to PRIORITIZE the issues, crime/public safety dropped to fourth behind public education, health care, and illegal immigrants. Public education and health care top the priority list for Democrats, while illegal immigrants are a clear priority for Republicans. For Independents, public education is a top priority.

“Next I will read you a short list of issues and actions your Virginia State Legislators will be considering in the next session of the General Assembly. Tell me which one you feel should be the top priority and the second priority for the State’s General Assembly and Governor to work on first.” (cells = %)				
Issue Item	1 st choice and 2 nd choice combined	1 st choice and 2 nd choice by Party ID		
		Dem	Rep	Ind
Public Education	40	47	31	43
Health Care	29	42	16	32
Illegal Immigrants	25	12	42	33
Crime	25	26	30	24
Jobs	18	21	20	14
Property Taxes	14	12	19	12
Higher Education	16	22	5	21
Veterans	12	6	13	15
Abortion	7	3	17	3
Virginia Tech Mental Health Recommendations	6	8	3	6

II. Voters frustrated over local taxes, ok with state taxes

Voter frustration over taxes appears focused on local city and county property taxes. Four in ten respondents say that property taxes are much too high or somewhat too high given the services and programs provided by local government. Just over half (51%) of respondents say that state income and sales taxes are about right or too low given the services and programs provided by state government. A majority of voters in the Northern Virginia and the Charlottesville areas think state taxes levels are about right or too low. Negativity towards local taxes is most pronounced in the Hampton Roads area, while voters in Northern Virginia appear least frustrated with local tax levels. Republicans are most upset with local taxes, followed by Independents and Democrats.

State: "Considering all of the services and programs provided by state government, do you feel that Virginia's overall level of state taxes that comes primarily from the state income tax and sales tax are much too high, somewhat high, about right, or probably too low?" (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
High	47	38	62	49	51	41	40	58	41
Right/Low	51	59	37	48	46	59	58	41	57

Local: "And given the services and programs provided at the local level by your county or city government, do you feel the overall level of local taxes . . . primarily property taxes . . . are much too high, somewhat high, about right, or probably too low?" (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
High	61	49	72	60	67	75	56	65	60
Right/Low	37	48	27	39	31	23	43	34	39

III. Kaine's plan for handling budget shortfall supported by plurality of voters

How should the General Assembly respond to the budget shortfall? A plurality of voters pick the course Governor Tim Kaine has initially proposed – hold the line on taxes and make selective cuts; 40% choose this option with the next most popular choice being an increase in taxes to expand funding for top priorities (25%). Just 18% take the 'No tax; cut all programs equally' position. Both Republicans and Independents are most likely to support the Governor's budget approach, while Democrats are divided between the Governor's approach and 'increasing taxes to expanding funding.'

"As you may or may not know, Virginia is projected to have a budget shortfall next year . . . possibly as large as one Billion dollars. As a result, your Legislator will have to make tough decisions about spending and taxes. In general, which of these four approaches to the state's budget would you prefer your Legislator take . . . ?" (cells = %)				
	All	Rep	Dem	Ind
Hold the line on taxes and cut spending across the board for all government programs	18	29	14	14
Hold the line on taxes but cut spending deeper on some programs, but not others	40	48	32	42
Increase taxes enough to continue funding for all programs at current levels	12	5	16	14
Increase taxes enough to expand funding for the most important priorities	25	15	35	26

But, when it comes to quality of life, a majority of Virginians support an 'invest and tax' approach to governing over a 'no tax and limit government' approach.

"Which of the following do you feel is a better way to preserve Virginia's quality of life and promote the right kind of economic growth, by increasing state government's investment on such things as roads, schools, the environment, and people's health, even if it means increasing taxes, or by not increasing taxes and limiting new government spending on roads, schools, and health care?" (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Increase Investment/Tax	55	58	59	55	42	52	73	32	61
No Tax/Limit Spending	36	34	31	39	44	33	20	58	31
DK	10	8	11	6	14	15	7	10	8

IV. Virginians sour on transportation plan; Approve of regional funding for transportation

Asked whether the transportation plan agreed to earlier in the year by Governor Kaine and the General Assembly will be enough to address the state's traffic congestion needs, 61% of Virginians say that more will be needed. Only 18% believe it will be enough. Opinions in Northern Virginia (70%) and Hampton Roads (59%) mirror statewide views. Even downstate Republicans say it will not be enough by a 2-1 ratio.

“Earlier this year, Governor Kaine and the General Assembly agreed to a \$500 million transportation plan. In your opinion, will this new transportation plan be enough to address the state’s congestion needs especially in the Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads regions OR will more be needed to be done in the near future to address traffic problems?” (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Enough	18	11	18	22	29	17	15	22	18
More Needed	61	70	59	62	44	57	68	57	63
Don’t Know	21	18	24	17	27	26	17	20	19

One of the central elements of the transportation plan was to allow for local area transportation funding. A majority of voters (55%) approve of this approach, and this majority holds across all regions of the state except in Hampton Roads, where voters are split on the idea of local area transportation funding. Democrats are nearly evenly split on the idea of local area transportation funding, while a majority of Republican and Independents support it.

“Part of the new transportation plan allows the local areas of Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia for the first time, to raise their own local tax revenues and spend that money only locally on transportation projects. Do you support this idea of local area transportation funding OR do you feel transportation funding should remain only a state government responsibility?” (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Support Local	55	60	45	59	49	60	51	56	57
State Responsibility	38	35	45	37	40	27	42	38	37
Don’t Know	7	5	10	4	11	13	7	6	5

V. Voters frustrated by abusive driver fees . . . spread blame around

Voters are frustrated about abusive drive fees, and spread the blame evenly. Asked if they had a positive or negative view of the so-called abuse driver fees, 58% of respondents had a negative view and only 38% had a positive view. Negative views are shared across the state, except in Hampton Roads where voters are split. Republicans and Independents have stronger negative views than do Democrats. Who do voters blame for the abusive driver fees? They blame everyone, by a whopping 70% margin.

“Part of this funding for the new transportation plan included a steep increase in the so-called abusive driver fees that can add up to thousands of dollars in fines for Virginia’s drunk drivers and those guilty of multiple aggressive driving violations. As originally written, these higher abusive driver fee laws apply only to Virginia residents and not out-of-state licensed drivers. First of all, is your opinion of these so called ‘abusive driver fees’ positive or negative?” (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Positive	38	33	48	36	41	31	44	35	36
Negative	58	63	49	59	54	65	52	63	59
Don’t Know	4	3	3	5	6	3	4	2	4

“Who do you think is most responsible for these abusive driver fees being in the transportation package – the Governor, Republican leaders of the legislature, Democrats in the legislature, or a mix of all?” (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Governor	8	8	6	10	6	9	4	13	6
Republican	9	13	8	8	3	5	14	4	9
Democrats	2	3	0	2	1	0	0	5	1
Mix	70	66	69	69	79	73	73	64	73
Don’t Know	12	10	18	11	11	13	8	14	12

VI. Virginian’s Balkanized on importance of regional issues

While the traffic problems in Northern Virginia are seen as important by almost half of voters, Virginians generally have very parochial views about the importance of problems in other parts of the state. When asked to rate the importance of unemployment in Southwest and Southside, traffic congestion on I-81, and traffic congestion in Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia, voters tend to see their own regional problems as more critical than problems in other parts of the state. In addition, a surprising number of voters think certain regional problems are not a priority for the rest of the state. For instance, around 1 in 4 voters in Hampton Roads and Richmond think traffic congestion and dangerous driving conditions on I-81 are not a priority for the rest of the state. Similarly, 1 in 4 voters in Northern Virginia, Richmond, and the Roanoke area think traffic congestion in Hampton Roads is not a priority for the rest of the state. Finally, 1 in 4 voters in Richmond and Roanoke think traffic congestion in Northern Virginia is not a priority for the rest of the state.

“As you may be aware, different parts of Virginia face different challenges and problems. Tell me if, in your opinion, each of the following is a Critical Problem, the state legislature should make a top priority, an Important Problem the legislature should consider after other priorities, or Not A Top Priority problem the rest of the state should worry about.”

“The high unemployment rate in Southwest and Southside Virginia.” (cells = %)

		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Critical top priority	30	19	27	36	52	38	37	21	34
Important after other priorities	49	55	48	47	34	55	49	50	48
Not priority for rest of state	16	19	21	15	11	4	8	25	15
Don’t Know	4	6	4	3	3	3	5	4	3

“Traffic congestion and dangerous driving conditions on I-81 that runs through the western part of the state including the Shenandoah Valley and Southwest Virginia.” (cells = %)

		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Critical top priority	19	27	22	26	41	49	29	27	32
Important after other priorities	44	49	42	41	39	43	50	48	40
Not priority for rest of state	21	18	28	27	15	8	16	21	21
Don’t Know	6	6	9	5	5	0	5	4	7

“Traffic congestion problems with the tunnel and bridge system in the Hampton Roads area.” (cells = %)

		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Critical top priority	32	18	65	38	17	21	34	36	31
Important after other priorities	34	41	22	35	29	41	36	32	34
Not priority for rest of state	21	25	13	22	25	14	18	22	20
Don’t Know	13	16	0	5	29	24	13	10	14

“Traffic congestion problems in the Northern Virginia area.” (cells = %)

		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Critical top priority	47	65	41	43	28	29	56	43	47
Important after other priorities	30	26	36	29	30	42	27	35	27
Not priority for rest of state	17	9	15	23	27	19	12	19	17
Don’t Know	6	0	8	5	15	10	5	4	9

VII. Voters upbeat about direction of State, local and state economies

Half of Virginia’s voters (50%) have a positive view of their state’s direction, while less than a quarter (24%) think the state is headed in the wrong direction. This two-to-one “right” vs. “wrong” judgment is mirrored in most parts of the state with the exception of Hampton Roads and the Valley and Charlottesville area, where voters appear more hesitant about the direction of the state. Democrats are more optimistic than are Republican and Independents. In addition, voters by wide margins have positive views of their local economy (66% positive) and the state’s economy (63% positive). Regionally, only voters in the Roanoke area assess their local economy more negatively than positively, a reflection of the high unemployment on the Southside. Voters in the Charlottesville area appear less optimistic about the state’s economy, but positive about their local economy. There appears to be little partisan difference, with six out of ten or better Republicans, Independents, and Democrats rating their local and the state’s economy positively.

“Overall, would you say the State of Virginia is headed more in the right direction or the wrong direction?” (cells = %)

		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Right Direction	50	56	43	52	50	37	67	41	47
Mixed	13	10	15	14	14	21	9	15	14
Wrong Direction	24	23	25	23	24	23	16	30	24
DK/Refused	13	11	17	11	12	19	8	14	14

“Next, tell me if you rate each of the following as positive or negative . . .”

“The health of the local economy in your area?” (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Road	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Positive	66	75	63	74	43	59	71	69	63
Mixed	5	3	7	5	4	9	3	4	8
Negative	26	19	26	19	50	27	24	22	27
DK/Refused	3	2	4	2	3	4	1	5	2

“The overall health of the Virginia state economy?” (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C’ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Positive	63	72	55	68	52	45	62	68	64
Mixed	10	9	14	10	6	12	8	10	9
Negative	23	16	25	17	36	36	24	16	24
DK/Refused	5	3	7	5	6	8	6	6	3

VIII. Kaine gets positive ratings, but General Assembly panned by voters

Twenty-two months into his term, a majority of Virginia voters hold positive views of the job Governor Kaine is doing addressing the state’s major problems. Three-fourths of Democrats rate Kaine’s performance positively, while Republicans are lukewarm, with only a third (36%) giving Kaine positive reviews and nearly four in ten (39%) giving him negative ratings. Six in ten Independents give Kaine positive ratings. Voters pan the job the General Assembly is doing addressing the states major problems. Only a third of voters (34%) rate the General Assembly positively, while 42% rate it negatively. Democrats and Republicans hold somewhat similar positive vs. negative views, while Independents are decidedly more negative about the General Assembly, with half of them holding negative views.

“Next, tell me if you rate each of the following as positive or negative . . .”

“The job the Virginia General Assembly in Richmond is doing addressing the state’s major issues and problems?” (cells = %)				
		Dem	Rep	Ind
Positive	34	39	37	27
Mixed	11	13	15	9
Negative	42	37	33	50
Don’t Know	13	11	15	14

“The job Virginia Governor Tim Kaine is doing addressing the state’s major issues and problems?” (cells = %)				
		Dem	Rep	Ind
Positive	55	76	36	60
Mixed	10	4	14	9
Negative	25	11	39	21
Don’t Know	10	9	12	9

Virginia Poll Methodology

The Virginia Poll is provided as a public service to the citizens of Virginia. It is an omnibus public opinion survey of registered Virginia voters conducted by telephone between September 27 and October 1, 2007. Results for the full sample have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7% at the 95% confidence level. This means for the full sample we can be 95% confident that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3.7%. In addition to sampling error, the other potential sources of error include non-response, question wording, and interviewer error. Where percentages for subgroups are reported, the margin of error would be higher. The poll was designed by the Center for Public Policy at CNU and conducted for CNU by Frederick Polls, LLC of Arlington, Virginia. For information or requests, contact Dr. Quentin Kidd, at (757) 594-7971 or qkidd@cnu.edu.

