

Virginia Poll Report

Volume 1 Number 2 Spring, 2008

I. Virginia Voters Slightly Less Upbeat about Direction of State

Virginia voters are more positive (48%) than negative (27%) about the state's overall direction, but their views reflect a slight move in the "negative" direction since last October, when 50% of respondents were positive and 24% were negative about the overall direction of the state. These findings are from Christopher Newport University's *Virginia Poll*, a statewide omnibus survey from the Center for Public Policy at CNU. The poll was conducted January 8-10, 2008 with 700 registered voters in Virginia. The margin of error is +/- 3.7% at the 95% confidence level. Voters in Northern Virginia and Richmond are most positive about the direction of the state, while voters in the Shenandoah Valley and Charlottesville area are most pessimistic. Democrats are far more positive about the direction of the state than are Republicans, with 60% of Democrats saying the state is moving in the right direction compared to 44% of Republicans.

"Overall, would you say the Commonwealth of Virginia is headed more in the right direction or the wrong direction?" (cells = %)										
		Oct. 2007	NoVA/DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/SW	Valley/C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Right Direction	48	50	50	47	52	47	37	60	44	43
Mixed	15	13	13	15	14	16	19	15	14	13
Wrong Direction	27	24	27	26	27	25	34	17	31	32
DK/Refused	10	13	9	12	8	13	9	7	11	12

II. Voters Give Kaine and Local Government Thumbs Up; Feel Better About General Assembly

At the mid-point of his term, a strong majority of Virginia voters hold positive views of the job Governor Kaine is doing. Nearly 8 in 10 Democrats rate Kaine's performance positively, while Republicans are split with just over 4 in 10 rating him positively and just over 4 in 10 rating him negatively. Both Kaine's positives and negatives have gone up since last October. Voters also feel better about the General Assembly, with 45% rating it positively, while 31% rate it negatively. This is an 11% improvement for the General Assembly. Republicans are most positive about the General Assembly, with 51% rating it positively; Democrats are more hesitant, with only 4 in 10 giving the General Assembly a positive rating. Voters feel equally good about their local government, with 55% rating it positively and 30% negatively. Voters in Northern Virginia and Richmond are most positive, while voters in Hampton Roads and the Shenandoah Valley and Charlottesville areas least positive.

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

"Governor Tim Kaine?" (cells = %)					
		Oct. 2007	Dem	Rep	Ind
Positive	60	55	79	43	62
Mixed	7	10	4	9	5
Negative	29	25	14	42	29
Don't Know	5	10	3	5	4

"The Virginia General Assembly?" (cells = %)					
		Oct. 2007	Dem	Rep	Ind
Positive	45	34	41	51	43
Mixed	14	11	18	13	10
Negative	31	42	30	27	36
Don't Know	10	13	11	9	11

"Your local county or city government?" (cells = %)						
		NoVA/DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/SW	Valley/C'ville
Positive	55	58	50	57	55	51
Mixed	11	9	9	10	14	16
Negative	30	28	38	30	28	28
Don't Know	3	5	2	2	3	4

III. Voters Want General Assembly To Get Things Done

By large margins, voters want the General Assembly to compromise and get things done, and don't want deadlock. Nearly 7 in 10 voters say they want compromise over deadlock, and this margin holds across most regions of the state and across partisan identification.

"As you may know, the Virginia General Assembly in Richmond is now split along party lines, with Republicans still controlling the House of Delegates and Democrats recently gaining control of the State Senate. This political division could lead to a deadlock on numerous issues. As the 2008 legislative session begins, would you support greater efforts on the part of Delegates and Senators to reach compromises to get things done or would you prefer they stick firmly to what they believe to be right even if it means deadlock with little getting accomplished?" (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Compromise	68	73	70	62	62	69	72	64	69
Stick to Beliefs	25	20	20	31	29	30	20	30	25
Don't Know	7	5	10	6	9	1	8	5	6

IV. Virginians Think General Assembly's Highest Priorities Should Be Tighten Gun Laws, Crack Down On Businesses That Hire Illegal Immigrants

When it comes to legislative priorities, two gun control issues top the list of priorities voters would like the General Assembly to address – stopping gun purchases by those with a history of mental health problems and requiring background checks of gun show purchases. Both issues have strong bipartisan support, although Republicans are less supportive of requiring background checks at gun shows. A majority of Virginia voters also rate cracking down on business that hire illegal immigrants as a highest priority, but Republicans feel much more strongly than do Democrats about this issue. Other clear partisan splits emerge on issues ranging from support for a higher education bond to funding the Governor's plan to provide funding for pre-kindergarten to some 4-year olds.

"Next I will read you a short list of issues and actions your Representatives in the Virginia General Assembly will be considering in the upcoming session. Rate how high a priority you feel each should be accorded on a 1 to 5 scale. "5" means HIGHEST PRIORITY, "1" means LOWEST PRIORITY, and "3" is the middle." (cells = %)				
Issue Item	Rating as "Highest Priority"	Dem	Rep	Net Rating – Important (4-5) vs. Not Important (1-2)
Changing the law to stop people with a history of mental health problems from purchasing guns.	75	82	75	85-8
Require gun purchasers at gun shows to undergo the same background check required for guns purchased at gun shops.	68	80	66	79-10
Cracking down on businesses that employ illegal immigrants.	54	41	68	65-16
Supporting the state's higher education bond which will provide over \$1.5 Billion to Virginia's 4-year public universities and 2-year community colleges to meet growing student enrollment needs.	48	60	38	69-10
Fully funding the Chesapeake Bay clean up effort that would modernize wastewater treatment plants and limit fertilizer run-off from farms.	44	60	34	65-12
Eliminate the abusive driver fees portion of the new transportation plan.	43	45	41	55-18
Increase spending on the state's mental health system to put in place reforms suggested following the Virginia Tech shootings.	42	52	39	67-12
Banning smoking in all restaurants and bars	38	41	37	47-32
Reforming the business of high interest rate short-term loans, often called payday lending.	36	39	38	52-18
Funding the Governor's plan to start providing pre-kindergarten to some 4-year olds	30	46	19	44-30
Changing the way Legislative Districts are drawn	15	20	11	24-26

V. How to Fix Budget Shortfall? Virginians Want To Cut Spending, Avoid Tax Increases Or Rainy Day Fund

A majority of Virginia voters (56%) want to balance any revenue shortfalls by cutting spending without raising taxes or dipping into the state's Rainy Day Fund. About a third (31%) support both spending cuts and dipping into the Rainy Day Fund, while just under 10% support raising taxes to balance the budget. Republicans are far more supportive of balancing budget shortfalls by cutting spending (64%) without raising taxes or dipping into the Rainy Day Fund, while Democrats are more interested in either a combination of tax increases (15%) or a combination of reduced spending and tapping into the Rainy Day Fund (35%).

As you may or may not know, because of the economic slowdown Virginia is projected to have a budget shortfall next year. Virginia has a reserve fund, called the "Rainy Day Fund", to meet needs in critical budget situations which currently has over a Billion dollars in it. Given this, which of these <u>three</u> general approaches to this budget deficit problem do you support? (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Reduce spending on some programs but continue to fund most programs at their current level by tapping the Rainy Day Reserve Fund	31	31	26	36	31	33	35	29	31
Cover the budget shortfall with tax increases but don't touch the Rainy Day Reserve Fund	9	11	8	5	7	12	15	4	7
Cover the shortfall by reducing spending as much as needed but don't raise taxes and don't tap the Rainy Day Reserve Fund	56	52	61	56	58	54	44	64	57
Don't Know	5	7	5	3	4	1	5	2	5

VI. What To Cut First? Transportation, Social Services

When voters were asked to PRIORITIZE the areas they would cut first, transportation and social services to low-income Virginians topped the list, with 55% of voters choosing transportation as their first or second choice. There was little partisan difference with this first choice. However, partisan differences did emerge beyond transportation, with Democrats more supportive of cutting public safety and Republicans more supportive of cutting social services and health care spending.

If the State Legislature decided to cut spending to balance this year's budget shortfall, which area would you cut first? And which area would be your second choice for making budget spending cuts? (cells = %)				
Issue Item	1 st choice and 2 nd choice combined	1 st choice and 2 nd choice by Party ID		
		Dem	Rep	Ind
Transportation	55	50	52	54
Social services to low-income Virginians	41	23	44	43
Public safety	27	38	18	20
Health care	18	14	35	24
Education	16	18	23	20
Cut all equally*	14	12	16	20
None/Don't cut*	19	23	8	13

* Volunteered responses

VII. Voters Send Mixed Signals On Illegal Immigrants

On four specific illegal immigration policy tests, a majority of Virginia voters support two policies and oppose two others. Slight majorities (55% and 53%) support giving authority to local police to stop any driver they suspect of being an illegal immigrant, and support having local governments denying services to anyone without proper documented legal status. However, majorities of 58% and 75% oppose splitting immigrant families by deporting undocumented parents while U.S.-born children stay or denying hospital care to pregnant or seriously ill illegal immigrants. When it comes to the economy, two-thirds of Virginia voters believe a loss of the state's illegal immigrant workforce would have negative consequences for the state's economy, including 69% who say loss of this workforce would be a "problem" for the state's economy and 65% who feel wages and consumer prices would go up if illegal immigrant workers were no longer available.

"The next couple of questions have to do with the issue of illegal immigration which has been a prominent topic in the news lately. Tell me if you SUPPORT or OPPOSE each of the following actions.

"Having Virginia's local government's deny any and all local government services to anyone, including children, without proper documented legal status" (cells = %)

		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Support	53	52	53	53	55	52	33	67	56
Oppose	41	46	39	41	37	42	59	28	41
DK/Refused	6	3	8	6	8	6	8	5	3

"Giving local police the authority to stop any driver they suspect might be an illegal immigrant to check their legal status?" (cells = %)

		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Support	55	48	58	56	65	51	38	73	55
Oppose	42	52	41	49	29	48	60	24	44
DK/Refused	2	0	1	3	6	1	2	3	1

"Splitting immigrant families by deporting the illegal immigrant parents but allowing their U.S.-born citizen children to stay?" (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Support	35	35	37	38	33	34	30	43	32
Oppose	58	60	57	56	57	57	65	50	59
DK/Refused	7	6	6	6	10	9	5	7	9

"Denying hospital emergency room care to illegal immigrants, including children, even if they are pregnant or have serious life threatening conditions??" (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Support	21	20	28	20	21	18	16	27	18
Oppose	75	78	68	76	72	79	80	68	78
DK/Refused	4	2	4	4	7	3	4	4	3

"Do you think if Virginia were to somehow suddenly lose its illegal immigrant workforce, that this would be a <u>big problem</u> for the state's economy, a <u>small problem</u> , or have <u>no real impact</u> ?" (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Big problem	31	36	24	31	25	36	43	21	28
Small problem	38	35	40	37	41	37	32	41	41
No real impact	28	27	32	29	30	25	24	34	27
DK/Refused	3	2	4	3	4	1	1	4	4

"Do you think the sudden loss of Virginia's illegal immigrant workforce would cause wages and prices for products or services to go up a lot, up a little, or have no real impact on these?" (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Go up a lot	19	20	15	15	19	24	25	14	18
Go up a little	46	47	43	50	40	52	49	45	48
No real impact	33	32	40	31	38	19	24	39	32
Go down	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
DK/Refused	2	1	3	2	2	4	1	1	2

VIII. Virginians Support Bipartisan Approach to Redistricting

While redistricting is not one of the most important issues this year for Virginia voters, when given two independent choices, voters express higher support for an independent bipartisan commission (73%) than elected officials controlling redistricting (43%). Republicans are most skeptical of an independent bipartisan process, but still prefer it over elected officials drawing lines by 66% to 58%.

Changing subjects: After the next 2010 national census, Virginia's Legislative District boundary lines will have to be redrawn to reflect population growth and shifts. Tell me if you agree or disagree with each of the following two statements about this process.

"Elected officials know their Districts best and should be in charge of the redistricting process of drawing Legislative district boundary lines." (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Strongly agree	16	11	18	17	20	19	17	17	14
Somewhat agree	33	25	32	36	38	39	25	41	28
Somewhat disagree	21	27	19	14	18	19	24	22	19
Strongly disagree	24	29	24	27	17	19	28	15	31
DK/Refused	6	7	7	6	6	3	6	5	7

"An independent bipartisan commission should be in charge of the redistricting process of drawing Legislative district boundary lines." (cells = %)									
		NoVA/ DC	Hampton Roads	Richmond	Roanoke/ SW	Valley/ C'ville	Dem	Rep	Ind
Strongly agree	47	53	46	48	40	45	51	40	54
Somewhat agree	26	24	22	29	26	33	25	26	25
Somewhat disagree	12	10	12	11	14	10	13	15	7
Strongly disagree	10	8	12	6	11	12	6	13	9
DK/Refused	6	5	8	6	9	0	5	5	6

Survey 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 January 8-10, 2008. 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 FrederickPolls, LLC of Arlington, Virginia. For information or requests, contact Dr. Quentin Kidd, at (757) 594-7971 or qkidd@cnu.edu.

Christopher Newport University is a four-year public university in Newport News, Virginia. CNU enrolls 4,800 students in programs through its College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Luter College of Business and Leadership and offers great teaching, small classes and an emphasis on leadership, civic engagement and honor. Visit us at www.cnu.edu