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Gillespie gains, but Warner holds solid 51-39 lead; voters favor Warner over Gillespie on issues

Summary of Key Findings

1. As voters have tuned in since Labor Day, some undecideds have gone for Gillespie, but Warner still holds a commanding lead, 51% to 39%.
2. Warner's support is very broad, as independents, ideological moderates and some ideological conservatives add to his strong lead among Democrats, women and African-Americans. He also leads in every region.
3. Most Warner and Gillespie voters are certain of their decisions.
4. Voters say the economy and health care are the top issues, followed by the budget deficit and immigration and border security. Voters think Warner would do a better job than Gillespie on all issues surveyed.

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Analysis

Warner Leads: With four weeks of campaigning left to go, Mark Warner holds a commanding lead over Ed Gillespie, 51% to 39% among likely voters in the November 4 election for U.S. Senate. The Wason Center likely voter model takes into consideration how much thought registered voters have given to the upcoming elections, how closely they are following news about the elections, and how certain they are to vote. Libertarian Robert Sarvis has 3% support, and 7% say they are undecided. Three-fourths of Warner and Gillespie voters say they are very certain of their vote choice.

While Warner’s share of the vote remains similar to the Wason Center’s September 10 survey, in which he had 53%, Gillespie’s share has grown from 31% to 39%. The share of both undecided voters and supporters of Libertarian Robert Sarvis have shrunk since our September poll, accounting for Gillespie’s increased support. In the September poll, 60% of voters said they didn’t know enough about Gillespie to decide. Warner’s lead continues to rest upon solid support from Democrats and liberals, but also a sizeable level of support from moderate and conservative voters. Warner is in a stronger position with Democrats (94%) than Gillespie is with Republicans (88%), and has the support of 50% of Independents, compared with 29% for Gillespie. Ideological moderates break for Warner over Gillespie, 59% to 30%. A majority of ideological conservatives back Gillespie (82%) but a significant segment favors Warner (13%). Warner also continues to hold a sizeable lead among women (57% to 34%), but splits the male vote with Gillespie (44% to 45%). Warner leads Gillespie in all regions, but is below 50% in South/Southwest, where he has 47% of the vote.

At just 3%, the Sarvis vote is much less a factor than it appeared at this point last year, when the Libertarian was on the gubernatorial ballot against Democrat Terry McAuliffe and Republican Ken Cuccinelli. Sarvis drew 8% among likely voters in the Wason Center’s Oct. 8, 2013 poll. His final election tally was just under 7% -- more than the margin by which McAuliffe defeated Cuccinelli.

“While Ed Gillespie’s numbers are improving as the campaigns turn up the volume, Mark Warner continues to be in a strong position heading into the final few weeks of this election,” said Dr. Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center for Public Policy. “Warner not only maintains the solid backing of his own partisans, but also strong support among ideological moderates and meaningful shares among Republicans and ideological conservatives.”

If the election were held TODAY would you vote for [Randomize: “Ed Gillespie the Republican” “Mark Warner the Democrat” “Robert Sarvis the Libertarian]?	LV	Dem	Rep	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	
	n=690								
	Warner	51	94	7	50	44	57	43	80
	Gillespie	39	1	88	29	45	34	48	7
	Sarvis	3	1	2	7	3	3	4	
Undecided /Dk (vol)	7	4	3	14	8	6	5	13	

	Ideol Lib	Ideol Mod	Ideol Cons	NOVA	Rich/Central	HR	South/Southwest
Warner	91	59	13	50	55	53	47
Gillespie	1	30	82	39	34	37	44
Sarvis	3	4	1	4	3	3	1
Undecided /Dk (vol)	4	8	5	7	8	7	8

[Warner vote] And how certain is that vote choice, would you say it is very certain, or you could you change your mind between now and the election?	Very certain	77
	Could change mind	22
	Dk/ref (vol)	1

[Gillespie vote] And how certain is that vote choice, would you say it is very certain, or you could you change your mind between now and the election?	Very certain	76
	Could change mind	24

[Sarvis vote] And how certain is that vote choice, would you say it is very certain, or you could you change your mind between now and the election?	Very certain	38
	Could change mind	62

On the Issues: Whoever is elected the next U.S. Senator from Virginia, voters would like to see that person focus on the economy and jobs, with 35% saying that is the most important among a list of issues. Jobs and the economy are followed by health care issues (19%), the federal budget deficit (14%), immigration and border security (12%), foreign policy and international conflicts (8%), environmental policy (7%), and energy policy (2%).

Asked who they think would do a better job dealing with the issues, voters express far more confidence in Warner’s ability than Gillespie’s ability. Voters favor Warner in all instances, with the largest margin being on environmental policy (51% to 28%) and the smallest margin being on the federal budget deficit (43% to 38%). On the top issue – the economy and jobs – they strongly favor Warner, 50% to 33%.

“Voters trust the competence of Mark Warner on the important issues of the day, especially the one they say matters the most – jobs,” said Kidd. “Ed Gillespie has only a few weeks to convince voters that he would do a better job than Warner, and at this point in the race he has not done that.”

I’m going to read a list of issues and I’d like you to tell me which ONE is the MOST important issue you would like to see the next U.S. Senator from Virginia focus on... [ITEMS ROTATED]	Economy and jobs	35
	Health care issues	19
	Federal budget deficit	14
	Immigration and border security	12
	Foreign policy and international conflicts	8
	Environmental policy	7
	Energy policy	2
	Dk/ref (vol)	3

I'm going to read those issues again, and for each one tell me if you think Mark Warner or Ed Gillespie would do a better job dealing with it. Ok, here is the first one...[NAMES ROTATED]				
	Warner	Gillespie	Neither (vol)	Dk/ref (vol)
Economy and jobs	50	33	5	12
Health care issues	48	33	5	14
Federal budget deficit	43	38	6	13
Immigration and border security	41	35	8	16
Foreign policy and international conflicts	45	32	8	15
Environmental policy	51	28	6	15
Energy policy	47	33	5	15

Full Toplines

THOUGHT: Ok, thank you. As you know, this November Virginia will hold elections for U.S. Senate and Congress. How much thought have you given to these upcoming elections...

Quite a lot 31
 Some 31
 Only a little 34
 None (vol) 4

FOLLOW: And how closely have you have been following news about the candidates for the U.S. Senate election, would you say...

Very closely 16
 Somewhat closely 41
 Not very closely 28
 Not at all 15

VOTEPLAN: Do you yourself plan to vote in the upcoming November election, or not?

Yes 99
 Already voted (vol) 1

VOTECERT: [ASK IF VOTEPLAN=1] And how certain are you to vote in the upcoming November election, would you say...

Absolutely certain 78
 Fairly certain 21
 Not certain 1

Q1: And thinking about that 2014 election for U.S. Senate... if the election were held TODAY would you vote for [RANDOMIZE: "Ed Gillespie the Republican", "Mark Warner the Democrat", "Robert Sarvis the Libertarian]?

[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ("DON'T KNOW", "DEPENDS", "NOT SURE", ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH: Which one are you leaning toward right now?]

Warner 51
 Sarvis 3
 Gillespie 39
 Undecided (vol) 7

Q2a: **[Warner vote]** And how certain is that vote choice, would you say it is very certain, or you could you change your mind between now and the election?

Very certain	77
Could change mind	22
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q2b: **[Gillespie vote]** And how certain is that vote choice, would you say it is very certain, or you could you change your mind between now and the election?

Very certain	76
Could change mind	24

Q2c: **[Sarvis vote]** And how certain is that vote choice, would you say it is very certain, or you could you change your mind between now and the election?

Very certain	38
Could change mind	62

Q3: I'm going to read a list of issues and I'd like you to tell me which ONE is the MOST important issue you would like to see the next U.S. Senator from Virginia focus on... **[ITEMS ROTATED]**

The economy and jobs	35
Health care issues	19
Federal budget deficit	14
Immigration and border security	12
Foreign policy and international conflicts	8
Environmental policy	7
Energy policy	2
Dk/ref (vol)	3

Q4: I'm going to read those issues again, and for each one tell me if you think Mark Warner or Ed Gillespie would do a better job dealing with it. Ok, here is the first one...

	[NAMES ROTATED]			
	Warner	Gillespie	Neither (vol)	Dk/ref (vol)
The economy and jobs	50	33	5	12
Health care issues	48	33	5	14
Federal budget deficit	43	38	6	13
Immigration and border security	41	35	8	16
Foreign policy and international conflicts	45	32	8	15
Environmental policy	51	28	6	15
Energy policy	47	33	5	15

Demographics (weighted)

EDUC: What is the last grade of school or college you had the opportunity to complete?

High school or less	12
Some college	20
Vocational or technical training	2
College graduate	38
Graduate study or more	27

HISPANIC: Do you consider yourself to be Hispanic or Latino?

Yes	2
No	98

RACE: Do you consider yourself to be:

White	74
Black or African American	17
Other	9

AGE: (Recorded as exact year of birth)

18-24	5
25-34	17
35-44	17
45-54	22
55 & older	39

RELIG: What is your religious preference, are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, another religion, or no religion?

Protestant	36
Christian (non-specific) (vol)	15
Catholic	15
Jewish	2
Other	11
None	20
Dk/ref (vol)	1

IDEOL: When it comes to your ideology, would you consider yourself to be a...

Strong liberal	9
Liberal	11
Moderate, leaning liberal	21
Moderate, leaning conservative	20
Conservative	18
Strong Conservative	12
Dk/ref (vol)	9

PARTYID: In politics today, do you generally consider yourself to be a Democrat, Republican, or Independent?

Democrat	36
Republican	34
Independent	27
None/other (vol)	3

SEX: [INTERVIEWER CODE]

Male	47
Female	53

INCOME: And, just for statistical purposes, in which of the following categories does your family income fall?

Under \$25,000	7
\$25-\$49,999	13
\$50-\$74,999	16
\$75-\$99,999	14
\$100,000-\$149,999	19
Over \$150,000	19
Dk/ref (vol)	12

REGION:

Northern Virginia	33
Richmond/Central	21
Hampton Roads	24
South/Southwest	23

How the survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 839 interviews of registered Virginia voters (of which 690 are considered likely voters), including 461 on landline and 378 on cell phone, conducted Sept. 29-Oct. 5, 2014. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The margin of error for the whole survey is +/- 3.5% at the 95% level of confidence. The margin of error for the likely voter model is +/- 3.7% at the 95% level of confidence. In addition to sampling error, the other potential sources of error include non-response, question wording, and interviewer error. The response rate (AAPOR RRI Standard Definition) for the survey was 17%. Three callbacks were employed in the fielding process. Live calling was conducted by trained interviewers at the Wason Center for Public Policy Survey Research Lab at Christopher Newport University. The data reported here are weighted using an iterative weighting process on sex, age, race and region of residence to reflect as closely as possible the demographic composition of registered voters in Virginia. The survey was designed by Dr. Quentin Kidd of the Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University.