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If Trump is nominee, many Va. Republicans will defect; Clinton suffers no such 'loyalty gap' among Democrats

Summary of Key Findings

1. Clinton leads Trump 44% to 35% among likely Virginia voters.
2. 90% of Virginia Democratic primary voters say they will support Clinton in November, while only 67% of Republican primary voters say they will support Trump.
3. 29% of Republican primary voters say they will vote for the other party's candidate, vote for a 3rd party candidate or not vote at all. Among Democratic primary voters, that number is 9%.
4. Young voters, especially Millennials who have been strong for Clinton's Democratic primary rival, Bernie Sanders, would stick with Clinton over Trump by 22 points.
5. The prospect of a brokered GOP convention sharply divides Virginia Republicans. A majority (57%) of Virginia Republicans likely to vote in the general election oppose using a brokered convention to prevent Trump from becoming the nominee, while 36% support such a move.
6. The gender gap strongly favors Clinton. Women voters prefer Clinton to Trump by 23 points. Men prefer Trump by 6 points.

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Analysis

As Wisconsin's primary result adds fuel to the bitter Republican presidential contest and increases the likelihood of a fractious convention battle, many Republican voters in critical swing state Virginia say they will defect if the nominee is Donald Trump. On the Democrats' side, despite gains by Bernie Sanders over frontrunner Hillary Clinton, very few Virginia Democrats say they would not support Clinton if she is nominated.

With contentious primary races testing party loyalty across the country, the Wason Center sought to discover how solidly each party's voters in Virginia would support Trump and Clinton if they become the general election candidates. Overall, Clinton leads Trump 44-35 in a hypothetical November matchup in Virginia. But focusing on those who voted in their party's March 1 Super Tuesday primary shows a striking difference between Republicans and Democrats. A Trump general election candidacy would be in trouble in Virginia, with almost a third of likely Republican voters (29%) saying they would defect. In contrast, 90% of likely Democratic voters say they would stick with Clinton if she becomes the party's nominee.

"We found a real loyalty gap," said Dr. Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center. "If Donald Trump turns out to be the Republican nominee, it's clear that a very significant proportion of Republican voters will either defect or stay home. But it looks like most Democrats – even those who backed Bernie Sanders in the March primary – would support Clinton."

Where would those Republican voters go if Trump is the Republican nominee? Rather than vote for Trump, 13% say they would vote for the Democrat, 13% say they would vote for a 3rd party candidate, and 3% would stay home. Democrats, on the other hand, would strongly support Hillary Clinton, with just 4% switching to a Republican vote, 3% voting for a 3rd party, and 2% sitting it out on Election Day.

Despite their concern over a Trump candidacy, a majority (57%) of Republicans and Independents who lean Republican oppose the use of a brokered convention to keep Trump from becoming the party's nominee. Just over a third (36%) say they favor the use of a brokered convention to keep Trump from becoming the Republican nominee.

"There's a sizable distaste for Trump among Virginia Republican voters," said Dr. Rachel Bitecofer, director of the Wason Center Survey Research Lab. "Almost a third would defect or stay home in November. A solid third like the idea of stopping him in July by giving the nomination to another candidate in a brokered convention. This adds up to a real advantage for Clinton in purple Virginia."

Among all likely Virginia voters in the survey, Clinton leads Trump, 44-35, in a presidential matchup. Significantly, though, she is not above 50%, and 14% of likely voters say they would not vote for either Clinton or Trump.

Clinton's lead shows strong support from Democrats, young voters, and women. Millennials, the 18-34 voter group that has strongly favored Clinton's rival, Sen. Bernie

Sanders, in the Democrats' primary contests, nevertheless show a 22-point preference for Clinton over Trump in this survey. A gender gap also lifts Clinton, with women voters preferring her to Trump by 23 points, compared with male voters' 6-point preference for Trump. Geographically, a suburban-rural divide is clear, as Clinton wins in Northern Virginia, Richmond, and Hampton Roads, while Trump takes Southwest Virginia. However, even among all voters, Trump's biggest liability is within his own party, where only 68% of Republicans say they would vote for him over Clinton in November.

VOTECHOICE: If the November election were held today and the candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican nominee and Hillary Clinton, the Democratic nominee for whom would you vote?												
	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	18-34	35-<	Nova	Rich	HR	S'west
Trump	35	68	3	36	43	29	28	38	29	37	35	46
Clinton	44	7	87	26	37	52	50	43	52	47	44	31
Undecided	7	8	4	11	5	8	6	7	6	7	6	9
Neither	14	16	6	27	15	10	16	12	13	9	13	14
Dk/Ref	1	1		1		1		1			2	

Q5. As you know, Hillary Clinton is currently leading the Democratic Party's nomination race. Assuming Hillary Clinton is the Democratic Party's nominee for this fall's presidential election which of these statements comes closest to your view? (asked only of people that voted in the March 1 Democratic Primary, N=344)	
I will definitely vote for her	67
I will probably vote for her	23
I will vote for the other party's candidate	4
I will vote for a 3 rd Party Candidate	3
I will not vote in the election	2
DK/ref	1

Q6. As you know, Donald Trump is currently leading the Republican Party's nomination race. Assuming Donald Trump is the Republican Party's nominee for this fall's presidential election which of these statements comes closest to your view? (asked only of people that voted in the March 1 Republican Primary, N=453)	
I will definitely vote for him	43
I will probably vote for him	24
I will vote for the other party's candidate	13
I will vote for a 3 rd Party Candidate	13
I will not vote in the election	3
DK/ref	5

Q7. In a brokered convention, the party may bypass the candidate that received the most votes in the primary elections and award the party's nomination to a different candidate. Do you favor or oppose the use of a brokered convention to prevent Donald Trump from becoming the Republican Party's nominee for this fall's presidential election?

(Asked of Republicans and Independents who lean Republican, N=523)

Favor	36
Oppose	57
No Opinion	6
DK/ref	1

Demographic Toplines

EDUC:		PARTYID:	
High school or less	14	Republican	27
Some college	20	Independent lean Republican	17
Vocational or technical training	2	Independent	15
College graduate	41	Independent lean Democrat	14
Graduate study or more	22	Democrat	23
Dk/ref (vol)	1	No preference/other party (vol)	3
		Dk/ref (vol)	1
HISPANIC:		TEAPARTY:	
Yes	3	Support	19
No	97	Oppose	42
		No view either way	37
RACE:		Dk/ref (vol)	2
Black or African American	19	SEX:	
White	72	Male	49
Other	9	Female	51
RELIG:		INCOME:	
Protestant	30	Under \$25,000	5
Christian (non-specific) (vol)	19	\$25-\$49,999	11
Catholic	17	\$50-\$74,999	20
Jewish	2	\$75-\$99,999	17
Other	16	\$100,000-\$149,999	19
None	14	Over \$150,000	19
Dk/ref (vol)	2	DK/ref (vol)	10
EVANGELICAL OR BORN AGAIN?		AGE:	
Yes	33	18-24	9
No	96	25-34	11
Dk/ref (vol)	4	35-44	14
ATTEND SERVICES		45-54	23
Weekly	34	55 & older	43
Sometimes	18	REGION:	
Rarely	28	Northern Virginia	33
Never	18	Richmond/Central	21
Dk/ref (vol)	2	Hampton Roads	24
IDEOLOG:		South/Southwest	22
Strong liberal	6		
Liberal	9		
Moderate, leaning liberal	21		
Moderate, leaning conservative	20		
Conservative	23		
Strong Conservative	12		
Dk/ref (vol)	8		

How the survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 1,167 interviews of registered Virginia voters, including 598 on landline and 569 on cell phone, conducted March 23-April 3, 2016. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The margin of error for the whole survey is +/- 3.1% at the 95% level of confidence. All error margins have been adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, which is 1.2 in this survey. The design effect is a factor representing the survey's deviation from a simple random sample, and takes into account decreases in precision due to sample design and weighting procedures. Sub samples have a higher margin of error. 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 22%. Five 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 Drs. Quentin Kidd and Rachel Bitecofer of the Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University.