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Warner holds big lead over Gillespie, built on Democratic base plus ‘Warner Conservatives’

Summary of Key Findings

- 1.** Warner leads Gillespie 53% to 31%.
- 2.** Warner has solid Democratic support, but also strong support from ideologically moderate and conservative voters.
- 3.** Voters want their next U.S. senator to focus on jobs and the economy.
- 4.** Virginians give Governor McAuliffe a 47%-27% job approval.
- 5.** A majority (52%) disapprove of how President Obama is doing his job, while Congress stands at a historic low of 12% approval, 85% disapproval.

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Analysis

The State of Things: Virginia voters are slightly more optimistic than pessimistic about the direction of the state, with 42% saying things in the Commonwealth are mostly going in the right direction, and 38% saying they are mostly going in the wrong direction. Positive views on the direction of the state have held steady since the Wason Center’s April 2014 survey, which had shown a drop of 8% since early February. Virginians are more pessimistic about the direction of the country, with only 32% saying things in the United States are headed in the right direction, although that number is up slightly since April. Approval of Governor Terry McAuliffe is in positive territory, with 47% saying they approve of his job performance and 27% saying they disapprove. McAuliffe’s job approval has picked up since April, when it stood at 44%. President Obama’s approval stands at 43% among Virginia voters but a majority (52%) disapprove of how he is handling his job. Congress’ job approval remains in record low territory among Virginia voters at 12%, with 85% disapproval.

Overall, would you say things in the United States are heading more in the _____ direction?		Current	April 24	March 3	Feb.3
	Right	32	28	35	30
	Mixed (vol)	9	8	8	10
	Wrong	58	63	57	57
	Dk/ref (vol)	1	1		2

Overall, would you say things in the Commonwealth of Virginia are heading more in the _____ direction?		Current	April 24	Feb.3
	Right	42	42	50
	Mixed (vol)	13	11	11
	Wrong	38	44	34
	Dk/ref (vol)	7	2	5

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Terry McAuliffe is handling his job as Governor of Virginia?		Current	April 24
	Approve	47	44
	Disapprove	27	32
	Dk/ref (vol)	26	24

	Feb. 3*
Optimistic	53
Mixed (vol)	7
Pessimistic	34
Dk/ref (vol)	6

* question asked optimistic/pessimistic

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?		Current	March 3
	Approve	43	46
	Disapprove	52	48
	Dk/ref (vol)	5	6

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is doing its job?		Current	March 2
	Approve	12	10
	Not sure (vol)	3	10
	Disapprove	85	80

Warner Leads: In the first post-Labor Day public poll of the race, Mark Warner holds a commanding lead over Ed Gillespie, 53% to 31% among likely voters, in the November 4 election for U.S. Senate. The Wason Center likely voter model takes into consideration how closely registered voters are following news about the election, and how likely they are to vote. Libertarian Robert Sarvis has 5% support, and 11% say they are undecided.

Warner's lead is built upon solid support from Democrats and liberals, but also a sizeable level of support from what might be called "Warner conservatives." Warner is in a much stronger position with Democrats (91%) than Gillespie is with Republicans (80%). Warner also has the support of 11% of Republicans, and almost half (48%) of Independents. Ideological moderates break for Warner over Gillespie, 60% to 21%. A majority of ideological conservatives back Gillespie (67%) but a significant segment favors Warner (19%).

Warner also holds a sizeable lead among women (55% to 28%) and men (51% to 34%), and leads Gillespie in the vote-rich regions of Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads. While Gillespie trails in all regions, his strongest regional showing is in South/Southwest, where he has 36% of the vote.

The Warner-Gillespie numbers have changed little since the Wason Center's January 2014 survey, when voters said they favored Warner over Gillespie, 50% to 30%. Gillespie was then the front-runner for the Republican nomination, which he won in June. Warner's approval slipped from 63% in January to 56% in the current survey, though his disapproval number also dropped, from 26% to 22%. Since January, as Gillespie went from nomination favorite to campaigning candidate, his approval has gone up from 10% to 21%, but his disapproval number has also risen, from 9% to 17%. In the current survey, 60% of voters said they haven't heard enough about Gillespie to have a favorable or unfavorable opinion.

Whoever is elected the next U.S. Senator from Virginia, voters would like to see that person focus on jobs and the economy, with 27% saying that is the most important issue to work on. Jobs and the economy are followed by education (12%), healthcare and healthcare reform (6%), immigration and immigration reform (5%), and foreign policy and national security issues, taxes and tax reform, budget and budget deficits, and border security (each at 3%).

"Mark Warner's position as an incumbent Democrat in 2014 surely makes him the envy of all of those incumbent Democrats who are in trouble across the country," said Dr. Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center for Public Policy. "Warner not only has the solid backing of his own partisans, but also significant levels of support among Republicans and ideological moderates and conservatives -- what might best be called 'Warner conservatives.' Ed Gillespie's challenge is formidable. He has to build his base while at the same time chipping at Warner's solid lead."

If the election were held TODAY would you vote for [Randomize: “Ed Gillespie the Republican” “Mark Warner the Democrat” “Robert Sarvis the Libertarian]?		LV n=713	Dem	Rep	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black
	Warner	53	91	11	48	51	55	48	79
	Gillespie	31	1	80	23	34	28	37	6
	Sarvis	5	3	2	10	5	4	4	4
	Undecided/Dk (vol)	11	5	7	18	10	13	11	11

	Ideol Lib	Ideol Mod	Ideol Cons	NOVA	Rich/Central	HR	South/Southwest
Warner	93	60	19	61	45	53	49
Gillespie	1	21	67	29	30	28	36
Sarvis		7	3	9	9	3	5
Undecided/Dk (vol)	6	12	11	1	16	15	10

How closely have you been following news about these elections, would you say very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely, or not at all?	Very closely	11
	Somewhat closely	37
	Not very closely	35
	Not at all	17

And how likely are you to vote in the upcoming November elections, would you say that you are absolutely certain, fairly certain, not certain, or not likely to vote?	Absolutely certain	66
	Fairly certain	20
	Not certain	8
	Not likely	6
	Dk/ref (vol)	1

Is your opinion of ___ favorable, unfavorable, or do you not know enough about him either way to say?		Favorable	Unfavorable	Haven't heard enough	Dk/ref (vol)
	Warner	56	22	20	2
	Gillespie	21	17	60	2
	Sarvis	7	9	81	3

What do you think is the most important issue the next U.S. Senator from Virginia should work on? (Top eight issues mentioned)	Jobs/economy	27
	Education	12
	Healthcare/healthcare reform	6
	Immigration/immigration reform	5
	Foreign policy/national security issues	3
	Taxes/tax reform	3
	Budget/budget deficit	3
	Border security	3

Full Toplines

Q1: Ok, thank you. I'd like to start by asking your thoughts about the general state of things. Overall, would you say things in the UNITED STATES are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

Right	32
Mixed (vol)	9
Wrong	58
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q2: And how about in Virginia...would you say things in the COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

Right	42
Mixed (vol)	13
Wrong	38
Dk/ref (vol)	7

Q3: [READ] Do you approve or disapprove of the way Terry McAuliffe is handling his job as Governor of Virginia? **[IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE (“DON’T KNOW”, “DEPENDS”, “NOT SURE”, ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH: OVERALL do you approve or disapprove of the way Terry McAuliffe is handling his job as Governor? IF STILL UNSURE ENTER AS DON’T KNOW]**

Approve	47
Disapprove	27
Dk/ref (vol)	26

Q4: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President? **[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE (“DON’T KNOW”, “DEPENDS”, “NOT SURE”, ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH: OVERALL do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President? IF STILL UNSURE ENTER AS DON’T KNOW]**

Approve	43
Disapprove	52
Dk/ref (vol)	5

Q5: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is doing its job? **[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE (“DON’T KNOW”, “DEPENDS”, “NOT SURE”, ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH: OVERALL do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is doing its job? IF STILL UNSURE ENTER AS DON’T KNOW]**

Approve	12
Disapprove	85
Dk/ref (vol)	3

Q6. Thank you. As you know, this November Virginia will hold elections for U.S. Senate and Congress. I'd like to get a sense of how closely you have been following news about these elections, would you say very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely, or not at all?

Very closely	11
Somewhat closely	37
Not very closely	35
Not at all	17

Q7. And how likely are you to vote in the upcoming November elections, would you say that you are absolutely certain, fairly certain, not certain, or not likely to vote?

Absolutely certain	66
Fairly certain	20
Not certain	8
Not likely	6
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q8-12 Likely Voter Model based upon answers to Q6 & Q7 (n=713; MoE +/- 3.7%)

Q8: 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	53
Gillespie	31
Sarvis	5
Undecided/Dk (vol)	11

Q9-11: Is your opinion of (candidate names rotated) _____ favorable, unfavorable, or do you not know enough about him either way to say?

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>Haven’t heard enough</u>	<u>Dk/ref (vol)</u>
Mark Warner	56	22	20	2
Ed Gillespie	21	17	60	2
Robert Sarvis	7	9	81	3

Q12. What do you think is the most important issue the next U.S. Senator from Virginia should work on?

(Top eight issue group, and percentage of likely voters who indicated each issue group)

Jobs/Economy	27
Education	12
Healthcare/healthcare reform	6
Immigration/immigration reform	5
Foreign policy/national security	
Issues	3
Taxes/tax reform	3
Budget/budget deficient	3
Border security	3

Q13-16 Released earlier

Demographics – Full Survey

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

High school or less	13
Some college	21
Vocational or technical training	5
College graduate	35
Graduate study or more	26

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

Yes	4
No	96

RACE: Do you consider yourself to be:

White	73
Black or African American	18
Other	9

AGE: (Recorded as exact year of birth)

18-24	11
25-34	18
35-44	18
45-54	19
55 & older	34

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

Protestant	29
Christian (non-specific) (vol)	16
Catholic	15
Jewish	1
Other	17
None	18
Dk/ref (vol)	4

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

Strong liberal	5
Liberal	11
Moderate, lean liberal	28
Moderate, lean conservative	20
Conservative	17
Strong Conservative	11
Dk/ref (vol)	8

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

Democrat	35
Republican	26
Independent	35
No preference(vol.)	2
Dk/ref (vol)	2

TEAPARTY: Do you consider yourself to be a supporter of the Tea Party movement?

Yes	22
No	70
Dk/ref (vol)	7

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	10
\$25-\$39,999	9
\$40-\$49,999	9
\$50-\$74,999	15
\$75-\$99,999	10
\$100,000-\$124,999	11
\$125,000-\$149,999	4
Over \$150,000	17
Dk/ref (vol)	15

Thank you very much for your help with this survey.

How the survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 819 interviews of registered Virginia voters, including 713 likely voters in the November elections, conducted Sept. 2-7, 2014. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The margin of error for the whole survey is +/- 3.4% at the 95% level of confidence. The Margin of Error for the likely voter model (n=713) is +/- 3.7%. 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.