

*Sept. 26, 2014*

## **Virginia voters back U.S. military strikes on ISIS, support deployment to fight Ebola virus in Africa, but foreign policy views show strong partisan split**

### Summary of Key Findings

1. A strong, bipartisan majority of Virginia voters approve of President Obama's military campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, as 63% approve and 28% disapprove. However, far more Democrats approve (81%) than Republicans (59%) or Independents (56%).
2. A small majority of Virginia voters (52%) say that the U.S. government is doing very well or fairly well in reducing the threat of terrorism, but only 34% of Republicans feel that way, compared with 83% of Democrats.
3. Republican candidates in the current election might have an opportunity to counter Democrats' usual advantage among women voters by stressing the threat of Islamic extremism, which worries Republicans (57%) and women (50%) more than Democrats (32%) and men (35%).
4. 52% of Virginians say the Ebola epidemic in West Africa is a very serious or fairly serious threat to the U.S. A strong majority (63%) approve of sending troops to build clinics and organize logistics, but the party split shows: 88% of Democrats approve, but only 41% of Republicans.

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## Analysis

**The State of Virginia Views on Foreign Policy:** Given the high concentration of military bases in Hampton Roads, and the Pentagon’s location in Arlington County, perhaps no other state has as much at stake when the nation takes military actions overseas. Virginia voters are paying closest attention to news stories related to the Islamic militant group known as ISIS in Iraq and Syria, with 51% saying they are paying very close attention, followed by stories related to President Obama’s plans for military action against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, with 49% saying they are paying very close attention. The Ebola virus outbreak captures the very close attention of 43% of Virginia voters, while the situation involving Russia and Ukraine, a story that has been in the news for several months now, captures the very close attention of just over a third (36%) of voters.

<b>I’m going to name some stories that have been in the news recently, and for each one I’d like you to tell me if you have been following it...</b>				
	Very closely	Somewhat closely	Not very closely	Not at all
Reports about the Islamic militant group in Iraq and Syria, known as ISIS	51	33	11	5
Reports about President Obama’s plans for military actions against ISIS in Iraq and Syria	49	33	12	6
The situation involving Russia and Ukraine	36	34	15	15
The Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa	43	37	12	8

**Terrorism and Islamic Extremism:** When it comes to Virginia voters’ views on terrorism and Islamic extremism, clear partisan differences emerge. A small majority of Virginia voters (52%) say that the U.S. government is doing very well or fairly well in reducing the threat of terrorism, but Republicans are far less likely to feel this way than Democrats, with 34% of Republicans saying very well or fairly well, and 83% of Democrats saying very well or fairly well. Independents, too, are skeptical, with less than half (43%) saying the U.S. government is doing very well or fairly well.

The same partisan divide can be seen among Virginia voters on whether the country is as safe today as it was before the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, but with only a minority overall (38%) saying it is more safe. Only 25% of Republicans say it is more safe, versus 49% of Democrats. Independents fall between, with 37% saying more safe. There also appears to be a clear gender divide, with 43% of men feeling more safe versus 33% of women.

The partisan divide is even more evident when the responses of “more safe” and “about as safe” are combined. An overwhelming majority of Democrats (86%) say the country is as safe or safer than before 9-11, compared with a minority of Republicans (48%). The gap is also significant between men (69%) and women (61%).

A strong, bipartisan majority of Virginia voters approve of President Obama’s military campaign against Islamic extremists in Iraq and Syria, with 63% saying they approve and only 28% saying they disapprove. However, the partisan divide remains. Far more Democrats approve (81%) than Republicans (59%) or Independents (56%). Men approve slightly more than women (67% vs. 59%).

Virginia voters are more concerned with the rise of Islamic extremism in the world (54% very concerned) than in the U.S. (43% very concerned), but Republicans are far more concerned (70% and 64% respectively) than Democrats (43% and 30% respectively). Women are more concerned with the rise of Islamic extremism around the world and in the U.S. (57% and 47% respectively) than men (51% and 38% respectively).

Overall, 43% of Virginia voters think ISIS poses a “very serious” threat to the United States, with Republicans (57%) more concerned about ISIS than Democrats (32%), and women (50%) more concerned than men (35%).

The relative alignment of Republicans and a majority of women regarding the threat of Islamic extremism is unusual, suggesting that Republican candidates in the current election could counter the Democrats’ usual advantage among women voters by stressing that threat.

“While Virginia voters are concerned about the safety of the country and the threat posed by Islamic extremism, they tend to see the threat through a partisan lens,” said Dr. Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center for Public Policy. “There is clearly less support among Republicans and Independents than among Democrats for President Obama’s approach to handling terrorism and the rise of Islamic extremism.”

<b>How well do you think the U.S. government is doing in reducing the threat of terrorism?</b>		All	D	R	I	Male	Female
	Very well	12	22	3	13	15	10
	Fairly well	40	61	31	30	39	40
	Not too well	24	13	31	29	23	25
	Not well at all	21	2	34	26	22	21
	Dk/ref (vol)	2	2	1	2	2	3

<b>Do you think as a country we are more safe, about as safe, or less safe than we were before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001?</b>		All	D	R	I	Male	Female
	More safe	38	49	25	37	43	33
	About as safe	27	37	23	22	26	28
	Less safe	33	13	49	39	30	37
	Dk/ref (vol)	2	1	2	2	2	2

<b>How concerned are you about the rise of Islamic extremism around the WORLD these days? Would you say...</b>		All	D	R	I	Male	Female
	Very	54	43	70	54	51	57
	Somewhat	33	48	24	27	31	35
	Not very	7	5	5	11	9	6
	Not concerned	5	4	1	8	8	2
	Dk/ref (vol)	1			1	1	

<b>How concerned are you about the rise of Islamic extremism IN THE U.S. Would you say...</b>		All	D	R	I	Male	Female
	Very	43	30	64	41	38	47
	Somewhat	35	47	20	32	30	39
	Not very	13	14	14	12	19	8
	Not concerned	9	9	2	15	13	5
	Dk/ref (vol)						

<b>...would you say that you approve or disapprove of [plans for a military campaign against Islamic militants in Iraq and Syria...]</b>		All	D	R	I	Male	Female
	Approve	63	81	59	56	67	59
	Not sure (vol)	8	6	5	10	3	13
	Disapprove	28	13	36	32	29	27
	Dk/ref (vol)	1			2	2	1

<b>How serious a threat do you think ISIS poses to the United States, would you say...</b>		All	D	R	I	Male	Female
	Very serious	43	32	57	40	35	50
	Fairly serious	24	28	23	21	22	25
	Somewhat serious	24	25	18	28	29	20
	Not serious	7	10	2	10	13	7
	Dk/ref (vol)	2	4	1	2	2	2

**America's Role in the World:** Since the founding, Americans have debated their role in the world, and how engaged the United States should be in foreign affairs. The views of Virginia voters reflect this continuing debate. Virginians' views are divided into uneven thirds, with 25% saying the U.S. should be more active, 41% saying continue with the current level of activity, and 31% saying the U.S. should be less active. Democrats are far more comfortable with the current level of activity (60%) than are Republicans (32%). Republicans are more interested in the U.S. becoming more active (41%) than are Democrats (16%).

These views on America's role are reflected in the approach Virginia voters think the U.S. should take in confronting Islamic extremism. A majority (52%) say the U.S. should

act only if other countries are involved, but Democrats are far more interested in acting together with other countries (62%) than Republicans (40%), and Republicans are much more interested in the U.S. acting alone if necessary (54%) than Democrats (32%).

“Virginians, like the nation as a whole, are of mixed views about America’s role in the world,” said Kidd. “But here again we see a partisan divide: Republicans are much more interested in America fighting alone if need be, while Democrats are much more interested in an America that acts in concert with other countries.”

<b>When it comes to America’s role in the world generally, do you thin the U.S. should become...</b>		All	D	R	I	Male	Female
	More active	25	16	41	23	29	22
	Continue with current level of activity	41	60	32	34	37	44
	Less active	31	22	21	42	32	39
	Dk/ref (vol)	3	2	7	1	2	3

<b>When it comes to confronting threats like the rise of Islamic extremism in Iraq and Syria, should the US be willing to...</b>		All	D	R	I	Male	Female
	Act alone if necessary	41	32	54	40	44	39
	Not sure (vol)	5	3	4	7	4	5
	Act if other countries are involved	52	62	40	52	51	53
	Dk/ref (vol)	2	3	2	1	1	3

**The Ukraine Situation:** While the situation between Ukraine and Russia has been overshadowed by ISIS and Islamic extremism in Iraq and Syria, Virginia voters still think it is very or somewhat important (77%). They are of mixed views on how President Obama has handled the situation in Ukraine so far, with 42% approving and 40% disapproving. A strong majority (68%) think the U.S. should stick with economic and diplomatic efforts, while there is almost no support for military action (5%) and little support for taking no action at all (19%).

<b>How important to the interests of the United States is what happens between Russia and Ukraine...</b>		
	Very important	29
	Somewhat important	48
	Not very important	11
	Not important at all	4
Dk/ref (vol)	8	

<b>Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Obama is handling the situation in Ukraine so far?</b>		
	Approve	42
	Not sure (vol)	13
	Disapprove	40
Dk/ref (vol)	5	

<b>What do you think the U.S. should do in response to the situation in Ukraine:</b>	Military action	5
	Economic, diplomatic efforts	68
	No action at this time	19
	Dk/ref (vol)	8

**The Ebola Virus Epidemic:** Virginians are concerned about the Ebola virus epidemic, with 52% saying it is a very serious or fairly serious threat to the United States. A strong majority (63%) approve of President Obama’s plan to send U.S. troops to West Africa to build clinics and organize logistics; however, a sharp partisan split exists, with 88% of Democrats approving of the plan but only 41% of Republicans approving. Additionally, a gender difference exists, with 70% of men approving of the plan, while support among women comes from a smaller majority (57%).

<b>How serious a threat do you think the Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa poses to the United States...</b>	Very serious	29
	Fairly serious	23
	Somewhat serious	34
	Not serious	13
	Dk/ref (vol)	1

<b>Do you approve or disapprove of President Obama’s plan to deploy U.S. troops to West African countries to build clinics and organize logistics to fight the Ebola virus epidemic?</b>		All	D	R	I	Male	Female
	Approve	63	88	41	62	70	57
	Not sure (vol)	7	5	9	8	5	9
	Disapprove	29	7	49	30	25	32
	Dk/ref (vol)	1	1	1	1		2

## Full Toplines

Q1-Q4: Ok, thank you...I'm going to name some stories that have been in the news recently, and for each one I'd like you to tell me if you have followed it very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely, or not at all. Ok, here is the first one....did you follow [READ LIST OF STORIES IN ORDER].

	Very	Somewhat	Not very	Not at all
Reports about the Islamic militant group in Iraq and Syria, known as ISIS	51	33	11	5
Reports about President Barack Obama’s plan for military actions against ISIS in Iraq and Syria	49	33	12	6
The situation involving Russia and Ukraine	36	34	15	15
The Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa	43	37	12	8

Q5: Ok, thanks. In general, how well do you think the U.S. government is doing in reducing the threat of terrorism, would you say...?

Very well	12
Fairly well	40
Not too well	24
Not well at all	21
Dk/ref (vol)	2

Q6: Do you think as a country we are more safe, about as safe, or less safe than we were before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001?

More safe	38
About as safe	27
Less safe	33
Dk/ref (vol)	2

Q7: How concerned are you about the rise of Islamic extremism around the WORLD these days? Would you say...

Very concerned	54
Somewhat concerned	33
Not very concerned	7
Not concerned at all	5
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q8: How concerned are you about the possible rise of Islamic extremism IN THE U.S.? Would you say...

Very concerned	43
Somewhat concerned	35
Not very concerned	13
Not concerned at all	9

Q9: As you may know, President Obama recently announced plans for a military campaign against Islamic militants in Iraq and Syria, involving U.S. airstrikes and U.S. military training for opposition groups. Overall, would you say that you approve or disapprove of this plan?

Approve	63
Not sure (vol)	8
Disapprove	28
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q10: How serious a threat do you think ISIS poses to the United States, would you say...

Very serious	43
Fairly serious	24
Somewhat serious	24
Not serious	7
Dk/ref (vol)	2

Q11: When it comes to America's role in the world generally, do you think the U.S. should become more active in world affairs, less active in world affairs, or continue with its current level of activity in world affairs?

More active	25
Continue with current level of activity	41

Less active	31
Dk/ref (vol)	3

Q12: When it comes to confronting threats like the rise of Islamic extremism in Iraq and Syria, should the U.S. be willing to act alone if necessary, or should we only act if other countries will also be involved?

Act alone if necessary	41
Not sure (vol)	5
Act if other countries are involved	52
Dk/ref (vol)	2

Q13: Thanks, shifting to some other topics....How important to the interests of the United States is what happens between Russia and Ukraine, would you say...

Very important	29
Somewhat important	48
Not very important	11
Not important at all	4
Dk/ref (vol)	8

Q14: Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Obama has handled the situation in Ukraine so far?

Approve	42
Not sure (vol)	13
Disapprove	40
Dk/ref (vol)	5

Q15: What do you think the U.S. should do in response to the situation in Ukraine: take military action against Russia, use economic and diplomatic efforts but not take military action, or take no action against Russia at this time?

Military action	5
Economic, diplomatic efforts	68
No action at this time.	19
Dk/ref (vol)	8

Q16: Ok, thanks, just one more topic. How serious a threat do you think the Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa poses to the United States, would you say...

Very serious	29
Fairly serious	23
Somewhat serious	34
Not serious at all	13
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q17: Do you approve or disapprove of President Obama's plan to deploy U.S. troops to West African countries to build clinics and organize logistics to fight the Ebola virus epidemic?

Approve	63
Not sure (vol)	7
Disapprove	29
Dk/ref (vol)	1



## Demographics

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

High school or less	16
Some college	26
Vocational or technical training	2
College graduate	35
Graduate study or more	21

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

Yes	2
No	98

RACE: Do you consider yourself to be:

White	72
Black or African American	20
All other	8

AGE: (Recorded as exact year of birth)

18-24	11
25-34	17
35-44	17
45-54	20
55 & older	35

REGION:

Northern Virginia	33
Richmond/Central	21
Hampton Roads	24
South/Southwest	22

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

Protestant	31
Christian (non-specific) (vol)	15
Catholic	16
Jewish	1
Other	15
None	19
Dk/ref (vol)	3

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

Strong liberal	6
Liberal	10
Moderate, leaning liberal	22
Moderate, leaning conservative	20
Conservative	21
Strong Conservative	10
Dk/ref (vol)	11

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

Democrat	29
Republican	26
Independent	39
No preference (vol)	2
Dk/ref (vol)	3

SEX: [INTERVIEWER CODE]

Male	49
Female	51

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

Under \$25,000	8
\$25-\$39,999	12
\$40-\$49,999	6
\$50-\$74,999	14
\$75-\$99,999	11
\$100,000-\$124,999	13
\$125,000-\$149,999	7
Over \$150,000	13
Dk/ref (vol)	17

**How the survey was conducted:**

The results of this poll are based on 804 interviews of registered Virginia voters, including 470 on landline and 334 on cell phone, conducted Sept. 17-22, 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. 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 18%. 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.