

CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY'S
 JUDY FORD WASON
 CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

September 9, 2014

Virginians strongly agree with McDonnell verdict; majority want stiffer ethics rules as a result

Summary of Key Findings

- 1.** A strong majority of Virginia voters agree with the guilty verdict in the McDonnell trial, including a slight majority of Republicans.
- 2.** A strong majority think the trial was fair, but a partisan split is clear.
- 3.** Pre-verdict, most Virginia voters were not sure if the McDonnells were guilty of a crime, but strongly viewed their behavior and actions as wrong.
- 4.** A majority of Virginia voters think stiffer ethics laws are needed in light of the McDonnell guilty verdict.
- 5.** Virginia voters were tuned in to the trial, with 67% saying they were paying very close or somewhat close attention to the news.

For Further Information Contact:

Dr. Quentin Kidd, Director
Wason Center for Public Policy
e-mail qkidd@cnu.edu

McMurrin Hall 264
Christopher Newport University
Newport News, VA 23606

Office (757) 594-8499
Mobile (757) 775-6932
<http://cpp.cnu.edu>

Analysis

Paying Attention to the Trial: Virginians were paying close attention to the corruption trial of former governor Bob McDonnell and his wife, Maureen. Two out of three surveyed (67%) say they were following the trial very closely or somewhat closely, and only 12% said they were not paying attention to the trial at all. Virginians thought the trial was fair, with 64% saying it was mostly fair and only 11% saying it was mostly unfair. There was a clear partisan view of what constituted “fairness,” however, with 74% of Democrats saying they thought the trial was mostly fair, and only 53% of Republicans saying they thought it was mostly fair. Independents were between the two partisan groups, with 66% of them saying the trial was mostly fair.

How closely you have been following news about the trial, would you say very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely, or not at all?	Very closely	25
	Somewhat closely	42
	Not very closely	20
	Not at all	12
	Dk/ref (vol)	1

Based upon everything you’ve heard about it, do you think the trial was mostly fair or mostly unfair?						
	All	Male	Female	Dem	Rep	Ind
Mostly fair	64	65	63	74	53	66
Not sure (vol)	21	23	20	20	22	20
Mostly unfair	11	11	12	4	21	11
Dk/ref (vol.)	4	2	5	2	4	3

Pre-verdict Uncertainty about Guilt: The Wason Center survey was in the field for two nights prior to the verdict. During those two nights, respondents were asked whether they thought Bob McDonnell and his wife should be found guilty or not guilty. The majority of respondents were uncertain as to the guilt or innocence of the McDonnells, but strong differences were evident across party lines, with a quarter of Republicans saying they were not guilty. Regionally, Northern Virginia residents were much more likely to think the McDonnells guilty than any other region of the state.

Do you think that Bob McDonnell and his wife should be found guilty, found not guilty, or are you not sure either way? (pre-verdict only; MoE +/- 5.7%)										
	All	Male	Female	Dem	Rep	Ind	NoVa	Rich/Central	HR	SW/Southside
Guilty	29	24	34	29	29	30	44	24	24	24
Not guilty	11	11	11	4	25	13	13	8	11	13
Not sure	54	58	49	63	42	51	36	66	57	56
Dk/ref (vol.)	6	7	6	4	5	6	8	3	8	6

Pre-verdict Certainty about Right and Wrong: Although a majority of respondents surveyed before the verdict were uncertain as to the McDonnells’ guilt or innocence, they were not uncertain about whether the McDonnells’ actions were right or wrong. A strong two-thirds of respondents said they thought the McDonnells’ behavior and actions were wrong, and this high level of disapproval crossed sexes, party lines and regions of the state.

Regardless of whether Bob McDonnell and his wife are found guilty or not guilty, do you think their behavior and actions were wrong, or were they ok? (pre-verdict only; MoE +/- 5.7%)										
	All	Male	Female	Dem	Rep	Ind	NoVa	Rich/Central	HR	SW/Southside
Wrong	66	56	78	66	63	69	75	56	77	54
Not sure (vol)	19	27	9	19	19	17	9	23	14	29
Ok	12	16	8	13	15	9	10	16	8	15
Dk/ref (vol.)	3	2	5	2	3	3	6	3	2	2

Strong Agreement with Verdict, Support for Ethics Reform: Once the jury handed down the verdict, we inserted a question into our survey asking whether respondents agreed or disagreed with the verdict. Overall, 68% agreed. While Republicans were less likely to agree with the verdict than Democrats or Independents, even a majority of Republicans say they agree with it. Agreement with the verdict spans all parts of the state.

In light of the guilty verdict, a majority of Virginians would like to see the General Assembly pass stiffer ethics rules for elected officials, with 55% saying they want stiffer rules and 31% saying they think the current laws are OK. Support for stiffer ethics rules is highest among Democrats (64%) and residents of Southwest and Southside Virginia (65%) and lowest among Independents (47%) and residents of Northern Virginia (49%).

“In its totality, this poll demonstrates public dismay with the behavior of former governor McDonnell and his wife,” said Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center for Public Policy. “It also shows the public is satisfied that the trial was fair and the verdict was fair. But most importantly for lawmakers as we go forward, it shows that the public strongly wants stricter ethics rules for public officials.”

The jury found Bob McDonnell and his wife GUILTY of public corruption. Do you agree with this verdict or disagree with it? (post-verdict only; MoE +/- 4.2%)										
	All	Male	Female	Dem	Rep	Ind	NoVa	Rich/Central	HR	SW/Southside
Agree	68	71	66	85	52	69	69	73	64	67
Not sure (vol)	16	13	18	8	20	19	14	14	24	13
Disagree	12	13	11	7	23	8	11	12	9	15
Dk/ref (vol.)	4	3	5	-	4	4	6	1	4	6

In light of the guilty verdict, do you think the General Assembly should pass stiffer ethics rules for elected officials, or do you think the ethics laws are ok as they are? (post-verdict only; MoE +/- 4.2%)										
	All	Male	Female	Dem	Rep	Ind	NoVa	Rich/Central	HR	SW/Southside
Pass stiffer rules	55	55	55	64	57	47	49	59	51	65
Not sure (vol)	11	7	14	7	7	16	12	11	11	10
Laws are ok	31	37	27	29	34	35	36	30	35	21
Dk/ref (vol.)	3	1	4	1	2	1	4	-	3	4

Full Toplines

(Q1-12 held for later release.)

Q13. For the *past* several weeks the public corruption trial of former Governor Bob McDonnell and his wife, Maureen, has taken place in federal court in Richmond. How closely have you been following news about the trial, would you say very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely, or not at all?

Very closely	25
Somewhat closely	42
Not very closely	20
Not at all	12
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q14. Based upon everything you've heard about it, do you think the trial was mostly fair or mostly unfair?

Mostly fair	64
Not sure (vol)	21
Mostly unfair	11
Dk/ref (vol)	4

Q15a. **(pre-verdict)** Do you think the Bob McDonnell and his wife should be found guilty, found not guilty, or are you not sure either way?

Guilty	29
Innocent	11
Not sure	54
Dk/ref (vol)	6

Q15b. **(post-verdict)** The jury found Bob McDonnell and his wife GUILTY of public corruption. Do you agree with this verdict or disagree with it?

Agree	68
Not sure (vol)	16
Disagree	12
Dk/ref (vol)	4

16a. **(pre-verdict)** Regardless of whether Bob McDonnell and his wife are found guilty or not guilty, do you think their behavior and actions were wrong, or were they ok?

Wrong	66
Not sure (vol)	19
Ok	12
Dk/ref (vol)	3

16b. **(post-verdict)** In light of the guilty verdict, do you think the General Assembly should pass stiffer ethics rules for elected officials, or do you think the ethics laws are ok as they are?

Pass stiffer rules	55
Not sure (vol)	11
Laws are ok as they are	31
Dk/ref (vol)	3

Demographics

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

IDEOLOG: 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, 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 questions 15A and 16A (n=293) is +/- 5.7% and the Margin of Error for questions 15b and 16b (n=526) is +/- 4.2%. 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.