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Northam leads Gillespie, 47%-41%, in governor's race; regional and demographic trends favor Democrats

Summary of Key Findings

1. Democrats Northam, Fairfax and Herring lead similarly statewide on the strength of support in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads, and among women and younger voters.
2. In a generic House of Delegates ballot, voters favor a Democrat, 47% to 40%.
3. Partisan regional divides emerge across the ballot, with Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads favoring Democrats and the Richmond-central Virginia and rural South and Western Virginia favoring Republicans.
4. Republican voters say cutting taxes is a high priority, while Democratic voters say expanding Medicaid and addressing tidal flooding and sea level rise are high priorities.
5. Improving the quality of K-12 education clearly tops the list of issues all voters want the next governor to focus on.

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Analysis

Six weeks before Virginians choose their next governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, and all 100 members of the House of Delegates, Democratic candidates find themselves in a favorable position, according to a Wason Center survey of 776 likely voters. At the top of the ticket, current Democratic Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam leads former Republican National Committee Chair Ed Gillespie 47% to 41%, with Libertarian Cliff Hyra taking 4% of the vote and another 8% still undecided.

Democrat Justin Fairfax, a former federal prosecutor, leads Republican state Senator Jill Vogel in the Lieutenant Governor's race 46% to 42%, while current Democratic Attorney General Mark Herring leads former federal prosecutor and White House aide John Adams 47% to 42%. In a generic House of Delegates test ballot, the Democratic candidate leads the Republican candidate 47% to 40%.

The survey's margin of error is +/- 3.7% at the 95% level of confidence. Likely voters are registered voters with a history of voting in recent statewide elections, who also say they definitely or probably will vote in the November 7 election.

Northam's lead over Gillespie is built on strong support from women (+18), voters under 45 (+18), voters in Northern Virginia (+11) and Hampton Roads (+20), and ideological moderates (+26). Gillespie leads regionally in Richmond-Central Virginia (+8) and rural South and Southwest Virginia (+5), and among men (+7). Each has the overwhelming support of his party's base, and they split independents (38% to 38%).

"Northam is doing well where he needs to do well," said Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center. "A Democratic plus-11 advantage in Northern Virginia and plus-20 in Hampton Roads are hard for a Republican to overcome in the rest of the state."

As with Northam vs. Gillespie, the structure of the Democratic electorate compared to the Republican electorate gives Fairfax and Herring similar advantages, with both Democrats leading on the strength of support from Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads, among women, and among younger voters and African-American voters.

"The Democratic field clearly has an advantage now," said Rachel Bitecofer, assistant director of the Wason Center. "The question is whether they can turn out their voters on Election Day, something the party traditionally struggles with in off-year elections."

Partisan divides appear when voters are asked to rank issues by priority. Expanding Medicaid and addressing tidal flooding and sea level rise rank far higher among Northam voters, while cutting taxes to stimulate the economy ranks far higher among Gillespie voters. Voters in both camps rank improving K-12 education, making the economy less dependent on federal spending, and transportation as high priorities.

Improving K-12 education tops the list of policy issues both Democratic and Republican voters want their next governor to focus on, followed by cutting taxes and expanding Medicaid.

Q3: If the election for governor were being held today and the candidates were [RANDOMIZE NAMES] for whom would you vote? Which one are you leaning toward right now?

Q4: [If undecided or refused] Do you think by the time Election Day comes you might end up voting for either...

	All	Male	Female	Black	White	18-44	45+	Nova	Rich	HR	S/west	Lib	Mod	Cons	Dem	Ind	Rep	≤ \$50K	> \$50K
Ed Gillespie	41	47	35	7	51	33	45	40	47	34	45	6	30	79	2	38	89	41	40
Ralph Northam	47	40	53	83	38	51	45	51	39	54	40	88	56	12	94	38	4	48	47
Cliff Hyra	4	5	3	3	4	6	3	2	6	4	6	1	6	3	-	11	1	7	4
Undecided/Dk/Ref (vol)	8	7	9	7	7	10	7	6	8	8	9	5	8	6	4	13	6	4	9

Q5: If the election for lieutenant governor were being held today and the candidates were [RANDOMIZE NAMES] for whom would you vote? Which one are you leaning toward right now?

Q6: [If undecided or refused] Do you think by the time Election Day comes you might end up voting for either...

	All	Male	Female	Black	White	18-44	45+	Nova	Rich	HR	S/west	Lib	Mod	Cons	Dem	Ind	Rep	≤ \$50K	> \$50K
Justin Fairfax	46	41	50	78	37	53	41	51	40	52	35	87	52	13	90	37	5	49	46
Jill Vogel	42	46	38	7	51	34	46	36	47	36	53	5	32	79	3	39	88	44	41
Undecided/Dk/Ref (vol)	13	13	12	15	12	13	13	13	14	12	12	8	16	8	7	24	7	7	13

Q7: If the election for attorney general were being held today and the candidates were [RANDOMIZE NAMES] for whom would you vote? Which one are you leaning toward right now?

Q8: [If undecided or refused] Do you think by the time Election Day comes you might end up voting for either...

	All	Male	Female	Black	White	18-44	45+	Nova	Rich	HR	S/west	Lib	Mod	Cons	Dem	Ind	Rep	≤ \$50K	> \$50K
John Adams	42	50	34	9	50	38	44	36	49	34	52	5	31	79	3	42	85	45	41
Mark Herring	47	40	54	81	38	50	45	50	42	56	38	87	54	14	91	39	7	49	47
Undecided/Dk/Ref (vol)	11	10	12	11	12	12	11	14	9	10	10	8	15	7	5	19	8	6	12

Q9: In addition to the election for governor, there will also be elections for all 100 House of Delegates seats in November. Thinking about just the House of Delegates, if the election for the House of Delegates were held TODAY, would you vote for [RANDOMIZE NAMES]

	All	Male	Female	Black	White	18-44	45+	Nova	Rich	HR	S/west	Lib	Mod	Cons	Dem	Ind	Rep	≤ \$50K	> \$50K
Democratic candidate	47	40	54	85	37	54	43	52	39	53	41	91	54	12	96	37	4	53	47
Republican candidate	40	46	35	7	49	36	43	38	44	34	47	5	31	78	1	37	89	43	39
Undecided/Dk/Ref (vol)	13	14	11	8	14	10	14	10	17	13	12	4	15	10	3	26	7	4	14

I'm going to read a list of issues the next governor might focus on. Please rate how big a priority you feel each should be on a 1 to 5 scale, where 5 means HIGHEST PRIORITY, 1 means LOWEST PRIORITY, and 3 is in the MIDDLE. [RANDOMIZE Q14-Q19]

Q14: Expanding Medicaid to provide health insurance to more people in Virginia...

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Hyra	Undecided (vol)	Dk/ref (vol)
1 - lowest	13	24	2	19	14	42
2	7	14	1	6	6	-
3	24	31	14	44	37	25
4	16	11	21	9	12	8
5 - highest	39	17	61	22	29	25
Dk/ref (vol)	2	3	1	-	4	-

Q15: Cutting taxes to stimulate the economy in Virginia...

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Hyra	Undecided (vol)	Dk/ref (vol)
1 - lowest	9	3	15	10	6	8
2	10	3	15	13	14	8
3	29	23	35	32	26	42
4	17	23	12	19	20	17
5 - highest	33	47	22	26	33	25
Dk/ref (vol)	2	2	1	-	2	-

Q16: Working to expand and improve transportation...

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Hyra	Undecided (vol)	Dk/ref (vol)
1 - lowest	4	7	2	-	4	15
2	8	9	6	16	8	15
3	30	37	26	29	27	23
4	22	18	24	23	35	15
5 - highest	34	27	42	32	25	23
Dk/ref (vol)	1	1	-	-	2	8

Q17: Improving the quality of K-12 education...

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Hyra	Undecided (vol)	Dk/ref (vol)
1 - lowest	3	4	2	6	6	17
2	2	4	1	3	2	-
3	11	17	7	16	2	-
4	19	23	15	28	17	33
5 - highest	34	51	75	47	70	50
Dk/ref (vol)	1	1	-	-	4	-

Q18: Addressing tidal flooding and sea level rise on the Virginia coast...

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Hyra	Undecided (vol)	Dk/ref (vol)
1 - lowest	15	26	4	25	9	31
2	12	18	8	6	9	8
3	34	38	31	34	26	39
4	14	6	19	16	25	15
5 - highest	23	9	37	19	23	8
Dk/ref (vol)	2	4	1	-	8	-

Q19: Working to make Virginia's economy less dependent on federal spending...

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Hyra	Undecided (vol)	Dk/ref (vol)
1 - lowest	4	4	3	10	4	8
2	7	4	10	10	-	-
3	26	18	35	13	21	17
4	26	28	23	32	29	33
5 - highest	36	44	27	36	44	33
Dk/ref (vol)	2	2	1	-	2	8

Q20: I'm going to read those issues again, and this time please tell me which ONE issue is the most important issue you'd like to see the next governor work on. [RANDOMIZE]

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Hyra	Undecided (vol)	Dk/ref (vol)
Expanding Medicaid	20	7	34	3	14	9
Cutting taxes	21	40	7	10	12	9
Transportation	8	5	10	7	8	-
K-12 education	34	24	40	50	47	54
Tidal flooding & sea level rise	4	2	5	-	4	9
Economy less dependent	13	21	4	30	12	18
Dk/ref (vol)	1	2	1	-	4	-

Questions 10-13 & 21-24 held for later release

Demographics

EDUC:

High school or less	13
Some college	19
Vocational or technical training	4
College graduate	35
Graduate study or more	28

HISPANIC:

Yes	4
No	96

RACE:

White	72
Black or African American	19
Other	9

MIL OR RETIRED MIL IN HOUSE:

Yes	32
No	68

AGE:

18-24	6
25-34	14
35-44	17
45-54	22
55 & older	42

PARTYID:

Republican	31
Democrat	35
Independent	31
No preference (vol)	2
Other party (vol)	<1
Dk/ref (vol)	<1

[IF OTHER THAN REP OR DEM ABOVE]

PARTLEAN:

Republican	44
Democratic	35
Independent	21

RELIG:

Christian	75
Jewish	1
Muslim	1
Other	12
No Preference	10
Dk/ref (vol)	1

IDEOL:

Strong liberal	8
Liberal	10
Moderate, leaning liberal	23
Moderate, leaning conservative	22
Conservative	22
Strong Conservative	9
Dk/ref (vol)	6

INCOME:

Under \$25,000	5
\$25-\$49,999	14
\$50-\$74,999	17
\$75-\$99,999	17
\$100,000-\$149,999	20
Over \$150,000	20
Dk/ref (vol)	8

REGION (defined by DMA):

Northern Virginia	34
Richmond/Central	21
Hampton Roads	24
South/Southwest	21

SEX (interviewer coded):

Male	49
Female	51

How the survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 1,048 interviews of registered Virginia voters, of which 776 were determined to be likely voters in the upcoming November election (registered voters who have voted in recent statewide elections, who also say they definitely or probably will vote in the upcoming elections), including 205 on landline and 571 on cell phone, conducted September 12-22, 2017. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The margin of error for the whole survey is +/- 3.7 % at the 95% level of confidence. **This means that if 50% of respondents indicate a topline view on an issue, we can be 95% confident that the population's view on that issue is somewhere between 46.3% and 53.7%.** The margin of error is higher for subgroups. All error margins have been adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, which is 1.1 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 19%. 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 likely voters in the November 2017 Virginia elections.