



September 26, 2017

‘Trump Effect’ plays in Virginia governor’s race, but Confederate statues may raise a ‘Robert E. Lee Effect’

Summary of Key Findings

1. Overall, 39% of voters say President Trump is a factor in their choice for governor this year, with 28% saying he is a major factor.
2. Trump motivates Democrats more than Republicans. A slim majority of Democrat Ralph Northam voters (51%) say Trump is a factor, while a strong majority of Republican Ed Gillespie voters (72%) say Trump is not a factor.
3. Nearly a third of voters – mostly Democrats – say their vote sends a message of disapproval to Trump and Republicans in Congress. A strong majority of Republicans (65%) say their vote sends no message to Trump and Congress.
4. Overall, 54% of voters oppose removing Confederate monuments; voters differ on whether the monuments symbolize racism (32%) or Southern pride (47%).
5. This election may also show a “Robert E. Lee Effect.” Northam voters are divided about Confederate monuments, with 62% supporting removal but 25% opposed. Gillespie voters are nearly united, with 86% opposing removal.

For further information contact:

Dr. Quentin Kidd, Director
Wason Center for Public Policy

e-mail qkidd@cnu.edu

O: (757) 594-8499
M: (757) 775-6932

Dr. Rachel Bitecofer, Assistant Director
Wason Center for Public Policy

e-mail rachel.bitecofer@cnu.edu

O: (757) 594-8997
M: (541) 729-9824

Analysis

As Virginians prepare to choose their next governor, the “Trump Effect” plays into the fortunes of both Republican Ed Gillespie and Democrat Ralph Northam. For Gillespie, the GOP electorate is slightly divided on President Donald Trump, while Northam’s Democrats are mostly unified on Trump. A significant segment of voters say Trump is a factor in their vote for governor, according to a Wason Center survey of 776 likely voters.

Trump’s approval rating in Virginia stands at 35% overall, but Northam voters are nearly unified, with 96% disapproving of the president’s performance. Gillespie voters, however, are split, with 75% saying they approve while 16% say they disapprove.

Nearly 4 in 10 voters (39%) say Trump is a factor in their choice for governor, with 28% saying that he is a major factor. A strong majority of Gillespie voters (72%) say the president is not a factor, while a slim majority (51%) of Northam voters say he is a factor. More than 3 out of 4 Independents (78%) say Trump is not a factor in their choice. Overall, nearly half (49%) say they see their vote as a way to send a message to Trump and Republicans who control Congress, with 30% saying it is a message of disapproval and 19% saying it is a message of support. A majority of Gillespie voters (67%) say there is no message intended in their vote, while a majority of Northam voters (56%) say theirs is a message of disapproval.

“Disapproval of Trump and Congress is clearly motivating Northam’s voters,” said Rachel Bitecofer, assistant director of the Wason Center. “Gillespie voters mostly support Trump, but they’d rather keep him out of the picture here.”

There may also be a “Robert E. Lee Effect” in Virginia voters’ choice for governor. Overall, a slim majority (54%) of voters say they oppose removing Confederate statues and monuments from public spaces, but the issue shows a wide partisan gap. Strong majorities of Northam voters (62%) and Democrats (62%) say they support removing the monuments, while even stronger majorities of Gillespie voters (86%) and Republicans (83%) are opposed. Views on what the statues and monuments symbolize are mixed, with more voters saying they symbolize Southern pride (47%) than racism (32%). Nearly three-fourths of Gillespie voters (74%) and Republicans (73%) say the statues and monuments symbolize Southern pride, while smaller majorities of Northam voters and Democrats say they symbolize racism (59% and 60% respectively). A quarter (26%) of Northam voters say they symbolize Southern pride.

“It’s clear this is a more complicated issue for Northam than for Gillespie,” said Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center. “Gillespie appears to have a Donald Trump problem, but Northam may have a Robert E. Lee problem.”

Just over 4 in 10 of voters say things in Virginia are moving in the right direction (44% vs. 36%). Overall, 51% approve of the job Governor Terry McAuliffe is doing.

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.

Q10: Overall, would you say things in the UNITED STATES are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Right	30	49	5	4	39	56
Mixed (vol)	13	19	7	7	7	19
Wrong	55	21	87	88	52	23
Dk/ref (vol)	2	2	1	1	2	2

Q11: And how about in Virginia...overall, would you say things in the COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Right	44	28	56	55	44	32
Mixed (vol)	17	15	17	16	27	15
Wrong	36	53	22	24	24	50
Dk/ref (vol)	4	3	4	5	4	3

Q12: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as President? **[IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE (“DON’T KNOW”, “DEPENDS”, “NOT SURE”, ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH: OVERALL do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as President? IF STILL UNSURE ENTER AS DON’T KNOW]**

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Approve	35	75	3	2	21	71
Disapprove	58	16	96	96	66	20
Dk/ref (vol)	6	9	1	2	13	9

Q13: 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]**

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Approve	51	23	78	77	49	26
Disapprove	37	66	12	12	29	62
Dk/ref (vol)	12	11	11	11	22	12

Q21: Recently there has been a lot of debate and controversy surrounding Confederate statues and monuments in Virginia. Do you support or oppose removing confederate statues and monuments from public spaces around Virginia?

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Support	36	7	62	62	36	10
Oppose	54	86	25	25	47	83
Dk/ref (vol)	11	8	13	13	18	7

Q22: Do you, yourself, see Confederate statues and monuments more as a symbol of Southern pride or more as a symbol of racism?

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Southern pride	47	74	26	25	31	73
Racism	32	4	59	60	22	6
Dk/ref (vol)	21	22	15	15	47	22

Q23: Thinking about your vote for governor again, is Donald Trump a factor in your vote choice for governor this year? [Note: If respondent says yes, prompt for “major” or “minor” factor]

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Yes - major	28	18	38	39	13	20
Yes - minor	11	9	13	13	9	9
No	60	72	49	48	78	70
Dk/ref (vol)	1	1	-	-	-	1

Q24: Do you see your vote choice for governor this year as a way to send a message to President Trump and the Republicans who control Congress? [Note: If respondent says yes, prompt for a message of “support” or “disapproval”]

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Yes - support	19	30	12	12	-	29
Yes - disapproval	30	2	56	57	16	4
No	51	67	32	31	84	65
Dk/ref (vol)	1	2	1	-	-	2

Questions 1-9 & 14-20 released earlier.

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

MILITARY OR RETIRED MILITARY:

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.