CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY
THE WASON CENTER
FOR CIVIC LEADERSHIP

February 19, 2021

Most voters undecided in Virginia nominating contests; McAuliffe, Herring have head starts among Democrats; Chase leads Cox, Snyder for Republican governor bid

Summary of Key Findings

1. **Former Gov. Terry McAuliffe opens Democrats' primary race for governor with a quarter of the vote (26%), but half of Democratic voters are undecided (49%).**

2. **State Sen. Amanda Chase leads Republican field for governor with 17%, with former Virginia House Speaker Kirk Cox at 10% and tech entrepreneur Pete Snyder at 6%; but 55% of Republican voters say they are undecided.**

3. **No candidate for lieutenant governor has made much of an impression on voters in the crowded Democratic field, with most voters undecided (78%).**

4. **Virginia Beach Del. Glenn Davis (8%) leads the field for the Republican lieutenant governor nomination, but most voters are undecided (71%).**

5. **Attorney General Mark Herring (42%) holds a commanding lead for Democrats' nomination to a third term, but half of Democratic voters are undecided (50%).**

6. **Virginia Beach lawyer Chuck Smith (10%) leads the race for the Republican attorney general nomination, but two-thirds of voters are undecided (68%).**

7. **With all 100 House of Delegates seats up in November, Democrats lead Republicans in a generic ballot, 49% to 37%.**

8. **Deep partisan division defines voters, with 83% of Democrats approving Gov. Ralph Northam's job performance, while 79% of Republicans disapprove.**

For further information, contact:

Dr. Quentin Kidd	qkidd@cnu.edu	O: (757) 594-8499
Academic Director	@QuentinKidd	M: (757) 775-6932
Dr. Rebecca Bromley-Trujillo	rebecca.bromleytrujillo@cnu.edu	O: (757) 594-9140
Research Director	@becky_btru	M: (269) 598-5008

Analysis

Gubernatorial Races: In the Democratic primary contest for governor, former governor Terry McAuliffe leads among Democratic voters with 26%, followed by Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax (12%), former Prince William Del. Jennifer Carrol Foy and Richmond Sen. Jennifer McClellan at 4% each and Manassas Del. Lee Carter (1%). In terms of race, gender, and ideology, Virginia Democrats will be choosing from the most diverse field of gubernatorial candidates ever seen in the Commonwealth. Four months from the June 8 primary, many of these candidates are largely unknown to voters, nearly half of whom say they are undecided (49%). "New Democratic faces and priorities have emerged since Terry McAuliffe was governor," said Wason Center Academic Director Dr. Quentin Kidd. "He opens with a head start, but he's a long way from closing the deal."

In the Republican contest for governor, tentatively to be decided in a convention in May, Chesterfield Sen. Amanda Chase leads a crowded field with 17%, followed by former Virginia House Speaker Kirk Cox (10%) and entrepreneur Pete Snyder (6%). A majority of Republicans (55%) are undecided in this very unsettled race. Chase has sued the party to require a primary, rather than a convention, and other candidates are also competing. "The underlying friction between Chase's fervent Trumpism and Cox's Reagan Republican credentials could crack the party and open the door for Snyder or another contender," said Wason Center Research Director Dr. Rebecca Bromley-Trujillo.

Among all voters, McAuliffe, the best-known candidate in the field, has a favorable/unfavorable rating of 25% to 21%, while 52% indicated no opinion. Fairfax follows with a favorable/unfavorable rating of 17% to 20%. Of the Republicans seeking their party's nominations, Chase has the highest favorability rating at 9%, though her unfavorable rating is higher at 14%.

Lieutenant Governor: In the Democratic race for lieutenant governor, candidates barely break the surface among voters. The vast majority of Democrats are undecided (78%), while each candidate received just 1-2% support. Most Republicans (71%) are also undecided among their lieutenant governor contenders, though Virginia Beach Del. Glenn Davis leads this survey at 8%, followed by former Fairfax Del. Tim Hugo at 4%.

Attorney General: In the Democrats' nominating contest for attorney general, incumbent Mark Herring (42%) has a solid lead over Norfolk Del. Jerrauld "Jay" Jones (3%). Seeking a third term, Herring's support is the strongest of any candidate in this survey, but 50% of Democratic voters remain undecided. For the Republican nomination, Norfolk lawyer Chuck Smith leads with 10%, followed by Chesterfield Supervisor Leslie Haley (5%) and Virginia Beach Del. Jason Miyares (3%).

House of Delegates: With all 100 House of Delegates seats up in November, Democrats lead Republicans in a generic ballot, 49% to 37%, with 13% undecided.

State of the Commonwealth: More Virginia voters say the state is headed in the right direction (47%) than the wrong direction (41%), with a clear partisan division. Governor Ralph Northam's 54% approval rating also falls along partisan lines, with 83% of Democrats approving of his job performance and 79% of Republicans disapproving.

Q1: Overall, would you say things in the COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

	All	Rep	Ind	Dem	Males	Females	White	Black	18-44	45 +	Non-College	College
Right	47	14	31	76	42	51	44	61	51	44	37	58
Mixed	8	5	12	9	6	9	7	11	9	7	6	10
Wrong	41	78	45	12	48	35	45	21	34	47	51	30
Don't Know	5	3	12	4	4	5	4	7	7	3	7	2

Trends:	Nov. 2020	Dec. 2019	Oct. 2019	April 2019	Dec. 2018
Right	48	48	50	46	64
Mixed	7	11	18	14	11
Wrong	47	41	32	40	25
Dk/ref (vol)	2	2	-	5	5

Q4: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ralph Northam 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 Ralph Northam is handling his job as Governor? **IF STILL UNSURE ENTER AS DON'T KNOW]**

	All	Rep	Ind	Dem	Males	Females	White	Black	18-44	45 +	Non-College	College
Approve	54	17	45	83	49	57	50	73	61	48	45	64
Disapprove	40	79	51	8	47	34	46	14	32	46	49	30
Don't Know	6	4	4	9	4	9	5	13	7	6	7	6

Trends:	Nov. 2020	Dec. 2019	Oct. 2019	April 2019	Dec. 2018
Approve	53	52	51	40	59
Disapprove	41	36	37	49	24
Dk/ref (vol)	6	12	12	11	17

Q6: Several people have announced they are running for Governor of Virginia in 2021. As I read some of them, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of them, or if you don't know enough about them to have an opinion **[RANDOMIZE Candidate Names].**

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion	Refuse (vol)
Terry McAuliffe	25	21	52	2
Jennifer Carroll Foy	5	3	88	4
Lee Carter	2	5	89	4
Jennifer McClellan	8	4	84	5
Justin Fairfax	17	20	60	3
Kirk Cox	6	5	85	4
Amanda Chase	9	14	73	4
Glenn Youngkin	3	2	91	5
Pete Snyder	5	3	89	4

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

Democrat	38
Republican	25
Independent	34
Other party (vol)	1
No preference (vol)	1
Dk/ref (vol)	1

PARTYLN **[ASK FOR ALL BUT DEMOCRAT AND REPUBLICAN ON PARTYID]** And do you lean more towards the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?

Lean Republican	12
Lean Democratic	11
Does not lean	14
Dk/Refused (vol.)	1

Q17: **[ASK OF REPUBLICAN & INDEPENDENT LEAN REPUBLICAN ONLY]** If the Republican Party were to hold a selection process for GOVERNOR would you support…? **[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ("DON'T KNOW", "DEPENDS", "NOT SURE", ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH:** Which one are you leaning toward right now?**] [RANDOMIZE]**   n=370 *(MoE = +/- 5.6%)*

Kirk Cox	10
Amanda Chase	17
Merle Rutledge	0
Kurt Santini	0
Pete Snyder	6
Sergio de la Pena	0
Glenn Youngkin	3
Someone else (vol)	1
Undecided	55
Dk/ref (vol)	7

Q18: **[ASK OF REPUBLICAN & INDEPENDENT LEAN REPUBLCAN ONLY]** If the Republican Party were to hold a selection process for LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR would you support…? **[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ("DON'T KNOW", "DEPENDS", "NOT SURE", ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH:** Which one are you leaning toward right now?**] [RANDOMIZE]**   n=370 *(MoE = +/- 5.6%)*

Puneet Ahluwalia	0
Lance Allen	1
Tim Hugo	4
Winsome Sears	2
Glenn Davis	8
Someone else (vol)	1
Undecided	71
Dk/ref (vol)	14

Q19: **[ASK OF REPUBLICAN & INDEPENDENT LEAN REPUBLICAN ONLY]** If the Republican Party were to hold a selection process for ATTORNEY GENERAL would you support…? **[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ("DON'T KNOW", "DEPENDS", "NOT SURE", ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH:** Which one are you leaning toward right now?**] [RANDOMIZE]**   n=370 *(MoE = +/- 5.6%)*

Leslie Haley	5
Jason Miyares	3
Chuck Smith	10
Someone else (vol)	1
Undecided	68

Dk/ref (vol)   14

Q20: **[ASK OF DEMOCRAT & INDEPENDENT LEAN DEMOCRAT ONLY]** If the Democratic primary for governor were being held today and the candidates were….for whom would you vote? **[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ("DON'T KNOW", "DEPENDS", "NOT SURE", ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH:** Which one are you leaning toward right now?**]** **[ROTATE NAMES]**   n=488 *(MoE = +/- 4.9%)*

Terry McAuliffe	26
Jennifer Carroll Foy	4
Lee Carter	1
Justin Fairfax	12
Jennifer McClellan	4
Someone else (vol)	0
Undecided (vol)	49
Dk/ref (vol)	5

Q21: **[ASK OF DEMOCRAT & INDEPENDENT LEAN DEMOCRAT ONLY]** If the Democratic primary for lieutenant governor were being held today and the candidates were….for whom would you vote? **[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ("DON'T KNOW", "DEPENDS", "NOT SURE", ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH:** Which one are you leaning toward right now?**]** **[ROTATE NAMES]** n=488 *(MoE = +/- 4.9%)*

Hala Ayala	2
Paul Goldman	1
Elizabeth Guzman	2
Mark Levine	2
Andria McClellan	2
Sean Perryman	1
Sam Rasoul	2
Xavier Warren	2
Someone else (vol)	1
Undecided (vol)	78
Dk/ref (vol)	9

Q22: **[ASK OF DEMOCRAT & INDEPENDENT LEAN DEMOCRAT ONLY]** If the Democratic primary for attorney general were being held today and the candidates were….for whom would you vote? **[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ("DON'T KNOW", "DEPENDS", "NOT SURE", ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH:** Which one are you leaning toward right now?**]** **[ROTATE NAMES]** n=488 *(MoE = +/- 4.9%)*

Mark Herring	42
Jerrauld Jones	3
Someone else (vol)	0
Undecided (vol)	50
Dk/ref (vol)	5

[ASK ALL]
Q23: In addition to the statewide elections, there will also be elections for all 100 House of Delegates seats this year. If the election for the House of Delegates were held TODAY, would you vote for **[RANDOMIZE:** "the Republican Party's candidate" or "the Democratic Party's candidate"**]** for the House of Delegates in your district?

Republican	37
Democratic	49
Other	0
Undecided	13
DK/refused (vol)	1

Demographics Full Survey n=1,005

EDUC: Could you tell me the highest level of school or college you had the opportunity to complete:

High school or less	55
College or more	45

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

Yes	3
No	94
Dk/ref (vol)	2

RACE: Do you consider yourself to be:

White	71
Black or African American.	18
Other	11

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

Protestant	24
Christian (non-specific) (vol)	21
Catholic	10
Jewish	1
Other	12
None	26
Dk/ref (vol)	6

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

Strong liberal	8
Liberal	10
Moderate, leaning liberal	24
Moderate, leaning conservative	16
Conservative	17
Strong Conservative	14
Dk/ref (vol)	12

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

Democrat	25
Republican	38
Independent	34
No Preference (vol)	1
Other Party (vol)	1
Dk/Ref (vol)	1

PARTYLN

Lean Republican	37
Lean Democrat	49
Independent	15

AGE: (Recorded as exact year of birth)

18-24	5
25-34	15
35-44	23
45-54	13
55 & older	44

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

Under $25,000	6
$25-$49,999	13
$50-$74,999	18
$75-$99,999	12
$100,000-$149,999	18
Over $150,000	19
Dk/ref (vol)	15

CELL/LANDLINE

Cell	58
Landline	42

SEX:

Male	47
Female	53

REGION

Northern	32
Richmond-Central	22
Hampton Roads-East	24
South/Southwest/West	22

How the survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 1,005 interviews of registered Virginia voters, including 419 on landline and 586 on cell phone, conducted January 31- February 14, 2021. 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. 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 46.5% and 53.4%. The margin of error for subgroups may be higher. All error margins have been adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, which is 1.2 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 .09%. Five callbacks were employed in the fielding process. Live calling was conducted by trained interviewers at the Wason Center for Civic Leadership Survey Research Lab at Christopher Newport University. The data reported here are weighted using an iterative weighting process on region, age, race, sex, and education to reflect as closely as possible the population of Virginia's electorate.