



March 5, 2018

Stewart leads GOP Senate primary, but 66% undecided; majority of Va. voters ‘strongly disapprove’ of Trump

Summary of Key Findings

1. Two-thirds of Republican voters are undecided about who they will support in their party's June U.S. Senate primary, but Corey Stewart begins the nominating campaign with a small lead.
2. Democratic Senator Tim Kaine enters a reelection campaign with a 53% favorability rating and a 20-plus point lead on potential Republican challengers.
3. President Trump's approval rating in Virginia is 37%, 52% of voters "strongly disapprove" of the job he's doing as president.
4. Although 57% of Virginians say the Commonwealth is on the right track, only 32% say the same about the country.

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Analysis

Although positive about the state of the Commonwealth, Virginia voters enter the 2018 election year with a pessimistic view of the state of the Union. While 57% of voters say that things in Virginia are heading in the right direction, only 32% say the same about the country, a 25-point difference. This reflects Democrats' and Independents' deep dissatisfaction with President Donald Trump's performance, a result that remains largely unchanged among Virginia voters since he took office in January 2017. Almost 9 out of 10 Democrats (88%) and a majority of Independents (53%) say they strongly disapprove of the job Trump is doing. However, Trump's overall favorability rating among Republicans is 84%, with 59% saying they strongly approve of the job he is doing. Among those who voted for him for president, 86% approve of his performance, of which 59% strongly approve. Only 11% of 2016 Trump voters in Virginia disapprove of his performance now.

"While Trump has lost a little ground among Republicans and those who voted for him in 2016, he nevertheless enjoys very robust support among his partisan loyalists," said Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center for Public Policy. "If Trump's approval-disapproval is a guide, the 2018 elections are setting up to be base elections in Virginia."

Tim Kaine enters his first reelection bid to retain his seat in the U.S. Senate with a 53% favorability rating and significant advantages against potential Republican challengers. Few Republican primary voters have tuned into the party's June primary, but four candidates have declared their candidacies for the party's nomination. The two best known candidates are Corey Stewart, who nearly upset Ed Gillespie for the party's gubernatorial nomination last fall, and E.W. Jackson, who ran in the Republican primary for Senate in 2012 and was the party's nominee for lieutenant governor in 2013. Stewart enters as the frontrunner, with the support of 16% of potential Republican primary voters. Jackson has 7% and Delegate Nick Freitas has 6%.

Asked who they will support in the June primary, 66% of Republicans said they are undecided. More than 80% of all voters said they do not know enough about either Freitas or Jackson to register an opinion. "As it stands, the Republican primary is a contest between unknowns," said Rachel Bitecofer, the Wason Center's assistant director. "Stewart may be better known than the others, but two out of three voters couldn't offer a substantive opinion on him, either."

Hypothetical matchups between Kaine and Stewart, Jackson and Freitas underscore the challenge the eventual Republican nominee will face. Partly due to Kaine's high name recognition as an incumbent senator and as Hillary Clinton's running mate in 2016, and partly due to strong headwinds for Republicans in the midterm cycle, Kaine enjoys 23 or more point leads against his potential GOP challengers. Head-to-head, Kaine polls consistently at 56%, while his potential rivals poll around 33%. "That says less about the candidates and more about the size of the Republican base – the locked-in vote against Kaine," Bitecofer said.

The survey of 1,562 registered Virginia voters has an overall margin of error of +/-2.5%.

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

1. Right 57
 2. Mixed (vol) 13
 3. Wrong 26
 9. Dk/ref (vol) 4

Q2: And how about the country...overall, would you say things in the UNITED STATES are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

1. Right 32
 2. Mixed (vol) 11
 3. Wrong 56
 9. Dk/ref (vol) 1

TRUMP: Do you approve or disapprove of the job Donald Trump is doing as President?

	All	Male	Female	Black	White	18-44	45+	Nova	Rich	HR	S/west	Lib	Mod	Cons	Dem	Ind	Rep	Trump Voter
Strongly Approve	23	28	19	4	28	15	28	29	24	17	19	4	13	57	2	17	60	59
Somewhat Approve	14	16	12	3	16	14	13	16	11	13	15	2	14	20	2	16	24	27
Somewhat Disapprove	8	9	7	10	8	11	6	7	7	10	8	5	10	5	7	9	6	6
Strongly Disapprove	52	44	59	81	45	57	50	45	56	55	55	88	60	14	88	53	6	5
Undecided/ Dk/Ref (vol)	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	5	3	1	3	4	1	5	4	3

Q3: I'd like to get your overall opinion of some people in the news. As I read each name, tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of them. **[ROTATE NAMES]**

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion/DK
a. Nick Freitas	4	9	87
b. E.W. Jackson	7	10	83
c. Tim Kaine	53	35	12
d. Corey Stewart	13	20	67

Q5: [ASK OF REPUBLICAN & INDEPENDENT LEAN REPUBLICAN ONLY] If the Republican primary for U.S. Senate 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]

	All	Male	Female	Nova	Rich	HR	S/west	18-44	45 +	Mod	Cons	Trump Voter
Nick Freitas	6	8	5	3	10	8	7	8	5	7	6	6
E.W. Jackson	7	6	8	7	5	6	7	8	6	5	7	7
Ivan Raiklin	1	0	2	1	1	3	0	1	1	1	1	1
Corey Stewart	16	16	14	17	17	13	14	12	17	12	18	20
Someone else	4	5	2	5	3	3	4	6	3	3	4	3
Undecided/ Dk/ref (vol)	66	65	69	67	64	67	68	65	68	72	64	63

Q6: [ASK ALL] If the election for U.S. Senate 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]**

1. Tim Kaine, the Democrat	56
2. Nick Freitas, the Republican	33
3. Someone else (vol)	1
9. Undecided/Dk/ref (vol)	10

Q7: [ASK ALL] If the election for U.S. Senate 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]**

1. Tim Kaine, the Democrat	56
2. E.W. Jackson, the Republican	32
3. Someone else (vol)	1
9. Undecided/Dk/ref (vol)	11

Q8: [ASK ALL] If the election for U.S. Senate 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]**

1. Tim Kaine, the Democrat	56
2. Corey Stewart, the Republican	32
3. Someone else (vol)	1
9. Undecided/Dk/ref (vol)	11

Additional questions held for release on Wednesday, March 7, 2018

Demographics

EDUC:

High school or less	12
Some college	19
Vocational or technical training	2
College graduate	40
Graduate study or more	27

HISPANIC:

Yes	5
No	95

RACE:

White	72
Black or African American	19
Other	9

MIL OR RETIRED MIL IN HOUSE:

Yes	33
No	67

AGE:

18-24	9
25-34	12
35-44	15
45-54	23
55 & older	41

PARTYID:

Republican	27
Democrat	32
Independent	38
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	4
\$25-\$49,999	10
\$50-\$74,999	16
\$75-\$99,999	15
\$100,000-\$149,999	19
Over \$150,000	24
Dk/ref (vol)	12

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 1,562 interviews of registered Virginia voters, including 763 on landline and 799 on cell phone, conducted February 5-28, 2018. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The margin of error for the whole survey is +/- 2.5 % 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 47.5% and 52.5%.** 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 20%. 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 population of registered voters in Virginia.