Gillespie leads GOP contest for Virginia governor; Northam, Perriello tied for Democrats' nomination

Summary of Key Findings

1. Former Congressman Tom Perriello is tied at 26% with Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam in the Democratic primary for governor.

2. Former Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie has a commanding lead (38%) in the Republican primary for governor.

3. The 2016 party divisions persist. Sanders voters prefer 'insurgent' Perriello; Clinton voters prefer 'establishment' favorite Northam. 'Establishment' candidate Gillespie underperforms among Trump voters.

4. Susan Platt, former chief of staff to Senator Joe Biden, leads the Democratic field for lieutenant governor, with most voters undecided.

5. State Senator Jill Vogel leads the field for the Republican nomination for lieutenant governor, but a majority of voters are undecided.

6. President Donald Trump's approval rating among Virginia voters is 37%, with 59% disapproving of the job he is doing as president.

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Analysis

With just more than two months before Virginians go to the polls to select their party's nominees for statewide office, most candidates are still largely unknown to voters. Current Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam and former congressman Tom Perriello are locked in a dead-even race in the Democratic primary for governor. Both have 26% of the vote, with just under half (45%) saying they are undecided. Former Republican National Committee Chair Ed Gillespie is the best known candidate in the June 13 election and leads the GOP field for governor by a wide margin, with 38%, compared to 11% for Prince William County Chairman Corey Stewart and 10% for Virginia Beach state Senator Frank Wagner. More than a third of Republicans (38%) are undecided.

In the Republican contest for lieutenant governor, state Senator Jill Vogel (17%) leads Delegate Glenn Davis (13%) and state Senator Bryce Reeves (10%). On the Democratic slate for lieutenant governor, Susan Platt, former chief of staff for Senator Joe Biden, leads former federal prosecutors Justin Fairfax and Gene Rossi. Platt has 20% of the vote to Fairfax's 11% and Rossi's 6%. In both primaries, a majority of voters are undecided which candidate they support for lieutenant governor.

Gillespie's primary lead is strong across all demographic categories. Regionally, he has a strong showing in Richmond-Central Virginia (45%) and South/Southwest (47%). He has particular strength among men, voters older than 45, and ideological conservatives. Among voters who participated in last year's Republican presidential primary in Virginia, Gillespie does well among those who voted for Marco Rubio (44%), Ted Cruz (48%), and John Kasich (70%). But at 32% among Republicans who supported President Donald Trump in the 2016 primary, Gillespie underperforms his statewide margin by 6%. Stewart (11%) and Wagner (11%) show no particular strength among Trump voters in last year's primary. Both cut into Gillespie's lead with strength in their home regions. Stewart's 18% showing in Northern Virginia outperforms his statewide total, as does Wagner's 23% showing in Hampton Roads.

This year's Democratic contest shows a clear divide among voters who favored Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders in last year's Virginia presidential primary. Clinton voters favor Northam (34%) over Perriello (25%). But Sanders voters back Perriello (32%) over Northam (21%). Northam's strength lies with voters in his home region of Hampton Roads (33%), while Perriello's strength lies with voters in the Richmond-central (33%) and South/Southwest (43%) regions. Perriello also overperforms his statewide margin among voters younger than 45 (37%) and self-identified liberals (30%). Significantly, both candidates underperform in Northern Virginia, but Perriello's showing is particularly weak in that Democratic-leaning region. African-American voters, a crucial bloc in the Democratic coalition, are evenly divided between Northam (22%) and Perriello (24%). Men show a slight preference for Northam, while women show a slight preference for Perriello.

"Just a few months ago, nobody expected to be saying that the real action in this primary would be on the Democratic side, but that's where it is," said Quentin Kidd,

director of the Wason Center for Public Policy. "The Democratic primary for governor looks to be a replay in some respects of last year's presidential primary."

"A Trump effect adds some uncertainty to the Republican contest," said Rachel Bitecofer, assistant director of the Wason Center. "Gillespie, the establishment favorite, is underperforming among voters who preferred Trump to all those insider Republicans last year. But Stewart and Wagner don't seem to be picking them up, either."

Most Virginia voters say they disapprove of how Donald Trump is handling his job as president. Trump's job approval stands at 37%, with 59% disapproving. Virginia voters are mostly unhappy with the direction of the country. They are mostly happy with the direction of the state.

Q1: Overall, would you say things in the UNITED STATES are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

Right   37
Mixed (vol)   7
Wrong   55
Dk/ref (vol)   1

Q2: 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?

Right   50
Mixed (vol)   9
Wrong   25
Dk/ref (vol)   4

Q3: [READ] 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]**

Approve   37
Disapprove   59
Dk/ref (vol)   4

Q4: Several people have announced they are running for Governor of Virginia in 2017. As I read each name, 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.

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion	Ref (vol)
a. Ed Gillespie	23	15	58	4
b. Ralph Northam	15	9	71	6
c. Corey Stewart	11	12	71	6
d. Frank Wagner	11	8	75	7
e. Tom Perriello	16	10	69	6

[REPUBLICAN & INDEPENDENT LEAN REPUBLCAN ONLY, n=349 / MofE +/- 5.7%. MofE for subgroup is higher.]

Q12: If the Republican 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]**

	All	Male	Female	Nova	Rich	HR	S/west	18-44	45+	Mod	Cons	Trump Approve	Trump Disapprove	Trump	Rubio	Cruz	Kasich
Ed Gillespie	38	42	33	32	45	29	47	29	40	35	40	39	33	32	44	48	70
Corey Stewart	11	10	12	18	10	4	8	15	10	8	12	11	10	11	11	4	4
Frank Wagner	10	9	10	7	4	23	8	13	9	12	9	8	14	11	9	4	9
Someone else (vol)	3	2	3		1	5	7	8	1	3	2	3	1	4	2	4	
Undecided/ Dk/ref (vol)	38	36	42	44	40	39	30	36	40	42	36	38	41	42	33	40	17

Q13: If the Republican 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]**

	All	Male	Female	Nova	Rich	HR	S/west	18-44	45+	Mod	Cons
Glenn Davis	13	15	12	12	8	26	9	15	13	10	15
Jill Vogel	17	17	17	16	19	16	19	30	15	22	13
Bryce Reeves	10	8	11	5	14	4	19	3	11	8	11
Someone else (vol)	3	2	4	4	1	1	4	2	3	4	3
Undecided/ Dk/ref (vol)	57	57	56	63	58	53	49	51	58	57	59

[DEMOCRAT & INDEPENDENT LEAN DEMOCRAT ONLY, n=391 / MofE +/- 5.4%. MofE for subgroups is higher.]

Q14: 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]**

	All	Male	Female	White	Black	Nova	Rich	HR	S/west	18-44	45+	Lib	Mod	Clinton	Sanders
Ralph Northam	26	31	23	28	22	22	27	33	23	18	29	29	20	34	21
Tom Perriello	26	27	26	26	24	14	38	19	43	37	23	30	23	25	32
Someone else (vol)	3	3	2	3	2	2	7	2		2	3	2	4	3	2
Undecided/ Dk/ref (vol)	45	40	49	43	52	62	27	46	34	43	45	39	53	38	45

Q15: 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]**

	All	Male	Female	White	Black	Nova	Rich	HR	S/west	18-44	45+	Lib	Mod
Justin Fairfax	11	15	9	12	8	14	16	8	7	23	8	13	10
Gene Rossi	6	5	7	6	7	4	4	9	9	7	6	5	4
Susan Platt	20	16	23	15	28	9	30	29	15	24	19	18	20
Someone else (vol)	3	2	3	3	3	3	5	2	1	2	3	1	3
Undecided/ Dk/ref (vol)	60	61	59	65	54	70	46	52	68	44	64	63	63

Questions 16-22, 28-29 held for later release

Q23: Ok thanks. Thinking back to last year's presidential election, did you vote in the 2016 election for president?
Yes   76
No   20
Don't remember (vol)   2
Don't know/refused (vol)   2

Q24: **[ASK IF YES ON Q23]** And did you vote for Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump?
Clinton   50
Trump   37
Someone else (vol)   12
Don't know/refused (vol.)   1

Q25: And what about in last year's presidential primary, did you vote in the 2016 Democratic or Republican presidential primary?
Democratic   37
Republican   34
Did not vote   26
Don't know/refused (vol)   2

Q26: **[ASK IF DEMOCRATIC ON Q25]** And did you vote for Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, or someone else?
Hillary Clinton   59
Bernie Sanders   37
Someone else (vol)   3
Undecided/Dk/ref (vol)   1

Q27: **[ASK IF REPUBLICAN ON Q25]** And did you vote for Donald Trump, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, John Kasich, Ben Carson, or someone else?
Donald Trump   37
Marco Rubio   25
Ted Cruz   11
John Kasich   13
Ben Carson   7
Someone else (vol)   4
Undecided/Dk/ref (vol)   2

Demographics

EDUC:

High school or less	12
Some college	19
Vocational or technical training	2
College graduate	35
Graduate study or more	32

HISPANIC:

Yes	4
No	96

RACE:

White	72
Black or African American	19
Other	9

RELIG:

Protestant	30
Christian (non-specific) (vol)	15
Catholic	16
Jewish	2
Other	15
None (vol)	18
Dk/ref (vol)	3

PARTYID:

Republican	27
Democrat	30
Independent	39
No preference (vol)	2
Other party (vol)	1
Dk/ref (vol)	1

[IF OTHER THAN REP OR DEM ABOVE]
PARTLEAN:

Republican	36
Democratic	38
Independent	21
Dk/ref (vol)	5

IDEOL:

Strong liberal	6
Liberal	13
Moderate, leaning liberal	24
Moderate, leaning conservative	21
Conservative	19
Strong Conservative	10
Dk/ref (vol)	6

AGE:

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

INCOME:

Under $25,000	5
$25-$49,999	12
$50-$74,999	15
$75-$99,999	14
$100,000-$149,999	19
Over $150,000	24
Dk/ref (vol)	11

REGION:

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

SEX:

Male	49
Female	51

How the survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 831 interviews of registered Virginia voters, including 414 on landline and 417 on cell phone, conducted March 16-26, 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 1.2 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 18%. 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 Virginia.