

Oct. 31, 2014

Warner leads Gillespie, 51-44, as election nears; likely voters say attack ads have not swayed them

Summary of Key Findings

1. In the final days leading up to the Nov. 4 U.S. Senate election, some undecideds have gone for Republican Ed Gillespie, but Democrat Mark Warner holds a solid 51% to 44% lead, with only 3% undecided.
2. Warner's broad appeal has held throughout the election, as independents, ideological moderates and some ideological conservatives continue to add to his strong lead among Democrats, women and African-Americans. He leads in every region except Southside/Southwest.
3. Most voters have seen the negative ads leveled against each candidate by the other, but say the issues raised have had no effect on their choice.
4. Libertarian Robert Sarvis appears to be a negligible factor in this election, with only 2% support.
5. Voters are satisfied with the number of candidate debates.

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Analysis

Heading into the Final Days: In the Wason Center's final statewide survey of likely voters before Election Day, Mark Warner holds a solid lead over Ed Gillespie for U.S. Senate, 51% to 44%. The Wason Center likely voter model takes into consideration how much thought registered voters have given to the upcoming elections, how closely they are following news about the elections, and how certain they are to vote. Libertarian Robert Sarvis has 2% support, and 3% say they are undecided.

While Warner's share of the vote remains similar to the Wason Center's October 7 survey, in which he had 51%, Gillespie's share has grown from 39% to 44%. The numbers of both undecided voters and supporters of Libertarian Robert Sarvis have shrunk since the earlier poll, accounting for Gillespie's increased support. As it has the entire election season, Warner's lead rests upon a broad political foundation. He continues to show solid support from Democrats and liberals, but also a sizeable level of support from moderate and conservative voters. Warner is in a stronger position with Democrats (97%) than Gillespie is with Republicans (89%), and has the support of 54% of Independents, compared with 41% for Gillespie. Warner more than doubles Gillespie among ideological moderates, 65% to 30%. A very large majority of ideological conservatives back Gillespie (84%), but a significant segment favors Warner (12%). Warner also continues to hold a sizeable lead among women (53% to 43%), and carries the male vote (50% to 45%). Warner leads Gillespie in the "Golden Crescent" from Northern Virginia to Richmond to Hampton Roads, and trails him only in Southside/Southwest Virginia. His biggest lead is in Richmond/Central Virginia, where he has a 62% to 34% advantage over Gillespie. Gillespie leads Warner in Southside/Southwest, 55% to 41%, a region where Warner never reached 50% and has lost support during the course of the election, according to Wason Center polling.

At just 2%, the Sarvis vote is much less a factor than it appeared at this point last year, when the Libertarian was on the gubernatorial ballot against Democrat Terry McAuliffe and Republican Ken Cuccinelli. Sarvis drew 10% among likely voters in the Wason Center's Nov. 1, 2013 gubernatorial poll. His final election tally was just under 7% -- more than the margin by which McAuliffe defeated Cuccinelli.

The last several weeks of this year's campaign have seen a turn to negative advertising, with both the Gillespie and Warner campaigns charging each other with ethically questionable behavior. The Gillespie campaign has accused Warner of trying to persuade former state senator Phil Puckett not to resign his seat by talking with a family member about a job or a federal judgeship for Puckett's daughter. The Warner campaign has accused Gillespie of being a lobbyist for Enron and running a lobbying firm that represented foreign governments run by dictators. Both campaigns have blanketed the state's airwaves with negative ads in the last weeks of the campaign.

"This turn negative does not seem to have changed the fundamental dynamics of the campaign," said Dr. Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center for Public Policy. "The Gillespie commercials do not appear to have dislodged any voters who were already committed to Warner, though they may have attracted the support of some voters who were undecided."

Asked if they had heard the Gillespie charges against Warner, 20% of voters said they had heard a lot and another 25% said they had heard some; but 85% of voters said the issue had no effect on their choice.

Asked if they had heard the Warner charges against Gillespie, 32% of voters said they had heard a lot and another 30% said they had heard some; but 78% of voters said the issue had no effect on their choice.

Virginia voters appear to be satisfied with the number of debates held between the two candidates, with 48% saying three is enough, and 32% saying they would like to see more. Nearly two in ten (17%) said three debates was too many.

“As we close in on Election Day, the Warner advantages that we first noted in our January 2014 poll – that he was in a strong position with his own party, had a solid toe-hold with Republicans, and had a good position amongst ideological moderates – seem to have held from start to finish,” said Kidd.

If the election were held TODAY would you vote for [Randomize: “Ed Gillespie the Republican” “Mark Warner the Democrat” “Robert Sarvis the Libertarian”]?		LV n=634	Dem	Rep	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black
	Warner	51	97	6	54	50	53	43	97
	Gillespie	44	2	89	41	45	43	53	1
	Sarvis	2		1	4	2	2	2	
	Undecided /Dk (vol)	3	1	4	2	3	3	2	2

	Ideol Lib	Ideol Mod	Ideol Cons	NOVA	Rich/ Central	HR	South/ Southwest
Warner	97	65	12	51	62	53	41
Gillespie	1	30	84	45	34	43	55
Sarvis		2	1	1	2	2	3
Undecided /Dk (vol)	2	3	3	3	1	2	1

In recent weeks the Gillespie campaign has accused Mark Warner of trying to persuade former Virginia state senator Phil Puckett not to resign his seat in the Virginia Senate by talking with a family member of Puckett's about a job or a federal judgeship for his daughter. Nothing illegal has been alleged. The Warner campaign says it was just a conversation, and nothing was promised. How much have you heard about this issue?	A lot	20
	Some	25
	A little	24
	None	31

Has this issue made you...	Less certain of your vote choice...	3
	More certain of your vote choice...	11
	Had no effect on your vote choice...	85
	Dk/ref (vol)	1

In recent weeks the Warner campaign has accused Ed Gillespie of being a lobbyist for Enron, and for running a lobbying firm that represented foreign governments run by dictators. Nothing illegal has been alleged. The Gillespie campaign says Gillespie was not working for the firm at the time it represented those countries, and the firm cut ties with Enron after it collapsed. How much have you heard about these issues?	A lot	32
	Some	30
	A little	19
	None	19

Has this issue made you...	Less certain of your vote choice...	4
	More certain of your vote choice...	16
	Had no effect on your vote choice...	78
	Dk/ref (vol)	2

In recent elections, including in this election for U.S. Senate, the candidates have participated in as few as three public debates. In your view, is this enough, would you like to see candidates for statewide office in Virginia debate more, or is three debates too many?	Three is enough	48
	Debate more	32
	Three is too many	17
	Dk/ref (vol)	3

Full Toplines

Q1. Thank you. As you know, this November Virginia will hold elections for U.S. Senate and Congress. I'd like to get a sense of how closely you have been following news about these elections, would you say very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely, or not at all?

Very closely	27
Somewhat closely	58
Not very closely	13
Not at all	3

Q2. And how likely are you to vote in the upcoming November elections, would you say that you are absolutely certain, fairly certain, not certain, or not likely to vote?

Absolutely certain	87
Fairly certain	10
Not certain	1
Not likely	2

Q3: And thinking about that 2014 election for U.S. Senate... if the election were held TODAY would you vote for [RANDOMIZE: "Ed Gillespie the Republican", "Mark Warner the Democrat", "Robert Sarvis the Libertarian"]?

[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ("DON'T KNOW", "DEPENDS", "NOT SURE", ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH: Which one are you leaning toward right now?]

Warner	51
Gillespie	44
Sarvis	2
Undecided (vol)	3

[Q4/Q5 & Q6/Q7 ROTATED]

Q4: In recent weeks the Gillespie campaign has accused Mark Warner of trying to persuade former Virginia state senator Phil Puckett not to resign his seat in the Virginia Senate by talking with a family member of Puckett's about a job or a federal judgeship for his daughter. Nothing illegal has been alleged. The Warner campaign says it was just a conversation, and nothing was promised. How much have you heard about this issue?

A lot	20
Some	25
A little	24
None	31

Q5: Has this issue made you...

Less certain of your vote choice	3
More certain of your vote choice	11
Had no effect on your vote choice	85
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q6: In recent weeks the Warner campaign has accused Ed Gillespie of being a lobbyist for Enron, and for running a lobbying firm that represented foreign governments run by dictators. Nothing illegal has been alleged. The Gillespie campaign says Gillespie was not working for the firm at the time it represented those countries, and the firm cut ties with Enron after it collapsed. How much have you heard about these issues?

A lot	32
Some	30
A little	19
None	19

Q7: Have these issues made you...

Less certain of your vote choice	4
More certain of your vote choice	16
Had no effect on your vote choice	78
Dk/ref (vol)	2

Q8: In recent elections, including in this election for U.S. Senate, the candidates have participated in as few as three public debates. In your view, is this enough, would you like to see candidates for statewide office in Virginia debate more, or is three debates too many?

Three is enough	48
Debate more	32
Three is too many	17
Dk/ref (vol)	3

Demographics (weighted)

EDUC: What is the last grade of school or college you had the opportunity to complete?

High school or less	14
Some college	18
Vocational or technical training	1
College graduate	36
Graduate study or more	30

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

Yes	3
No	97

RACE: Do you consider yourself to be:

White	75
Black or African American	16
Other	9

AGE: (Recorded as exact year of birth)

18-24	5
25-34	11
35-44	17
45-54	23
55 & older	44

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

Protestant	36
Christian (non-specific) (vol)	11
Catholic	13
Jewish	3
Other	18
None	15
Dk/ref (vol)	4

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

Strong liberal	5
Liberal	11
Moderate, leaning liberal	23
Moderate, leaning conservative	16
Conservative	22
Strong Conservative	14
Dk/ref (vol)	9

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

Democrat	35
Republican	34
Independent	27
None/Other (vol)	4

SEX: [INTERVIEWER CODE]

Male	49
Female	51

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

Under \$25,000	6
\$25-\$49,999	11
\$50-\$74,999	20
\$75-\$99,999	16
\$100,000-\$149,999	17
Over \$150,000	17
Dk/ref (vol)	12

REGION:

Northern Virginia	35
Richmond/Central	20
Hampton Roads	22
South/Southwest	23

How the survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 815 interviews of registered Virginia voters (of which 634 are considered likely voters), including 494 on landline and 321 on cell phone, conducted Oct. 23-29, 2014. 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. The margin of error for the likely voter model is +/- 3.9% at the 95% level of confidence. 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%. Three 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 registered voters in Virginia. The survey was designed by Dr. Quentin Kidd of the Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University.