

Oct. 12, 2015

Clinton top choice among Virginia Democrats, but Biden performs better against Republicans

Summary of Key Findings

1. Hillary Clinton is the top choice among Democrats, but her lead drops dramatically since April.
2. Clinton beats only Donald Trump and Ted Cruz in hypothetical head-to-head 2016 matchups.
3. Joe Biden beats every Republican candidate in hypothetical head-to-head 2016 matchups.
4. Trump still leads Republicans but also has the highest unfavorable ranking of any candidate of either party.
5. Ben Carson, who is second among Republicans, cuts into Democrats' traditional advantage with African Americans and younger voters.
6. 2nd choices show that many GOP voters cluster around "outsiders" Trump, Carson and Carly Fiorina vs. "establishment" candidates.

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Analysis

Mirroring the national dynamic, the vulnerability of establishment favorites for the 2016 presidential nomination in both parties is clear in the results of a poll of Virginia voters by the Wason Center for Public Policy. “Outsider” candidates Donald Trump and Ben Carson dominate Virginia Republican voters’ preferences in the crowded contest for their party’s nomination. And Virginia Democratic voters are seriously considering alternatives to Hillary Clinton, whose overwhelming lead has dropped by half since spring. With more than a year to the general election, and 5 months to go before a primary vote, Virginia voters are already tuned in to the 2016 presidential race.

Virginia voters are already engaged in the 2016 contests. Virginia voters appear ready to do their part in the Commonwealth’s pivotal role in deciding the next president. Five months from the first 2016 votes in the state – the March 1 Super Tuesday primary – a strong majority of voters are thinking about the elections and following news about the candidates. Nearly half (47%) say they’ve given quite a lot of thought to the upcoming primary elections, and 75% have given at least some thought.

Additionally, 41% of voters say they are following news about the candidates for president very closely, and 84% are following news about the presidential candidates at least somewhat closely.

Q1: As you know, this coming March Virginia will hold primary elections for president. How much <u>thought</u> have you given to these upcoming presidential primary elections...	Quite a lot	47
	Some	28
	Only a little	19
	None (vol)	6
	Dk/ref (vol)	

Q2: And how closely have you have been <u>following</u> news about the candidates for president, would you say...	Very closely	41
	Somewhat closely	43
	Not very closely	12
	Not at all (vol)	4
	Dk/ref (vol)	

Biden has the highest favorable rank; Trump the highest unfavorable. Vice President Joe Biden was not an official candidate for president while this survey was in the field, but Virginia voters have a more favorable view of him than any of the declared candidates, with 46% of registered voters saying they have a favorable view and 40% saying they have an unfavorable view. Retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson follows right behind Biden, with a 44% favorable rating. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has a 39% favorable rating, but also has an unfavorable rating above 50%, at 53%. Former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina's favorability rating stands at 38%, with 31% saying they have an unfavorable view of her, and 31% saying they don't know.

The candidate leading the Republican field nationally, Donald Trump, has a 30% favorable rating and a 61% unfavorable rating – the highest unfavorable rating of all the candidates of either party. In addition to Trump and Clinton, the other candidates with unfavorable ratings above 50% are former senator Rick Santorum (51%) and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee (52%). Several candidates have work to do in terms of introducing themselves to Virginia voters, including former Rhode Island senator Lincoln Chafee, former New York governor George Pataki, former Maryland governor Martin O'Malley, and Ohio governor John Kasich. A majority of voters say they don't know enough about them to have a view either way. Home-state status does not seem to help how voters view former governor Jim Gilmore or former senator Jim Webb. Both Gilmore and Webb have favorability ratings at 22%. Almost half (46%) say they don't know enough about Webb to have a view.

Q3. I'm going to read the names of some people in the news who have either announced or have been mentioned as possible candidates for president in 2016. For each one, please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable view of them, or if you don't know enough about them to have an opinion either way.				
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Don't know	Refused (vol)
Joe Biden	46	40	14	
Ben Carson	44	33	23	
Hillary Clinton	39	53	8	
Carly Fiorina	38	31	31	
Marco Rubio	36	35	28	
Jeb Bush	35	48	17	
Bernie Sanders	33	38	29	
Chris Christie	32	43	25	
Rand Paul	30	43	26	
Donald Trump	30	61	8	1
Ted Cruz	24	47	29	
Mike Huckabee	23	52	25	
Jim Webb	22	33	46	
Jim Gilmore	22	39	39	
John Kasich	19	25	56	
Bobby Jindal	14	40	46	
Rick Santorum	14	51	35	
Lindsey Graham	12	45	42	1
Martin O'Malley	11	31	58	
George Pataki	6	35	58	1
Lincoln Chafee	2	25	72	1

Leading pack emerges in large Republican field. A few candidates stand out at the top of the poll results, with the rest of the 15-person field as the first choice of 5% or fewer Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. In the pack of leaders, no single candidate has jumped far ahead. Donald Trump leads with 23%. Ben Carson is in second place with 17%, followed by Marco Rubio at 14% and Carly Fiorina at 13%. Jeb Bush has the support of 9% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents.

As the field shrinks, Carson is likely to be the biggest beneficiary, as the second choice of 22% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. Fiorina is the second choice of 18%, followed by Bush and Rubio with 10%. Trump is the second choice of 9%.

Second choices also show a substantial bloc of Republican voters clustered around “outsiders” Trump, Carson and Fiorina. Of Carson voters, 61% would choose Trump or Fiorina second. Voters who prefer Trump break 52% for Carson or Fiorina second. Of those who choose Fiorina first, 40% would choose Carson or Trump second.

“There is a clear pack of leaders in the crowded Republican field,” said Tom Kramer, Assistant Director of the Wason Center for Public Policy. “But the order of that pack is likely to change as candidates drop from the race, and Ben Carson and Carly Fiorina seem to be positioned to move up.”

REPUBLICAN OR INDEPENDENT LEAN REPUBLICAN; n=412 (MoE = +/- 5.1%)

Q4: Let’s say the 2016 Republican presidential primary in Virginia were being held today. I’m going to read a list of names of people who have either announced or have been mentioned as possible candidates, and I’d like you to tell me for whom you would vote...the candidates are: **[ROTATE NAMES]**

Q5: And who would be your second choice? **[NAMES SAME ORDER AS Q4]**

	First Choice	Second Choice
Donald Trump	23	9
Ben Carson	17	22
Marco Rubio	14	10
Carly Fiorina	13	18
Jeb Bush	9	10
Ted Cruz	5	5
Chris Christie	4	4
Mike Huckabee	3	3
John Kasich	2	1
Rand Paul	2	2
Lindsey Graham	1	1
Rick Santorum	<1	1
George Pataki	<1	1
Bobby Jindal	<1	<1
Jim Gilmore	<1	<1
Someone else (vol)	1	2
Undecided/Dk/ref (vol)	5	10

Clinton's position drops among Virginia Democrats. Virginia Democrats' enthusiasm for Hillary Clinton has waned since April. If the 2016 Democratic primary in Virginia were held today, Clinton would garner 40% of the Democratic and Democrat-leaning vote, down from 80% in the Wason Center survey of Virginia voters in April. Clinton's lead has been dramatically cut by Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden, both of whom take 23% of the vote. At the time of this survey, Biden had not declared his candidacy. In April, Sanders took 2% of the vote and Biden took 5% of the vote.

Biden is the second choice of 37% of Virginia Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents, followed by Clinton at 31% and Sanders at 11%. Jim Webb's home-state status does not seem to help much, with 5% of voters saying he is their first choice, and 3% saying he is their second choice.

"Virginia Democrats are hesitating on Clinton," said Dr. Quentin Kidd, Director of the Wason Center for Public Policy. "While she continues to lead, the fact that Sanders' campaign and Biden's potential candidacy have cut her lead in half shows that they are looking seriously at alternatives."

DEMOCRAT OR INDEPENDENT LEAN DEMOCRAT; n=407 (MoE = +/- 5.1%)

Q6: Let's say the 2016 Democratic presidential primary in Virginia were being held today. I'm going to read a list of names of people who have either announced or have been mentioned as possible candidates, and I'd like you to tell me for whom you would vote...the candidates are: **[ROTATE NAMES]**

Q7: And who would be your second choice? **[NAMES SAME ORDER AS Q6]**

	First Choice	Second Choice
Hillary Clinton	40	31
Joe Biden	23	37
Bernie Sanders	23	11
Jim Webb	5	3
Martin O'Malley	2	3
Lincoln Chafee	<1	1
Someone else (vol)	1	4
Undecided/Dk/ref (vol)	5	10

Biden polls stronger against Republicans, as Clinton weakens. If the presidential election were held today, only Joe Biden would win against the entire field of potential Republican candidates. In head-to-head matchups, Biden beats all Republicans by between 4 points and 17 points. Biden is strongest against Donald Trump (+17) and Ted Cruz (+17) and weakest against Ben Carson (+4) and Jeb Bush (+5). Hillary Clinton loses to all Republicans except Trump (+7) and Cruz (+8). Her biggest loss would be to Ben Carson, who beats her by 6 points. Bernie Sanders would also lose to all Republicans except Trump (+12), Cruz (+10) and Rubio (+1). Sanders' biggest loss is also to Ben Carson, who beats him by 10 points.

Key to any Democratic candidate's chances of winning Virginia are younger voters, African American voters, and women voters. All three Democrats perform best among Millennial voters (age 18-34) when they face Trump and Cruz. Carson performs better among Millennial voters than any other Republican, taking between 36% and 39% against Biden, Sanders, and Clinton.

Among African American votes, Carson is able to reduce the traditionally strong Democratic preference. Against Clinton, Carson takes 14% of the African American vote. Against Sanders, he takes 25%. Biden is the only Democrat who is able to hold Carson's share of the African American vote below 10%, giving up 9% to Carson.

Among women voters, Biden performs consistently better than Clinton against the top seven Republicans, while Sanders gives up the most. Biden performs best among women in any single matchup, taking 58% of the female vote against Trump and 56% against Cruz. Sanders loses the female vote to Carson, and ties among women with Fiorina, 41% to 41%. Against Clinton, Fiorina loses the female vote 48% to 41%.

"With so many candidates in the field, things are a little fluid in Virginia," said Kidd. "It is clear, though, that Clinton's once dominant position is no longer. Virginia Democrats are intrigued by Joe Biden, but younger voters are also intrigued by Bernie Sanders. Republicans also have a set of candidates who seem to be able to peel voters from the traditional Democratic coalition of young voters, African Americans, and women."

Clinton vs. the Republican field

Q8: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Hillary Clinton, the Democrat, or Donald Trump, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Clinton	47	35	90	39	55	61	43
Trump	40	50	5	48	32	48	42
Someone else (vol)	8	9	2	9	7	9	9
Undecided (vol)	6	6	3	5	6	5	6

Q9: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Hillary Clinton, the Democrat, or Ben Carson, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Clinton	43	33	79	36	49	49	41
Carson	49	59	14	57	41	37	52
Someone else (vol)	3	3	2	4	3	3	3
Undecided (vol)	6	5	5	3	7	11	4

Q10: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Hillary Clinton, the Democrat or Carly Fiorina, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Clinton	43	32	81	36	48	48	41
Fiorina	47	59	6	54	41	32	51
Someone else (vol)	4	4	6	5	4	7	4
Undecided (vol)	6	5	8	6	7	14	4

Q11: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Hillary Clinton, the Democrat or Jeb Bush, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Clinton	43	31	89	36	50	55	40
Bush	46	57	6	53	39	31	49
Someone else (vol)	5	6	4	6	4	6	5
Undecided (vol)	6	6	3	5	7	8	6

Q12: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Hillary Clinton, the Democrat or Marco Rubio, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Clinton	45	33	87	39	50	52	43
Rubio	45	56	5	50	40	29	49
Someone else (vol)	4	4	3	4	3	4	4
Undecided (vol)	7	7	6	7	7	15	5

Q13: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Hillary Clinton, the Democrat or Ted Cruz, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Clinton	49	39	90	44	54	60	46
Cruz	41	50	5	47	35	24	45
Someone else (vol)	5	5	3	5	4	6	4
Undecided (vol)	6	6	4	4	7	10	5

Q14: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Hillary Clinton, the Democrat, or Chris Christie, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Clinton	42	31	85	36	48	49	40
Christie	47	58	9	52	41	36	49
Someone else (vol)	4	5	1	6	3	3	5
Undecided (vol)	7	7	6	6	9	12	7

Sanders vs. the Republican field

Q15: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Bernie Sanders, the Democrat or Donald Trump, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Sanders	49	41	78	44	53	64	45
Trump	37	48	6	45	30	22	41
Someone else (vol)	6	6	7	5	8	5	7
Undecided (vol)	8	6	10	6	9	9	7

Q16: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Bernie Sanders, the Democrat or Ben Carson, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Sanders	39	34	59	37	41	50	36
Carson	49	56	25	54	43	39	51
Someone else (vol)	4	4	5	4	4	2	5
Undecided (vol)	8	6	11	5	11	9	8

Q17: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Bernie Sanders, the Democrat or Carly Fiorina, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Sanders	39	33	65	38	41	50	36
Fiorina	44	54	14	48	41	28	49
Someone else (vol)	6	5	7	6	6	7	6
Undecided (vol)	10	8	15	9	12	15	9

Q18: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Bernie Sanders, the Democrat or Jeb Bush, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Sanders	41	34	75	40	42	55	38
Bush	46	56	9	50	41	32	49
Someone else (vol)	6	4	8	5	6	4	6
Undecided (vol)	7	6	9	5	10	10	7

Q19: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Bernie Sanders, the Democrat or Marco Rubio, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Sanders	43	35	75	41	44	59	39
Rubio	42	52	8	47	37	26	46
Someone else (vol)	5	5	7	5	6	4	6
Undecided (vol)	10	8	11	6	13	11	9

Q20: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Bernie Sanders, the Democrat or Ted Cruz, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Sanders	47	40	77	46	47	60	43
Cruz	37	46	4	42	32	22	40
Someone else (vol)	6	5	7	5	7	6	6
Undecided (vol)	11	9	13	8	14	12	10

Q21: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Bernie Sanders, the Democrat or Chris Christie, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Sanders	41	34	72	40	43	56	38
Christie	44	54	15	49	40	28	48
Someone else (vol)	5	5	6	5	6	3	6
Undecided (vol)	9	8	8	7	11	12	8

Biden vs. the Republican field

Q22: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Joe Biden, the Democrat or Donald Trump, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Biden	54	45	86	48	58	64	51
Trump	37	46	7	43	31	25	40
Someone else (vol)	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
Undecided (vol)	5	4	4	4	6	6	5

Q23: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Joe Biden, the Democrat or Ben Carson, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Biden	48	39	84	42	53	55	46
Carson	44	54	9	53	36	36	46
Someone else (vol)	3	3	3	2	4	2	3
Undecided (vol)	5	5	4	3	8	8	5

Q24: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Joe Biden, the Democrat or Carly Fiorina, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Biden	48	37	85	44	51	56	46
Fiorina	42	53	7	48	37	31	45
Someone else (vol)	3	3	3	2	4	3	3
Undecided (vol)	7	6	6	7	7	10	6

Q25: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Joe Biden, the Democrat or Jeb Bush, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Biden	47	37	87	43	51	57	45
Bush	42	52	7	47	38	32	45
Someone else (vol)	5	5	3	5	5	5	5
Undecided (vol)	6	6	4	5	7	7	6

Q26: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Joe Biden, the Democrat or Marco Rubio, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Biden	50	39	88	47	53	58	48
Rubio	40	50	6	45	35	28	43
Someone else (vol)	3	4	3	3	4	3	4
Undecided (vol)	7	7	3	6	8	10	6

Q27: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Joe Biden, the Democrat or Ted Cruz, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Biden	53	44	88	50	56	60	51
Cruz	36	45	5	41	32	24	39
Someone else (vol)	4	4	3	4	4	5	4
Undecided (vol)	7	7	5	5	9	12	6

Q28: If the 2016 presidential elections were held today and the candidates were [Rotate: Joe Biden, the Democrat or Chris Christie, the Republican], for whom would you vote?							
	All	White	Black	Male	Female	18-34	35 - <
Biden	48	38	86	45	51	57	45
Christie	41	51	5	46	36	31	43
Someone else (vol)	4	4	3	4	5	2	5
Undecided (vol)	7	7	6	5	9	9	7

Demographic Toplines

EDUC:	
High school or less	16
Some college	21
Vocational or technical training	2
College graduate	38
Graduate study or more	23

HISPANIC:	
Yes	4
No	96

RACE:	
Black or African American	19
White	72
Other	9

RELIG:	
Protestant	30
Christian (non-specific) (vol)	25
Catholic	13
Jewish	1
Other	14
None	14
Dk/ref (vol)	3

IDEOL:	
Strong liberal	7
Liberal	12
Moderate, leaning liberal	21
Moderate, leaning conservative	19
Conservative	22
Strong Conservative	11
Dk/ref (vol)	8

PARTYID:	
Republican	21
Independent lean Republican	17
Independent	19
Independent lean Democrat	14
Democrat	24
No preference/other party (vol)	4
Dk/ref (vol)	1

TEAPARTY:	
Support	19
Oppose	42
No view either way	37
Dk/ref (vol)	2

SEX:	
Male	49
Female	51

INCOME:	
Under \$25,000	5
\$25-\$49,999	14
\$50-\$74,999	21
\$75-\$99,999	15
\$100,000-\$149,999	14
Over \$150,000	20
DK/ref (vol)	11

AGE:	
18-24	9
25-34	11
35-44	14
45-54	23
55 & older	43

REGION:	
Northern Virginia	33
Richmond/Central	21
Hampton Roads	24
South/Southwest	22

How the survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 1,067 interviews of registered Virginia voters, including 559 on landline and 508 on cell phone, conducted Sept. 29 – Oct. 8, 2015. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The margin of error for the whole survey is +/- 3.2% at the 95% level of confidence. All error margins have been adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, which is 1.15 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. 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 24%. 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 registered voters in Virginia. The survey was designed by Dr. Quentin Kidd of the Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University.