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Farrah Stone, Ph.D.
Poll Director
Phone: (804) 305-3447
Email: stonefn@vcu.edu

Almost 30 percent of Virginians undecided on which party should control the General Assembly

RICHMOND, Va. (June 26, 2019) — With every House and Senate seat up for election in November, nearly 30% of Virginians remain unsure of which party should win control of the General Assembly in 2020, according to a new commonwealth poll by the Center for Public Policy at Virginia Commonwealth University’s L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs.

Support for a Democrat controlled General Assembly dropped 9 percentage points since July 2018 (52% to 43%), while the percentage of respondents saying they didn’t know who should have control increased by 12 percentage points in the same time frame (17% to 29%).

Independents (76%) were most likely to say “don’t know,” compared to only 13% of Democrats and 19% of Republicans reporting uncertainty.

Job approval for the General Assembly and administration

Approval ratings for how the General Assembly handles its job also dropped 7 percentage points, from 38% of respondents approving strongly or somewhat in December 2018 to 31% currently. In the current poll, 14% of respondents volunteered that they were indifferent or neither approved or disapproved.

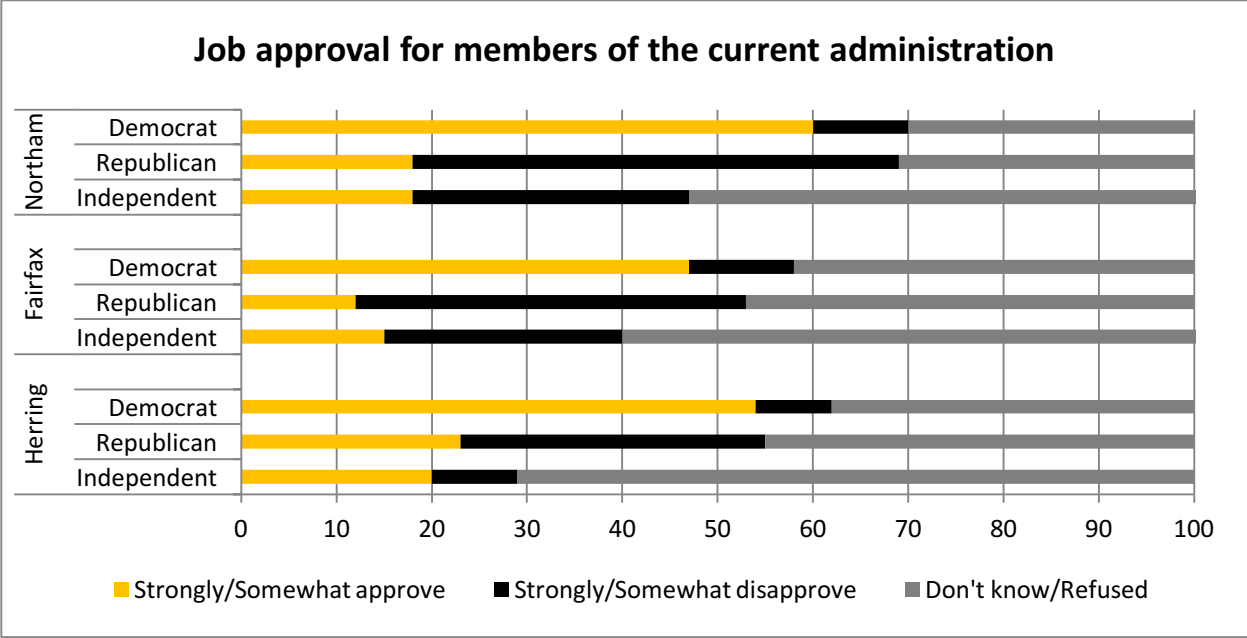
While Democrats (40%) were more likely to approve of the job being done by the current General Assembly (compared to 24% of Republicans and 20% of independents), almost a quarter of Democrats (23%) and Republicans (27%) said “don’t know.” Independents were the most likely to report being uncertain, with 45%.

Which Party Should Control the General Assembly?

What is your preference for the outcome of this year’s statewide elections: A General Assembly controlled by Republicans or a General Assembly controlled by Democrats?

	2019	2018
Democrat General Assembly	43	32
Republican General Assembly	28	52
Don’t know/Refused	29	17

Source: Wilder Public Policy Poll June 2019



Governor’s job approval

The approval rating for Gov. Ralph Northam hovers at approximately 40%. Thirty-seven percent of Virginians say they strongly or somewhat approve of the way Northam is handling the job of governor. Even after a tumultuous General Assembly session, this represents only a 4% decrease from December 2018 (which is statistically insignificant). Thirty-five percent still say don’t know, but this is a decrease from 43% in December 2018.

Almost half of Virginians said “don’t know” when asked about how Justin Fairfax and Mark Herring are handling their jobs, 47% and 46% respectively. For Fairfax, the remaining respondents were almost evenly split on whether they approve (29%) or disapprove (24%). Herring has a higher approval with 37% and only 17% saying they disapprove strongly or somewhat.

For Northam, minorities were still more likely to strongly or somewhat approve of how he is handling his job (44%), while whites were almost evenly split (33% approving and 32% disapproving). Fairfax also was more likely to receive approval from minorities (40%), while whites were more evenly split (22% approving and 27% disapproving).

Northam was more likely to have the approval of women, with 42% approving strongly or somewhat, compared to 32% of men. Women also were more likely to strongly or somewhat approve of the job Fairfax is doing (34% versus 25% of men); however, both genders were most likely to say “don’t know,” with 48% of women and 46% of men. For Herring, there was no statistically significant difference in approval based on gender or race.

All members of the administration were more likely to have Democrats approve of how they were handling their jobs. However, the margins are not as wide as one might expect and the percentage of respondents saying “don’t know” remains large, especially with independents. Northam has the largest

level of support from Democrats with 60% saying they approve strongly or somewhat. Herring also had majority Democrat approval with 53%. A plurality of Democrats (47%) said they approved strongly or somewhat of the job Fairfax is doing.

Other significant findings:

- **On who should control the General Assembly:** Women (47%), those with lower levels of income (55%), and minorities (59%) also were more likely to prefer Democrat control, while those ages 35 to 44 (40%), and those making \$100,000 or more (50%) were more likely to prefer Republican control. Regionally, those living in Northern Virginia (51%) and the South Central region (60%) were more likely to prefer Democrat control, while the Northwest and Western regions were more likely to prefer Republican control (48% and 39%, respectively).
- **On how the General Assembly is handling its job:** Minorities (37%) were more likely than whites (26%) to approve of the job being done, as were those between ages 45 and 64 (40%). Those between the ages of 35 and 44 (42%) were more likely to disapprove, while those ages 18 to 34 (49%) were more likely to say they didn't know. Those with a college degree or more (36%) were also more likely to approve, while those with an education level of high school or less (40%) were more likely to say that they didn't know. Considering the regional breakdown, those in the Tidewater (40%) and Northern Virginia (33%) regions were more likely to approve, while the South Central region was evenly split with 28% approving and 28% disapproving, and the Western region (26%) was more likely to be indifferent. Those living in the Northwest (45%) were most likely to say that they didn't know.
- **On Northam's job approval:** Those in the Tidewater (49%), South Central (42%) and Northern Virginia (40%) regions were more likely to approve, and those in the Northwest (50%) and Western regions (39%) were more likely to say they didn't know. Women (42%) were more likely than men (32%) to approve of the job that Northam is doing, as were participants over age 65 (53%). Younger participants ages 18 to 34 (60%) were most likely to say that they didn't know.
- **On Fairfax's job approval:** Those in the Tidewater region (40%) were more likely to approve, those in Northern Virginia were nearly evenly split (33% approving and 31% disapproving), and those in the South Central (51%) Western (54%) and Northwest (64%) regions were more likely to say that they didn't know.
- **On Herring's job approval:** Those ages 35 to 44 (52%) were most likely to approve of the job that he is doing, and those ages 18 to 34 (70%) were most likely to say that they didn't know. Those in the Tidewater (41%), Northern Virginia (41%) and Western regions (39%) were more likely to approve, and those in the South Central (55%) and Northwest (67%) regions were more likely to say that they didn't know.

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About the Wilder School and the Center for Public Policy

The L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, named for the nation's first African American elected governor, is a top-50 nationally ranked public affairs school. Located blocks from the state Capitol in Richmond, the school enrolls about 1,000 undergraduates and 400 graduate students in eight academic programs. The Wilder School's 10,000-plus alumni work across the public, private and nonprofit sectors. Drawing on the wide-ranging expertise of Wilder School faculty, the Center for Public Policy's programs provide diverse public-facing services including leadership development and training, economic and policy impact analysis, survey insights and program evaluation to clients in state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses and the general public across Virginia and beyond. For more, please visit wilder.vcu.edu/center-for-public-policy/.

About VCU and VCU Health

Virginia Commonwealth University is a major, urban public research university with national and international rankings in sponsored research. Located in downtown Richmond, VCU enrolls more than 31,000 students in 217 degree and certificate programs in the arts, sciences and humanities. Thirty-eight of the programs are unique in Virginia, many of them crossing the disciplines of VCU's 11 schools and three colleges. The VCU Health brand represents the VCU health sciences academic programs, the VCU Massey Cancer Center and the VCU Health System, which comprises VCU Medical Center, Community Memorial Hospital, Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, MCV Physicians and Virginia Premier Health Plan. For more, please visit vcu.edu and vcuhealth.org.

Methodology and sample information

The OPPO Commonwealth June Poll 2019, obtained telephone interviews among 816 respondents. The telephone surveys were conducted with respondents 18+ years old, living across 5 areas/regions in Virginia. Issues and Answers Network, Inc. conducted the surveys between June 7th and June 18th, 2019. Interviews were conducted with 416 landline (51%) and 400 cell (49%) phone with soft quotas implemented by region and gender. The average interview length was 10 minutes and conducted in English.

As with the previous wave, the same contact procedures were used for the landline and cell samples. For the landline sample, the program was set up to ask for the youngest adult male/female currently at home. If the specific gender was not available at the time of the call, the interviewer would ask to speak with the youngest male/female currently at home. For the cell phone sample, interviews were conducted with the person answering the phone. The program was set up to verify the respondent was an adult and in a safe place to take the survey. Both sample sources verified they were residents of Virginia.

The data was weighted using an iterative raking technique in WinCross that uses iterative proportional fitting techniques. This method avoids negative weights. Respondents were weighted on several demographics to match a previous wave of this study data and to maintain levels of non-response for each question. The previous study was weighted to 2010 U.S. Census data.

The survey's margin of error is +/- 3.43 percentage points, meaning that we are 95 percent confident that the actual result lies within 3.43 percentage points (in either direction) of the result our sample produced.

Wilder School Commonwealth Poll June 2019

Statewide survey of Virginians¹

June 7-18, 2019

Number of Respondents: 816

Q1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that Ralph Northam is handling his job as Governor? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	2019	Dec 2018²
	%	%
Strongly approve	12	21
Somewhat approve	25	20
Somewhat disapprove	12	7
Strongly disapprove	16	9
Don't Know/Refused	35	43

Q2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that Justin Fairfax is handling his job as Lieutenant Governor? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	2019
	%
Strongly approve	6
Somewhat approve	23
Somewhat disapprove	9
Strongly disapprove	15
Don't Know/Refused	47

Q3. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that Mark Herring is handling his job as Attorney General? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	2019
	%
Strongly approve	8
Somewhat approve	29
Somewhat disapprove	8
Strongly disapprove	9
Don't Know/Refused	46

¹ Percentages may add to 99 or 101 due to rounding. Cells that are blank contain no cases. Cells with a zero percent entry contain cases, but the percentage is less than 0.5%.

² Wilder School Public Policy Poll, Dec 3-13, 2018, n=805 VA residents.

Q4. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the General Assembly is handling its job? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	2019	Dec 2018²
	%	%
Strongly approve	8	12
Somewhat approve	23	26
Somewhat disapprove	16	10
Strongly disapprove	11	12
Neither/Indifferent (VOLUNTEERED)	14	-
Don't Know/Refused	29	40

Q5. What is your preference for the outcome of this year's statewide elections [READ AND RANDOMIZE]: A General Assembly controlled by Republicans or a General Assembly controlled by Democrats?

	2019	July 2018³
	%	%
Republican General Assembly	28	32
Democrat General Assembly	43	52
Neither (VOLUNTEERED)	-	-
Don't Know/Refused	29	17

QUESTIONS 6 THROUGH 17 SAVED FOR SEPARATE RELEASE

³ Wilder School Public Policy Poll, July 2018, n=815 adult VA residents.

Tables for subgroup analysis

Q1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that Ralph Northam is handling his job as Governor? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

		Strongly approve	Somewhat approve	Somewhat disapprove	Strongly disapprove	Don't know/refused	Unweighted count
Region							
	Northwest	4%	14%	18%	13%	50%	131
	Northern VA	11%	29%	18%	15%	27%	187
	West	8%	17%	8%	27%	39%	167
	South Central	15%	27%	7%	15%	36%	137
	Tidewater	18%	31%	5%	13%	33%	194
Gender							
	Male	7%	25%	13%	21%	34%	383
	Female	16%	26%	10%	12%	35%	433
Age							
	18-34	4%	19%	8%	9%	60%	62
	35-44	11%	21%	23%	10%	35%	61
	45-64	15%	29%	10%	23%	24%	293
	65 and older	21%	32%	8%	22%	17%	330
Education							
	High school grad or less	10%	24%	13%	13%	40%	166
	Some college	10%	21%	10%	21%	38%	205
	College grad or more	15%	31%	10%	17%	27%	413
Income							
	Under \$50,000	10%	25%	9%	10%	46%	180
	50K to under \$100,000	19%	26%	7%	14%	34%	191
	\$100,000 or more	11%	29%	15%	19%	25%	178
Race							
	White	10%	23%	13%	19%	35%	584
	Minority	15%	29%	10%	9%	37%	172
Party ID							
	Democrat	21%	39%	9%	1%	30%	327
	Republican	3%	15%	16%	35%	31%	353
	Independent	4%	12%	7%	22%	55%	104

Q2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that Justin Fairfax is handling his job as Lieutenant Governor? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

		Strongly approve	Somewhat approve	Somewhat disapprove	Strongly disapprove	Don't know/refused	Unweighted count
Region							
	Northwest	5%	13%	11%	7%	64%	131
	Northern VA	8%	25%	13%	18%	36%	187
	West	3%	15%	9%	19%	54%	167
	South Central	7%	20%	8%	14%	51%	137
	Tidewater	7%	33%	5%	11%	45%	194
Gender							
	Male	3%	22%	10%	20%	46%	383
	Female	10%	24%	9%	10%	48%	433
Age							
	18-34	0%	17%	1%	10%	72%	62
	35-44	7%	17%	16%	20%	40%	61
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	Democrat	11%	36%	7%	3%	42%	327
	Republican	1%	11%	13%	28%	47%	353
	Independent	4%	10%	8%	17%	61%	104

Q3. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that Mark Herring is handling his job as Attorney General?
Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

		Strongly approve	Somewhat approve	Somewhat disapprove	Strongly disapprove	Don't know/ refused	Unweighted count
Region							
	Northwest	5%	14%	8%	5%	67%	131
	Northern VA	11%	30%	11%	7%	41%	187
	West	6%	33%	9%	15%	37%	167
	South Central	9%	24%	2%	9%	55%	137
	Tidewater	7%	34%	4%	10%	44%	194
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	Republican	1%	21%	9%	23%	45%	353
	Independent	2%	18%	5%	4%	71%	104

Q4. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the General Assembly is handling its job? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

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