



THE COMMONWEALTH POLL

Center for Public Policy
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Allen Pulls Ahead in U.S. Senate Race While Bush Takes a Strong Lead in Virginia

Richmond, VA—In the country’s toughest re-election battle this fall, Virginia incumbent Sen. Chuck Robb (D) is losing ground to former Gov. George Allen (R). A survey of likely voters by The Commonwealth Poll of Virginia Commonwealth University shows Allen with a comfortable lead over Robb by 54% to 39% with 7% still undecided.

Vote Choice for U.S. Senate				
	Allen	Robb	Undecided	Other
Likely Voters	54%	39%	7%	0%

The Commonwealth Poll was conducted October 18-24, 2000 with 596 likely voters in Virginia. The margin of error is +/- 4.5%. The dates of interviewing span both before and after the debate between the two candidates held Sunday, October 22. There was no indication of a debate effect. Those interviewed after the Sunday night debate divided their support between the two candidates in about the same way as those interviewed prior to the debate.

Republican Turnout Advantage

Republican candidates in Virginia are helped along considerably by differences between partisans in who is more likely to go to the polls. Though 81% of Republicans and 78% of Democrats report that they are registered to vote, sizeable differences emerge when further questions are used to determine who will turn out. The 596 likely voters in the Commonwealth Poll are people who reported that they are 1) registered to vote 2) will “definitely” or “probably”

go to vote and 3) voted in the 1996 Presidential election, if age-eligible and 4) are paying either “a lot”, “some” or “not much” attention to the Senate campaign rather than “no attention at all”. **70%** of Republican respondents in the poll meet these criteria as “likely voters” while only **58%** of Democrats do so.

Likely to Vote			Number of cases
	Likely	Not Likely	
Total	57%	43%	1055
Democrat	58%	42%	287
Republican	70%	30%	296
Independent	56%	44%	323
Liberal	53%	47%	179
Moderate	63%	37%	417
Conservative	59%	41%	352

All estimates aside, who shows up to vote on election day could make a difference in the outcome of the election. Liberals and conservatives split predictably in support of the two Senate candidates; 67% of liberals support Robb and 82% of conservatives support Allen. Moderates are divided in their support with more of them leaning to Robb. 50% of moderates support Robb while 44% support Allen. Both candidates enjoy strong support from their fellow partisans though Republicans are more likely to line up for their party’s candidate. **91%** of Republicans choose Allen for U.S. Senate while **71%** of Democrats choose Robb. Independents lean to Allen by 49 to 43%. While both candidates enjoy support from those who share their partisan and ideological points of view, there is some evidence that Robb’s support is less enthusiastic. In response to a question about whether each candidate is inspiring or not, 71% of Allen’s supporters said he is inspiring. 49% of Robb’s supporters said the same of Robb.

Region, Race, and Gender Differences

Senator Robb is ahead in highly populated Northern Virginia (51% to 43%) and holding his own in Tidewater (44 to 45% for Robb and Allen, respectively). Allen’s margin in the South Central area (which includes Richmond) and in the more rural areas more than offsets Robb’s showing in Northern Virginia and Tidewater.

Whites support Allen by 60% compared to 34% for Robb. African-Americans support Robb by 65 to 19%.

A plurality of both men and women favor Allen. Men support Allen over Robb by 60 to 34%. Women do so by 48 to 43%. Women who are employed (either full or part-time) lean to Robb by 50 to 41% while other women lean to Allen by 64% to 29%. The stronger support for Robb among working women is consistent with broader ideological differences between women. Conservative women are less likely to be working outside the home while liberal and moderate women are more likely to be employed. Similarly, Republican women are less likely to be working outside the home while Democratic women are more likely to be in the paid workforce.

The Issues

More voters are concerned about education than any other issue of the campaign. Asked to rate a series of issues on whether or not each was “critical, important, or not important” to the respondent in deciding how to vote, 38% stated that the candidate’s “record and ideas for improving public education” was critical to their vote. Of these, 44% support Robb and 47% support Allen.

34% of likely voters consider the candidate’s “character as a person” critical to their vote. Allen is heavily favored among these voters. 72% of those viewing character as critical support Allen and only 22% support Robb.

Across the series of issue items, there is a chord of conservatism that works to Allen’s advantage. Candidate character, reducing taxes, and abortion were more likely to be of concern to conservative respondents. On these issues, a clear plurality of those with greater concern on the issue favor Allen over Robb. Moderates were more likely to report education and gun control issues as critical to their vote. Among voters who see education and gun control as critical, Allen is favored by only a small margin over Robb.

Summary:

The Republican nature of the electorate helps to account for Allen’s lead at this point in the campaign. Senator Robb will have to energize the Democratic base at a level equivalent to the mobilization of Republicans to be truly competitive on November 7th.

	% Saying Critical	% of Those Who Say Issue is "Critical" in Voting Decision	
		For Robb	For Allen
Record and Ideas on Public Education	39%	44%	47%
Character as a person	34	22	72
Position on Gun Control	32	44	47
Position on reducing Taxes	26	26	66
Position on Abortion	26	35	54
Record on Environment	18	53	46
Ideas on Transportation	17	50	43

	Senate Vote Choice of Likely Voters				Number of cases
	Robb	Allen	Other	Don't Know	
Total	39%	54%	0%	7%	586
Male	34%	60%	1%	5%	276
Female	43%	48%	0%	9%	310
Women Working	50%	41%	0%	10%	205
Other Women	29%	64%	0%	7%	105
White	34%	60%	1%	5%	479
Black	65%	19%	0%	16%	75
Democrat	71%	20%	0%	9%	169
Republican	6%	91%	1%	2%	205
Independent	43%	49%	1%	7%	174
Liberal	67%	19%	0%	14%	89
Moderate	50%	44%	1%	6%	257
Conservative	13%	82%	1%	4%	212
Northwest	28%	66%	0%	6%	81
Northern VA	51%	43%	0%	6%	153
West	37%	60%	0%	3%	112
South Central	23%	67%	2%	8%	110
Tidewater	44%	45%	0%	11%	130

Similarities for Presidential Election in Virginia

In every presidential election since 1964, a plurality of Virginians have voted for the Republican presidential candidate. This year looks like it will follow the same pattern. 54% of likely voters support George W. Bush for president while 40% support Al Gore.

Vote Choice for President				
	Bush	Gore	Undecided	Other
Likely Voters	54%	40%	4%	1%

Both candidates receive a strong endorsement from their party’s supporters. Democrats are backing Gore (by 88 to 9%) while Republicans are backing Bush (94 to 4%). Independents are more likely to favor Bush with 54% expressing support for him compared to 34% for Gore and 12% undecided.

The divisions by race and gender are substantial. In terms of race, whites support Bush over Gore by 63 to 32% while African-Americans support Gore by 85% to 6% for Bush. Men, on the whole, favor Bush by 63% to 30%. Women as a group lean to Al Gore by 50 to 46%. Where does the gender divide come from? Divisions between working women and others account for much of Al Gore’s support among female voters. Employed women (either full or part-time) favor Gore by 57% compared to 40% for Bush, while other women support Bush by 58 to 36% for Gore.

METHODOLOGY OF THE COMMONWEALTH POLL

The Commonwealth Poll is an omnibus public opinion survey of Virginia residents. Each survey covers a variety of topics. The survey is conducted by telephone with a randomly-selected sample of adult Virginians.

Interviewing for The Commonwealth Poll was conducted by telephone from the facilities of the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. The interviewing is conducted by a staff of professionally trained, paid interviewers using computer-assisted telephone interviewing software.

The Commonwealth Poll was conducted October 18-24, 2000 with a randomly-selected sample of 1055 adult Virginians. The results reported above were asked of 596 likely voters, that is those who said they are 1) registered to vote at their current address and 2) are either “definitely” or “probably” going to vote in the November elections 3) are paying a minimum of attention to the Senate campaign and 4) if age-eligible, voted in the 1996 presidential elections.

The sample of telephone numbers was prepared by Genesys Sampling Systems of Ft. Washington, Pennsylvania, and was designed so that all residential telephones, including new and unlisted numbers, had a known chance of inclusion. The cooperation rate for the survey was

54%. Using the CASRO response rate calculations, interviews were obtained with respondents in 43% of the known or assumed residential households in the sample.

The data were weighted to adjust for unequal probabilities of selection due to multiple telephone lines and multiple adults living in the household. In addition, the data were weighted on sex, race, age, and region of residence to reflect the demographic composition of the Virginia adult population. Percentages reported in the text and tables are weighted, while the number of cases shown in the tables for various subgroups is the actual number of respondents.

Questions answered by the sample of 596 likely voters are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus approximately 4.5 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples like the one used here, the results obtained should be no more than 4.5 percentage points above or below the figure that would be obtained by interviewing all Virginia likely voters with telephones. Where the answers of subgroups are reported, the sampling error would be higher. Because of nonresponse (refusals to participate, etc.), standard calculations of sampling error are apt to understate the actual extent to which survey results are at variance with the true population values. Surveys are also subject to errors from sources other than sampling. While every effort is made to identify such errors, they are often difficult or impossible to measure. Readers making use of the results are urged to be mindful of the limitations inherent in survey research.

Further information is available on request from the Director of the Commonwealth Poll, Dr. Cary Funk, at 804 827 1430 or clfunk@vcu.edu.