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Voters' low view of Trump lifts Democratic candidates in governor's races in both New Jersey and Virginia

Summary of Key Findings

- 1.** In twin polls in New Jersey and Virginia, a significant segment of likely voters says President Trump is a factor in their choice for governor, and the 'Trump Effect' is a net negative for the Republican candidates in both states.
- 2.** In New Jersey, where Trump's approval among likely voters stands at 31 percent, Democrat Phil Murphy's decided edge over Republican Kim Guadagno is boosted slightly by those who consider Trump a factor in their decision. Many are sending a message of disapproval to the President and the Republican-controlled Congress.
- 3.** In Virginia, where Trump's approval stands at 33%, Democrat Ralph Northam's voters are unified in their disapproval, while Republican Ed Gillespie's voters are divided. That imbalance in the 'Trump Effect' may underpin Northam's slight edge over Gillespie in a close contest.

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Analysis

As voters in New Jersey and Virginia prepare to choose their next governors, the “Trump Effect” plays into the fortunes of candidates in both states, with Democrats benefitting from President Donald Trump’s low approval ratings.

New Jersey

Fairleigh Dickinson University’s most recent statewide survey of likely voters in the upcoming 2017 gubernatorial election finds Democrat Phil Murphy leading his Republican challenger, Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno. Murphy’s 15-point lead, among those who have made up their minds, is helped by the disaffection that many feel for the Trump administration.

The president receives just a 31 percent approval rating among likely voters. A quarter (25%) of voters say President Trump is a factor in their decision about whom to support in the gubernatorial election, with almost a fifth (18%) saying that the president is a major factor. Seven percent say his administration is a minor factor. A third of Democrats (34%) are considering Trump in their decision, with similar numbers of independents (13%) and Republicans (16%) saying the same.

“New Jersey’s off-year statewide elections were scheduled that way to stop voters from being influenced by national forces when they cast their votes. Clearly, a quarter of likely voters didn’t get the message,” said Krista Jenkins, director of the poll and a professor of political science at FDU.

Voters were also asked if their choice for governor was intended to send a message to President Trump and the Republicans who control Congress. Half said that it was not (55%) with the remainder split between those who said they are sending a message of support (10%) or disapproval (32%). More Democrats (53%) say they are using their vote to express disapproval than Republicans (26%) say they are using it to express approval.

As for how the “message” of support or disapproval is affecting gubernatorial choices, 87 percent of those who approve of what’s going on in our nation’s capital support Guadagno, with 78 percent of those who say their vote is a thumbs-down on Trump and Congressional Republicans supporting Murphy.

“In order to close the gap with Murphy, Guadagno has been doing things motivated by an appeal to Trump voters. Mobilizing more Republican voters would certainly help close the gap if turnout is as low as what many expect it to be,” said Jenkins. “These numbers suggest getting out the vote may be tough, since most Republicans aren’t thinking of Trump when they consider their vote.”

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll was conducted by landline and cellular telephone October 11-15, 2017, using a listed sample of registered voters with a known history of voting in past elections. Results for the poll of 658 likely voters featured in this release have a margin of sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points, including the design effect.

Virginia

In Virginia, 32% of likely voters say President Donald Trump is a factor in their vote for governor, and 20% say he is a major factor, according to a Wason Center survey of 642 likely voters. Although most voters say their choice for governor is not affected by their view of the president, the “Trump Effect” in Virginia appears to be a net negative for Republican Ed Gillespie, as the GOP electorate is slightly divided on Trump, while Ralph Northam’s Democrats are unified in their disapproval.

Northam leads Gillespie, 48% to 44%, according to results from the first part of this survey, released October 17.

Trump’s approval rating in Virginia stands at 33% overall, but Northam voters are nearly unified, with 96% disapproving of the president’s performance. Gillespie voters are split, with 69% saying they approve and 22% saying they disapprove of how Trump is handling his job as president. Self-identified independents mirror the overall approval rating, with 31% approving and 62% disapproving Trump’s performance.

“Virginia voters have tended to choose a governor from the party not in the White House,” said Rachel Bitecofer, assistant director of the Wason Center. “This year, it looks like Donald Trump’s unpopularity is nudging them in that direction again.”

Nearly half of the likely voters in Virginia (45%) say they see their vote for governor as a way to send a message to Trump and the Republicans who control Congress. Overall, 28% say their vote is a message of disapproval and 17% say it is a message of support. About 1 in 4 Gillespie voters (26%) say their vote is a message of support for Trump and the Republicans in Congress, while a strong majority of Gillespie voters (69%) say no message intended in their vote. A slim majority of Northam voters (51%) say their vote is a message of disapproval of Trump and the Republican majority in Congress, while 39% say no message is intended.

Overall in Virginia, although almost 1 in 3 voters cite Trump as a factor in their choice, a strong majority of Gillespie voters (75%) say the president is not a factor, and a majority (58%) of Northam voters also say he is not a factor. Nearly 3 out of 4 Independents (71%) say Trump is not a factor in their choice.

A majority of voters say things in Virginia are moving in the right direction (52% vs. 29%). Overall, 54% approve of the job Democratic Governor Terry McAuliffe is doing.

“Northam may hope there’s a McAuliffe Effect to add to his advantage in the Trump Effect,” said Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center.

The Virginia survey was conducted by landline and cell phone October 9-13, 2017. The survey’s margin of error is +/- 4.2% at the 95% level of confidence. Likely voters are registered voters with a history of voting in recent statewide elections, who also say they definitely or probably will vote in the November 7 election.

New Jersey Tables, Questions, and Methodology

<i>If the election were being held today, for whom would you vote?</i>												
	PID				Gender		Race		Trump approval		Direction of country	
	All	Dem	Ind	Repub	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Approve	Disapprove	Right track	Wrong direction
Guadagno	32%	5	25	79	38	26	39	7	77	8	7	67
Murphy	47%	81	26	4	43	51	42	65	5	69	78	10
Someone else	5%	3	12	4	4	6	4	8	6	5	4	5
DK (vol)	13%	10	26	11	12	14	12	16	9	15	9	14
Refused (vol)	3%	1	11	1	4	3	3	4	3	3	2	3

<i>If the election were being held today, for whom would you vote?</i>						
	Trump a factor?				Sending message	
	All	No	Major	Minor	Approve	Disapprove
Guadagno	32%	36	21	17	87	3
Murphy	47%	41	66	68	7	78
Someone else	5%	5	3	4	3	4
DK (vol)	13%	14	11	11	3	14
Refused (vol)	3%	4	0	0	0	2

<i>Thinking about your vote for governor again, is Donald Trump a factor in your vote choice for governor this year? [If yes, "Would you say that is a major or minor factor?"]</i>												
	PID				Gender		Race		Trump approval		Direction of country	
	All	Dem	Ind	Repub	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Approve	Disapprove	Right direction	Wrong track
Yes – major	18%	24	7	12	15	20	15	25	12	22	12	21
Yes – minor	7%	10	6	4	7	8	8	7	5	9	5	9
No	74%	66	86	82	77	70	76	67	81	68	80	70
DK (vol)	1%	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

<i>Do you see your vote choice for governor this year as a way to send a message to President Trump and the Republicans who control Congress?</i>												
	PID				Gender		Race		Trump approval		Direction of country	
	All	Dem	Ind	Repub	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Approve	Disapprove	Right direction	Wrong track
Message of support	10%	1	7	26	10	9	11	5	27	1	26	3
Message of disapproval	32%	53	20	5	28	36	24	57	1	49	1	46
No	55%	44	70	66	59	51	61	35	67	47	69	48
DK (vol)	3%	1	4	4	2	3	4	0	4	2	4	2
Refused (vol)	1%	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	0	1	0	1

<i>And turning to the United States, do you approve or disapprove [rotate] of the way Donald Trump is handling is job as president?</i>													
	PID				Gender		Race		Education		Age		
	All	Dem	Ind	Repub	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS/Some college	College+	18-34	35-59	60+
Approve	31%	3	28	76	38	25	38	10	41	25	13	31	34
Disapprove	62%	94	64	15	55	70	55	84	53	68	79	63	58
DK(vol)	5%	2	8	7	6	3	5	4	5	5	5	5	5
Refused (vol)	2%	1	1	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	3

<i>In your opinion, do you believe the country is moving in the right direction or is it on the wrong track? [Randomize right direction/wrong track]</i>													
	PID				Gender		Race		Education		Age		
	All	Dem	Ind	Repub	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS/Some college	College+	18-34	35-59	60+
Right direction	31%	4	29	75	38	25	38	10	38	27	17	31	34
Wrong track	63%	91	63	20	56	71	57	83	55	68	78	64	60
DK (vol)	5%	4	8	4	6	3	5	4	6	4	2	4	6
Refused (vol)	1%	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	4	1	0

Question wording and order

ELEC1 If the election for governor were being held today, for whom would you vote? [Rotate names]

- 1 Phil Murphy, the Democrat
- 2 Kim Guadagno, the Republican
- 3 Someone else
- 8 DK(vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

ELEC2 released October 17, 2017

US1 and US2 withheld

NJ1 and NJ2 released October 17, 2017

ELEC3 Thinking about your vote for governor again, is Donald Trump a factor in your vote choice for governor this year? [IF Yes, "Would you say that is a major or minor factor?"]

- 1 Yes - major
- 2 Yes – minor
- 3 No
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

ELEC4 Do you see your vote choice for governor this year as a way to send a message to President Trump and the Republicans who control Congress?

- 1 Yes – a message of support
- 2 Yes - a message of disapproval
- 3 No
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Sample characteristics (weighted)

PID (with leaners)	
Democrat	51%
Republican	32%
Independent	13%
Other/DK/Ref	4%
Gender	
Male	48%
Female	52%
Age	
18-34	9%
35-59	51%
60+	40%
Race	
White	73%
Black	13%
Hispanic	10%
Asian	2%
Other	3%

Methodology - The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll was conducted by landline and cellular telephone October 11-15, 2017, using a listed sample of registered voters with a known history of voting in past elections. Results for the pool of 658 likely voters featured in this release have a margin of sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points, including the design effect.

Likely voters are determined based on their responses to questions concerning their voting intentions and attentiveness to the 2017 gubernatorial election.

Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

The total combined sample is mathematically weighted for age, sex, and race based on the state's voter registration list. 389 interviews were conducted on landlines and 269 were conducted on cellular telephones.

The sample was purchased from Marketing Systems Group and Aristotle and the research was funded by Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Virginia Tables, Questions, and Methodology

Q10: Overall, would you say things in the UNITED STATES are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Right	28	56	5	2	28	57
Mixed (vol)	12	18	7	7	12	19
Wrong	59	25	87	91	58	22
Dk/ref (vol)	1	1	1	-	2	2

Q11: 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?

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Right	52	38	63	63	48	42
Mixed (vol)	15	14	17	18	16	11
Wrong	29	45	16	17	32	42
Dk/ref (vol)	4	3	4	2	4	5

Q12: 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]**

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Approve	33	69	2	1	31	71
Disapprove	61	22	96	97	62	20
Dk/ref (vol)	6	9	2	2	7	9

Q13: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Terry McAuliffe is handling his job as Governor of Virginia? **[IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE (“DON’T KNOW”, “DEPENDS”, “NOT SURE”, ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH: OVERALL do you approve or disapprove of the way Terry McAuliffe is handling his job as Governor? IF STILL UNSURE ENTER AS DON’T KNOW]**

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Approve	54	29	78	79	46	33
Disapprove	31	61	6	5	37	57
Dk/ref (vol)	15	10	16	16	17	10

Q23: Thinking about your vote for governor again, is Donald Trump a factor in your vote choice for governor this year? **[Note: If respondent says yes, prompt for “major” or “minor” factor]**

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Yes - major	20	11	28	28	19	12
Yes - minor	12	12	13	14	9	13
No	66	75	58	58	71	73
Dk/ref (vol)	2	2	1	-	1	2

Q24: Do you see your vote choice for governor this year as a way to send a message to President Trump and the Republicans who control Congress? [Note: If respondent says yes, prompt for a message of “support” or “disapproval”]

	All	Gillespie	Northam	Dem	Ind	Rep
Yes - support	17	26	9	11	7	31
Yes - disapproval	28	4	51	54	25	3
No	54	69	39	33	67	65
Dk/ref (vol)	1	1	1	2	1	1

Questions 1-9 released earlier.

Demographics - Virginia

EDUC:		[IF OTHER THAN REP OR DEM ABOVE]	
		PARTLEAN:	
High school or less	12	Republican	44
Some college	19	Democratic	35
Vocational or technical training	2	Independent	21
College graduate	38		
Graduate study or more	28	IDEOL:	
Dk/ref (vol)	1	Strong liberal	7
RACE:		Liberal	10
White	72	Moderate, leaning liberal	25
Black or African American	20	Moderate, leaning conservative	20
Other	9	Conservative	20
MIL OR RETIRED MIL IN HOUSE:		Strong Conservative	10
Yes	33	Dk/ref (vol)	8
No	67	INCOME:	
AGE:		Under \$25,000	5
18-24	6	\$25-\$49,999	9
25-34	14	\$50-\$74,999	18
35-44	17	\$75-\$99,999	14
45-54	22	\$100,000-\$149,999	20
55 & older	42	Over \$150,000	23
PARTYID:		Dk/ref (vol)	12
Republican	31	REGION (defined by DMA):	
Democrat	34	Northern Virginia	33
Independent	30	Richmond/Central	22
No preference (vol)	3	Hampton Roads	24
Other party (vol)	1	South/Southwest	21
Dk/ref (vol)	1	SEX (interviewer coded):	
		Male	49
		Female	51

How this survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 1,085 interviews of registered Virginia voters, of which 642 were determined to be likely voters in the upcoming November election (registered voters who have voted in recent statewide elections, who also say they definitely or probably will vote in the upcoming elections), including 309 on landline and 333 on cell phone, conducted October 9-13, 2017. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The margin of error for the likely voter model is +/- 4.2 % 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 45.8% and 54.2%.** The margin of error is higher for subgroups. All error margins have been adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, which is 1.19 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 21%. 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 likely voters in the November 2017 Virginia elections.