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THE WASON CENTER

FOR CIVIC LEADERSHIP

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## ***McAuliffe narrowly leads Youngkin in Virginia governor contest; Democrats Herring and Ayala hold small leads in down-ballot races***

### **Summary of Key Findings**

- 1. Former Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe leads Republican Glenn Youngkin, 49% to 45%, among likely voters, which is within the survey's margin of error (+/- 4.2%). Third-party candidate Princess Blanding polls at 1%, with 5% undecided.***
- 2. Seeking a third term, Attorney General Mark Herring leads Republican Jason Miyares, 49% to 43%, with 7% undecided.***
- 3. For lieutenant governor, Democrat Hala Ayala leads Republican Winsome Sears, 48% to 44%, with 8% undecided.***
- 4. On abortion, 61% of Virginia likely voters support laws to protect women's access to abortion, while 30% support making it more difficult. Voters oppose a law banning abortion once a fetal heartbeat is detected around 6 weeks (55% to 36%).***
- 5. Republican likely voters are more enthusiastic about voting in this election than Democratic likely voters (61% to 55% very enthusiastic).***

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## ***Analysis***

With voting underway, Democrats hold small but narrowing leads in Virginia's statewide races, according to our survey of likely voters in the Nov. 2 general election. Since we polled these races in late August, Democratic leads have shrunk, and the contests for governor and lieutenant governor now stand within this survey's margin of error (+/- 4.2%). Independent voters have moved significantly toward all three Republican candidates. Republican voters are more enthusiastic about voting than Democrats, with 61% of Republican likely voters indicating they are very enthusiastic compared to 55% of Democrats.

**Governor:** Democrat Terry McAuliffe maintains a narrow lead against Republican Glenn Youngkin, 49% to 45% in the race for governor. This represents a tightening in the race since our August 26 poll, which showed McAuliffe with a 9-point lead (50% to 41%).

Independent voters have shifted significantly, with Republican Youngkin gaining 11 points since late August (from 39% to 50%), while McAuliffe has lost ground among Independents (from 44% to 41%).

Youngkin's support is currently driven by white voters (58%), male voters (48%) and those from the South/Southwest region (57%). Youngkin maintains 90% of his Republican base.

Former Governor McAuliffe has largely maintained his overall support at 49% (compared to 50% in late August). McAuliffe's support is strongest among women (50%), Black voters (86%), voters age 44 and younger (55%) and voters in the Northern Virginia region (59%). McAuliffe shows 92% support among Democrats and has gained slight ground among self-identified Republicans (7% compared to 3% in August).

A small percentage of those surveyed (4%) have already voted in the governor's race, with 1.3% indicating they voted for Youngkin and 2.7% for McAuliffe.

**Lieutenant governor:** Democratic Del. Hala Ayala leads former Republican Del. Winsome Sears by 4 points (48% to 44%), with 8% undecided. The race has tightened significantly since our August 26 survey, which showed Ayala leading by 10 points. The race is now within this survey's margin of error (+/- 4.2%).

Since our August 26 poll, Sears has gained 10 points among Independents (from 40% to 50%), while Ayala's support has dropped (from 49% to 41%). Both candidates have lost some ground among their base; Ayala currently has support from 88% of Democrats (compared to 95% previously), while Sears shows 87% support from Republicans (compared to 95%). Overall, Ayala's support is driven primarily by voters age 44 and younger (55% to 41%), Black voters (85% to 5%) and women (50% to 40%), and an advantage in Northern Virginia (58%-35%). Sears' strongest support comes from white voters (56% to 38%) and voters in the South/Southwest region (55% to 34%).

**Attorney general:** Seeking a third term as attorney general, Democratic incumbent Mark Herring leads Republican Del. Jason Miyares, 49% to 43%, with 7% undecided. This represents a 6-point tightening of the race since our August survey, which showed Herring leading 53%-41%. Miyares has increased his support 11 points over the last month among Independents (from 38% to 49%), while Herring has lost support among Independents (from 49% to 41%). Herring continues to have support among the conventional Democratic base of women (49% to 42%), Black voters (81% to 6%) and younger voters (53% to 42%). Miyares shows an advantage over Herring among white voters (56% to 40%) and voters in the South/Southwest region (54% to 37%).

**Abortion:** Abortion has become a hotter topic nationally and among Virginia voters since Texas implemented a ban on abortions at 6 weeks and the U.S. Supreme Court declined to block that measure. Virginia likely voters largely support protecting women's access to abortion (61%), while 30% wish to pass laws making it more difficult for women to get an abortion. Virginia likely voters largely oppose a measure that would ban abortions once a fetal heartbeat is detected around 6 weeks of gestation (55% Oppose/Strongly Oppose to 36% Support/Strongly Support).

"The abortion issue has been tricky for Youngkin," said Wason Center Research Director Dr. Rebecca Bromley-Trujillo. "Trying to navigate between moderate voters who oppose further restrictions while simultaneously appealing to the Republican base who would like a strong pro-life stance, Youngkin has said he would not have voted for the Texas law, but he's been unclear about how far he would go to restrict abortions in Virginia."

Q2: And how enthusiastic would you say you are about voting in the elections this fall? Would you say you are...

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind
Very Enthusiastic	57	61	55	51
Somewhat Enthusiastic	33	28	36	36
Less Enthusiastic	6	6	5	6
Not Enthusiastic	5	6	3	6
Don't Know	1	0	0	2

Q3: :Thinking about the election for governor... if the election were held TODAY would you vote for [RANDOMIZE: "Glenn Youngkin, the Republican, Terry McAuliffe, the Democrat, or Princess Blanding, the Liberation Party"], or if you've already voted who did you vote for? [INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ("DON'T KNOW", "DEPENDS", "NOT SURE", ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH: Which one are you leaning toward right now?

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45 +	NoVa	Rich/Central	HR/East	South/SW
Glenn Youngkin	45	90	1	50	48	43	58	7	43	46	36	49	45	57
Terry McAuliffe	49	7	92	41	47	50	38	86	55	46	59	46	49	35
Princess Blanding	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	2
Undecided/DK (vol)	5	2	7	7	5	6	4	6	0	8	5	5	6	7

Q4: Thinking about the election for lieutenant governor... if the election were held TODAY would you vote for [RANDOMIZE: "Winsome Sears, the Republican, or Hala Ayala, the Democrat"], or if you've already voted who did you vote for? [INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ("DON'T KNOW", "DEPENDS", "NOT SURE", ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH: Which one are you leaning toward right now?

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45 +	NoVa	Rich/Central	HR/East	South/SW
Winsome Sears	44	87	1	50	47	40	56	5	41	45	35	50	39	55
Hala Ayala	48	9	88	41	46	50	38	85	55	45	58	46	50	34
Undecided/DK (vol)	8	4	10	9	7	10	7	10	4	10	7	5	11	11

Q5: Thinking about the election for attorney general... if the election were held TODAY would you vote for [RANDOMIZE: “Jason Miyares, the Republican, or Mark Herring, the Democrat”], or if you’ve already voted who did you vote for? [INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE (“DON’T KNOW”, “DEPENDS”, “NOT SURE”, ETC.) PROBE ONCE WITH: Which one are you leaning toward right now?

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45 +	NoVa	Rich/Central	HR/East	South/SW
Jason Miyares	43	85	3	49	45	42	56	6	42	44	31	51	44	54
Mark Herring	49	14	86	41	49	49	40	81	53	48	63	39	50	37
Undecided/DK (vol)	7	2	11	10	6	9	4	13	6	8	5	10	6	9

Q8: Thinking about Virginia, would you generally like to see your state pass laws to make it more difficult for women to get an abortion OR to protect women’s access to an abortion

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45 +	NoVa	Rich/Central	HR/East	South/SW
To make it more difficult for women to get an abortion	30	60	5	29	30	30	36	8	26	32	22	36	25	41
To protect women’s access to an abortion	61	28	93	56	61	60	53	87	64	59	71	58	63	44
Don’t know/ref (vol)	10	12	3	16	9	10	11	6	10	10	7	6	12	15

Q9: As you may know, some states around the country are considering, or have passed laws that ban abortion once a fetal heartbeat is detected at approximately 6 weeks of gestation. Would you support or oppose such a 6 week ban on abortion in Virginia? [INTERVIEWER PROBE FOR STRONGLY SUPPORT OR STRONGLY OPPOSE]

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45 +	NoVa	Rich/Central	HR/East	South/SW
Strongly support	20	34	5	21	18	22	24	4	17	21	16	23	14	30
Support	16	29	4	17	17	14	19	7	17	15	15	14	21	14
Oppose	18	18	20	17	19	18	14	31	16	19	18	17	20	18
Strongly Oppose	37	9	65	34	39	35	35	47	40	36	48	36	33	25
Dk/ref (vol)	9	11	7	11	8	11	9	12	10	9	3	11	13	13

## Demographics Full Survey n=802

EDUC: Could you tell me the highest level of school or college you had the opportunity to complete:

High school or less	51
College or more	49

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

Yes	3
No	97

RACE: Do you consider yourself to be:

White	69
Black or African American	20
Other	11

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

Very conservative	12
Conservative	24
Moderate	36
Liberal	19
Very liberal	6
Dk/ref(vol)	3

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

Democrat	38
Republican	34
Independent	22
No Preference (vol)	2
Other Party (vol)	0
Dk/Ref (vol)	3

SEX:

Male	49
Female	51

PARTYLN [among Independents/No Pref]

Lean Republican	39
Lean Democrat	21
Independent	27
Dk/ref (vol)	13

AGE: (Recorded as exact year of birth)

18-24	3
25-34	9
35-44	18
45-54	12
55 & older	59

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

Under \$25,000	5
\$25-\$49,999	10
\$50-\$74,999	17
\$75-\$99,999	16
\$100,000-\$149,999	19
Over \$150,000	21
Dk/ref (vol)	13

CELL/LANDLINE

Cell	57
Landline	43

REGION

Northern	33
Richmond-Central	24
Hampton Roads-East	24
South/Southwest/West	20

### ***How the survey was conducted:***

The results of this poll are based on 802 interviews of registered Virginia voters who are likely general election voters, including 347 on landline and 455 on cell phone, conducted September 27 to October 6, 2021. A likely general election voter is one who has voted in at least two of the last four general elections or is newly registered in the last 12 months and indicates they are enthusiastic and plan to vote (or already have) in the upcoming November 2 election. The margin of error for the whole survey is  $\pm 4.2\%$  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 for subgroups may be higher. All error margins have been adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, which is 1.5 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. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The response rate (AAPOR RRI Standard Definition) for the survey was 9%. Five callbacks were employed in the fielding process. Live calling was conducted by trained interviewers at the Wason Center for Civic Leadership survey research lab at Christopher Newport University. The data reported here are weighted using an iterative weighting process on region, age, race, sex, and education to reflect as closely as possible the population of Virginia's November 2, 2021 electorate. Parameters for the weights used in this survey come from the 2020 Census, 2017 and 2019 American Community Survey, and data from the last eight election exit polls in Virginia.