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THE WASON CENTER

FOR CIVIC LEADERSHIP

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Voters would cut grocery tax; require vaccines for first responders, teachers, medical pros but not for students; keep teaching impact of racism on society, not ban CRT

Summary of Key Findings

1. **A majority of Virginia voters prefer spending the state budget surplus on underfunded government services, such as education, public safety and social services (59%), rather than providing tax cuts or tax rebates (38%).**

2. **Voters overwhelmingly support cutting the 2.5% grocery tax, either by a total repeal (47%) or by giving low-income Virginians a tax credit (25%).**

3. **Voters support teaching how racism continues to impact American society (63% to 33%) and oppose a ban on the teaching of Critical Race Theory in public schools (57% to 35%).**

4. **Virginia voters support vaccine mandates for first responders (58%), teachers (57%) and medical providers (61%), while opposing mandates for elementary students (55%) and middle school students (51%). On masks in schools, voters say health data should be used to determine mask requirements (56%) versus leaving the decision to parents (41%).**

5. **Voters strongly support stationing a police officer in every school (70%).**

6. **On abortion, a plurality oppose a 24-hour waiting period (49% to 44%), while a majority oppose requiring an ultrasound (57% to 36%) and a ban on abortions at 6 weeks (58% to 33%).**

7. **Voters support the state's membership in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative carbon cap-and-trade program (67% to 26%) and the Virginia Clean Economy Act (67% to 28%), a law requiring the state to generate 100% of its electricity from renewable energy by 2050.**

For further information, contact:

Dr. Rebecca Bromley-Trujillo	rebecca.bromleytrujillo@cnu.edu	O: (757) 594-9140
Research Director	@beckybtru	M: (269) 598-5008
Dr. Quentin Kidd	qkidd@cnu.edu	O: (757) 594-8499
Academic Director	@QuentinKidd	M: (757) 775-6932

Analysis

As the General Assembly passes crossover and moves into the second half of its 2022 session, Virginia registered voters are split on the direction of the state, their views of Governor Glenn Youngkin, and key agenda items before legislators. While Virginia voters show support for some of Governor Youngkin's proposals, including a repeal of the grocery tax and placing a police or resource officer in public schools, a majority of registered voters do not support the governor's environmental policy proposals or a ban on the teaching of Critical Race Theory.

State of things: When asked about the direction of the Commonwealth, 45% say Virginia is headed in the right direction, while 41% say the wrong direction. Views about the right/wrong direction of the Commonwealth have remained relatively consistent over the last four years. After his first few weeks in office, Governor Youngkin's job approval is mixed, with 41% saying they approve of the job the governor is doing and 43% indicating disapproval; 16% say they don't know.

Differences are largely along partisan lines, with 80% of Republican voters saying Virginia is heading in the right direction, compared to 22% of Democrats and 45% of Independents. On Governor Youngkin's job performance, 85% of Republicans approve, while 81% of Democrats disapprove, and Independents are fairly split (42% approve, 36% disapprove, 22% don't know).

"In this highly polarized environment, we see partisans running to their corners on how they view the direction of the Commonwealth and the job of the governor," said Quentin Kidd, Academic Director of the Wason Center. "Youngkin's approval numbers are certainly lower than those of recent governors in Wason Center polling early in their term."

Direction of the country and presidential approval: Virginia voters are pessimistic about the direction of the country amid an ongoing pandemic and economic uncertainty. Only 22% of Virginia registered voters say the United States is headed in the right direction, compared to 67% percent who say the wrong direction. That is decidedly more pessimistic than over the past four years. President Biden's job approval numbers reflect this overall discontent, with 40% saying they approve of his job performance, compared to 53% who disapprove; 7% say they don't know. A year ago, Biden's approval among Virginia voters stood at 57%.

"Virginian's views have soured markedly on the direction of the country compared to a year ago when they are more optimistic after President Biden's election," said Kidd. "That pessimism is also reflected in Biden's dramatic drop in approval."

Taxes and the budget: Governor Youngkin has proposed to repeal the state's 2.5% grocery tax. In this survey, 47% of Virginia voters support a full repeal; 25% support granting a tax credit for low-income residents to offset the grocery tax; 24% say the grocery tax should remain as is.

With the state budget showing a significant surplus, a majority of Virginia voters would prioritize spending the surplus on underfunded government services, such as education, public safety and social services (59%), while 38% say the surplus should go back to Virginia citizens in the form of tax cuts or tax rebates.

Climate change: On environmental issues associated with renewable energy and climate change, Virginia voters show concern and support for government policy to address those concerns.

Most voters said potential climate change effects are having an impact on Virginia. On sea level rise, 44% of voters see major impact, 30% see minor impact, 20% see no impact and 7% say they don't know. On harm to wildlife and ecological systems, 46% see major impact, 31% see minor impact, 17% see no impact and 7% don't know. On hurricanes, floods and other extreme weather, 41% see major impact, 35% see minor impact, 23% see no impact and 2% don't know. As to long periods of hot weather, 41% see major impact, 34% see minor impact, 24% see no impact and 2% don't know.

A majority of Virginia voters say climate change should be either a top priority (34%) or a medium priority (32%) for the governor and General Assembly, while 33% indicate the issue should be a low priority (22%) or not a priority at all (11%). "It's not surprising to see many Virginia voters say climate change should be a priority for their state government," said Rebecca Bromley-Trujillo, Research Director of the Wason Center. "Sea level rise, harm to ecosystems and extreme weather largely accord with scientists' expectations of climate effects here."

Governor Youngkin proposes to repeal the Virginia Clean Economy Act, a law passed in the Democratic-controlled legislature in 2020 and signed by Governor Ralph Northam that would require electric utilities in the state to produce 100% of their energy from renewable resources by 2050. Two-thirds (67%) of Virginia voters surveyed support this law, while just over a quarter (28%) oppose it. By a similar margin (67% to 26%), voters support another environmental policy targeted by the Youngkin administration, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, under which Virginia participates in a carbon cap-and-trade program with other states to reduce carbon pollution.

Teaching about race; stationing police in public schools: Virginia voters largely support teaching how racism continues to impact American society today (63% support/strongly support to 33% oppose/strongly oppose). In addition, a majority oppose a government ban on the teaching of Critical Race Theory in Virginia public schools (57% oppose/strongly oppose to 35% support/strongly support). While Critical Race Theory is currently not specifically taught in K-12 public schools in the state, the topic gained political traction during the 2021 gubernatorial campaign and Governor Youngkin signed an executive order banning its teaching on his first day in office. Demonstrating how politically charged the specialized term has become, differences in this survey emerge primarily along partisan lines, with Democrats heavily opposing a ban (82% oppose/strongly oppose) and Republicans supporting a ban (63%

support/strongly support). While a majority of both white and Black voters oppose a ban, significant gaps are apparent (73% of Black voters and 53% of white voters oppose a ban; 19% of Black voters and 42% of white voters support a ban).

A large majority of Virginia voters support Governor Youngkin's proposal to require the placement of a police or resource officer in every Virginia public school (70% support/strongly support to 25% oppose/strongly oppose).

Abortion: Some Virginia Republican lawmakers proposed to reinstate restrictive abortion laws that were repealed under Democratic control in 2020, including a law mandating a 24-hour waiting period before a woman could have an abortion and a law requiring a woman to undergo an ultrasound before having an abortion. A plurality of Virginia voters oppose the 24-hour waiting period requirement (49% oppose/strongly oppose to 44% support/strongly support) and a solid majority oppose an ultrasound requirement (57% oppose/strongly oppose to 36% support/strongly support). A comparably large majority also oppose a ban on abortions once a fetal heartbeat is detected around the 6th week of pregnancy (58% oppose/strongly oppose to 33% support/strongly support).

COVID-19 vaccination and mask requirements: A majority of Virginia voters support vaccine requirements for people in jail or prison (57%), first responders (58%), members of the U.S. military (58%), teachers (57%), medical providers (61%), and members of Congress (56%). Virginia voters are split on vaccine requirements for college students (50% yes to 48% no), federal government employees (50% yes to 48% no), organizations/businesses with federal government contracts (48% yes to 50% no), state government employees (50% yes to 48% no), and high school students (49% yes to 49% no). A slight majority oppose a vaccine requirement for middle school students (47% yes to 51% no) and a larger majority oppose a vaccine requirement for elementary school students (42% yes to 55% no).

On masking in public schools, a majority of Virginia voters indicate that school mask requirements should be determined by health data and information from health experts (56%) versus a decision left to parents (41%). This result runs counter to a law just passed by the 2022 General Assembly and signed by Governor Youngkin allowing parents to opt their children out of mask mandates rather than leave the decision to local school boards.

Q1: Overall, would you say things in the COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45+	Non-College	College
Right	45	80	22	45	52	39	48	41	40	49	47	43
Mixed	10	5	8	11	8	12	7	20	7	12	9	11
Wrong	41	13	66	37	37	45	40	38	50	34	40	42
Don't Know/ref (vol)	4	2	4	6	4	5	5	1	3	5	4	5

Trends:	Feb. 2021	Nov. 2020	April 2019	Dec. 2018
Right	47	48	46	64
Mixed	8	7	14	11
Wrong	42	47	40	25
Dk/ref (vol)	5	2	5	5

Q2: And how about the country … would you say things in the UNITED STATES are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45+	Non-College	College
Right	22	5	38	21	21	23	23	22	22	22	19	25
Mixed	9	4	10	12	11	9	8	16	9	10	6	15
Wrong	67	91	51	64	69	66	68	61	68	67	74	59
Don't Know/ref (vol)	2	0	1	3	0	3	2	1	2	1	2	1

Trends:	Feb. 2021	Jan. 2020	Oct. 2019	Dec. 2018
Right	46	29	30	35
Mixed	8	16	8	15
Wrong	45	55	62	49
Dk/ref (vol)	1	-	-	5

Q3: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Glenn Youngkin is handling his job as Governor of Virginia?

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45+	Non-College	College
Approve	41	85	9	42	51	32	49	20	32	48	45	37
Disapprove	43	3	81	36	31	54	39	53	52	36	37	51
Don't Know/ref (vol)	16	12	10	22	17	15	13	27	16	16	19	12

Q4: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Joe Biden is handling his job as President?

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45+	Non-College	College
Approve	40	5	80	29	30	49	32	73	37	43	35	46
Disapprove	53	94	14	61	64	44	63	20	56	52	61	44
Don't Know/ref (vol)	7	2	6	10	6	7	5	8	8	6	4	10

Trends: Feb. 2021
Approve 57
Disapprove 36
Dk/ref (vol) 7

Q5: Now, moving to some policy ideas for Virginia…

Which of the following proposals comes closest to your view on Virginia's 2.5% grocery tax, even if none are exactly right? [ROTATE]

The grocery tax should be repealed	47
A tax credit should be provided to low-income residents to offset the cost of the grocery tax	25
The grocery tax should remain in place as is, at 2.5%	24

Q6: The Commonwealth is experiencing historic budget surpluses. The Governor and General Assembly will decide how to spend the surplus revenue during the 2022 General Assembly Session.

In thinking about how this money should be spent, which of the following would you prioritize? [ROTATE]

Sending the surplus money back to Virginia citizens in the form of tax cuts or tax rebates	38
Spending the money on underfunded government services like education, public safety, and social services	59
Don't Know/ref (vol)	3

Q7: Now, moving to issues related to the environment

I am going to read you a list of potential climate change effects. Would you say that each of these effects is having a major impact, a minor impact, or no impact on Virginia?

a. Rising sea levels

Major impact	44
Minor impact	30
No impact	20
Don't know/ref (vol)	7

b. Harm to wildlife and ecological systems

Major impact	46
Minor impact	31
No impact	17
Don't know/ref (vol)	7

c. Extreme weather, such as floods or hurricanes

Major impact   41
Minor impact   35
No impact   23
Don't know/ref (vol)   2

d. Long periods of unusually hot weather

Major impact   41
Minor impact   34
No impact   24
Don't know/ref (vol)   2

Q11: Now, thinking about priorities for the Governor and General Assembly in Virginia, should addressing climate change be a…..?

Top priority   34
Medium priority   32
Low priority   22
Not a priority at all   11

Q12: Virginia recently passed the Virginia Clean Economy Act, which requires the state to generate 100% of its electricity using clean, renewable energy sources like solar and wind by 2050.

Would you say you support or oppose the Virginia Clean Economy Act?

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45+	Non-College	College
Strongly support	33	8	56	31	34	32	33	32	37	31	32	34
Support	34	33	38	31	27	41	30	53	40	31	33	36
Oppose	14	22	3	18	19	10	16	7	11	16	16	12
Strongly Oppose	14	27	0	17	18	10	16	5	9	17	14	13
Dk/ref (vol)	5	10	2	4	3	7	5	4	4	6	5	4

Q13: Virginia recently joined the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), which enters the Commonwealth into a carbon cap and trade program with other states in the region to reduce carbon pollution. Would you say you support or oppose Virginia's participation in RGGI?

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45+	Non-College	College
Strongly support	32	8	54	30	28	36	28	44	39	28	30	35
Support	35	33	38	33	30	39	33	47	35	34	31	39
Oppose	15	27	3	18	20	11	18	2	13	17	18	11
Strongly Oppose	11	21	2	12	17	6	13	5	8	13	12	10
Dk/ref (vol)	7	11	3	7	6	8	8	2	5	9	9	5

Q14: Do you support or oppose teaching how racism continues to impact American society today?

Strongly support 36
Support 27
Oppose 15
Strongly Oppose 18
Dk/ref (vol) 4

Q15: Do you support or oppose a government BAN on the teaching of Critical Race Theory in Virginia public schools?

	All	Rep	Dem	Ind	Male	Female	White	Black	18-44	45+	Non-College	College
Strongly support	21	42	3	21	26	17	26	10	16	26	25	17
Support	14	21	6	17	17	12	16	9	14	15	16	12
Oppose	21	17	26	20	17	25	19	30	24	19	20	22
Strongly Oppose	36	16	56	35	35	38	34	43	42	32	32	42
Dk/ref (vol)	7	4	8	7	6	8	6	9	4	9	8	6

Q16: Do you support or oppose a requirement placing a police or resource officer into every public school in Virginia?

Strongly support 30
Support 40
Oppose 18
Strongly Oppose 7
Dk/ref (vol) 6

Shifting to another topic…

Q17: Do you support or oppose each of the following possible changes to Virginia abortion law

A. A law that would mandate a 24-hour waiting period before a woman could have an abortion

Strongly support 16
Support 28
Oppose 21
Strongly Oppose 28
Dk/ref (vol) 7

B. Requiring a woman to undergo an ultrasound before having an abortion

Strongly support 13
Support 23
Oppose 28
Strongly Oppose 29
Dk/ref (vol) 7

C. A ban on abortions once a fetal heartbeat is detected around the 6th week of pregnancy

Strongly support   16
Support   17
Oppose   28
Strongly Oppose   30
Dk/ref (vol)   8

Now, shifting topics to COVID-19…

Q20: Do you think the following groups of people should be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 once they are eligible?

	Yes, should	No, should not
People in jail or prison	57	42
First responders such as police officers or firefighters	58	40
Members of the U.S. military	58	41
College students	50	48
Teachers	57	42
Medical providers such as doctors, nurses, lab techs, etc.	61	38
Federal government employees	50	48
Organizations and businesses that have contracts with the federal government	48	50
State government employees	50	48
Members of the U.S. Congress	56	43
High school students	49	49
Middle school students	47	51
Elementary school students	42	55

Q30: Which of the following comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right….

Health data and information from health experts should be used to determine
        whether masks should be required in public schools   56
Parents should be the ones to decide whether or not their children wear a mask in public school   41
Don't Know/ref (vol)   3

Demographics Full Survey n=701

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

High school or less	55
College or more	45

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

Yes	5
No	94

RACE: Do you consider yourself to be:

White	70
Black or African American	19
Other	11

RELIG: What is your religious preference, are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, another religion, or no religion?

Protestant	27
Christian (non-specific)	21
Catholic	13
Jewish	2
Muslim	1
Other	11
None	22

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

Very conservative	4
Conservative	20
Moderate	34
Liberal	26
Very liberal	9

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

Democrat	33
Republican	27
Independent	33
No Preference (vol)	4
Other Party (vol)	0

PARTYLN

Lean Republican	14
Lean Democrat	15
Independent	7

AGE: (Recorded as exact year of birth)

18-24	7
25-34	13
35-44	24
45-54	17
55 & older	40

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

Under $25,000	4
$25-$49,999	15
$50-$74,999	16
$75-$99,999	17
$100,000-$149,999	13
Over $150,000	23
Dk/ref	12

CELL/LANDLINE

Cell	54
Landline	46

SEX:

Male	47
Female	53

REGION

Northern	32
Richmond-Central	22
Hampton Roads-East	24
South/Southwest/West	22

How the survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 701 interviews of registered Virginia voters, conducted January 26 – February 15, 2022. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The margin of error for the whole survey 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 54.2% and 45.8%. 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 1.3 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 data reported here are weighted using an iterative weighting process on region, age, race, sex, and education to reflect as closely as possible the demographic composition of registered voters in Virginia. Parameters for the weights used in this survey come from the 2020 Census, 2017 and 2019 American Community Survey, and the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program (PEP).