

MEMORANDUM

To: RGA Leadership
From: Wes Anderson & Kayla Dunlap
Date: October 5, 2017
Re: WaPo Virginia Statewide

KEY FINDINGS

Below are a few notes comparing the *Washington Post-Schar School's* latest Virginia Statewide survey with ours – fielded only a few days prior. On the whole, our findings divulged many questionable methods in this survey that simply make it unreliable.

The Washington Post's History in Virginia

First and foremost, the Washington Post has a history of missing Virginia races. Heading into VA's 2013 gubernatorial election, WaPo's October survey showed Terry McAuliffe running away with the race leading by 12 points, 51-39 with 8 points going to the Libertarian. On Election Day, McAuliffe beat Cuccinelli by a mere 2.5 points, 47.7% to 45.2%.

Here are some of the reasons we think they're probably wrong again.

Party Break

The most glaring difference off the bat is WaPo's party break. While WaPo has Democrats +10, 34% to Republican's 24% our survey pegs Democrats with a much smaller 3 point advantage, 37-34, findings that are consistent with VA statewide elections for the last two cycles. Meanwhile, they peg Independents at 32% compared to our 24%. If you look at WaPo's Party ID trend, they notoriously have Republicans in the low to mid 20s. For a frame of reference, while exit polls have their own problems, CNN's Virginia exits following the 2016 Presidential election had Republicans at 33%.

Party ID. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an independent or what?

	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	No op.
10/2/17	34	24	32	6	5
5/14/17	34	24	33	5	3
10/30/16	30	24	36	6	5
8/14/16	31	21	37	7	3
10/27/13	32	24	31	6	7
9/22/13	33	24	33	6	5
5/2/13	28	26	33	8	4
10/26/12	31	23	36	6	3
9/16/12	32	24	35	5	4
5/2/12	31	25	36	5	2

Cell Phones

WaPo states that their total sample "included 286 interviews on landlines and 835 interviews completed via cellular phones, including 464 interviews with adults in cell-phone only households." That means that 74% of their sample were cell phone respondents, and 41% were cell phone-only respondents. As you well know, the conversation surrounding cell phone composition has been ongoing over the past decade because as any reputable pollster can tell you, the percentage of cell phones included in a

survey can make or break your results. The overall consensus among the industries best has generally concluded that a) cell phones should not be a fixed percentage but tailored state by state to reflect an individual state's migration rate to cell-only households and b) with a few outliers, very rarely do any surveys require going above 50% in cell phone composition at this point. They very well may in the future but not now. Why does over-sampling cell phones matter? Because over-sampling cell phone leads to socioeconomic, age and race distortions in the data. Our Virginia survey capped cell phones at 40%.

Weighting Regimen

Weighting exists on a need be basis to minimally adjust a sample so it best represents the historical turnout of any given race. It can be very beneficial and often necessary, but it can also be detrimental by laying on a rigid set of assumptions that in no way are an accurate representation of the electorate. In WaPo's methodological details, they go into a lengthy explanation of their weighting regimen.

This survey uses statistical weighting procedures to account for characteristics of the sample design and deviations in the survey sample from known population characteristics, which helps correct for differential survey participation and random variation in samples. The overall sample is weighted to correct for differential probabilities of selection among individuals who were interviewed through the RDD and voter list samples based on the size of each frame.

Results are also weighted to match the demographic makeup of the population according to the latest American Community Survey by age, race/ethnicity, sex, education and by region of Virginia, and the National Health Interview Survey by telephone usage. In addition, the sample is weighted to match the average party identification in the previous three Washington Post and Post-Schar Virginia surveys and the current survey.

First, they weighted "to account for characteristics of the sample design and deviations in the survey sample from known population characteristics." Then, they weighted again to match the demographic makeup based on ACS data. Lastly, they weighted to match the average party ID of past surveys. This means not only did they use multiple weights, but their weighting was based very little on actual vote history and voter turnout. And as we pointed out earlier, weighting to match the average party ID of your past surveys does no good when your results are historically wrong.

Final Comment

For these reasons, we believe this survey has failed to meet many of the standards required to be considered an accurate survey and should be taken with a pound of salt, maybe even more.

ABOUT US

Wes Anderson is a leading GOP pollster with 20 years of experience in opinion research. As a founding partner, Wes now leads the polling divisions of OnMessage Inc. and OnMessage Sports, providing political and corporate clients with a full spectrum of quantitative and qualitative opinion research products. You can read more about Wes Anderson at onmessageinc.com.