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Republican Brat and Democrat Spanberger in dead heat as Virginia’s GOP-leaning 7th District race hits final week; Trump disapproval and voter enthusiasm lift Spanberger

Summary of Key Findings

1. In our likely voter model, Democrat Abigail Spanberger and Republican incumbent Dave Brat are in a statistical tie, 46% Spanberger, 45% Brat.
2. In our second model, restricted to the most committed voters, Spanberger has a 3-point lead, 48%-45%, just inside the margin of error.
3. A 16-point “enthusiasm gap” boosts challenger Spanberger, as 78% of Democrats are “very enthusiastic” about voting, versus 62% of Republicans.
4. While 47% of voters in the 7th District approve of the job President Trump is doing, 51% disapprove; 30% strongly approve, while 43% strongly disapprove.
5. In the U.S. Senate contest, likely voters in the GOP-leaning 7th District favor incumbent Democrat Tim Kaine over Republican Corey Stewart, 48%-43%.

For further information contact:

Dr. Rachel Bitecofer, Assistant Director
Wason Center for Public Policy

e-mail rachel.bitecofer@cnu.edu

O: (757) 594-8997
M: (541) 729-9824

Dr. Quentin Kidd, Director
Wason Center for Public Policy

e-mail qkidd@cnu.edu

O: (757) 594-8499
M: (757) 775-6932

Analysis

Among registered voters who have voted in at least two of the last four elections in Virginia, or who were new voters to Virginia in 2017 (n=871), incumbent Republican Dave Brat is in a statistical tie with Democratic challenger, Abigail Spanberger. Of these likely voters, 46% favor Spanberger while 45% favor Brat. Libertarian candidate Joseph Walton has 4% and 3% are undecided (*see Model 1, Likely Voters*). The model's margin of error is +/- 4.2.

If the voting model is restricted to only those voters who said they were definitely going to vote and were very enthusiastic about the coming election (n=790), Spanberger opens a 3-point lead over Brat, which is inside the model's margin of error (+/- 4.4). Of these committed voters, Spanberger receives 48%, Brat 45% and Walton 3%, with 3% of voters undecided (*see Model 2, Committed Voters*).

Although partisans are firmly entrenched in their respective camps, Democrats are more strongly behind Spanberger than Republicans are behind Brat. Among likely voters, 89% of Republicans plan to vote for Brat, compared to 96% of Democrats for Spanberger. Among committed voters, 90% of Republicans will vote for Brat, while Spanberger maintains 96% of Democrats. Among Independents who are likely voters, Brat holds an 8-point advantage, 46% to 38%. That lead decreases to 6 points, 46%-40%, in the committed voter model.

As in congressional districts around the country, Virginia's 7th District shows a large gender gap, with men breaking for the Republican by 15 points (52%-37%) and women breaking for the Democrat by 14 points (53%-39%). Spanberger holds a 9-point advantage among likely voters age 44 and under (49%-40%), which jumps to 14 points among committed voters (52%-38%). Among likely voters age 45 and older, Brat is leading Spanberger by 6 points (49%-43%), but his advantage narrows to 5 points among committed voters (49%-44%).

“The fact that a district like the 7th is competitive is strong evidence that 2018 should produce a strong midterm effect that benefits Democrats,” said Dr. Rachel Bitecofer, assistant director of the Wason Center. “This district has a significant structural advantage for Republicans. But that advantage can be overcome with strong turnout in the Richmond suburbs. Democratic turnout will determine which candidate prevails on Election Day.”

Unlike the 2nd District in Hampton Roads and the 10th District in Northern Virginia, which broke in favor of Democrat Ralph Northam in last year's gubernatorial election, the 7th District broke for Republican Ed Gillespie by nearly 4 points. “Assuming Independents favor Brat, as our survey suggests, Spanberger's best strategy is to drive Democratic turnout as high as possible,” Bitecofer said. The 16-point “enthusiasm gap” between Democrats and Republicans in the survey suggests that there may be enough energy in the 7th District for that to happen. Spanberger also appears to benefit from the inclusion of a Libertarian Party candidate on the ballot.

Although the Wason Center is not polling Virginia’s U.S. Senate race statewide, we wanted to get a sense of how the race between incumbent Democratic Senator Tim Kaine and Republican Corey Stewart stood in the 7th District, which is normally a safe Republican area. Among likely voters in the district, Kaine holds a 5-point lead over Stewart, 48%-43%.

Although President Trump enjoys a higher approval rate in the 7th District than shown in Wason Center surveys in the 2nd District (Oct. 15) and 10th District (Oct. 4), more voters disapprove of the job he is doing as president than approve. While 47% of likely voters approve of his job performance, 51% disapprove. Paralleling the “enthusiasm gap” that favors Democrat Spanberger, 43% of likely voters strongly disapprove of the job President Trump is doing, while 30% strongly approve.

Tables

HOUSE: If the election for House or Representatives were being held today and the candidates were ... for whom would you vote?

1. Dave Brat, the Republican
2. Abigail Spanberger, the Democrat
3. Joseph Walton, the Libertarian
4. Undecided (vol)
9. Dk/ref (vol)

Likely Voter Model

(n=871)	All	Rep	Ind	Dem	Males	Females	White	Black	18-44	45 +	Conservative	Liberal
Brat	45	89	46	1	52	39	55	6	40	49	87	6
Spanberger	46	2	38	96	37	53	37	86	49	43	11	88
Walton	4	5	7	1	5	2	4	1	7	1	2	2
Undecided	3	4	5	1	3	3	2	3	2	4	<1	3
Dk/Ref (vol)	2	0	4	1	3	3	2	4	2	2	<1	1

Committed Voter Model

(n=790)	All	Rep	Ind	Dem	Males	Females	White	Black	18-44	45 +	Conservative	Liberal
Brat	45	90	46	1	51	39	54	6	38	49	88	6
Spanberger	48	3	40	96	40	54	39	88	52	44	9	89
Walton	3	3	6	1	4	2	3	1	6	1	<1	1
Undecided	3	4	4	1	4	3	2	3	2	4	2	4
Dk/Ref (vol)	1	0	4	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	0	0

Other Findings

ENTH: How enthusiastic would you say you are about voting in this election? Would you say you are...

1. Very Enthusiastic
2. Somewhat Enthusiastic
3. Not Enthusiastic
9. Dk/ref (vol)

(n=871)	All	Rep	Ind	Dem
Very Enthusiastic	66	62	58	78
Somewhat Enthusiastic	25	28	31	17
Not Enthusiastic	8	10	10	5
Dk/Ref (vol)	1	0	1	0

SENATE: If the election for Senate were being held today and the candidates were ...for whom would you vote?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| 1. Corey Stewart, the Republican | 43 |
| 2. Tim Kaine, the Democrat | 48 |
| 3. Matt Waters, the Libertarian | 4 |
| 4. Undecided | 3 |
| 9. Dk/ref | 2 |

TRUMP: Thinking about the job President Trump is doing as president, do you approve or disapprove of the job Donald Trump is doing as president?

- | | |
|------------------------|----|
| 1. Strongly Approve | 30 |
| 2. Somewhat Approve | 17 |
| 3. Somewhat Disapprove | 8 |
| 4. Strongly Disapprove | 43 |
| 9. Dk/ref | 2 |

Demographics

EDUC:

High school or less	16
Some college	35
Vocational or technical training	3
College graduate	25
Graduate study or more	19

HISPANIC:

Yes	4
No	93

RACE:

White	75
Black or African American	17
Other	8

AGE:

18-24	8
25-34	11
35-44	24
45-54	25
55 & older	33

PARTY ID:

Republican	34
Democrat	34
Independent	27
No preference (vol)	3
Other party (vol)	1
Dk/ref (vol)	1

[IF OTHER THAN REP OR DEM ABOVE]

PARTLEAN:

Republican	43
Democratic	33
Independent	19

RELIG:

Christian	73
Jewish	2
Muslim	1
Other	8
No Preference	13
Dk/ref (vol)	3

IDEOL:

Strong liberal	9
Liberal	11
Moderate, leaning liberal	20
Moderate, leaning conservative	21
Conservative	17
Strong Conservative	14
Dk/ref (vol)	8

INCOME:

Under \$25,000	3
\$25-\$49,999	11
\$50-\$74,999	18
\$75-\$99,999	10
\$100,000-\$149,999	18
Over \$150,000	22
Dk/ref (vol)	14

SEX (interviewer coded):

Male	47
Female	53

How the survey was conducted:

The results of this poll are based on 871 interviews of registered voters in Virginia's 7th Congressional District who have voted in at least two of the last four elections or who were new voters to Virginia in 2017, including 293 on landline and 576 on cell phone, conducted October 18-27, 2018. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The margin of error for the whole survey (Model 1, n=871) 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 for the more restrictive model (Model 2, n=790) is +/- 4.4 at the 95% level of confidence. The margin of error is higher for subgroups within cross-tables. All error margins have been adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, which is 1.6 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 16%. 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. In addition to the quotas imposed on the sample, the data reported here are weighted using an iterative weighting process on sex, age, race, and education to reflect as closely as possible the population of likely voters in the 7th Congressional District of Virginia.