

2024 Life in Hampton Roads: Politics and Political Opinions

The Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Old Dominion University recently completed data collection for the 15th annual Life in Hampton Roads (LIHR) survey. The purpose of this survey is to gain insight into residents' perceptions of the quality of life in Hampton Roads as well as other topics of local interest such as perceptions of police, politics, the economy, education and health. A total of 640 telephone surveys were completed between June 4 and August 16, 2024. This year's Life in Hampton Roads survey included several questions about political attitudes given that Virginians will be electing a US Senator and, along with the rest of the country, a President this year. Those results are being released in advance of the November election; the remainder of the survey results will be released in the coming months. Survey data was weighted to match each city's population distribution on several variables including race, Hispanic ethnicity, age education, and gender, along with type of telephones in the household. Funding for the 2024 survey was provided by the Social Science Research Center and the Dragas Center for Economic Analysis and Policy. The SSRC would also like to thank the College of Arts and Letters and the ODU Office of Research for their continued support of the survey.

Key points

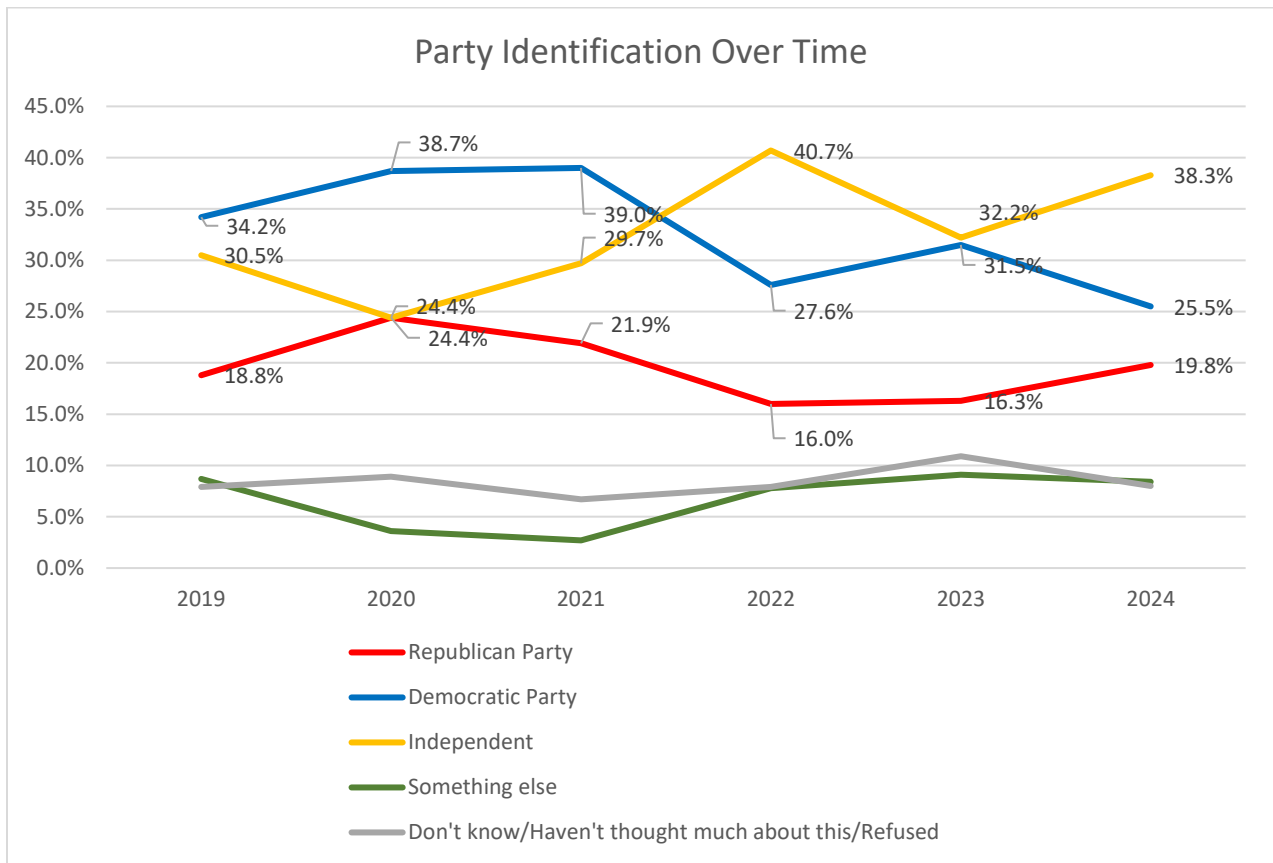
- Identification with the major political parties has slipped.
- Kaine is ahead regionally in the Senate race by a margin consistent with a statewide victory.
- In the presidential contest, although Democrats are ahead in the region the margin is consistent with a very close statewide contest.
- Few respondents indicate problems with security at their polling place.

Baseline Party Identification and Ideology

Political party affiliation among respondents to the survey continued to lean substantially toward the Democratic Party, in line with past Life in Hampton Roads' surveys, but also continued to track a decline in overall party identification. Less than 26 percent of respondents (down from more 31 percent last year) said they felt closest to the Democratic party when asked the question "Do you generally feel closer to the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, or do you consider yourself to be an independent or something else?" Approximately 20 percent (up from 16 percent) responded Republican Party. This difference from the previous year is partly due to a change in survey weighting methodology. This year LIHR was weighted on the basis of education in addition to other variables. If the survey was not weighted on education, Democratic identification would have been slightly higher (27.8 percent) and Republican

identification slightly lower (18.4 percent).¹ Affiliation with both parties remains lower than in several recent years: as in 2022 and 2023, more respondents identified as independents than with either party alone, with less than half of respondents affiliated with the major parties.

Winning over individuals who are not affiliated with either major party may be critical for November 2024 election outcomes. Many respondents do not feel that close to either party, a marked difference from 2020 when a substantially larger portion of the sample identified with one of the major parties.



The Senate Race

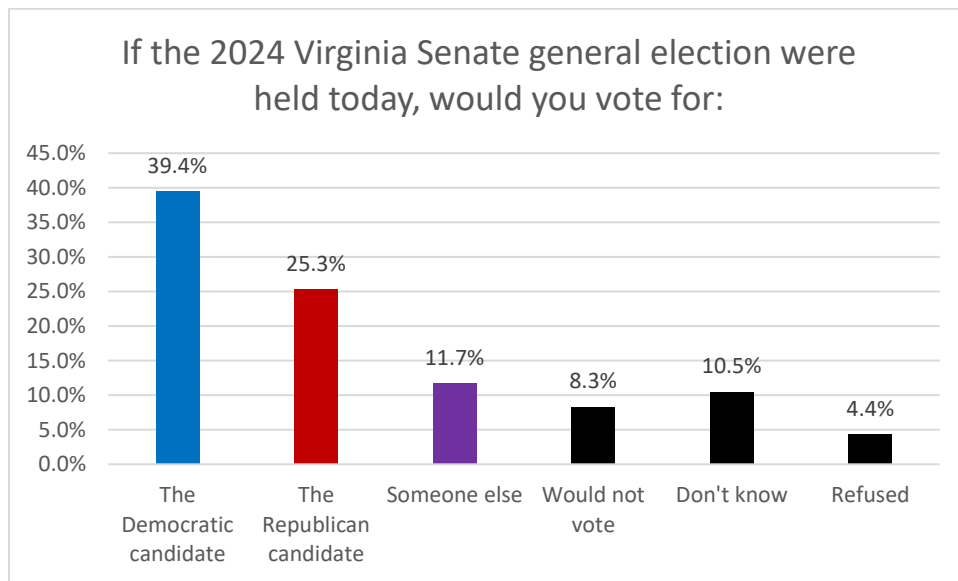
In 2024, incumbent Democratic Senator Tim Kaine will face Republican challenger Hung Cao. The last time Kaine ran for Senate (in 2018) Kaine won statewide by a wide margin, winning 57 percent of the

¹ Inclusion of weights brings LIHR in line with current national practice, and adjusts for the tendency of more educated individuals to be more likely to respond to surveys.

vote versus Republican Corey Stewart’s 41 percent. Within the seven Hampton Roads cities, Kaine won 63 percent of the two-party vote.

The 2024 survey asked respondents about their preferences in the Senate race. Overall, the results suggest that the Kaine campaign is positioned to win Hampton Roads, and the Senate race, but with a margin somewhat smaller than in 2018. Thirty-nine percent of all respondents indicated that they planned to vote for the Democratic candidate (61 percent of those who expressed a two-party preference), while 25 percent indicated that they would vote for the Republican candidate (39 percent of those with a two-party preference). Overall, these results are good news for Kaine, who appears to be on track to win another Senate term.

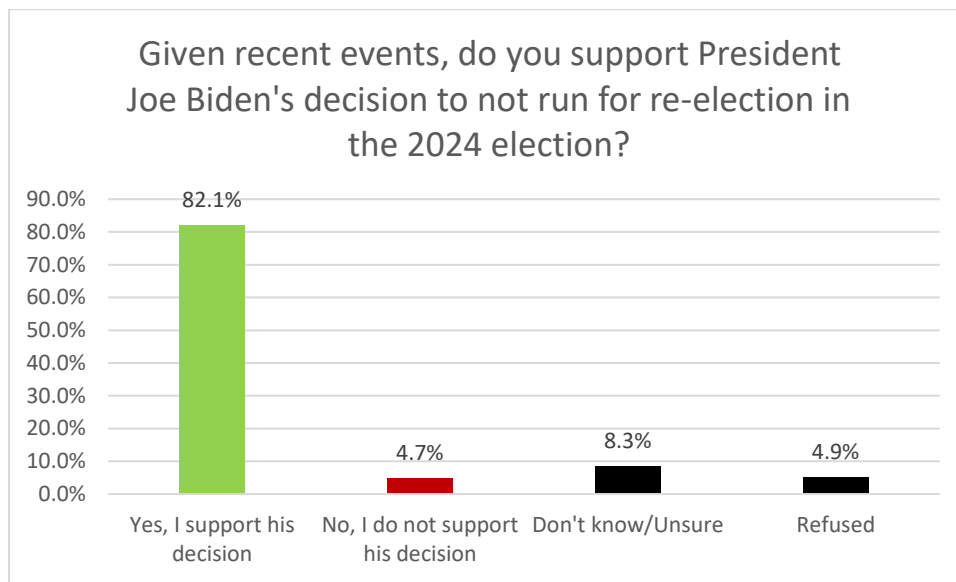
Roughly a third of respondents (35 percent) indicated that they currently would vote for someone else, would not vote, did not know who they would vote for, or refused to answer the question.²



² The figure includes all survey respondents, including non-registered voters. Thus, it does not add to 100 percent.

The Presidential Election

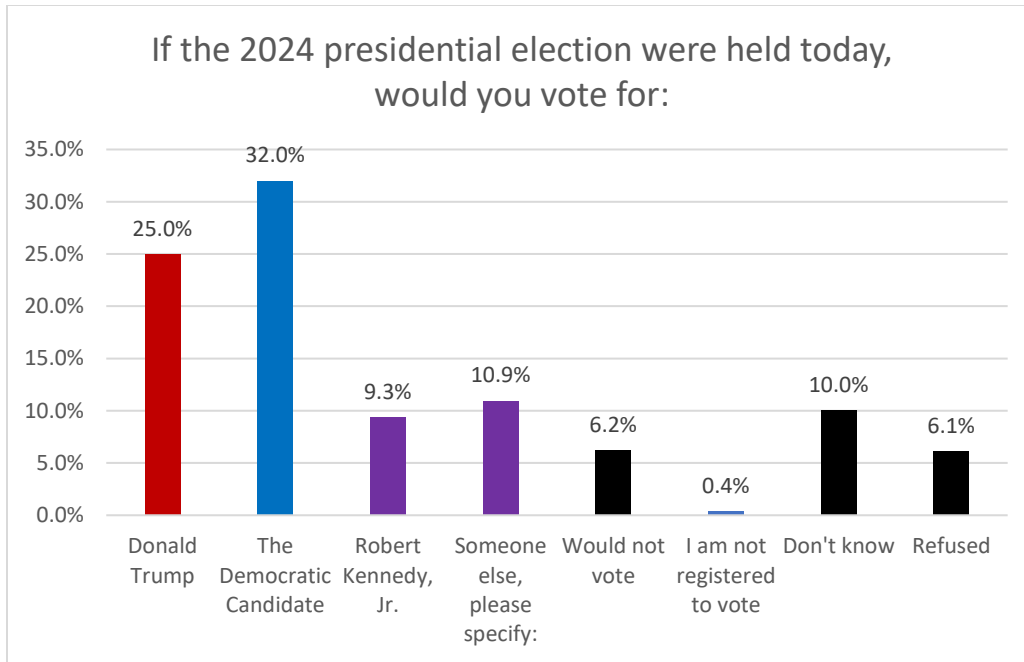
The LIHR survey data collection took place during a span of time that included the decision by Joe Biden to remove himself from the contest for the Democratic nomination. After Biden withdrew, a question was added to the survey that gave the final 237 survey respondents a chance to weigh in on that decision. This additional question asked: “Given recent events, do you support President Joe Biden's decision to not run for re-election in the 2024 election?”



More than 82 percent of respondents supported Biden’s decision, with opposition concentrated among Republicans, only 11.6 percent of whom opposed Biden’s decision, versus the 92.5 percent of Democrats who supported the decision.

Polling the presidential horserace itself was complicated by the changes at the top of the Democratic ticket and in the dynamics of the race. The survey ultimately included three versions of the question: a question asking about support for Joe Biden, a question asking about support for “the Democratic candidate” and a question asking about support for Kamala Harris. The analysis below basically merges responses to all three of these questions, but also includes an examination of shifting support.

In the most recent Presidential election, Donald Trump lost the seven cities of Hampton Roads by a substantial margin to Joe Biden. Biden won 60.6 percent of the two-party vote, while Trump won only 39.3 percent.



In the overall survey data, the Democratic candidate (again this combines Biden and Harris) received 56 percent of the regional two-party vote, with Trump winning 43.8 percent. This is a performance in the region consistent with a very close outcome statewide. In 2021, Governor Youngkin lost Hampton Roads with 45.6 percent of the regional two-party vote on the way to winning the governor’s office by a two percent margin.

As this result and a variety of other recent polls indicate, Virginia appears to be a swing state in the 2024 election cycle, albeit one with a narrow Democratic lean.

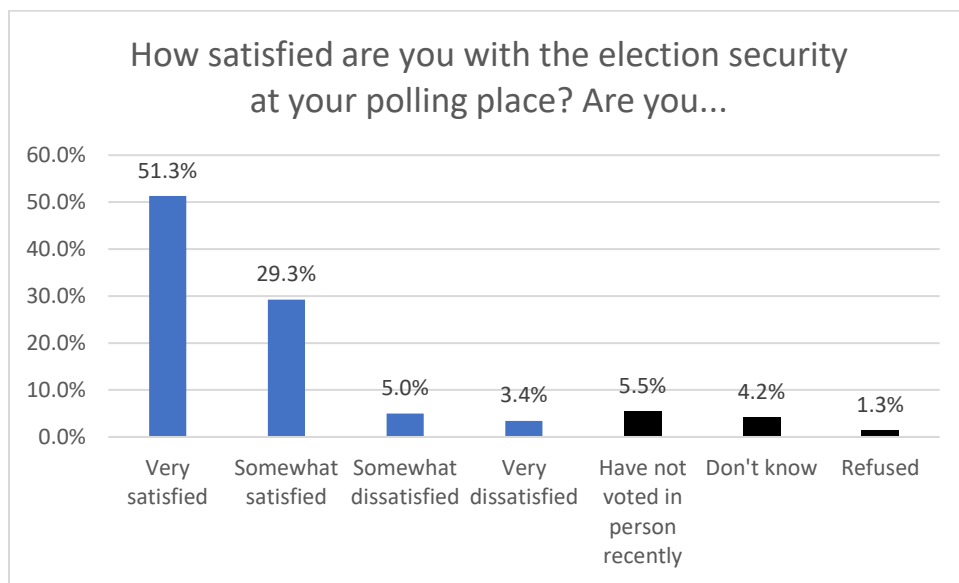
An important caveat, however, is that the analysis above includes the period before Biden dropped out of the race, and many responses were collected during the period when Biden was a wounded candidate following a disastrous performance in the June 2024 presidential debate. In addition, some of the post-Biden-drop responses were collected before Harris was the official nominee.³ If we restrict our attention only to responses collected after Biden dropped out of the race, the picture looks somewhat more bleak for Democrats, however, rather than brighter. During the pre-Biden-drop polling Trump was at 42.6 percent of the two-party vote, while afterwards Trump was at 45.2 percent. The difference is not statistically significant, and it is in the wrong direction for the hypothesis that Biden’s removal from the

³ Several individuals said they would vote for “some other candidate” during this period, and then responded with Kamala’s name. These were recoded as supporting the Democratic candidate.

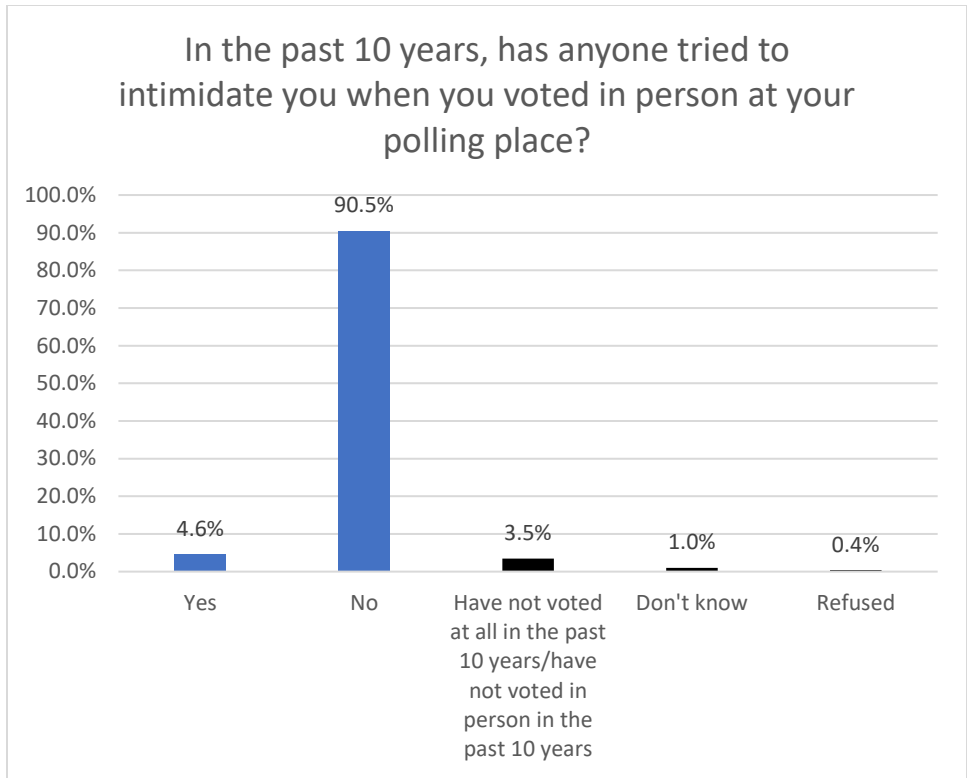
ticket was a boon for Democratic chances of victory. The subsample sizes are small, but the post-Biden-drop performance by the Democratic presidential candidate in this regional survey should remind Democrats that taking Virginia for granted would be a mistake.

Election Security

The LIHR survey included two questions about election security. The first question asked respondents how satisfied they were “with the election security at your polling place?” More than 80 percent indicated that they were very or somewhat satisfied and less than 9 percent were very or somewhat dissatisfied.



The second question asked, “In the past 10 years, has anyone tried to intimidate you when you voted in person at your polling place?” This question also indicated low levels of security issues at polling places, with less than 5 percent of respondents answering yes.



Follow-up questions about this press release should be addressed to:

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