

SWING LEFT PRIMER

THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

State elected officials

Governor

Ralph Northam (D)

Senate

21 Republicans
19 Democrats

House of Delegates

51 Republicans
49 Democrats

Federal elected officials

U.S. Senate

Mark Warner (D)
Tim Kaine (D)

U.S. House

7 Democrats
4 Republicans

Swing Left's Objective

Flip two seats in the State Senate, two seats in the House of Delegates, and protect currently Democratic seats to help ensure a fair redistricting process in 2021, and set up a decade of progressive victories with a Democratic trifecta.

Geography

Virginia is a mountainous state (Blue Ridge Mountains, part of the Appalachians) that is heavily forested, especially in the Eastern region. It has a large number of national parks, including Great Falls Park and Shenandoah National Park.

Issues for Voters

According to a poll conducted by the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee in February, 2019, the top issues for voters as they head into the 2019 General Assembly elections are funding for education and healthcare. Teacher pay in Virginia lags behind the national average by \$8,400 per year ([source](#)) and the Virginia public school system began last school year with a 1,000-teacher shortage. In 2018, bipartisan majorities in both the House of Delegates and State Senate passed Medicaid expansion, extending healthcare to around 400,000 low-income Virginians. However, an estimated 320,000 Virginians are still uninsured ([source](#)) and there is still concern around costs.

In the Hampton Roads region in Southeastern Virginia (Hampton-Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News), a huge issue

Facts & Stats

Major Metro Areas

Washington-Arlington
-Alexandria:
6.2 million

Hampton Roads Area:
1.7 million

Richmond:
1.3 million

Roanoke:
300,000

Charlottesville:
228,000

US Census Bureau

Demographics

Total population: 8,581,300

Black or African American:
19.8%

Hispanic or Latino: 9.4%

AAPI: 6.8%

American Indian and Native
Alaskan: 0.5%

White: 61.9%

Median age: 38

American Community Survey

is coastal flooding. The region is sinking into the ocean faster than any other part of the East Coast ([source](#)) and is second only to Louisiana in the U.S. While clearly caused by sea level rise, the issue is primarily not viewed as a discussion on climate change. Coastal resilience and flooding mitigation are more immediate issues for voters in these purple districts than the existential problem of climate change. The Hampton Roads region is also dominated by a sense of duty and service that stems from the vast physical and cultural presence of the Navy and other branches of the Armed Services.

In the wake of the shooting in Virginia Beach on May 31, 2019, gun violence prevention has been brought back to the front of the legislative agenda. Gov. Northam called for a special session of the General Assembly to convene on July 9, 2019 ([source](#)), calling on state lawmakers to pass common-sense legislation including universal background checks, Extreme Risk Protection Order laws, a handgun purchase limit, and a ban on so-called assault weapons and related devices, including sound suppressors like the one used—and bought legally—by the Virginia Beach gunman. In January 2019, Gov. Northam called on the legislature to pass a nearly identical package, but it was voted down by the GOP in committee ([source](#)) on a party-line vote. One specific proposal would have banned the kind of high-capacity magazines that were used by the gunman. (Updated: 6/6/19)

Gerrymandering Snapshot

In the wake of the 2010 census, the Republican-controlled House of Delegates generated a heavily racially gerrymandered map, which favored Republicans. Twelve of the 100 state House districts were drawn such that 55%+ of the voting age population was African-American. Republican legislators utilized the strategy known as “packing” in order to concentrate African-American voters in a small number of districts and consequently dilute the population of African-American voters in others. Challengers filed suit against this gerrymander in 2014, charging that Republican legislators had unfairly and disproportionately considered race while drawing district boundaries. After a federal district ruled against the challengers, they brought the case to the Supreme Court, which ruled in 2017 that the lower court had applied an erroneous legal standard to the case. When the case was tossed back to the district court, judges ruled that 11 of the 12 districts were unconstitutionally gerrymandered.

Republican legislators subsequently appealed the lower court’s decision, in a case that has made its way back up to the Supreme Court in early 2019. Redistricting has continued to be carried out at the

Prominent Institutions of Higher Learning (by undergraduate enrollment)

Virginia Tech: 27,000

George Mason University: 25,000

Virginia Commonwealth University: 24,000

James Madison University: 20,000

Old Dominion University: 19,500

University of Virginia: 16,000

College of William and Mary: 6,000

US News Education

lower-court level, with the involvement of a “special master” to help redraw the maps in a more just way. Gerrymandering is especially consequential for this year’s elections given last cycle’s results. Fifteen Democrats flipped seats in the House of Delegates election in 2017, and while the General Assembly remained majority-Republican, this was by a razor-thin margin. The new court-ordered map made six, formerly safe Republican-held districts into some of the most competitive races in the state’s 2019 elections. The Supreme Court agreed to hear the case in 2019, following Republican Delegates’ appeal of the new maps. A decision is expected for June 2019.

Key State Senate Races

District	Democratic candidate
SD-7	Cheryl Turpin
SD-8	Missy Cotter Smasal
SD-10	Ghazala Hashmi
SD-12	Debra Rodman
SD-13	John Bell

Key House of Delegates Races

District	Democratic candidate
HD-10*	Del. Wendy Gooditis
HD-21*	Del. Kelly Convirs-Fowler
HD-27	Larry Barnett
HD-28	Joshua Cole
HD-40	Dan Helmer
HD-66	Sheila Bynum-Coleman
HD-68*	Del. Dawn Adams
HD-72*	Del. Schuyler VanValkenburg

District	Democratic candidate
HD-73*	Rodney Willett
HD-76	Clint Jenkins
HD-83	Nancy Guy
HD-85*	Alex Askew
HD-91	Martha Mugler
HD-94	Shelly Simonds
HD-100	Phil Hernandez

* Democratic-held seat