

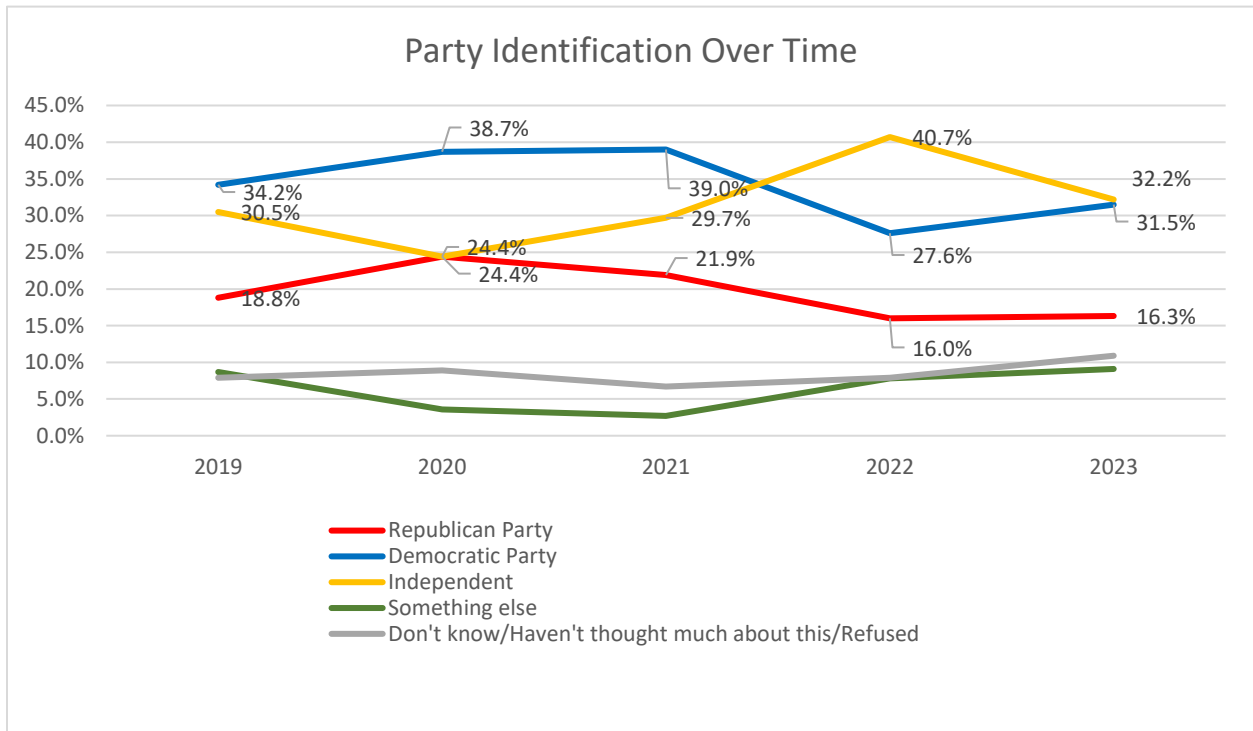
## 2023 Life in Hampton Roads: Politics and Political Opinions

The Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Old Dominion University recently completed data collection for the 14th 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 610 telephone surveys were completed between June 6 and Aug. 25, 2023. This year's Life in Hampton Roads survey included several questions about political attitudes given that Virginians will be electing all members of the House of Delegates and Senate 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. As with previous years, this year's survey data was weighted to match a city's population distribution on several variables including race, Hispanic ethnicity, age and gender, along with type of telephones in the household. Funding for the 2023 survey was provided by the Social Science Research Center. The SSRC would like to thank the College of Arts and Letters and the ODU Office of Research for their continued support of the survey.

### 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. More than 31% of respondents 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 16% responded Republican Party. Affiliation with both parties remains lower than in several recent years, although Democratic affiliation has increased modestly from last year's low (27.6%). As in 2022, more respondents identified as independents than with either party alone with less than half of respondents affiliated with the major parties.

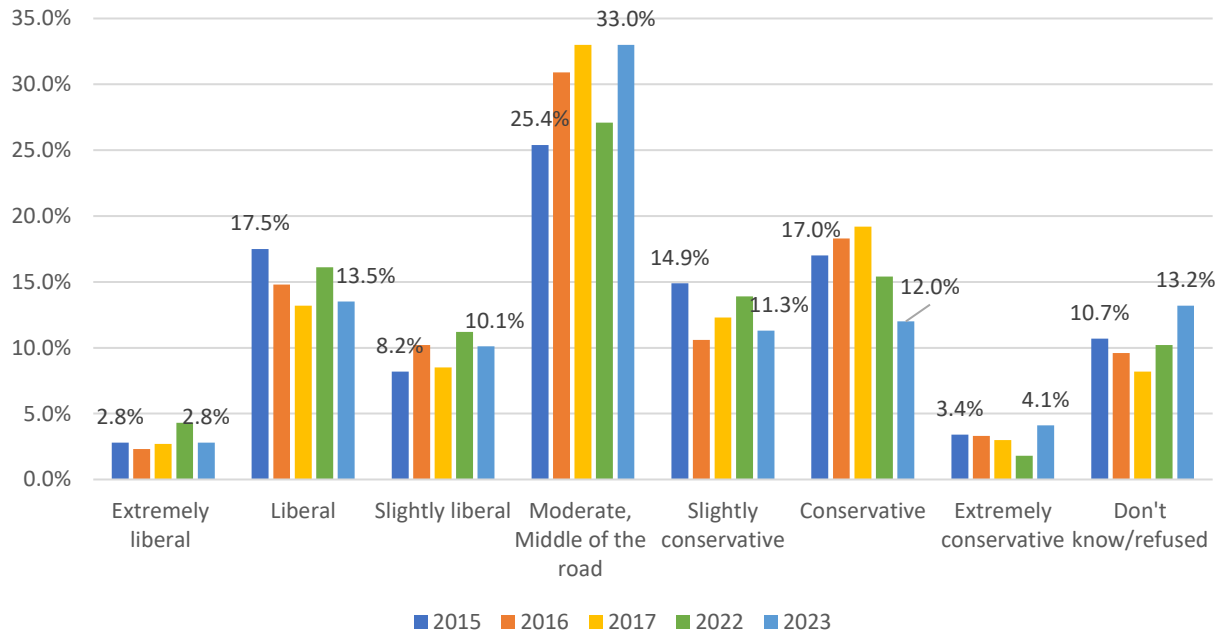
Winning over individuals who are not affiliated with either major party may be critical for November 2023 election outcomes. Many respondents do not feel that close to either party.



This year’s survey also asked about respondent self-rated political ideology. Individuals were asked to describe their political views on a seven-point scale ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. This item suggests that the region is quite balanced ideologically, with nearly equal numbers of liberals and conservatives. The largest group of respondents was those who said they were moderate (33%). Overall, just over one-quarter of respondents (26.4%) described themselves as liberal (summing across the three liberal categories) which is down 5.2% from 2022, and slightly more than one-quarter of respondents (27.4%) described themselves as conservative, also down nearly 4% from 2022. This year the portion of respondents who either refused to state their ideology or indicated that they did not know increased somewhat to 13.2%.

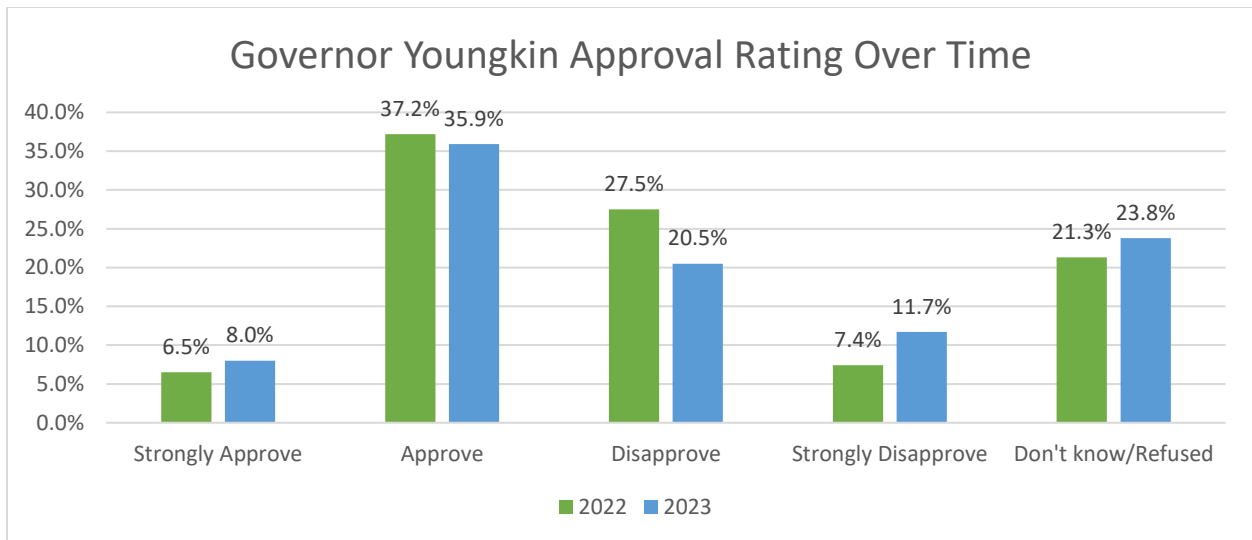
Overall, almost half of survey respondents (46.2%) did not see themselves as either liberal or conservative. The many moderate, non-ideological, non-partisan respondents reflect the diverse audiences that both parties will potentially need to attract to win in the November elections.

## Political Ideology Over Time



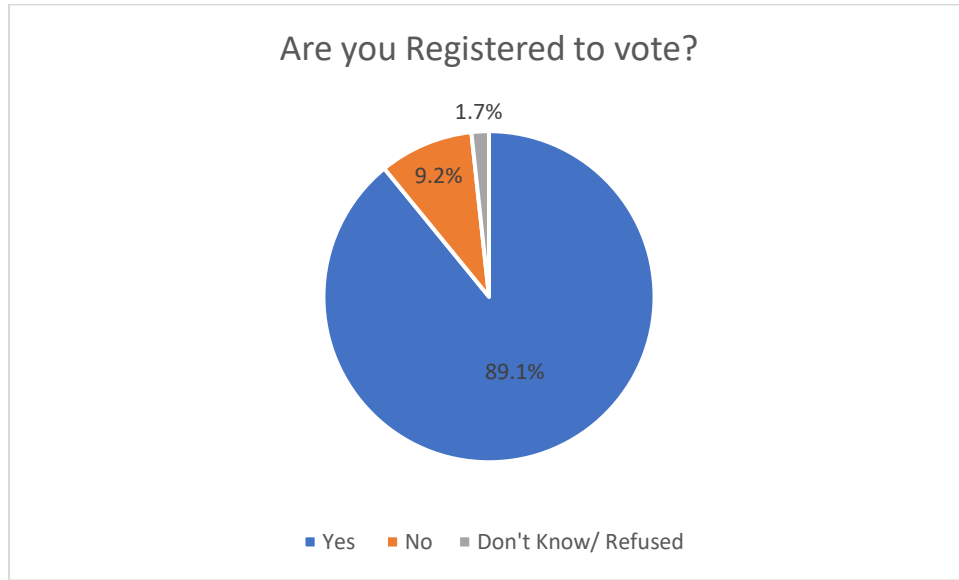
### Approval of the Governor: Largely Unchanged

At the time that the survey was conducted, Glenn Youngkin was in his second year as governor. Opinion of Youngkin’s job performance remained mixed, with 43.9% approving or strongly approving and 32.2% disapproving or strongly disapproving. Nearly one in four respondents indicated that they either did not know or refused to answer (23.8%). Since Youngkin received roughly 45% of the vote in the November 2021 gubernatorial election within the seven cities surveyed (217,129 out of 479,886 votes), this level of approval seems consistent with neither major gains nor losses in popularity for the governor at this point in his administration. There has, however, been a modest hardening of opinion toward the governor since the 2022 survey, with more respondents (19.7% versus 13.9%) indicating that they held their views strongly compared to 2022.



## The 2023 Legislative Elections: Many Undecideds and Some Signs of Trouble for Both Parties

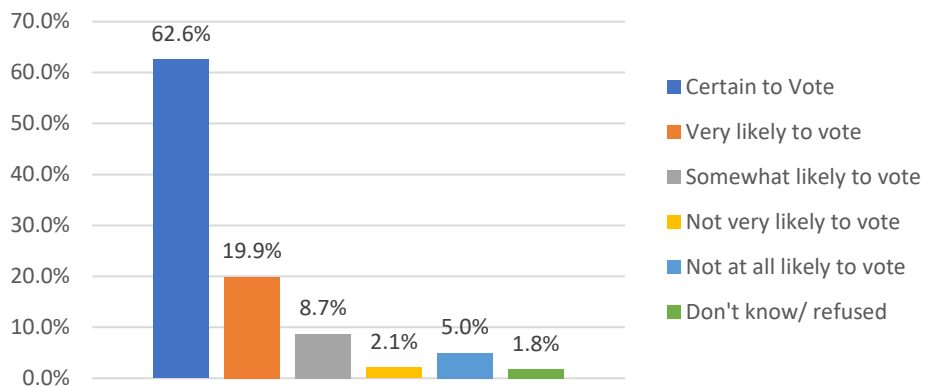
In November Virginia will hold an election for all members of the House of Delegates and State Senate. Because of this, the Life in Hampton Roads Survey included several questions concerning the election. These questions included some issue priority questions, and questions concerning how respondents planned to vote. Most survey respondents (89.1%) indicated that they were registered to vote.



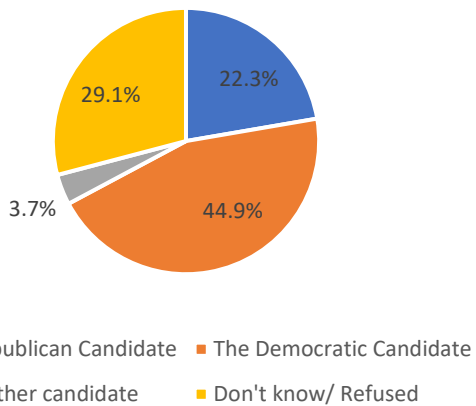
Among those who were registered voters, 62.6% indicated that they were “certain to vote,” with another 19.9% claiming that they were “very likely to vote” in the November election.

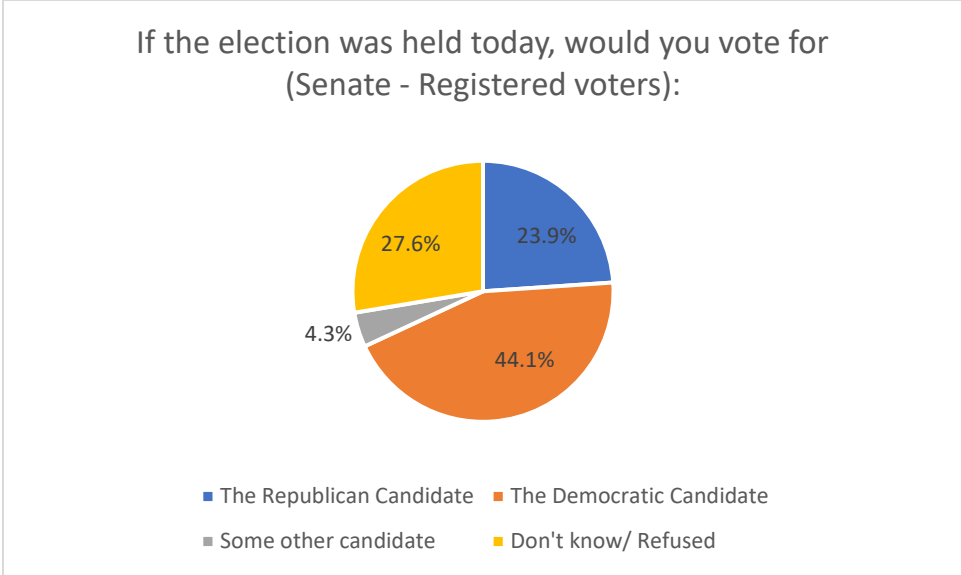
In the analyses below, some results are reported for the entire set of respondents, sometimes just those who were registered to vote, and sometimes only of likely voters, defined as respondents who indicated that they were at least “very likely to vote” and were also registered to vote. Many registered voters had yet to make up their mind about which candidate to support in the 2023 Virginia legislative election. This uncertainty may be multiplied by the major changes brought by redistricting, which have many Hampton Roads residents in new districts with new candidates running. This year will be the first year that Virginia’s legislature is elected using the new districts drawn by special masters hired by the Virginia Supreme Court after the redistricting commission deadlocked. For both the House of Delegates (29.1%) and Virginia Senate (27.6%), more than one quarter of respondents did not know what candidate they would vote for or refused to answer the question. These numbers were only marginally lower among likely voters (26.1% and 24.6%, respectively). Clearly, many respondents have yet to make up their minds, and this could make a big difference in terms of the election outcomes if particular campaigns manage to attract the support of undecided voters.

### How Likely to Vote this November for the Virginia Senate and House of Delegates (Registered voters only)



### If the election was held today, would you vote for (House of Delegates - Registered voters):

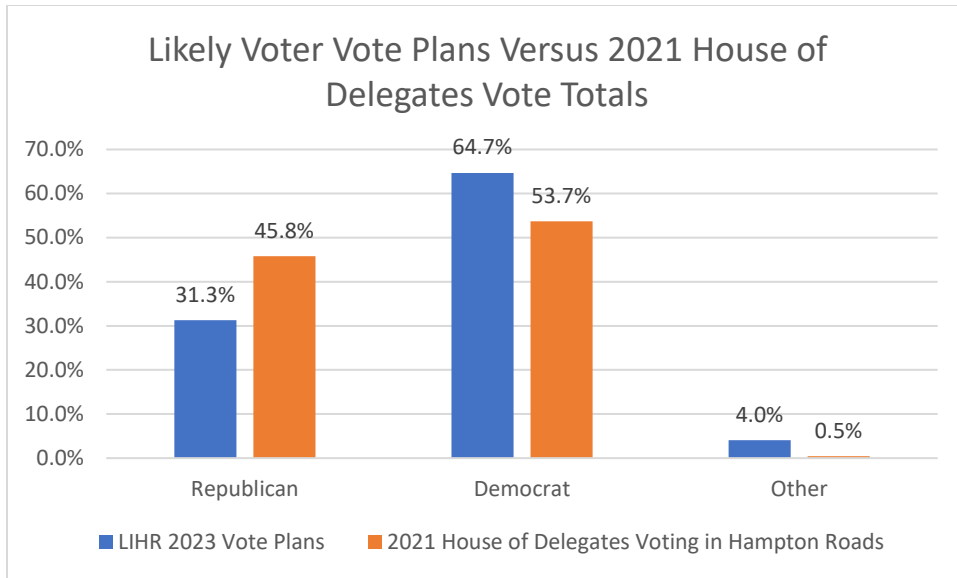




Among likely voters who had made up their minds, however, Democrats had a striking advantage in the House of Delegates. Almost two-thirds (64.7%) indicated that they planned to vote for the Democratic candidate for the Virginia House of Delegates, whereas only 31.3% indicated that they planned to vote for the Republican candidate. By contrast, when the last election for these offices took place in 2021, voters from the seven Hampton Roads cities gave 45.8% of their votes to Republican candidates, and 53.7% to Democratic candidates. This suggests Republicans may have some significant ground to make up if they want to avoid Hampton Roads area House of Delegates seat losses in the November election.<sup>1</sup> Among likely voters who indicated a candidate choice, the survey results suggest that Republicans may be headed for substantial trouble in the 2023 state legislative elections in Hampton Roads House of Delegates races.

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<sup>1</sup> Unweighted responses were somewhat more favorable for the Republicans. In the unweighted data, among likely voters who indicated a candidate preference, 58.4% supported the Democratic candidate, and 37.1% supported the Republican candidate for the House of Delegates. It is possible that the weighting process could have distorted the Republican vote totals, particularly as (to retain consistency with past years) LIHR is not weighted based on education, and failure to weight on education sometimes leads to inaccuracies in favor of Democrats in polls.

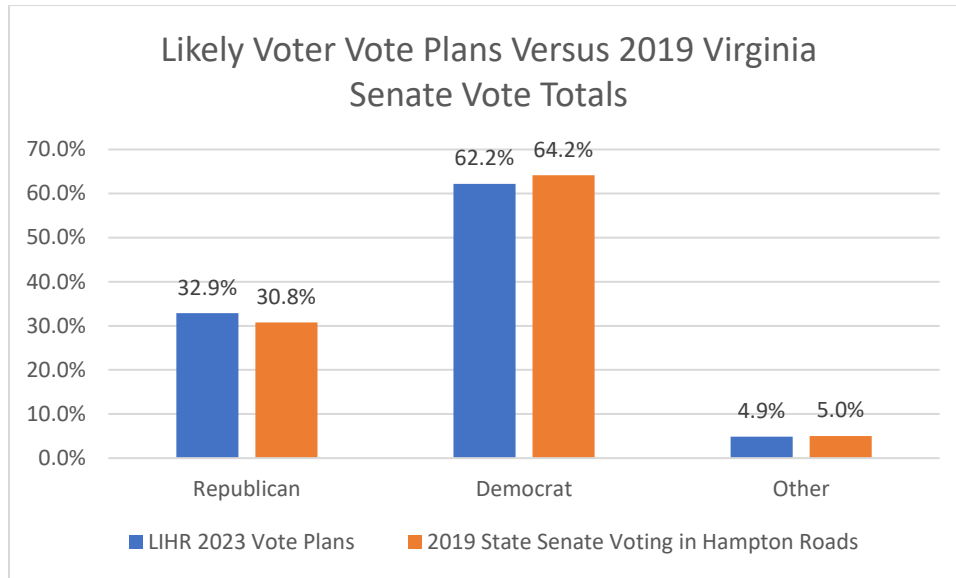


A similar pattern was observed for the Virginia Senate, although the political implications may be somewhat distinct. Among likely voters who had made up their minds, 62.2% indicated that they would vote for the Democratic candidate if the election was held today, compared to 32.9% who supported the Republican candidate.<sup>2</sup> The most recent election for Virginia’s Senate occurred in 2019, a year that was favorable for Democrats, and several seats were not even contested by Republicans in that cycle. Democrats won 64.2% of votes cast in the Hampton Roads seven cities during the 2019 Senate contests, compared to only 30.8% for the Republicans. Thus, in contrast with the House of Delegates races, the results for the Virginia Senate offer some modest encouragement for Republicans concerning their prospects in that chamber; current polling places Republicans modestly ahead of their 2019 performance.

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<sup>2</sup> As for the House of Delegates, unweighted responses were somewhat more favorable for the Republicans. In the unweighted likely voter sample, 58.4% indicated that they would vote for a Democrat if the election was held today, and 37.1% indicated that they would vote for a Republican.



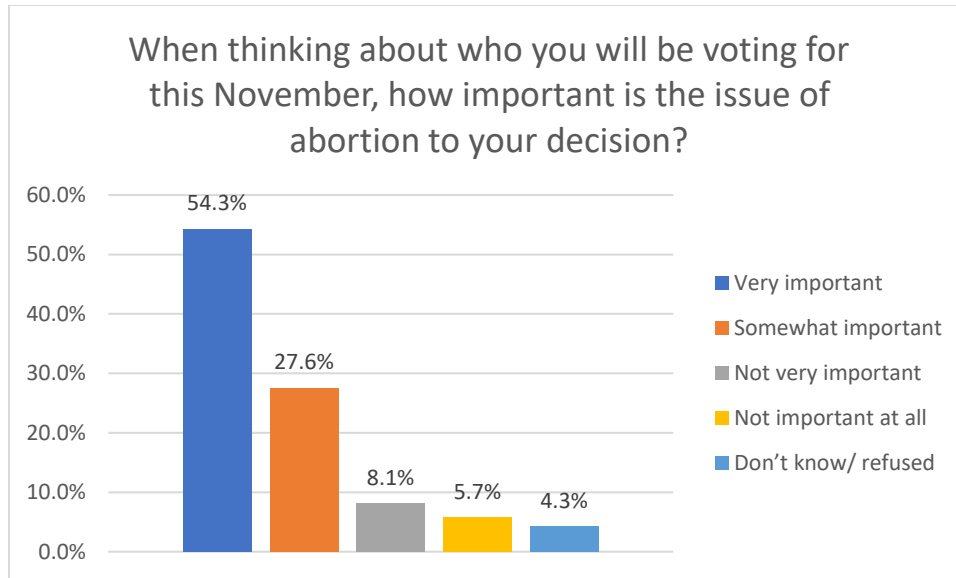


Taken together, the results of the survey suggest that Republicans may struggle to maintain their advantage in the House of Delegates which dates from a year where the strong performance of the Youngkin campaign in Hampton Roads may have helped boost Republican chances in the House of Delegates, but that Democrats potentially face some challenges maintaining their advantages in the Virginia Senate which date from the last Senate election in 2019, a good election cycle for Democrats. For candidates from both parties, a major challenge is to win over the substantial share of the electorate that is still undecided.

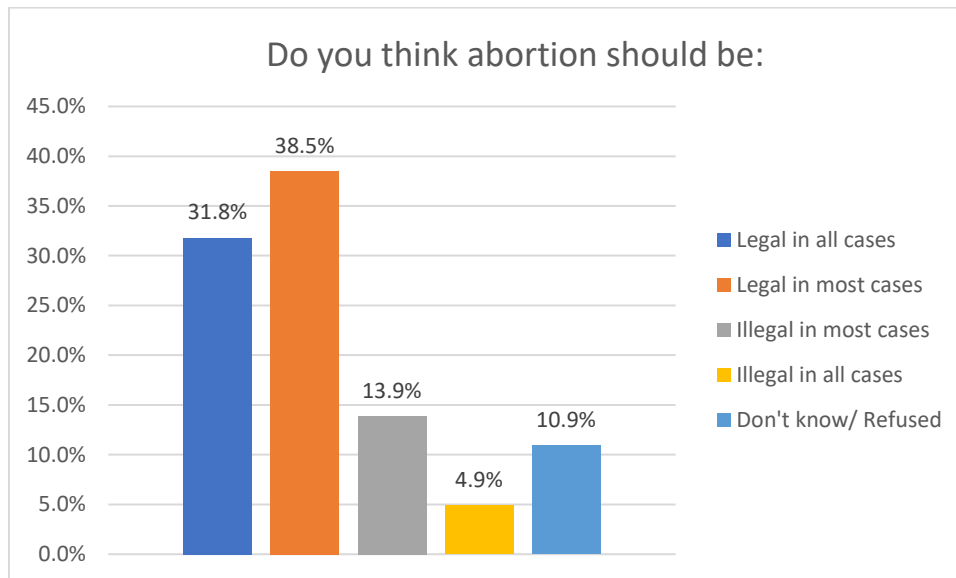
An important caveat is that this analysis looks across the seven cities in Hampton Roads as a whole and does not break the vote totals out by district. Future analyses might exploit a multilevel regression and post-stratification (MRP) strategy to estimate candidate performance in the new state legislative districts.

### Abortion: Still a Potent Electoral Issue?

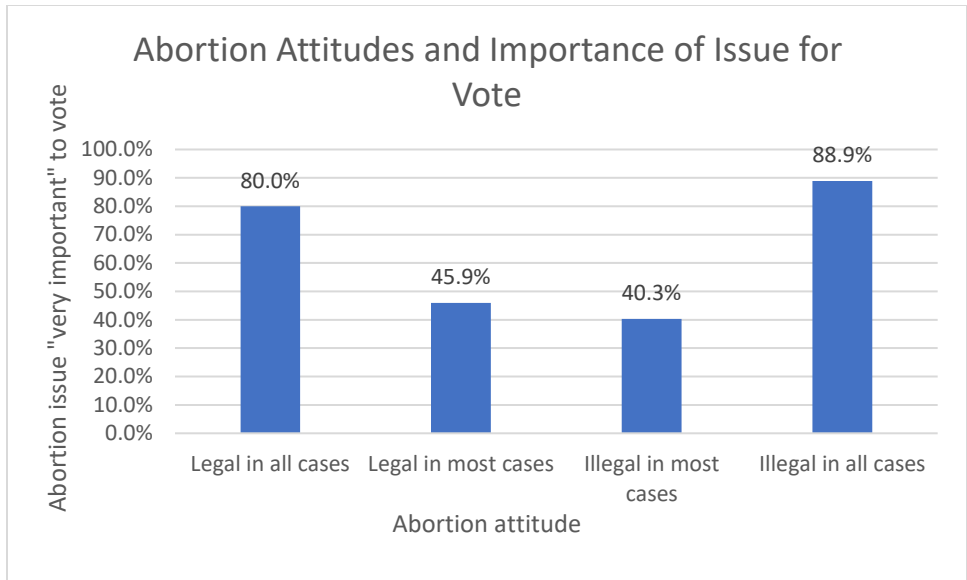
What issues are moving voters? The survey included a set of questions about the importance of the issue of abortion. After the United States Supreme Court overturned the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 2022, abortion became a much more salient issue in the subsequent Congressional midterm elections. The survey asked about abortion to assess whether and to what extent this intensity on the abortion issue continued into 2023. When asked “How important is the issue of abortion to your decision” in the election, more than half of respondents (54.3%) indicated that it was very important, and more than a quarter indicated that it was somewhat important (27.6%). Overall, 81.9% of respondents indicated that abortion would be at least somewhat important for their decision.



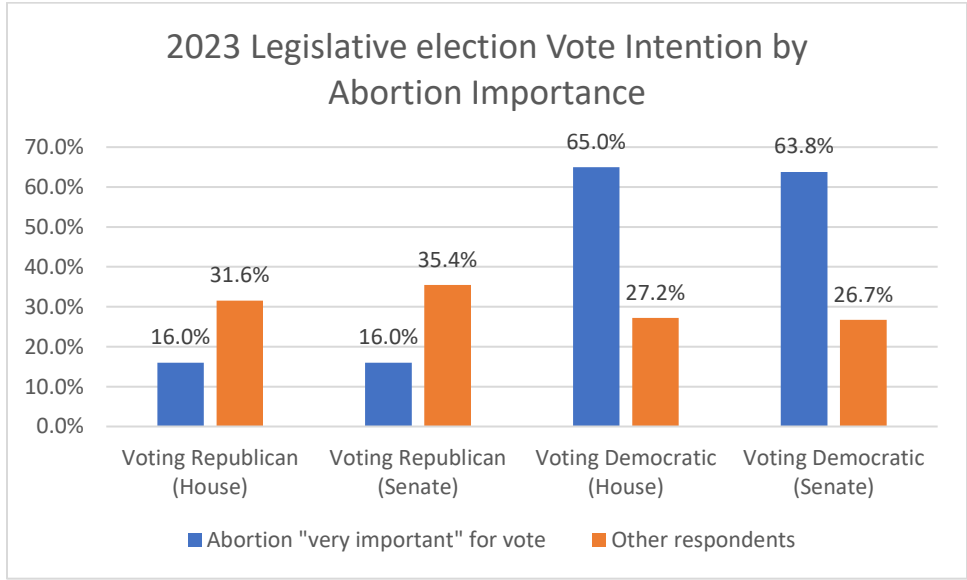
The political implications obviously depend upon voters' views concerning abortion policy. Nearly one-third of respondents (31.8%) indicated that they thought that abortion should be legal in all cases, with the largest share of respondents (38.5%) indicating that it should be legal in most cases. Only 4.9% indicated that they thought abortion should be illegal in all cases.



There was a statistically significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) between abortion attitude and the importance of abortion for the vote, with a “very important” for the vote response most likely among respondents who thought abortion should be legal in all cases (80.0%) and illegal in all cases (88.9%). Even among respondents with more moderate positions on abortion, the issue was seen as very important for the vote by more than 40% of respondents.

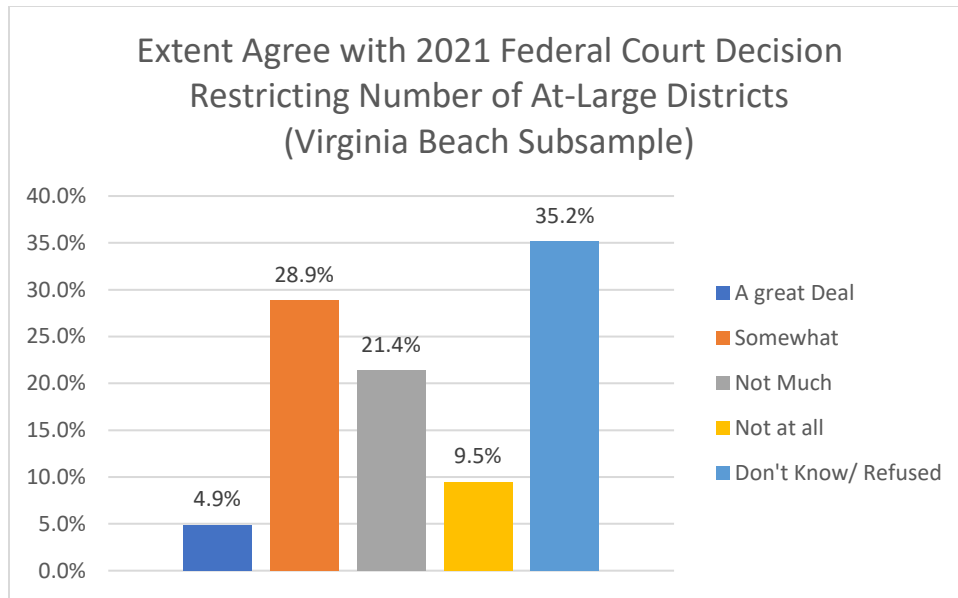


Among likely voters, Democrats have a particular advantage among respondents who thought abortion was a “very important” issue. About two-thirds (65.0%) of such voters indicated that they would vote for the Democratic candidate for the Virginia House of Delegates and 63.8% indicated that they would vote for the Democratic candidate for the Virginia Senate. In 2022, Democrats performed relatively well in the midterm Congressional elections by emphasizing the abortion issue. These results suggest that the abortion issue continues to advantage Democrats in Hampton Roads.



## City council in elections in Virginia Beach

Virginia Beach residents (n=191) were also asked their views on the 2021 decision by a federal judge which restricted the number of at-large city council seats in Virginia Beach. Very few respondents said that they agreed “a great deal” with the ruling (4.9%) and the remainder of the respondents were split relatively equally between somewhat (28.9%), not much/not at all (30.9%) and don’t know/refused (35.2%).



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

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