

Virginia is a key battleground state in the race for President between Barack Obama and John McCain



Davis

U.S. Rep. Tom Davis says this is the worst year for Republicans since Watergate

Three weeks from Election Day, Virginia remains a key battleground state in the presidential campaign; Mark Warner is a prohibitive favorite to win the U.S. Senate race; and the state's incumbent congressmen appear headed for re-election. Following is an overview of Virginia's election landscape as campaigns enter the final 21 days.

Presidential Politics

Momentum in recent weeks has favored Barack Obama, with the Democrat gaining in national polls and building a substantial lead in the projected electoral vote. There is still time for John McCain to reverse the direction of this contest, but it would take something big – such as a sudden national security crisis or a big blunder by Obama – to change the dynamics of what has become an uphill climb for the Republican ticket. It is getting late in the game for McCain to substantially alter the underlying fundamentals and regain his post-convention lead.



Obama | McCain

Nationally, the faltering economy hurts McCain – bad economic news always hurts the party in the White House. As the stock market falls, McCain's poll numbers slide. The performance of the candidates in responding to this crisis, and concerns – even among Republicans – that McCain has been erratic in his response, have contributed to a recent surge in the projected electoral vote for Obama/Biden.

This widening gap reflects the economic crisis as well as the anti-Republican fundamentals of this election year, namely the embattled Bush White House, an unpopular foreign war, a depressed economy and an 8-year itch. Virginia Republican U.S. Rep. Tom Davis says the political atmosphere facing Republicans this November is “the worst since Watergate and is far more toxic than the fall of 2006 when we lost thirty seats in the House.” It's a difficult year for Republicans. But then it's a difficult year for everyone, and both candidates are struggling to navigate history-making bad news day after day, and adapt to extraordinary circumstances that have overtaken their campaigns.

As Washington Post political writer David Broder put it:

“This nation is mired in two wars it does not know how to end. It is struggling to escape the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. The federal government is staring at record deficits, with no plausible plan for financing the retirement and health-care needs of a giant generation of retirees. Our transportation and education systems need help, and we are dependent on other countries for the energy we use. In the face of all this, Obama and McCain are stubbornly repeating promises they made in happier times – broad tax cuts, new health benefits, big government-financed projects.”

This presidential race, Broder says, is being driven by real-world events, far more than by campaign strategy. And real-world events are altering the landscape in several key battleground states. The crisis in financial markets has changed things so much that there are now several scenarios

Election Day Outlook



for Obama to capture the 270 electoral votes needed to win. Based on current polling data, several national observers say Obama is already beyond 270, and that McCain needs a clean sweep in swing states to capture the winning margin.

For more on electoral map predictions:

Real Clear Politics: www.realeclearpolitics.com/epolls/maps/obama_vs_mccain/

Pollster.com: www.pollster.com/

270towin.com: www.270towin.com/

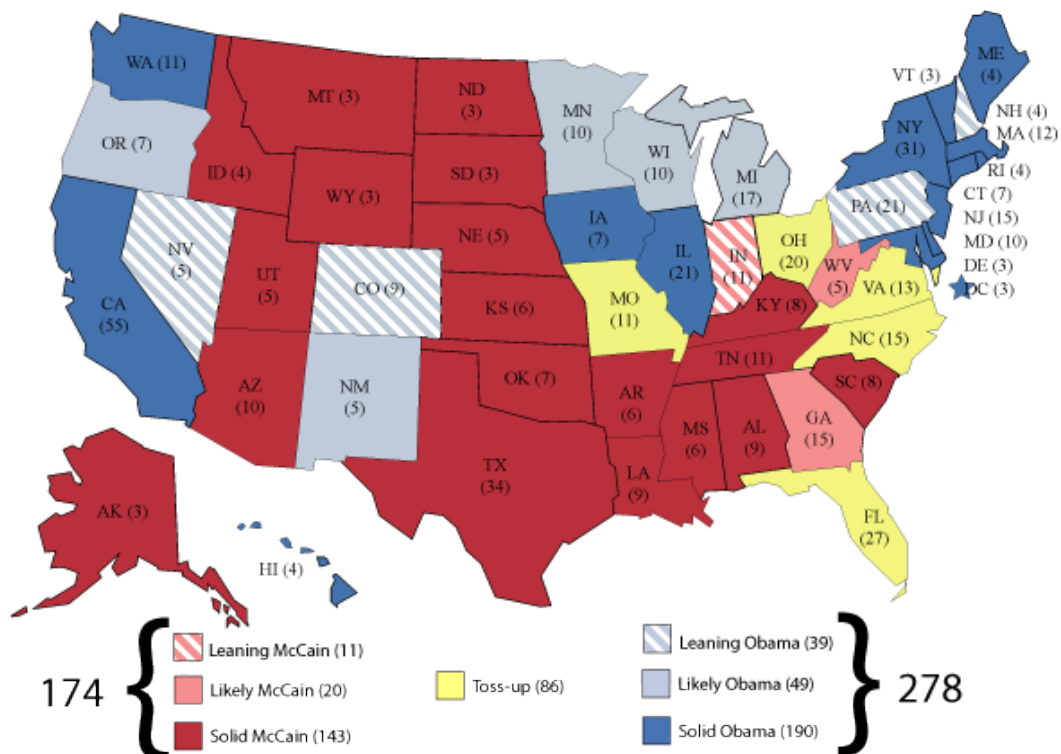
By any measure, Virginia is a very important state for both candidates, and an absolute “must-win” for McCain.

The good news for McCain is that The Old Dominion hasn’t voted for a Democrat for President since LBJ in 1964. The bad news for McCain is that this is now The New Dominion, and Obama is betting heavily that now is the time to break the GOP hold on Virginia’s 13 electoral votes. He has opened 49 offices across the state and he’s campaigned here far more often than McCain. Since wrapping up the Democratic nomination in June, Obama, his wife, and his running mate have visited the Commonwealth more than a dozen times. He’s pouring millions of dollars into Virginia, registering hundreds of thousands of new voters, and blanketing the state with TV and radio ads and direct mail.

McCain/Palin, meanwhile, have been to Virginia just twice. And, in a little-noticed move in early October, the campaign pulled their ads off the network affiliates in the expensive Washington, D.C. market that reaches all of Northern Virginia, the commonwealth’s most populous region. It’s hard to see how McCain carries the state without being at least competitive in Northern Virginia.

Three weeks out, the battle is being waged in swing states that historically have voted Republican for President; states like Virginia, North Carolina, Florida and Missouri – a clear indicator that McCain/Palin face a tough trail to November 4.

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Map: The University of Virginia Center for Politics



Wild cards remain a factor in this year's campaign such as the "Wilder Factor" and new voters.



Stranger things have happened in politics though, and several wild cards remain to be played:

- **The Wilder Factor.** This term refers to the 1989 gubernatorial campaign of Democratic candidate Doug Wilder. Polls indicated he was leading by double digits going into the election. Yet Wilder became the nation's first elected black governor by just one-tenth of a percentage point. The disparity between the polls and the outcome reflect the reluctance of some voters to vote across racial lines. How much will race affect the balloting this year? No one knows.
- **New Voters.** There are millions of newly registered voters across the country this year, 300,000 just in Virginia. A majority of them are believed to be Obama supporters. But we don't register by party in Virginia so we can't know for sure what the split will be – and we don't know how many in this army of new voters will actually vote.
- **Divided Government.** It appears certain that Democrats will control both Houses of Congress in January. Will voters opt to give one party control of the Legislative and the Executive branches in Washington? As one commentator put it: "it's like having a car with two accelerators and no brake pedal."

U.S. Senate Race

Open: John Warner (R) retires – Mark Warner (D) / Jim Gilmore (R)

Virginia is a competitive, two-party state that offers viable choices in this year's race to succeed John Warner. But the impressive popularity and deep pockets of former Governor Mark Warner give him a big advantage over former Governor Jim Gilmore, who has faded from the limelight in recent years and is struggling to fund his campaign.

Shifting demographics are turning portions of Virginia blue and purple, especially in the vote-rich regions of Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads. As a result, Virginia Republicans have lost the past two Gubernatorial campaigns in 2001 and 2005, George Allen's U.S. Senate seat in 2006, control of the state Senate in 2007, and 11 seats in the House of Delegates since 2003. This growing base of support for Democrats, along with Mark Warner's broad appeal among independent voters and GOP moderates, makes Warner a formidable candidate.

This contest is among the top targets of National Democrats looking to increase their narrow 51-49 margin in the U.S. Senate. Congressional Quarterly, National Journal, Roll Call, Robert Novak, Stuart Rothenberg and Larry Sabato all rate the outcome of this race as "Likely Democratic."

Nationally, experts widely agree that the outlook for Republicans is bleak. In the Senate, there are 35 seats up this year, with 23 held by the GOP. Only 15 are truly competitive, and 13 of those are GOP seats. So Republicans have much more territory to defend, and if they could manage to break even in competitive races, they would still have a net loss of six seats.

According to Kiplinger.com:

"Our latest survey of Senate races shows the GOP certain to lose one seat (Virginia), very likely to lose one other (New Mexico), and in real danger of losing two more (Colorado and New Hampshire). Two others are at best a toss-up (Mississippi and Minnesota). And Republicans have only a slight lead in Alaska, Maine, and Oregon. Even some Republicans who should be shoo-ins (John Cornyn in



Texas, Pat Roberts in Kansas, Liddy Dole in North Carolina and Mitch McConnell in Kentucky) face challengers who are getting uncomfortably close in recent polls.”

Outlook: It seems likely that “Mark-not-John” will claim the Warner Senate seat and that Democrats will increase their majority in the upper chamber by anywhere from 4 to 8, coming very close to the 60 votes needed to advance major legislation through the Senate.

Virginia Congressional Campaigns

It is extremely difficult to beat an incumbent member of the U.S. House of Representatives in Virginia. It has happened just twice in the past 25 years: when Jim Moran ousted Stan Paris in 1990, and Tom Davis beat Leslie Byrne to capture Virginia’s newest congressional district, the eleventh, in 1994. (Before that, you have to go back to 1982 when Norman Sisisky beat Bob Daniel, and Rick Boucher beat William Wampler.)

Since the year 2000, when current districts were first drawn, Virginia’s incumbent congressmen have won reelection with an astonishing average of 71% of the vote while outspending major-party challengers by nearly four to one. The advantages of incumbency have been all but insurmountable.

Despite the odds, eight of Virginia’s 11 incumbent U.S. Representatives have major-party opposition this year and six of seven incumbent Republicans face Democratic challengers.

The most competitive congressional campaign in Virginia is the race for retiring Republican Tom Davis’ open seat in Northern Virginia, where shifting Demographics make this a tough district for Republicans. Other races to watch are challenges to incumbents Thelma Drake in Hampton Roads, Virgil Goode in Southside, and Frank Wolf in Northern Virginia. Despite some strong challenges, it is difficult to see how any Virginia incumbents will be ousted this year. Nationally, political pundits predict GOP losses ranging from 10 to 20 seats in the House.

Congressional District 11

Outlook: Likely Democratic

The retirement of 7-term moderate GOP congressman Tom Davis makes this race a top target of both national parties in a competitive Northern Virginia district.

Fairfax County Board Chairman Gerry Connolly won a fiercely contested nomination fight over former U.S. Rep. Leslie Byrne with 58% of the vote, an unexpectedly high margin that propelled him to front-runner status in this increasingly blue district. Although long held by a Republican, the 11th district is voting decidedly Democratic in recent elections, and Democrats nationally rate it among their best chances to pick up a GOP-held seat in the House.

Conservative businessman Keith Fimian makes this bid with the formidable backing of retiring incumbent Tom Davis and the national GOP, plenty of money, and a strong Republican base that will certainly be energized and mobilized in this Presidential election year.

The district includes the city of Fairfax and large portions of Fairfax and Prince William counties. U.S. Sen. Jim Webb carried the district with 55% in 2006. In the statewide races of 2005, Gov. Kaine garnered 56%, and Leslie Byrne, running for Lt. Gov., captured 55%.

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Connolly



Drake

Congressional District 2

Outlook: Safe Republican

Although reliably Republican, Virginia's second congressional district is host to a competitive campaign that has drawn the attention, money and star power of both national political parties.

The incumbent, 2-term U.S. Rep. Thelma Drake, 58, is campaigning hard to turn back a well-funded, energetic challenge from political upstart Glenn Nye, 33, a former diplomat from Norfolk. Drake has a substantial lead in the polls.

The second congressional district includes all of the City of Virginia Beach, parts of the cities of Norfolk and Hampton, and Virginia's Eastern Shore.

Congressional District 5

Outlook: Safe Republican

The geographic and political diversity of this district makes for a complicated electoral formula that leans decidedly Republican but also gives winning margins to Democrats such as Mark Warner (52% in 2001) and Tim Kaine (50% in 2005). President Bush received 56% of the vote here in 2004.

Incumbent Congressman Virgil Goode Jr. appears a perfect fit for the politics of the district. He has been elected here as a Democrat and a Republican, and is known as a spirited orator who can unleash a populist stem-winder.

Challenger Tom Perriello, a lawyer, is a formidable opponent. He was fast out of the gate and quickly outpaced Goode in fundraising, reporting a war chest of nearly \$1 million as early as June. He established a campaign organization early in the year, opening offices in Franklin County, Charlottesville and Danville. Perriello, 33, is an Albemarle County native and the son of a prominent local pediatrician.



Goode

Congressional District 10

Outlook: Safe Republican

Once a four-way race, this campaign has narrowed to a re-match of the 2006 contest between long-time incumbent Republican Frank Wolf and Democrat Judy Feder. That race was the toughest challenge confronting Wolf since 1982 – and still he cruised to victory with 57% of the vote. Feder is back again, this time with better name ID, more money, a flood of new voters in this Loudoun-based district, and a political climate thought to be more favorable to Democratic challengers.

Frank Wolf, the most senior of the 11 members of the House of Representatives from Virginia, is seeking his 15th term in Congress after winning the nomination in a June primary. Wolf's re-election margins in the past decade average 74%. He sits on the powerful House Appropriations Committee and is the co-chairman of the bipartisan Congressional Human Rights Caucus.

Judy Feder is a professor and author and, from 1999 through 2007, was Dean of Georgetown University's Public Policy Institute. She worked at the Brookings Institution and Urban Institute before joining the faculty of Georgetown University in 1984. She is a proven fundraiser, reporting campaign funds of \$1.2 million through June of this year, and she was well funded in her bid against Wolf two years ago.



Wolf

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