



Public Opinion and Housing Affordability in the Commonwealth

Views of Virginia Voters in 2017

Executive Summary

This study, which focuses on the public's attitudes toward affordable housing and related issues in the Commonwealth, is commissioned by the Campaign for Housing and Civic Engagement (CHACE), a statewide network of housing advocates spearheaded by the Virginia Housing Alliance and the Virginia Poverty Law Center. The survey research is conducted by the Judy Ford Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University. The study endeavors to assess the public's views and policy preferences on an important public policy issue facing the commonwealth: housing affordability.

The study reveals several important conclusions regarding the views of Virginia voters on this issue. First, and most importantly, Virginia voters are robustly supportive of policies and programs aimed at addressing housing affordability issues. The survey finds that a vast majority (78%, see Figure 1) of voters in the commonwealth support the

Housing Trust Fund, a state program intended to create and preserve affordable housing and address homelessness, and wish to see it preserved.

A similar percentage (80.3%, see Figure 2) are supportive of the use of 20% of the Housing Trust Fund specifically to address homelessness. Voters were asked whether they support or oppose using the Housing Trust Fund to provide funding for aging Virginians to modify their homes to allow them to safely “age in place” in their current home rather than move into a retirement home or other assisted living facility. As seen in Figure 3 support for such use is overwhelming with 87% of Virginia voters supportive of expanding the Housing Trust Fund to assist in the costs of “aging in place” modifications.

Another public policy issue examined in the survey involves the role that energy efficiency plays in affordable housing. As shown in Figure 4 nearly 84% of voters surveyed support the state using incentives and financial support to encourage Virginia utilities to increase their financial support for energy efficiency programs for their customers while 89% support actually requiring Virginia utility companies to achieve greater energy savings for their customers (see Figure 5). Voters are also asked whether they support or oppose adding a .50 cent surcharge to their monthly utility bill in order to provide financial support for weatherization programs for low-income residents such as weather stripping doors and windows and attic insulation. As seen in Figure 6, 61.1% of voters are willing to increase their own energy bill to provide energy savings to less fortunate Virginians. These findings are suggestive that the public is open to maintaining the Housing Trust Fund and may be open to expanding it to include dedicated funds for “aging in place” programs. The findings also suggest that voters in the commonwealth are concerned about housing affordability and are aware of, and sensitive to, role that energy costs play in increasing the financial burden of housing on low-income residents.

Voters were also asked to indicate the level of their support or opposition to several statements related to the survey topic of housing affordability. For each statement voters were asked to agree or disagree with the statement using a 1 to 5 scale where 5 means they strongly agree with the statement and 1 means they strongly disagree with the statement. One statement asks if having an adequate supply of housing options in their community is important to them. 79.4% of voters indicated strong support of this statement, with 66.4% indicating the highest level of support (see Figure 7). Few respondents reported having issues personally affording their housing costs. Just 21.1% of respondents agreed strongly that their family struggled to meet the costs of housing (see Figure 8). Respondents were very supportive of the statement that people working in their community should be able to afford to live in their community. 26.2% of respondents rated that statement a 4 and 55.9 % rated it a 5 for a combined support of 82.1% (see Figure 9).

The surveys also finds that a majority of voters (55.8%, see Figure 10) agree that housing affordability contributes to the economic success of their community and that ending homelessness should be an important government priority (58.3%, see Figure 13). In separate questions voters were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that local governments and state government should work to provide housing opportunities for families whose incomes are a barrier to quality housing. Voters indicated their belief that both local and state government should actively work to reduce housing access issues with 57.6% of voters agreeing that local governments should be involved (see Figure 11) and 50.4% agreeing that state government should do so (see Figure 12).

When asked whether they are more likely to support a candidate for political office who makes housing affordability a priority 57.2% of voters say that it does. This suggests that housing affordability is an important public policy issue in the eyes of voters and may especially salient for voters living in areas where housing shortages and/or proximity to Washington D.C. have inflated home values significantly.

Figure 1: Percent of Virginia voters who support or oppose continuation of the Housing Trust Fund

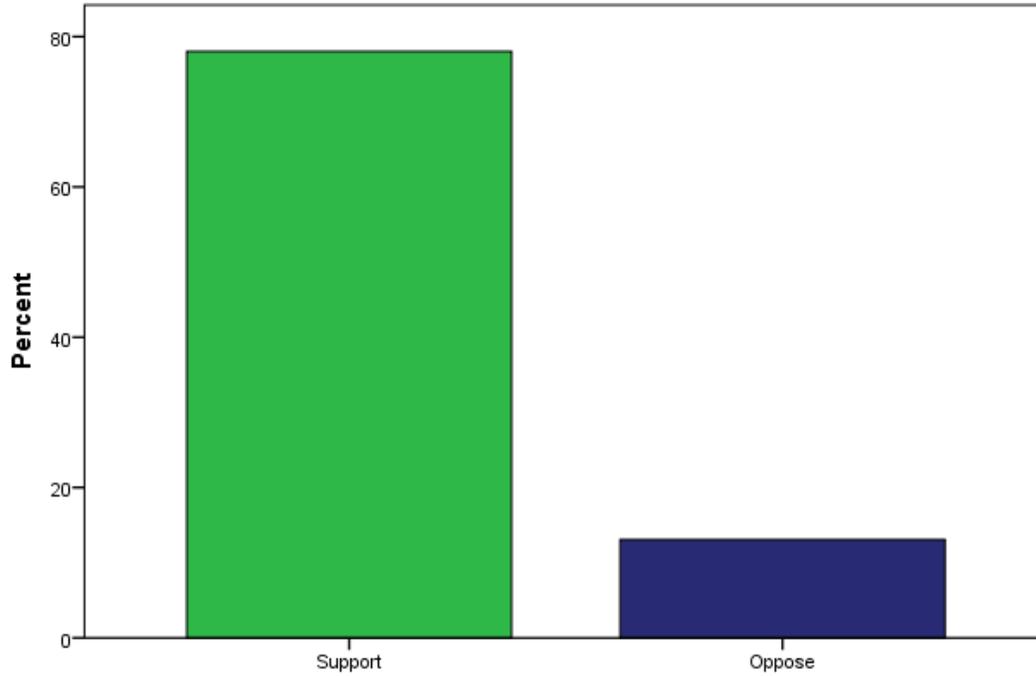


Figure 2: Percent of Virginia voters who support or oppose continued use of 20% of the Housing Trust Fund to fight homelessness

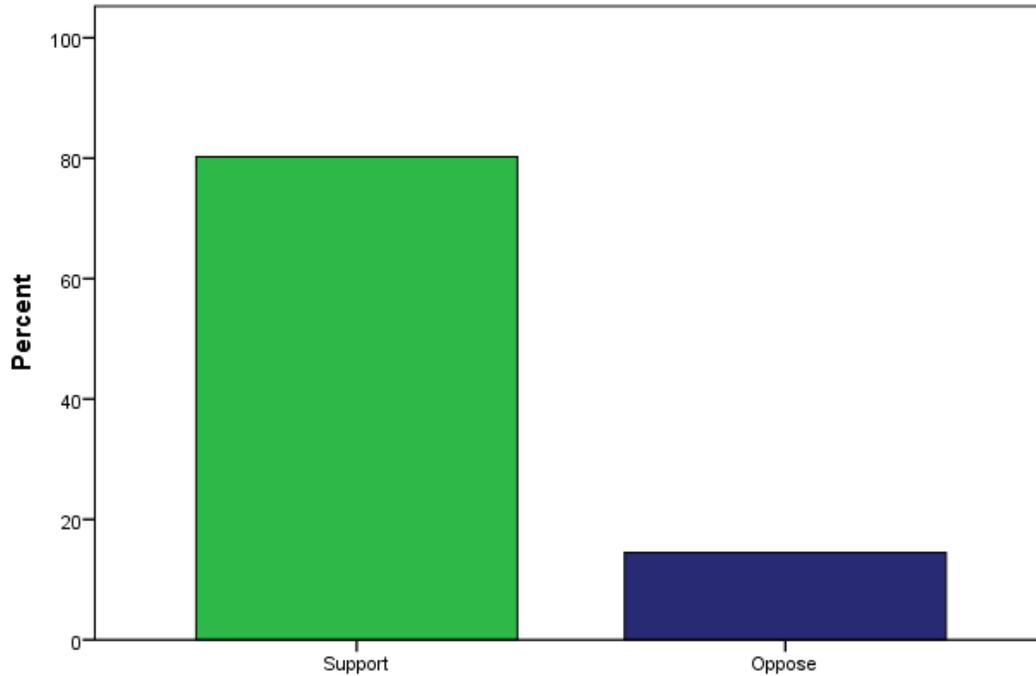


Figure 3: Percent of Virginia voters who support or oppose using the Housing Trust Fund to help elderly Virginians with limited incomes to make their homes safe and comfortable in order to "age in place."

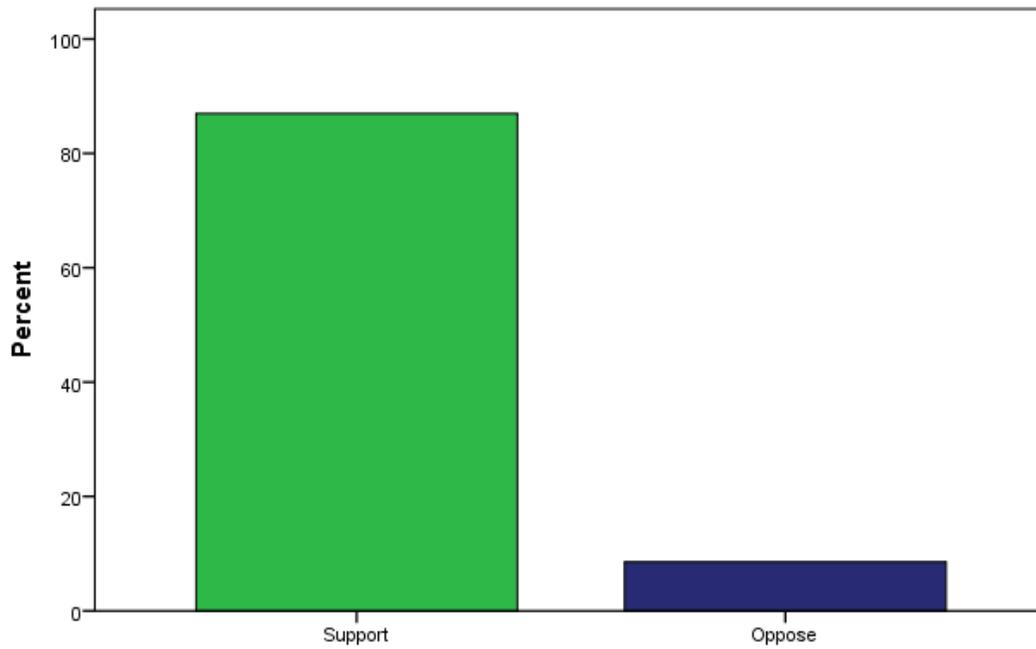


Figure 4: Percent of Virginians who support or oppose the state expanding incentives and financial support for energy efficiency in housing

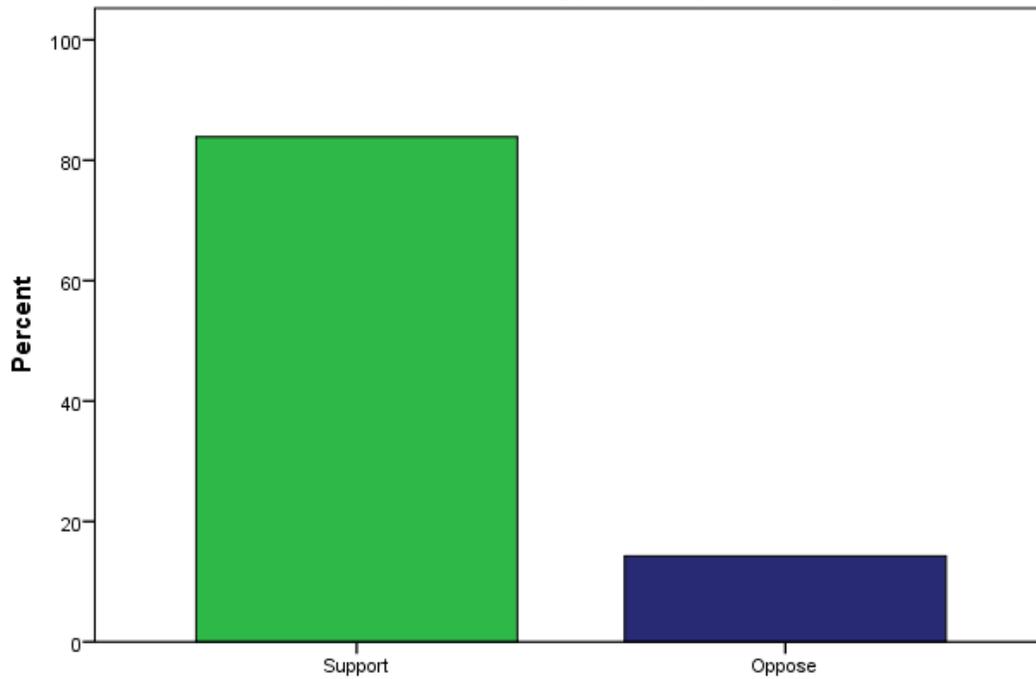


Figure 5: Percent of Virginians who support or oppose requiring Virginia utility companies to achieve greater energy savings for their customers

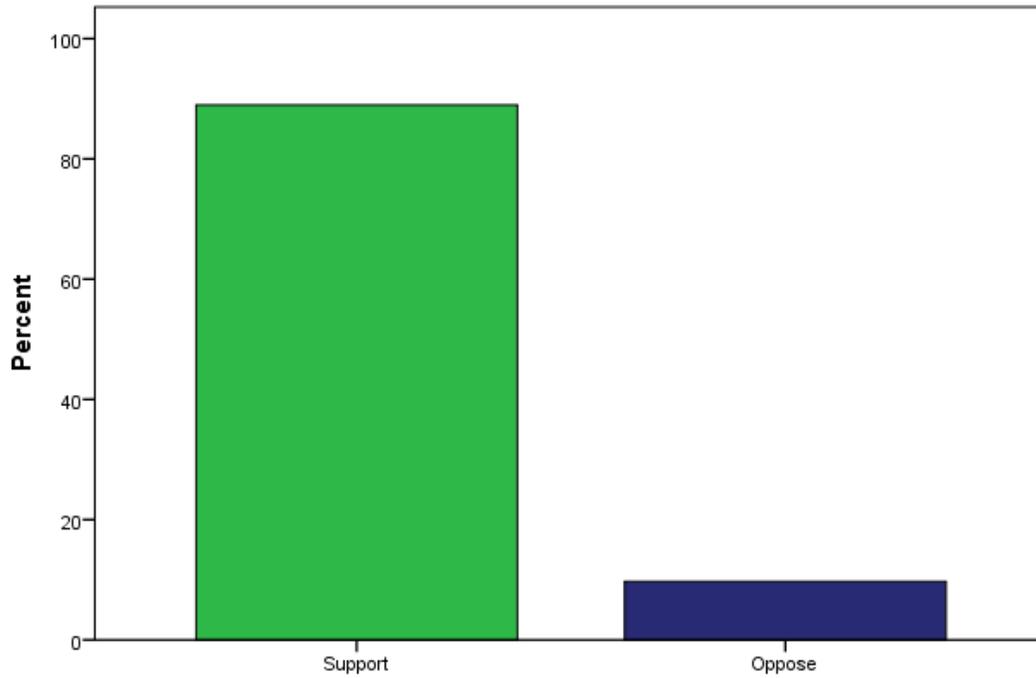


Figure 6: Percent of Virginia voters who support or oppose a .50 cent surcharge on their monthly utility bill to support energy efficiency upgrades from low-income Virginians

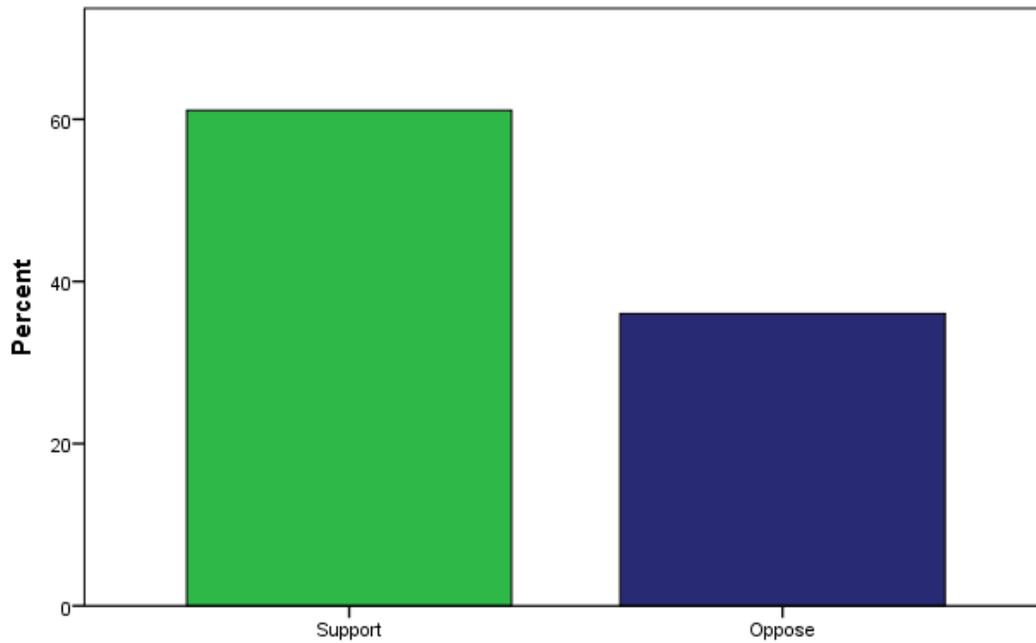


Figure 7: Having an adequate supply of housing options in my community is important to me

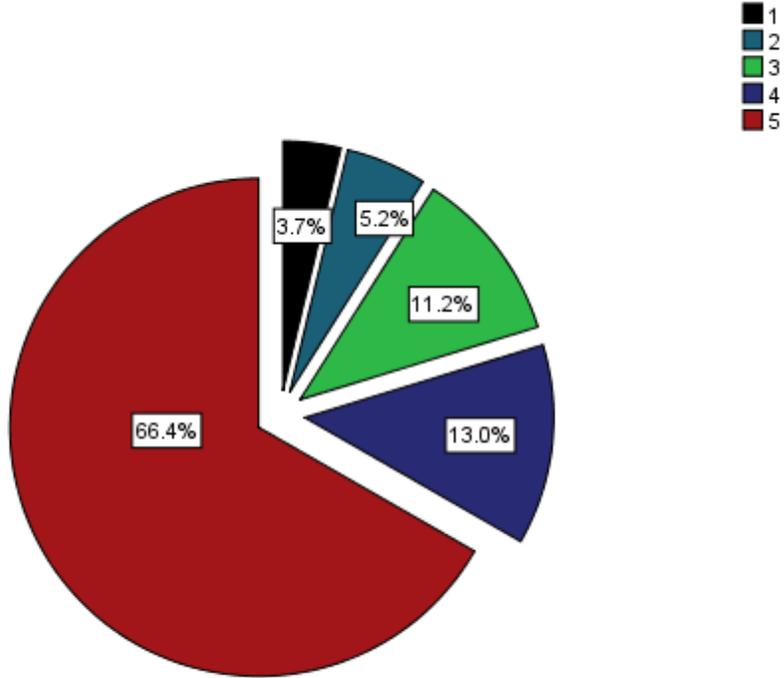


Figure 8: My family has struggled to meet the costs of housing

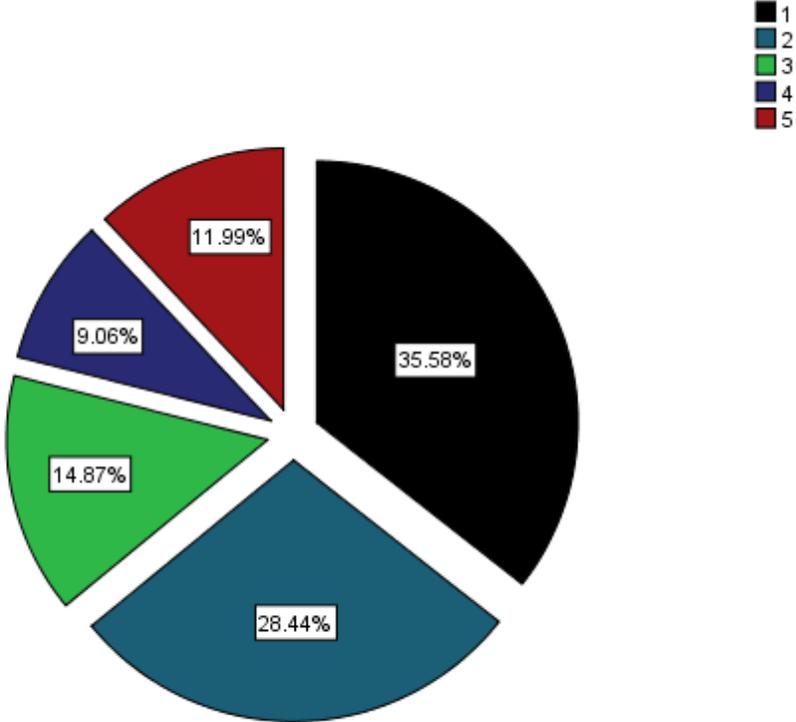


Figure 9: People who work in my community should be able to live in my community

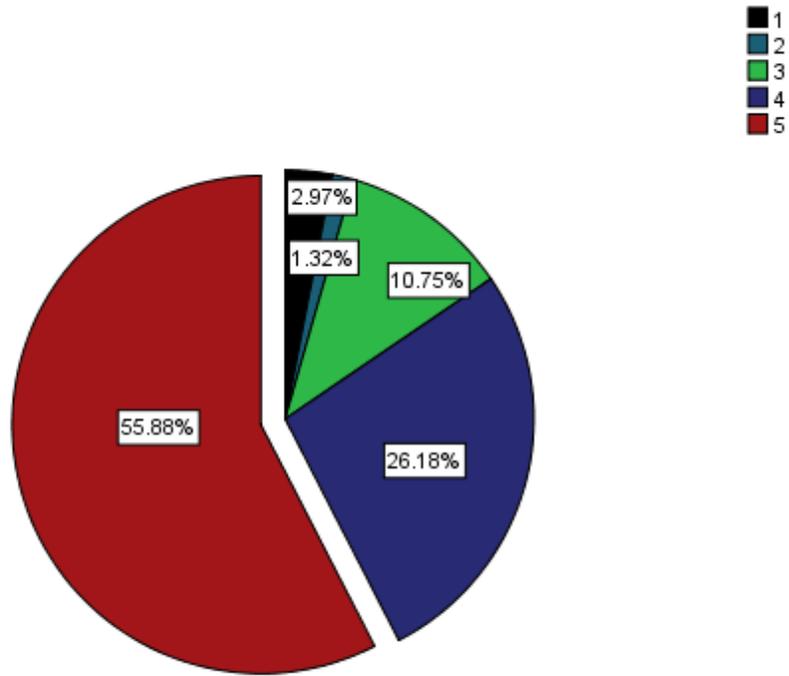


Figure 10: A wide range of housing choices contributes to the economic success of my community

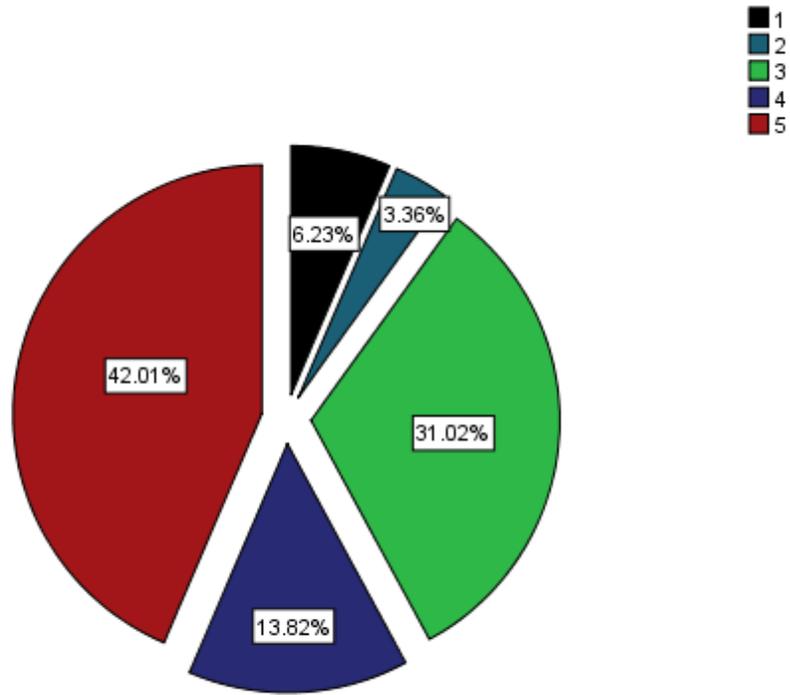


Figure 11: Local government should work to provide housing opportunities for families whose incomes are a barrier to quality housing

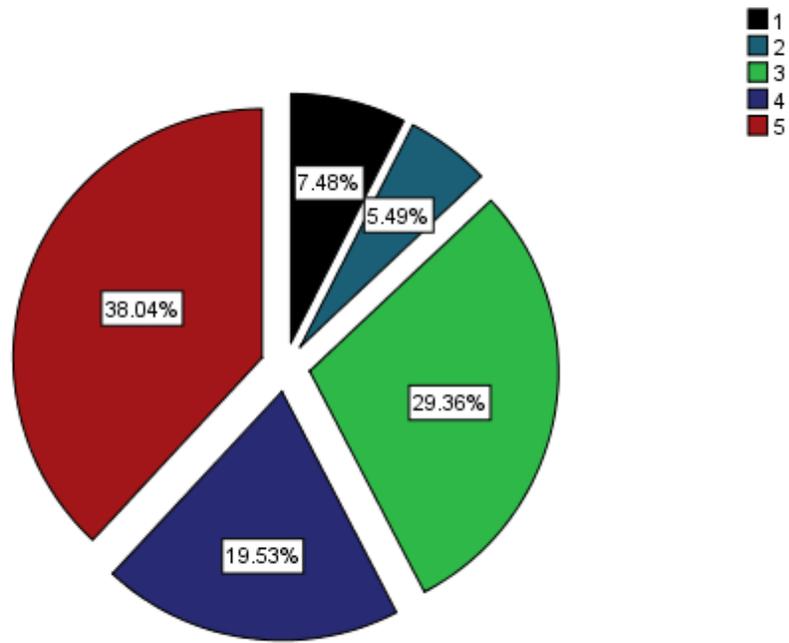


Figure 12: State government should work to provide housing opportunities for families whose incomes are a barrier to quality housing

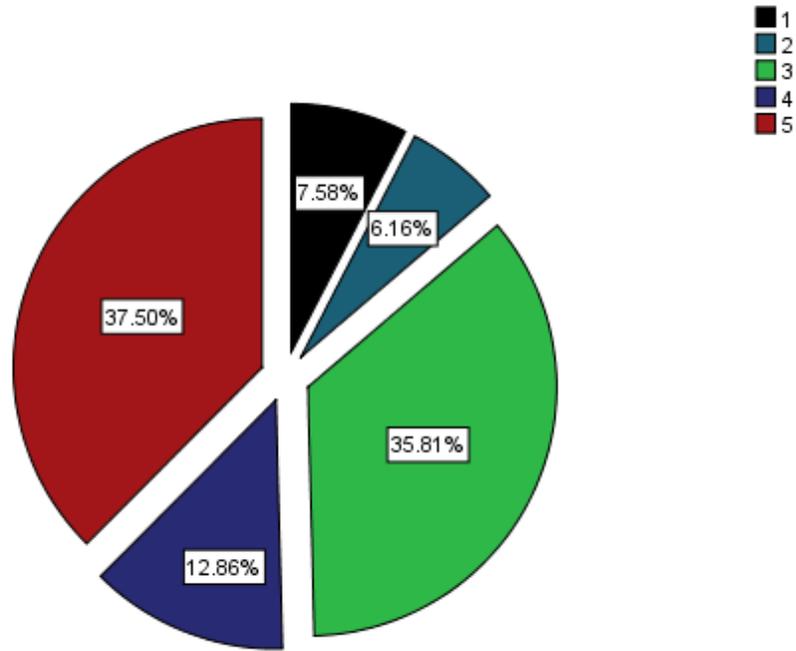


Figure 13: Ending homelessness is an important government priority

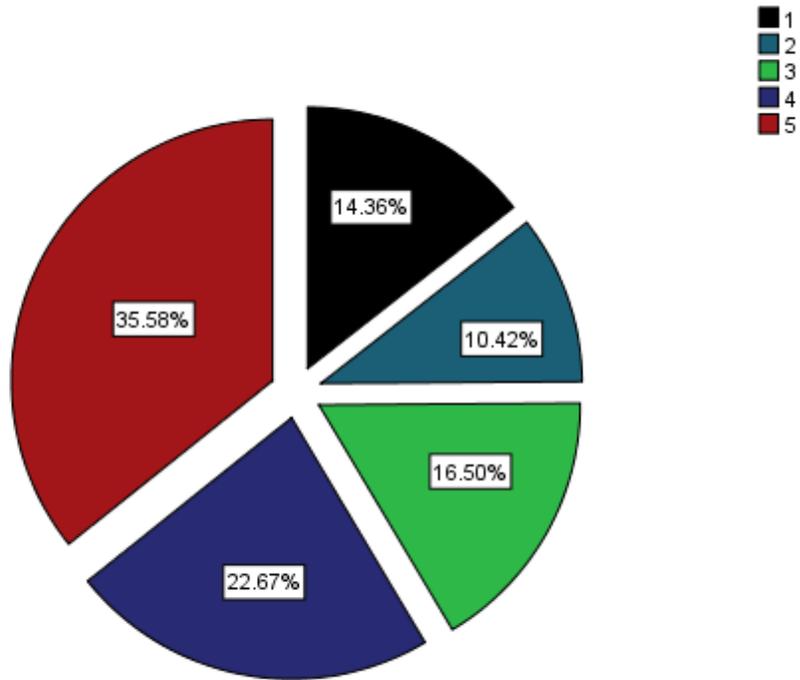
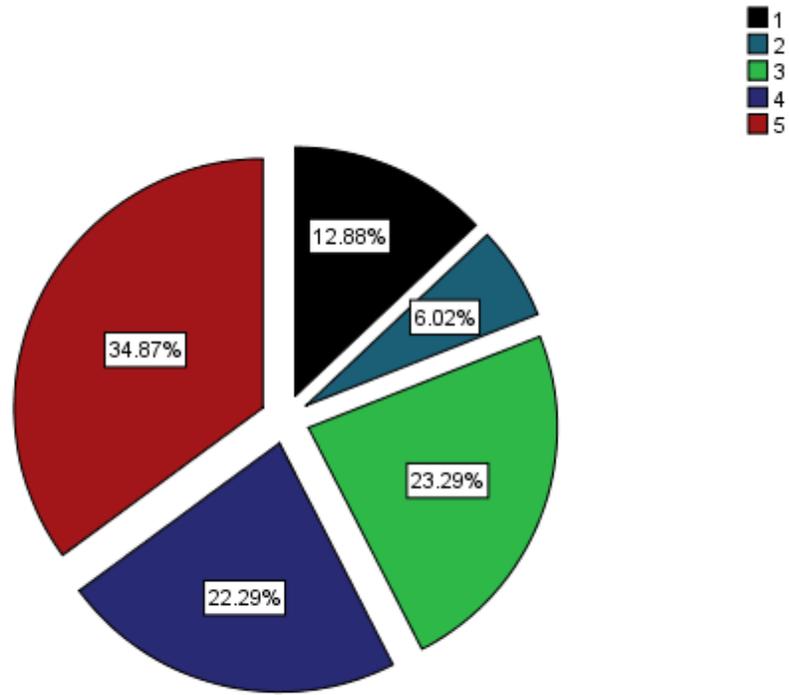


Figure 14: I would be more likely to support a candidate who made housing affordability a priority



Full Survey Toplines

Data is in %

Q1. Using a scale of 1-5 where 5 means you strongly agree and 1 means you strongly disagree please tell how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements
[1-5]

1A. Having an adequate supply of housing options in my community is important to me

1=3.7
2=5.2
3=11.2
4=13
5=66.4
9=.5

1B. My family has struggled to meet the costs of housing

1=35.6
2=28.4
3=14.9
4=9.1
5=12
9=.1

1C. People who work in my community should be able to live in my community

1=3
2=1.3
3=10.8
4=26.2
5=55.9
9=2.9

1D. A wide range of housing choices contributes to the economic success of my community

1=6.2
2=3.4
3=31
4=13.8
5=42
9=3.6

1E. Local government should work to provide housing opportunities for families whose incomes are a barrier to quality housing

1=7.5
2=5.5
3=29.4
4=19.5

5=38

0=.1

1F. State government should work to provide housing opportunities for families whose incomes are a barrier to quality housing

1=7.6

2=6.2

3=35.8

4=12.9

5=37.5

9=.1

1G. Ending homelessness is an important government priority

1=14.4

2=10.4

3=16.5

4=22.7

5=35.6

9=.5

1H. I would be more likely to support a candidate who made housing affordability a priority

1=12.9

2=6

3=23.3

4=22.3

5=34.9

9=.7

Q2: Currently, Virginia provides funding to create housing opportunities across the state through the Housing Trust Fund. The Virginia Housing Trust Fund is dedicated to creating and preserving affordable housing and reducing homelessness in the commonwealth. Do you support or oppose continuing the Housing Trust Fund?

1. Support=78

2. Oppose=13.1

9. Don't Know/Ref=8.9

Q3. Up to 20 percent of the fund may be used to provide grants for targeted efforts to reduce homelessness in the commonwealth. Do you support or oppose the continued use of the Housing Trust Fund to reduce homelessness?

1. Support=80.3

2. Oppose=14.5

9. Don't Know/Ref=4.5

Q4. A recent study looking at population trends in the commonwealth finds that by 2040, 1 in 5 Virginians will be over the age of 65. Three in five Virginia baby boomers say they plan to stay in their homes after they retire in what is called "aging in place." Would you support or oppose

using the Housing Trust Fund to ensure Virginians with limited incomes who choose to age in place can make their homes safe and comfortable?

- 1. Support=87
- 2. Oppose=8.6
- 9. Don't Know/Ref=4.5

Q5. According to the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy, Virginia ranks 33rd in the nation on energy efficiency and Virginia's utility companies lag behind some of their out-of-state peers in terms of energy efficiency support for customers.

A. Do you support/oppose the state of Virginia expanding incentives and financial support for energy efficiency in housing?

- 1. Support=83.9
- 2. Oppose=14.3
- 9. Don't Know/Ref=1.8

B. Do you support/oppose requiring our utilities to achieve greater energy savings for their customers?

- 1. Support=89
- 2. Oppose=9.7
- 9. Don't Know/Ref=1.3

Q6. Increasing demand for energy in Virginia is causing utility companies to propose new power lines and power plants. One method of limiting demand is improving energy efficiency in older homes and apartments. Currently, utility companies in 24 states include a small surcharge on each customer's bill to support efficiency improvements for low-income customers such as attic insulation and weather stripping doors and windows. Would you support or oppose a monthly .50 cent surcharge paid by every utility customer to help low-income Virginians make their homes more energy efficient?

- 1. Support=61.1
- 2. Oppose=36.1
- 9. Don't Know/Ref=2.8

Demographics (in %)

EDUCATION:

High school or less	16
Some college	16.5
Vocational or technical training	4.6
College graduate	26.7
Graduate study or more	35.2
Dk/Refused (vol.)	.9

INCOME:

Under \$25,000	4.6
\$25-\$49,999	21.4
\$50-\$74,999	20.6
\$75-\$99,999	14
\$100,000-\$149,999	17.1
Over \$150,000	14.7
Dk/Refused (vol.)	7.7

LATINO:

Yes	3
No	96.4

RACE:

White	72
Black or African American	19
Other	9

PARTYID:

Democrat	29
Republican	32
Independent	31
No preference(vol.)	4
Other party (vol.)	3
Dk/Refused (vol.)	1

If Independent ask:

Lean Republican	21
Lean Democratic	9.4
Does not lean	42.5
Dk/Refused (vol.)	27.2

IDEOL:

Strong liberal	5.7
Liberal	10.1
Moderate, leaning liberal	22.2
Moderate, leaning conservative	18.5
Conservative	17.6
Strong Conservative	11.5
Dk/Refused (vol.)	14.3

Sex: [INTERVIEWER CODE]

Male	49
Female	51

AGE: (Recorded as exact year of birth)

18-24	9
25-34	12
35-44	15
45-54	23
55 & older	41

REGION:

Northern Virginia	34
Richmond/Central	21
Hampton Roads	24
South/Southwest	21

Survey Methodology

This study is based on 509 interviews of registered Virginia voters, including a mix of landlines and cell phones, conducted between Sept. 3rd and Sept. 10th 2017. Percentages in topline may not equal 100 due to rounding. Percentages in graphs may not total 100 due to exclusion of the “Don’t Know/Refused” category. The margin of error for the whole survey is +/- 4.3 % at the 95% level of confidence and +/- 3.6% at the 90% level of confidence. This means, for example, that if 50% of respondents indicate a particular view on a given issue, we can be 95% confident that the population’s view on that issue is between 45.7% and 54.3%. All error margins have been adjusted to account for the survey’s design effect, which is 1.2 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 18%. 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. The data reported here are weighted using an iterative weighting process on sex, age, race, party, and region of residence to reflect as closely as possible the demographic composition of Virginia.