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Social Science Research Center

2021

Life in Hampton Roads Survey Press Release #4: Politics & Ethics in Government

Social Science Research Center, Old Dominion University

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Life in Hampton Roads 2021 – Politics & Ethics in Government

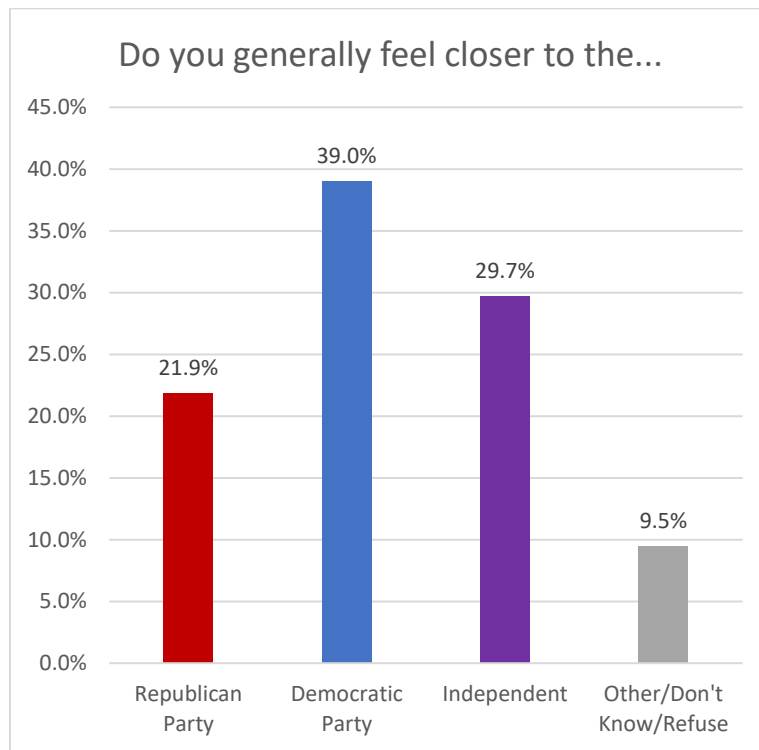
Introduction

The Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Old Dominion University recently completed data collection for the 12th annual Life in Hampton Roads (LIHR) survey. The purpose of the survey is to gain insight into residents' perceptions of the quality of life in Hampton Roads and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other topics of local interest such as perceptions of police, employment and other issues. A total of 796 online and telephone surveys were completed between July 12 and Oct. 3, 2021. It is important to note that the methodology this year differs from previous Life in Hampton Roads surveys. For several reasons, including continued concerns about COVID-19 and labor shortages, we conducted both telephone surveys and online panels. This change limits to some degree the ability to compare this year's results with those from previous years or to confidently generalize the results to the Hampton Roads population as a whole. Nonetheless, we note that an increasing number of surveys have moved online in recent years, and that in many instances useful data has been developed despite the challenges of online survey research. For more detailed information on the methodological changes and potential impacts please see the Methodology section in the full report, or please contact the SSRC directly.

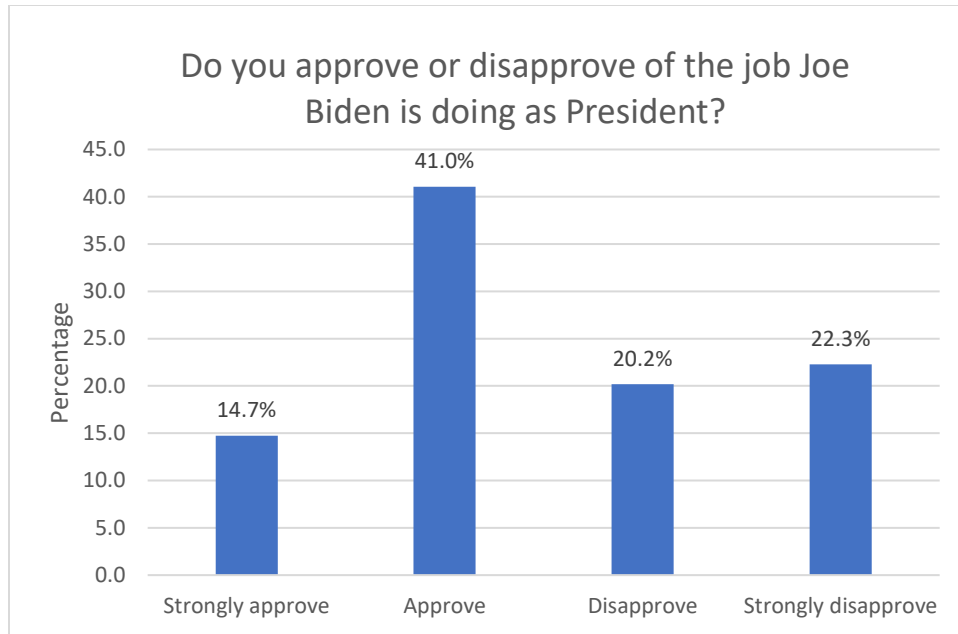
The Life in Hampton Roads survey typically includes a few questions about political attitudes. In 2021, the questions asked included party affiliation, job approval of President Biden and preferences for the 2021 gubernatorial election. The survey also included a set of questions about ethics in local government that have been asked in previous surveys.

Political party affiliation among respondents to the survey leaned substantially toward the Democratic Party, in line with past surveys in Hampton Roads. Thirty-nine percent of respondents chose the Democratic party when asked "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 22% responded Republican Party. This represents a modest gain for the GOP from some previous years. For instance, in 2017 and 2015, less than 20% indicated

that they felt closest to the Republican Party. This year's survey puts the Republican Party roughly where it was in surveys a decade ago. But it also represents a gain for the Democratic Party relative to nearly all previous years. In 2015 and 2017, only 35% indicated that they felt closest to the Democratic Party. Overall, this seems to indicate a trend toward more individuals responding with a major party they felt closest to, especially on the Democratic side.

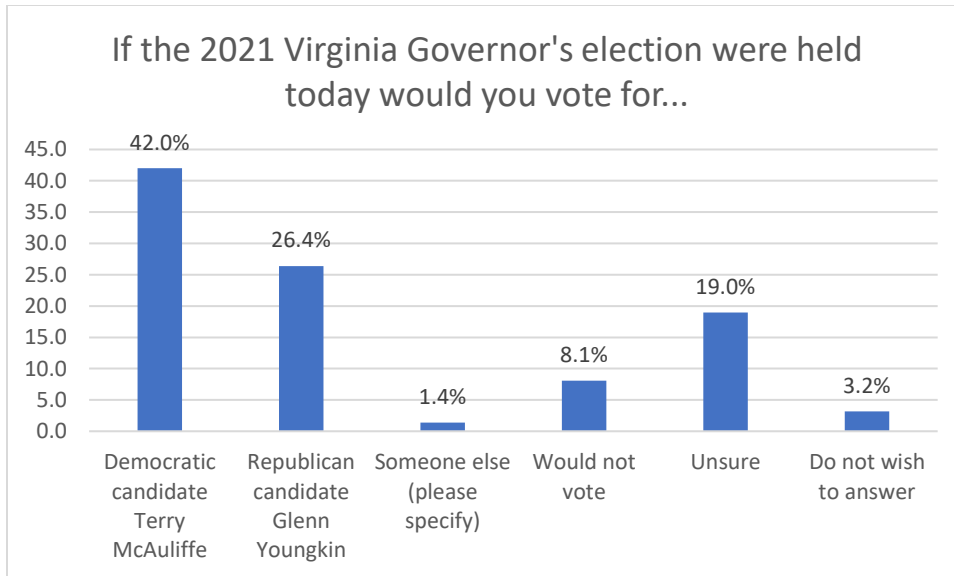


Overall, respondents also tended to have a positive view of President Joe Biden's job performance, with 14.7% saying that they strongly approve, and another 41% indicating that they approve. Just over 40% selected the disapprove or strongly disapprove option (20.2% and 22.3%).

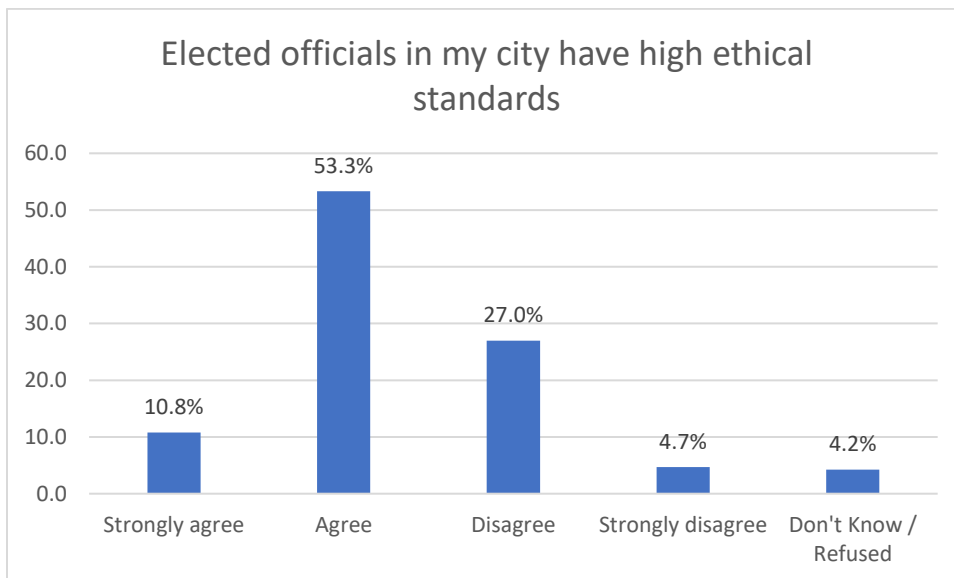


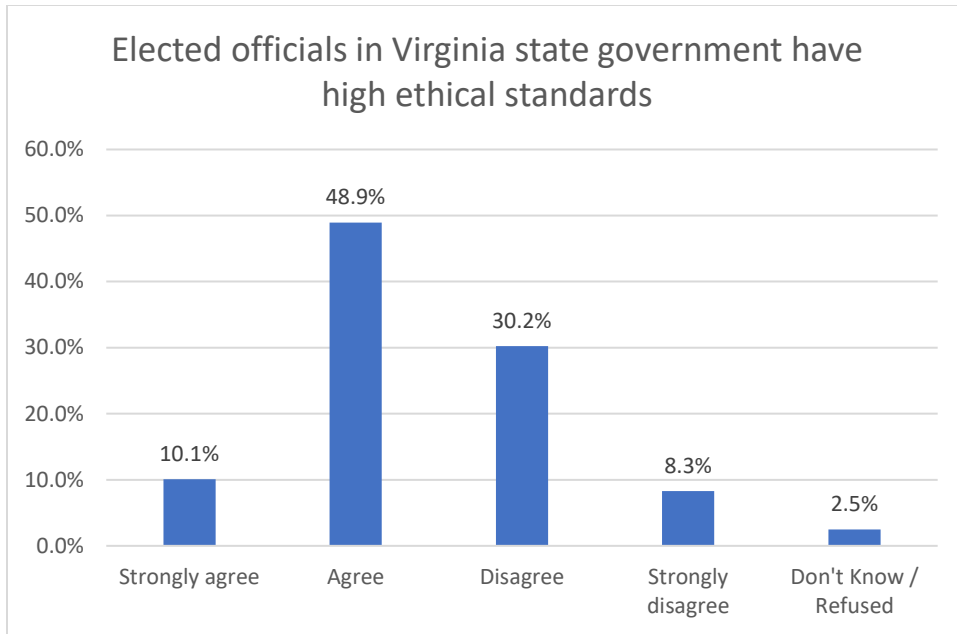
As the numbers above might lead one to expect, when respondents were asked which candidate they supported for governor, Democratic candidate Terry McAuliffe received the most support, with 42% of respondents indicating that they would support him. It is worth noting that the survey was conducted over the summer and early fall – months before the election. Of respondents who indicated they would vote for one of the two major-party candidates, 61.4% indicated that they would vote for McAuliffe. One important caveat to note is that this survey did not include a likely voter screen and is not restricted to registered voters. Thus, higher turnout by supporters of one candidate or the other could lead to substantially different outcomes. In the November general election, McAuliffe received only 54.3% of the two-party vote in the seven cities included in the survey. The decline in McAuliffe support from early October when the survey concluded to Nov. 2 is consistent with the change in support seen in statewide polling: McAuliffe’s support dropped by roughly six percentage points in the Real Clear Politics average from Oct. 3 though Nov. 2.¹

¹ For example, see https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2021/governor/va/virginia_governor_youngkin_vs_mcauliffe-7373.html



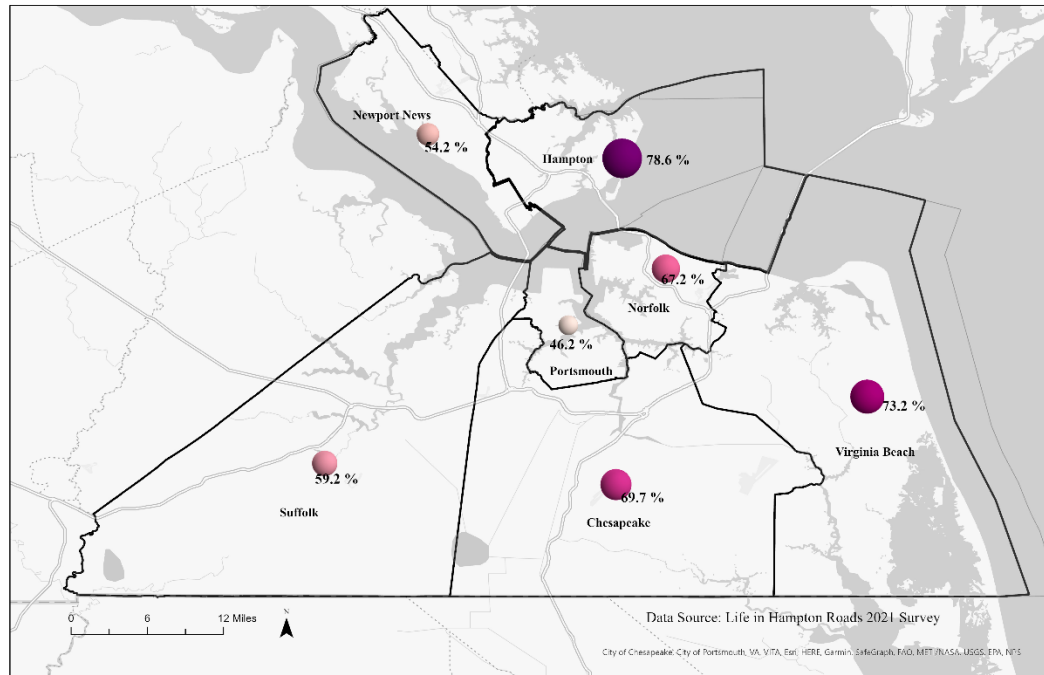
Two questions were asked about perceptions of ethics in state and local government. Overall, both questions indicated that substantial majorities believe that “elected officials in my city have high ethical standards” with similar proportions at the state level.





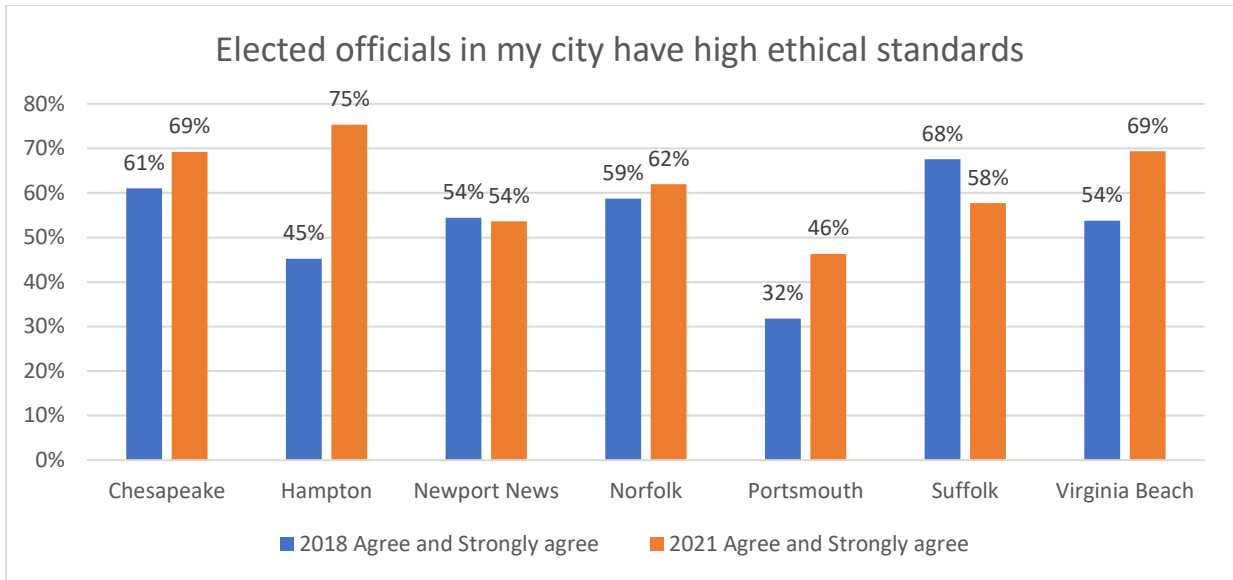
The percent of respondents who agreed/strongly agreed that their city elected officials have high ethical standards varied significantly by city. At the highest end were respondents from Hampton (78.6%), Virginia Beach (73.2%), Chesapeake (67.7%) and Norfolk (67.2%). Considerably lower rates of believing that city elected officials have high ethical standards were reported by residents in Suffolk (59.2%), Newport News (54.2%) and Portsmouth (46.2%).

% of Respondents Who Agree/Strongly Agree that City Elected Officials Have High Ethical Standards



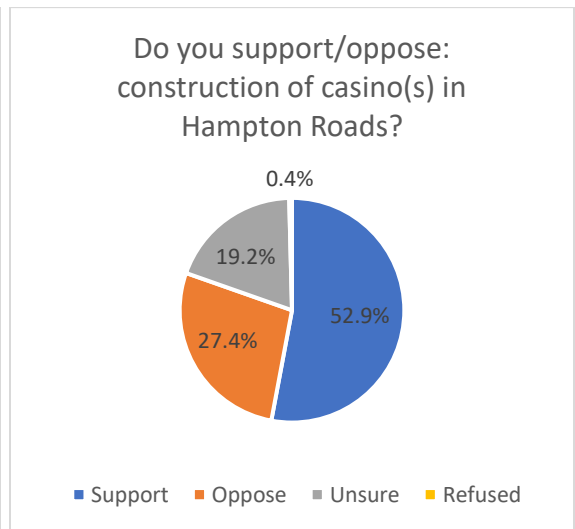
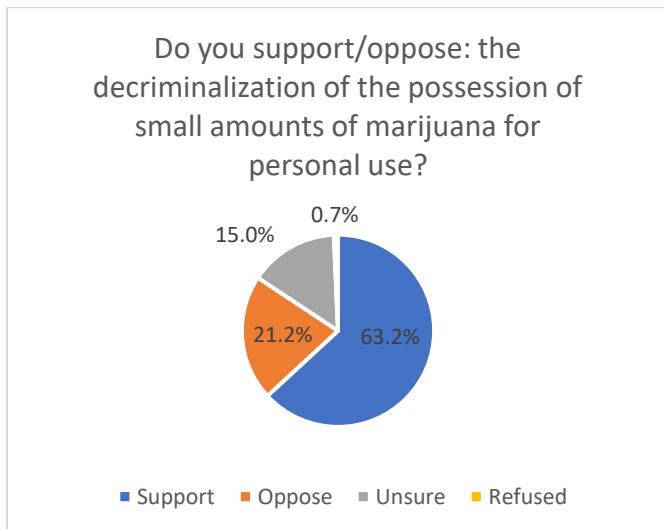
The city and state level results both reflect a substantial improvement in respondent perceptions relative to the last time the survey examined these questions in 2018. In that year's survey, only 49.8% of respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed Virginia elected officials had high ethical standards, and only 48.7% felt likewise about local elected officials. However, it is possible that this reflects consequences of the changes in survey mode. A larger portion of respondents in the 2018 telephone survey gave a "don't know" response.

Some cities in particular have seen major improvements in respondent perceptions in the three years since the question was last asked. Portsmouth remains the lowest among the cities but has seen major gains (32% to 46%). Hampton jumped from second lowest to highest. Suffolk and Newport News saw declines.



Support for Marijuana Decriminalization & Casinos

Respondents were asked about their support for two current issues: the decriminalization of marijuana and construction of casinos in Hampton Roads. Just under two-thirds of respondents (63.2%) support the decriminalization of the possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use and 15% are unsure. A smaller percentage but still more than half (52.9%) support the construction of casinos in Hampton Roads while 19.2% are unsure.



The Life in Hampton Roads Data report and press releases will be placed on the Social Science Research Center website as they are released (<http://www.odu.edu/al/centers/ssrc>). Follow-up questions about the 2021 Life in Hampton Roads survey should be addressed to:

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