

# Partisan Politics in Hampton Roads



# PARTISAN POLITICS IN HAMPTON ROADS: COLOR US PURPLE

**F**or nearly a century after Reconstruction ended, Virginia was reliably a “blue” Democratic state. For much of that time, all of the state’s regions, including Hampton Roads, could be expected to follow the lead of its long-time political boss, U.S. Sen. Harry F. Byrd, who served in Congress from 1933 to 1965. This meant, with few exceptions, that they should vote for the Democratic presidential candidate and, with even fewer exceptions, for the Byrd machine-selected candidates for governor, the state legislature and local offices.

All that certainty changed in the last half of the 20th century when the pendulum of political influence clearly swung in the other direction. Election results during the last couple of decades could lead one to conclude that Virginia has become a “red” Republican state and Hampton Roads a reliably Republican region. But just as the predictability and orderliness of Virginia’s politics under the Byrd machine eventually became unraveled, recent election results suggest that Republicans should not take the Old Dominion or Hampton Roads for granted.

## National Politics

Led by Sen. Byrd, Virginians moved away from the national Democratic Party as it got too liberal for them, with big government and spending under President Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. The civil rights movement, embraced by many national Democratic leaders, may have put the final nail in the coffin of dependable Virginia Democratic political participation. Virginians voted for Harry Truman, but not John F. Kennedy, but then for Lyndon Johnson, for president. However, the Commonwealth did not vote for another Democratic presidential candidate for 44 years, when Barack Obama received its support in 2008.

Table 1 depicts the strength of the Obama/Biden ticket relative to the McCain/Palin ticket in Hampton Roads. Voters in our region contributed mightily to the president’s historic win in the Commonwealth. Approximately 70 percent of voters in Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk and Portsmouth put their X in the Obama/Biden box. **Nevertheless, it is far from clear whether the**

**November 2008 support for Obama represents the beginning of a new trend among voters in the region, or is simply an aberration reflecting this particular election.**

Hampton Roads voters joined the rest of the state in replacing Republican Sen. George Allen with Democrat Jim Webb in 2006. Webb did not receive over 50 percent of the vote in his win, but came away with a more than 21,000-vote lead in Hampton Roads that proved to be his margin of victory statewide. In the second Senate race of the decade, Virginia voters in 2008 chose former Democratic Gov. Mark Warner over former Republican Gov. Jim Gilmore as Virginia’s junior senator to succeed retiring Republican Sen. John Warner. The 69-31 ratio numbers depicting Warner votes to those of Gilmore reflect the approximate approval rating each had when leaving the governor’s office. While Webb’s race was a squeaker, Warner won in a landslide. In the space of two years Virginia had gone from Republican to Democratic representation in the U.S. Senate. Hampton Roads voters contributed to both victories, as can be seen in Table 2.

At the congressional level, few shifts in power have occurred in the region during the last decade, but there have been some changes in those who represent the region in Washington, D.C. Four congressional districts encompass all or parts of Hampton Roads: the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th. The past decade started with two Republicans and two Democrats representing the region and ended with the same ratio, but with some personnel and district changes.

**TABLE 1**  
**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION - 2008**  
**RESULTS - HAMPTON ROADS JURISDICTIONS**

Jurisdiction	Obama/Biden		McCain/Palin	
	Total Votes	% Votes	Total Votes	% Votes
<b>Counties</b>				
Accomack	7,607	48.69	7,833	50.13
Isle of Wight	8,573	42.87	11,258	56.29
Northampton	3,800	57.69	2,713	41.19
Surry	2,626	60.71	1,663	38.45
York	13,700	40.41	19,833	58.5
<b>Cities</b>				
Chesapeake	53,994	50.21	52,625	48.94
Franklin	2,819	63.67	1,576	35.59
Hampton	46,917	69.05	20,476	30.13
Newport News	51,972	63.93	28,667	35.26
Norfolk	62,819	71.02	24,814	28.05
Poquoson	1,748	24.74	5,229	74.01
Portsmouth	33,327	69.27	13,984	29.96
Suffolk	22,446	56.24	17,165	43.01
Virginia Beach	98,885	49.13	100,319	49.84
Williamsburg	4,328	63.76	2,353	34.16
<b>Hampton Roads</b>	<b>415,561</b>	<b>56.31</b>	<b>310,508</b>	<b>43.68</b>
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>1,959,532</b>	<b>52.62</b>	<b>1,725,005</b>	<b>46.33</b>

Source: Virginia State Board of Elections  
 \*Percentages do not add to 100 because third-party candidates and write-in votes are not included.

The 1st District remained firmly under conservative Republican control when Robert J. Wittman succeeded Rep. Jo Ann Davis, who died after representing the district for most of the decade.

The 2nd District seat was won in 2008 by moderate Democrat Glenn Nye after being controlled by Republicans for most of the decade. Republican Rep. E.L. Schrock, a retired Naval officer, left office under a whiff of misconduct and was replaced by Republican Thelma Drake, who in turn was defeated by Nye.

The 3rd District, a majority-minority district, remains strongly in the hands of Congressman Bobby Scott, a veteran, eloquent and liberal African American Democrat from Newport News.

The 4th District shifted power following the death of Democratic Rep. Norman Sisisky and the election in 2002 of conservative Republican Randy Forbes of Chesapeake, who continues to represent the district.

Three of the four congressional races in Hampton Roads are not expected to be competitive in 2010. The exception is the 2nd District, where Republican Scott Rigell, a successful businessman, will mount a strong and well-financed challenge to first-term Rep. Nye. Nye, who voted against several Obama administration priorities, has alienated some members of his own party for that reason, though these votes generally played well in the region. In any case, many Republicans view this seat as "theirs." A shift here would give Republicans a 3-to-1 majority in the region's Congressional delegation for the first time since 2002.

**TABLE 2**  
**VIRGINIA SENATORIAL ELECTIONS, 2006 AND 2008**  
**HAMPTON ROADS RESULTS**

	2006				2008			
	Jim Webb		George Allen		Mark Warner		Jim Gilmore	
Jurisdiction	Votes	Percent	Votes	Percent	Votes	Percent	Votes	Percent
<b>Counties</b>								
Accomack	4,704	47.51	5,059	51.10	9,594	63.11	5,379	35.38
Isle of Wight	5,126	41.35	7,105	57.32	11,579	58.87	7,849	39.90
Northampton	2,302	54.64	1,860	44.15	4,803	74.17	1,583	24.44
Surry	1,534	56.36	1,162	42.69	2,732	71.83	1,029	27.05
York	9,370	40.98	13,222	57.83	18,389	55.05	14,599	43.71
<b>Cities</b>								
Chesapeake	30,761	47.09	33,772	51.70	65,527	62.48	38,304	36.52
Franklin	1,300	52.91	1,131	46.03	3,217	76.23	958	22.70
Hampton	24,325	61.70	14,541	36.89	51,193	77.31	14,149	21.36
Newport News	25,242	55.19	19,851	43.40	57,654	72.82	20,469	25.85
Norfolk	31,909	64.48	16,879	34.11	69,102	79.58	16,660	19.18
Poquoson	1,569	29.77	3,640	69.07	3,324	47.66	3,562	51.08
Portsmouth	17,453	68.83	9,527	34.85	35,371	77.68	9,597	21.07
Suffolk	11,810	49.85	11,638	49.12	24,069	65.44	12,260	33.33
Virginia Beach	57,657	46.48	64,852	52.28	124,517	63.85	67,886	34.81
Williamsburg	2,066	59.35	1,375	39.50	4,875	73.02	1,630	24.41
<b>Hampton Roads</b>	<b>227,128</b>	<b>52.48</b>	<b>205,614</b>	<b>47.51</b>	<b>485,946</b>	<b>69.24</b>	<b>215,914</b>	<b>30.76</b>
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>1,175,606</b>	<b>49.59</b>	<b>1,166,277</b>	<b>49.20</b>	<b>2,369,327</b>	<b>65.03</b>	<b>1,228,830</b>	<b>33.72</b>

Source: Virginia State Board of Elections  
\*Percentages do not add to 100 because third-party candidates and write-in votes are not included.

## State Politics

Paralleling the state's switch from blue to red at the national level has been the change from Democratic to Republican dominance at the state and local levels. Over the years, the relative liberalism of Democratic candidates at the national level has caused many Virginia leaders and voters to reject them. At the same time, the failure of the Byrd political machine at the state and local levels to adequately fund schools, colleges, mental health services and other programs, plus its conservatism on social issues, pushed many moderates into Republican ranks.

One of Byrd's young lieutenants, Mills Godwin from Suffolk, led the "Young Turks" in the Virginia Senate to provide more money for state programs. Although Godwin, likewise a Democrat, was more moderate than Byrd, he was able to keep Byrd's support and was elected governor in 1966. After being out of office for one term, he ran a second time and was elected governor as a Republican. His reason for running again (after switching political parties) was to prevent the much more liberal (in a national sense) Democrat Henry Howell of Norfolk from being elected governor. Apparently it was all right for the political pendulum to swing toward the center in the state in the 1970s, but not too far to the left.

Hampton Roads citizens during the past decade voted for two winning Democratic and one winning Republican governors just as voters throughout the Commonwealth did. Table 3 shows the vote by Hampton Roads jurisdictions for successful candidates Mark Warner, Tim Kaine and Bob McDonnell, and their opponents, in the 2001, 2005 and 2009 races, respectively. Previous to 2001, Republicans had won two straight races for governor, George Allen in 1997 and Jim Gilmore in 1993. Yet, those are the same two individuals whom voters rejected in 2006 and 2008 for the U.S. Senate. Times change.

Graphs 1 and 2 illustrate the steady decline of the Democratic Party's dominance of the House of Delegates and the state Senate, 1975-2000. Eventually, in 1995, the Democrats lost their majority in the Senate and likewise their majority in the House in 1999. Only recently have Democrats become competitive in the Senate, where they hold a thin majority going into the 2011

elections. Republicans in the House of Delegates came close to a super majority in 2003 and currently hold about 60 seats there.

Republicans had an almost 2-to-1 margin in the Hampton Roads House of Delegates delegation at the beginning of the last decade. By last year, that advantage had dwindled to almost parity with the Democrats. In Senate districts fully or partially in Hampton Roads, Republicans boasted seven state senators to four Democrats in 1999. By 2007, when senators were last up for election, the advantage had declined to six Republicans to five Democrats in the region's delegation at the same time the Democrats were taking control of the Senate. The changing partisan representation in the House of Delegates and the Senate for districts fully or partially in Hampton Roads is shown in Tables 4 and 5.



**TABLE 3**

**ELECTION OF GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA - 2001, 2005 AND 2009**

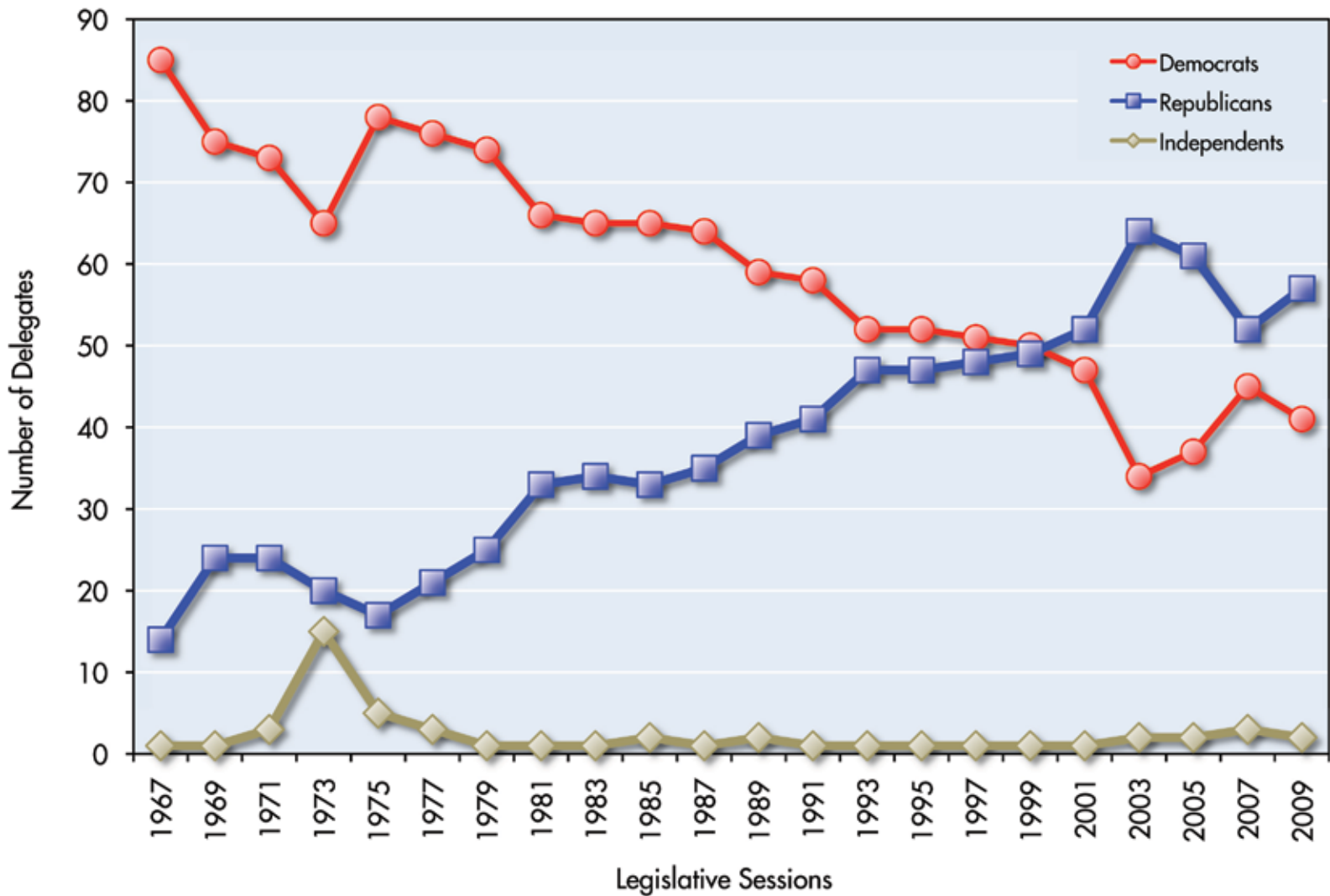
	2001				2005				2009			
Jurisdiction	Mark Warner		Mark Earley		Tim Kaine		Jerry Kilgore		Bob McDonnell		Creigh Deeds	
Counties	Total	% Votes	Total	% Votes	Total	% Votes	Total	% Votes	Total	% Votes	Total	% Votes
Accomack	3,710	50.21	3,575	48.48	3,860	49.84	3,754	48.47	5,400	62.42	3,249	37.56
Isle of Wight	4,727	49.91	4,708	49.71	4,664	45.66	5,262	51.51	7,684	65.83	3,981	34.1
Northampton	2,316	64.16	1,236	34.24	2,058	60.76	1,256	37.08	1,976	51.03	1,892	48.86
Surry	1,550	65.54	801	33.87	1,480	60.68	919	37.68	1,105	46.18	1,283	53.61
York	7,530	45.04	9,083	54.33	8,142	44.39	9,565	52.15	13,420	69.6	5,839	30.28
<b>Cities</b>												
Chesapeake	24,087	45.76	28,328	53.82	26,612	50.32	24,885	47.05	32,518	60.29	21,376	39.63
Franklin	1,434	65.54	781	35.15	1,394	57.53	988	40.78	1,013	45.43	1,216	54.53
Hampton	20,627	63.68	11,592	35.79	20,961	63.75	11,078	33.69	13,559	41.98	18,696	57.88
Newport News	21,318	56.97	15,920	42.54	21,743	57.41	15,095	39.86	18,401	49.93	18,415	49.96
Norfolk	28,244	65.24	14,741	34.05	27,791	66.12	12,899	30.69	15,913	39.79	24,025	60.08
Poquoson	1,489	35.7	2,656	63.68	1,383	34.2	2,515	62.19	3,737	80.16	922	19.78
Portsmouth	17,336	65.73	8,922	33.83	16,314	65.74	7,926	31.94	8,824	40.18	13,124	59.76
Suffolk	9,124	53.11	7,996	46.54	10,480	53.72	8,561	43.88	11,095	55.73	8,798	44.2
Virginia Beach	43,495	46.33	49,800	53.04	47,120	48.63	46,471	47.96	63,964	63.73	36,303	36.17
Williamsburg	1,475	57.48	1,067	41.58	1,782	60.53	1,081	36.72	1,579	45.26	1,905	54.6
<b>Hampton Roads</b>	<b>188,462</b>	<b>52.9</b>	<b>161,206</b>	<b>47.24</b>	<b>195,784</b>	<b>55.42</b>	<b>152,255</b>	<b>44.57</b>	<b>200,188</b>	<b>56.4</b>	<b>161,024</b>	<b>43.59</b>
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>984,177</b>	<b>52.16</b>	<b>887,234</b>	<b>47.03</b>	<b>1,025,942</b>	<b>51.72</b>	<b>912,327</b>	<b>45.99</b>	<b>1,163,523</b>	<b>58.62</b>	<b>818,909</b>	<b>41.26</b>

Source: Virginia State Board of Elections

\*Percentages do not add to 100 because third-party candidates and write-in votes are not included.

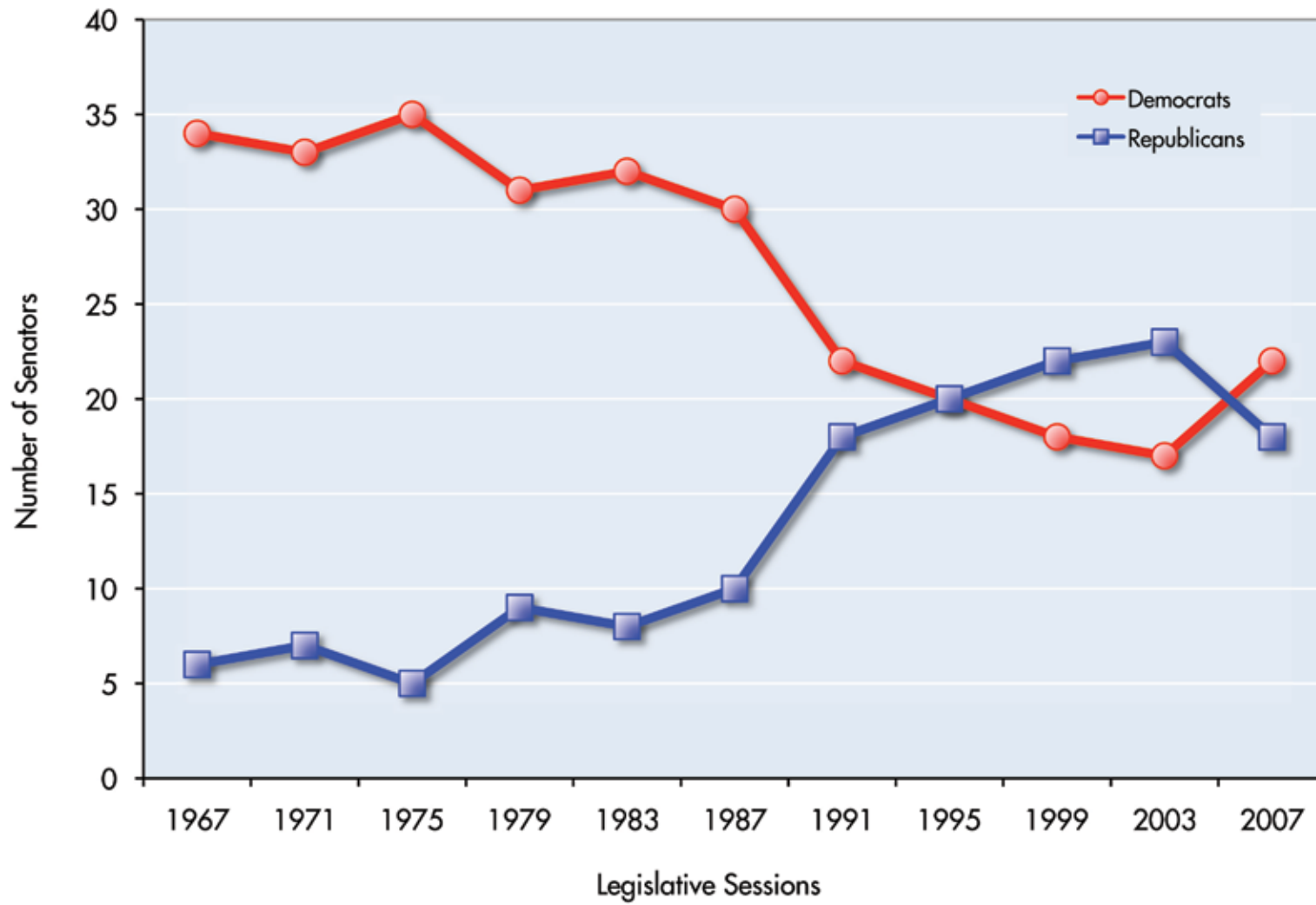
GRAPH 1

POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES





**GRAPH 2**  
**POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE SENATE**





**TABLE 4**

**VIRGINIA HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
HOUSE DISTRICTS IN WHOLE OR IN PART IN  
HAMPTON ROADS—PARTY AFFILIATION OF MEMBERS,  
2001 TO 2009**

District	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009
<b>Whole</b>					
21	R	R	R	D	R
76	R	R	R	R	R
77	D	D	D	D	D
78	R	R	R	R	R
79	D	D	D	D	D
80	D	D	D	D	D
81	R	R	R	R	R
82	R	R	R	R	R
83	R	R	R	D	R
84	R	R	R	R	R
85	R	R	R	R	R
87	R	R	R	R	R
89	D	D	D	D	D
90	R	D	D	D	D
91	R	R	R	R	R
92	D	D	D	D	D
94	R	R	R	R	R
95	D	D	D	D	D
100	R	D	D	D	D
<b>Part</b>					
64	D	D	D	D	D
75	D	D	D	D	D
93	R	R	R	R	D
96	R	R	R	R	R

**TABLE 5**

**VIRGINIA STATE SENATE  
SENATE DISTRICTS IN WHOLE OR IN PART IN  
HAMPTON ROADS—PARTY AFFILIATION OF MEMBERS,  
1999 TO 2007**

District	1999	2003	2007
1	R	R	D
2	D	D	D
3	R	R	R
5	D	D	D
6	R	R	D
7	R	R	R
8	R	R	R
13	R	R	R
14	R	R	R
15	D	R	R
18	D	D	D

# Political Clout

**Voters in Hampton Roads consistently have been in the mainstream with state and national voters as of late, as indicated by their strong support both for President Barack Obama and Gov. Bob McDonnell (who earned 64 percent of the vote in his home city of Virginia Beach).** Hampton Roads voters joined other Commonwealth voters in rejecting an incumbent Republican U.S. senator in 2006 and replacing him with Democrat Jim Webb, who had never before held elective office, but had served as secretary of the Navy under President Ronald Reagan. In 2008, our region joined the rest of Virginia in pulling a “Warner for Warner” substitution by electing businessman and former Virginia Gov. Mark Warner, a Democrat, to replace retiring powerful Republican Sen. John Warner. Even as Democratic gubernatorial candidate Creigh Deeds was getting roundly defeated statewide, he still won with respectable numbers in Hampton Roads’ older cities.

Meanwhile, the region’s congressional delegation has been reasonably stable and has preserved a split between the two major political parties. While it contains one clearly liberal member and two clearly conservative members, they unite on the issues that define the region. Hampton Roads has self-evident interest in federal issues, especially defense spending and technology development. Both of its current senators are viewed as being exceptionally well versed on those issues.

**Some assessments of Hampton Roads politics speak of the region as though it has been monolithically conservative in its choice of candidates. As we have seen, this is not true.** What is true is that the older cities of Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk and Portsmouth (all of which have significant African American populations) vote more strongly Democratic than the region as a whole. President Obama carried these cities with nearly 70 percent of the vote. However, he lost Virginia Beach, the most populous city in Virginia, and nearly all of the smaller towns and counties in the region.

When Jim Webb was edging out incumbent George Allen, he was helped by a strong vote in Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk and Portsmouth. For various

reasons, Mark Warner faced a much weaker opponent in Jim Gilmore, and as a consequence he garnered more than three-fourths of the votes in the older cities of the region.

Hampton Roads, then, is not uniformly red or blue in its politics and frequently switches sides from one election to another. The region’s electorate may lean slightly Republican when no scandals, major issues or exceptionally charismatic candidates are present. Nevertheless, we have become a swing region that either party can hope to win, depending upon the particular characteristics of the election in question.

## DECLINING INFLUENCE?

**It is generally agreed that our region’s political influence has declined in recent years, both at the state and federal levels.**

At the state level, *“Hampton Roads shoots itself in the foot by defeating its most senior, influential legislators”* (the observation of a legislator from outside the area). Setting politics and parties aside, seniority clearly counts in the Virginia General Assembly. Old hands oftentimes evaluate a legislator’s influence by the number on his/her automobile license plate. The lower the number (indicating lengthier service) – 1 through 100 in the House of Delegates and 1 through 40 in the Senate – the more power and influence a legislator is likely to be able to wield.

Movement of Hampton Roads state legislators into positions of influence in Richmond has been thwarted by voter and individual actions. Sen. Marty Williams, of Newport News, who chaired the Senate Transportation Committee and showed strong leadership in attempting to resolve the region’s transportation challenges, was defeated in a Republican primary by an individual who went on to lose the general election. Delegate Leo Wardrup, of Virginia Beach, a capable and sometimes combative legislator who chaired the House Transportation Committee, typically evinced much less willingness to consider taxes as a solution to the region’s transportation challenges. When he retired, he was replaced by a Democrat (Joe Bouchard, the respected former commander of Naval Base Norfolk) who held the seat for a single term before being voted out of office decisively.

Delegate Phil Hamilton chaired a committee and was vice chair of the House Appropriations Committee. Despite his key position and heretofore good reputation, he lost his seat in 2009 amid allegations that he had arranged an appropriation for a position to be filled by him at Old Dominion University. Hamilton was replaced by a Democrat. Also in the House, Delegate Terrie Suit, of Virginia Beach, showed leadership potential and was building seniority before deciding not to run for re-election. She later took a senior position in Gov. McDonnell's administration.

In the state Senate, Democrats Yvonne Miller, Mamie Locke and Louise Lucas chair the committees on Transportation, General Laws and Technology, and Local Government, respectively. They occupy relatively safe seats and hold key positions that could be very valuable to the region in the long run if they are united in approach and are able to find ways to work with the Republican-controlled House of Delegates.

The challenge and disappointments of working with a state legislature that is divided in its control – a Republican majority in the House of Delegates and a Democratic majority in the Senate – are not unique to Hampton Roads. Many Virginia regions have experienced success for their legislative agendas in one house, only to see those items defeated in the other house. **Increasingly sharp partisanship in Virginia politics has hollowed out the political center and it is increasingly difficult to build bipartisan coalitions on many issues. It seems unlikely that redistricting after the 2010 U.S. Census will change this situation, which is at least partially a function of noncompetitive districts, politically speaking.**

Ideally, most items that appear on locally developed legislative wish lists will not be seen as partisan. For example, appropriations for Old Dominion University or Christopher Newport University have no intrinsic partisan character. The trick for local officials and community leaders is to get buy-in from all segments of their delegation to support their agenda above state partisan interests.

The ultimate weapon of enforcement in favor of any regional agenda is the ballot box. Legislators who adhere to statewide political ideology above taking care of the people back home, in theory, can be held accountable at election

time. A “no tax pledge,” for example, may please state and national political leaders and in fact be a key to election, but at the same time may well be inconsistent with a regional agenda that includes improving the area's tunnels. Yet, it is not hard to understand why wizened legislators would take such a pledge. If they don't, they may be punished both by local voters and the state party. They may encounter well-financed primary opposition and receive inferior committee assignments if they survive.

**Schizophrenic voters, who don't like taxes but do like services and good roads, are left to sort out their often contradictory impulses at the ballot box. Thus, we see some legislators biting the dust because they have advocated increased taxes, even while others are elected because they support increased provision of services and larger investments in transportation. Voters frequently do attempt to have the best of both worlds, however impossible that might actually be.**

Another factor that will influence Hampton Roads' political clout in the state in the future is the decline in our regional population as a percentage of the state's population. **As indicated in Table 6, our region is projected to grow through 2030, but not as fast as the rest of Virginia (or, more specifically, Northern Virginia). This will ultimately decrease Hampton Roads' share of the state's population, from nearly 23 percent in 1990 to about 19 percent in 2030. Each percentage decline will represent the loss of another state delegate seat to Northern Virginia; each 2 1/2 percent decline represents the loss of a state Senate seat. At the federal level, the region also will share its Congressional representation with areas outside Hampton Roads.**

Local residents understandably took offense at a local newspaper headline earlier this year that read: “Old, slow and not too bright. Welcome to Hampton Roads?” But it is important to look carefully at the Brookings Institute study to which the newspaper article referred. It lumped Hampton Roads into a group of “the most demographically disadvantaged” of the nation's 100 largest metropolitan areas. The Brookings report, “State of Metropolitan America,” found that Hampton Roads, the nation's 35th-largest metro area, has a slow-

growing, aging population with less education and diversity than the national average. Of particular concern was the conclusion that the region has a below-average population growth rate and an aging population.

TABLE 6					
POPULATION PROJECTIONS: 2010, 2020, 2030					
Locality	1990 Population	2000 Population	2010 Est. Population	2020 Est. Population	2030 Est. Population
<b>Cities</b>					
Chesapeake	151,982	199,184	236,683	272,381	308,736
Franklin	8,392	8,346	8,809	9,348	9,930
Hampton	133,773	146,437	144,803	144,655	144,650
Newport News	171,477	180,150	181,601	182,415	183,372
Norfolk	261,250	234,403	236,338	237,448	238,927
Poquoson	11,005	11,566	11,921	12,281	12,782
Portsmouth	103,910	100,565	99,919	100,429	101,071
Suffolk	52,143	63,677	93,830	122,482	151,427
Virginia Beach	393,089	425,257	447,836	470,288	493,095
Williamsburg	11,600	11,998	13,707	13,866	14,159
<b>Counties</b>					
Accomack	31,703	38,305	40,245	42,185	44,249
Isle of Wight	25,053	29,728	37,067	44,083	51,629
Northampton	13,061	13,093	13,990	14,932	15,931
Surry	6,145	6,829	7,210	7,585	8,156
York	42,434	56,297	66,569	76,376	86,823
<b>Hampton Roads</b>	1,417,017	1,525,835	1,640,528	1,750,754	1,864,937
<b>Statewide</b>	6,189,197	7,078,515	8,010,239	8,917,396	9,825,019
HR as % of State	22.89%	21.56%	20.48%	19.63%	18.98%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

**The inability of the region to come to an agreement on the resolution of major issues affects its political clout at all levels of government. The polls and surveys over many years have clearly established that transportation is considered by everyone to be the major issue in Hampton Roads. Yet, agreed-upon solutions have been as scarce as the polls and surveys have been numerous.** A well-publicized effort to invest additional funds in regional transportation led by former state Sen. Marty Williams resulted in a referendum in 2002 that was soundly defeated. And, as we already have noted, so was Sen. Williams. The region was strong in its rejection of the proposal, voting 61.75 percent “no” to 38.25 percent “yes.” While one might seek to attribute the decisiveness of this defeat to the form of taxation proposed or the projects listed, since then no one has come forth with another proposal or solution. Hence, the region’s transportation needs (at least as some see them) largely have gone unaddressed. To have clout in Richmond or Washington, Hampton Roads must express clearly what it actually will support, just as it did when it emphatically revealed via referendum what it would not support.

A second initiative in the General Assembly with Hampton Roads legislator support would have shifted the responsibility for raising funds for transportation from the state legislature to an appointed body. In the instance of our region, it would have allowed the Hampton Roads Transportation Commission to raise taxes to finance transportation projects. Several local governments in Hampton Roads objected, and a lawsuit was brought in Northern Virginia. Eventually, the state Supreme Court ruled the notion was unconstitutional. Those observing these attempts by the state legislature to side-step responsibility viewed the initiative as an incredible display of a lack of leadership and statesmanship. **Perhaps, but the ultimate sanction upon legislators is to defeat them at the polls, and that has happened most often to those who have proposed tax increases, however clothed.**

Prior to the introduction of effective two-party politics in the 1970s, a single party (the Democrats) eventually would have proffered some solution to the region’s transportation challenges, whether or not the proposal was well crafted, and it would have passed. The absence of effective competition from Republicans would have insulated supportive Democrats from defeat if a tax increase were involved, and hence such initiatives usually passed, though frequently after long

delays. Those days are long gone, however, and the robust two-party character of Hampton Roads' legislative delegation today often diffuses the region's focus and putative unity. This observation does not constitute a hagiographic view of Virginia's one-party dominance by Democrats; it does reflect the reality that one party held the keys to progress, or lack thereof, on many issues ranging from transportation to civil rights for slightly more than a century. Viewed historically, this was both good and bad.

## Conclusion

The last time partisan politics in Hampton Roads was considered in The State of the Region report was 2001. The report at that time "confirmed the recent decline in the political power of the region." It offered this explanation: "For a variety of reasons, including lower than average regional population growth and the retirement or defeat of senior regional legislators, Hampton Roads' political power has been on the wane. ... One can sugarcoat this result in various ways, but it is undeniable that the region's political clout in the legislative halls of Richmond has declined significantly since the mid-1990s." Clearly the region has not regained what the 2001 report described as the "obvious power that the Moss-Diamondstein-Walker-Andrews quartet enjoyed in the days of yore."

**It is fair to say that the region continues to lack political clout. This not only is true in Richmond, but also in Washington, where two talented, but relatively junior senators have taken the place of powerful Sen. John Warner and Sen. George Allen, whose influence was growing significantly until he stumbled verbally in his re-election bid.**

The State Board of Elections reports that at the time of the 2008 election, 82.8 percent of the estimated voting-age population in Hampton Roads was registered to vote. That number is third highest in the Commonwealth, where the statewide average is 82.2 percent. The Hampton Roads Center for Civic Engagement conducted a civic capital assessment of the region in 2009. The interviews and surveys conducted were designed to assess our civic capital: i.e., the "civic values, skills and infrastructure needed for citizens to work

together to define and shape the region's quality of life." When asked the most important public issue, respondents listed transportation, regionalism and the economy. Of these three issues, elected officials and other area leaders ranked transportation the highest of the three. At the same time, regionalism was **not** ranked important by elected officials.

It should come as little surprise that survey participants gave their lowest grade (D) on this regional report card to the question: How would you grade overall civic engagement in regional issues? When asked to rank certain institutions on a scale of trust from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest level, local government employees had the greatest level of trust at 6.5, while local elected officials at 5.65 and elected state representatives at 5.63 had the lowest levels of trust among respondents.

In political theory, competition between two political parties should result in more and better solutions, but that is most likely to happen if there are vigorous political campaigns on issues for which the outcome for a jurisdiction is otherwise fairly predictable. Such issue-oriented campaigns really have not occurred in the region, with few exceptions. We know with some predictability those cities and counties that are likely to be red or blue. While that mix within the region may give an overall hue of purple, Hampton Roads voters may want to create a stronger color of purple by holding elected officials to a higher level of accountability than they have in the past, and by sending home in electoral defeat some of the reds and blues who have not been performing at an acceptable level on behalf of the region. However, since many districts in Hampton Roads are not really competitive, that is unlikely to occur in many cases. We are poorer for this.