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TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Paul Shumaker

RE: 2024 NC Gubernatorial Election
"The Power of the Unaffiliated Voter"

DATE: June 15, 2023

There is hardly a day that goes by when I don't get a call from a reporter or a member of the Republican donor community with the following question: "How do you think Mark Robinson will play to the general election voter?"

Glen Bolger of Public Opinion Strategies and I worked on a client research project for North Carolina a few weeks ago. With the client's permission, we added a few questions on the 2024 gubernatorial election to enable me to respond to these inquiries with hard data rather than my opinions.

But before I get to the meat of the numbers, a few relevant facts on the state of play in North Carolina are worth noting:

1. North Carolina Republicans are the smallest voting bloc of the state's three major voting groups.
2. Both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party have become so polarized that crossover voting between the two Parties only occurs when one candidate is badly flawed.
3. The Unaffiliated Voter, and more precisely, the four-year college-educated unaffiliated voter, holds the key to winning a statewide race in North Carolina. The Party or candidate best positioned to win this group will win in 2024.
4. Polling on the gubernatorial election without candidate information is irrelevant to how the campaign will play out. Voters don't know much about Mark Robinson, so anyone saying the GOP race is a lock is just promoting their favored candidate.

Last week, during IIANC Action Fund Thinker Lunch, Governor Cooper and Attorney General Stein's consultant Morgan Jackson said, "Democrats pray daily for a Trump/Robinson ticket in North Carolina." The following set of numbers bears out why he made that statement.

Robinson/Stein/Trump/Biden Image Numbers

The survey was fielded before the Trump indictments. However, I don't see voters who were unfavorable before becoming more favorable after.

Trump and Biden are both underwater in North Carolina. Biden is net-negative 20 points with an image ratio of 36% favorable to 56% unfavorable. He is 2% favorable to 94% unfavorable with Republicans, 72% favorable to 16% unfavorable with Democrats, and 32% favorable to 59% unfavorable with Unaffiliated Voters.

Trump is net-negative 26 points with voters. He is 78% favorable to 20% unfavorable with Republican voters, 5% favorable to 92% unfavorable with Democrats, and 24% favorable to 69% unfavorable with Unaffiliated Voters.

Biden is net-negative 27 points with Unaffiliated voters compared to Trump, who is net-negative 45 points with the same group. Remember point two in the introduction about less crossover voting. Anyone can see the polarization these two men have with voters. However, overall Biden is in better standing with the Unaffiliated Voters. But not to overstate the point: he is the lesser of two evils.

Both Mark Robinson and Josh Stein remain undefined with voters. Robinson has an overall image of 22% favorable to 17% unfavorable. 44% of voters had never heard of him. He is 44% favorable to 3% unfavorable with Republicans, 1% favorable to 31% unfavorable with Democrats and 21% favorable to 16% unfavorable with Unaffiliated Voters.

Stein's overall image is slightly weaker than Robinson with 18% favorable to 12% unfavorable and 50% of voters saying they have never heard of him. He is 5% favorable to 15% unfavorable with Republicans, 29% favorable to 8% unfavorable with Democrats, and 20% favorable to 14% unfavorable with Unaffiliated Voters.

The Initial Ballot Test

The ballot test was Stein 45% and Robinson 42% in a two-way race between Mark Robinson and Josh Stein. Both numbers are relatively consistent with a generic ballot test. Both candidates need identity and issue definitions. The generic ballot test for Governor was 45% Democratic to 40% Republican in the survey.

Republicans were 87% Robinson, 4% Stein and 9% Undecided. Democrats were 88% Stein, 6% Robinson, and 6% undecided. Unaffiliated Voters were 42% Stein, 37% Robinson, and 19% undecided.

Concerns About Electability

Much has been written about rumors among Republican activists about Mark Robinson's electability. The concern is understandable, given the 2020 elections and what played out for Dan Forest. So, it is prudent to test a few of those concerns and see how they may impact voters'

opinions. We tested two well-known facts about Mark Robinson that have been reported in the media and his social media.

On the issue of eliminating science and history classes in grades one to five, 72% of all voters said they were less likely to support Mark Robinson compared to 4% who said they were more likely and 23% said it made no difference. 58% of Republicans said less likely, 80% of Democrats said less likely, and 76% of Unaffiliated Voters said less likely.

Robinson's failure to pay his property taxes is also an issue with voters. Overall, 65% said they were less likely to 2% more likely, and 31% makes no difference. Republicans were 58% less likely, Democrats 71% less likely and Unaffiliated Voters were 68% less likely.

Concerns about Robinson Are Real And the GOP Should Take Note

Any election for a major office in a competitive state will not be held in a vacuum. The candidates with the best ability to drive key messaging points are usually the candidates who win. Robinson and Stein will be well funded, but Robinson needs to do himself more favors.

When voters learned of the Robinson issues, the statewide ballot moved to 51% Stein to 31% Robinson. Republicans were 67% Robinson, 10% Stein and 19% undecided. Democrats were 89% Stein, 5% Robinson and 5% undecided. Unaffiliated Voters were 55% Stein, 25% Robinson and 15% undecided. For Robinson to be competitive in the General, he must win the Unaffiliated vote. It is simply a function of math, which as Robinson has acknowledged, is sometimes a problem for him. Republicans have time to fix this; the question remains whether or not they will find the will to do so.

More about the Survey

The Survey was conducted from May 30-June 4, 2023, among 600 likely voters with a margin of error of $\pm 4.0\%$. All interviews were phone interviews with screener questions to determine likely voters in 2024. 89% were cellphone interviews, 11% were landline interviews. Crosstabs are available upon request.