



## THE 1970 U. S. SENATE ELECTION IN VIRGINIA: Independent Voting and Turnout Patterns

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Virginia reelected Harry F. Byrd, Jr. to the United States Senate in 1970 by a majority of the State's popular votes in a three-way contest for the post. The most startling feature of Senator Byrd's resounding reelection was that, running as an Independent, he so easily defeated both major political party candidates. Although these results demonstrated clearly that large numbers of voters had disregarded party labels to reelect Senator Byrd, it is still uncertain what implications the election has for the future of political parties in Virginia and whether Byrd's reelection as an Independent was merely an aberrant election in Virginia's political history and therefore only a momentary detour from the direction of recent political developments.

The significance of the 1970 election was the election of an Independent, albeit an incumbent and a Byrd, and the massive rejection of both Democratic and Republican party candidates. The dimensions of Senator Byrd's triumph were even more impressive than his lack of a party label, especially in view of the record number of votes cast in 1970 in a non-Presidential election (see **Table 1**). The total State vote of over 946,000 surpassed the totals of all Virginia elections except the Presidential elections of 1964 and 1968. About 31,000 more votes were cast in 1970 than in the 1969 gubernatorial general election, an increase of 3.4 percent, and almost 213,000, or 29 percent, more than in the preceding off-year U.S. Senate

election in 1966; the 1970 total vote even exceeded the previous record for a U.S. Senate election in the 1964 Presidential year.

In contrast, the major parties' proportions of the 1970 record vote marked low points for both. The Republican percentage of the Statewide vote interrupted that party's string of successes over the past 20 years while the proportionate Democratic vote even fell short of what it was in the 1968 Presidential election. Senator Byrd's victory drew heavily from the ranks of supporters of both major political parties, and accentuated the growing propensity of Virginia voters to disregard party labels in balloting for particular offices. This increasingly independent voting behavior also was dramatized in 1970 by the ease with which six Republicans and four Democrats were elected to Congressional seats.

Another significant aspect of the 1970 election was the small turnout of less than 129,000 votes in the July primary election for the Democratic Party's Senate nomination. The number of votes cast in the Democratic primary was the smallest since 1948, when a not-very-seriously-contested U.S. Senate primary attracted only 114,000 voters, while every other Democratic primary since 1925 drew more voters to the polls. The low turnout in the 1970 Democratic primary raised serious questions about how many consistently loyal Democrats there now are in Virginia, while the poor Republican showing in the general election posed equally important questions about the number of solid core Republicans. The

1970 elections revealed how open and unpredictable Virginia politics has become in terms of party allegiances. Previous patterns of independent voting behavior, traceable to 1952 and reenforced increasingly in almost every election since then, reached their zenith in 1970. The 1970 election results, therefore, suggest that the leadership of both parties ought to reassess their strategies for potential victory and to regauge the posture of Virginia's voters, particularly those in urban areas.

### THE DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

Senator Byrd announced, well before the filing date deadline for the primary, that he would not try to obtain the Democratic Party's nomination but would seek reelection as an Independent candidate in the November general election. Nevertheless, there were three candidates seeking the U.S. Senate nomination in the Democratic Party's primary election on July 14, 1970. The principal conflict involved Democratic moderates and liberals, with the conservative wing of the Party failing first to field a candidate and then even to participate in the primary balloting.

The candidates in the primary were George C. Rawlings, Jr., a former member of the House of Delegates from Fredericksburg; Clive L. DuVal II, incumbent Delegate from Fairfax County; and Milton Colvin of Lexington, a faculty member of Washington and Lee University. Rawlings, backed by the liberal supporters of State Senator Henry E. Howell, Jr., was principally known throughout the State for his defeat of



**TABLE 1 / VOTING IN THE 1970 U.S. SENATE ELECTION IN VIRGINIA IN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRIMARY AND THE GENERAL ELECTION**

Democratic Party Primary Election			General Election			
Candidate	Number of Votes	Percent of Total Vote	Candidate	Party	Number of Votes	Percent of Total Vote
Milton Colvin	11,911	9.2	Harry F. Byrd, Jr.	Independent	506,633	53.5
Clive L. DuVal	58,174	45.1	Ray Garland	Republican	145,031	15.3
George C. Rawlings, Jr.	58,874	45.7	George C. Rawlings, Jr.	Democratic	295,057	31.2
			Scattered	---	30	---
<b>Totals</b>	<b>128,959</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Totals</b>		<b>946,751</b>	<b>100.0</b>

veteran Congressman Howard W. Smith in the 1966 Democratic primary. Rawlings, however, subsequently was defeated in the general election in 1966 by a Republican, and in 1969 was defeated by a Republican in his bid for reelection to the House of Delegates. DuVal was the candidate of Democratic moderates and he too had been defeated in a quest for a Congressional seat from the 10th District in the 1966 general election. The liberal-moderate struggle left Colvin to seek support from conservatives. But since few conservatives participated in the primary, Colvin never was effectively in contention, although his total State vote far exceeded the difference in the number of votes cast for the winner and the runner-up. The primary result was a Rawlings victory by only a plurality.

Rawlings won the July primary by only 700 of the almost 129,000 votes cast. He won 45.7 percent of the State's vote to DuVal's 45.1 percent. Colvin received almost 12,000 votes, or a little over 9 percent of the total. Rawlings carried 58 of Virginia's 96 counties, 44 with a majority of votes, while DuVal led in 37 counties, winning 26 with a majority of the vote. Among Virginia's cities, Rawlings won 20 with majorities in 12, and DuVal 16 with majorities in 12. Colvin carried only one county with a plurality and two cities with majorities, but these were his home city and neighboring localities. Rawlings' strength emerged primarily from Southside and Tidewater rural areas, where he swept to majorities in every county in the general area, and in cities distributed widely across the State but including most of the largest cities. DuVal's city support also was widely dispersed but he did especially well in Northern Virginia localities, in counties in Southwest Virginia, and in the Shenandoah Valley.

In terms of the urban vote in Virginia's then 6 metropolitan areas which cast 59.8 percent of the total vote in the primary, DuVal won over 50

percent while Rawlings won only 40.8 percent (see **Table 2**). Most of the DuVal metropolitan vote came from suburban areas where he won almost 57 percent of the vote compared to less than 34 percent for Rawlings. However, Rawlings carried the central city vote with 47.7 percent to DuVal's 44.7 percent, an important dimension of Rawlings' victory because over half of the metropolitan votes in the primary were cast in the central cities. Colvin drew 8.5 percent of the metropolitan votes, with slightly more in the suburbs than in the central cities. The urban corridor, which includes 4 of the State's metropolitan areas and other developing counties, cast 63.8 percent of the total State vote. DuVal also led in the corridor with 47.3 percent of its vote, again exactly 3 percent more than Rawlings. However, in the votes cast in cities alone across the State, Rawlings ran more than four percent ahead of DuVal.

From the data in **Table 3**, it is clear that Rawlings' success in cities, and especially in central cities, was in large part attributable to his support among black voters. Although Rawlings did not win monolithic support from the black community, he did achieve bloc support of almost 63 percent while the moderate DuVal won 34.4 percent.

In such a close contest, however, it is impossible to pinpoint the key ingredient of victory. Rawlings' support in cities generally and in the rural areas of Tidewater and Southside clearly was the most significant element producing his narrow victory. Under Virginia law, however, because his plurality was less than one percent, Rawlings could have faced a run-off primary election if runner-up DuVal had requested it. But DuVal declined in the cause of party unity to seek a second primary and thus Rawlings carried the Democratic label into the general election for United States Senator.

#### THE GENERAL ELECTION

The November general election for U.S. Senate pitted Senator Byrd against both Democratic and Republican nominees. The Republican candidate was Delegate Ray Garland of Roanoke whose nomination was clouded by an intra-party battle at the State Republican Convention over whether the Republicans should even field a candidate to contest Senator Byrd. The decision of the convention to nominate a candidate at all was largely the result of efforts to this end by Governor Linwood Holton. But Garland's

**TABLE 2 / VOTING IN VIRGINIA METROPOLITAN AREAS IN THE 1970 U. S. SENATE ELECTIONS**

Democratic Party Primary Election							
	Total No. of Votes	Colvin		DuVal		Rawlings	
		No. of Votes	Percent	No. of Votes	Percent	No. of Votes	Percent
Metropolitan Areas	77,137	6,591	8.5	39,045	50.6	31,501	40.8
Central Cities	39,258	3,010	7.7	17,530	44.7	18,718	47.7
Suburbs	37,879	3,581	9.5	21,515	56.8	12,783	33.7
General Election							
	Total No. of Votes	Byrd		Garland		Rawlings	
		No. of Votes	Percent	No. of Votes	Percent	No. of Votes	Percent
Metropolitan Areas	525,496	284,447	54.1	72,986	13.9	168,047	32.0
Central Cities	226,108	117,629	52.0	23,437	10.4	85,037	37.6
Suburbs	299,388	166,818	55.7	49,549	16.6	83,010	27.7



campaign was handicapped from its inception by the remnants of the convention struggle, the failure of the Nixon Administration to endorse the Republican Senate candidate, and the shortage of financial support for the campaign. And as the campaign wore on, it appeared that the spectre of a possible Rawlings victory haunted efforts to mobilize even Republican voters to Garland's cause.

Senator Byrd won the general election easily with 53.5 percent of the popular vote. Republican Garland won less than 16 percent of the State's vote and Rawlings less than 32 percent. The pattern of voting across the State demonstrated that Byrd won impressive numbers of normally Republican voters, as well as a large amount of traditionally Democratic support. So sweeping was

Byrd's triumph that Rawlings carried only eight counties, all but two in Southwest Virginia, and only three of these by a majority. Garland won only four counties, all in Southwest Virginia, and only one with a majority. Rawlings carried only three cities, all by pluralities, and one a normally Republican locality, while Garland failed to carry a single city. The rest of the State belonged to Senator Byrd, who won most of Virginia's localities by majorities, including those in its most urban areas. Byrd swept to majorities in all of the State's largest cities and counties, outside of Northern Virginia, except for Norfolk. And he swept all Northern Virginia localities by pluralities with little difficulty.

Byrd's domination of the election was evident in his majority support

among urban voters, both in metropolitan areas, city and suburb, and throughout the urban corridor. Of the over half million votes cast in metropolitan areas, Byrd won over 54 percent including majorities in central cities and suburbs alike. In contrast, Democrat Rawlings polled less than a third of the metropolitan vote, including well under 30 percent in suburban areas. Republican Garland lost heavily in metropolitan Virginia, winning less than 14 percent of the vote. In the urban corridor, the results were approximately the same. Byrd's majority in the corridor area reached 53.1 percent while Rawlings' share of the popular vote was 34 percent and Garland's only 12.9 percent.

Viewing the sweep of Byrd's victory makes it clear that his majority was the

**TABLE 3 / VOTING IN SELECTED PREDOMINANTLY BLACK PRECINCTS IN VIRGINIA CITIES IN THE 1970 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY AND GENERAL ELECTION FOR U.S. SENATOR**

		Democratic Primary Election July 14, 1970				General Election November 3, 1970			
City	Precinct	Total No. of Votes	Percent Colvin	Percent DuVal	Percent Rawlings	Total No. of Votes	Percent Byrd, Indep.	Percent Garland, Repub.	Percent Rawlings, Democ.
Charlottesville	Firehouse	131	5.3	17.6	75.2	479	19.0	5.8	75.2
Virginia Beach	Seatack	125	4.0	4.0	92.0	440	2.0	8.2	89.8
Norfolk	1	318	0.9	26.1	73.0	917	4.6	3.4	92.0
Norfolk	2	465	0.6	46.7	52.7	998	3.3	3.1	93.6
Norfolk	4	637	1.4	42.7	55.9	1,498	1.2	4.7	94.1
Norfolk	5	242	1.7	42.6	55.7	594	2.0	4.2	93.8
Norfolk	6	198	1.0	41.9	57.1	548	2.0	4.7	93.2
Norfolk	7	353	1.4	20.4	78.2	733	1.6	4.0	94.4
Norfolk	8	675	0.6	18.7	80.7	1,382	1.8	2.9	95.3
Norfolk	9	102	0.0	65.7	34.3	251	6.4	7.6	86.1
Norfolk	17	431	20.2	20.9	58.9	714	4.8	4.5	90.8
Norfolk	42	377	8.8	5.3	85.9	1,002	1.2	3.7	95.1
Portsmouth	26	491	0.4	46.2	53.4	1,403	1.0	7.8	91.2
Portsmouth	27	303	0.7	25.1	74.3	873	0.8	8.6	90.6
Richmond	1	177	1.7	37.9	60.5	346	0.9	4.0	95.1
Richmond	4	223	1.3	41.3	57.4	615	2.9	10.6	86.5
Richmond	5	36	5.6	36.1	58.3	132	17.4	6.8	75.8
Richmond	6	110	2.7	38.2	59.1	416	14.7	2.9	82.5
Richmond	18	343	0.6	22.4	77.0	1,061	1.6	4.9	93.5
Richmond	19	173	2.9	30.1	67.1	507	6.9	8.5	84.6
Richmond	24	281	0.7	37.7	61.6	733	7.0	4.6	88.4
Richmond	46	364	1.1	37.1	61.8	946	2.6	9.2	88.2
Richmond	55	305	0.7	35.4	63.9	716	1.3	7.5	91.2
Richmond	62	389	0.8	37.8	61.4	1,362	1.1	6.4	92.5
Richmond	63	148	1.4	68.2	30.4	461	4.1	8.2	87.6
Richmond	64	533	0.6	53.7	45.8	1,372	0.9	6.0	93.1
Richmond	65	295	1.4	46.8	51.9	659	3.5	6.4	90.1
Richmond	66	353	1.1	37.7	61.2	858	0.9	4.1	95.0
Richmond	67	439	1.1	39.0	59.9	1,193	1.0	5.0	94.0
Lynchburg	1-1	111	6.3	88.3	5.4	481	27.2	9.8	63.0
Hampton	Phenix	160	2.5	50.6	46.9	603	2.0	6.3	91.7
Hampton	Pembroke	70	4.3	38.6	57.1	376	0.8	2.9	96.3
Hampton	Y.H. Thomas	58	3.4	60.3	36.2	368	1.9	6.3	91.8
Newport News	Dunbar	63	7.9	22.2	69.8	536	0.7	4.5	94.8
Newport News	Lee	80	5.0	15.0	80.0	369	0.5	3.0	96.5
Newport News	Marshall	158	3.8	17.1	79.1	404	1.2	8.4	90.3
Newport News	Chestnut	142	4.2	13.4	82.4	826	2.2	6.2	91.6
Newport News	Jefferson	96	6.3	14.6	79.2	720	1.8	5.3	92.9
Newport News	Huntington	113	2.7	15.9	81.4	504	1.2	4.8	94.0
Newport News	Washington	77	14.3	29.9	55.8	563	1.1	6.4	92.5
Newport News	Newsome Park	57	3.5	24.6	71.9	372	0.0	3.2	96.8
<b>Totals</b>		<b>10,202</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>34.4</b>	<b>62.9</b>	<b>29,331</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>91.4</b>



result of his support by both Republican and Democratic voters. In counties and cities of the Valley of Virginia that normally produce Republican majorities or, at the least, sizeable Republican votes, Byrd as an Independent won substantial majorities. Similarly, his pluralities in Northern Virginia suburbs must be attributed to defections of Republican voters. Garland in polling under 16 percent of the State vote fell at least 20 percent under the usual core of Republican State support. But Rawlings' performance also provided evidence of the normally Democratic vote that Byrd won. By winning in Virginia's cities and generally by a majority of votes, Byrd obviously won support in those localities from voters who in past elections usually produced Democratic pluralities or majorities. This phenomenon also was evident in the outcomes of the voting in rural counties throughout the State. Rawlings depended heavily upon support from black voters who, as Table 3 indicates, gave him over 90 percent of their votes in the cities. Even this support, however, proved to be an insufficient base for him to carry the cities, or the counties with large proportions of black voters.

#### RELATIVE TURNOUT

Some of the most interesting aspects of the 1970 election in Virginia are found in the relationship of voter participation in the Democratic primary and in the subsequent general election. In terms of the numbers of voters who participated in the electoral process in 1970, both elections produced record totals, at polar extremes, however; the

primary for its low turnout and the general election for its high turnout. In terms of the relationship of primary voting to general election voting, the total number of votes cast in the primary amounted to only 13.6 percent of the number of general election votes, a figure lower than any similar proportion in Virginia elections at least as far back as 1925. In central cities only, the vote in the primary was 17.4 percent of the general election totals, while the comparable figure in the suburbs was only 12.7 percent. Among voters in the predominantly black precincts in Table 3, however, the primary to general election voting relationship was 34.8 percent, over twice the Statewide proportion and twice the figure in central cities. As in other recent elections, the preponderance of metropolitan votes in the general election was cast in the suburbs, reversing the slight central city edge in the primary balloting.

Comparing the total votes in the 1970 and 1969 Democratic primary elections reveals that only some 29 percent of the votes cast in the 1969 primary were cast in 1970. Among categories of voters, the metropolitan vote in total and in both its central city and suburban components, exceeded the Statewide relationship of the two primaries by only one to three percent. Votes in the predominantly black precincts in 1970, however, amounted to 40.8 percent of the total cast in those same precincts in 1969 (see Table 3). The comparison suggests that in the low turnout of 1970, black voters participated proportionately more than white voters, and thus contributed to

Rawlings' win. However, even black voter participation in the Democratic primary slipped substantially from 1969 and was consistent with the general low participation in the primary.

#### CONCLUSION

The 1970 reelection of Senator Byrd resulted from a coalition of conservative and moderate Republican and Democratic voters who rejected their parties' nominees. The scope of Senator Byrd's triumph in winning conservative areas of the State normally carried by either party's candidates and in winning handily in urban areas of both city and suburban character normally carried by moderate to liberal candidates of both parties indicates that the election was a personal triumph for the Senator. But it also suggests that the relatively liberal thrust of the major party candidates was decisively rejected by Virginians. The massive sit-out of the Democratic primary in comparison to the large general election turnout demonstrated voter indifference to the Democratic choices from almost all groups of Democrats. The wholesale abandonment by the electorate of their past party voting habits to reelect Senator Byrd so handily raised the possibility that party allegiance grows increasingly fragile in Virginia. Whether another independent candidacy in Virginia can succeed in 1971 will determine whether the prime ingredient of Senator Byrd's triumph was personal, or ideological in the sense of a rejection of too liberal candidates. Solely on the evidence of 1970's events, it appeared that both factors were at play in the U.S. Senate contest.

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# NEWS LETTER

Editor / Weldon Cooper

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