



STATE NAVIGATE POLL BRIEFING

WEST VIRGINIA SENATE DIST. 3 (SPECIAL)
REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

Sen. Trent Barnhart (appointed) vs. Jason Harshbarger
Special election · Smith / Takubo factional contest

AT A GLANCE



PRIMARY DATE

May 12, 2026



EARLY VOTING BEGINS

Apr 29, 2026



FIELD DATES

Apr 27–29, 2026



MARGIN OF ERROR

± 4.1%

n = 568 likely Republican primary voters · Parkersburg area · Weighted by age, race, gender, education, county

METHODOLOGY

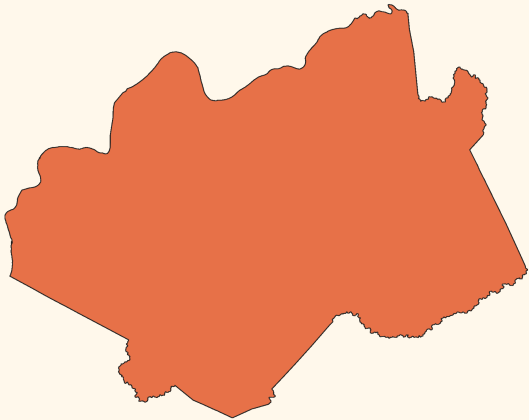
State Navigate surveyed 568 likely Republican primary voters in West Virginia's Senate District 3 (special primary) from April 27 through April 29, 2026, using AllianceForge's text-to-web methodology via SurveyMonkey. The sample was drawn from the i360 voter file and weighted by age, race, gender, education, and county to reflect the likely 2026 R primary electorate. The survey carries a margin of error of ±4.1% at a 95% confidence level. This survey was not sponsored by any party, candidate, or candidate's committee.

DISTRICT DNA · SD-3 (SPECIAL)



PARKERSBURG AREA

Counties: Wood, Pleasants, Ritchie, Wirt
(all four counties in full)



WHERE A FEW VOTES MATTER

~19%

OF VOTERS WILL DETERMINE WHO
THE NEXT STATE SENATOR WILL BE

~69,500

registered voters in SD-3

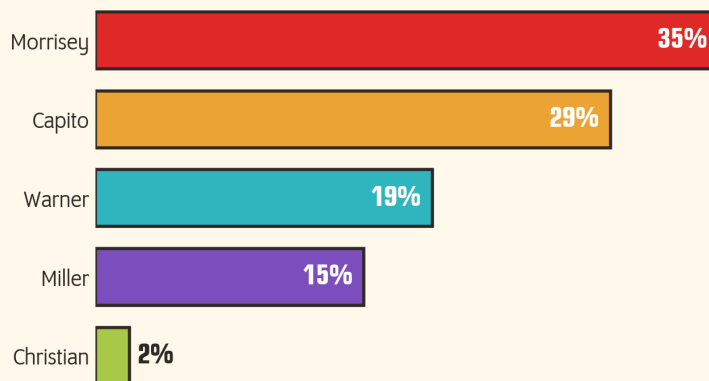
~12,900

voters cast in the 2022
GOP primary in SD-3

This district is safely Republican: a few
voters will determine the election.

2024 PRIMARY RESULT IN SD-3

2024 GOP Gov. Primary in SD-3 (Morrisey +6)

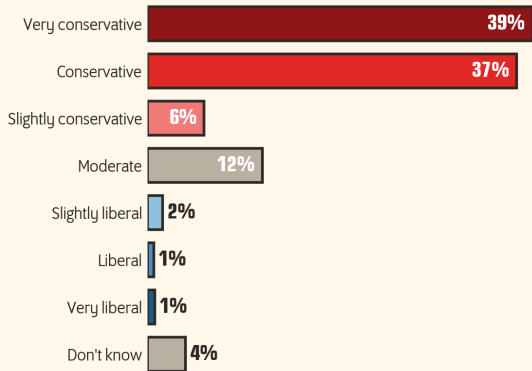


A NOTE ON 2024

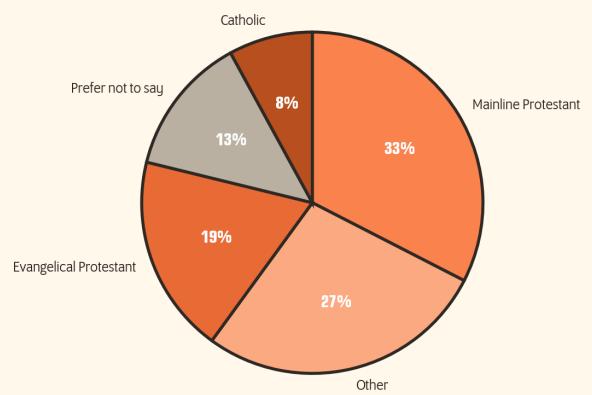
Patrick Morrisey carried SD-3 by 6 points (35-29) over Moore Capito in the 2024 GOP gubernatorial primary, running close to his statewide margin of around 6 points. The arch-conservative wing of the WV GOP has the upper hand in this district — and Barnhart, backed by both Senate President Randy Smith and the Governor, sits squarely on that side of the Civil War. Harshbarger's path to an upset runs through the wide undecided pool, not through ideological positioning.

DISTRICT DNA • SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS (LV)

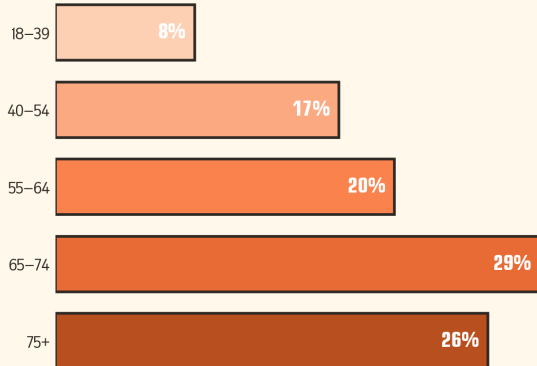
IDEOLOGICAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION



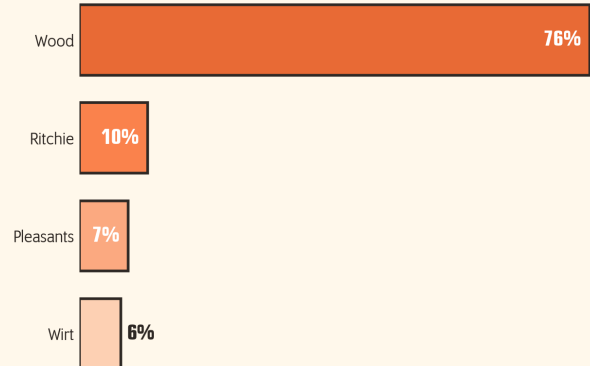
RELIGION



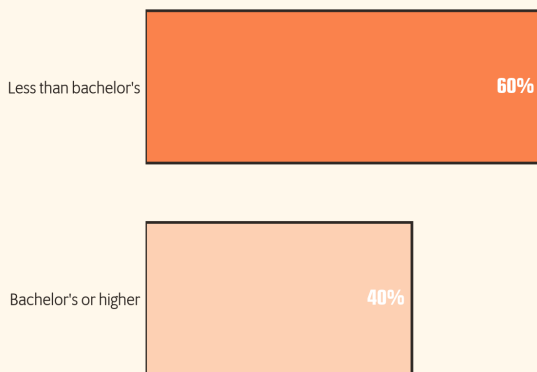
AGE



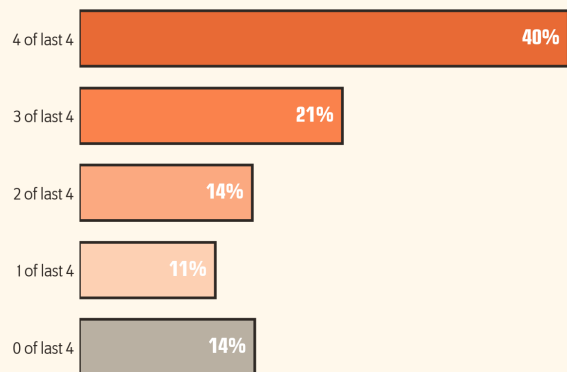
RESPONDENTS BY COUNTY



EDUCATION



PRIMARY VOTING HISTORY (LAST 4 CYCLES)



White/Caucasian = 99%. n = 568 likely R primary voters, weighted.



THE CANDIDATES

TRENT BARNHART

Appointed Incumbent · Pleasants County

BACKGROUND

Appointed incumbent state Senator from Pleasants County. Backed by Senate President Randy Smith and the Governor in this special-election race.

BACKERS

Sen. Randy Smith; Gov. Patrick Morrisey.

KEY STRENGTH

Has been uncontested on TV; hails from Pleasants County, which is more similar to Wood than Ritchie County.

JASON HARSHBARGER

Former WV Delegate · Ritchie County

BACKGROUND

Former WV Delegate from Ritchie County. Aligned with the anti-Smith faction of the Senate Civil War.

BACKERS

Mountaineer Freedom Alliance.

KEY STRENGTH

Outsider profile; running against an appointed (not elected) incumbent.

THE SNAPSHOT

THE HORSERACE · WITH LEANERS

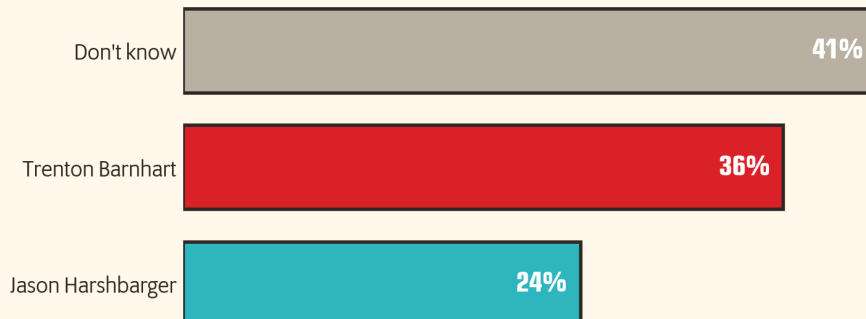
SD-3 Special Republican Primary Horserace (with leaners)



Barnhart leads narrowly at 37%, with the undecided column close behind at 36% and Harshbarger at 27%. The story of the special primary is the size of the undecided pool — even after a leaner push, more than a third of likely voters say they don't know who they'll back. The race remains very much in play.

NO LEANER PUSH

No leaner push



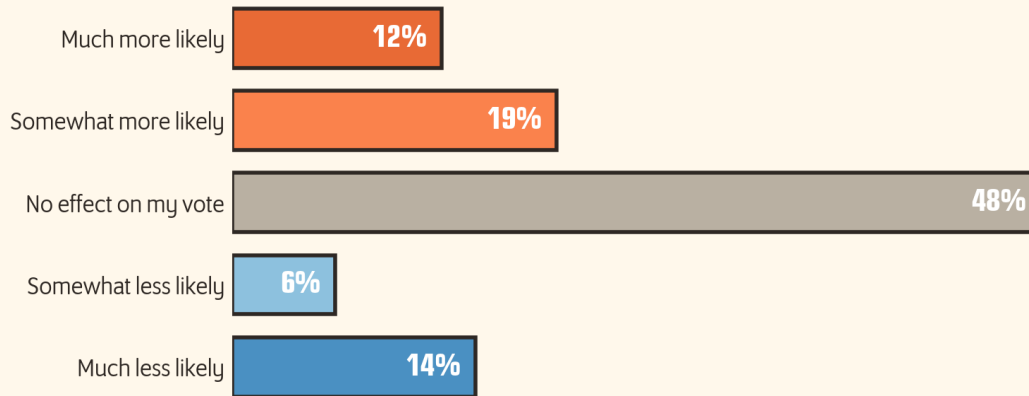
Without a leaner push, undecided leads at 41%, with Barnhart at 36% and Harshbarger at 24%. Among the undecided pool, an additional 87.6% still don't lean either way — the deepest undecided crater of any race in this set of polls. Whoever can finish converting that pool will likely win.

REPUBLICAN TYPOLOGIES & IDEOLOGY

EFFECT OF A MORRISEY ENDORSEMENT

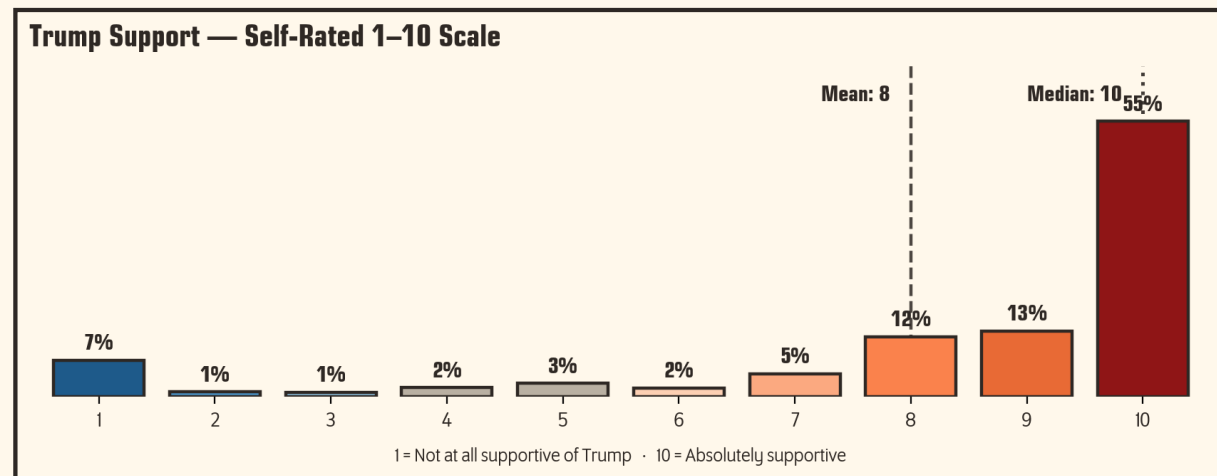


Effect of a Morrisey Endorsement on Vote



This is an astounding finding in our survey. Despite Morrisey carrying this district by 6 points in the 2024 Governor's primary, his endorsement strength here falls more in line with our SD-17 poll, even though Morrisey placed third in that primary. It performs slightly worse among undecided voters: 30% say they'd be more likely to support a Morrisey-backed candidate vs. 23% who say they'd be less likely. One reason for this may be that the Governor has upset voters here by going after down-ballot incumbents in the House of Delegates races, including House Finance Chair Vernon Criss and Delegate Scot Heckert.

TRUMP SUPPORT



Trump support in SD-3 is overwhelming and lopsided. 55% say they support the president absolutely, and 80% rate their level of support at 8 out of 10 or above. The mean is 8, and the median is 10. Any campaign that drifts too far from MAGA will likely struggle with voters in this district.



TEAM NOTES & ANALYSIS

CHAZ NUTTYCOMBE · ON SURVEY DESIGN

Live and learn: an important survey design change.

As is standard in West Virginia Republican primaries, the hometown heroes are leading their respective turf. One important change to our survey design compared to the previous surveys is the addition of information about the candidate's hometown and county. We recently learned that this information will be available on voters' ballots, and we want our polls to be as close as possible to what voters will see in the voting booth.

CHAZ NUTTYCOMBE · ON KEY COUNTIES

Wood County is a barometer of the topline: the winner will carry it.

Unlike the regular primary, the special pits two candidates from different counties, and neither of them is the golden goose of Wood County: Barnhart's from Pleasants (7% of the electorate) and Harshbarger's from Ritchie (10%). Wood County is 76% of the electorate and the results within the county match the topline: Barnhart has a 10-point lead (33% to Harshbarger's 23%) in Wood.

MARY RADCLIFFE · ON CROSS-RACE CANDIDATE SUPPORT

Voters aren't sorting into two factional camps across the regular and special races.

Despite some seemingly similar dynamics in the regular and special elections, voters don't appear to be aligning into two camps in this district. For example, voters who say they plan to back Azinger in the regular election break 40% to 29% in favor of Barnhart in the special; we see an almost identical 40% to 28% split in favor of Barnhart among Fehrenbacher voters. Likewise, Harshbarger voters break for Azinger by 26%, while Barnhart voters intend to support Azinger by 25%.

CHAZ NUTTYCOMBE · ON VOTER PROPENSITY

High-propensity voters tilt more conservative; SD-3's electorate is older and Barnhart-friendly.

When analyzing voters' determination on how likely they are to vote and their previous primary voting record, one thing's for certain: ideology drives turnout. The more conservative a respondent is, the more likely they are to vote, which helps Barnhart's status as the prohibitive favorite, though far from a shoo-in, given the toplines. Totaling voters who are conservative + very conservative, Barnhart leads 39% to Harshbarger's 26% (a 13-point lead). The electorate isn't totally polarized like in the regular election, though: Barnhart also leads 34% to Harshbarger's 27% (a 7-point lead) among voters who skew from slightly conservative to very liberal.



State Navigate is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to becoming a compass for state legislatures everywhere. Our bipartisan polling team consists of alumni of FiveThirtyEight, political scientists, and polling experts. Last year, State Navigate was the most accurate pollster in the country for the 2025 election cycle. To learn more about our poll sponsorship opportunities, [click here!](#) Public polling on state governance, especially state legislatures, is rare, so we try to make our polling as affordable as possible for sponsors to help fill this gap.

OUR POLLING TEAM

CHAZ NUTTYCOMBE

FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Chaz was the Director of CAnalysis.com, the only website dedicated to state legislative election forecasting. He has successfully forecasted thousands of state legislative elections since 2017 during his senior year in high school. Chaz leads the polling team and works with them on survey design, field work, weighting, and written analysis.

MICHAEL FOLEY

ELECTIONS COORDINATOR

Michael is an expert in GIS technology and has experience in coding and scraping technology. He is a graduate of Fordham University and the University of Chicago Law School. In our polling, Michael conducts fieldwork, setting up surveys and texts, and exports/designs crosstabs.

MARY RADCLIFFE

DATA MANAGER

Mary Radcliffe is a mathematician and data analyst from Pittsburgh. She earned a PhD in Mathematics from the University of California, San Diego in 2012. Mary has previously worked as a Teaching Professor at Carnegie Mellon University and Researcher at FiveThirtyEight. In our polling, Mary helps with survey design, keeps our polling operations ethical, creates toplines, and writes analyses of results.

G. ELLIOTT MORRIS

POLLING COMMITTEE MEMBER

Elliott Morris is a data-driven journalist and author living in Washington, DC. He's the author of STRENGTH IN NUMBERS: How Polls Work and Why We Need Them. Elliott was most recently the Editorial Director of Data Analytics at ABC News, where he developed polling aggregation and election-forecasting models and managed the research and data visualization teams for ABC's data-journalism website FiveThirtyEight/538. In our polling, Elliott helps with survey design and writing weighting scripts.

NICHOLAS GOEDERT

POLLING COMMITTEE MEMBER

Nicholas / "Nick" is an assistant professor of Political Science at Virginia Tech with expertise focused on legislative elections and American politics. He is the author of GROUND WAR: Courts, Commissions, and the Fight over Partisan Gerrymanders (Oxford, 2022). He served as an expert witness in the Wisconsin redistricting case Whitford v. Gill. He holds a Ph.D. in Politics from Princeton and a J.D. from Georgetown Law. In our polling, Nick helps with survey design and gives academic feedback.

Your compass for state legislatures

PEACE OUT. THAT'S ALL.

