



STATE NAVIGATE POLL BRIEFING

WEST VIRGINIA SENATE DIST. 8
REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

Kevan Bartlett (appointed) vs. Steven Eshenaur vs. Lance Wheeler

Three-way race: AFP backs Wheeler, Morrissey backs Bartlett, Takubo backs Eshenaur

AT A GLANCE



PRIMARY DATE

May 12, 2026



EARLY VOTING BEGINS

Apr 29, 2026



FIELD DATES

Apr 27–29, 2026



MARGIN OF ERROR

± 4.9%

n = 395 likely Republican primary voters · Charleston area · Weighted by age, race, gender, education, county

METHODOLOGY

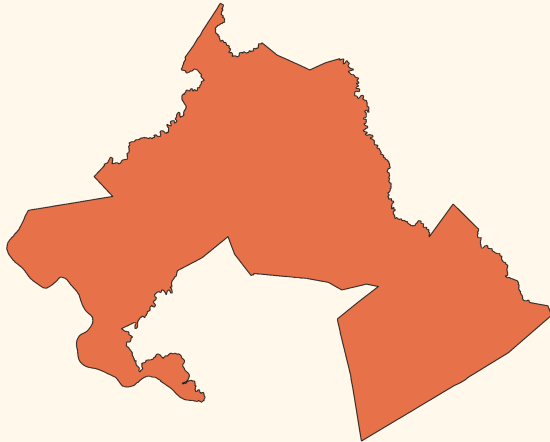
State Navigate surveyed 395 likely Republican primary voters in West Virginia's Senate District 8 from April 27 through April 29, 2026, using AllianceForge's text-to-web methodology via SurveyMonkey. The sample was drawn from the i360 voter file and weighted by age, race, gender, education, and county to reflect the likely 2026 R primary electorate. The survey carries a margin of error of ±4.9% at a 95% confidence level. This survey was not sponsored by any party, candidate, or candidate's committee.

DISTRICT DNA • SD-8



CHARLESTON AREA

Counties: Kanawha, Putnam, Roane, Jackson, Clay



WHERE A FEW VOTES MATTER

~8%

OF VOTERS WILL DETERMINE WHO THE NEXT STATE SENATOR WILL BE

~65,900

registered voters in SD-8

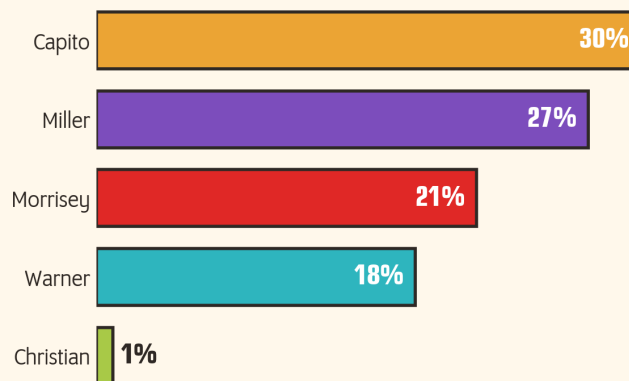
~5,200

voters cast in the 2022 GOP primary in SD-8

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

2024 PRIMARY RESULT IN SD-8

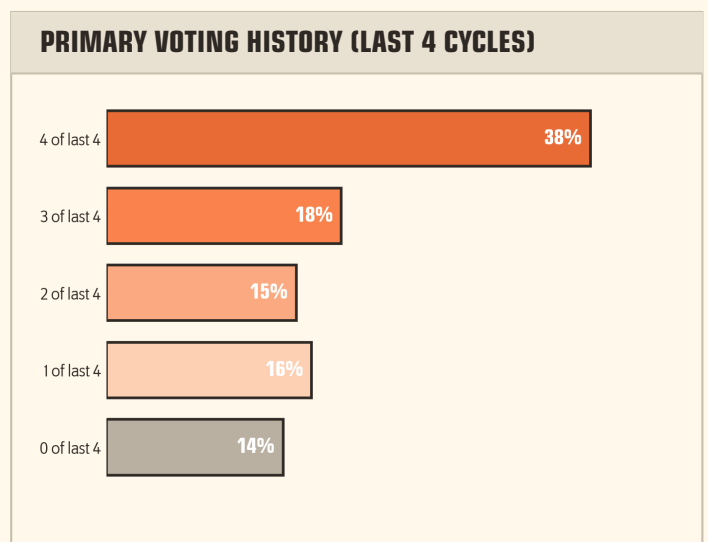
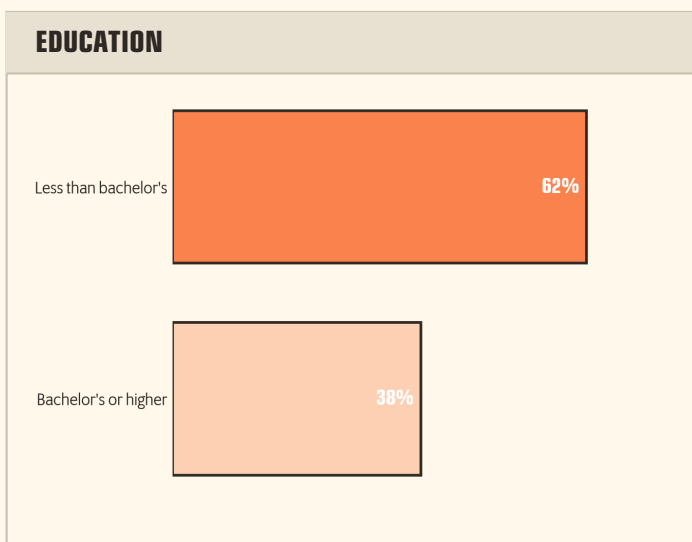
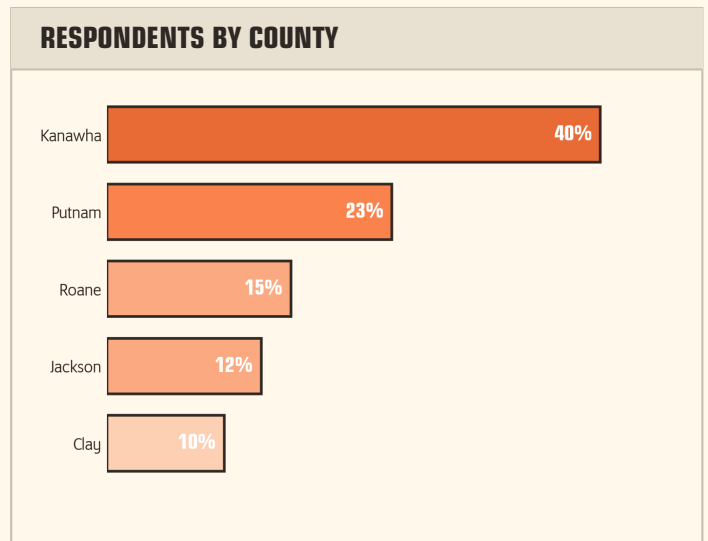
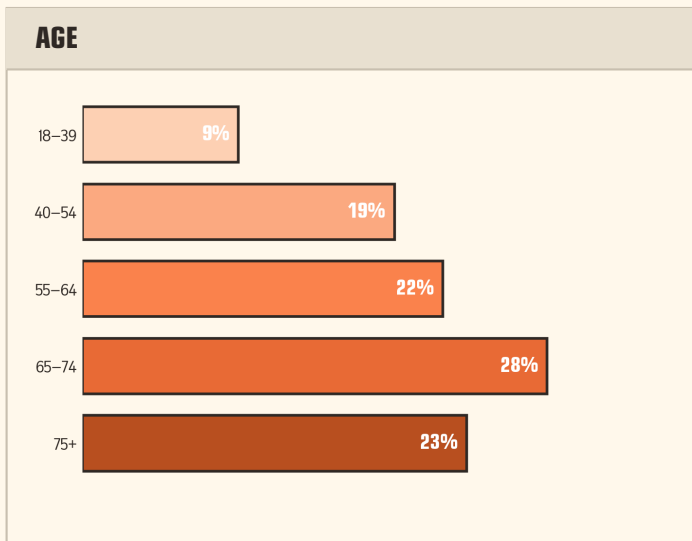
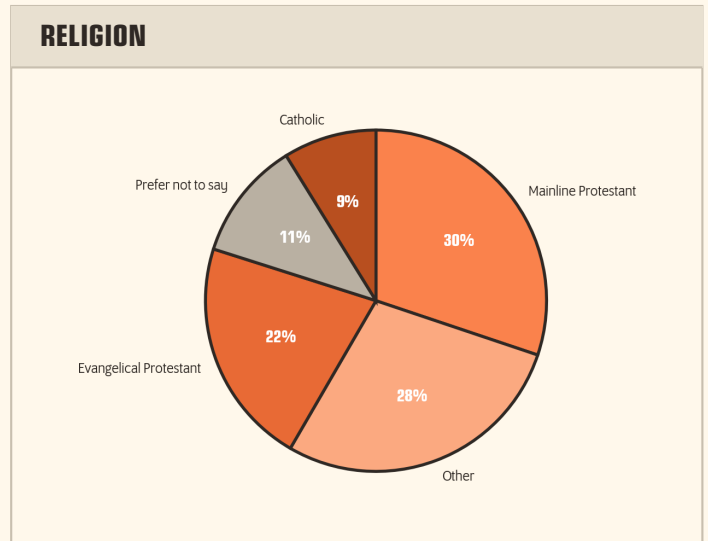
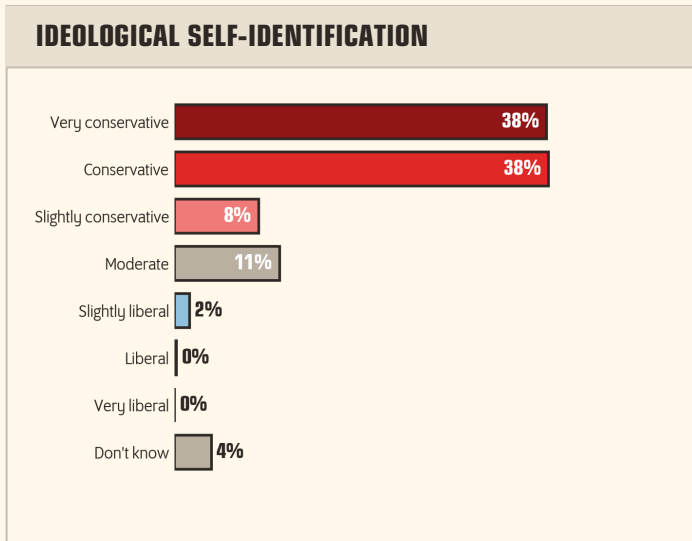
2024 GOP Gov. Primary in SD-8 (Capito +9 over Morrisey)



A NOTE ON 2024

Moore Capito narrowly carried SD-8 over Chris Miller in the 2024 GOP gubernatorial primary, with Morrisey a distant third (30-27-21). Home to Charleston, this district is the part of WV where the Smith/Morrisey coalition is weakest. That ideological balance helps explain the three-way nature of the SD-8 primary: there is no single faction strong enough to consolidate the field, and Charleston-suburban Republicans are open to a range of profiles.

DISTRICT DNA • SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS (LV)



White/Caucasian = 99%. n = 395 likely R primary voters, weighted.



THE CANDIDATES

KEVAN BARTLETT

Appointed Senator • Sissonville

BACKGROUND

Appointed incumbent state Senator from Sissonville (rural Kanawha County). Endorsed by Governor Patrick Morrisey.

BACKERS

Gov. Patrick Morrisey; Mountaineer Conservative Action.

KEY STRENGTH

Hails from a rural area; heavy spending from outside groups backing him.

STEVEN ESHENAU

ER Physician • Dunbar

BACKGROUND

ER Physician from Dunbar (Charleston suburb in Kanawha County). Aligned with the Tom Takubo faction of the Senate.

BACKERS

Sen. Tom Takubo; WV Chamber of Commerce.

KEY STRENGTH

Suburban Charleston base; running a formidable campaign in a year when AFP and the Governor have split.

LANCE WHEELER

County Commissioner • Charleston

BACKGROUND

Kanawha County Commissioner from Charleston city. Backed by Americans for Prosperity.

BACKERS

Americans for Prosperity (AFP).

KEY STRENGTH

AFP's organizing infrastructure and the only candidate from urban Charleston city; biggest hometown bloc inside Kanawha.

THE SNAPSHOT

THE HORSERACE • WITH LEANERS

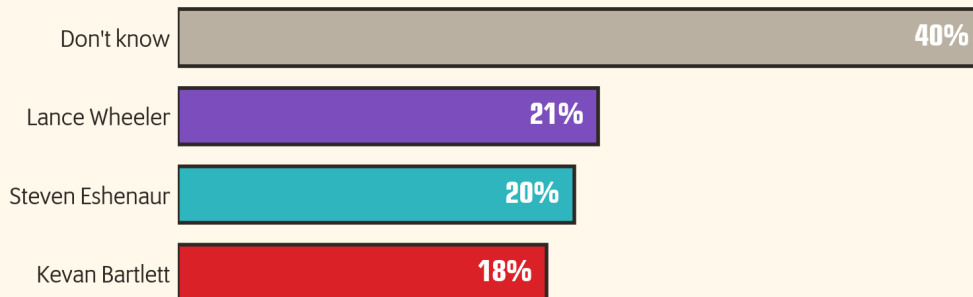
SD-8 Republican Primary Horserace (with leaners)



SD-8 is a three-way virtual tie: Wheeler 25%, Eshenaur 22%, Bartlett 22%, with 31% undecided. All three candidates hail from Kanawha County, but from different parts of it — Bartlett rural, Eshenaur suburban, Wheeler urban. The split between AFP (backing Wheeler) and the Governor (backing Bartlett) is a major reason why Eshenaur is competitive.

NO LEANER PUSH

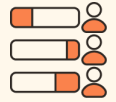
No leaner push



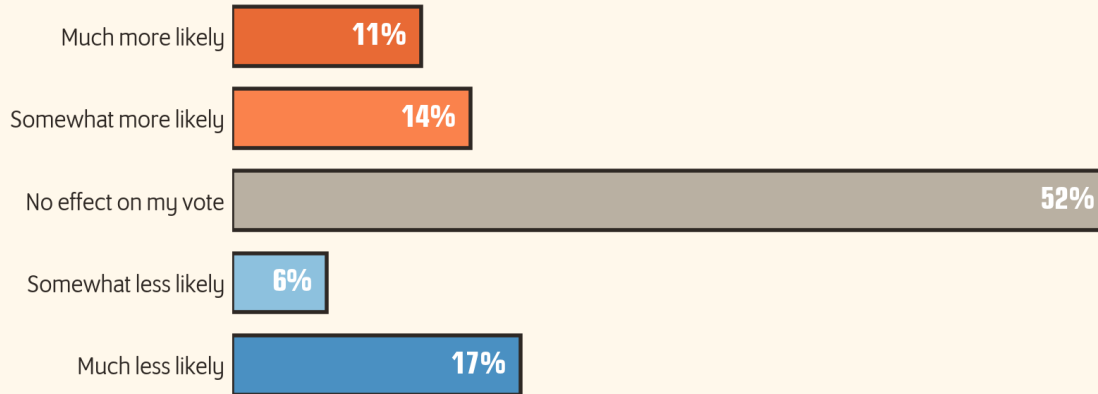
Without a leaner push, undecided leads at 40%, with the three candidates clustered between 18% and 21%. Among the undecided pool, 78% still don't lean — meaning fewer than 1-in-4 voters in this race have meaningfully picked a side.

REPUBLICAN TYPOLOGIES & IDEOLOGY

EFFECT OF A MORRISEY ENDORSEMENT

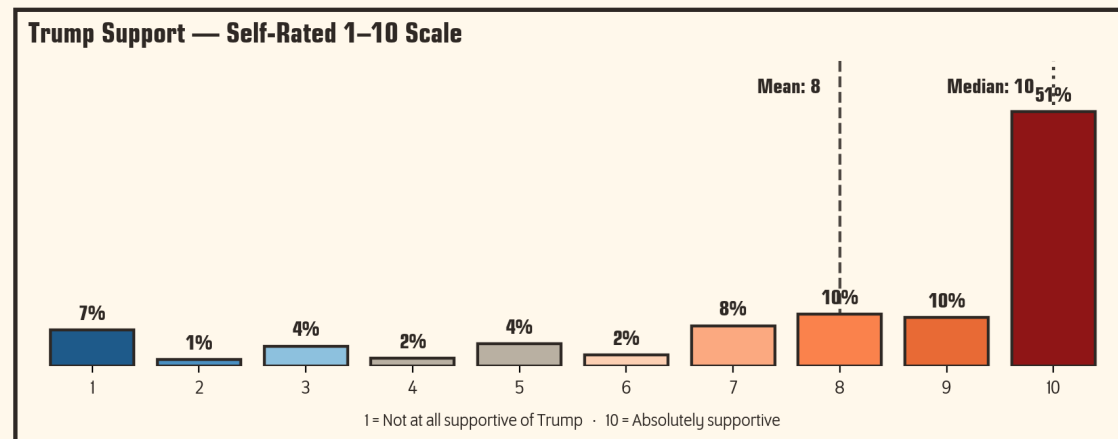


Effect of a Morrisey Endorsement on Vote



In Birmingham they love the Governor, but in Charleston they hate him. Morrisey placed third in the 2024 Governor primary election within SD-8 and ran behind most other statewide Republicans in the general by double-digits. Out of all of our surveys so far, this is where his endorsement performs the worst: only 25% say they'd be more likely to vote for a Morrisey-backed candidate vs. 23% who say they'd be less likely (a net +2 points). Undecideds largely look like the electorate on this question. With AFP and the Governor failing to consolidate, Eshenaur stands to benefit from running as the anti-Morrisey candidate if he capitalizes on that messaging in the final stretch: 12% of Bartlett voters and 15% of Wheeler voters say they'd be less likely to support a Morrisey-backed candidate, a number that jumps to 40% among Eshenaur voters.

TRUMP SUPPORT



Trump support in SD-8 is overwhelming and lopsided. 51% say they support the president absolutely, and 71% rate their level of support at 8 out of 10 or above. The mean is 7, and the median is 10. Any campaign that drifts too far from MAGA will likely struggle with voters in this district. This could ultimately be a challenge for Eshenaur: while overall he's holding his own against a divided conservative electorate, among voters who rate their support for the President at 10 out of 10, he's trailing — 12% of these voters say they'll vote for Eshenaur, 26% for Wheeler, and 27% for Bartlett.



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 & MICHAEL FOLEY · ON KEY COUNTIES

Each candidate is fighting for Kanawha (40%), but the other counties matter.

Kanawha County is 40% of the SD-8 primary electorate, and all three candidates hail from different parts of it. In Kanawha, it's Wheeler 31%, Bartlett 23%, and Eshenaur 19%. That's good for Bartlett despite the Morrissey endorsement and being from the smallest in-district Kanawha community. In Charleston, it's Wheeler 32%, Bartlett 24%, and Eshenaur 22%. What's good for Eshenaur is that he leads in the remaining 60% of the district in the counties outside of Kanawha: the race in the non-Kanawha portion is 25% Eshenaur, 21% Bartlett, 20% Wheeler. That's a lead buoyed by his ties in 2/4 non-Kanawha counties: Jackson (13% of the districtwide electorate) and Roane (15%). Eshenaur serves as an ER physician at Jackson and Roane's hospitals and attends church in Jackson. In Jackson, it's 41% Eshenaur, 32% Bartlett, 5% Wheeler. Bartlett is geographically close to Jackson, so it makes sense that he has more support here than districtwide. In Roane, it's 36% Eshenaur, 17% Bartlett, and 14% Wheeler.

CHAZ NUTTYCOMBE · ON IDEOLOGY

“Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.” — Sun Tzu

3-in-4 voters here are either very conservative or conservative, just like in SDs 2 and 3. If this were a Wheeler vs. Eshenaur race, Wheeler would likely have a strong lead; he hasn't been endorsed by the Governor and is positioning himself as a strongly conservative candidate, but his issue is Bartlett's existence. Among Conservative + Very Conservative voters, it's Wheeler 25%, Bartlett 24%, and Eshenaur 18%. Among the Slightly Conservative to Slightly Liberal bucket (1/5th of the electorate), it's Eshenaur 39%, Wheeler 23%, Bartlett 14%. The arch-conservative faction may have made a grave mistake in splitting itself, giving Eshenaur a strong path to victory if he can consolidate the anti-Morrissey voters. Still, this is a toss-up between all three candidates, so they may end up coming out on top regardless.



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.

