

NORTH CAROLINA POLL: LARA TRUMP, THOM TILLIS, OR ROY COOPER FOR US SENATE IN 2026?

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Poll conducted November 26th, 27th, and 29th, 2024 among 800 likely voters throughout North Carolina. Responses were collected via Interactive Voice Response and Text-To-Web. This poll was not commissioned by any candidate or committee.





Executive Summary

It's only 2024, but the 2026 rumor mill is already hard at work. Fresh off the heels of Donald Trump winning the state by more than 3%, some North Carolina Republicans are chomping at the bit to replace incumbent Republican US Senator Thom Tillis with someone who they believe will be more loyal to President Trump. Mark Robinson's name has been discussed quite a bit, but although he could certainly mount a formidable *Republican primary election* challenge to Tillis, he has continually denied any speculation that he's interested in running.

Okay, so if not Mark Robinson, then whom? The conservative grassroots are unlikely to simply back down and accept Tillis as their party's nominee. There will almost certainly be a serious primary election challenge to Tillis (assuming he even runs for re-election). A contentious Republican primary could prove disastrous for Republicans, as defeating the Democratic nominee – which could very possibly be Roy Cooper – will already be an uphill battle. If Republicans hope to win, they need a candidate who can fundraise on par with the Democrats, make it through the primary election unscathed, and win over nonpartisan and middle-of-the-road voters.

Our new poll finds that Lara Trump – President Trump's daughter-in-law, campaign advisor, and co-chair of the RNC – could be just the right person for the job.

Lara Trump would likely crush Tillis in the Republican primary, currently holding 65% support compared to Tillis's 11%. Though she performs similarly to Tillis in a hypothetical 2026 general election matchup against Roy Cooper, she is viewed more favorably than Tillis among independent voters and wins independent voters by a slightly larger margin than Tillis. Still, both Tillis and Lara Trump trail Cooper by around 1 point.

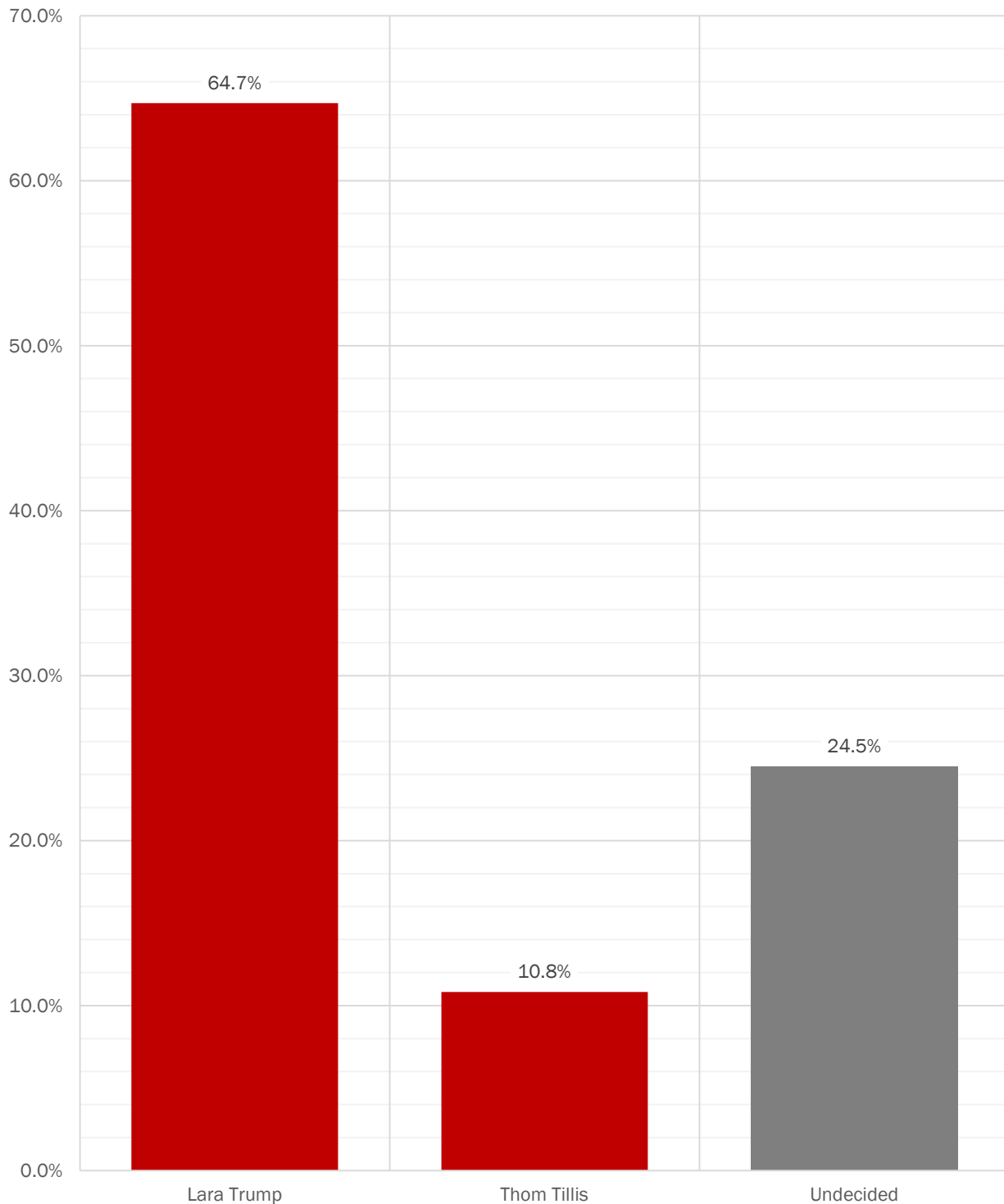
There are some factors that polling alone can't take into account. First, though they might be polling similarly in the general election right now, Tillis would first need to survive a bloody primary election, which would likely hurt him in the general election. And second, Lara Trump could turn out low-propensity Trump-supporting voters who don't typically vote in midterm elections, which could make a massive difference in a race likely to be decided by a narrow margin.

To our knowledge, Lara Trump has not publicly expressed any interest in running for this seat, but if she does, she could be a very formidable candidate, both in the primary election and the general election. **Read on to learn more.**

- ✓ **Ben Galbraith**
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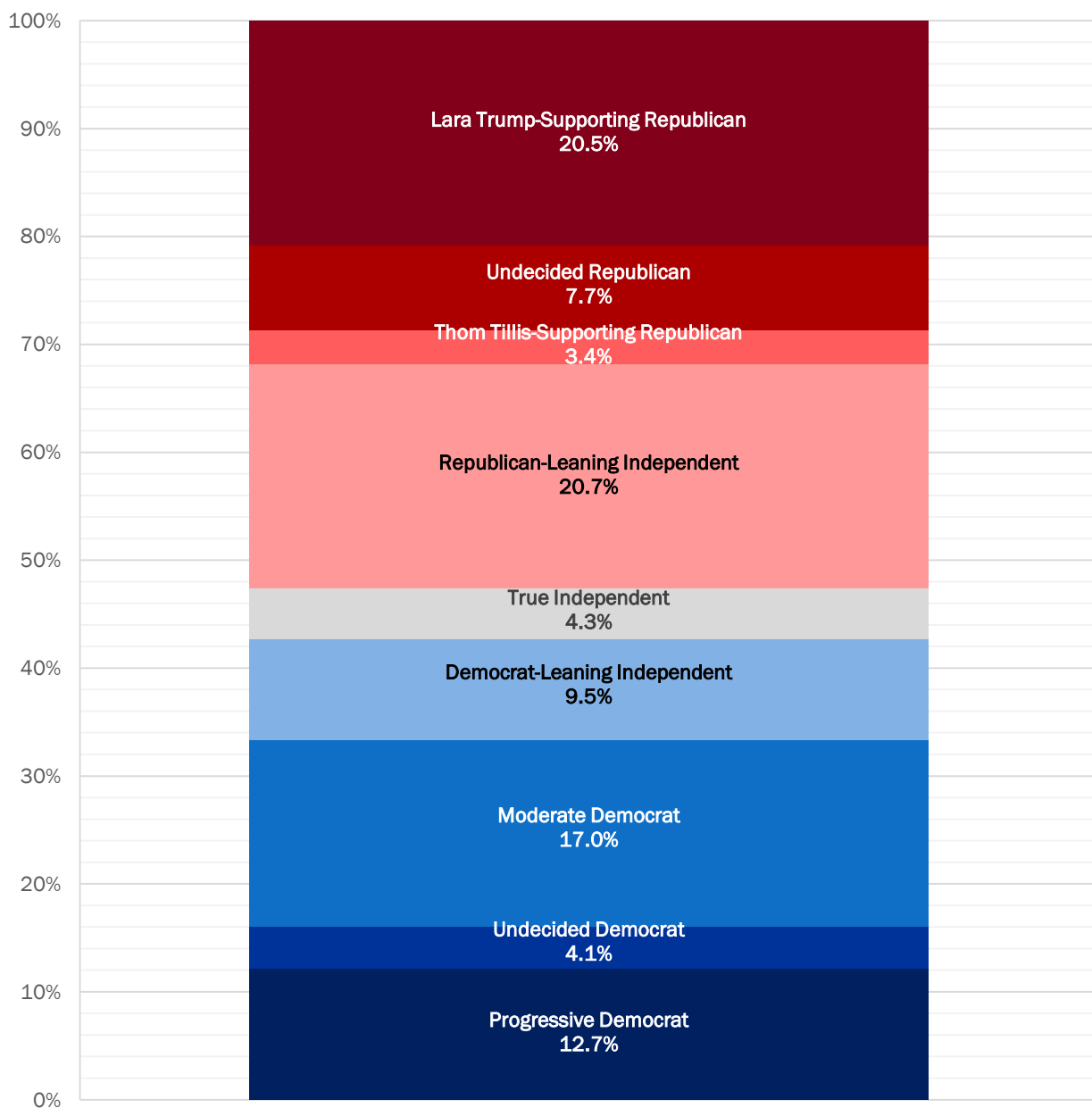
Republican Primary

We asked Republican voters who they would support in a hypothetical 2026 Republican primary matchup between Lara Trump and Thom Tillis. In this scenario, voters would overwhelmingly back Lara Trump. With 65% of the vote, Lara Trump is the obvious favorite, as Tillis earns only 11% support. An additional 24% of voters are undecided.



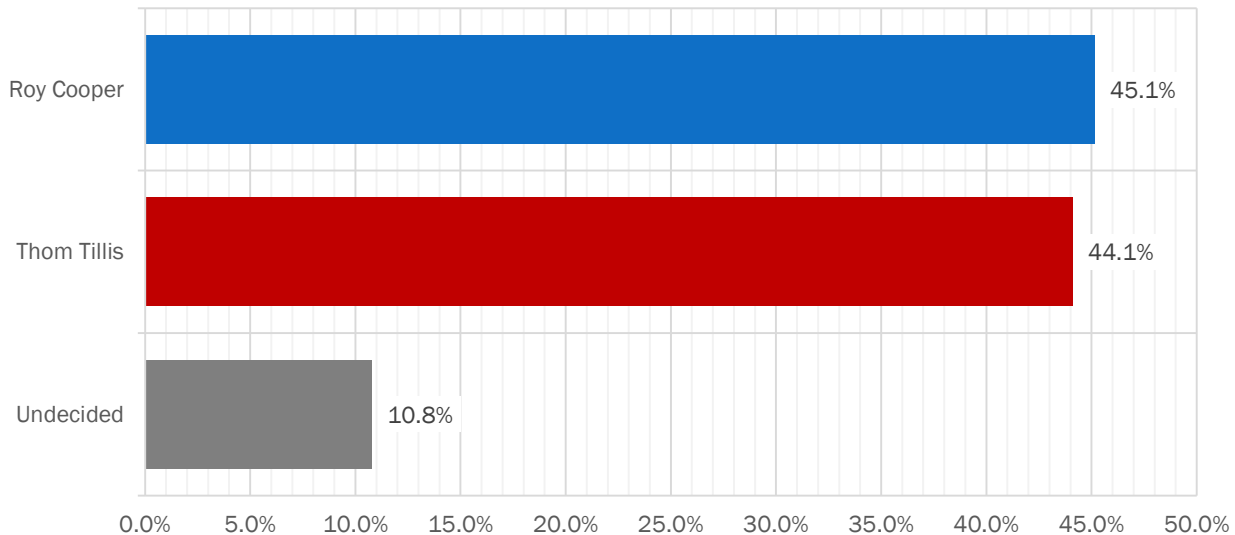
General Electorate Breakdown

We broke down the North Carolina general election electorate into nine groups. The chart below displays this breakdown. Republicans were split into three groups based on how they voted in the primary ballot question. Independents were asked whether they voted for more Republicans or more Democrats in the last election, and were split into their three groups based on their responses to this question (those who said they didn't vote for more Republicans nor more Democrats are labeled as True Independents). Finally, Democrats were asked whether they considered themselves to be more moderate or more progressive, and were split based on their responses to that question. Altogether, 52.4% of the electorate leans right, while 43.3% leans left.



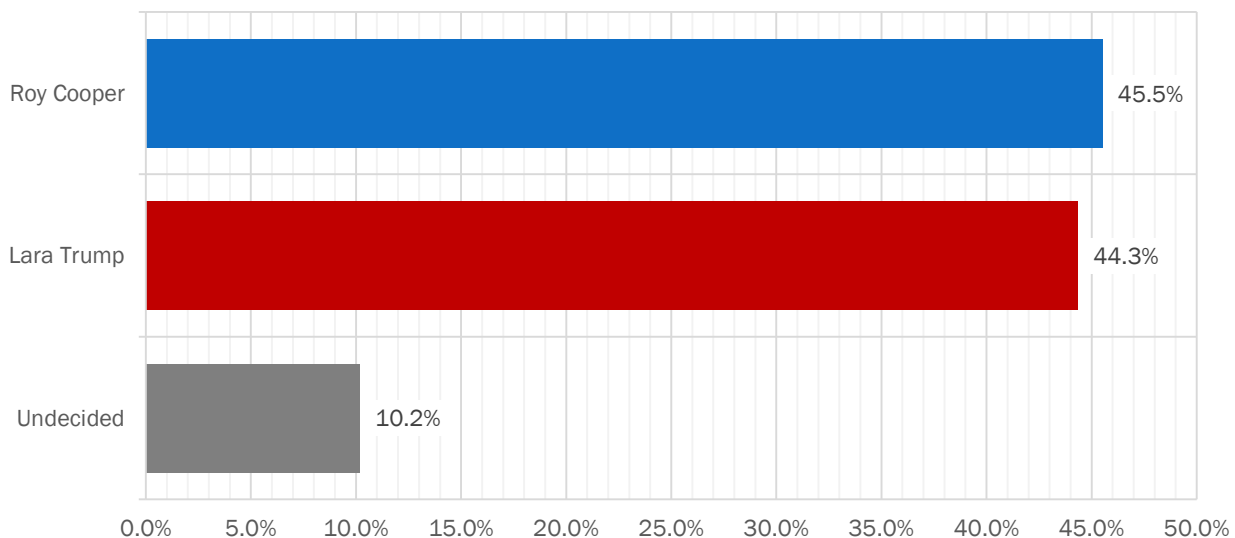
General Election: Roy Cooper vs. Thom Tillis

Many insiders consider Roy Cooper to be a very strong option for North Carolina Democrats in the 2026 US Senate race due to his relatively popular term as Governor and his proven cross-partisan appeal. Our poll finds that he would, in fact, be a strong candidate. Against Tillis, the incumbent, Cooper has a 1.1% lead. 11% of voters remain undecided.



General Election: Roy Cooper vs. Lara Trump

But what if the Republican nominee was Lara Trump instead of Thom Tillis? Our poll finds that that wouldn't make a very big difference. A few more voters would have their minds made up, so the share of undecided voters would tick down to 10%. Despite this, Cooper's lead would be 1.2%, almost exactly the same as his lead over Tillis.



General Election Ballots by Party Affiliation

The difference in Thom Tillis's and Lara Trump's prospective performance against Cooper is a bit more complex than just "a few more voters made up their minds." In this section, we dive deeper into the data to see what's really making the difference. The two tables below show breakdowns of the general election ballot by voters' party affiliations. The green/red colors of each cell refer to whether that cell's value is more favorable to Republicans when Tillis is the nominee or when Trump is the nominee. For instance, since Cooper gets 86.0% of the Democrat vote when Trump is the nominee, but only 84.6% when Tillis is the nominee, that cell is highlighted in **red** in Trump's table and in **green** in Tillis's table.

COOPER VS. TILLIS	Democrats	Republicans	NPA/Others
R. Cooper (D)	84.6%	8.9%	39.7%
T. Tillis (R)	12.1%	82.1%	40.6%
Undecided	3.3%	9.0%	19.7%

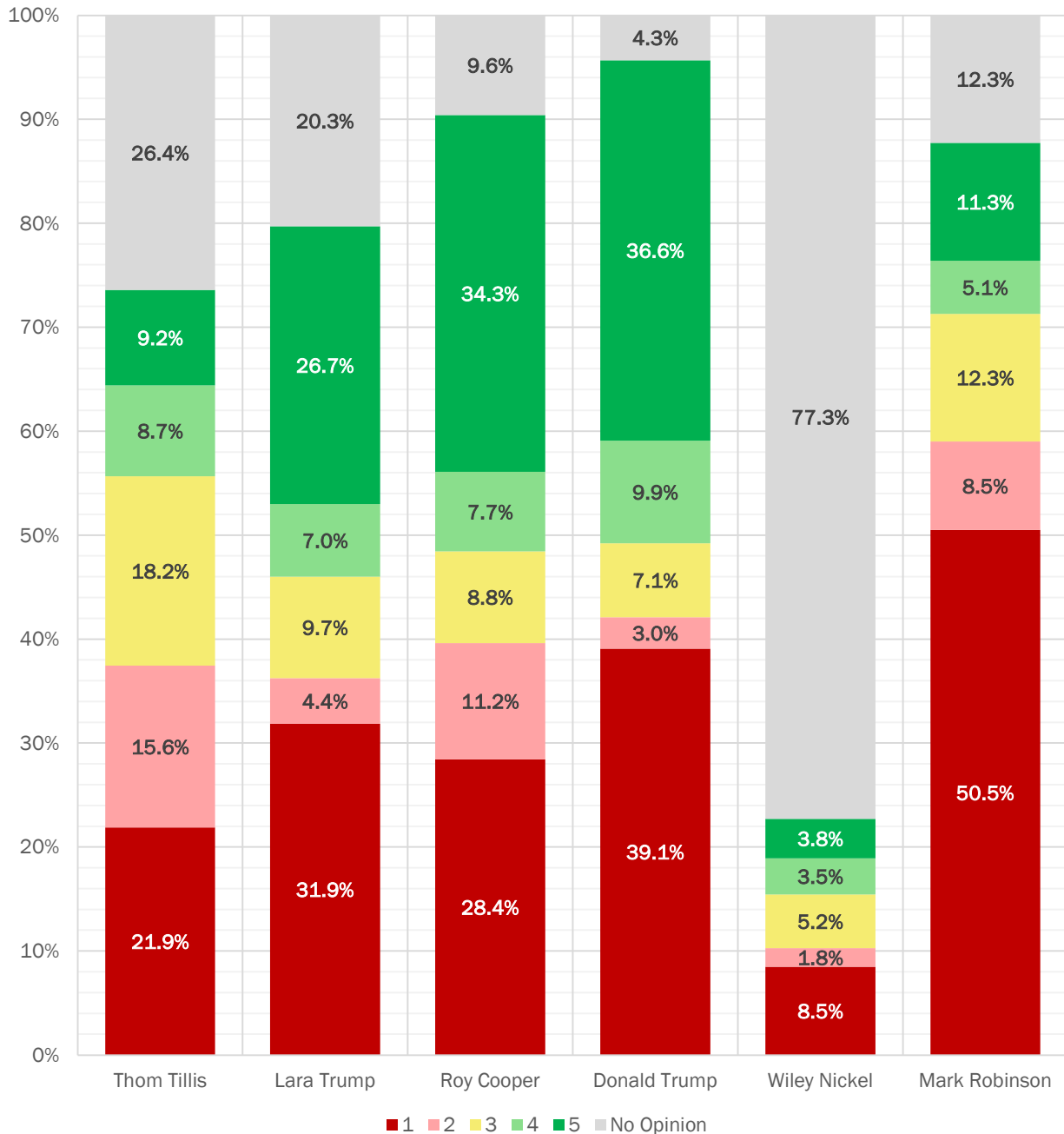
COOPER VS. TRUMP	Democrats	Republicans	NPA/Others
R. Cooper (D)	86.0%	9.6%	38.7%
L. Trump (R)	10.9%	83.6%	41.1%
Undecided	3.1%	6.8%	20.1%

We can draw several important conclusions from this data. First, if Trump is the Republican nominee, it would result in greater party loyalty *for both* parties, as a higher percentage of Democrats would support the Democratic nominee and a higher percentage of Republicans would support the Republican nominee. This likely means Trump is a more polarizing candidate *among partisan voters*. Second, Tillis does a better job of winning over Democrats, earning 12.1% of the Democrat vote compared to 10.9% for Trump. That being said, Trump outperforms Tillis among independents, leading that group by 2.4%, compared to Tillis's lead of only 0.9%. A reasonable question one might ask is: "If Republicans outnumber Democrats, and nonpartisans break for the Republican candidate, why is the Democratic candidate leading?" The answer to that question goes back to party loyalty: Democrats are more loyal to their party's nominee than Republicans are, regardless of whether their nominee is Tillis or Trump.

This section's data can be summarized as follows: If the Republican Party wants to court Democrats, then Thom Tillis is the better pick. But if the Republican Party wants to court independents, then Lara Trump is the better pick.

Public Figure Favorability

We asked voters to rate relevant public figures on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being extremely negative and 5 being extremely positive. Voters could also indicate that they have no opinion of each public figure. The results of these questions are shown below, and will be discussed in further detail on the following page. In addition to asking about Cooper, Tillis, and Lara Trump, we also asked about Donald Trump, as well as two other names that have been in the 2026 US Senate conversation: Wiley Nickel and Mark Robinson.





Favorability Metrics

The table below shows how every public figure performed across several key metrics. In each row, the candidate with the best value for that metric is highlighted in dark green, and the candidate with the second-best value is highlighted in light green. The same is true for the worst values, but the color red is used.

	Tillis	L. Trump	Cooper	D. Trump	Nickel	Robinson
Positive Name ID	17.9%	33.7%	42.0%	46.5%	7.3%	16.5%
Negative Name ID	37.4%	36.2%	39.6%	42.1%	10.3%	59.0%
Total Name ID	73.6%	79.7%	90.4%	95.7%	22.7%	87.7%
Avg. Opinionated Rating	2.56	2.90	3.09	3.02	2.66	2.07
AOR (Democrats)	2.15	1.52	4.36	1.52	2.95	1.28
AOR (Republicans)	3.11	4.21	1.93	4.53	2.39	3.05
AOR (Independents)	2.52	2.88	2.82	3.04	2.31	1.98

Donald Trump and Roy Cooper are the most popular two public figures studied. President Trump has the highest Positive Name ID and Total Name ID of all public figures, as well as the second-highest overall Average Opinionated Rating (AOR), which approximates likeability. Among both Republicans and Independents, President Trump has the highest AOR, while Cooper has the highest overall AOR and the highest AOR among Democratic voters.

Mark Robinson doesn't place in the top two for any metric, but he comes in very last place in terms of Negative Name ID, overall AOR, and AOR among Democrats and Independents. Wiley Nickel isn't very impressive either, as less than a quarter of voters have an opinion of him, and those that do know him don't have particularly positive opinions of him.

Finally, let's compare Thom Tillis and Lara Trump. Lara Trump has nearly twice the Positive Name ID as Tillis, yet slightly lower Negative Name ID. She also posts the second-highest AOR values among Republican and Independent voters, trailing only her father-in-law. The only metric in which Tillis outperforms Lara Trump is AOR among Democrats.



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