

BYRON DONALDS DOMINATES REPUBLICAN PRIMARY FIELD FOR GOVERNOR OF FLORIDA

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Poll conducted January 26-27, 2025 among 850 likely Republican primary voters throughout Florida. Maximum margin of error of $\pm 3.5\%$. Responses were collected via Interactive Voice Response and Text-To-Web. This poll was not commissioned by any candidate or committee.





Executive Summary

Ron DeSantis's tenure as Governor of Florida has been a political rollercoaster. Catapulted into the limelight in 2020 thanks to his laissez-faire approach to COVID-19 precautions, DeSantis captured the attention of not just his state, but also the nation. For a time, DeSantis (and the donor class as a whole) even believed that he could defeat formerly-former President Donald Trump. Clearly that didn't happen, but along the way, Florida – once the most prized swing state of them all – rapidly transformed into a solid red state, leaving Florida's Democratic Party as not much more than a relic of the past.

Due to term limits, DeSantis must vacate the Governor's Mansion after the 2026 election and turn over the keys to whomever Floridians elect as their next leader. Given the way that Florida has been barreling to the right in recent election cycles, most analysts expect that the next Governor of Florida will be a Republican. We concur.

The question now is: **Who?**

As the race currently stands, the most likely answer to that question is Byron Donalds. Donalds, a congressman from Florida's 19th district, led our first poll of the race nearly a year ago, outperforming names like Matt Gaetz, Mike Waltz, and Jimmy Patronis. With Waltz in the White House, Patronis on his way to Congress, and Gaetz hosting a television show, Donalds's path to victory seems to have cleared, or at least simplified. Yes, Gaetz could attempt a comeback after his Attorney General nomination fell short and an ethics report made some less-than-stellar conclusions about his past behavior. But with Negative Name ID far higher than any other Florida Republican and a cushy job on the airwaves, it's becoming increasingly hard to believe that Gaetz will make a run for Governor.

That leaves a number of potential contenders in the mix. Chief among them is Commissioner of Agriculture Wilton Simpson, who has a well-stocked war chest, a statewide elected position, and an extensive rolodex of Republican donors and insiders. Other rumored contenders include Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez and Miami Mayor Francis Suarez. But in a hypothetical Republican primary election with Donalds, Simpson, Nuñez, and Suarez, Donalds is the clear leader, garnering 31% support compared to 4% for Nuñez, 3% for Simpson, and just 1% for Suarez.

In a head-to-head matchup between Donalds and Simpson, the story stays the same. Donalds (34%) dwarfs Simpson (5%). Donalds's strength comes primarily from self-identified MAGA Republicans and Constitutional Conservatives, two groups which together make up just over two thirds of Florida's Republican primary electorate.

But might Simpson be saved by an endorsement from the incumbent Governor or President? That also seems unlikely. Simpson is currently engaged in a high-profile spat with DeSantis over an immigration bill, and though Simpson tends to align himself with Trump, it's unlikely that Trump would forfeit his long-standing alliance with an unwavering loyalist like Donalds by endorsing Simpson.

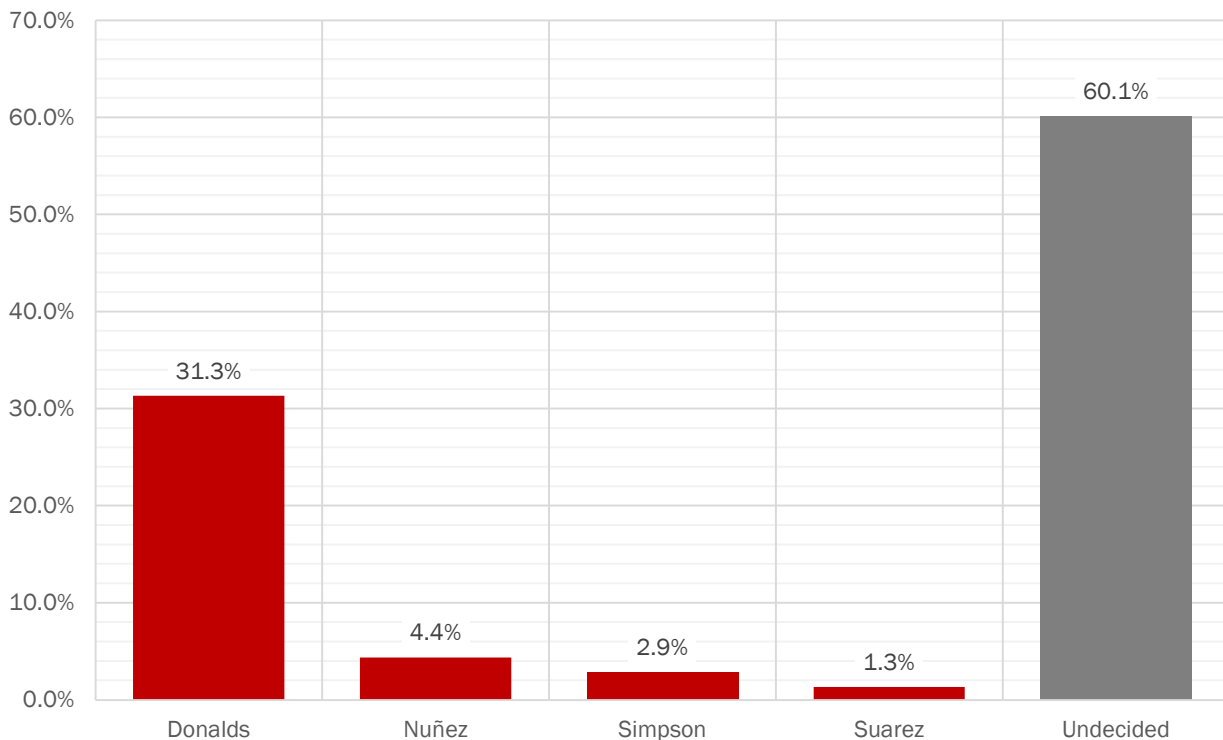
Though Donalds is the clear frontrunner today, much crazier things have happened than an early frontrunner squandering his head start. As the race continues to develop, we'll continue to provide the public with high-quality polling data as we inform our clients across the nation on both big-picture trends and hyper-focused insights.

Read on to learn more.

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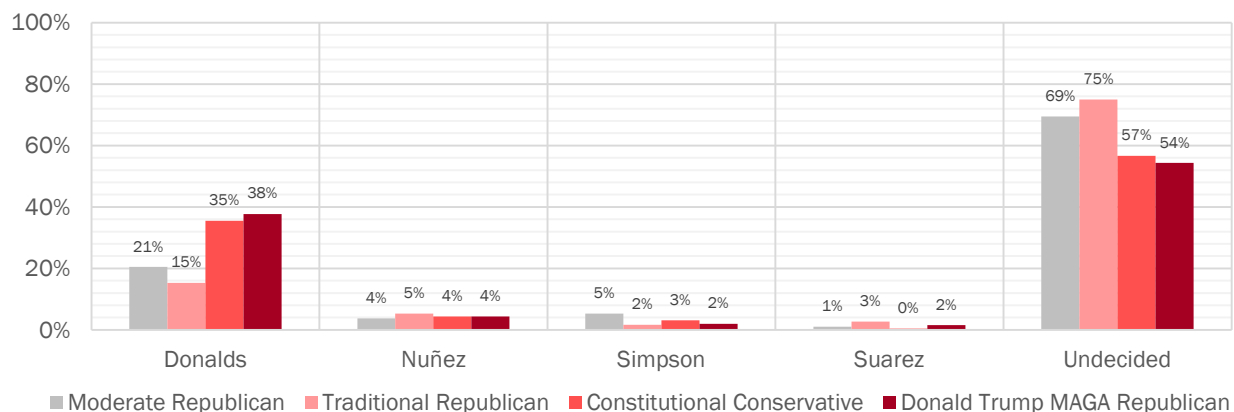
4-Way Republican Primary Ballot

In a hypothetical 4-way Republican primary election, Donalds is the only candidate who garners any significant support. At 31%, he towers over the other three contenders, each of whom fall in the low single digits. Still, 60% of voters remain undecided, meaning that although Donalds has a clear head start on the rest of the field, most voters don't have a preference just yet.



4-Way Ballot by Type of Republican

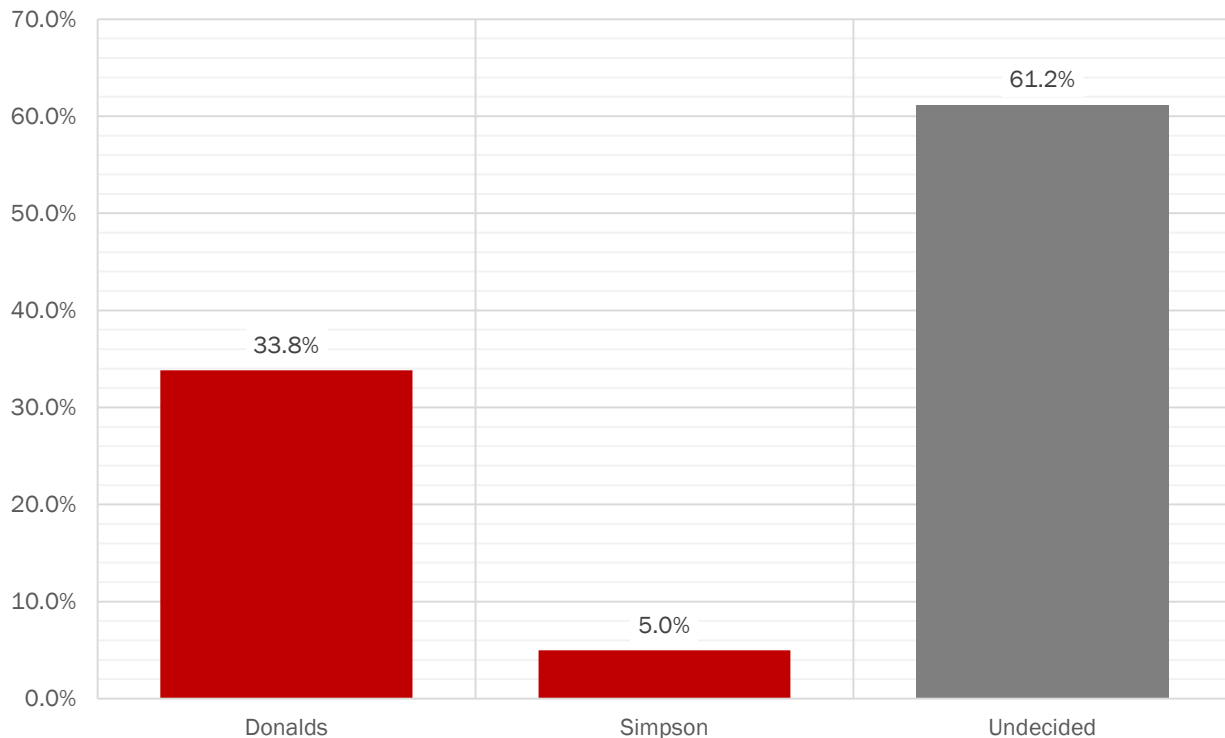
The chart below breaks down the 4-way ballot by voters' self-identified type of Republican. Though Donalds holds a commanding lead among all 4 types, his strong overall performance is thanks to fierce support among Constitutional Conservatives and MAGA Republicans.





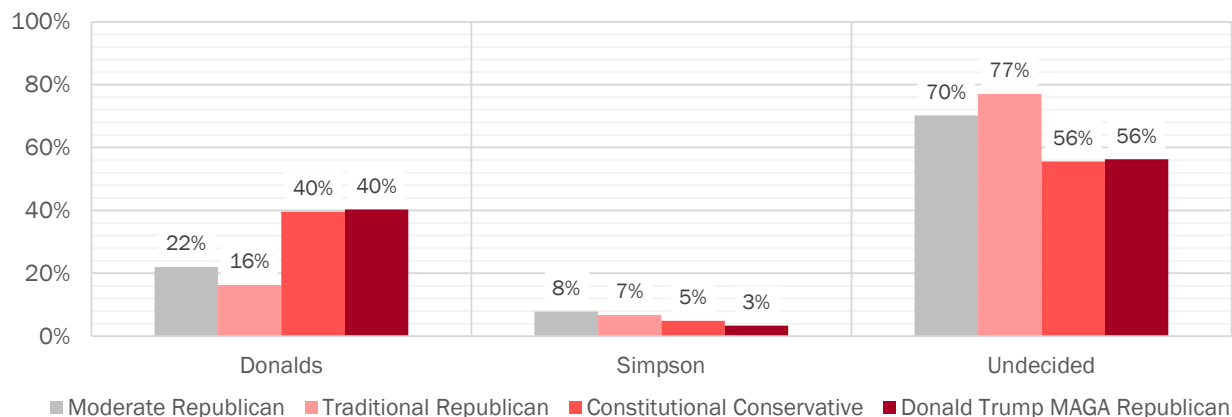
Head-to-Head Republican Primary Ballot

If the field were narrowed to just Donalds and Simpson, not much would change. Donalds' support would bump to just below 34%, while Simpson would capture 5% of the vote. Again, just over 60% of the electorate remains undecided about whom they would support in such a matchup.



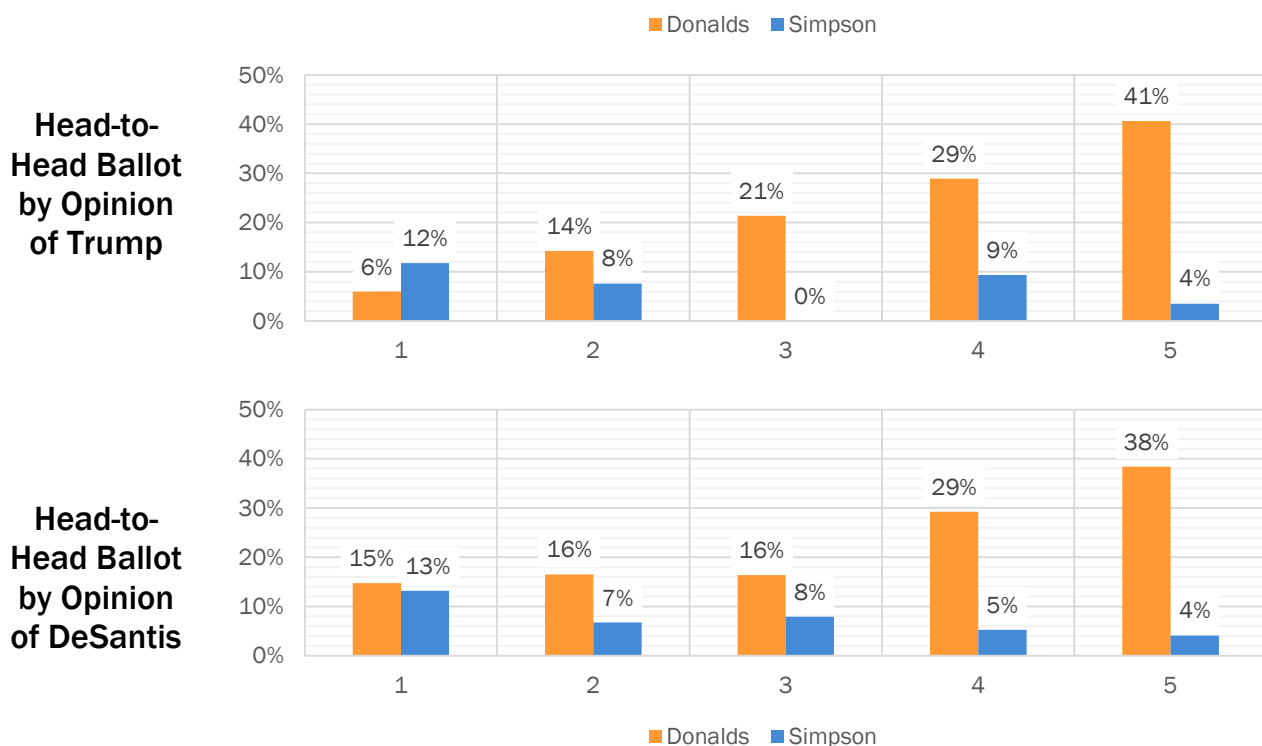
Head-to-Head Ballot by Type of Republican

The ballot-by-type chart below shows how Republicans of different self-identified types voted in the head-to-head ballot, and this time, it's even easier to spot the trends. Generally, the more MAGA the voter, the more likely they are to support Donalds, while the more moderate the voter, the more likely they are to support Simpson.



Head-to-Head Ballot by Opinion of Trump/DeSantis

The candidates themselves are not the only factors in this race – Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis, both wildly popular in the Sunshine State, could become major factors in the race if they choose to get involved. As the chart below shows, Trump’s strongest supporters (those who rated him 5 out of 5) are currently overwhelmingly in support of Donalds (41%) over Simpson (4%). Meanwhile, those who hate Trump (and thus rated him 1 out of 5) prefer Simpson (12%) over Donalds (6%). This is the only group in which Simpson leads Donalds. Meanwhile, Donalds narrowly leads Simpson among those who despise DeSantis, and his lead generally expands as support for DeSantis rises.



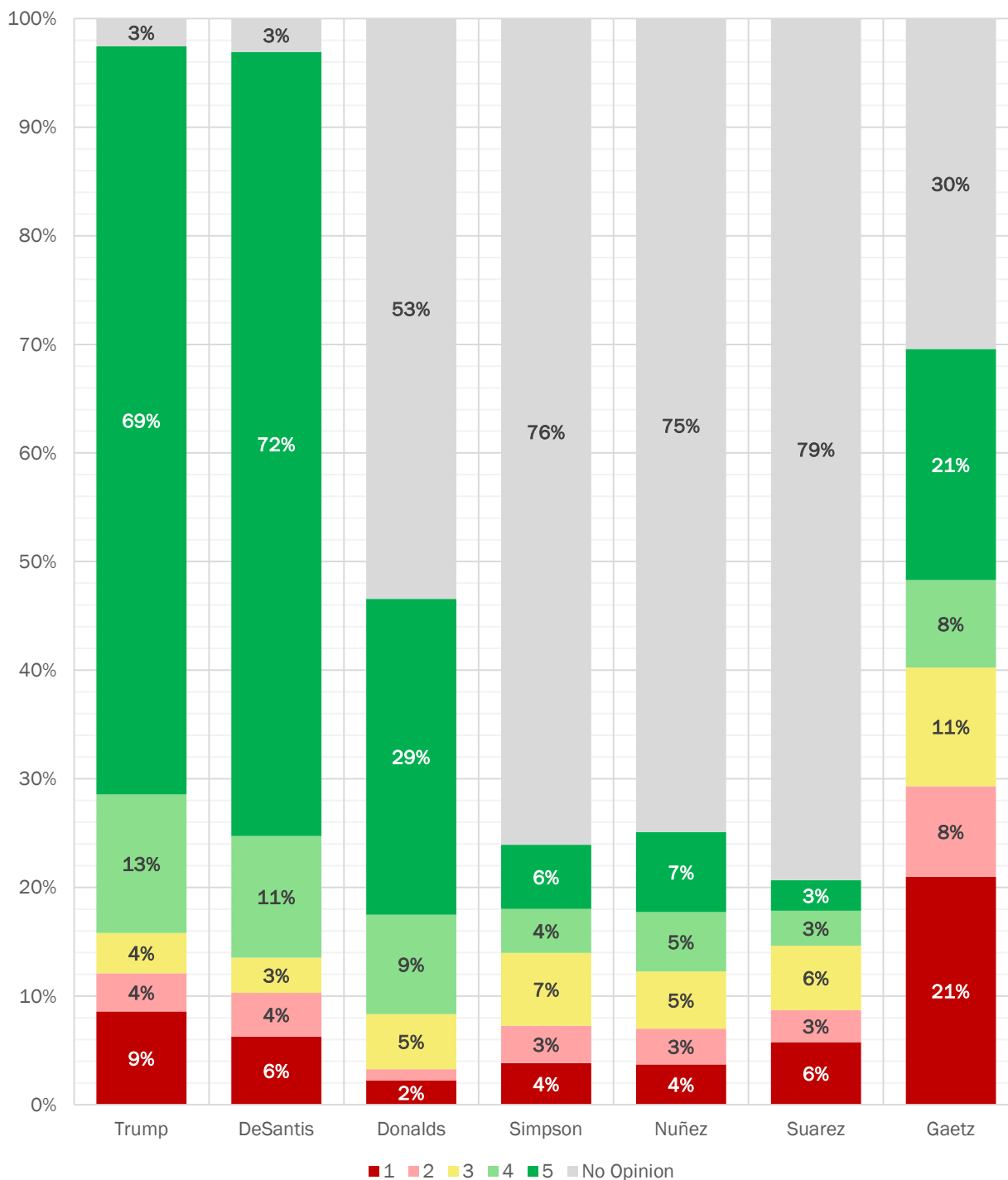
Other Relevant Head-to-Head Ballot Takeaways

Though these final few takeaways from the head-to-head ballot question may not merit their own charts, we felt it would still be helpful to include the following insights:

- Donalds’s strongest showing is within his home media market of Fort Myers-Naples, where he commands nearly 65% of the vote.
- Hispanic voters favor Donalds over Simpson by a slightly narrower margin than the overall electorate, while Black voters (a tiny fraction of the Republican primary electorate) heavily favor Donalds.
- Simpson wins over more Nuñez voters (18% to 13%) and Suarez voters (21% to 15%) than Donalds when the field is narrowed to just the two frontrunners.

Overall Favorability

Finally, voters were asked to rate Trump, DeSantis, the four surveyed gubernatorial contenders, and former congressman Matt Gaetz 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 chart below shows the overall results of these questions. We'll dive deeper into these results on the following page.



Favorability Metrics

From voters' ratings of each public figure, we calculated four different metrics which together provide a near-comprehensive explanation of the results. These four metrics, as well as their definitions, are shown in the table below. For each metric, the best result is highlighted in dark green, the second-best in light green, the second-worst in light red, and the worst in dark red.

	Trump	DeSantis	Donalds	Simpson	Nuñez	Suarez	Gaetz
Positive Name ID % of respondents who rated the public figure "4" or "5" out of 5	81.6%	83.4%	38.2%	10.0%	12.8%	6.0%	29.3%
Negative Name ID % of respondents who rated the public figure "1" or "2" out of 5	12.1%	10.3%	3.3%	7.3%	7.0%	8.7%	29.3%
Total Name ID % of respondents who rated the public figure anything other than "No Opinion"	97.4%	96.9%	46.6%	23.9%	25.1%	20.7%	69.6%
Avg. Opinionated Rating Average rating (1-5) given to the public figure by those who gave any numerical rating	4.33	4.43	4.33	3.20	3.38	2.73	3.00

As has long been the case in Florida, DeSantis narrowly beats Trump in terms of Positive Name ID. But beware: assuming that that means Florida voters would stick with DeSantis over Trump is a misguided assumption that cost donors tens of millions of dollars in the 2024 presidential primary. Favorability does not equate to fervor, and history shows that Trump has the fervor. As for the potential gubernatorial candidates, Donalds again comes out on top. Gaetz stands about 9 points behind Donalds in this metric, yet about 20 points ahead of the other potential gubernatorial hopefuls.

Gaetz's downfall, however, is his Negative Name ID. At 29.3%, that's 17 points higher than Trump's and 9 times as high as Donalds's. Of the surveyed gubernatorial candidates, Suarez (8.7%) has the highest Negative Name ID, trailed closely by Simpson (7.3%) and Nuñez (7.0%). Donalds seems to have escaped negative press altogether, posting a Negative Name ID value of only 3.3%.

This exceedingly low Negative Name ID allows Donalds to tie Trump in terms of average ratings by opinionated voters, trailing only DeSantis. At 4.33, Donalds stands head and shoulders above his potential competitors, who each score in the low 3s or high 2s. Clearly, Donalds has done things right when it comes to establishing himself as a likeable Floridian conservative. Will he be able to keep it up and become Florida's next Governor? Only time will tell.



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