

FLORIDA POLL: BYRON DONALDS LEADS FIRST POLL OF 2026 GOP RACE FOR GOVERNOR

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Poll conducted April 3-6, 2024 among 1200 registered likely GOP primary voters throughout the state of Florida. Maximum margin of error of 2.9%. Responses were collected via Interactive Voice Response and Text-To-Web. Commissioned by Victory Insights, not by any candidate or committee.





Table of Contents

Cover Page	1
Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary	2
Governor Ballot	3
Favorability	6
Endorsement Effects	9
Contact Information	10

Executive Summary

Ever since the 2020 election, we at Victory Insights have been hard at work tracking the pulse of Florida’s GOP electorate. We provided the most consistent and insightful poll numbers in the presidential primary, showing Governor Ron DeSantis taking the lead in late 2022, former President Trump resurging after the Mar-a-Lago raid, DeSantis bringing the race to a tie immediately following his campaign announcement, and finally Trump trouncing DeSantis and eventually ending his campaign. Now, that race is effectively over, and Florida Republicans have a new question they must answer: **Who will replace DeSantis as Florida’s next Governor?**

That election may not be until August of 2026, but political power-brokers, donors, and potential candidates are already eyeing the seat. In fact, they have been for months, if not years. After many conversations with politicians across the state of Florida, we’ve identified five major public figures who are very likely to file for the seat: Rep. Matt Gaetz (FL-1), Rep. Michael Waltz (FL-6), Rep. Byron Donalds (FL-19), Florida CFO Jimmy Patronis, and Florida Ag Commissioner Wilton Simpson. This poll report dives deep into the dynamics of that race.

Our most consequential finding is that Donalds (21%) currently leads the field, trailed by Gaetz (13%), Waltz (5%), Patronis (3%), and Simpson (2%). More than 40% of voters are undecided, and another 14% say they support “someone else.” Donalds’ lead can be attributed to a number of factors, such as a dominant performance in his own district and favorability ratings that exceed even Trump’s and DeSantis’s. Gaetz, on the other hand, is by far the most disliked candidate in the field, though he does earn votes from a fervent base of supporters, 64% of whom self-identify as “Donald Trump MAGA Republicans.”

It’s April 2024, and much will change between now and August 2026. This race will be shaped by who files to run, how much each candidate raises, and who receives coveted and game-changing endorsements from big names like Trump and DeSantis. We’re in for quite a ride, and Victory Insights will be there at every step, providing the data Floridians trust.

- ✓ **Ben Galbraith**
Senior Pollster, Victory Insights
🐦 @_BenGalbraith

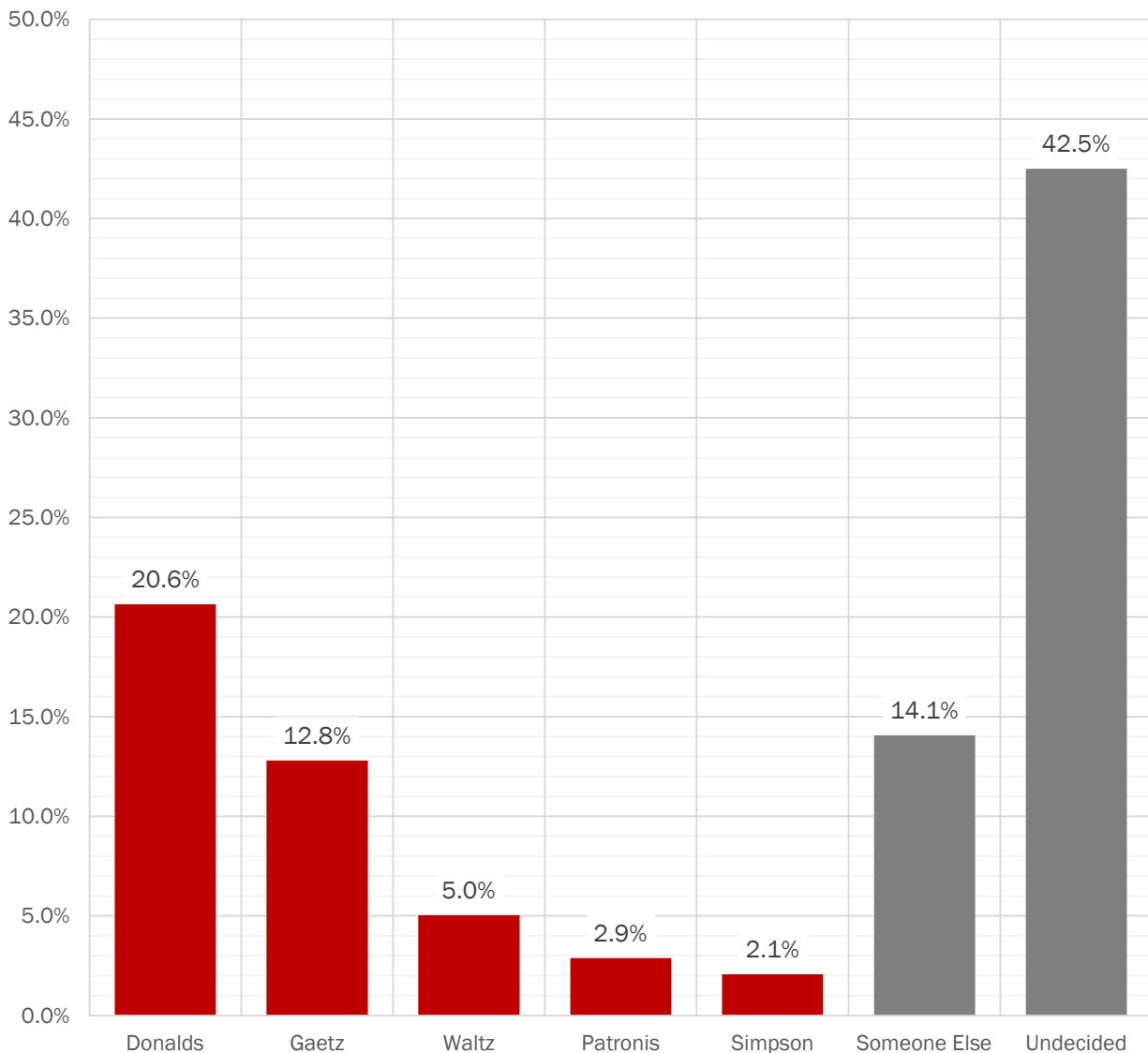


Governor Ballot

We asked respondents to indicate who they would most likely vote for in the 2026 Republican primary for Governor of Florida. This section dives deep into the results of this question.

Overall Ballot

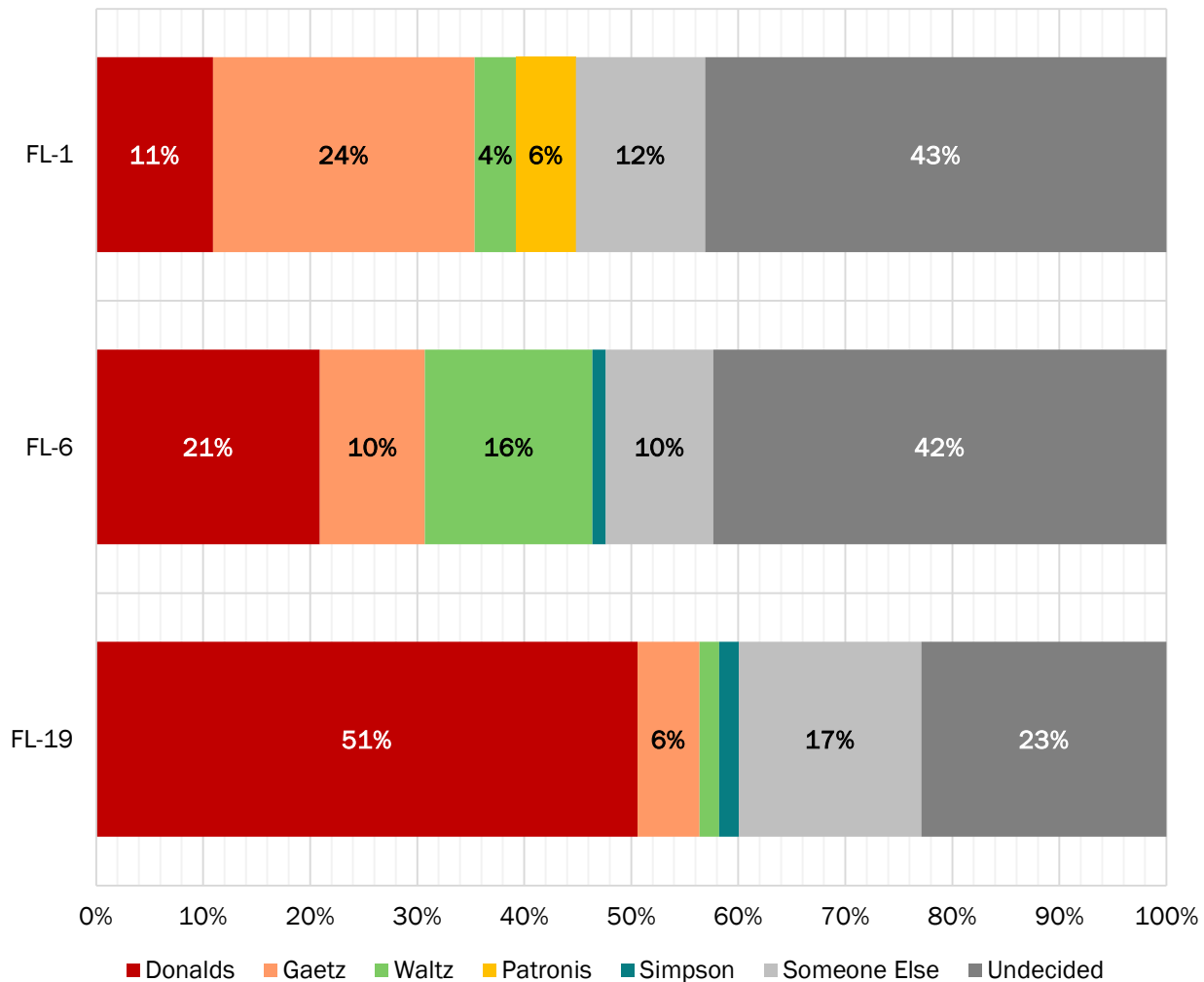
The most common answer for Florida Republicans was that they are undecided, with 43% of the electorate choosing this option. But among all candidates, Donalds is the clear leader, with 21% of the vote. He is trailed by congressional colleagues Gaetz (13%) and Waltz (5%). State cabinet members Patronis and Simpson barely register, each earning less than 3% of the vote. Finally, another 14% of the electorate says they would support an unnamed “someone else.” The chart below shows the overall results of this question.





Home Field Advantage

The chart below shows how each of the three US Representatives (and frontrunners) named in our poll performed in their own district. Donalds was by far the most dominant in his own district, earning just over half of the votes in FL-19, while no other candidate exceeded 6%. Meanwhile, Gaetz also led his own district, albeit only by 13%. Waltz, on the other hand, failed to win his own district, with Donalds earning 5% more than him and Gaetz closely trailing. Patronis only registered statistically significant support in Gaetz's FL-1, which makes sense due to his previous public service in the panhandle. Simpson was not a factor in any of the three districts of interest.

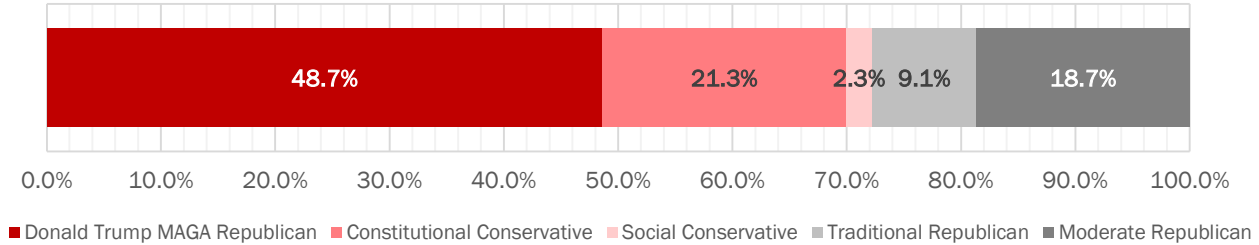


(Note: When we weighted the responses to this poll, we were careful to make sure that we didn't count an unrepresentative influx of responses from any of the US Representatives' congressional districts. As a result of our weighting, Districts 1 (Gaetz), 6 (Waltz), and 19 (Donalds) were all represented in our poll within 0.8% of their expected proportion of the total turnout in the 2026 Republican primary election, ensuring that the poll was not tainted by any over-zealous constituencies.)

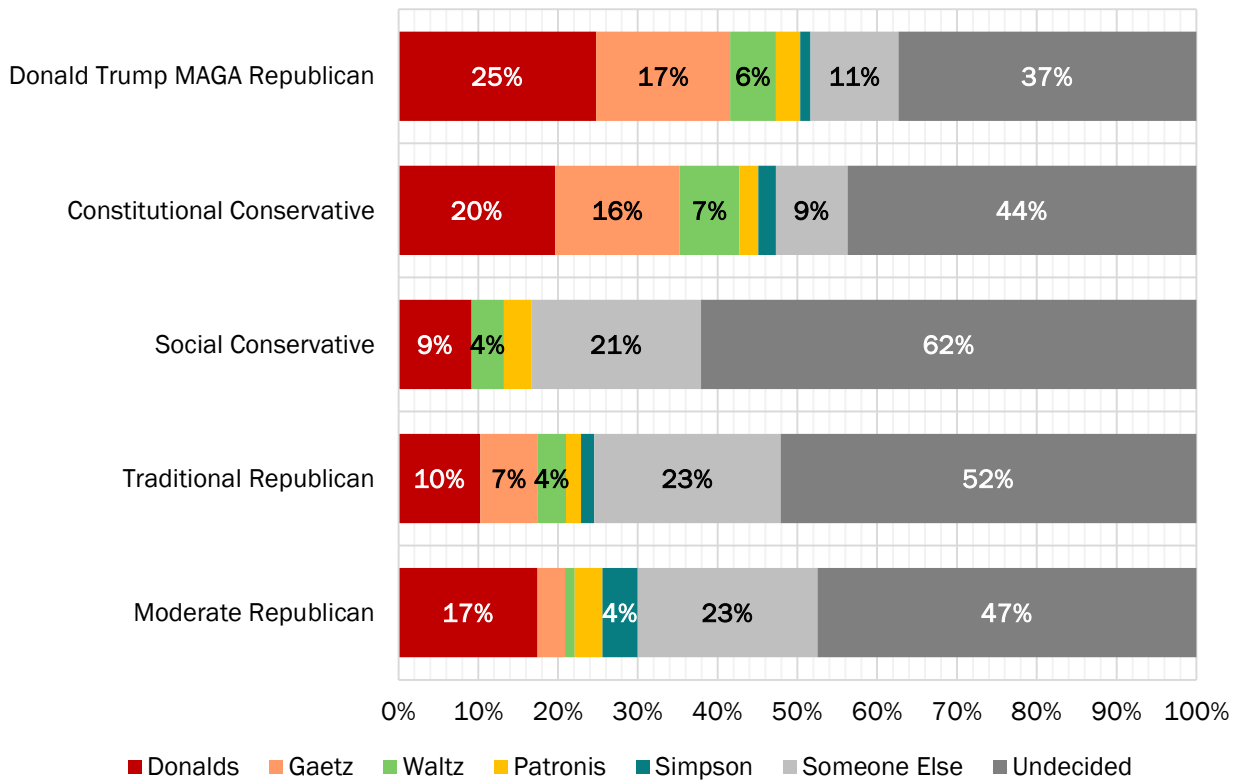


Ideological Differences

In this same poll, we asked voters to self-identify as one of five “types” of Republicans. Historically, this approach has been a powerful tool in segmenting the electorate based on their own perception of their ideology. The chart below shows how voters self-identified.



Clearly, a plurality of voters identify as “Donald Trump MAGA Republicans.” The next-most popular identification is “Constitutional Conservatives.” Together, these two groups make up 70% of the electorate. By comparison, the moderate wing, made up of “Traditional” and “Moderate” Republicans, accounts for less than 28% of the electorate. The chart below shows how the Governor ballot differed by type of Republican.



Importantly, Donalds leads among every single type of Republican, but *the amount by which he leads* varies considerably. His greatest lead is among Donald Trump MAGA Republicans, but Gaetz trails him closely among Constitutional Conservatives and Traditional Republicans. Donalds’ consistency across all types of Republicans is key to his overall lead.

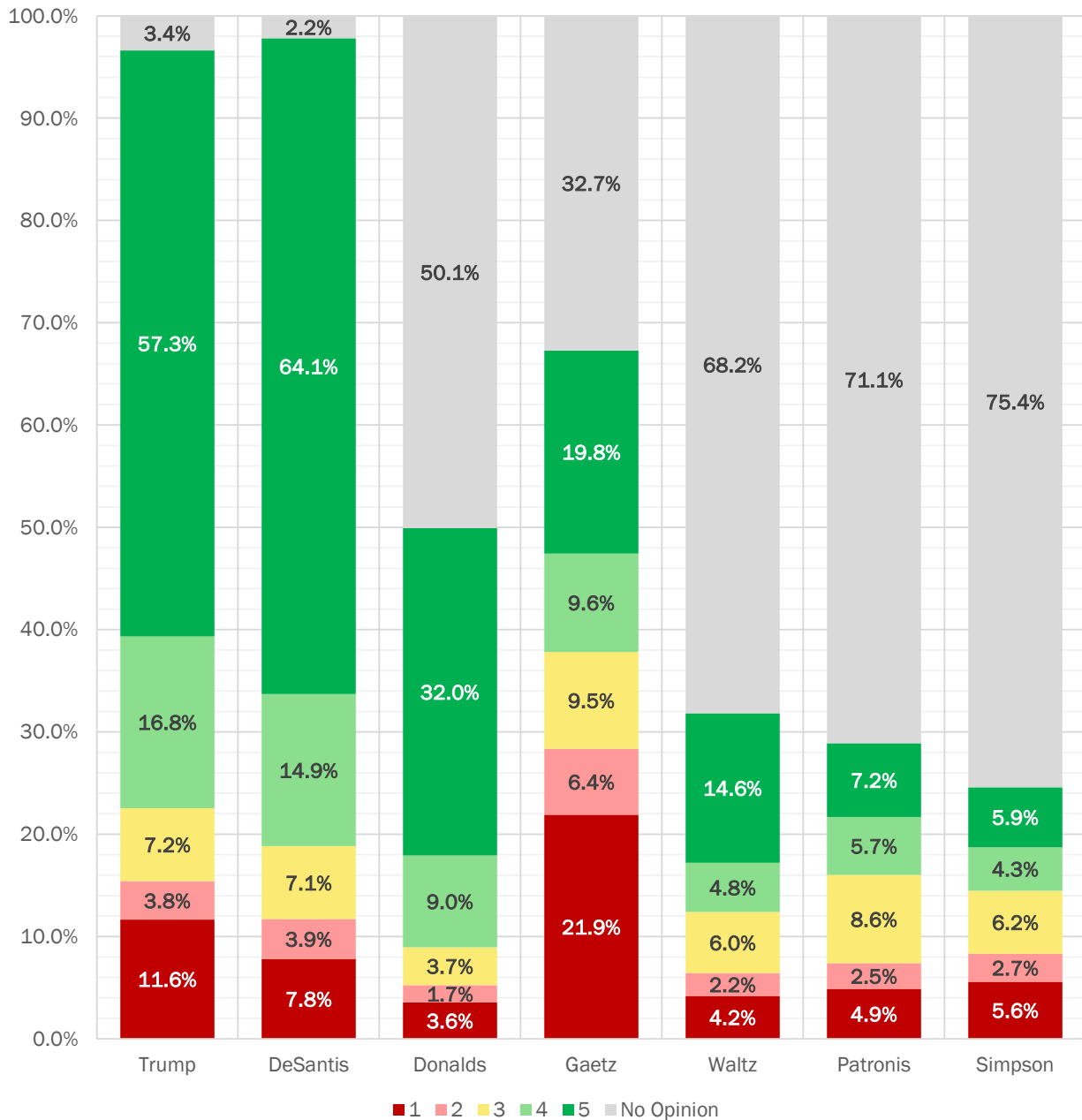


Favorability

We asked respondents to rate each candidate, as well as former President Trump and Governor DeSantis, on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being extremely negative and 5 being extremely positive. Respondents could also indicate that they have no opinion of the candidate.

Overall Favorability

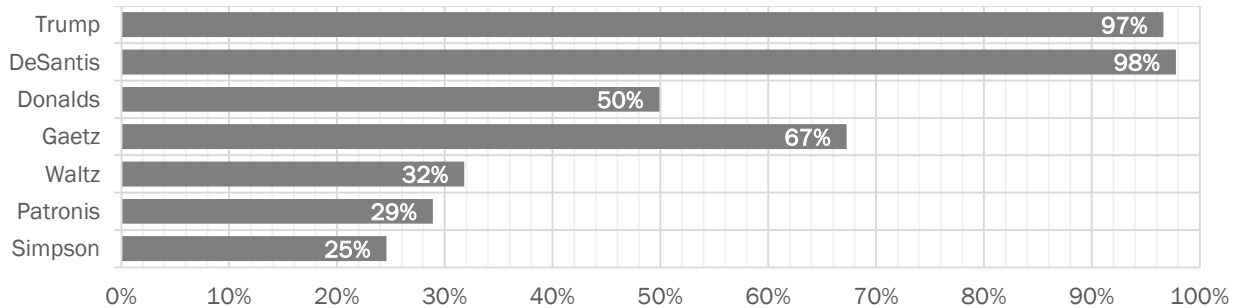
The chart below displays the overall results of this question. We'll dive deeper into these numbers throughout the rest of this section.





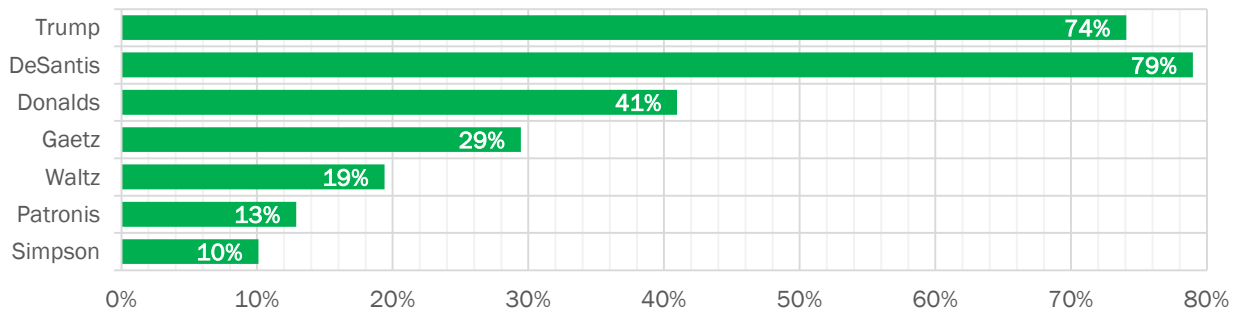
Total Name ID

The chart below shows what percentage of the electorate had any opinion of each of the candidates. Trump and DeSantis have practically ubiquitous Name ID, while Gaetz has the highest Name ID of the potential gubernatorial candidates, followed distantly by Donalds.



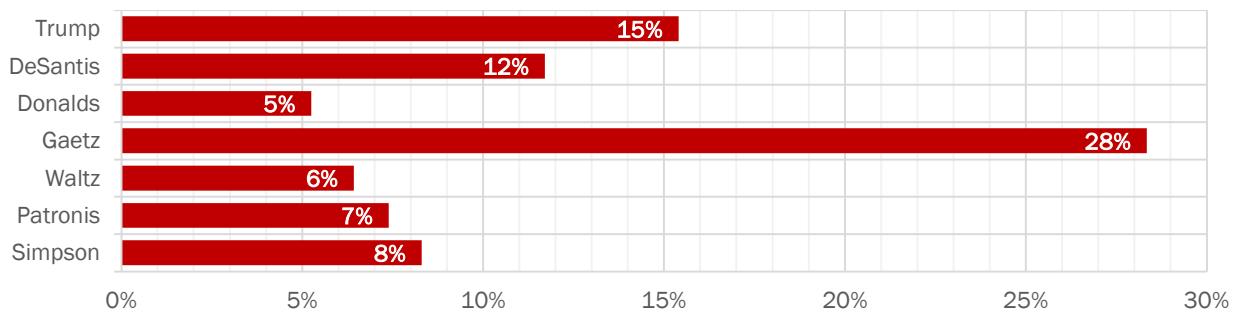
Positive Name ID

The chart below shows what percentage of the electorate rated each candidate a “4” or “5” out of 5. DeSantis leads with 79% positive Name ID, trailed closely by Trump with 74%. Of the potential gubernatorial candidates, Donalds is the clear leader, followed by Gaetz and then Waltz. Patronis and Simpson each have positive Name ID in the low double digits.



Negative Name ID

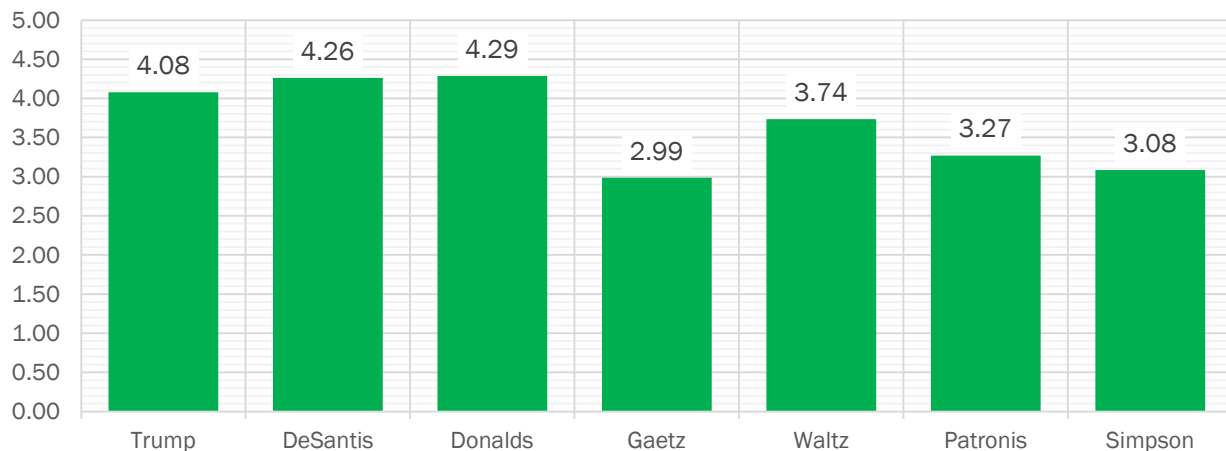
The chart below shows what percentage of the electorate rated each candidate a “1” or “2” out of 5. Gaetz’s negative Name ID practically jumps off the chart, with 28% of the electorate holding a negative opinion of him. That’s nearly double Trump’s value and more than three times the value of any other potential gubernatorial candidate. Donalds is disliked by the fewest number of voters, with a negative Name ID value of only 5%.





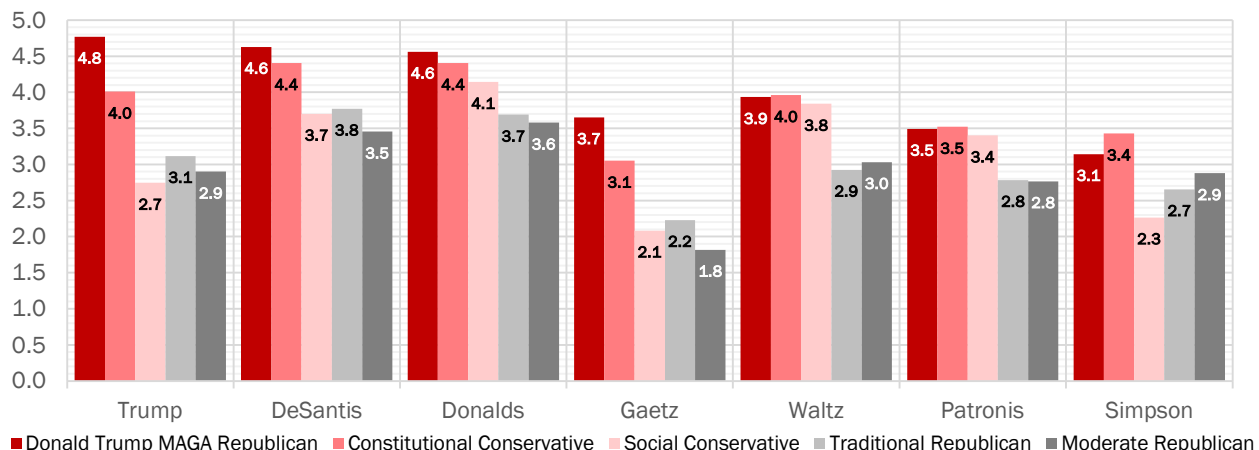
Average Opinionated Rating

Another important metric we can derive from the favorability question is a candidate's Average Opinionated Rating (AOR). This number represents the average rating given to the candidate *by those who had any opinion of the candidate*. In other words, if someone answered that they had no opinion of the candidate, their response would not be factored into the AOR. This metric approximates a candidate's likeability. It answers the question, "Of those who know about the candidate, what do they think of him?" Donalds and DeSantis make up the top tier of candidates for this metric, while Trump is one step down. Waltz is next, followed distantly by Patronis, Simpson, and finally Gaetz, who is the least "likeable" candidate on the list.



Average Opinionated Rating by Type of Republican

We then broke each candidate's AOR down by respondents' self-identified "types" of Republicans. The chart below displays this information. Unsurprisingly, the highest AOR recorded is for "Donald Trump MAGA Republicans" when asked about Trump. Meanwhile, the lowest AOR is for moderates when asked about Gaetz. Donalds outperforms every other gubernatorial candidate across all five types of Republicans, further demonstrating the consistency of his support.



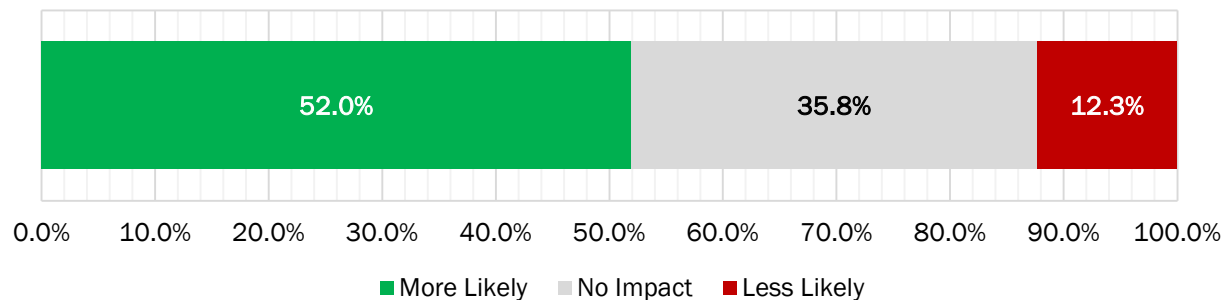


Endorsement Effects

An endorsement from Trump or DeSantis could be a game-changer in any race, especially the race for Governor of the state both call home. We asked voters whether an endorsement from Trump or DeSantis would make them more or less likely to vote for the endorsed candidate (or if it would have no effect). This section details the results of these questions.

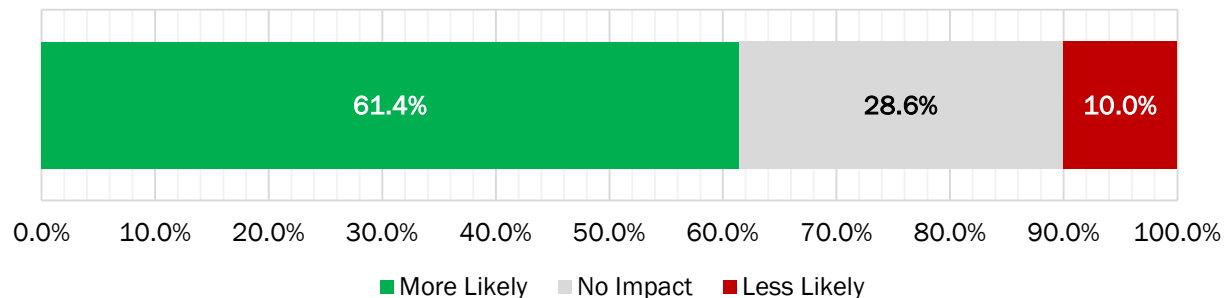
Trump Endorsement Effect

Just over half of the electorate (52%) said that an endorsement from former President Trump would make them more likely to vote for a candidate. Only 12% would be less likely to support a candidate if they were endorsed by Trump, while another 36% say it would have no impact on their decision. 75% of self-described “Donald Trump MAGA Republicans” would be more likely to support a Trump-endorsed candidate, along with just over 40% of Constitutional Conservatives. However, a Trump endorsement is more harmful than helpful among the minority of the electorate that identifies as either Moderate Republicans, Traditional Republicans, or Social Conservatives.



DeSantis Endorsement Effect

An even higher proportion of the electorate (61%) says that an endorsement from DeSantis would make them more likely to support a candidate for Florida Governor. This isn't too much of a surprise; after all, this race is to replace DeSantis in the Florida Governor's Mansion, so an endorsement from the incumbent would carry a lot of weight. Unlike a Trump endorsement, a DeSantis endorsement would be more helpful than harmful among all five self-identified types of Republicans.





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