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New National UMass Amherst Poll Finds Ron DeSantis Neck-and-Neck with Donald Trump in Republican 2024 Presidential Matchup

The Florida governor has gained ground on the former president to pull into a dead heat among Republicans in new national poll

Topline results and crosstabs for the poll can be found at www.umass.edu/poll

AMHERST, Mass. – A new national University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll has found Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis running neck-and-neck with former President Donald Trump in a potential head-to-head matchup for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination.

In a one-on-one matchup, DeSantis edges Trump among Republicans in the new national poll, 51-49, which is within the poll's margin of error. When both are included in a larger field that includes potential candidates such as former Vice President Mike Pence, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and others, Trump leads the field with 37% of Republicans choosing him as their preferred choice for the party's nomination, with DeSantis close behind at 34%. No other candidate received double-digit support.

"The Republican race for the presidency is shaping up to be highly competitive with a former president an a number of popular governors, senators, representatives and even media personalities all potentially vying to become the 47th President of the United States," says Tatishe Nteta, provost professor of political science at UMass Amherst and director of the poll. "However, if the race comes down to the two current frontrunners, former President Donald Trump and the current governor of the state of Florida Ron DeSantis, the election is a statistical dead heat. In the coming year, if the election does indeed become a two-person race GOP voters will have a difficult decision to make between two viable and popular candidates."

"DeSantis appears to be the choice among the more establishment-oriented Republicans," says Raymond La Raja, professor of political science at UMass Amherst and co-director of the poll. "In a head-to-head matchup between DeSantis and Trump among Republican voters, the outcome is basically even. However, older people, the more educated and the wealthy prefer DeSantis by solid margins. Men also prefer him – 57-43 – compared to women, who favor Trump, 54-46."

"The fact that support for Ron DeSantis' presidential ambitions comes disproportionately from older, wealthier and more educated Republicans is good news for him – and bad news for Trump," says Jesse Rhodes, professor of political science at UMass Amherst and co-director of the poll. "These are the people who are most likely to vote, make political contributions and participate in campaigns. If DeSantis is able to hold these voters, he will be in a very formidable position in the GOP primary."

"The dominant narrative following a disappointing Republican showing in the 2022 midterm elections has Republicans distancing themselves from Donald Trump and his election denialism and recognizing that he and his ilk have been an albatross fettered to the Party's electoral fortunes," says Alexander Theodoridis, associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and co-director of the poll. "While hints of such a shift can be seen among GOP elites, results from our latest poll make it clear the Republican rank-and-file have yet to fully receive the memo about quitting Trump and acknowledging the electoral liability he brings. Just over a year before the nominating contests will begin, Trump and DeSantis are essentially tied in a head-to-head matchup and no other contender appears to have meaningful backing, and he remains among the top three choices for most Republicans. A mere 10% of Republican respondents blame Trump for the Party's lackluster midterm performance, attributing it instead to old-standby rationalizations like mainstream media bias (30%) and voter fraud (21%), and most Republican voters still don't believe it would be better for the GOP – or the nation – if Trump stepped away from politics."

"DeSantis' rise as a threat to Donald Trump's claim on the 2024 Republican presidential nomination points to important indirect impacts of the House Select Committee on American politics," Rhodes surmises. "While most Republicans question the Committee and its findings, it's likely that a significant fraction also understands that the Committee's findings damage Trump's electability in the general election. This has put some Republicans on the search for a viable conservative Republican alternative, and right now DeSantis seems to be the person they're looking for."

Views on the House of Representatives, Speaker McCarthy and the GOP

Asked to measure their feelings on a scale of 0 (coldest) to 100 (warmest), the poll's respondents continue to hold Democrats in a higher regard than Republicans, 46-40, while new House Speaker Kevin McCarthy holds an average rating of 37. More than half of those surveyed (54%) say that the views and policies of the Republican Party are too extreme, while 55% of the respondents say that the Democratic Party's views and policies are "generally mainstream."

The new poll also asked respondents about their views on what the new Republican-led House of Representatives should prioritize. While 63% of those surveyed said the House GOP should compromise with House and Senate Democrats and President Biden to pass legislation, 55% believe they should push bills that reflect Republican priorities – even though they likely wouldn't become law – and an equal percentage want the GOP to

investigate the business dealings of Hunter Biden. Nearly six in 10 (58%) want investigations into the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Biden administration's handling of immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border.

"The challenges in store for newly-minted House Speaker Kevin McCarthy as he attempts to wrangle his caucus with a razor-thin majority are on full display in our latest results," Theodoridis says. "The vast majority of Republicans believe the House should impeach Joe Biden – and half expect that it will – and launch investigations into Hunter Biden, the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the handling of immigration at the southern border. Nearly 90% of Republicans want the GOP-controlled House to pass legislation that reflects Republican priorities, even if the Democratic Senate and Joe Biden won't allow those bills to become law."

The poll once again also asked respondents about their views on a potential impeachment of President Biden by the House GOP.

"Since Joe Biden's inauguration in 2021, a number of prominent Republican elected officials and conservative media personalities have proposed that if the GOP took control of the House of Representatives they should seek to impeach the president," Nteta says, "As our polling shows, momentum for the impeachment of Biden increased in 2021, as a growing number of Americans not only thought that the GOP controlled House would impeach Biden, but that he should be impeached. With Republicans underperforming in the 2022 midterms, Republicans holding a slim majority in the House and questions concerning the political vulnerability of President Biden subsiding, we have seen a decrease in both the expectation and desire that Biden will be impeached."

Among all respondents, expectations that Biden will be impeached have fallen from 44% in a May 2022 UMass Amherst Poll to 38% in the latest poll. Meanwhile, those who say Biden should be impeached has increased from 34% in May to 40% in the current poll.

"Hunter Biden is going to be in the news a lot and many Americans believe the president is linked inextricably to accusations against his son's business dealings," La Raja says. "Among the 40% of voters who think Biden should be impeached, the most common reason they tell us, according to our word cloud, is related to Hunter Biden and his business affairs in Ukraine years ago. The desire to impeach Biden is strictly along partisan lines – 72% of Republican voters think he should be impeached compared to 15% of Democrats and 37% of Independents. These figures have not budged in more than a year."

"The Constitution stipulates that the president should be impeached if they commit treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors," Nteta explains. "While we have seen a decrease in the number of Americans who believe that President Joe Biden should be impeached, many among those who continue to believe that President Biden should be impeached point to the alleged criminal business dealings of his son Hunter Biden, his withdrawal from Afghanistan, the immigration crisis on the southern border and the president's age and mental acuity as the central reasons why Biden should be

impeached. Whether these supposed offenses rise to the level of impeachable offenses remains to be seen but given the slim majority enjoyed by the GOP it is unlikely that we will see Articles of Impeachment approved by the House of Representatives."

Confidence in the Integrity of the 2022 Midterm Elections

"Across demographic groups, a majority of Americans express confidence in the legitimacy of the 2022 electoral results," Nteta says about the latest poll's findings, which found that 56% of those surveyed were confident that the midterm elections were fair and accurate. "However, given the continued popularity of the 'Big Lie' and the presence of a number of Republican candidates, such as Arizona Republican gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake, who denied the legitimacy of the 2022 midterm electoral results, it is no surprise that Republicans, conservatives and Trump voters question the fairness and accuracy of the 2022 midterm election. The true test of whether false claims regarding the legitimacy of the nation's elections will come in 2024 when Trump will likely make electoral integrity and voter fraud a key part of his presidential campaign."

Meanwhile, La Raja points to results in the poll regarding whether state legislatures should have the power to overturn elections.

"Some Republicans have been circulating a constitutional theory that legislatures have authority to change the results of an election if they believe there were problems," he says. "More than one in four Americans are unsure about this argument. However, a majority of Americans (53%) oppose – and 40% are strongly opposed to – making it easier for state legislatures to change election results if they believe there were problems. The largest set of supporters for this theory are Republican and conservative voters who likely think elections are full of shenanigans by the Democrats, so they want the legislature to step in. This is a dangerous theory of elections and will undermine democracy if Republican politicians try to pull it off."

"Opposition to this plan is seen across demographic groups and unlike a number of other hot button issues, Democrats and Republicans both express trepidation about granting this new power to state legislatures," Nteta adds. "On this issue, the public looks to have spoken in one voice, and it is still left to be seen if the Supreme Court will again contradict the public sentiment."

Methodology

This University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll of 1,000 respondents nationwide was conducted by YouGov Jan. 5-9. YouGov interviewed 1,051 total respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 1,000 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race and education. The sampling frame is a politically representative "modeled frame" of U.S. adults, based upon the American Community Survey (ACS) public use microdata file, public voter file records, the 2020 Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration supplements, the

2020 National Election Pool (NEP) exit poll and the 2020 CES surveys, including demographics and 2020 presidential vote.

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on 2020 presidential vote choice, and then post-stratified on the variables of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories) and education (4-categories) to produce the final weight.

The margin of error within this poll is 3.55%.

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