



EMBARGOED UNTIL 5 a.m. EST Tuesday, February 24, 2026

Byron Donalds pulls ahead in Republican gubernatorial primary
President Trump's endorsement widens the gap

Jacksonville, Fla. –A new poll of likely Republican primary voters from the Public Opinion Research Lab (PORL) at the University of North Florida shows Byron Donalds with a four-point lead in the race for Republican nominee for governor, just inside the margin of error of this poll (+/- 4.38 percentage points).

When asked who they would vote for if the 2026 Republican primary election for governor were held today, 28% indicated a vote for Byron Donalds, followed by 24% for Casey DeSantis. In a distant third place comes James Fishback with 4%, followed by 3% for Jay Collins, less than 1% for Paul Renner, and 36% said they do not know who they'll vote for.

Respondents who said they would vote for Casey DeSantis were then told that she has not publicly expressed her intent to run for governor, and were asked which of the remaining candidates they would vote for if she were not on the ballot. With DeSantis out of the equation, Byron Donalds picked up just three percentage points, going from 28% to 31%, while other candidates gained one to two points. A strong majority (64%) of would-be Casey DeSantis voters said they do not know who they'd vote for if she were not in the running. Out of the total sample, undecided voters increased from 36% to 51% when DeSantis was removed from the choices.

"Casey DeSantis's entrance into the race is still possible, though she hasn't been engaged in the fundraising we'd expect from someone interested in running," commented Dr. Sean Freeder, PORL director and professor of political science. "Still, given her level of name recognition and the impact that has on voters, she'll remain a factor at least until the June 15 filing deadline."

In addition, all respondents were told that Donald Trump has endorsed Byron Donalds for governor and then asked to choose again from the full list of candidates. With this additional information, Donalds' support increases to 47%, while support for Casey DeSantis slides to 12%. Twenty-eight percent said they do not know.

"When all candidates are from the same party, voters lose their most important decision-making cue, and endorsements usually fill that vacuum," said Freeder. "Given Trump's notoriety and high popularity among Republicans, an endorsement from him is likely to decide the race, especially when Donalds has the campaign funds to heavily advertise this advantage to voters."

Finally, respondents were asked whose endorsement for Florida governor would matter most, between Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis. Despite the 19-point boost for Donalds with a Trump endorsement attached, a greater percentage of respondents indicated a DeSantis endorsement for governor would matter more to them, with 42%, compared to 32% who said an endorsement from Trump would matter more. Eighteen percent said they don't know.

"That DeSantis's endorsement edges out Trump's in terms of importance may be less about voters' preference for DeSantis's opinion and more about their curiosity about it, given Trump's opinion is already public knowledge," said Freeder. "This would explain Donalds' clean advantage over Casey DeSantis

once the Trump endorsement is known, as her husband’s endorsement is surely assumed, should she run.”

Please see the crosstabulations below for the full survey results. To download ADA-accessible crosstabs, please [visit our website](#).

Methodology

The UNF PORL Florida Statewide Poll consists of a random sample of 657 likely Republican Primary voters, and was conducted from February 16 through February 20, 2026, by the Public Opinion Research Lab (PORL) at the University of North Florida. The sampling frame, consisting of phone numbers, was sourced from the January 2026 update of the Florida voter file. A voter is considered “likely” if they voted in at least one of the 2020, 2022, or 2024 Republican primaries. Respondents who said they would “probably not” or “definitely not” vote in the 2026 Republican primary election were screened out of the survey. To ensure a representative sample, the 10 Florida designated media market areas (DMAs) were stratified by geography and urbanicity into 18 different strata, with Miami-Dade County separated into its own stratum due to its unique population. Surveys were conducted in English and Spanish.

Respondents were contacted by live callers via telephone between 5 to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday and 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, with up to three callbacks attempted. Data collection took place at the PORL facility with its 40-station Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. A single interviewer, through hand dialing, asked for the listed voter by name. If they reached the wrong person, or if the listed voter was not available, the interview was terminated. The response rate of this study was 3.2%, using the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Response Rate 3 (RR3) calculation.

The weighting process had two steps: All data are weighted first by educational attainment, and then by partisan registration, age, race and ethnicity, sex, and geographic strata to match the population of likely Republican primary voters in Florida. Geographical strata, party registration, sex, race and ethnicity, and age weights were calculated using their respective proportions in Florida Voter File. Education weights were calculated using the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) 2023 five-year estimates for individuals 25 years of age and over, with those under 25 receiving an education weight of one. All weights are calculated and applied using the SPSS version 30 rake weighting function, and assigned a weight of one if any weighting variables are missing. The overall margin of sampling error is +/-4.38 percentage points, including estimated design effect due to weighting. Estimates for smaller subpopulations have greater margins of error, indicating greater uncertainty in the data. It is important to note that sampling error is just one of many potential sources of error. This and all other public opinion research is susceptible to unmeasured, real-world error.

PORL is a full-service survey research facility that provides tailored research to fulfill each client’s individual needs from political, economic, social, and cultural projects. PORL opened in 2001 and is an independent, non-partisan center, a charter member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research Transparency Initiative, and a member of the Association of Academic Survey Research Organization. As members of AAPOR, PORL’s goal is to support sound and ethical practices in the conduct of survey and public opinion research. This research was fully self-sponsored, and PORL received no funding or compensation from any outside entity. For more information, visit unf.edu/coas/porl or contact Dr. Sean Freeder at porl@unf.edu or (904) 620-2784.

About University of North Florida

The University of North Florida is a nationally ranked university located on a beautiful 1,381-acre campus in Jacksonville surrounded by nature. Serving more than 17,000 students, UNF features six colleges of distinction with innovative programs in high-demand fields. UNF students receive individualized attention from faculty and gain valuable real-world experience engaging with community partners. A top public

university, UNF prepares students to make a difference in Florida and around the globe. Learn more at www.unf.edu.

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Media Contact:

Amanda Ennis
Media Relations Assistant Director
Amanda.ennis@unf.edu

Methodology Contact

Dr. Sean Freeder
Public Opinion Research Lab Director
Associate Professor of Political Science
PORL@unf.edu
(904) 620-2784

University of North Florida Public Opinion Research Lab
Florida Likely Republican Primary Voter Statewide Poll
Feb 16 - Feb 19, 2026

Overall Margin of Error = +/- 4.38 percentage points

Crosstabulations consist of weighted percentages, while observation counts (n) are unweighted totals. For more about weighting, see the survey methodology.

Due to rounding, some column percentages may not total 100%.

Unless otherwise noted, the following survey questions were asked of all respondents.

VOL = Volunteered by respondent

[For more information visit unf.edu/coas/porl/](http://unf.edu/coas/porl/)

Thinking ahead to the 2026 Republican primary election for governor of Florida, how likely are you to vote?

Response	Total	Male	Female	No BA	BA or higher	18-34	35-54	55+	White	Hisp/Lat	North FL	Central FL	South FL	Rural	Urban
You will definitely vote	90%	88%	93%	91%	89%	73%	88%	92%	90%	92%	92%	87%	94%	92%	88%
You will probably vote	10%	12%	7%	9%	11%	27%	12%	8%	10%	8%	8%	13%	6%	8%	12%
You will probably not vote [SCREENED OUT]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
You will definitely not vote [SCREENED OUT]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Don't know [VOL] [SCREENED OUT]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refusal [VOL] [SCREENED OUT]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Unweighted N</i>	657	352	305	305	352	39	121	497	561	67	164	302	191	410	247

If the Republican primary election for governor of Florida were held today, who would you vote for if the candidates were... [ROTATE ANSWER CHOICES]

Response	Total	Male	Female	No BA	BA or higher	18-34	35-54	55+	White	Hisp/Lat	North FL	Central FL	South FL	Rural	Urban
Byron [BYE-run] Donalds	28%	31%	25%	27%	29%	8%	31%	29%	29%	24%	23%	24%	38%	28%	28%
Casey DeSantis [Duh-SAN-Tis]	24%	21%	26%	25%	22%	14%	23%	25%	25%	24%	28%	28%	15%	26%	21%
Paul Renner	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%	1%	-	-	1%	1%	-	1%	-	1%	<1%	1%
Jay Collins	3%	3%	2%	3%	3%	-	2%	3%	3%	3%	1%	4%	2%	3%	3%
James Fishback	4%	7%	1%	4%	3%	32%	9%	<1%	3%	4%	3%	5%	2%	2%	6%
Someone else (please specify)	2%	3%	1%	1%	3%	-	5%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	3%
Wouldn't vote [VOL]	2%	2%	2%	1%	3%	5%	1%	2%	2%	-	3%	1%	2%	2%	2%
Don't know [VOL]	36%	30%	41%	37%	35%	41%	28%	38%	36%	40%	39%	36%	34%	37%	35%
Refusal [VOL]	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	-	2%	2%	1%	4%	1%	1%	4%	2%	2%
<i>Unweighted N</i>	657	352	305	305	352	39	121	497	561	67	164	302	191	410	247

[ONLY if vote choice = Casey DeSantis] Casey DeSantis has not publicly announced her intention to run for governor. If she weren't on the ballot, which of the following candidates would you vote for: [ROTATE ANSWER CHOICES]

Response	Total
Byron [BYE-run] Donalds	12%
Paul Renner	4%
Jay Collins	7%
James Fishback	8%
Someone else (please specify)	3%
Wouldn't vote [VOL]	2%
Don't know [VOL]	64%
<i>Unweighted N</i>	148

[TOTAL SAMPLE - RECODED without Casey DeSantis] If the Republican primary election for governor of Florida were held today, who would you vote for if the candidates were... [ROTATE ANSWER CHOICES]

Response	Total	Male	Female	No BA	BA or higher	18-34	35-54	55+	White	Hisp/Lat	North FL	Central FL	South FL	Rural	Urban
Byron [BYE-run] Donalds	31%	35%	27%	30%	33%	8%	33%	32%	32%	24%	26%	27%	41%	31%	31%
Paul Renner	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	5%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Jay Collins	4%	4%	4%	5%	3%	3%	2%	5%	5%	3%	1%	7%	4%	5%	4%
James Fishback	6%	8%	4%	7%	3%	32%	11%	2%	5%	9%	4%	8%	3%	4%	8%
Someone else (please specify)	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%	-	5%	2%	3%	1%	3%	2%	2%	2%	3%
Wouldn't vote [VOL]	2%	2%	2%	2%	4%	5%	1%	3%	3%	-	4%	1%	3%	2%	2%
Don't know [VOL]	51%	43%	59%	51%	51%	46%	45%	54%	51%	57%	59%	53%	44%	53%	49%
Refusal [VOL]	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	-	2%	2%	1%	4%	1%	1%	4%	2%	2%
<i>Unweighted N</i>	657	352	305	305	352	39	121	497	561	67	164	302	191	410	247

Donald Trump has endorsed Byron Donalds for governor. With this additional information, if the Republican primary election for governor of Florida were held today, who would you vote for if the candidates were... [ROTATE ANSWER CHOICES]

Response	Total	Male	Female	No BA	BA or higher	18-34	35-54	55+	White	Hisp/Lat	North FL	Central FL	South FL	Rural	Urban
Byron [BYE-run] Donalds	47%	48%	46%	48%	45%	22%	43%	50%	48%	42%	43%	43%	54%	47%	46%
Casey DeSantis [Duh-SAN-Tis]	12%	10%	13%	13%	11%	5%	16%	11%	13%	7%	17%	13%	7%	14%	9%
Paul Renner	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%	-	1%	1%	4%	1%	2%	1%	0%	3%
Jay Collins	2%	3%	1%	2%	3%	-	1%	3%	2%	3%	1%	4%	2%	2%	2%
James Fishback	5%	8%	1%	5%	3%	32%	12%	1%	4%	6%	3%	7%	3%	2%	8%
Someone else (please specify)	1%	2%	1%	<1%	2%	-	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Wouldn't vote [VOL]	2%	1%	2%	<1%	4%	3%	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%
Don't know [VOL]	28%	25%	32%	28%	30%	35%	23%	29%	28%	29%	32%	28%	27%	30%	26%
Refusal [VOL]	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%	-	2%	2%	1%	7%	1%	1%	6%	2%	3%
<i>Unweighted N</i>	<i>657</i>	<i>352</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>352</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>497</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>164</i>	<i>302</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>410</i>	<i>247</i>

Which endorsement for Florida governor would matter more to you:

Response	Total	Male	Female	No BA	BA or higher	18-34	35-54	55+	White	Hisp/Lat	North FL	Central FL	South FL	Rural	Urban
Donald Trump	32%	33%	31%	34%	28%	22%	27%	34%	31%	41%	23%	33%	39%	8%	14%
Ron DeSantis	42%	42%	41%	41%	44%	62%	46%	39%	42%	40%	48%	46%	31%	45%	37%
Don't know [VOL]	18%	17%	19%	17%	21%	8%	19%	19%	19%	14%	23%	16%	18%	19%	17%
Refusal [VOL]	8%	7%	9%	8%	7%	8%	9%	8%	9%	5%	6%	6%	12%	6%	10%
<i>Unweighted N</i>	<i>657</i>	<i>352</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>352</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>497</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>164</i>	<i>302</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>410</i>	<i>247</i>

Do you or your family rent or own your home?

Response	Total	Male	Female	No BA	BA or higher	18-34	35-54	55+	White	Hisp/Lat	North FL	Central FL	South FL	Rural	Urban
Rent	11%	12%	10%	12%	9%	11%	17%	9%	9%	23%	8%	12%	12%	8%	14%
Own	85%	84%	86%	83%	89%	81%	81%	86%	88%	68%	89%	86%	81%	89%	81%
Something else [VOL]	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%	1%	1%	1%	3%	3%	1%	2%	1%	2%
Don't know [VOL]	<1%	-	<1%	<1%	<1%	3%	-	<1%	<1%	-	1%	<1%	-	<1%	-
Refusal [VOL]	2%	3%	2%	4%	<1%	3%	1%	3%	2%	5%	1%	1%	6%	2%	3%
<i>Unweighted N</i>	<i>657</i>	<i>352</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>352</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>497</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>164</i>	<i>302</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>410</i>	<i>247</i>

Thinking back to the 2024 Presidential Election, who did you vote for?

Response	Total	Male	Female	No BA	BA or higher	18-34	35-54	55+	White	Hisp/Lat	North FL	Central FL	South FL	Rural	Urban
Donald Trump	89%	90%	88%	91%	84%	92%	90%	88%	89%	85%	95%	91%	82%	91%	86%
Kamala [COMMA-luh] Harris	5%	3%	6%	3%	8%	-	6%	5%	4%	7%	2%	4%	8%	4%	6%
Someone else	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	-	-	2%	1%	3%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Didn't vote	1%	1%	1%	<1%	2%	6%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Don't know [VOL]	1%	<1%	1%	<1%	1%	-	-	1%	1%	-	-	1%	1%	1%	<1%
Refusal [VOL]	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%	1%	2%	8%	3%	5%
<i>Unweighted N</i>	<i>657</i>	<i>352</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>352</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>497</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>164</i>	<i>302</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>410</i>	<i>247</i>

Are you the parent or guardian of a child under 18 who lives in Florida?

Response	Total	Male	Female	No BA	BA or higher	18-34	35-54	55+	White	Hisp/Lat	North FL	Central FL	South FL	Rural	Urban
Yes	14%	17%	11%	11%	19%	11%	56%	3%	13%	24%	17%	15%	11%	12%	17%
No	84%	81%	87%	87%	80%	86%	43%	95%	85%	75%	83%	85%	85%	86%	82%
Don't know [VOL]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refusal [VOL]	2%	1%	2%	2%	<1%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	<1%	4%	2%	1%
<i>Unweighted N</i>	<i>657</i>	<i>352</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>352</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>497</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>164</i>	<i>302</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>410</i>	<i>247</i>

Nature of the Sample	N
Likely Republican Primary Voters	657
Sex	%
Male	48%
Female	52%
Education	%
No Bachelor's Degree	64%
Bachelor's Degree or higher	36%
Race/Ethnicity	%
White	84%
African American/Black	1%
Hispanic/Latino	11%
Other	4%
Age	%
18-24	1%
25-34	4%
35-44	8%
45-54	11%
55-64	20%
65+	55%
Strata	%
Pensacola DMA	5%
Panama City	4%
Tallahassee DMA - Rural	1%
Jacksonville DMA - Rural	7%
Gainesville DMA - Rural	1%
Orlando DMA - Rural	15%
Tampa DMA - Rural	16%
West Palm DMA - Rural	3%
Fort Myers DMA - Rural	6%
Broward & Monroe Counties	4%
Miami-Dade County	7%
Tallahassee DMA - Urban	1%
Jacksonville DMA - Urban	4%
Gainesville DMA - Urban	1%
Orlando DMA - Urban	6%
Tampa DMA - Urban	10%
West Palm DMA - Urban	6%
Fort Myers DMA - Urban	3%
Survey Language	%
English	98%
Spanish	2%