

Newest Saint Leo University Poll Shows Primary Races for Florida Governor Tilting Toward Putnam and Graham in Tough Contests

Rick Scott Maintains Slight Lead in Poll Over Bill Nelson for U.S. Senate Election

ST. LEO, FL – The most recent survey by the Saint Leo University Polling Institute (<http://polls.saintleo.edu>) of Florida voters indicates a slight lead for state Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam over challenger Ron DeSantis in the upcoming primary race for the GOP nomination for governor, but the race is still highly competitive. On the Democratic side, former U.S. Representative Gwen Graham is leading a populous field of Democratic candidates, but just as many voters are unsure whom to select in their party's bid.

The nationally watched U.S. Senate race is also close, with GOP candidate and current Florida Governor Rick Scott holding a lead over current U.S. Senator Bill Nelson, a Democrat from South Florida.

“Most of all, the survey shows that when the margin of error is considered, all these races are too close to call right now,” according to Frank Orlando, director of the Saint Leo University Polling Institute. The primary is Tuesday, August 28, but early voting at polling places and by mail has already commenced.

The survey was fielded among 500 Florida voters from August 10 through August 16. When all 500 answered questions, the margin of error for results is plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

The results from the sub-sample of 172 GOP voters thinking about the governor's race show a small edge for Putnam. Republican voters in the survey were asked:

*Please think for a moment about the potential candidates running for the Republican nomination to run for Florida governor in 2018. If the Republican primary for **governor** was held today, which of the following would you support for the Republican nomination?*

Republican Candidates	%	% plus leaners
Adam Putnam	37.8	51.7
Ron DeSantis	29.7	41.2

Someone else	5.2	--
Undecided / Don't Know (Follow-up question asked)	27.3	--

Those who were undecided were asked which of the two they were leaning toward, and the cumulative results of the decided voters and those inclined toward one or the other candidate are shown in the column on the right.

While Putnam has a strong background in the Florida Republican party, DeSantis has regional name recognition from a seat in Congress representing part of Florida's eastern coast, a background of military service as an attorney in the U.S. Navy, and the endorsement of President Donald J. Trump. In the same survey, 30.8 percent of respondents say they strongly approve of Trump's job performance and another 19.6 percent say they somewhat approve, for a combined approval rating of 50.4 percent.

Polling Institute Director Orlando said the GOP numbers reflect an influence from Trump's endorsement of DeSantis and related mid-July visit to Florida on the candidate's behalf. Still, the situation is subject to change, Orlando said. "It's clear that the Trump endorsement and visit to Florida gave a boost to DeSantis. Many polls around the time gave him a lead over Putnam, but our poll here is consistent with other recent polls that the effect of the endorsement has faded a bit and that we are in for a close finish. Since DeSantis was relatively unknown throughout the state, the endorsement might have meant that people automatically gave him their support in light of the Trump endorsement, but that support has melted a bit since voters have gotten to know more about his candidacy. It will be interesting to watch if President Trump's Midas touch in GOP primaries continues or if Adam Putnam can use the fact that he's won statewide in the past to win."

Democratic Field

As for the Democrats, Orlando said, "the large field for Democrats made it difficult for Graham to lock up a large portion of the electorate to the point where, even with leaners, she's still only attracting around one-third of the voters in the field. On the other side of the coin, she's fortunate that her competitors are splitting the vote up relatively evenly. She's definitely not out of the woods yet though, with a week to go."

She faces Philip Levine, former mayor of Miami Beach, real estate magnate Jeff Greene, Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum, and Orlando-area businessman Chris King.

The precise question asked of 188 Democrats and the results were:

Please think for a moment about the list of candidates and potential candidates running for the Democratic nomination to run for Florida governor in 2018. If the Democratic primary for governor was held today, which of the following would you support for the Democratic nomination?

Democratic Candidates	%	% plus leaners
Gwen Graham	25.5	31.3
Philip Levine	18.6	22.3
Jeff Greene	12.2	17
Andrew Gillum	10.1	15.4
Chris King	3.2	4.7
Someone else	4.3	--
Unsure / don't know (Follow-up question asked)	26.1	--

Those who were unsure were asked toward which Democratic candidate they were leaning, and when those voters' sentiments were added, Graham still leads the field, but as Orlando noted, she still comes in at less than one-third of party voters.

Projected November Choices

To see how all voters in Florida might act during the general election in November, the survey posed questions asking them to think about which candidate they would choose for governor given the most likely scenarios. Here are the outcomes of hypothetical Republican and Democratic races.

- Adam Putnam versus Gwen Graham: Putnam, 36.2 percent; Graham, 30.8 percent; undecided, 23.6 percent.
- Adam Putnam versus Philip Levine: Putnam, 36.6 percent; Levine, 29.8 percent; undecided, 24.6 percent.
- Ron DeSantis versus Gwen Graham: Graham, 35.8 percent; DeSantis, 31.2 percent; undecided, 24 percent.
- Ron DeSantis versus Philip Levine: Levine, 34 percent; DeSantis, 30.2 percent; undecided, 24.8 percent.

Upon reviewing the results, Orlando, the polling director, said: “As it stands now, our data shows that the GOP would have a better shot at holding the governorship if Putnam secures the nomination. While President Trump has done well in anointing GOP nominees, his preferred candidates have not fared as well in general elections. We see that on display here with Putnam leading head-to-heads against Graham and Levine, and with DeSantis losing both potential head-to-head races.”

U.S. Senate Race from Florida

The survey also asked 500 Florida voters (all parties and non-affiliated voters) about the keenly watched race to represent Florida in the U.S. Senate, which has outgoing Republican Governor Rick Scott challenging the longtime incumbent Democrat Bill Nelson.

If the 2018 election for Florida United States Senator was held today and the candidates were Bill Nelson and Rick Scott, which would you support?

U.S. Senate candidates from Florida	%
Rick Scott	40.4
Bill Nelson	35.8
Someone else	8.4
Undecided / Don't Know	15.4

The survey also shows that Scott has an approval of 61 percent for the job he has done as governor, with 31 percent saying they have a very favorable opinion of the job he has done, and 30 percent saying they hold a somewhat favorable opinion. His combined unfavorable rating is 31 percent. Scott also has the support of President Trump.

“It appears as though Rick Scott's close association with the president won't hurt too much in the Sunshine State with around 50 percent of our respondents approving of the way Donald Trump is handling his duties,” said Orlando, the polling director. “This is slightly higher than the president's approval nationwide.”

About the Poll

METHODOLOGY: The poll sampled opinions of 500 Florida respondents. The survey was conducted August 10 through August 16, 2018. All surveys were conducted using an online survey instrument. The poll has a +/- 4.5 percent margin of error at a 95 percent confidence level (on a composite basis) with questions asked of all 500.

To attain a representative view of the electorate, the sample included 172 Republican voters and 188 Democratic voters. The balance were unaffiliated, belong to another party, or were unsure of their current party status.

The Saint Leo University Polling Institute conducts its surveys using cutting-edge online methodology, which is rapidly transforming the field of survey research. The sample is drawn from large online panels, which allow for random selections that reflect accurate cross sections of all demographic groups. Online methodology has the additional advantage of allowing participants to respond to the survey at a time, place, and speed that is convenient to them, which may result in more thoughtful answers. The Saint Leo University Polling Institute develops the questionnaires, administers the surveys, and conducts analysis of the results. Panel participants typically receive a token incentive—usually \$1 deposited into an iTunes or Amazon account—for their participation.

The Saint Leo University Polling Institute survey results about national and Florida politics, public policy issues, Pope Francis' popularity, and other topics, can also be found here: <http://polls.saintleo.edu>. You can also follow the institute on Twitter @saintleopolls.

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Saint Leo University (www.saintleo.edu) is a modern Catholic teaching university that is firmly grounded in the liberal arts tradition and the timeless Benedictine wisdom that seeks balanced growth of mind, body, and spirit. The Saint Leo University of today is a private, nonprofit institution that creates hospitable learning communities wherever students want to be or need to be, whether that is a campus classroom, a web-based environment, an employer's worksite, a military base, or an office park. Saint Leo welcomes people of all faiths and of no religious affiliation, and encourages learners of all generations. The university is committed to providing educational opportunities to the nation's armed forces, veterans, and their families. Saint Leo is regionally accredited to award degrees ranging from the associate to the doctorate, and the faculty and staff guide all students to develop their capacities for critical thinking, moral reflection, and lifelong learning and leadership.

The university remains the faithful steward of the beautiful lakeside University Campus in the Tampa Bay region of Florida, where its founding monks created the first Catholic college in the state in 1889. Serving more than 13,000 students, Saint Leo has expanded to downtown Tampa, to other sites in Florida and beyond, and maintains a physical presence in seven states.

The university provides highly respected online learning programs to students nationally and internationally. More than 90,000 alumni reside in all 50 states, in Washington, DC, in three U.S. territories, and in 76 countries.