

Florida Southern College
Center for Polling and Policy Research

2018 Florida General Election Poll

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Executive Summary

With Election Day approximately one month away, races for Florida's highest offices continue to be close. Using live callers, the Florida Southern College Center for Polling and Policy Research conducted a telephone survey of registered, likely, voters across the state. This survey took place during the evenings of Monday, October 1st through Friday, October 5th and elicited responses from 476 likely voters with an overall margin of error of ± 4.49 .

Our results show a narrow lead for Democrat, Andrew Gillum over Republican, Ron DeSantis; however, this is not outside the poll's margin of error. Gillum received 47.13 percent support compared to DeSantis' 43.82 percent. While our results show a small degree of separation between the candidates, this race is still up for grabs.

Incumbent Senator Bill Nelson is locked in a tie with Governor Rick Scott for one of Florida's two seats in the U.S. Senate. Scott currently holds a 1.5-point lead over Nelson. While polls released over the past several weeks have shown Nelson to have a slight lead in this race, ours is showing Scott making headway and gaining a marginal advantage.

Like the race for Governor and Senate, less than one point separates Republicans from Democrats on the generic House ballot. Additionally, when asked which party they wish to see controlling the U.S. House of Representatives after November's elections, there is an effective tie between those who would like to see Republicans maintain control and those who would prefer for Democrats reclaim the majority.

Finally, President Trump continues to be influential in how voters evaluate candidates. When asked how influential the President will be to their choice of candidate, 54 percent of all respondents indicate he will be extremely or very important. When asked to evaluate his performance in office, a statistical tie emerges with 48 percent strongly or somewhat approving of his job in office and 48 percent strongly or somewhat disapproving.

Acknowledgements

This survey would have never been possible without the dedication and professionalism of our call room employees: Connor Angell, Jollice Boyd, Esteban Cepero, Cheyenne Charles, Noelle Gascon, Alexis Goolsby, Lauren Lassiter, Morgan McDermott, Kevin Medina, Lexi Potter, Natalia Schulz, Catherine Stogner, and Kaitlynn Swanbeck. Special thanks are also due to the Center's student assistant, Shelby Welch, who helped manage this project, solved logistical problems and aided throughout the research process. All of the preceding individuals are current FSC students whose assistance made it possible to bring this study to fruition. Finally, this survey was supported substantially by the work of our field director, **Bill Rufty**, who managed the call room and offered his expertise from years of polling and reporting on Florida politics throughout the design and implementation stages.

Special thanks are also due to the administration of Florida Southern College, specifically our President, Dr. Anne Kerr, our Provost, Dr. Kyle Fedler, and the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Brad Hollingshead. This survey would not have been possible without the dedication and support of FSC students, faculty, and administration. The Florida Southern College Center for Polling and Policy Research is here to further the College's mission of preparing students through the use of dynamic and engaged learning opportunities. The College's generous funding of the Center make it possible for students to gain valuable firsthand experience fielding surveys and analyzing results.

Results

Andrew Gillum currently leads Ron DeSantis by approximately three percentage points in his bid to become the next governor of Florida. This difference is not outside the margin of error for this poll but comports with similar, recent, surveys showing the Democrat ahead. Both Gillum and DeSantis are enjoying considerable support from members of their own parties with Democrats choosing Gillum 95 percent to DeSantis' 1 percent. Likewise, 88 percent of Republicans support DeSantis compared to 6 percent supporting Gillum. Independents are breaking toward Gillum 46 to 33 percent in this sample. Our survey indicates a healthy gender gap between the two candidates with Gillum polling 15 points ahead of DeSantis among women.

Table 1: Gubernatorial Vote Choice

	Total	Party			Gender		Race			
		Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Native Am.
Andrew Gillum	47.13	94.46	5.74	46.37	42.06	51.98	40.10	89.76	57.02	100.00
Ron DeSantis	43.82	1.42	88.36	33.10	50.92	37.03	50.27	7.57	42.98	0.00
Other Candidate	5.26	3.11	4.30	10.05	2.84	7.58	5.82	0.00	0.00	0.00
Don't Know	3.79	1.01	1.60	10.48	4.17	3.42	3.81	2.67	0.00	0.00

	Hispanic		Age			
	Yes	No	18-29	30-44	45-64	64+
Andrew Gillum	62.71	45.15	58.72	56.68	37.23	46.22
Ron DeSantis	24.46	46.35	25.00	34.81	51.46	50.21
Other Candidate	7.27	5.02	12.82	0.64	8.54	1.67
Don't Know	5.56	3.48	3.46	7.87	2.77	1.90

These results are presented as the percent of each column providing a given response.

The margin of error for the poll is ± 4.49 (higher in subsamples of the data).

All cells are weighted by education, age, and race.

Respondents identifying themselves as Hispanic prefer Gillum to DeSantis, 63 to 24 percent. This 39 percent difference is second only to the preferences of African Americans who almost universally prefer the Democratic candidate. Interestingly, we see evidence that Gillum is attracting a younger base of support with over half of respondents aged 18 to 29 and 30 to 44 indicating they plan on voting for the candidate. DeSantis holds a substantial lead among those aged 45 to 64 and a smaller advantage among those 64 years old and older.

These poll results are showing signs of separation between the candidates for governor; however, they should not be interpreted as providing one with a clear advantage. The difference in support does not lie outside the poll's margin of error and the race is likely to be close through Election Day.

Senate

Florida's race for the U.S. Senate featuring the Democratic incumbent, Bill Nelson and current governor, Rick Scott is currently in a statistical tie. Our results show Scott slightly ahead of Nelson, 46 to 44.5 percentage points, but well within the margin of error. Both candidates appear to have

a solid grasp on their bases; however, 8 percent more independents currently support Nelson relative to Scott. As in the gubernatorial race, there is a slight gender gap with Scott receiving 9 percent less support among women. Scott’s outreach efforts to the Hispanic communities of Florida do not appear to be generating a sufficient amount of traction in these data; there is currently a 34 percent difference between the two candidates with almost 10 percent indicating they are undecided in the race. Examining this race by the age of our respondents, Scott holds an advantage among voters over the age of 44. Over half of both the 45 to 64 and over 64 age groups support his candidacy. Additionally, there appears to still be some opportunity for peeling away younger voters from “other” candidates as Election Day draws closer.

Table 2: U.S. Senate Vote Choice

	Total	Party			Gender		Race			
		Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Native Am.
Bill Nelson	44.48	86.92	6.75	46.36	39.95	48.80	38.94	75.05	57.02	100.00
Rick Scott	45.97	5.23	86.95	38.03	52.53	39.70	52.49	8.23	42.98	0.00
Other Candidate	5.93	6.94	3.26	7.45	4.66	7.14	5.44	10.13	0.00	0.00
Don’t Know	3.62	0.91	3.04	8.16	2.86	4.35	3.13	6.60	0.00	0.00

	Hispanic		Age			
	Yes	No	18-29	30-44	45-64	64+
Bill Nelson	55.36	43.11	48.23	53.24	39.07	42.01
Rick Scott	21.45	49.22	37.38	29.73	55.09	51.83
Other Candidate	13.37	4.95	10.93	8.41	4.42	3.78
Don’t Know	9.82	2.71	3.46	8.62	1.43	2.38

These results are presented as the percent of each column providing a given response.

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All cells are weighted by education, age, and race.

The race for Senate is still, decidedly, a toss-up. These results show Scott leading by approximately 1.5 points, but the margin of error of this poll does not allow us to place one candidate firmly ahead of the other.

House

Democrats hold a narrow, but not statistically significant, lead over Republicans on the generic House ballot question. When asked whom voters will support in their local House races, Democrats are about 1 percentage point ahead of Republicans statewide. Breaking this result down does not reveal many surprises, Democrats almost universally support their nominees (93 percent plan to vote for the Democratic candidate) and Republicans, the same (90 percent plan to vote for the Republican candidate). Interestingly, with approximately one month remaining before the November election, 21 percent of Independents still do not know whom they will support. This may prove fruitful to candidates in competitive House districts looking to gain an advantage in the waning weeks of the election cycle. Similar to the gubernatorial and senatorial races, these data include a 13-point advantage for Democrats among women and a 32 percent lead among Hispanic identifiers.

Table 3: Who Would You Vote For in Your District?

	Total	Party			Gender		Race			
		Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Native Am.
Democrat	42.40	92.93	1.41	38.46	33.73	50.69	34.98	84.88	57.02	100
Republican	41.52	0.40	90.07	24.29	45.67	37.55	48.31	7.57	25.65	0.00
Other Candidate	5.69	1.88	1.52	15.05	9.46	2.10	5.76	3.19	0.00	0.00
Don't Know	9.55	4.79	5.71	20.83	10.14	8.98	9.91	4.36	17.33	0.00
Refused	0.84	0.00	1.29	1.37	1.00	0.69	1.04	0.00	0.00	0.00

	Hispanic		Age			
	Yes	No	18-29	30-44	45-64	64+
Democrat	58.46	40.22	52.74	48.56	34.72	41.39
Republican	26.27	43.48	42.59	29.74	44.71	46.25
Other Candidate	9.56	5.20	1.89	8.54	7.94	3.04
Don't Know	5.71	10.14	2.78	13.16	10.2	9.32
Refused	0.00	0.96	0.00	0.00	2.43	0.00

These results are presented as the percent of each column providing a given response.

The margin of error for the poll is ± 4.49 (higher in subsamples of the data).

All cells are weighted by education, age, and race.

Table 4 reports the desire of respondents to see Republicans retain control of the House or their preference that it be taken over by the Democratic Party. Here we see about half of a percentage points separating the parties – roughly the same number of Floridians want the GOP in control of the House after this fall’s election than want the Democrats to regain power. Partisanship seems to be motivating much of this story with over 93 percent of members of both parties preferring their party have control.

Table 4: Would You Prefer Republicans or Democrats Control the House?

	Total	Party			Gender		Race			
		Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Native Am.
Republican	48.02	1.42	93.98	41.32	54.06	42.24	54.99	7.57	34.31	0.00
Democrat	47.97	93.63	4.83	52.53	40.63	54.98	41.21	91.00	57.02	100.00
Doesn't Matter	0.70	1.72	0.00	0.45	1.21	0.22	0.24	1.43	0.00	0.00
Don't Know	3.31	3.24	1.19	5.70	4.10	2.56	3.56	0.00	8.67	0.00

	Hispanic		Age			
	Yes	No	18-29	30-44	45-64	64+
Republican	24.21	51.19	43.81	36.47	54.51	51.09
Democrat	69.18	45.12	50.11	59.38	40.36	47.24
Doesn't Matter	2.86	0.41	2.63	0.00	0.82	0.26
Don't Know	3.76	3.27	3.46	4.15	4.31	1.41

These results are presented as the percent of each column providing a given response.

The margin of error for the poll is ± 4.49 (higher in subsamples of the data).

All cells are weighted by education, age, and race.

The Cook Political Report currently lists two Florida House races as toss-ups and two more in the leaning category. These data do not allow us to draw conclusions about specific races, but like those for governor and Senate our data reveal a close electoral environment.

President Trump

Turning to the impact of President Trump on Florida elections, our data reveal 54 percent of those surveyed say he will be “very” or “extremely” important to their electoral choices with 23 percent indicate, “not at all.” Among Republicans, 50 percent say he will be extremely important to their choice of candidates this November with only 15 percent responding his preferences will not affect them at all. Corresponding with this partisan story, these data show his impact is also likely to be seen among those over the age of 45 and those identifying as white. While our data do not allow us to fully appreciate the direction of the effect the President is likely to have on Florida races, they do show most voters are paying attention to his actions.

Table 5: Importance of Donald Trump to Your Electoral Choices

	Total	Party			Gender		Race			
		Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Native Am.
Extremely	40.24	36.42	49.87	30.68	42.07	38.49	41.70	28.45	32.54	0.00
Very	13.53	11.12	13.91	17.40	13.81	13.26	13.50	16.59	0.00	100.00
Somewhat	19.12	16.69	19.51	22.45	18.66	19.57	17.21	34.28	34.31	0.00
Not At All	22.69	28.46	15.21	25.00	24.07	21.38	23.29	20.02	0.00	0.00
Don't Know	4.42	7.32	1.80	4.47	1.39	7.31	4.31	0.66	33.14	0.00

	Hispanic		Age			
	Yes	No	18-29	30-44	45-64	64+
Extremely	37.29	40.50	16.58	36.54	45.87	46.18
Very	4.47	14.78	16.35	10.60	10.62	16.78
Somewhat	18.54	19.34	34.67	22.65	18.63	11.31
Not At All	39.71	20.34	32.40	24.80	20.51	19.89
Don't Know	0.00	5.05	0.00	5.41	4.37	5.84

These results are presented as the percent of each column providing a given response.

The margin of error for the poll is ± 4.49 (higher in subsamples of the data).

All cells are weighted by education, age, and race.

Finally, we asked respondents to evaluate the job President Trump is doing in office. We find 47 percent “strongly” or “somewhat” approve and 48 percent “somewhat” or “strongly” disapprove. Table 6 reveals partisanship is driving a great deal of variation in these numbers with almost 90 percent of Democrats indicating some form of disapproval and 90 percent of Republicans, some form of approval. Independents in Florida are split on the question with approximately 43 percent approving and 55 percent disapproving. Examining approval ratings among those identifying as Hispanic, we find disapproval rates substantially higher than approval – 65 percent versus 29 percent. These data also reveal a 12 point difference in overall approval ratings among women with 54 percent disapproving of his job in office and 42 percent approving.

Table 6: Approval of President Trump

	Total	Party			Gender		Race			
		Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Native Am.
Strongly Approve	34.12	0.79	72.03	20.71	35.26	33.03	39.89	2.75	8.67	0.00
Somewhat Approve	13.68	3.29	18.05	21.84	18.15	9.41	14.63	11.42	8.67	0.00
Somewhat Disapprove	7.77	11.91	2.89	10.09	5.78	9.67	8.36	4.29	0.00	0.00
Strongly Disapprove	40.47	77.67	4.72	44.84	36.67	44.10	34.81	70.87	57.02	100.00
Don't Know	2.74	5.45	1.38	0.31	2.47	3.01	1.44	9.24	10.64	0.00
Refused	1.22	0.89	0.93	2.21	1.68	0.79	0.87	1.43	15.01	0.00

	Hispanic		Age			
	Yes	No	18-29	30-44	45-64	64+
Strongly Approve	15.64	36.47	7.03	22.10	43.35	43.95
Somewhat Approve	13.34	13.82	27.41	16.93	12.04	7.92
Somewhat Disapprove	9.87	7.53	24.80	2.71	2.54	10.15
Strongly Disapprove	54.64	38.54	34.77	51.81	38.18	36.60
Don't Know	6.51	2.24	5.99	3.75	1.96	1.39
Refused	0.00	1.40	0.00	2.71	1.91	0.00

These results are presented as the percent of each column providing a given response.

The margin of error for the poll is ± 4.49 (higher in subsamples of the data).

All cells are weighted by education, age, and race.

President Trump is likely to continue influencing campaigns in Florida this November. Approximately 64 percent of Republicans indicate he is extremely or very important to their decision on which candidate to support during this upcoming election cycle. While our data do not allow us to ascertain how much his positions will help or hurt Republican candidates, it is reasonable to conclude that he will continue to influence how a significant portion of voters evaluate races this November.

Methodology

The 2018 Florida General Election Poll was conducted from Monday, October 1st through Friday, October 5th by live callers employed by the Florida Southern College Center for Polling and Policy Research. All callers are current students at Florida Southern College. Callers received training before beginning work and the survey instrument was precleared by the Institutional Review Board at Florida Southern College before implementation. The questionnaire was administered in both English and Spanish. Calls took place from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. daily to a randomly selected sample of registered Florida voters. The sampling process was conducted by Survey Sampling International, LLC and included a randomized draw of both landline and mobile phone numbers. The Florida Southern College Center for Polling and Policy Research funded this survey through the generosity of the College.

We received responses from 499 registered voters over the campaign, 476 of whom were evaluated to be likely voters. Only likely voters are used in these analyses. The margin of sampling error for this poll is 4.49. That means that in 19 out of 20 times the results would vary no more than 4.49 percentage points if every one of the more than 13 million registered voters in the state had been contacted. The margin of error will be higher for subsamples of these data.

In addition to sampling error variables such as nonresponse, question wording, context effects or news events that occur during the time of the survey could affect opinions. Survey weights are generated to correct for deviations between our sample's characteristics and the known population characteristics of the state's registered voters and the voting eligible population. To correct for nonresponse bias, these data are weighted based on the education, age, and race of our respondents. A raking approach is used to generate each weight and information about the population's characteristics were obtained from the Florida Secretary of State, Division of Elections reports and the 2017 American Community Survey 1-year supplement. The analysis was conducted using the R statistical environment and the 'survey' library.

Top-Line Results

All cells are percent values and are weighted by education, age, and race of the respondent. Screening questions are omitted from the following summary.

Question 1: Andrew Gillum and Ron DeSantis are running for governor. If November's election for governor were held today, whom would you support: Andrew Gillum, the Democrat, Ron DeSantis, the Republican, or some other candidate?

Candidate	Percent
Andrew Gillum	47.13
Ron DeSantis	43.82
Another Candidate	5.26
Don't Know	3.79
Refused	0.00

(N = 476)

Question 2: Bill Nelson and Rick Scott are running for the U.S. Senate. If the election for Senate were held today, whom would you support: Bill Nelson, the Democrat, Rick Scott, the Republican, or some other candidate?

Candidate	Percent
Bill Nelson	44.48
Rick Scott	45.97
Another Candidate	5.93
Don't Know	3.62
Refused	0.00

(N = 476)

Question 3: If the election for Congress were held today, would you vote for the Democratic candidate in your district, the Republican candidate in your district, or some other candidate?

Party	Percent
Democrats	42.40
Republicans	41.52
Other Candidate	5.69
Don't Know	9.55
Refused	0.84

(N = 476)

Question 4: Overall, would you prefer Republicans to retain control of the U.S. House of Representatives or would you prefer Democrats to take control?

Party	Percent
Republicans	48.02
Democrats	47.97
Doesn't Matter	0.70
Don't Know	3.31
Refused	0.00

(N = 476)

Question 5: Do you approve or disapprove of the job Donald Trump is doing as president?

	Percent
Strongly Approve	34.12
Somewhat Approve	13.68
Somewhat Disapprove	7.77
Strongly Disapprove	40.47
Don't Know	2.74
Refused	1.22

(N = 476)

Question 6: How important will Donald Trump be to your electoral decisions this November?
Extremely, Very, Somewhat, or Not at all important?

	Percent
Extremely	40.24
Very	13.53
Somewhat	19.12
Not At All	22.69
Don't Know	4.42
Refused	0.00

(N = 476)

Question 7: Party identification of respondent

	Percent
Democrat	34.40
Republican	37.84
Independent	25.52
Another Party	1.50
Don't Know	0.73
Refused	0.00

(N = 476)

Question 9: Would you describe yourself as Male or Female?

	Percent
Male	48.86
Female	51.14
Other Gender	0.00
Don't Know	0.00
Refused	0.00

(N = 476)

Question 10: What is your age?

	Percent
18 to 29	13.04
30 to 44	20.85
45 to 64	34.53
Over 64	30.74
Don't Know	0.08
Refused	1.03

(N = 476)

Question 11: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

	Percent
Less than High School	5.65
High School	25.61
Some College	21.52
Associate's Degree	11.65
Bachelor's Degree	21.82
Professional Degree	13.35
Don't Know	0.16
Refused	0.23

(N = 476)

Question 12: To ensure we have a representative sample, would you please tell me whether you are from a Hispanic or Spanish-speaking background?

	Percent
Yes	11.99
No	87.40
Don't Know	0.14
Refused	0.47

(N = 476)

Question 13: Again, for statistical purposes, what is the race you most identify with – white, black, Asian, Native American, or something else?

	Percent
White	80.71
Black	11.84
Asian	2.36
Native American	0.41
Other	3.67
Don't Know	0.16
Refused	0.86

(N = 476)