

2024 poll: DeSantis slides as Trump surges to 1st.

Andrew Romano

A new Yahoo News/YouGov poll shows that after trailing for the last three months, former President Donald **Trump has suddenly surged to a substantial lead over Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis** in a two-man matchup for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination. Previously, DeSantis led Trump 45% to 41% among Republican voters. **Now Trump leads DeSantis 47% to 39%** — a net swing of 12 percentage points in Trump's direction since early February. The survey of 1,516 U.S. adults, which was conducted from Feb. 23 to 27, suggests that Trump could prove more resilient in 2024 than his rivals had hoped — and more difficult for someone like DeSantis to defeat. Other national surveys, including prior Yahoo News/YouGov polls, have consistently placed the former president atop a multi-candidate GOP pack, where the non-Trump vote is split among several alternatives. But the recent Yahoo News/YouGov poll is the first to find that Trump has vaulted past DeSantis — by far his strongest challenger — in a one-on-one contest.

This movement is striking because outwardly, little has transpired over the last three weeks to predict such a rapid shift in Trump's standing. Yet it may be a combination of subtle factors that has propelled him back into his party's pole position: a Feb. 22 campaign stop in East Palestine, Ohio, the site of the Feb. 3 train derailment; a lull in the various probes into his business dealings and efforts to overturn the 2020 election; and the continued reluctance on the part of other would-be Republican nominees to attack him directly.

Whatever the cause, **Trump's February comeback signals that going forward, many, if not most, Republicans and Republican-leaning independents will have no problem returning to their former standard bearer** in the absence of some compelling, countervailing force — such as a sharp GOP challenge or a criminal conviction. The Trump bounce is evident throughout the new Yahoo News/YouGov poll. Nearly half of Republican and Republican-leaning voters (49%), for instance, now say they prefer him for the 2024 GOP nomination over “someone else” (38%) — an 11-point margin, up from 5 points in early February (45% to 40%). Trump has also picked up 8 points over the last three weeks, climbing from 37% to 45%, when pitted against a wider field of nine other potential GOP opponents. DeSantis's support, meanwhile, has fallen by 6 points (from 35% to 29%). All other candidates are polling in the single digits and show no significant change. Likewise, Trump has gained 5 points (up from 38% to 43%) in a hypothetical three-way matchup against DeSantis (who gets 31%, down from 35%) and former South Carolina governor and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley (8%, down from 11%). Unlike DeSantis, who is expected to launch his 2024 campaign later this spring, Haley has already announced that she is running for the Republican nomination.

And when asked who has the “best chance” of winning the 2024 election, registered voters who are Republicans or Republican-leaning independents are now just as likely to say Trump (43%) as DeSantis (44%). In December, DeSantis led Trump by a wide margin — 48% to 39% — on this key measure of “electability.” To be sure, such results reflect a relatively small subgroup of Republicans and Republican leaners and carry a wider margin of error than the survey as a whole. And the 49% support that Trump currently registers against “someone else,” while a significant increase from the 41-43% he was earning in December and January, is still shy of the 54% he was attracting as recently as September. So far, his rebound among Republican voters remains partial.

Still, Trump's gains have been sizable enough to put him ahead of President Biden in a general-election survey for the first time since last June. Earlier this month, Biden (47%) led Trump (41%) by 6 points among registered voters. **Now Trump (45%) narrowly edges out Biden (43%).** For Trump, that 45% matches his highest level of support in any Yahoo News/YouGov poll conducted since October 2021.

The survey does not show any real deterioration in views of Biden over the last few weeks. The president's current job-approval rating (41% approve, 53% disapprove) is nearly identical to the rating he received in early February (41% approve, 52% disapprove), and his approval numbers across 10 specific issue areas were either unchanged or slightly higher than before. But the results do hint at one difference in perception that may be hurting Biden and helping Trump in a hypothetical head-to-head matchup. The number of Americans who believe either politician would be a “stronger candidate now than he was in 2020” is relatively small. Yet more

say **Trump would be stronger (29%) than say the same about Biden (20%)** — and while Biden's number has flatlined in recent months, Trump has risen (from 25% in December).

It's likely that Biden's age is a factor here. Informed that "Joe Biden would be 82 at the start of his second term and 86 at the end of it," a full 65% of Americans say he is "too old for another term as president." Informed of Trump's age — "78 at the start of his second term and 82 at the end of it" — just 45% say the same about him. Relatedly, Trump also has an advantage over Biden, though narrower, on the issue of competence. More Americans (42%) say Trump "has the competence to carry out the job of president" than say the same about Biden (35%). The last time Yahoo News and YouGov asked this question, in August 2021, the share who said Biden had the competence to serve as president was 11 points higher (46%).