



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on February 17, 2022

Florida Governor's Race Likely to Be DeSantis vs. Crist

Fortune appears to be favoring Democrat Charlie Crist's bid for the governorship of Florida, but will Ron DeSantis' star power lead the sitting governor to certain reelection?

Representative Crist, a former governor of Florida who has gone from Republican to Independent to Democrat over the years and lost his previous two races for statewide office, has [risen to front-runner status](#) in the Democrat primary for Florida governor.

With six months before the August 23 primary election, Crist has succeeded in out-fundraising his opponents and has also garnered the support of many of the state's most influential black politicians. He has performed well in recent polls, including one released Tuesday that showed him leading the other two primary candidates by double digits.

Joshua Karp, an advisor to Crist, said the 65-year-old politician is "running a powerful campaign fueled by the momentum of our grassroots supporters."

But Democrats have a major challenge ahead of them in their quest to take the governor's mansion. Florida hasn't had a Democrat governor since 1999.

And Democrats' prospects in what was once considered a purple state appear to have diminished in the wake of the 2020 election, in which Republican gains among key demographics (including Hispanics) gave President Trump a three-point victory over Joe Biden — a remarkable improvement over the usual razor-thin margins of presidential elections.

Moreover, Republicans have reversed Democrats' previous decade-long advantage in voter registration. As *Politico* notes, DeSantis' strong stance on various hot-button issues has made him extremely popular both inside and outside of Florida:

DeSantis, too, has seen his profile in Florida and across the nation rise after his fights against Covid-19 mandates as well as his full-throated embrace of culture war issues like eradicating critical race theory and railing against illegal immigration. That has translated to sky-high approval ratings and more than \$81 million in cash. A recent Mason-Dixon poll had DeSantis' job approval rating at 53 percent overall but 89 percent among Republicans, and with an 8-point lead over Crist.

That same poll had Crist, who once served as a Republican governor but switched parties in the aftermath of the tea party wave, with a 17-point edge over Democratic primary



AP Images

Ron DeSantis and Charlie Crist



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challenger Nikki Fried, the state's agriculture commissioner, and a 41-point margin over Annette Taddeo, a Miami-area state senator.

Amid Crist's improved primary situation, Fried has begun restructuring her campaign. Her team announced on Tuesday that her chief of staff, Matthew Van Name, would be leaving his post within the state government in order to work as a strategic manager for the campaign. This comes after Fried's campaign manager, Farah Melendez, left after just six months on the job.

Fried said in a statement that hiring Van Name was a prelude to her getting "fired up to win this primary and beat DeSantis.... It's about to get real."

But Crist doesn't have the primary race in the bag yet. Brad Coker, CEO and managing director for Mason-Dixon, said a lot can still change, pointing to the fact that the poll that has Crist ahead in the Democratic field also shows that 26 percent of primary voters are still undecided.

"Although politically active observers are following this, the average voter hasn't paid much attention," Coker said. "They don't know Charlie Crist is in the race. They don't know who Nikki Fried is."

While still serving as governor, Crist ran for U.S. Senate in 2010 as an Independent after falling from grace within the GOP, losing his bid to Republican Marco Rubio. Four years later, he unsuccessfully tried getting his old job back, running as a Democrat against then-governor Rick Scott.

Since May, Crist has followed a methodical approach to campaigning, traveling the state, lining up endorsements and releasing policy proposals on issues he claims DeSantis is ignoring. He's picked up major amounts of donor money, boasting \$4.26 million in the bank as of the end of January.

Taddeo, who was on Crist's ticket as the Democrat lieutenant governor nominee in 2014, considers herself the "underdog" in the race but launched a plan in February to visit all 67 counties in the state. On the fundraising side, she finds her hands tied somewhat as a lawmaker, as Florida law prohibits her from raising money during the legislature's two-month long legislative session.

But this week's Mason-Dixon poll had DeSantis ahead of Crist by eight points and ahead of Fried by 11 points.

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