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USA

# DeSantis, also a Far-Right Candidate, Challenges Trump for Republican Nomination

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### **Will Donald Trump be the Republican nominee in 2024? Could Ron DeSantis, another far-right Republican who announced his candidacy last week, defeat him in the party primary? And what would that mean for the election and for America if he did?**

Several Republican candidates are challenging former president Trump, but the leading contender is Florida governor DeSantis who is as far right as Trump himself. While Trump is a charismatic rightwing wildcard, DeSantis is a serious and systematic far right politician. Though their styles are different, their politics are virtually identical.

DeSantis has sterling elite credentials. He graduated from Yale University, studied law at Harvard, served for fifteen years in the U.S. Navy becoming a lieutenant commander, then as a U.S. Justice Department attorney.

Then, elected to Congress, he was a founding member of the rightwing Freedom Caucus and a Trump supporter. He opposed any tax increases to fight global warming, He worked to repeal President Barack Obama's Affordable Health Care Act. He opposed gun controls. He opposed progressive immigration laws. And he opposed the special counsel investigation into Trump and Russian interference in the 2016 election.

In 2018 DeSantis ran for governor of Florida on the Trump program of building a border wall to exclude immigrants and "Make America Great Again." And he won.

During the COVID pandemic, DeSantis resisted such health measures as facemasks, stay-at-home orders, and vaccination requirements as well as signing a law that forbid businesses from requiring proof of vaccination. Consequently, the state experienced surges in infections and hospitalizations and was 27 out of 50 in deaths per capita in April 2021. His business-as-usual policies, combined with federal stimulus funds, and tax cuts led to a booming economy, and he was reelected governor by a historic 19.4 percent lead over his Democratic Party challenger.

DeSantis characterizes his ideology as "anti-woke." He opposes "critical race theory," that is, teaching about the history of racism, takes anti-LGBTQ positions, and he worked to exclude transgender girls from sports as well as forbidding discussions of sexual orientation and gender from the schools, the notorious "don't say gay" law. When the Walt Disney Company, which owns Disney World in Orlando, Florida opposed the law, DeSantis responded by ending the company's special independent administrative district and is now involved in a series of lawsuits with Disney. In a bizarre publicity stunt attack on immigrants, DeSantis sent his agents to Austin, Texas to recruit Venezuelan asylum-seekers whom he then flew to liberal Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts where they were abandoned. DeSantis has also signed a law that makes abortion illegal after six weeks of pregnancy. He has called for putting armed guards into schools, expanding stand-your-ground laws to include shooting looters, and signed a law permitting carrying concealed weapons.

According to the latest polls, 55 percent of Republicans support Trump and only 20 percent support DeSantis, but the latter is far ahead of the rest of the field, each of whom has only between 1 and 5 percent support. If for some reason, Republicans should turn away from Trump—which seems unlikely even if Trump were indicted and convicted of a felony—at present, DeSantis seems like he would be the leading candidate.

As a candidate against President Joe Biden, who is 80 years old, DeSantis' age of 44 would be a great advantage. DeSantis would also be the favorite-son candidate of Florida, a crucial swing state. But in other key states, where

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independent voters will determine the outcome, he would find it hard to win a majority, having alienated many women, LGBTQ people, Blacks and Latinos. His far-right record makes clear that his election would be a disaster for the country and especially for its working people.

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*PS:*

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