

Tampa Bay Times



WINNER OF 10 PULITZER PRIZES

Times poll: Rick Scott leads Charlie Crist, 41-36



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Tuesday, September 2, 2014 11:00pm

Republican Gov. Rick Scott has opened up a 5-point lead over Democratic rival Charlie Crist as a new *Tampa Bay Times*/Bay News 9/UF Bob Graham Center poll finds Florida voters mostly optimistic about the state's economic direction but decidedly sour on their gubernatorial choices.

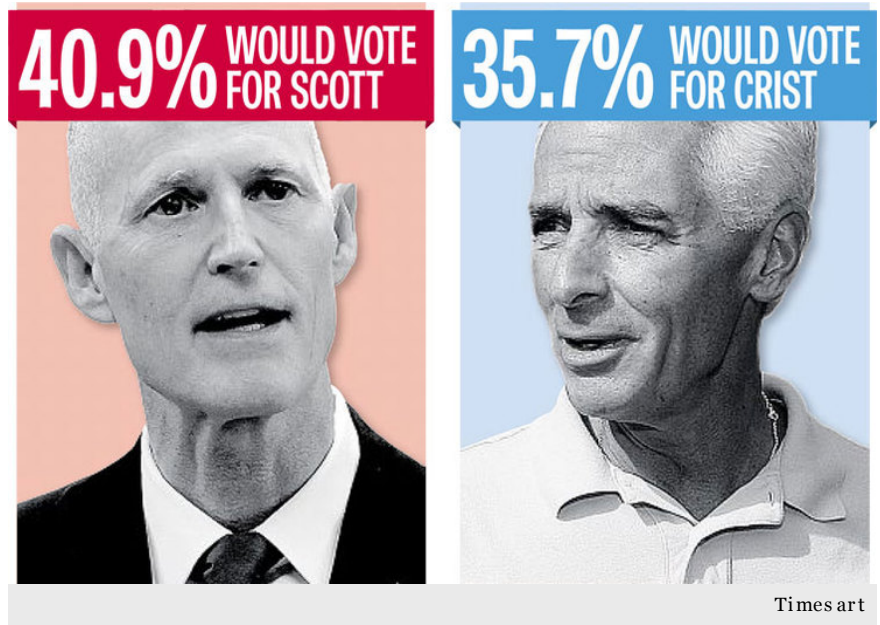
Scott received support from 40.9 percent of those surveyed, Crist drew 35.7 percent and Libertarian Adrian Wyllie 6.3 percent. When asked to choose between only Scott and Crist, Scott's lead grew to 6 points over Crist, 43.7 percent to 37.6 percent.

An overwhelming seven in 10 voters said the governor "can do a lot" about the state's economy, while 48.7 percent said Florida's economy is recovering and another 25.2 percent said it will recover soon.

"If I were Rick Scott, I'd be playing up the economy as he has been. I would take this poll result and I would run with it," said Dr. Christopher McCarty, director of the UF Survey Research Center and director of the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research.

The poll suggests Crist would be wise to try and debunk Scott's efforts to take credit for Florida's improving economy, as well as to press his slight advantage over Scott as the candidate perceived as understanding voters' problems.

The telephone survey of 814 registered Florida voters — all likely to vote in the November election — was conducted Aug. 27-31 for the *Tampa Bay Times*, Bay News 9 and News 13 of Orlando by the University of Florida's Bob Graham Center for Public Service and Bureau of Economic and Business Research. The poll, which included respondents using landlines and cellphones, has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.4 percentage points. Results were weighted by age, party identification and media market, thus allowing the results to mirror the distribution of age groups, party identification and media market in the Florida Voter File.



The governor's race between the multimillionaire former hospital chain CEO and the former Republican governor trying to make history as a Democrat has emerged as one of the nation's marquee races of 2014. Floridians have never before seen a volume of negative advertising as they have in this race, and the poll shows the toll it's taking.

Only 35.4 percent of likely voters described Crist as honest and ethical and 53 percent said the Democratic nominee is not. Thirty-seven percent said Crist can be trusted and 53 percent — said he can't be, including 29 percent of Democrats.

Scott performed slightly better but still poorly when voters were asked about specific descriptions, with 39 percent calling him honest and ethical and 50.7 percent saying he's not. Voters were closely divided on the governor's trustworthiness, with 44.3 percent saying he can be trusted, and 45.5 percent saying otherwise. Even among Republicans, roughly one in four said he can't be trusted and is not honest.

Scott also outperformed Crist on the question of leadership, with 53.4 percent saying Scott "provides leadership" and only 46.6 percent saying the same for Crist.

Scott has spent at least \$25.6 million on TV ads, many of them attacking Crist as a slick politician and lousy governor and highlighting Crist's formerly close relationship with Scott Rothstein, an attorney serving a 50-year prison sentence for running a Ponzi scheme. Crist and Democrats have spent about \$9.6 million on TV so far, featuring old footage of Scott being evasive in a deposition and calling the governor "too shady for the Sunshine State."

"This is not a case in which we've got two gubernatorial candidates who are captivating voters by their integrity and their leadership," said David Colburn, interim director of the Bob Graham Center for Public Service. "The voters are troubled by these candidates, and it seems to me anything can happen over the last two months."

The lack of enthusiasm was reflected in interviews with poll respondents.

"Rick Scott has his baggage but I look at the overall economy in the state" and it's in "pretty good shape," said Ron Bates, a 66-year-old pastor in Ocoee who expects to vote for Scott as the lesser of two evils.

Crist strikes Bates as a politician more interested in his own political future than Florida's.

"I don't know if I can trust him because ... he switched overnight, quicker than you can say 'Ouch,'" Bates said.

But Judy Barber, a 68-year-old church administrative assistant who switched from Republican to Democrat last year views Scott as a "white-collar criminal" who is "too much for the rich people."

She appreciated Crist as governor and said he is "honest and open with what he says."

Overall, voters were closely divided on both major candidates' performance as governor. Nearly 46 percent said they approved of how Crist handled the job and 40.8 percent disapproved. Nearly 47 percent said they approved of Scott's job performance and 45.8 percent disapproved.

The poll found Crist leading comfortably among independent voters, pulling 35 percent support compared to 27 percent for Scott, and nearly 6 percent for Libertarian Wyllie. But Democrats typically need to win women voters to win a statewide election, and Crist and Scott were effectively tied among likely women voters, 37 percent for Crist and 38.5 percent for Scott.

Still more bad news for Crist: Fewer than 12 percent of Republican voters said they are backing him, while nearly 15 percent of likely Democratic voters said they supported Scott.

Angela Morales, a 39-year-old restaurant manager in Fort Myers, is a Democrat who expects to vote for Scott because she sees the economy improving in Southwest Florida.

"I think he's done a good job with the recovery. Especially down here, we've got a few companies moving into the area that are providing jobs and revenue," she said. "Charlie Crist did a good job the first time. I think it's kind of weird that he switched parties. I'd just like to see what Rick Scott could do with another four years."

Scott also enjoys a double-digit lead over Crist in Tampa Bay, the former governor's home turf and a bellwether region for statewide elections, though the margin of error is considerably higher for subgroups in the poll.

Wyllie so far appears to be having little impact on the race, though he has been invited to participate in one of three televised debates. The poll suggests Wyllie pulls voters from both Crist and Scott, though slightly more from Democrats.

"He's not looking like a spoiler at this point," said McCarty.

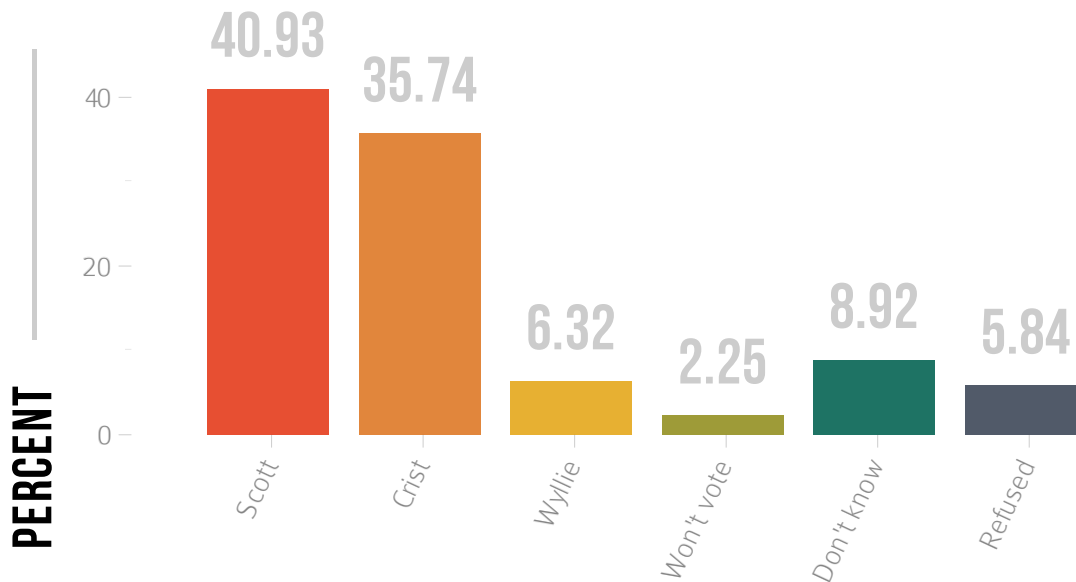
About 35 percent of those surveyed were identified as Republicans, 30 percent as Democrats and nearly 26 percent as independents. While Florida has more registered Democrats than Republicans, Republicans tend to have considerably higher turnout in off-year elections.

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TIMES/BAY NEWS 9/UF BOB GRAHAM CENTER POLL FLORIDA GOVERNOR

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GOVERNOR'S ELECTION: SCOTT VS. CRIST VS. WYLLIE



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