

## Rubio/Bush—Who remains on the stage makes a huge difference in Florida

- Trump leads the GOP presidential primary field in Florida today
- If Bush drops out before March 15<sup>th</sup>, his voters appear ready to flock to Rubio
- If Rubio drops out before March 15<sup>th</sup>, Rubio's voters look set to splinter between Cruz/Carson/Bush
- Trump's success or failure in Florida depends entirely on whether non-Trump voters find a single alternative – and who that alternative is

Viewpoint Florida conducted a survey of likely Republican Presidential preference primary voters in Florida the evening after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republican presidential debate was held in Colorado and broadcast nationwide on CNBC. Our survey sought to capture where the field stood in the first hours after the widely-watched campaign event.

Our key findings are shared below, along with frequencies and crosstabulations of our survey results.

- Florida's likely Presidential Preference Primary voters have shuffled about a bit in the month since we last surveyed the race for the Republican presidential nomination. Donald Trump remains the leader with 27% support, just a hair under his 29% showing in our September survey, suggesting at a minimum a lack of movement among his base of support – for better or worse for his electoral prospects. Marco Rubio holds steady in 2<sup>nd</sup> place with 16% support with Ben Carson a close 3<sup>rd</sup> at 15%. Ted Cruz and Jeb Bush tie for 4<sup>th</sup> place at 12% and Carly Fiorina falls to 6<sup>th</sup> place at 4%, after tying for 2<sup>nd</sup> place in our September survey.
- We asked half of our survey respondents how they would vote if Jeb Bush were to drop out of the Republican primary before Florida's elections on March 15<sup>th</sup>. Trump maintains his 27% share, while Rubio climbs within the margin of error with 24%. Carson holds steady at 15%, Cruz holds at 12% and Fiorina up to 6%. Rubio picks up 43% of Bush's votes, while 29% of Bush voters were undecided or picking somebody else if the former Governor were to withdraw.
- We asked the other half of our survey respondents the same question, only with Marco Rubio being the withdrawn candidate instead of Bush. Here, Trump's support holds steady at 28%, followed by Ben Carson at 19%, Cruz at 19% and Bush at 17%. Unlike Bush's voters who were much more likely to flock to Rubio in Bush's absence, Rubio's voters scatter in equal proportions to Cruz (24%), Bush (23%) and Carson (22%), with Trump picking up 14% of Rubio voters as well.

- Among Hispanic voters in particular, Rubio collects a larger share if Bush were to withdraw than Bush would if Rubio were to withdraw. Here, it would appear that Ted Cruz is a confounding factor for Bush, collecting 27% support with Hispanic respondents to Bush's 52% in the ballot test without Rubio. By contrast, Rubio wins 63% of Hispanic respondents in his ballot test without Bush, while Cruz earns just 10%.
- As other public surveys and ours have indicated, the top 6 candidates in Florida are the clear preferred picks of the overwhelming majority of likely presidential preference primary voters. 87% of our survey respondents told us they would vote for one of these six candidates, with only 13% backing another candidate or still undecided. This would suggest that while primary voters have plenty of options to vet and shift to before March 15<sup>th</sup>, they may be comfortable with these top 6 options and have little interest in the candidates who remain. Florida's primary election can remain hard to predict, but if indeed primary voters have winnowed down their preferences to these six candidates, the race may become a bit less chaotic going forward.
- At least in Florida, it does not appear that Carly Fiorina has been able to sustain the intense bump she got from her debate performance in California last month. Her 15% showing just after that debate has dropped down to 4%, and if anybody, Senator Ted Cruz may be the biggest beneficiary of his own performance Wednesday night. Cruz has doubled his 6% showing from September to 12% as of this week. It is possible that Cruz's boost in support will be similarly short-lived, as Fiorina's appears to have been. Maintaining whatever boost Cruz gets will prove a telling test of his campaign infrastructure, long reported to be more robust than Fiorina's.

### *Methodology*

The survey was fielded by Viewpoint Florida on the evening of October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015 and morning of October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015 using telephone interviews conducted using interactive voice response (IVR) technology among respondents identified as using landline telephones.

The survey was offered to respondents in English and in Spanish, and given the limitations of IVR survey work offered a presidential primary ballot test to registered Republicans that features the Top 6 primary candidates in Florida based on most recent publicly available polling results of Republican primary voters. These top 6 candidates are:

- 1) JEB BUSH
- 2) BEN CARSON
- 3) TED CRUZ
- 4) CARLY FIORINA
- 5) MARCO RUBIO
- 6) DONALD TRUMP



A followup question was asked in two different ways to provide a split sample of responses based on how voters might respond to either former Governor Jeb Bush or Senator Marco Rubio dropping out of the presidential primary race before Florida's primary election on 15 March 2016.

Our topline results and crosstabulations and analysis are conducted based on the combined results of these two split groups, and you can also view topline and crosstabs for the individual split samples to observe where variance in candidate performance does occur. All 2,047 respondents completed questions 1-3 and 5-7 with the same question language and response orders.

Respondents are registered voters in the state of Florida registered with the Republican Party of Florida, and who have voted in at least one of the last two presidential primary elections, and at least 2 of the last four primary and general elections in 2012 and 2014. If a respondent has not voted in either of the last two presidential primary elections because they were not registered to vote until after the 2012 presidential preference primary, they were included in our sample if they had voted in at least two of the last four primary and general elections in 2012 and 2014. A total of 2,047 respondents completed the survey over those nights, and results are weighted to the proportions of Republican voter turnout in the 2012 Republican presidential preference primary election by age, gender, race and media market. Results have a margin of error of +/- 2.2% within a confidence interval of 95%.