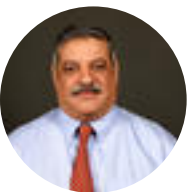


Wasserman Schultz has 10-point lead over challenger Canova, poll shows



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Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz has a 10-point lead over challenger Tim Canova, a South Florida Sun Sentinel/Florida Atlantic University poll shows, as the candidates approach the Democratic primary finish line.

The Sun Sentinel/FAU poll found Wasserman Schultz was the choice of 50 percent of likely Democratic voters in the Broward/Miami-Dade County 23rd Congressional District. Canova had 40 percent.

Each candidate can point to something positive in the findings.

"He's doing better, at least in our polling numbers, than typically a challenger to an incumbent does," said FAU political scientist Kevin Wagner. "Ideally, if you're the incumbent, you'd like to have a bigger cushion. But I don't think there's an election where a person looks at a poll and sees they're up by double digits and thinks that's a bad thing."

The incumbent was preferred by men, older voters, people who voted for Hillary Clinton in the Democratic presidential primary, and those with a favorable view of President Barack Obama. Women also supported Wasserman Schultz, but not as strongly as men.

The challenger was ahead with younger voters, people who wanted Bernie Sanders to win the presidential nomination, and those who have an unfavorable view of Obama.

The Democratic congressional primary between Wasserman Schultz and Canova is Aug. 30; voting by mail and in-person early voting is underway.

The Business and Economics Polling Initiative surveyed 400 likely Democratic voters in the 23rd Congressional District for the Sun Sentinel from Wednesday through Friday. The margin of error for the poll, which was conducted by an interactive voice response system, is plus or minus 5 percentage points, said Monica Escaleras, director of the polling initiative.

The district is so overwhelmingly Democratic that the winner of the Canova-Wasserman Schultz primary is

virtually guaranteed to win the November general election.

For Wasserman Schultz, 2016 has been the most challenging year of her 25 years in public life. She has a well-funded primary challenger, was criticized for months by Sanders, and resigned her position last month as chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee.

Still, Democratic voters in the 23rd District view her positively. She is seen favorably by 58 percent of the Democratic voters in the Sun Sentinel/FAU poll and unfavorably by 35 percent, a net positive of 23 points.

Just 7 percent said they were undecided or had never heard of Wasserman Schultz, who is serving her sixth term in Congress and spent more than five years as chairwoman of the national party.

Canova, a professor of law and public finance at Nova Southeastern University who has never before run for public office, was viewed favorably by 46 percent and unfavorably by 22 percent, giving him a net positive of 24 points.

A total of 32 percent said they were undecided or had never heard of Canova.

Neither Wasserman Schultz nor Canova came close to the stellar approval Obama enjoys among 23rd District Democrats. He was viewed favorably by 86 percent and unfavorably by 12 percent of voters, a net positive of 74 points.

Obama has endorsed Wasserman Schultz, as has Clinton, who showed her support with an Aug. 9 visit to the congresswoman's Davie campaign headquarters.

The Sun Sentinel/FAU poll found 42 percent said Clinton's support would make them more likely to vote for Wasserman Schultz, 22 percent said it would make them less likely to vote for her, and 36 percent said it would make no difference.

Sanders' endorsement of Canova is less influential with 23rd District Democrats. It would make 31 percent more likely to support Canova, 26 percent less likely to support him, and 43 percent said it would make no difference.

Those findings aren't surprising, as Democrats in the district are solidly with Clinton. In the 23rd District, Clinton got 68 percent of the vote in the March 15 Democratic presidential primary.

"Barack Obama is relatively popular there among the Democrats, as is Hillary Clinton. That support translates pretty well" for Wasserman Schultz, Wagner said. A candidate like Canova who is challenging the system "would probably do better in a district that is more dissatisfied with the Democratic leadership."

The poll shows 68 percent of Clinton voters are supporting Wasserman Schultz and 81 percent of Sanders

voters support Canova.

Breakdowns by age mirror the presidential primaries, when younger voters preferred Sanders and older voters chose Clinton.

The Sun Sentinel/FAU poll found 69 percent of voters ages 18 to 34 favored Canova.

Democrats from 35 to 54 were essentially tied, with 45 percent for Canova and 43 percent for Wasserman Schultz.

From age 55 to 74, voters preferred Wasserman Schultz 55 percent to 34 percent. Among voters 75 and older, 69 percent favored Wasserman Schultz.

Although it's tricky to draw conclusions about different demographic groups because the sample sizes are small, making the margins of error high, Wagner said the results show Canova needs to motivate younger voters if he has any hope of prevailing.

"The key for him, if he's going to pull an upset, he has to get a lot more energy in those younger voters," Wagner said. "He has to motivate some of those younger voters to come out, and that's hard to do in a primary."

DNC and WikiLeaks

For much of 2016, Sanders complained that the Democratic National Committee — which Wasserman Schultz led from 2011 until last month — was unfairly tilting the presidential nominating process toward Clinton.

Wasserman Schultz repeatedly denied pro-Clinton bias in the way she ran the DNC. But in July, WikiLeaks published hacked Democratic Party emails showing some party staffers had been favoring Clinton. A political furor erupted, Wasserman Schultz resigned as party chairwoman, and Canova enjoyed a bonanza of publicity and campaign contributions.

The Sun Sentinel/FAU poll found 87 percent of Democratic voters in South Florida said they were aware of the release of DNC emails and 93 percent said they were aware of Wasserman Schultz's resignation as party chairwoman.

The fallout from the emails appears to be marginally negative for Wasserman Schultz. The Sun Sentinel/FAU poll found that 35 percent of Democratic likely voters said revelations that DNC staffers favored Clinton over Sanders made them less likely to vote for Wasserman Schultz.

Another 29 percent said the revelations made them more likely to vote for her and 36 percent said it made

no difference.

Iran deal

Obama's agreement with Iran aimed at preventing that country from developing a nuclear weapon was a major issue on the national stage in 2015. It especially resonated in the 23rd District, which is home to a large Jewish community concerned about Israel, which opposed the deal.

Wasserman Schultz voted for the agreement, which she said was the most difficult and complex vote she's cast during her time in public office.

Canova said in July he had concerns about the deal but didn't know how he would have voted because he didn't have access to classified briefings on the issue. In January, he said he would have supported the agreement.

Among 23rd District Democrats, 43 percent support the Iran deal, 17 percent are opposed, 31 percent are undecided and 9 percent say they have never heard of it.

Among voters who support the Iran deal, 55 percent support Wasserman Schultz. Canova is the choice of 63 percent of those who oppose the agreement.

Data breakdown

The poll found the candidates are strongest where they live.

The Weston area, home to Wasserman Schultz, favors her 59 percent to 30 percent for Canova. The Hollywood area, where Canova lives, prefers him 57 percent to 35 percent for Wasserman Schultz.

Other Broward parts of the district were much closer: The Davie area favored Wasserman Schultz 45 percent to 42 percent and the Pembroke Pines area favored Wasserman Schultz 48 percent to 44 percent.

The survey also found men supported Wasserman Schultz over Canova, 56 percent to 40 percent. Among women, Wasserman Schultz led by less, 46 percent to 41 percent.

Wagner said he didn't know what to make of the gender difference.

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