

DeSantis vs. Newsom: a Scorecard

Here's a cheat sheet to keep track of Thursday's debate between the Florida and California governors.

By WSJ The Editorial Board

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Gavin Newsom and [Ron DeSantis](#) are set to square off Thursday evening in a Fox News debate, and it should be instructive. Besides offering voters a look of the alternatives to [Joe Biden](#) and [Donald Trump](#), the showdown between the California and Florida governors could provide a revealing policy contrast.

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Sacramento has rushed to the left in recent decades while Tallahassee has moved to the right. Since winning election in 2018, Messrs. Newsom and DeSantis have advanced sharply different policies on Covid lockdowns, taxes, school choice and climate regulation, among other things. In case you'll be keeping track at home, here is a scorecard of policy results.

- *Employment.* Since January 2019, employment has increased by 1,031,030 in Florida while declining by 85,438 in California. Amid Mr. Newsom's prolonged Covid lockdowns, businesses and workers moved to places with a lower tax burden and cost of living. Florida's population is 22.2 million and rising, while California's is 39 million and falling.
- *Unemployment.* Despite a shrinking labor force, California's 4.8% jobless rate is the second highest in the country and nearly twice as high as Florida's (2.8%). California has paid \$48.7 billion in unemployment benefits since January 2019—nine times as much as Florida. One reason for the disparity: Fewer Californians are starting businesses.
- *Business formation.* Florida has received 2.7 million new business applications since January 2019—one for every eight residents—compared to 2.3 million for California, or about one for every 18 residents. Small businesses in California pay a top income-tax rate of 13.3% compared to zero in Florida, contributing to the Golden State's more onerous business burden.
- *Personal income.* Business and worker earnings have increased by an annual compounded 7.7% (in current dollars) in Florida since the first quarter of 2019 compared to 5% in California. Had California's earnings grown at the same rate as Florida's, the Golden State would be about \$255 billion richer and collect tens of billions of dollars in more tax revenue.

- *Population migration.* Between July 2019 and July 2022—the latest available Census Bureau data—1,044,494 Californians left for other states while 737,433 people on net moved to Florida. According to the latest IRS data, California lost \$55.7 billion in adjusted gross income between 2019 and 2021 from population migration while Florida gained \$80.6 billion.
- *Energy prices.* Electricity prices are twice as high in California as in Florida owing to green energy mandates. Californians also pay about \$1.80 more per gallon for gasoline on average than Floridians because of higher taxes and climate regulation. Gas prices have increased about 70 cents more per gallon under Mr. Newsom than Mr. DeSantis.
- *Taxes and spending.* State and local taxes in California add up to \$10,167 per capita versus \$5,406 in Florida. Higher taxes drive more spending. California spent about \$14,755 per capita (including federal dollars) in 2021 compared to \$8,816 in Florida.
- *Pensions.* Public-worker pension payments were \$51.2 billion in California last year versus \$7.3 billion in Florida. To fund growing pension bills, Californians will have to pay even higher taxes. Each Californian is on the hook for about \$18,500 in unfunded pension obligations compared to \$5,200 for each Floridian.
- *Medicaid.* California spends \$129.2 billion annually on Medicaid—more than four times as much as Florida (\$39.7 billion). California has expanded Medicaid coverage to illegal immigrants under the ages of 26 and over 50. Next year all undocumented immigrants in California will be eligible for Medicaid.
- *Homelessness.* The federal government counted 171,521 homeless in California last year versus 25,959 in Florida. California’s Prop. 47—which was backed by Mr. Newsom—has effectively decriminalized drug use, making it harder to force addicts on the street into treatment.
- *Deficit.* Despite its higher taxes, California boasted a \$31.5 billion budget shortfall in May while Florida ran a \$17.7 billion surplus. Personal income tax collections in California for the current fiscal year that started in July are running about \$20 billion below Sacramento’s projections, auguring another large deficit.
- *Student learning.* California spends about 45% more per pupil on K-12 education than Florida, but its student test scores are significantly lower, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Only 30% of fourth-graders in California rated proficient in math last year compared to 41% in Florida. California’s prolonged pandemic school shutdowns magnified learning loss.

Our guess is that Mr. Newsom won't want to talk about much of this and will instead spend most of his time flogging abortion and Donald Trump. But that will be revealing too.