



# DEMOCRATIC EDGE SHRINKS IN ARIZONA SENATE, GOVERNOR RACES - ASSOCIATED PRESS

Posted on November 10, 2022 by JONATHAN J. COOPER | Associated Press



*Photo: An election worker boxes tabulated ballots inside the Maricopa County Records Office*

Margins between Democrats and Republicans narrowed considerably Wednesday in key Arizona races as election officials chipped away at counting more than half a million mail ballots returned on Election Day and shortly before.

Democrats maintained small but dwindling leads in key races for U.S. Senate, governor and secretary of state, while Republicans were optimistic the late-counted ballots would break heavily in their favor, as they did in 2020.

It could take several days before it's clear who won some of the closer contests.

With Republicans still in the hunt, it remained unclear whether the stronger-than-expected showing for Democrats would extend to Arizona, a longtime Republican stronghold that became a battleground during Donald Trump's presidency.

The GOP nominated a slate of candidates who earned Trump's endorsement after falsely claiming his loss to President Joe Biden was tainted.

Among them former television news anchor Kari Lake was about half a point behind Democratic Secretary of State Katie Hobbs in the race for governor, a contest that centered heavily on Lake's baseless claims of fraud in the 2020 election. The Republican candidate for attorney general also trailed narrowly.

Lake predicted she would "win big" and urged her followers on Twitter to "stay tuned."

Democrats had more comfortable 5-point margins in the races for U.S. Senate and secretary of state, but with so many ballots outstanding, the races were too early to call.

In the race for attorney general, Republican Abraham Hamadeh took the lead from Democrat Kris Mayes.

Officials in Maricopa County, the state's most populous, said about 17,000 ballots were affected by a printing mishap that prevented vote-counters from reading some ballots, a problem that slowed voting in some locations and infuriated Republicans who were counting on strong Election Day turnout. County officials said all ballots will be counted but gave no timeline for doing so. They did not offer any new information about what caused the problem but promised a thorough review.

"There is no perfect election. Yesterday was not a perfect election," said Bill Gates, the Republican chairman of the county board of supervisors. "We will learn from it and do better."



A political urban-rural divide was evident among Arizona voters.

Democrats Katie Hobbs and Sen. Mark Kelly each drew support from nearly two-thirds of urban voters, according to AP VoteCast, an expansive survey of more than 3,200 voters in Arizona.

Suburban voters split about evenly between the two Democratic candidates and their GOP rivals, Kari Lake and Blake Masters. Small town and rural voters were more likely to favor Lake and Masters.

In the Senate race, suburban men and women were divided in their candidate preferences. Suburban men clearly favored Masters, suburban women Kelly.

In the race for governor, suburban men overwhelmingly backed Lake, while suburban women slightly favored Hobbs.

Meanwhile, Republicans who control the three-member board of supervisors in southeastern Arizona's GOP-heavy Cochise County voted Wednesday to appeal a judge's decision that blocked them from hand-counting all the ballots, which are also being tabulated by machines.

The efforts to hand-count ballots in the county and elsewhere across the nation are driven by unfounded concerns among some Republicans that problems with vote-counting machines or voter fraud led to Trump's 2020 defeat.

A judge said the plan ran afoul of state election law that limits hand counts to a small sample of ballots, a process meant to confirm the machine count was accurate.

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Associated Press writers Bob Christie and Terry Tang contributed.