



LATE-COUNTED ARIZONA VOTES WILL DECIDE WINNERS OF KEY RACES - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Photo: An election worker verifies a ballot on a screen inside the Maricopa County Records Office, Thursday, Nov. 10, 2022

A key question hangs over the more than 600,000 ballots left to be tallied in Arizona: Do they look like the state's late-counted 2020 ballots that overwhelmingly went to Republicans or break down more like the 2018 midterms, when Democrats won most of them?

The answer will determine who wins extremely tight races for U.S. Senate and House, as well as governor, secretary of state and attorney general. At stake are control of Congress and the rules for the 2024 presidential election in a crucial battleground state.

The races remained too early to call two days after the midterm election, with about a quarter of the ballots still left to count.

Former President Donald Trump's lies about the 2020 election have rejiggered voting patterns across the country and especially in Arizona, which has played a starring role in conspiracy theories suggesting the outcome was tainted. That makes it even more complicated for news organizations to declare winners because historical data doesn't necessarily apply.

After opening big leads on election night, when only mail ballots returned early were reported, Democrats saw their margins dwindle as more Republican ballots were counted. Democratic leads improved Thursday afternoon in the races for Senate, governor, secretary of state and attorney general when Pima County, which includes left-leaning Tucson, reported new results. New results were expected later Thursday from Maricopa County, which includes the Phoenix area and more than 60% of Arizona voters.

It could take several days before it's clear who won some of the closer contests, as was the case in the 2018 and 2020 elections. Maricopa County officials emphasized that this year's process was no different than in previous years.

"This is how things work in Arizona and have for decades," said Bill Gates, the Republican chair of the county board of supervisors. He said staff are working 14 to 18 hours a day and will continue through the weekend.

"We are doing what we can and still maintaining accuracy," Gates said.

Protracted vote counts have for years been a staple of elections in Arizona, where the overwhelming majority of people vote with mail ballots and many wait until the last minute to return them. But as Arizona has morphed from a GOP stronghold to a competitive battleground, the delays have increasingly become a source of national anxiety for partisans on both sides.

Processing mail ballots is time-consuming because officials have to verify that the voters didn't vote in person and that the signatures on their ballot envelopes match those on file. Maricopa County officials said they received a record number of mail ballots returned on Election Day.



With Republicans still in the hunt, it remained unclear whether the stronger-than-expected showing for Democrats in much of the U.S. would extend to Arizona.

Republicans were antsy for more results, believing the remaining ballots strongly favor them.

The GOP nominated a slate of candidates who earned Trump's endorsement after falsely claiming his loss to President Joe Biden was tainted. Kari Lake, the Republican gubernatorial candidate who is trailing her Democratic opponent, Katie Hobbs, claimed Thursday morning that Maricopa County officials are "slow rolling" the release of results to make it look like Democrats are doing better than they actually are.

"We're going to win this and there's not a darn thing they can do about it, but they're trying to pour cold water on this movement," Lake told conservative radio host Charlie Kirk. "This movement is on fire, and no amount of water is going to put that fire out. We the people are taking our government back."

Gates pushed back on Lake's accusations of a purposely slow count and said ballots were counted in the order in which they came in.

"We are absolutely not slow rolling it," he said. "And if their team had been paying attention before the election, they would've heard us talking about this over and over again, that we were not going to have results on election night, that it would take days."

Lake has pledged to immediately call lawmakers into special session upon being sworn in to make massive changes to Arizona election laws. She wants to significantly reduce early and mail voting, options chosen by at least 8 in 10 Arizona voters, and to count all ballots by hand, which election administrators say would be extremely time consuming.

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 contests were too early to call.

Officials in Maricopa County, the state's most populous, said they were able to count 17,000 ballots cast in person on Election Day that were affected by a printing mishap. The printer problem at 70 of 223 vote centers prevented on-site vote-counters from reading those ballots, a problem that slowed voting in some locations and infuriated Republicans who were counting on strong Election Day turnout.

The cause remained a mystery. The two top officials on the county board of supervisors, both Republicans, said in a statement Wednesday night that they used the same printers, settings and paper thickness during the August primary and pre-election testing, when there were no widespread issues.

Associated Press writers Bob Christie and Terry Tang contributed to this report.

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