

State Room Arizona 003: George Khalaf | AZ Politics: The Data

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Full Article-Style Transcript

Introduction: Arizona's Electoral Landscape

Scot Mussi: Hi, welcome to the State Room, a podcast dedicated to discussing key policy issues and events affecting the state here in Arizona. My name is Scot Mussi. I'm your host for the podcast. For today's episode of the State Room, we're going to focus on the electoral landscape of Arizona. For nearly a decade now, Arizona has been a hotbed of hotly contested races, ones that have gotten a ton of attention from around the country, whether it be president, governor, US senate races, pretty much every race up and down the ticket. State House, State Senate, labeled us largely as a battleground state. Here as a purple state or whatever people want to kind of categorize us as. However, in 2024, that seemed to shift a little bit. Whether you look at the presidential race, President Trump, he won by a comfortable margin, five and a half points.

Republicans up and down the ticket seemed to be doing a little bit better. The trends seem to have shifted away from that battleground status. The question is, is that something that's going to continue for the upcoming election? And so, today for our guest to talk about these voter trends here in Arizona, I've brought George Khalaf onto the State Room. George is the founder of Data Orbital, a data and polling firm here in Arizona, one that has been used for statewide races for years and has been nationally recognized as one of the leading polling and research firms. Also now, George is a candidate for legislative district three. So not only does he do polling analysis for other races, it seems like now he'll probably be doing it for himself. So George, thank you for joining us here at the State Room.

George Khalaf: Yeah, thanks for having me on, Scot. This is great.

Arizona's Current Political Status

Scot Mussi: Yeah, glad for coming on. And first, let's just dive in. Want to talk a little bit about these voter trends, what's been going on here in the state of Arizona, the electoral landscape. And so, what's your take on it? Where do you find Arizona now? From a from a voting or a election standpoint, are we a purple state? Are we a slightly red state? What do you see where we're at today compared to where we at were a few years ago?

George Khalaf: Yeah. So, look, I even two, four years ago hated the label of us being a purple state. I would say now with the recent voter registration trends, which we're going to get into with the results in 2024, I'm comfortable in saying that we are we are a right-leaning state. We are a red state. We're not Florida, right? We're not having 20 point victories anytime soon statewide, but the fundamentals favor Republicans. And the fundamentals have not favored Democrats at least in the last couple of years.

Why Arizona's Trend Changed

Scot Mussi: So what's changed then? How is it that today you feel more comfortable about it versus 2020 or 2022 in those elections that in 2020 that was one that you know was an election that was razor close. 22 many people anticipated and were optimistic about a red wave in Arizona that didn't materialize here in the state. So what do you think what's driven that change as far as what you've seen?

George Khalaf: So look, Arizona for folks that don't remember is ancestrally a democratic state until about the 1980s in 2020 the first cycle and really this started in 2018 where we had some tremendous difficulty. We were at the lowest level of voter registration as Republicans, except for the time when we were a Democratic state before the 1980s. What's happened since then is that Republicans now are at the peak. We're at our peak voter registration: a 7.64% statewide advantage, growing in all of the areas that you'd want to see us grow in, I believe, every county except for Coconino. And that's only because Coconino, everybody is just shrinking as a county. The other 14 counties are trending more Republican, even the most blue ones. And so there are just fundamentally more registered Republicans. There are fundamentally less registered Democrats.

And I believe that's happening because up until 1820, Republicans, we had taken the status of Arizona for granted. I mean, for folks, you talked about in the last 10 years, 12, 14 years ago, we had super majorities in the House and Senate. We dominated every statewide office. We were winning races by 15, 20 points. And we didn't have the infrastructure that you need to have. And Democrats really came surging in going into 18 2020 and since then we've come roaring back and Democrats one of my favorite slides I always show when I present is the line of Democratic registration that has been on a very quarter overquarter drop from 2020 until today and Republicans have been growing in that time. So, there's fewer Democrats today in Arizona than there was in 2020, 100%. And that's with all of our population growth because people are leaving and re-registering as Republicans.

And there are quite a bit of Democrats that are re-registering as independents. And that's always the big question mark people ask me in Arizona is like, well, what happens with the independents? There is some of that re-registration. But there are just people, like I said, either whether they're they're moving out or the Democratic party in general is losing voters. And Republicans are just seeing the exact opposite happen.

Scot Mussi: And so the gap has grown over the last six years. But you said that now Republicans have a larger gap over Democrats than ever.

George Khalaf: Than ever. This is the highest the history of the state, 7.64% driven by Maricopa County where 60% of the population is based, but driven by Pinal County. Pinal County is growing. That's San Tan Valley is the is the largest city in the county now. Newly city in the county growing tremendously Republican Yavapai County, Mohave County. And look, I always got asked this question and I know you always did, Scot, and anyone who's in this space. What is happening with those that are moving to Arizona? Those Californians, those people from Chicago, Minneapolis, the Pacific Northwest, are they coming here making our state blue? That is fundamentally, statistically impossible with the data that we're seeing.

And anecdotally, as I'm out and about talking to folks, people when they introduce themselves as having moved here in the last 5 years, which many people in Arizona have, they always very then immediately tell me they're a political refugee. Meaning there are conservatives moving from blue states, making those states bluer, but making Arizona more Republican. That's similarly to what happened in Florida, but from the East Coast. So Florida saw a lot of New Yorkers, a lot of people from New Jersey. We're seeing a lot of Chicagoans and people from California moving to our state, but they're conservative and they're registering as Republicans and they're voting as such.

New Movers and “Don’t California My Arizona”

Scot Mussi: I think that's something anecdotally we have seen here at the Free Enterprise Club. It last few years we launched this campaign, this don't California my Arizona campaign. It's been a very popular campaign. It resonates with voters and taxpayers here in Arizona. But one of the interesting anecdotes about this is with that we have bumper stickers, we have signs and the most eager to get the signs to get the bumper stickers are people that have just moved from California and don't want to see Arizona turn into the state that they just left. So anecdotally that's what we've

seen but that's what the polling indicates to you as well and the registration numbers 100% registration show that polling

George Khalaf: shows that if the opposite were true we would be at our lowest point. We have a lot of people moving into Arizona. We're one of the fastest growing counties. We have some of the fastest growing cities like Buckeye in the Far West Valley, Queen Creek in the Far East Valley, San Tan Valley. But right, I mean, we're not seeing that. There are just more and more Republicans. And look, we all know birth rates in America are not the reason why we're growing. Arizona has and is only growing because we have a lot of people moving into our state and they're registering as Republicans. And by my estimation of the results, they are voting for Republicans. It's not like they're just registering and then they're like split ticketing or voting the other way. I mean, you know, you noted you know, in the intro, President Trump won Arizona by five and a half points, even larger than his 2016 numbers.

And so that's a significant margin in a state that is quote unquote purple.

Hispanic Voters and Republican Opportunity

Scot Mussi: Hispanic voters, what do you see trending with Hispanic voters? There's a lot of discussion in states like Texas and Florida that there's been this move of Hispanic voters away from Democrats. I think we saw that nationally. Is that what we're seeing here in Arizona as well? Are Hispanic voters moving away or does it depend on maybe areas geographically or what you're talking what you're looking at?

George Khalaf: So, this answer is a little bit more nuanced. We have historically not seen with 2024 being the exception the same growth that Texas and Florida has. But that's part of the reason or partly it's because Florida it's I mean it's been like a 30-point reversal. I mean Miami Dade County where it's a heavy Cuban population Puerto Rican very conservative. I mean it went from giving Hillary Clinton a victory in 2016 by 40 points and giving President Trump a victory eight years later by 87 points. We're not seeing anything like that in Arizona. But Yuma County, for the first time, Republicans have a registration advantage. It's because of Hispanic voters. You have districts like district legislative district 23 in the far west valley all the way down to Yuma County heavily Hispanic.

The Democratic registration advantage has been cut by more than half and it elects consistently a Republican conservative Republican to the State House. And so we are now seeing those trends. The president did very well with Hispanic voters in 2024. There are still pockets that need a lot of work. I think part of the reason why in Arizona is because of such a heavy immigration focus, which technically Florida does not have, Texas does. But look, Hispanic voters are often people of faith, Christian, Catholic, right? They go to church. They don't like the farther left the Democratic party gets on the cultural issues. They don't like it. They're the ones that often support legal immigration, but do not want illegal immigration. And so, they align with the Republican party on rank and file issues. And they're finally beginning to feel, I would say, more comfortable.

And we're finally investing time and energy into Hispanic voters, not the 6 months before the election, which I always critique, but actually being in the community and building deep roots, which we have been in Arizona. They've definitely done in Florida and they've done in Texas, and we're doing more and more of that in Arizona.

Where Republicans Are Growing

Scot Mussi: You mentioned how in Yuma Republicans now have a registration advantage. You mentioned statewide. Is there any specific areas where you're seeing that Republicans are making quicker gains? And then what are areas where you're seeing that perhaps they're still backsliding, that there's still maybe geographic areas or demographic areas that Republicans aren't doing as well as they were a couple years ago?

George Khalaf: So, there's not really a lot of areas that are backsliding. I would say generally more Republican legislative districts are getting more Republican, especially ones that have room to move. So, for example, the Northeast Valley, Legislative District 3 has a lot of state land trust. There's people moving in. We've added 5,000 Republicans in the last four years in legislative district 3. When you compare that to legislative district 4, the neighboring swing district, we've added about 500. So, big difference, but there's just not a lot of places for people to move. The northwest valley, the far southwest valley, lots of Republican growth because there's a lot of places to move into. Yuma County is seeing a lot of growth. I mean growth in Yavapai Mohave in rural Arizona it's been growing but it's slow because it's just more of rural populations.

They've got different considerations from a land growth perspective but bar none Pinal county is growing the quickest in terms of a total county and it's become significantly more Republican folks that remember and have been in Arizona for a while as recently as '08 it was it was voting in Democrats at the state legislature and I don't think a Democrat would stand a chance in winning anywhere in Pinal County nowadays. But even in Pima County, it's still very

Scot Mussi: Again, activists down in Pima are working very hard to try to spread the message that Pima needs a change, and they need to start electing people who are going to protect taxpayers and be pro-family.

George Khalaf: Exactly. And look, the first step is you have to grow those that are willing to say and signal, hey, I'm a Republican. That is the first step. Second step is to get them to vote. And then you see change. It's not going to happen overnight. And you know, and I should say I'd be remiss if I didn't mention, you know, we've talked a lot about all this growth. This didn't happen by accident. There's a lot of people that have put a tremendous amount of work and effort and money and time since 2020 to make us be in this position today. It's not like we just spontaneously woke up and started winning races and having a high registration advantage because there was significant resources invested in re-registering Republicans, registering new movers, and it's worked.

Infrastructure and Year-Round Engagement

Scot Mussi: You're correct about that. That is something new that did not exist pre2020. It is something that the left however built out beginning and we saw that the seeds of this being planted around 2015 where millions began flowing into Arizona. In fact, we just recently published a report last year on the we call it the liberal NGO syndicate that's operating here in the state of Arizona. Tens of millions of dollars funding large organizations that all they do is just go out on the left and try to get people to register to vote and do these things. And they do it year-round. They don't just do it before the election, which has always been typically what Republicans do. They are day in and day out, whether there's an immediate election or not, they're building and perfecting their infrastructure. And they frankly did it way earlier than us and up until recently had done it better.

But, you know, we absolutely eclipse them going into 2024. And the results, it's clear proved it.

Scot Mussi: It is clear our side has caught up, and that has made a big difference. It is good to hear that the registration gains Republicans are making are not just segmented in certain areas. It is broad-based and across the board.

Independents in Arizona

Scot Mussi: that we have, but often times it's described that Arizona is a third, a third, a third. You have a third Republicans, third Democrats. Obviously it isn't exactly third. You mentioned that, but there's that there's a huge independent contingent here in Arizona. When you when you look at independents, how would you describe them? Do you think that they're true independents? Do you think they lean to the left? Do you think they lean to the right in Arizona? And has that changed over the last 10 years that you've seen?

George Khalaf: Yeah. So, in general, I think the consensus in Arizona is that independents statewide lean slightly to the right. They lean to the right on the key issues that Republicans we lead on, like for example, immigration, public safety. They sometimes have leaned a little to the left on healthcare or K12 education funding. But it also is area by area specific in general as well. If you're an independent who's located in Peoria or Sun City, you're probably going to be more right leaning than an independent who's located in, you know, what I call uptown Phoenix, right between the 117 and the 51. You're probably suburban areas. Yeah. Yeah. You're probably going to be a little bit more democratic.

I do wonder and more research has to be done into this because I think this is an open question if there is a little bit of the fact that there are some Democrats who are re-registering more than Republicans are re-registering to being independent and that independents may behave a little bit differently. But we don't have conclusive information on that because the other big question is what is the type of independence that's going to show up and vote? Independents we know have a much lower turnout. They have a much lower engagement rate. They

Scot Mussi: engage more in a presidential than in a midterm. And look, we just talked about how in the presidential what is the difference there? Because as often described, people look at the registration, they go, "Oh, look at this." You know, you know, rep independents, you know, the total number of people not affiliated with the with the Democrat being a Democrat or Republican is about the same number of Republicans, but they don't actually vote and turn out the same rate as Republicans.

George Khalaf: No, no, not at all. I mean, Republicans, we have the highest in general rate of turnout. Democrats are the second. So like for example on average we're like let's say in the low 80s to mid 80s or high 80s depending on the type of election it is. Democrats also kind of in the 80% range. Independents in the midterms they could be in the 50s depending and in some places they absolutely don't show up. If they have a really good year they're I think the highest that we've seen them is maybe in the high 60s low 70s and that's in a high turnout presidential. So they are at least 10 15 points below Republicans or Democrats. Even if they may have a higher number, many of them never vote and they are just truly, you know.

Scot Mussi: So how many how much does like when you look at independents, there's there again people or people not affiliated with two of one of the two major political parties? Right now it's about 35%. For turnout in an election, how much do they actually make up of the turnout? Like for example, in the upcoming election, what do you think that number is going to be?

George Khalaf: So in the highest presidential they've made up, they've made up 33%. So less than their actual registration, but typically in a midterm they're going to be in the mid20s. So they're only going to make up about a fourth of the electorate. When it's all said and done in a midterm, in some of their best midterms, they've maybe gotten up to 28% in a general election. Part of that is that Republicans and Democrats, we engage in the primary. We have a semi-open state in Arizona for folks that don't know, meaning that independents can vote in the partisan primaries. They have to pick one in advance, but they have to actively pick it. Well, they only represent about 15% respectively of both of the parties primaries. So they don't have the same type of primary to set them all to set them up for sort of in terms of an enthusiasm level as Republicans and Democrats do.

So they'll probably only make up like I said anywhere between 26 to 28% of this midterm. So much less than their registered percentage.

Split Tickets and Persuadable Voters

Scot Mussi: So a little over a quarter. So much less than what the registration is. But still a significant amount. You know and when it comes to voting split ticketing or people that maybe will vote for different candidates, Republicans, independents, do are they generally they vote their

political party? Do they or does one or the other split ticket more or less? And compared to independents, independents, I'm assuming will split ticket a little bit more.

George Khalaf: Yeah. So, Republicans and Democrats definitely do the least amount of split ticketing with some exceptions. There are some races where people leave it blank. So, we have a higher undervote, meaning that you could have voted, but you didn't. So, that's how we track that. It's called the undervote. Independent split ticket the most, for sure. And we've seen that happen in prior years. There's there's no question about it. And so, that's why independents in certain districts, they are the holy grail. You have to go after them. You have to talk about you have to talk to them. And again, they are for sure in the in the worst case for a Republican. An independent currently going into 2026 is going to be slightly center left broadly, but still on core issues like public safety and other things.

There's not a lot of data, but from what we can tell and what we're seeing, they still lean to the right. So, typically how you message to them is they want their kids to be safe. They want an ability to be able to generally afford to live. That's obviously a big deal. I know that you all have been talking about going into 2026. And those are Republican staple issues. And they don't want this crazy crap, frankly, right? A very technical term there. And there's only one party that's giving them that. It's the Democratic party. And so we have a lot of opportunity. There's no doubt. But it will be very curious to see how they perform in 2026 and then going into 2028.

Top Issues for 2026

Scot Mussi: So on that, so now you're talking about those persuadable voters, the independents, top issues. You talked about some of the broad, you know, the broad strokes, what some of those look like. When you're looking at the polling, what is the top issues? What are the ones that specifically you think candidates need to focus on, talk about, make sure that they're hammering home. So with those persuadable voters, the ones that are showing up to vote in this midterm election, convincing them that, you know, they need to select a pro- freedom conservative at the ballot.

George Khalaf: So up until about the last 10 to 12 months, it had been immigration all day long, led by Republicans and a majority of independents still. And 12 months ago, no surprise, it changed to affordability. Now people identify affordability as cost of living, inflation. People identify affordability as jobs in the economy. However you categorize it, that is for sure the top issue followed by immigration and public safety. And now everything else is sort of like middling, education, different things. There were blips, like for example, going into the 2022 midterm, abortion was a top issue and it was not because Republicans were wanting it to be a top issue. It was because Democrats, so that really animated them. We're not really seeing that type of issue going into 2026. And anytime we don't see that, then it goes back to the fundamentals, which we've just been covering, which is it ends.

It tends to do better for Republicans, but right now it's affordability in every way that you think about it. Then it's got to immigration and public safety and then it's like three, four, five, six important issues is like education, housing depending on who you ask, but they're all like seven, eight, four, 5%. There's nothing like very conclusive at that point.

Scot Mussi: Okay. So, but it's basically there's two main issues that you think right now are still driving the is driving the issue I guess the issue discussion on anything that you're going to be out discussing with voters that it's going to be immigration but primarily economy cost of living affordability.

George Khalaf: Yeah. Yeah. That paired with public safety I like to say it people feeling secure in their wallets, pocketbooks, secure and being able to raise a family here. Secure and feeling like their kids are safe and protected. That gets into sure aspects of education, but it really gets into the affordability and public safety issues. When you focus on that with your typical what we call

persuadable voter, some of those are registered Republicans. Most of those are registered independents. Very few are registered Democrat. That's what they care about. They just want to know, do you have solutions for these things? Can you deliver it and talk about it to me in a way that I can understand? Do you have some conviction and a core belief? Or are you another lukewarm? I mean, believe it or not, independents like both parties. Nobody likes lukewarm anything anymore, right?

And so you need people are hungry for people with conviction and a and a very clear northstar. For the left, it's obviously people that do that from a progressive perspective and for many independents and rich Republicans, it's people that have a very clear conservative northstar. Do you see anything indicating that there's a

Trust, Divided Government, and Arizona's Mood

Scot Mussi: that the independents or persuadable voters, I prefer to say persuadable because there are some Republicans and even some Democrats that are persuadable on different issues. Do you see where they're right now trusting one party over the other right now or is it they equally distrust both parties?

George Khalaf: Is anything in the polling show any indications right now or is it pretty still wide open? So nationally it does seem a bit more that the persuadable voters are they're not trusting either party. They're maybe a little bit more frustrated inherently with the party that's in charge and right now that's the Republican party nationally and in the House and Senate and White House. In Arizona though, we're not really seeing that. It is fairly open because we have divided government one. So the governor is a Democrat. The State House and State Senate are very clearly run by Republicans.

Were sending all kinds of amazing things up to her that she keeps vetoing one after another after another like very common-sense tax cuts you know for example that Arizonans are going to benefit from and so I do feel like it's wide open we're not seeing that gap that anger that we're seeing nationally in Arizona I just I think I don't want to say it's much ado about nothing but I think we are applying things from other states that do not actually have like negative things do not actually have bearing in the data and in the anecdotal conversations that we all have with actually what's happening on the ground in Arizona.

Arizona Compared to National Trends

Scot Mussi: Yeah, and that was what I wanted to get into next. Looking ahead to November, you know, normally party in power is at a disadvantage. At least that's been the historical trend for the last 20 to 25 years. Seems as if the party out of power especially when you're talking about nationally in the White House or control of Congress has an advantage. You don't think that the current national trends where things are going right now, you're seeing kind of nationally where that historical country trend. You think Arizona is right now kind of a little bit on its own course as far as that goes or do you think national trends are going to catch up with us?

George Khalaf: look, we've always prided ourselves on our cowboy mentality. Whether we dress or act like cowboys or not, we all have a cowboy mentality in our hearts. Meaning, and I'll give you one very specific statistical example. Nationally, there's a very clear what we call enthusiasm gap. Meaning that Republicans are less enthusiastic to vote in the election than Democrats are. It's only about six points, 6%. It used to be 10%, so it's shrinking. In Arizona, we don't have that. There's no enthusiasm gap among Republicans and Democrats that we would think should vote in the November election. Both of them are equally as likely to vote and so that's a positive trend.

The voter registration data is a positive trend even though we're seeing a slight advantage now for Democrats over Republicans in Maricopa County, but that doesn't factor in the other rural counties

where Republicans have typically done well. So that's another data point that is contrary to the national trends. And on that, I remember

Scot Mussi: a couple months ago it was reported, I think it was picked up in some of the national news outlets that various Democrat organizations were going to be were doing a seven or I'm not seven or an eight figure spend nationally. Arizona is one of those states where they're going to look to do a voter registration drives. And so we're getting targeted by the Democrats on the left for voter registration. And that might be a reason we're seeing that happening in Maricopa County here where there's like a Democrat.

George Khalaf: And with all of that though, Scot, the net advantage that Democrats have built up in the last 3 months from everything that we could tell in the data is 7,000. It's not insignificant, but it pales in comparison to all the gains that we have made. There were some quarters where we gained more than 7,000 or and considerably more than that. And so, are we still ahead from where we were in 2024? Oh, 100%. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. 100% that we are we've all technically what we call lost voters because at the beginning of every year, not to get too nerdy, but the recorders and the secretary of state do a voter cleanup. Democrats had more cleaned up than Republicans do. You do that what you what you may. And so it's always inherent that like right at the election, you go up, you shrink a little bit, and then you grow again.

But yeah, Republicans have been consistently growing in an off year unlike any other prior off year. And so that set us up for success.

Key Battlegrounds and Turnout Targets

Scot Mussi: So looking again ahead to November, what parts of Arizona do you think will be key to deciding, you know, the statewide the governor's race will be a big race attorney general, secretary of state, but then also some of these legislative districts? Where do you think the battlegrounds are going to be in Arizona that'll decide control here, whether governor's race or legislative races or the chambers? So

George Khalaf: let's start with the statewide number one by far most important thing I've been screaming this to anybody who will hear me is if Republicans in Mohave County, Yavapai County, Pinal County and the very Republican areas of Maricopa County, if Republicans in those areas vote at 2018 midterm percentages or higher with as much gains as we have made, we do very well in November, right? 100%. That is by far the biggest thing and we need to convert what we call presidential year only voters, meaning Republicans that only now vote in presidential years, not in midterms. That is the highest value target. They're kind of located everywhere, but those three rural counties plus the very Republican areas of Maricopa County are very important to that end. Of course, the persuadables are always a big deal. That includes Hispanic voters. So, who can win over that middle 510%.

Ironically, the middle is not that big anymore, right? We're a very polarized state as we are a polarized nation. So those are really my big my two big things. We already kind of expect Democrats to be very likely to vote. Their motivation has generally been high. I think Republicans we can match or exceed it. And if we do, with our registration advantage, we set ourselves up for tremendous success. From a legislative district perspective, there has been consistently seven districts that are swing districts. I think five of them are more swing than the other seven. Those are all located four out of the five are located in suburban Phoenix area and one of them is located in Pima County. So we've got one in the East Valley, kind of Chandler area, District 13. We have one in the Paradise Valley, South Scott area, district 4. We have one in like the Moon Valley, Deer Valley area, district 2.

And then we've got one in the West Valley down to Yuma, District 23. That's like Buckeye down to Yuma. And then we have seven district 17, which is kind of like what I called a donut around Tucson. And then there's a couple of others that I think are less swingy than they have been in the past, but still. And there are opportunities for Republicans to make gains in these districts, not just hold.

Scot Mussi: You mentioned, you know, you talk about some of these other outlying counties as far as getting turnout. You mentioned 2018, you got to match 2018 turnout. Why not 2022?

George Khalaf: because in 2022, we had some of the lowest turnout in these counties. I don't want to pick on Mohave County. I love the folks in Mohave County, but I'll use them as an example. Turnout was 7% less as a total percentage in 2022 than it was in 2018. And that 7% turnout differential costs the statewide Republicans 4,900 votes. Why do I how did I come up with that calculation? Because based on the size of Mohave County, based on how well Republicans do, it's our best performing county. Every 1,400 voters in Mohave County, which is about 1% increase in turnout, 1,400 voters represent 700 net votes for Republicans, meaning that we win by 50% over the Democrat. And so that's why I focus on those three. Yavapai and Pinal had sort of similar numbers, but because Mohave is so dramatically Republican, even more so than Yavapai and Pinal, we feel it in a huge way.

And 4,900 votes is a big margin in a state that still is decently close statewide.

Republican Challenges and Headwinds

Scot Mussi: So when you are looking at the challenge and why get out the vote is so important, are there any other challenges you foresee for Republicans heading into November? Anything you think is a landmine we need to watch out for?

George Khalaf: I mean look you know you said at the party in charge nationally we have headwinds we have to work through those headwinds. Obviously there's a lot that continues to be in flux with what's happening with Iran and in the Middle East. That's going to be a big deal. I don't want to see gas over \$5 in the Phoenix metro area. That's a big deal. We still have plenty of time to go, but those are things I would be worried about. But so far the fundamentals, the data, things that are super specific to Arizona, I feel like Republicans, we've got a very clear narrative. We have a very clear juxtaposition with the governor. While she tries to talk like she's more moderate, literally not a single action that she's taken shows that she's more moderate. It's just her words. Voters catch on to that.

Even if we're going to get outspent in some areas, money is coming in a much more efficient way now than it was six years ago. We have more infrastructure. So I feel generally positive that there's a lot of work to do. And the reason why I feel generally positive is because I kind of have a sense of all the work that has to happen and is already kind of in progress. But I'd say the biggest headwinds is can we navigate through some of the downward pressures from what's happening nationally? And I think judging what we've seen from Arizona in the past, I'm confident that we can do that. Because we're starting off already in a very good position.

No Federal Race at the Top of the Ticket

Scot Mussi: Yeah. One of the things that'll be unique about this election that hasn't been the case in I think over a decade now, we're actually not going to have a federal race statewide. Yeah. At the at the top of the ticket, normally because of, you know, retirements, other quirks that have been happening, we've either had a US Senate race or a presidential. Yeah. Do you think that'll have an impact either on turnout or you know resources in the state? Do you think it's going to have an impact or do you think because the Democrats do have a an incumbent at the top they're going to have Katie Hobbs. She'll be top of the ticket. I guess she's going to be the you know the brand I guess they're going to have to carry with all the Democrats on there. But do you think it's going to have an impact on Arizona not having a federal race?

George Khalaf: I think so. I mean one it'll make it harder for Democrats to nationalize the race, right? For obvious reasons because there's not a national figure at the top. Even if Katie Hobbs is their number one priority, it will make resources lower. Look, any gubernatorial race resources are going to be a lot less. Senate races are just expensive and people can blink and pour in millions. Last cycle, in 2024, I think there's already commercials up on television for the US Senate race.

Exactly. We're just not seeing that now. So we operate in very different ways. It is also very clear Democratic national groups are in a cash crunch. They're actually not raising nearly as much money as we are.

They're not in power and a lot of the money they're raising is going to a whole bunch of these other random fights like redistricting and the other craziness that they're trying to shove down our throats in various states. And so I do think it's going to have an impact. I think it's going to have again it's another thing that for me, if I'm looking at it objectively, it's a net positive for Republicans that there's not that nationalized race at the top of the ticket.

Looking Ahead to November 2026

Scot Mussi: Frankly, I'll take juxtaposing ourselves to Katie Hobbs any day of the week based on her performance the last three years. So, you're bullish on November. You think Republicans, conservatives can do well heading into this election here in Arizona?

George Khalaf: I am. I was bullish going into 2024. I was even bullish in parts of 2022. So, I am bullish going into 26. I think the fundamentals are there. I think we have to work it. I think the grassroots is energized in a huge way, maybe more so than at any point except going into 2024 just because President Trump making a comeback was a big deal, but we're seeing that gain steam. If you had asked me six months ago, nine months ago, I felt like the energy was maybe a little bit off. Does not feel that way now. I think people are dialed in and it will only be more and more so as we get closer to November.

Why George Khalaf Is Running for LD3

Scot Mussi: All right, George, last question. So, you decided to go from pollster data analyst to candidate for office. You're running an LD3. It's mostly I guess north Scottsdale, Fountain Hills, Cave Creek, Carefree area, running for the House, State House here. Why are you doing it?

George Khalaf: I'm doing it because frankly all the things we just talked about, we have way too much opportunity in Arizona. We need good conservative voices in the state legislature. I am bullish that we're going to get a good conservative governor in November. When we beat Katie Hobbs, that conservative governor needs not just a conservative legislator, someone who's a good vote. As I tell folks, that's the bare minimum. He needs someone who is going to lead, who's going to be able to message. That's what I've done as an outsider and someone who's supported other candidates and other organizations. I felt it was time for me to step out in front as a Christian, as someone who also has a vested interest, three young kiddos under 10, nine, and 5 months old. I felt like I owed it not just to them, but to our state and the children of our state across the state.

So decided to jump in the fray late last year. It's going well, but it's a lot of work. That is for sure. Running for office is no joke, but it's absolutely worth it. Our best days are ahead. I know that in Arizona. I've always been bullish in that regard. And we have some real opportunity to set us up for the next 10 years.

Closing

Scot Mussi: Well, congratulations, George, jumping in the fray. Thank you for joining us today here on The State Room. And to everyone watching today, thank you for joining us here in The State Room, a podcast dedicated to focusing on the key issues and events that will define the future of our state and keeping Arizona free.