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SPEAKERS

NPR promo, Christopher Conover, Mike Noble, Nicole Cox, Lara Brown



Christopher Conover 00:03

Welcome to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover, this week what the last two weeks of presidential campaigning means for Arizona. The last two weeks of the presidential campaign will be ones that show up in history books. A gunman tried to kill Donald Trump at a rally and then President Joe Biden announced a little more than 100 days before the election, that he was withdrawing from the race for the White House. Biden quickly threw his support behind Vice President Kamala Harris. And while most of the nation watched with interest, Arizona voters may have had even more of a raised eyebrow to all the goings on because Senator Mark Kelly was immediately mentioned as being seriously considered as a running mate for Harris. Given that Arizona voted for Biden four years ago, and the race is close here now, though, leaning for Trump. What do all of these things mean? Joining us to try and make sense of it all is Mike Noble with Phoenix based Noble Predictive Insights.



Mike Noble 01:09

This is made for TV this election. I've been around this a while this is my eighth or ninth election cycle going through and I feel like I've seen it all. And I ain't seen nothing yet after watching this election, because and here's the thing, if people thought it's been crazy so far, well, guess what? I've news for them. We got four months left, and it's gonna get weirder before it gets more normal.



Christopher Conover 01:33

So let's talk about Arizona, four years ago, went for Biden, just barely. Last time a Democrat had done that was was President Clinton. Now, and you're a pollster so you know this, it's the state is leaning back Republican towards Donald Trump. But now we bring Kamala Harris into it. I know you because you and I talked earlier in the week, you're not hard polling on this yet. But what do you hear on on the street, so to speak, when it comes to all of this in Arizona, which is now a swing state.

M

Mike Noble 02:12

we have polled Arizona more than anyone else in the country. So I would say that, basically, right now, where I assess the race is that Kamala Harris, even though there's switching out of Biden for Harris, she's basically starting in the same position as Biden is, which is behind. So you know, as you correctly called out, Biden barely won, and no Democrats and then a while, by 11,000 votes. So a lot of things aligned for that to happen. However, average right now Trump's up about, you know, around four or five points in Arizona, which is pretty good. Anything over four points basically is usually a better spot to be in if you're only one or two. I mean, that's it's really close. Right. So basically same spot and it what's interesting is and you see that not only in our Arizona polling, because we always ask the President's fav/un-fav, and Kamala Harris, and we've done it ever since they've been in office. And so you look at our polling, but also national polling, you'll notice, Kamala Harris says the same exact favourability numbers as Joe Biden does, which are not good, mind you. I think it's 1/3 of Arizonans have a favorable opinion, where over 50% from 54% 55% have an unfavorable opinion. So among those that have an opinion, is negative 20. So what's interesting, swapped it out. I've seen there has been some early polling because this news only happened just this past Sunday, Quinnipiac came with some polling Emerson and a couple others. And basically, you saw that the race got slightly tighter in let's say, the Midwest states like Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, but in the Sunbelt hasn't really changed. But you look at the demographics, Trump's still ahead in all of those key battleground states. I think it was tied in Wisconsin. But you know, other than that, I mean, it's still Kamala starting in a backfoot position. And it's going to be tougher for her in Arizona, I think compared to the other battleground states for the unique factor. We are a border state, and she was ahead of the border team when she was in the administration. And there's been a lot of talks and questions about what border borders czar, whatever you want to call it. With that and so the Arizona is gonna be a tough nut for Kamala to crack but she's also not starting out in a great position.

C

Christopher Conover 04:26

Of course, adding to the Arizona intrigue is all the talk about Arizona Senator Mark Kelly, potentially being a running mate. He's done well here statewide, is generally viewed as a moderate. But does the vice president really help in a state and what are you seeing again, kind of with your what you've heard on the street amongst other pollsters and what your past polls have told you?

M

Mike Noble 04:53

Yeah, when you have a VP pick, it usually doesn't have a big impact on the overall vote because you remember for example, in the 2020 election, Biden picked Kamala which Biden ran as a moderate Democrat, come on, hailing from California, which is considered quite liberal. Right. So she was considered, you know, a very different type. It didn't really impact the race so much, especially given Biden's age and then something happened and she take over. So that didn't really happen. And remember, she wasn't exactly super well, like there. But I think you'd see an impact with it with like Mark Kelly, because you know, you have one of your home

state people running right. But also Mark Kelly, not only is he in the running, he's received one of the packets, the packets that have been sent out for the vetting process of VP candidates. I know you and I didn't get one.

C

Christopher Conover 05:42

No, I didn't

M

Mike Noble 05:44

No. So right now, I think the likely who's likely going to be the VP is either going to be Shapiro, Governor out of a key battleground state, Gretchen Whitmer, out of Michigan, another battleground state, and then Mark Kelly and Arizona battleground state. So he's got decent odds, frankly, and he's received a packet. So he's in the running, but when you look at it, it actually makes a lot of sense to pick Mark Kelly, because he really balances out Kamala well. He's an astronaut, there's really no other thing that's more popular than that. His numbers, he's literally the has the best polling numbers of like a candidate's image or favourability. of any other elected official in the state of Arizona. We know that because we did what we do every two years the power rankings or rate the top 50. So and also you can raise money, but the bigger kicker, him and Kamala have a really great relationship. Anyways, I think it will have an impact. And I think it could where I see it, I think you'd have an impact down at the legislative level because the Republicans only in the two seat edge in the state senate in the State House, Democrats haven't held the majority there in four decades, there is a chance, especially in a presidential year, Kelly being there that really juices turnout, and also maybe get some more voters to crossover that are maybe anti Trump or kind of that McCain wing of the party. So that's actually what I think is most interesting is the impact to Arizona specifically is if Kelly gets the pick, I feel like that could have actually a pretty big impact.

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Christopher Conover 07:11

So I know you've worked with campaigns in the past, and obviously you do a lot of polling. With Mark Kelly, getting that packet and being vetted as someone who could potentially become a vice presidential candidate. Does the campaign in this case, the Harris campaign, do they do internal polling, you know, how does he look to voters? Forget the does he have skeletons in his closet part of the vetting. But do they look at other things like polling, which would be your area and we won't ask you to blink twice or anything if you've ever done that kind of polling?

M

Mike Noble 07:50

Well, yeah, 100% that's why they gave time they said, Hey, we're gonna make our pick, I think around middle of August, right? So about three weeks from now, and they sent out the packets about a week ago. So it's about the time you need about a month to vet candidates, right, but you can bet your bottom dollar that they will be polling the heck out of this stuff to see the impacts, but I would gander because of polling Mark Kelly stuff in the past, it's gonna come up pretty good. Because again, his profile, like think of think of candidates as products and your as a product. What is your resume, he's an astronaut. He's a veteran, he's flown in combat, right.

He's also the husband to a wife, who was a congresswoman or a public servant, who got shot in the face and lived and supported her all throughout that. And so, especially with Trump's to attempt that as a counterweight balance to that argument, and so when you look at it from a profile perspective, and he comes off more even keel than maybe Kamala might, and so again, I feel like he's gonna test pretty well because look, no further, he's an astronaut.

C Christopher Conover 08:59

That's a tough one to beat that really is there's you can find combat veterans, you know, to balance but astronauts a tough one.

M Mike Noble 09:08

Try to find me a group of people that are like, I'm anti-astronaut. Seriously? Yeah, anti everything else have you got Flat Earthers out there and maybe Flat Earthers, maybe Flat Earthers could be the ones that are very much against astronauts. But aside from that small very microcosm of the electorate, here's the thing is that astronauts, it doesn't get much more American than that.

C Christopher Conover 09:32

So looking longer term at this race, we've got 100 or so days left until ballot counting starts. Knowing what we know and who knows what's going to happen in between. We've had two events happen in the last two weeks that nobody saw coming. But does Arizona do you think tighten up?

M Mike Noble 10:01

Potentially, I think the biggest thing what we're seeing right now is that we're in this hyper polarized electorate. So for example, when attempted assassination attempt on Reagan, Reagan went up 20 points in the polls. That was a very different political climate than it is now where we're seeing the highest rates of hyper partisanship. So the two sides really dug in. And so you saw what Trump dodged a bullet basically, in what he got like a point bump, but that happened right around the time the RNC convention. It basically didn't move. But it's really I think this election is very few if any voters that don't have an opinion. So it's not so much the swing voter, I think it's really going to come to turnout of the respective bases. And right now, Republicans are fully unified. They came out of that RNC convention, ready to go. Democrats, and that's been their problem. They haven't they're not fully unified. They weren't really settled on Biden, that was clear the polling, and now you have Kamala, but she still has some hurdles to get through. In it, basically, I'd say to tell folks kind of to pay too much attention in the polls as any other wait till after the convention, which is towards the end of August, because, one, if she gets picked in the convention looks like this. You will be but you know, basically after that convention, because it's really is that party unified because they have the number numerical advantage over Republicans Democrats do. But the thing is, they have to be united. And right now they're not. So I think that's the big thing. And that's what they're trying to do. But I think Arizona could tie it, but we got to wait to see if that happens. If it doesn't I don't think the race

really changes much. If it does, I think it gets a little more competitive and becomes a close one. But hence why we are a battleground state. We're going to be one of the six states that ultimately decides who sits in the most powerful office in the world.

C Christopher Conover 11:40

In the meantime, hold on to your TVs and internet. The ads are coming to Arizona.

M Mike Noble 11:46

Oh, record amount. We're number two in the country. But arguably we see the most Arizonans will see the most ads and anyone else in the country.

C Christopher Conover 11:54

Mike, thanks for spending some time with us.

M Mike Noble 11:56

Course they always appreciate you and always happy to help. Thanks for reaching out Chris.

C Christopher Conover 12:00

That was pollster and CEO of Noble Predictive Insights, Mike Noble. You're listening to The Buzz. After the break, we'll explore the precedent of these unprecedented political times. Stay with us.

N NPR promo 12:16

Here at shortwave space camp, we escape our everyday lives to explore the mysteries and quirks of the universe. We find weird, fun, interesting stories that explain how the cosmos is partying all around us. From stars to dwarf planets to black holes and beyond. We've got you listen now to the shortwave podcast from NPR.

C Christopher Conover 12:41

Welcome back to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover. This week, we're looking at the presidential race through the lens of Arizona and history. Dr. Lara Brown is a political scientist and election analyst. She's also the author of two books about presidential campaigns in history. Vice President Harris now has enough pledged delegates to be nominated as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate at the convention later this month. But nothing is for sure until those votes are cast and counted. So we started our discussion with Dr. Brown talking about the possibility of an open convention.

L

Lara Brown 13:20

I thought it was naive to believe that the Democrats had an appetite to have a debate over who their nominee was, after having such a vigorous debate over whether President Biden should step away. That just doesn't make sense at the Democratic Party level. All politicians know that there are times to be what I call strategically altruistic, meaning that they are realizing that it is in their self interest to put the party before their own ambition. And that happens infrequently. But it does happen and it is part of what creates actually partisan coalition's and partisan unity. Not only did I think it was naive, but I also thought that it was really kind of wrongheaded, because Vice President Kamala Harris had not only been chosen in 2020 to be, in fact, the replacement should President Biden step away or pass away while he was in the presidency. She was constitutionally next in line. But it is also the case that when delegates and voters were coming together during the primary process, no one thought that President Biden was going to select anyone else as his vice president other than Harris, so she was always in the minds of Democrats, the person who would step in, would Joe Biden suddenly become unavailable.

C

Christopher Conover 15:14

So the last time we saw an incumbent decide not to run for a second term, I believe was LBJ. That was different that was in March, not 100. And change days out. How does this play out?

L

Lara Brown 15:32

Well, I think this is very different than 1968. Again, I think this is where the historical analogy just falls apart. If you look at 1968, you know, President Johnson was embattled over Vietnam, he had had absolutely put all of his efforts into escalating that war. There were, you know, protests in the United States over that he had competition in the primaries over that. And then there was also civil rights that was roiling the nation at that moment. And so he stepped away at the end of March, partially, also, for health reasons, he had expressed some concerns about that privately. There was really no other process, except for him to turn over his delegates to his vice president, Hubert Humphrey. And that within a sort of divided Democratic Party created a lot of problems. You also had the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April, and then the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, in June. And both of those things happened before the Chicago convention. In other words, the Democrats could not have been more divided and more sort of at odds with each other over what the direction for the party was, when they showed up in Chicago, then they were

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Christopher Conover 17:07

you bring up the assassinations in 1968. Well, here we are. In 2024, we had an attempted assassination of a presidential candidate who happened to be a former president also. So that seemed to have maybe been a turning point in the election. But then a week later, we had the

incumbent state, Well, nevermind, I'm not going to run and I'm pulling out. Those two now cancel each other out and we just clear the table and hold on, because here we go, or does that assassination attempt play in? And what's your thought on this unprecedented craziness?

L

Lara Brown 17:51

Well, the assassination attempt was certainly a terrifying and tragic moment for our country. Not only was there a life lost in Pennsylvania, and others wounded, but it really speaks to just this sense of how out of control, at least for Democrats, gun violence has become in the United States. I mean, everything that we know about the shooter, this was not necessarily political, I do think that the shooter was looking for a way to be seen. And in this day and age, a school shooting a shooting at a theater or shooting it at a concert doesn't seem to rise to the level of notoriety that it appears the shooter wanted to obtain. And, you know, he likely did know that if you attempt to take the life of a president, you will go down in history, because presidents go down in history. I mean, I can also just say that I do think that we're in a different moment in that other assassination attempts. Were at times when we had less polarization, at least in the modern era. And so figures of both political parties may have been disliked or liked, but they were not kind of universally held as unacceptable to voters. And so there was a sense that the country came together in sympathy over this tragedy, and I don't think that sadly, we are in that kind of a moment. You know, if you just look at the favourability ratings of both President Biden and former President Donald Trump, they are net negative and that makes them generally unsympathetic figures even for something as tragic as an assassination attempt,

C

Christopher Conover 20:06

we're coming towards the the crucial part of the campaign. We know from four years ago, this probably will be a very, very tight campaign. In swing states like Arizona, which went for Biden last time, but hadn't gone for a Democrat since Bill Clinton, generally a red state. But as you know, and our listeners know, we do have our own drum here, and we tend to march to it. How does all of this play in a really tight election, especially in swing states like Arizona?

L

Lara Brown 20:41

Well, the most important part about the change to Harris from Biden is that she reinvigorates the Democratic base. Whether we're talking about people of color, or women or young voters, she is going to galvanize support toward the Democratic Party, which had been waning, and really not just existent for almost the last year. So I do think that that she is important in bringing the Democratic Party to parity with where the Republican Party is. The Republicans have been enthusiastic, Donald Trump's base is ready to be there for him. So I think what we are seeing this summer, is that both parties are now kind of going to have doubled down on their base, they will be at parity. And the real question is going to be what happens after Labor Day when, you know, moderately interested and marginally aligned voters kind of tune in to the race and decide where they're going to put their thumb on the scale. And this is where I think the Democrats appeal ends up being broader than the Republicans partly because all indications in the party suggest that she is going to be looking toward a moderate vice presidential pick

C Christopher Conover 22:17

You bring up that vice presidential issue. And of course, in Arizona, all of a sudden, everybody is paying attention because one of our US senators, Mark Kelly's name is in the mix. But in a race like this, that A is so close and B all the factors we've been talking about that are so unprecedented. Does the vice presidential pick end up mattering? And really does it ever matter?

L Lara Brown 22:45

Most people vote for the top of the ticket, and very few people actually make their decisions on the vice presidential picks. That said, we were in a situation where both presidential nominees were so elderly, that the vice presidential picks matter, because many Americans were saying, are these guys really going to make it another four years? Maybe what I'm really making a choice over is who's going to ascend to the office should the person at the top of the ticket actually pass away? And this is again, why I think Harris was well positioned to take over because so many had already contemplated that possibility. With that said, I do think voters are going to be looking at Harris's pick more than in a normal circumstance, because it will be an indication of where she wants to lead the country. It will provide a signal in a very short campaign of who she is and what matters to her. And this is where I would argue that as much as Senator Kelly is a compelling vice presidential candidate, I think the biggest knock against him is that he is a senator, that then would make the ticket a ticket of insiders against a ticket of outsiders. And at this moment, outsiders do have something of kind of a claim on the American imagination.

C Christopher Conover 24:32

Well, even as, as vice president Harris runs her campaign, we've seen a couple of times when the Vice President ascends for whatever reason, there there seems to be a feeling of obligation, at least for a little while to continue the President's policies. Because of the way this went down is Harris under any public obligation. Whether she actually is or not, but public perception obligation to continue Biden era policies or can she move out on her own?

L Lara Brown 25:11

Well, I do think she will move out on her own, especially on, you know, the issue of abortion. But I also imagine she is going to really be making a case for Biden's record. It is her record as well. And she will want to defend sort of the bipartisan legislation that was passed, and really the economic changes that are leading to a very strong sort of recovery. And though there is more work to do, and many Americans don't yet feel as though the economy has improved. There are real signs and real signals that the economy is stronger now than it was during most of President Trump's term, even excluding the time of the COVID pandemic.

C Christopher Conover 26:14

That was political scientists, Dr. Laura Brown. It's worth noting that if Senator Kelly is picked to

be the vice presidential nominee and if Democrats win the White House, Arizona governor Katie Hubbs, would appoint a Democrat to fill his seat until the next general election in 2026. Arizona law says the governor when they appoint someone to be in the Senate cannot change that party. If that happens, this would be Arizona's sixth consecutive general election where voters are asked to pick a US senator. And that's The Buzz for this week. You can find all our episodes online at azpm.org And subscribe to our show. Wherever you get your podcast just search for The Buzz Arizona. We're also on the NPR app. Zac Ziegler is our producer with production help from Deserae Tucker, Our music is by Enter the Haggis, I'm Christopher Conover thanks for listening.

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Nicole Cox 27:26

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