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# THE SUNDAY TIMES

## Arizona, the swing state where Donald Trump would still win votes from jail

In streets where a few ballots either way could decide the election, some remain undeterred by the prospect of electing a convicted felon as president

Louise Callaghan, Phoenix

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In the car park of a Costco supermarket in the northern suburbs of Phoenix some of America's most powerful voters were stocking up for the weekend.

Libertarians perused stacks of enormous biscotti, centrist Democrats hunted for parsley, and never-Trump Republicans considered buying miniature trampolines.

In November, the outcome of the election will be decided not by the 244 million Americans who are eligible to vote, but by a far smaller slice of the population — perhaps nearer to two million people — who are both undecided about their vote and living in the six or seven swing states that are not dependably Democrat or Republican.

Arizona is one of those states.

[Donald Trump](#)

won it in 2016, and

[Joe Biden](#)

managed to claw it back in 2020 by a margin of just over 10,000 votes. The smallest shift in attitudes, a few thousand votes here or there, could determine who is the next occupant of the White House.

But at Costco, Trump's

[conviction last week](#)

on 34 counts related to falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to a porn star had not yet moved the needle.

"You didn't like him before, you're not going to like him now," said Jim Yockey, 69, as he loaded his car with shopping. "And vice versa. People have already decided."

Yockey, originally from Pittsburgh, is one of the few who have not. But the idea of voting for a convicted felon would not, he said, put him off Trump. "Look, you've got one candidate who is mentally and physically diminished and another who is a compulsive liar," said Yockey, who is retired. "I'm a moderate, so I'll decide which of them seems closest to being a moderate by election day and vote for them."

His wife Cathy, a Democrat, said that while she hoped Trump's conviction would turn people off him, she doubted it would. "Trump is just a person who is morally bankrupt," she said. "He never takes responsibility for his actions."

For Trump's supporters, the conviction appears to have reinforced their view that he is being persecuted by the government. "I'd vote for him if he was in jail," said John, 59, an aircraft mechanic, as he pushed a trolley. "He'd just pardon himself when he got into power."

He and his wife Donna, 54, agreed that Biden had been a "disaster" as president, both for overseeing rising inflation and increasing numbers of people crossing the southern border illegally into the United States.

Trump's conviction, they said, was just another black mark that smacked, they said, of rising authoritarianism. "We're supposed to be worried about Putin, but he [Biden] is jailing his main opposition," John said.

Yet, in an election likely to be decided by fine margins, there have been indications that the jury's verdict could change some minds. A Morning Consult snap poll on Friday found that 49 per cent of independents and 15 per cent of Republicans nationwide think Trump should end his campaign because of the conviction.

In a Reuters/Ipsos poll taken in the hours after the verdict, 10 per cent of Republican-registered voters and 25 per cent of independents said that the ruling made them less likely to vote for Trump.

Polls have consistently shown that if Trump were found guilty of a criminal offence it would make a marginal but significant dent in his support, including in swing states.

Chuck Coughlin, a political consultant and pollster for a Republican-leaning firm in Arizona, said that Biden and Trump would use the conviction to try to increase turnout from their supporters who might have otherwise stayed home.

Trump, he said, "is going to play the martyr card that the government is corrupt" to try to get more voters to the polls. But the real opportunity, he said, would lie with the Democrats, who could use the spectre of a president who is a convicted criminal to get voters riled up enough that they go out to cast their ballot against him.

"That will be a very important part of this election in these swing states to determine who will be the winner," he said.

So far, the White House has not rammed home the fact that Biden will be running against a felon, or publicly gloated over the verdict.

Conor O'Callaghan, an Arizona Democrat who is running for Congress in a highly competitive race, thinks that may be a mistake. "I think we need to remind voters at every turn that Donald Trump is a convicted felon," he said in his air-conditioned office 20 minutes south of the Costco. "We need to remind voters about what happened on January 6. We need to remind voters about what Donald Trump himself is saying, the policies he's proposing."

In Maricopa county, where O'Callaghan is running, the margins are absurdly tight even by swing state standards: in 2022, the Republican candidate for the House of Representatives won by just 3,000 votes.

With these margins, O'Callaghan said, Trump's conviction was a "net negative" for the former president. "I don't see how being convicted on 34 counts makes [anyone] say, 'Oh, you know what, I wasn't really sure before, but now I think Donald Trump is my guy,'" he said.

Trump, meanwhile, used the furore from his conviction to raise more than \$35 million in donations in just six hours after the verdict. And, as his allies often point out, scandals that might cripple others do tend to slide off him;

[when he was indicted last year](#)

on four sets of criminal indictments, his level of support increased.

Brian Seitchik, a Republican strategist, said that the key demographic to look at when assessing the impact of Trump's conviction was those who might be thinking of voting for Robert F Kennedy junior, a third-party candidate who is polling to win about 10 per cent of the vote in key swing states.

"Are they going to view this as a witch-hunt by Democrats trying to oppress the Republican nominee?" he said. "Or are third-party voters going to say: you know what, I don't like Biden, I don't like Trump. But I'm not going to throw my vote away on a third-party candidate ... I'm going to hold my nose and vote for Biden."

At Costco, Kurt Stouvenel, 43, a management analyst living in Phoenix, said that one of his biggest concerns was that he did not think Biden would live for another four years. While he did not support either Trump or Biden, he also believed that the New York state judiciary overreached by convicting the former president.

Before the election, he said, he would assess each candidate's economic policies and vote accordingly. His wife, a registered Democrat who said she was nonetheless going to vote for Trump because she liked him personally, said Trump's criminal record did not make any difference to her.

"They're all felons anyway," she said.

#### Related Images



**A group purportedly from Arizona were among the pro-Trump protesters outside the court in Manhattan where the former president became a convicted felon last week**

Selcuk Acar/Anadolu/Getty Images





Arizona's capital, Phoenix. The state is one of the tightest battlegrounds in the race for the White House

Getty



Trump railed against the verdicts at a press conference on Friday — having raised millions of dollars since they were announced

ANGELA WEISS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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