

Under Threat: How Election Deniers Could Thwart the Next Election

Candidates for Governor, Secretary of State, and Attorney General in several battleground states have spent their campaigns spreading dangerous lies about the results of the 2020 presidential election. If any of these candidates win, they would be able to directly undermine our democracy through the powers given to them in these offices.

It's critical to understand what exactly those powers are and the concrete ways these election deniers and conspiracy theorists could restrict ballot access, sabotage and subvert the process, and create chaos and confusion in future elections.

In five states likely to be battlegrounds in the 2024 presidential election—*Arizona, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Nevada, and Wisconsin*—this report analyzes the impacts these extremists could have if they are successful in November.

END
CITIZENS
UNITED

LET
AMERICA
VOTE

ARIZONA

GOVERNOR

Arizona Republican candidate for governor Kari Lake [said she would not have](#) certified President Joe Biden's election and [has refused to say](#) whether she would honor the result of her election if she loses.

As governor, she would have tremendous power to change the way elections are administered and could sabotage the results. Specifically:

- The governor [must review and approve](#) the Election Procedures Manual that lays out how state elections are funded. She could refuse to approve a voter handbook unless the Secretary of State includes certain language or restrictions, creating more chaos and confusion. If the handbook does not align with Arizona law, it could also be challenged in court leading to more chaos and confusion.
- As governor she could approve restrictive voter legislation or veto legislation that would increase access to the ballot.
- The governor is able to appoint judges out of a pool from the [Arizona Judicial Nominating Commission](#) and could choose to appoint judges that are the most hostile to voting rights and democracy.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Republican Secretary of State candidate Mark Finchem [said if he were in office](#) in 2020, "We would have won. Plain and simple," and said if he loses his own race, there "ain't gonna be no concession speech coming from this guy." He opposes early voting, wants to sharply restrict mail-in voting, and cosponsored a bill that would've given the state's legislature the authority to overturn elections.

As Secretary of State:

- He would be in charge of certifying election results and may refuse to do so if the Republican presidential nominee doesn't win in 2024, leading to a constitutional crisis that could disenfranchise millions of voters.
- He could [also refuse](#) to certify voting devices, muddy the candidate certification process, and undermine the ballot initiative process.
- The Secretary of State [writes the Elections Procedures Manual](#) and Finchem "has pledged to rewrite those rules," [which means he could create](#) new rules for voter registrations, mail ballots, and more procedures that put onerous and arbitrary new restrictions on voting.
- He oversees the certification of election officers and provides election officer training, meaning he could refuse to certify certain election officers, making local election administration more partisan.

ARIZONA

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Republican Attorney General candidate Abraham Hamadeh [said](#) the 2020 election was “rigged” and people “worked to rob” Donald Trump.

Specifically:

- As Attorney General, he would have exclusive authority to defend the state against election related lawsuits and could defend unconstitutional voting laws passed by the legislature (Right now, [this exclusive power](#) lasts just until 2023, due to a law passed by Republicans to strip Democratic Secretary of State Katie Hobbes from such authority. This could change, depending on the outcome of that race this year.)
- Like the governor, the Attorney General is [able to review and approve](#) the Election Procedures Manual, which means he could add new language to restrict ballot access based on any number of election conspiracy theories.

CONGRESS

While they have no direct control over the administration of elections, members of Congress can decide whether or not to certify presidential electors.

In 2022, at least [eight of the House Republican incumbents and challengers for Arizona's nine House seats](#) are election deniers, as is Republican Senate candidate Blake Masters.

MICHIGAN

GOVERNOR

Michigan Republican [candidate for governor Tudor Dixon](#) has falsely claimed Donald Trump won the 2020 election and [has refused to commit](#) to accepting the results of the 2022 election if she loses.

As governor, she would have tremendous power to change the way elections are administered and sabotage the results. Specifically:

- The governor [appoints members](#) to the Michigan Board of State Canvassers, which compiles and certifies the election results that have already been confirmed by county election officials. In this capacity, she could appoint members who share her radical beliefs, creating a politicized or extreme Board that either refuses, or is unable, to properly certify future election results.
- The governor [is able to fill judicial vacancies](#) by appointment and could stack the courts with justices who share and support her extreme views around election and voting policies and practices, and false theories around voter fraud and election challenges.
- The governor [submits a suggested legislative program](#) and a proposed budget to the Legislature and Dixon has already [pledged to propose policies](#) that would make Michigan have the strictest voter ID requirements in the country, curtail mail voting, and implement improper voter purges that could kick countless voters off the voting rolls.
- Over the last four years, Governor Gretchen Whitmer has served as a check on voter suppression laws passed by the Republican legislature. If Dixon were governor, she would likely sign bills passed by the legislature to restrict ballot access or subvert the election.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Republican Secretary of State candidate Kristina Karamo [is a fringe conspiracy theorist](#) who believes "Donald Trump won Michigan" in 2020, tried to overturn President Biden's election at the Supreme Court, and has regularly made false claims about voter fraud.

If she were to win, Karamo [would have incredible power](#) to alter election rules and administration.

- As the state's "chief election officer," the Secretary of State has supervisory control over local election officials in the performance of their election related duties and investigates election law violations. Karamo could improperly influence the performance of election officials and their training to make administration more partisan.
- Karamo could use the office to investigate Democrats or other opponents for purported election law violations.

MICHIGAN

- While Karamo wouldn't certify the election, she'd be involved in crafting the certification process, which could lead to mechanisms that undermine democracy.
- Karamo could use her power to administer election laws and dispute resolution to target Democratic voters, make it harder for Michiganders to vote, and create an unfair system to address election related disputes.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Republican candidate [for Attorney General Matthew DePerno](#) has falsely claimed Michigan voting machines were rigged, repeatedly and falsely stated that Trump won the 2020 election, and is now under criminal investigation regarding his alleged participation in an effort to tamper with voting tabulator machines following the 2020 election.

This conspiracy theorist who has already threatened to investigate the current Attorney General for any number of baseless claims could do great damage to the state's democracy if elected. Specifically:

- As the state's top law enforcement official, [he would have the power](#) to position and represent the state in support of restrictive or unconstitutional voting laws and challenges to election results and certification.
- The Attorney General has the power [to investigate](#) alleged violations of election law and with DePerno's history of making baseless claims of election fraud and threatening to persecute his political opponents, there is little doubt that he would attempt to use the powers of his official position to do the same and undermine Michigan's elections and democracy.

CONGRESS

While they have no direct control over the administration of elections, members of Congress can decide whether or not to certify presidential electors.

In 2022, at least [six of the House Republican incumbents and challengers for Michigan's 14 House seats](#) are election deniers.

NEVADA

GOVERNOR

Republican candidate for governor Joe Lombardo [has played footsie](#) with “Big Lie” voter fraud conspiracy theories and [pledged to end](#) popular, safe, and secure voting practices such as vote by mail.

As Governor, Lombardo could dramatically curtail voting rights in a state that has worked hard to expand access to the ballot in recent years. Specifically, if Lombardo were governor, he could veto any expansive voting bills or pro-democracy bills, as well as sign any anti-democracy legislation if Republicans were to take power in the legislature.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Nevada Republican Secretary of State candidate Jim Marchant is a Big Lie conspiracy theorist [who has stated](#) that he would not have certified the 2020 election [and said](#), “President Trump and I lost an election in 2020 because of a rigged election...When my coalition of secretary of state candidates get elected, we're gonna fix the whole country and President Trump is going to be president again in 2024.”

The Secretary of State has a key role in administering the state’s election and Marchant could do major damage to ballot access in the state. Specifically:

- The Secretary of State [supervises state and local elections](#), including being responsible for the execution, interpretation, and enforcement of federal election and state election and campaign finance laws. Marchant will undoubtedly push for election administration and security practices that restrict voter access to the rolls and ballot box.
- The Secretary of State [certifies](#) statewide candidates, ballot questions, and election results. If Marchant’s preferred candidates don’t win in 2024, it’s likely he would refuse to certify those elections leading to creating a potential constitutional crisis in the state.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Republican Attorney General candidate Sigal Chattah [has made](#) evidence-free claims of voter fraud and [has led legal challenges](#) to restrict voting access.

As the state’s top law enforcement officer, the Attorney General is able to investigate and prosecute crimes like fraud and corruption and protecting voting rights. Based on her past statements, it’s likely that Chattah would launch unnecessary or baseless investigations to undermine the public’s faith in elections and push for new voting restrictions.

NEVADA

CONGRESS

While they have no direct control over the administration of elections, members of Congress can decide whether or not to certify presidential electors.

In 2022, at least [two House Republican challengers for Nevada's four House seats](#) are election deniers, as is Republican Senate candidate Adam Laxalt.

PENNSYLVANIA

GOVERNOR

Republican candidate for governor Doug Mastriano is a [dangerous conspiracy theorist](#) who has already used his power as a legislator to spread election conspiracy theories and was a key figure in Pennsylvania's "Stop the Steal" movement to overturn President Biden's victory.

As governor in a key battleground state, Mastriano could wreak havoc on the 2024 presidential election. Specifically:

- In Pennsylvania, [the governor appoints](#) the Secretary of the Commonwealth, who is the state's chief elections official. Mastriano [has already signaled](#) he has a pick in mind who is "a voting-reform-minded individual," which all but ensures it will be someone who shares his extreme views and fringe theories around election administration, security, and certification. This individual would have incredible power to implement practices like improper voter purges, election recounts, and decertification of certain voting machines and election results.
- The governor [signs the ascertainment](#) for the slate of the state's presidential and vice presidential electors. Mastriano already tried to overturn the 2020 presidential election and there's every reason to believe he'll do so as governor if his preferred Republican candidate does not win in 2024.
- Over the last 8 years, Governor Wolf has served as a check on bad voting laws passed by the Republican legislature. If Mastriano were governor, he would almost certainly sign restrictive voting measures and others aimed at subverting the electoral process.

**Democratic candidate for governor Josh Shapiro currently serves as the commonwealth's Attorney General. If he wins in November, a special election to fill his seat will be held in 2023.*

CONGRESS

While they have no direct control over the administration of elections, members of Congress can decide whether or not to certify presidential electors.

In 2022, at least [eight House Republican incumbents and challengers for Pennsylvania's 18 House seats](#) are election deniers, as is Republican Senate candidate Mehmet Oz.

WISCONSIN

GOVERNOR

Republican candidate for governor Tim Michels [refuses to say](#) the 2020 election wasn't stolen, [falsely claims](#) "decertifying" the election is an option if he's elected governor, and [won't commit](#) to accepting the results of his election if he loses.

As governor, this election denier would have a major role in our elections and ballot access. Specifically:

- The governor [certifies election results](#) for U.S. Senate elections and presidential electors. Based on his previous comments, he could attempt to decertify or delay certification of election results to defy the will of Wisconsin voters.
- He appoints two of the six members of the Wisconsin Elections Commission (which are confirmed by state Senate), giving him the opportunity to appoint members who share and support extreme views around election and voting policies and practices, and are able to push the Commission in that direction. Michels [has also said](#) he wants to eliminate this commission altogether.
- The governor makes appointments to fill any vacancy on the Wisconsin Supreme Court or any Court of Record, and he would likely stack the courts with justices who share and support his extreme views around election and voting policies and practices.
- Over the last four years, Governor Evers has served as a check on bad voting laws passed by the Republican legislature. If Michels were governor, he would almost certainly sign such bad bills passed by the legislature and could also veto any laws that increase access to the ballot that are passed by the legislature.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Republican Secretary of State candidate Amy Loudenbeck [has been "vague" about](#) whether or not President Biden won the 2020 election and wants to transfer powers from the bipartisan election commission to the Secretary of State's office.

In Wisconsin the chief election officer is currently appointed by the election commission and confirmed by the Wisconsin Senate, so as it stands, the Secretary of State has little role over elections. However, if Loudenbeck were to get her wish and have oversight over elections transferred to her, she would have control over a wide range of functions related to statewide election administration, including being able to implement aggressive voter purges and have the power to refuse to certify election results.

WISCONSIN

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Republican Attorney General candidate Eric Toney has claimed to be the “most aggressive prosecutors of election fraud” and [has criticized the Wisconsin Election Commission Board](#) for actions taken during the 2020 election to expand and protect ballot access during a once-in-a-generation global pandemic.

As the state’s top law enforcement official, the Attorney General has broad powers to protect the state’s election laws. Specifically:

- The Attorney General represents the state in all election related cases. If elected, Toney would have the power to position and represent the state in support of restrictive voting laws, improper voter purges, sham election audits, false theories around voter fraud, and challenges to election results and certification.
- The Attorney General is also able to provide their opinion in writing on questions of law submitted by the legislature. If elected, Toney, would be able to provide the legislature opinions to offer cover and support for legislation restricting the right to vote, implementing improper voter purges, sham election audits, promoting false election conspiracy theories, and blocking election results and certification.

CONGRESS

While they have no direct control over the administration of elections, members of Congress can decide whether or not to certify presidential electors.

In 2022, at least [three House Republican incumbents and challengers for Wisconsin’s eight House seats](#) are election deniers, as is Republican Senator Ron Johnson.

THE 118TH CONGRESS

While the power to administer elections and certify election results lies with state officials, Congress also plays a significant role in certifying the electors for the presidential election.

In 2020, 147 Republican members of the House and Senate—half the caucus—voted to reject electors without any evidence of widespread fraud, even after violent insurrectionists attacked the U.S. Capitol with the same goal in mind.

The 118th Congress will likely see a similar number of deniers. [According to the Washington Post](#), “Among 419 Republican nominees for the U.S. House, 230, or 55 percent, are election deniers. And the vast majority of those, 147, are running in safe Republican districts, with another 29 in competitive races, according to ratings as of Oct. 5 by the Cook Political Report.”

These officials, working with election deniers in top battleground states in a close election, could at worst work together to overturn an election they don’t like or simply sow chaos and undermine the public’s faith in elections as a predicate to passing new legislation to restrict the right to vote and subvert our elections.

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