

# Evers campaign: Governor protects democracy as “Wisconsin Republicans push to take over the state’s elections”

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MADISON, Wis. — Today, The New York Times [profiled](#) how Wisconsin Republicans are “engaged in an all-out assault on the state’s election system, building off their attempts to challenge the results of the 2020 presidential race by pressing to give themselves full control over voting in the state.”

Led by Speaker Robin Vos and Sen. Ron Johnson, Wisconsin Republicans are attacking heroic election officials and using conspiracy theories to try and destroy a bipartisan elections commission that they created. Last week, with no basis in reality, Sen. Johnson urged Republican legislators to [illegally take over Wisconsin’s federal elections](#) and attempt to circumvent Gov. Tony Evers.

Gov. Evers told The New York Times that “the outrageous statements and ideas Wisconsin Republicans have embraced aren’t about making our elections stronger, they’re about making it more difficult for people to participate in the democratic process.”

Gov. Evers has been clear that he will uphold the integrity of Wisconsin’s democratic institutions by stopping any assaults on Wisconsin’s elections. During his first term, Gov. Evers has stood as a [“sea wall for fair elections”](#) by vetoing [Republican-backed voter suppression bills](#) and [gerrymandered redistricting maps](#).

“As we’ve seen before, Wisconsin Republicans will stop at nothing to hold onto

power, even if it means suppressing votes to pre-determine the outcomes of our elections,” said **Tony for Wisconsin Communications Director Sam Roecker**. “Governor Evers believes that every eligible voter should be able to participate in our elections and will always work to make them free, fair, and secure.”

### **The New York Times: [Wisconsin Republicans Push to Take Over the State's Elections](#)**

Republicans in Wisconsin are engaged in an all-out assault on the state’s election system, building off their attempts to challenge the results of the 2020 presidential race by pressing to give themselves full control over voting in the state.

The Republican effort — broader and more forceful than that in any other state where allies of former President Donald J. Trump are trying to overhaul elections — takes direct aim at the bipartisan Wisconsin Elections Commission, an agency Republicans created half a decade ago that has been under attack since the chaotic aftermath of last year’s election.

The onslaught picked up late last month after a long-awaited report on the 2020 results that was ordered by Republican state legislators found no evidence of fraud but made dozens of suggestions for the election commission and the G.O.P.-led Legislature, fueling Republican demands for more control of elections.

Then the Trump-aligned sheriff of Racine County, the state’s fifth most populous county, recommended felony charges against five of the six members of the election commission for guidance they had given to municipal clerks early in the pandemic. The Republican majority leader of the State Senate later seemed to give a green light to that proposal, saying that “prosecutors around the state” should determine whether to bring charges.

And last week, Senator Ron Johnson, a Republican, said that G.O.P. state lawmakers should unilaterally assert control of federal elections, claiming that they had the authority to do so even if Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, stood in their way — an extraordinary legal argument debunked by a 1932 Supreme Court decision and a 1964 ruling from the Wisconsin Supreme Court. His suggestion was nonetheless echoed by Michael Gableman, a conservative former State Supreme Court justice who is conducting the Legislature’s election inquiry.

[...]

The uproar over election administration in Wisconsin — where the last two presidential contests have been decided by fewer than 23,000 votes each — is heightened by the state's deep divisions and its pivotal place in American politics.

Some top Republican officials in Wisconsin privately acknowledge that their colleagues are playing to the party's base by calling for state election officials to be charged with felonies or for their authority to be usurped by lawmakers.

Adding to the uncertainty, Mr. Johnson's proposal has not yet been written into legislation in Madison. Mr. Evers has vowed to stop it.

"The outrageous statements and ideas Wisconsin Republicans have embraced aren't about making our elections stronger, they're about making it more difficult for people to participate in the democratic process," Mr. Evers said Thursday. The G.O.P.'s election proposals, he added, "are nothing more than a partisan power grab."

[...]

Next year, Wisconsin will host critical elections for Mr. Johnson's Senate seat and for statewide offices, including the governor. Rebecca Kleefisch, the leading Republican in the race to challenge Mr. Evers, is running on a platform of eliminating the state election commission. (On Monday, she filed a lawsuit against the agency asking the Wisconsin Supreme Court to declare that the commission's guidance violates state law.)

The Republican anger at the Wisconsin Elections Commission, a body of three Democrats and three Republicans that G.O.P. lawmakers created in part to eliminate the investigatory powers of its predecessor agency, comes nearly 20 months after commissioners issued guidance to local election clerks on how to deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

Republicans have seized in particular on a March 2020 commission vote lifting a rule that required special voting deputies — trained and dispatched by municipal clerks' offices — to visit nursing homes twice before issuing absentee ballots to residents. The special voting deputies, like most other visitors, were barred from entering nursing homes early in the pandemic, and the commission reasoned that

there was not enough time before the April primary election to require them to be turned away before mailing absentee ballots.

The vote was relatively uncontroversial at the time: No lawsuits from Republicans or anyone else challenged the guidance. The procedure remained in place for the general election in November.

But after Joseph R. Biden Jr. won Wisconsin by 20,682 votes out of 3.3 million cast, Republicans began making evidence-free claims of fraudulent votes cast from nursing homes across the state. Sheriff Christopher Schmaling of Racine County said the five state election commissioners who had voted to allow clerks to mail absentee ballots to nursing homes without the visit by special voting deputies — as is prescribed by state law — should face felony charges for election fraud and misconduct in office.

[...]

Ann Jacobs, a Democrat who is the commission's chairwoman, said she had no regrets about making voting easier during the pandemic and added that "even my Republican colleagues" were afraid about the future of fair elections in the state.

"We did everything we could during the pandemic to help people vote," she said.

Mr. Johnson — a two-term senator who said he would announce a decision on whether to seek re-election "in the next few weeks" — is lobbying Republican state legislators, with whom he met last week at the State Capitol, to take over federal elections.

"The State Legislature has to reassert its constitutional role, assert its constitutional responsibility, to set the times, place and manner of the election, not continue to outsource it through the Wisconsin Elections Commission," Mr. Johnson said. "The Constitution never mentions a governor."

Mr. Johnson acknowledged that his proposal could leave the state with dueling sets of election regulations, one from the Wisconsin Elections Commission and another from the Legislature.

"I suppose some counties will handle it one way and other counties will handle it another," he said.

Even if Republican lawmakers adopted Mr. Johnson's proposal, it would apply only to federal elections, not those for state office.

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