

# WisDems: The Democrats' last stand in Wisconsin

Posted on Wednesday, Nov 2, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

**MADISON, Wis.** — [New York Times Magazine](#) wrote about Wisconsin's critical role in elections, profiling Wisconsin Democrats and WisDems Chair Ben Wikler's investments in the long-term success of our state.

By building a year-round organizational framework in communities throughout Wisconsin that is rooted in accountability and trust, Wisconsin Democrats have found footholds in even the deepest red parts of our state—and have no plans to leave. The stakes of this and future elections could not be higher, but Chair Wikler and WisDems have invested both time and money in Wisconsin's most important races, and in so doing, have invested in the future of Wisconsin.

**New York Times Magazine: [The Democrats' Last Stand in Wisconsin](#)**

*Key Points:*

- The choices [WisDems Chair Ben] Wikler makes — how to allocate money and organizing muscle, when to saturate local media markets with ads — will affect more than individual candidates or races, or even the midterm cycle as a whole. Wisconsin was central to President Donald Trump's effort to overturn his defeat in the 2020 election, an effort that continued well into this year.
- The administration of the state's elections is currently overseen by a bipartisan group, the Wisconsin Elections Commission, which upheld President Biden's victory over Trump's objections a few weeks after the election. But the commission's future is in jeopardy: Many members of the state's G.O.P. have been speaking openly about disbanding it and transferring its authority to the Republican-held Legislature or the secretary of state. **In Wisconsin, the**

**coming midterms are as much about 2024 — and every subsequent presidential cycle, for that matter — as they are about 2022.**

- In recent years, a number of young Democratic leaders have sought to redirect the party's attention toward the states and re-energize the grass roots.
- Wikler, at least, has the advantage of working in a perennial battleground state; four of the last six presidential elections in Wisconsin were decided by less than a percentage point, and it was the tipping-point state that put the winner over the top in the Electoral College in both 2016 and 2020. **“As I often say to voters and volunteers, being in Wisconsin you have a superpower,”** Wikler told me over the summer. **“Your vote for no good reason has more power in this moment to shape the future of the entire United States than the votes of people anywhere else.”**
- Wikler and WisDems are facing what may be an even bigger challenge in this year's midterms. **Even if the Democrats can prevent the Republicans from establishing a veto-proof supermajority in the Legislature, they also need to hold on to the governor's office in order to block the G.O.P. from advancing its statewide agenda. Over the course of his four years in office, Governor Evers has vetoed almost 150 bills that among other things would have further suppressed voting rights in Wisconsin** — for instance, limiting the sites where voters can return absentee ballots — and loosened restrictions on bringing guns onto the grounds of schools.
- It's always tough to mobilize voters in off-year elections, and midterms tend to break hard against the party in power in Washington. **Not since 1962 has a Democrat won the race for governor in Wisconsin while his party held the White House.**
- Wikler devotes a lot of his time to fund-raising. Standing at his desk in WisDems' office across from the state's Capitol, he calls individuals who have made large donations to the party — the bar for a personal call is typically \$1,000 — and asks them to consider making another, similarly sized donation. Every month, he and his team also run a social media campaign to encourage smaller donors to join the party's **8,000 regular monthly contributors.**

- The goal is to create a recurring source of revenue to fuel the party's year-round activities. Much of the money the party raises goes toward individual elections, which take place every year in Wisconsin. **But Wikler also wants WisDems to be a regular presence in people's lives even when it's not election season.** To that end, he directs whatever resources he can to the local Democratic parties in all 72 of Wisconsin's counties to help them rent out office space, advertise in their local newspapers and, above all, expand their network of volunteers.
- Even as Wikler was preparing for his last frantic push before the midterms, he was hopeful that no matter what happened, on Nov. 9 he would be able to say that the party had made progress. "The basic idea of organizing is that you should come out stronger whether you win or lose," he told me over the phone from La Guardia Airport in mid-October, on his way back home from a final fund-raising swing in New York. **"Every single year, Democrats in Wisconsin win some races that they're not supposed to win. You don't know where the forces will come together to make that happen. But if you are always organizing and investing everywhere, and cheering on the folks who are willing to put their names on the ballot and do the work behind the scenes, if you do all that, then you'll be ready when the opportunity comes."**