



To: Interested Parties
From: Thania Sanchez, SVP, Research and Policy Development
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Re: Replacing the Refs: Updated Analysis of Election Denier Campaigns as Critical Month of Primaries Begins

Elections are national events, but they're run by the states. That means the [state officials who oversee elections](#)—governors, secretaries of state, and attorneys general—are on the front lines of our democracy.

Throughout this midterm election year, States United Action is tracking Election Deniers running for these major statewide offices. Our tracking tool, [Replacing the Refs](#), helps define the landscape for one key element of the anti-democracy strategy: Change the rules, **change the referees**, in order to change the results.

In 2022, 39 states and the District of Columbia have races for governor, attorney general, and/or secretary of state across the country. So far, 22 states and the District of Columbia have held primaries or conventions to choose their general election candidates for statewide office, with 17 states to go.

As of July 28, our [tracker](#) shows:

- **More than half (60 percent)** of secretary of state contests include an Election Denier. In addition, **more than one-third (40 percent)** of governor and attorney general races currently have an Election Denier candidate on the ballot.
- There are still **five states** with Election Deniers running for all three top statewide positions—[Alabama, Arizona, Kansas, Michigan, and Wisconsin](#). Four of these states have primaries in the next two weeks.
- At least **26 Election Deniers** are running for governor **in 15 states**.
- At least **15 Election Deniers** are running for attorney general **in 12 states**.
- At least **20 Election Deniers** are running for secretary of state **in 16 states**.

Looking ahead to the general election, we can identify [broad trends](#) in the Election Denier landscape at this point in primary season.

- **Election Deniers are not sweeping the statewide primaries, but they are winning in some places across the country.** Looking at the 22 states that have already chosen general election candidates for statewide office, Election Deniers are moving on to the November election in **at least one in four races** for governor, attorney general, and secretary of state.
- **Pro-democracy Republican incumbents have mostly fought off their Election Denier challengers.** The most prominent example is Georgia, where Governor Brian Kemp and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger defeated Election Deniers in the Republican primary. However, there are notable exceptions. For example, in Idaho, incumbent Attorney General Lawrence Wasden lost his primary to Raúl Labrador, an Election Denier; in Indiana, the party convention chose Diego Morales, an Election Denier, over the incumbent, Secretary of State Holli Sullivan.
- **Voter participation in primaries allows a smaller subset of voters to have an outsized role in the election process.** Examining the historical turnout rates in 32 of the 39 states with primary elections for statewide offices this cycle—that is, wherever the data was available—the data shows that **less than half** of all people who voted in the last general election also voted in their state’s primary election. The data also shows that races at the top of the ticket, usually governor or U.S. senator in a midterm election, frequently draw more votes than other positions on the ballot, meaning that many voters leave parts of their ballot (often referred to as “down ticket”) empty. For example, in the 2018 primary in Arizona, only 88% of the people who cast a vote for governor also cast a vote for attorney general, and 93% for secretary of state. In 2018 in Wisconsin, only 83% of the voters who cast a vote for governor voted for in the race for attorney general, and 85% voted for secretary of state. Many of these contests were decided by narrow margins.
- **The trend of Election Deniers running for office must also be understood within the broader context of the anti-democracy movement.** As these Election Deniers seek statewide positions with election powers, their allies in state legislatures are introducing and passing bills that would politicize and interfere with the nonpartisan administration of elections. According to the May 2022 edition of *A Democracy Crisis in the Making*, a [report](#) by the States United Democracy Center, Protect Democracy and Law Forward, legislatures in 33 states were considering at least 229 of these bills seeking to politicize, criminalize, or otherwise interfere with elections. At the time of the report, 50 had been enacted or adopted since the beginning of 2021.

August will be a critical month. Some of the most closely contested states in the 2020 election are holding August primaries, and some of the highest-profile Election Denier races are slated to happen in the next few weeks. Arizona, which holds its primary Aug. 2, has Election Deniers on the ballot for governor, attorney general, and secretary of state. The same is true for Wisconsin, which holds its primary Aug. 9. Michigan holds its primary Aug. 2; the state Republican Party

has already endorsed Election Deniers for attorney general (Matthew DePerno) and secretary of state (Kristina Karamo).

As filing deadlines pass, primaries occur, and more information becomes available, we will update the tracker. Our hope is to put a spotlight on this alarming trend and educate the press and the public about the importance of these statewide roles and the belief in free, fair, and secure elections. Our tracking tool is a great place to start.