

Defend Democracy Project

**NEW REPORT**

# The Three Greatest Threats to Democracy in Minnesota

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## The Three Greatest Threats to Democracy In Minnesota

*Democracy in Minnesota is under attack by Donald Trump and his allies. This report describes the most dangerous of many ongoing efforts. We surveyed grassroots organizers, legal analysts, and academic experts to identify the key risks.*

*Our analysis found three primary threats that are intertwined –*

- *Election deniers are working at every level to disrupt the electoral process, starting with training rogue poll workers and encouraging MAGA constituents to threaten state and local election officials with harassment.*
- *Elected officials are pushing a slate of state bills and local initiatives predicated on baseless election conspiracy theories, aiming to constrict ballot access].*
- *The MAGA movement is undertaking an extensive effort to spread disinformation about Minnesota’s voting systems ahead of the midterm elections.*

*These threats are designed to overturn the will of American voters, and take away our most basic right to choose their own leaders. Trump and MAGA Republicans in Minnesota are actively working to disrupt election administration, obstruct certification, and suppress votes in order to consolidate power over elections for decades to come.*

### **Election Deniers Are Trying to Dismantle Local Election Infrastructure**

**MAGA Organizers Like Kim Crockett Are Working To Infiltrate Minnesota Elections.** One of the biggest threats to democracy in Minnesota is an ongoing effort to sow public distrust in election results, then pack election offices with election deniers. Far-right [attorney-turned-activist](#) Kim Crockett is a leading figure in the movement to [spread lies](#) about the [results of the 2020 election](#) in Minnesota, working with the conservative Minnesota Voters Alliance. An outspoken advocate for outlandish election conspiracy theories, she is part of a [right-wing network](#) known as the “Election Integrity Network” (EIN) which is recruiting an army of activists to become poll workers to put election denier eyes “on every ballot.” Crockett maintains that she has [attended](#) weekly EIN calls run by Trump ally and Jan. 6 conspirator Cleta Mitchell since 2021, focused on [training operatives across the country](#) to work in [local election administration offices](#). The network is funded by the Conservative Partnership Institute, a nonprofit organization [sponsoring a host of projects](#) led by MAGA activists.

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- **Kim Crockett Is Leading An Effort To Plant Partisan Poll Watchers & Election Judges In The Electoral Process.** Since [joining](#) the EIN, Kim Crockett has [successfully pushed](#) for local elected officials to adopt the “[Virginia model](#),” which involves [planting partisan election judges and poll watchers](#) in Minnesota election offices. For months, she has [pushed](#) for these so-called “Citizen election judges” in preparation for the midterms, attacking mail-in voting as “fraudulent” in an attempt to promote in-person voting adjudicated by partisan election judges. She wrote, “[w]hy are [ballot drop boxes, absentee voting and mail-in ballots](#) on the rise? Let's encourage voting on Election Day, where citizen election judges are involved in the process.” Further, she has accused the USPS of committing widespread mail-in voter fraud. Crockett has even [questioned](#) whether people with disabilities and non-English speakers should be allowed to vote. She has also criticized early voting, alleging that the process allows “[cheaters to game voter data with illegal ballots](#).” To make matters worse, the EIN is training these partisan election judges to [ignore local election rules](#), [gather intel](#) about local voting systems, and report back to the organization.
- **Election Integrity Network Insiders Are Pushing Counties To Hand-Count Election Results.** Across Minnesota, MAGA activists are pushing elected officials to hand-count election results in November. Over the past year, MAGA activists supported by the EIN and RNC have [harassed](#) at least 25-35 county boards with requests to remove voting machines, create tedious new requirements for hand-counting ballots, remove e-poll books, remove ballot drop boxes, and create complicated alterations to county-level absentee ballot boards. In Crow Wing County (where county leaders [unsuccessfully requested](#) a 2020 [election audit](#) earlier this year) local election officials voted to [hand-count election precincts](#) and cast vote records this November, enacting a [conspiratorial and unnecessary new process](#) demanded by a group of ‘persistent’ MAGA extremists, who have been pushing Carver and Sherburne county officials to [follow suit](#). “Replacing voting machines with hand counts as the main way of counting votes would [weaken the electoral system](#) by introducing a greater degree of human error into the process,” according to the Campaign Legal Center, a voting rights non-profit. Indeed, hand-counting ballots is [exceedingly time-consuming](#), labor-intensive work that has a [consistently higher rate of error](#) than ballot tabulation machines.

**Far-Right Activists Are Harassing Local Election Officials With Unproven Voter Fraud Claims.** Hundreds of far-right activists, loosely organized under the moniker “Swamp Watch,” have been [mobilizing at county board meetings](#) across Minnesota, aiming to convince officials that the 2020 election results were illegitimate. Leading MAGA “Swamp Watch” figure Rick Weible has [presented](#) his so-called election fraud findings to [dozens of groups across the state](#) in an effort to spread false conspiracy theories and [encourage local officials](#) to change systems. Many have even attempted to uncover “fraud” through direct [door-to-door](#) canvassing, [county data requests](#), and waves of [canvassing board complaints](#).

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## **MAGA Officials Are Attacking Minnesota's Electoral System**

**Minnesota Legislators Have Introduced 42 Bills Seeking To Politicize, Criminalize, And Interfere With Elections.** Since 2020, Minnesota legislators have introduced 42 bills intending to interfere with the electoral process. No bills advanced, but many would have imposed audits and heavy-handed voter ID restrictions, burdens in election administration, overhauled presidential electors, and restricted ballot access.<sup>1</sup> Most recently, Minnesota voting rights experts have [expressed concern](#) that immigrant voting access is up for debate. Above all, the introduction of these dangerous bills demonstrates that democratic elections administration is at stake in November.

**Election Deniers and Extremist Militia Affiliates Are Serving As Prominent Minnesota Officials.** A leaked Oath Keeper membership roster [revealed](#) that twelve current or former Minnesota Oath Keepers work in law enforcement, the military, as first responders, and even elected officials – state Representative Donald Raleigh (R–Blaine) [held past ties](#) with the group. Rep. Raleigh is part of a group of twenty-one state Minnesota lawmakers who have helped spread Trump's election lies, using their positions of power to spread baseless conspiracy theories about Minnesota elections and support legal and legislative efforts to “nullify” the 2020 election.<sup>2</sup>

## **Election Deniers Are Circulating Disinformation About Election Security**

**Local Minnesota Election Officials Are Inundated With MAGA Misinformation Amid Logistical Challenges.** MAGA disinformation campaigns have led to widespread distrust in election administrators in Minnesota. Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar [raised concerns](#) about state officials facing threats of violence while dealing with [misinformation](#), paper supply [challenges](#) and [funding limitations](#). Echoing Klobuchar, local election officials have noted [misinformation is fueling widespread election skepticism](#) in the state. Nationally, one in six election officials have faced violent threats and harassment because of their job, and 77 percent say that they feel these [threats have increased](#) in recent years. At least five Minnesota counties have seen election board meetings interrupted by MAGA constituents repeating unproven claims of “election fraud.” To make matters worse, insider threats against Minnesota

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<sup>1</sup> Bills requiring partisan/unprofessional audits: [HF3235](#); [HF4828](#); [SF 3141](#); [SF 4290](#). Bills creating unworkable burdens in election administration: [HF 2505](#); [HF 3505](#); [SF 3333](#); [SF 708](#). Bills changing the selection of presidential electors: [HF 2608](#); [HF 453](#); [SF 429](#). Bills imposing overly restrictive voter ID requirements: [HF 211](#); [HF 2732](#); [HF 293](#); [HF 3689](#); [HF 4790](#); [SF 173](#); [SF 2896](#); [SF 3398](#); [SF 3424](#); [SF 3663](#); [SF 5](#). Bills enacting anti-democratic voting rights restrictions: [HF 1518](#); [HF 1965](#); [HF 213](#); [HF 2335](#); [HF 2857](#); [HF 3097](#); [HF 365](#); [HF 4469](#); [HF 943](#); [SF 1422](#); [SF 1600](#); [SF 179](#); [SF 3077](#); [SF 3469](#); [SF 3537](#); [SF 3975](#); [SF 651](#); [SF 716](#); [HF 1046](#); [HF 4293](#).

<sup>2</sup> Group includes Minnesota State Representatives [Susan Akland](#), [Jeff Backer](#), [Cal Bahr](#), [Steve Draskowski](#), [Mary Franson](#), [Steve Green](#), [Matt Grossell](#), [Glenn Gruenhagen](#), [John Heinrich](#), [Eric Lucero](#), [Shane Mekeland](#), [Tim Miller](#), [Erik Mortensen](#), [Jeremy Munson](#), [John Poston](#), [Donald Raleigh](#); State Senators [Bruce Anderson](#), [Rich Draheim](#), [John Jasinski](#), [Mark Koran](#), [Bill Weber](#).

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election officials are [unlikely to abate](#) in the near future, according to Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon, who [declared](#), “This is about an organized outside effort to undermine and poison well-earned public confidence in our election system.”