

REPUBLICAN

ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

THREATS TO DEMOCRACY IN THE MICHIGAN LEGISLATURE

KEY FINDINGS

The Republican Accountability Project analyzed **288** Republican candidates seeking election to the Michigan state legislature. RAP has found that at least **151** have sowed distrust or lied about the 2020 election, including **40** out of the **66** Republican candidates for State Senate and **111** out of the **222** Republican candidates for State House.

This research groups these candidates' anti-democratic actions into four categories:

1. Making public statements that cast doubt on the legitimacy of the 2020 election
2. Attending a “Stop the Steal” rally
3. Signing onto an official letter or lawsuit that sowed distrust about the 2020 election
4. Attending the pro-Trump rally at the Capitol or participating in the attack on the Capitol on January 6

Note:

Some candidates have maintained such a low internet presence that RAP could not find evidence that they have either undermined or upheld the legitimacy of the 2020 election. These candidates may still hold anti-democratic views, making identification of the full extent of the problem more difficult.

INTRODUCTION

Ahead of Michigan’s August 2 primary, Republican Accountability Project researched the scope of the threat in this crucial battleground state. RAP has found a far-right “Stop the Steal” Republican-led effort to run in open state legislative seats or attempt to primary Republican incumbents who told their constituents that there was no widespread fraud and that Joe Biden was the legitimate president.

Since the 2020 presidential election, state legislatures have received increased attention over how they handle the certification of Electoral College votes. Trump met with seven Michigan lawmakers in November 2020 to pressure them to intervene in the election results. Following Trump’s loss, some Republican state representatives attempted to offer an alternate slate of electors, an effort meant to override the popular vote and the will of the people. Ahead of the 2024 presidential election, an election-denying caucus could choose to give themselves even more power over election administration. In fact, nearly every Republican candidate’s platform includes their support for “election integrity” legislation—often with no specifics about what such legislation would be.

Trump himself seems to understand this opportunity to exert more influence over Michigan’s elections. He has endorsed 11 candidates for Michigan state legislature, more than in any other state. Trump has also gone out of his way to endorse Michigan’s GOP nominees for Attorney General and Secretary of State, both of whom are anti-democracy Republicans and would have roles in election administration.

This problem is not only found among far-right candidates challenging elected Republicans or running in open seats. Many incumbents cast doubt on the legitimacy of the 2020 election and signed onto official letters, such as the Texas lawsuit which sought to overturn the results of the election in several states.

This report details the four categories and examples of anti-democracy actions among Michigan GOP candidates for state legislature.

1

CANDIDATES WHO HAVE MADE PUBLIC STATEMENTS THAT CAST DOUBT ON THE LEGITIMACY OF THE 2020 ELECTION

These statements range from spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories about Dominion Voting Machines and voting “irregularities” to outright denial that Joe Biden is the duly elected president.

Trump-endorsed Senate candidate **Jonathan Lindsey**’s campaign [website](#) says that the 2020 election “was not conducted legally” and “resulted in many reports of irregularities.” He criticizes Michigan’s Republican legislators, whom, he said, “refused to fulfill their constitutional duty when faced with election results tainted by illegality.” This indicates that Lindsey falsely believes that Michigan’s state legislature had the ability to overturn the state’s election results.

On House candidate **Steve Meckley**’s campaign [website](#), he asserts that “there was systemic voter fraud in the 2020 election.” He calls for “leaders to stand up to fight it” and for “a complete forensic audit” of the 2020 election.

House candidate **Diane Saber** shared a [photo](#) of herself wearing a tank top that said “Trump won” on her Facebook page. Senate candidate **Beth Socia** [posted](#) on Facebook that Trump won the 2020 election “by a landslide.”

House candidate **Sandy Kiesel** was a leader of the [Election Integrity Force](#), which has published reports on what they deem evidence of voter fraud in the 2020 election and recruited poll challengers for the 2020 election.

State Senate candidate **James Chapman** regularly posts about election fraud conspiracies on his Facebook page. He has even [stated](#) that, if elected, he will advocate “a thorough complete forensic audit of the 2022 elections for prosecution of election felonies.” He is also the administrator of Facebook groups called RINO Hunters and RINO Hunters Blacklist, in which he [calls](#) other Michigan Republicans “RINOs” and “Never Trumpers” — even pro-Trump candidates whom he deems insufficiently loyal to Trump because of their ties to the DeVos family.

RAP also analyzed candidates’ statements about the January 6 insurrection. One House candidate, **Mike Aiello**, [tweeted](#) what he says “was really happening on January 6th” — low gas prices, “zero” inflation, a strong economy, a secure border, and other common talking points the GOP touts as metrics of Trump’s successes as president.

2

CANDIDATES WHO HAVE ATTENDED A RALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE “STOP THE STEAL” MOVEMENT

Senate candidate **Charles Ritchard** [attended](#) a “Stop the Steal” [protest](#) at the Michigan State Capitol on November 23, 2020 during the state board of canvassers meeting. A member of the Oceana County Board of Canvassers, Ritchard also [attended](#) the “Save America March” in Washington, D.C. on January 6 and is a [plaintiff](#) in the Sidney Powell lawsuit referred to as “The Kraken.” Last year, Ritchard was [removed](#) from the Board of Canvassers because he has promulgated election fraud conspiracies and refused to certify the results of a May 2021 election.

Incumbent state **Rep. Andrew Fink**, who is running for reelection this year, [attended](#) another “Stop the Steal” rally at the Michigan State Capitol on January 6, 2021.

House candidate **Gene Haymaker** [attended](#) a “Stop the Steal” rally hosted by the Election Integrity Fund & Force at the Michigan State Capitol in October 2021. In a Facebook post he wrote, “There was tremendous turnout in support of a full forensic audit of the 2020 election.”

Trump-endorsed House candidate **Mick Bricker** also [attended](#) the October 2021 “Stop the Steal” rally at the Michigan State Capitol. In addition to advocating an audit of the 2020 election, Bricker [supports](#) auditing the 2022 election. In his endorsement of Bricker, Trump [wrote](#), “Mick is the real deal, he’s a champion on Election Integrity, he knows there was systemic voter fraud in the 2020 Election, and he can’t wait to expose the fraud so that the criminals involved can be exposed and we can fix our Elections so that this never happens again.”

Following the conclusion of the 2020 election, numerous Michigan Republican legislators—who are candidates for the legislature again this year—signed onto letters and lawsuits in their official capacities as elected officials that undermined the legitimacy of the election.

In November 2020, a [letter](#) was submitted by state lawmakers to Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, calling for a full independent audit of the 2020 election results. The letter was signed by 40 Michigan state senators and representatives. Additionally, 11 Republican senators signed their names to a [letter](#) to the U. S. Congress that asked members of Congress to “pursue every available option” to investigate alleged wrongdoing during the 2020 election.

Furthermore, 15 members of the state House signed a [brief](#) in support of a Texas lawsuit that sought to overturn the results of the election in several states, including Michigan. In one final futile attempt to subvert democracy, 11 members of the state House signed onto a letter to then-Vice President Mike Pence—the night before Congress was planning to certify the results—asking him to delay the vote.

Just this past June, 17 state House members who are running for reelection this year sent a [letter](#) to Attorney General Dana Nessel, calling on her to investigate the 2020 election fraud alleged in conservative activist Dinesh D’Souza’s movie “2000 Mules.”

Incumbent state Rep. **Matt Maddock**, who has received Trump's endorsement of his reelection bid, and his wife, Michigan GOP Co-Chair Meshawn Maddock, were [key figures](#) in the January 6 rally. Meshawn organized over 19 buses to transport Michiganders to D.C. for the rally. Both Maddocks made speeches to the crowd outside the Capitol leading up to the January 6 riot, but as far back as November 2020, Matt made comments that seemed to predict that Trump supporters would turn violent if Trump lost. He warned that "as soon as we lose our faith in elections...the next step was the Civil War." For her part, Meshawn says that she was back in her hotel room when violence started on January 6.

House candidate **Angela Rigas** has [admitted](#) that she traveled to D.C. for the January 6 rally and that she was tear-gassed while standing on a half-wall outside the Capitol building, indicating that she had trespassed Capitol grounds. But she also said that she considers being called an "insurrectionist" a "compliment" and doesn't believe that she or any of the rally-goers "should apologize for assembling on January 6" because they were "exercising their God-given Constitutional rights."

House candidate **Nevin Cooper-Keel** [responded](#) to a candidate questionnaire sent by America First Michigan Republican Precinct Delegates. When asked what he believed happened at the Capitol on January 6, Cooper-Keel responded, "I was in Washington DC on January 6th peacefully protesting and joining with my president, upon his call to show up." He went on to say that "the only violence" he saw there was "government targeting peaceful, unarmed Americans...tear gassing, flashbanging, and shooting unarmed civilians not presenting a deadly threat themselves."

Another House candidate, **Larry Hull**, [responded](#) to the same question by saying, "Yes, I was there, outside the Capitol, outside the boundary fence." He then went on to list many common right-wing talking points to minimize what happened on January 6: "1. The Capitol police were only at partial strength...2. Some Capitol policemen actually motioned people to come closer. 3. Provocateurs incited people to enter the Capitol. 4. ... Undercover federal agents on site to make arrests and 5. The VAST majority of people stayed outside the building...It was a total set-up to discredit Trump."

Jon Rocha, a write-in House candidate, also [attended](#) the pro-Trump rally at the Capitol on January 6. Rocha initially launched a campaign for Congress, seeking to unseat Rep. Fred Upton, before deciding to run for state House instead. When he was [disqualified](#) from the primary ballot, Rocha [decided](#) to run a write-in campaign. Rocha is endorsed by Trump, who [wrote](#) that Rocha "knows there was systemic voter fraud in the 2020 elections, and is working to uncover it."

ADDENDUM I

ANTI-DEMOCRACY REPUBLICAN MI STATE SENATE CANDIDATES

James Chapman (District 4)
Michael Frazier (District 4)
Beth Socia (District 4)
Jody Rice-White (District 5)
Leonard Scott Jr. (District 5)
Ken Crider (District 6)
Michael Webber (District 9)
Michael MacDonald (District 11)*
Pamela Hornberger (District 12)*
Joseph Bellino (District 16)*
Kim LaSata (District 17)*
Jonathan Lindsey (District 17)
Tamara Mitchell (District 19)
Kaleb Hudson (District 20)
Austin Kreutz (District 20)
Aric Nesbitt (District 20)*
Mike Detmer (District 22)
Lana Theis (District 22)*
Jim Runestad (District 23)*
Ruth Johnson (District 24)*

Daniel Lauwers (District 25)*
Kevin Daley (District 26)*
Aaron Gardner (District 27)
Christina Hickson (District 27)
Keith Hinkle (District 30)
Brian VanDussen (District 31)
Roger Victory (District 31)*
Jon Bumstead (District 32)*
Charles Ritchard (District 32)
Rick Outman (District 33)*
Roger Hauck (District 34)*
Annette Glenn (District 35)*
Tim Kelly (District 35)*
Michele Hoitenga (District 36)*
Triston Cole (District 37)
John Damoose (District 37)*
William Hindle (District 37)
George Ranville (District 37)
Matthew Furyk (District 38)
Kayla Wikstrom (District 38)

*Current Member of the Michigan state legislature

ADDENDUM II

ANTI-DEMOCRACY REPUBLICAN MI STATE HOUSE CANDIDATES

Ronald Kokinda (District 2)
Paul Taros (District 5)
Robert Noble (District 8)
Michele Lundgren (District 9)
Mark Corcoran (District 10)
Diane Saber (District 12)
Steven J. Mackie (District 15)
Penny Crider (District 17)
Daniel Lawless (District 21)
Cathryn Neracher (District 22)
Lisa Werner (District 27)
Nicone R. Dragone (District 28)
Jamie Thompson (District 28)
Sam Ditzhazy (District 29)
Holli Vallade (District 31)
Martin A. Church (District 32)
Robert Borer III (District 33)
Dale W. Zorn (District 34)*
Steve Meckley (District 35)
Andrew Fink (District 35)*
Steve Carra (District 36)*
Jack Coleman (District 36)
Brad Paquette (District 37)*
Troy Rolling (District 38)
Kelly Sackett (District 40)
Terry Haines (District 41)
Gary Mitchell (District 42)
Matt Hall (District 42)*
Phillip Joseph (District 43)
Lindsay Kronemeyer (District 43)
Rachelle M. Smit (District 43)
Nevin P. Cooper-Keel (District 43)
Dave Morgan (District 44)
Sarah Lightner (District 45)*
Kimberly Sheppard Hugle (District 46)
Jason Negri (District 48)
Jason Woolford (District 48)
Ann Bollin (District 49)*
Robert J. Bezotte (District 50)*
Matt Maddock (District 51)*
Sandy Kiesel (District 54)
Thomas E. Kuhn (District 57)
Michelle Smith (District 58)
Terence Mekoski (District 59)*
Douglas C. Wozniak (District 59)*
Joseph Aragona (District 60)
Mike Aiello (District 61)
Jacky Eubanks (District 63)
Jacob Skarbek (District 63)
Andrew Beeler (District 64)*
Gary Eisen (District 64)*
Jaime Greene (District 65)
Mary Berlingieri (District 66)
Jacob E. Newby (District 66)
Josh Schriver (District 66)
Sherri Cross (District 67)
Linda Glisman (District 67)
Phil Green (District 67)*
Gabriel Lossing (District 67)
Chad Moore (District 67)
Vern Miller (District 68)
Kristen Swanson (District 68)
Kevin Rathbun (District 71)
Ali Williston (District 71)
Mike Mueller (District 72)*
Dylan Pescarolo (District 72)
Norm Shinkle (District 73)
Christine Barnes (District 78)

*Current Member of the Michigan state legislature

ADDENDUM II

ANTI-DEMOCRACY REPUBLICAN MI STATE HOUSE CANDIDATES

Gina Johnsen (District 78)
Jon Rocha (District 78, write-in)
Ryan Gallogly (District 79)
Jeremiah Keeler (District 79)
Angela Rigas (District 79)
William Alexander (District 82)
Robert Regan (District 84)
Michael Haueisen (District 87)
Mick Bricker (District 88)
Luke Meerman (District 89)*
Bryan Posthumus (District 90)*
Kathy Clark (District 90)
Pat Outman (District 91)*
Thomas Anderman (District 92)
Gene Haymaker (District 92)
Todd Schorle (District 92)
Alan Hoover (District 93)
Rodney Wakeman (District 97)*
Dean Riley (District 97)
Kurt Damrow (District 98)
Mike Hoadley (District 99)
Tom Kunse (District 100)

Diane Schindlbeck (District 101)
Kelly Smith (District 101)
Ryan Roberts (District 102)
Andrew Sebolt (District 102)
Curt VanderWall (District 102)*
Jack O'Malley (District 103)*
Heather Cerone (District 103)
John Roth (District 104)*
Katie Kniss (District 104)
Ken Borton (District 105)*
Kim Morley (District 105)
Geyer Balog (District 106)
Cam Cavitt (District 106)
Larry Hull (District 106)
Bob Carr (District 107)
Neil Friske (District 107)
Jonathan Scheel (District 107)
Casey Hoffman (District 108)
Mark Simon (District 108)
Melody Wagner (District 109)
Gregory Markkanen (District 110)*

*Current Member of the Michigan state legislature