



Democracy itself was on the ballot in 2022... and won

How anti-democracy Secretary of State candidates lost, and a roadmap for safeguarding democracy moving forward

Democracy itself was on the ballot on Election Day, from county commission and state legislative races to Secretary of State and gubernatorial contests, and Americans resoundingly voted for democracy. Polls taken of voters before and after the election showed democracy as a top issue (Appendix A). **Americans sent a clear message, voting overwhelmingly for the preservation of free and fair elections and electing pro-democracy candidates to oversee the administration, counting, and certification of future elections.**

With initial election returns showing a mixed result for both parties, Republicans projected to win the House Majority by a narrower than expected margin, and Democrats slightly favored to win the Senate Majority, **pro-democracy candidates are closing in on a clean sweep of the closely contested Secretary of State races against election deniers.**

Across the country, from local elections, to congressional and gubernatorial races, to ballot initiatives, pro-democracy candidates and policies prevailed in competitive contests. Americans sent a clear message: free and fair elections matter. **But nowhere were these victories clearer – or more critical – than in races for Secretary of State.**

On the right, a well-organized [“America First” coalition](#) formed in 2021 with the express purpose of taking over the administration of elections in presidential battleground states, is on track for a humiliating defeat: as of early Wednesday, “America First” Secretary of State candidates were on track to end the election cycle losing 13 of the 14 states they contested. 8 candidates fell in Republican primaries earlier this year, 5 are projected to lose when all the votes are counted, and 1, the nominee in Indiana, managed to win while underperforming every other statewide Republican candidate.

To counter this right-wing effort to subvert free and fair elections, pro-democracy candidates like Arizona’s Adrian Fontes, Michigan’s Jocelyn Benson, Nevada’s Cisco Aguilar, and New Mexico’s Maggie Toulouse Oliver, who ran on platforms to expand voting access and safeguard elections are expected to prevail in their races.

But the victory for democracy in 2022 was not the end of the threats against it, but a temporary reprieve. As Donald Trump prepares to announce his 2024 campaign for the White House, the anti-democracy MAGA movement remains a dangerous political force in American politics. For democracy to survive, we must continue the work we’ve started to build a broad pro-democracy coalition of Republicans, Democrats, and independents, united in common purpose to safeguard our electoral system. 2022 showed us the path, now we must follow it. Nothing less than our democracy is at stake.

Pro-Democracy Secretaries of State vs. Trump-endorsed “America First” Candidates



The “America First” Secretary of State Coalition

The Trump-backed [America First Secretary of State Coalition](#), led by the Republican Secretary of State candidate in Nevada, Jim Marchant, was soundly defeated on Election Day. The group, founded in 2021, organized around a mission to implement an extreme overhaul of elections in key presidential battleground states with an aim to all but guarantee victory in those states for Donald Trump and MAGA Republicans. [Marchant recently said on Steve Bannon’s podcast](#) , “If we get elected, they know what’s in for them, they’re out of power. They’re so afraid of what we’re doing... They know they can’t win if we’re successful,” to which Bannon replied, “the game is over.”

This right-wing group’s agenda, which each candidate agreed to implement upon their election to Secretary of State, included new and expanded voter ID requirements, transition to only paper ballots, elimination of vote by mail, restricting voting to a single day, “unfettered poll watch reform” and an extensive purge of the voter rolls.

Here’s how the America First Coalition-backed candidates did on election day (as of 11/9):

- Doug Mastriano (PA Gov, appoints SoS): **Declared loser**, 42.4% // 55.8% (94% reporting)
- Kristin Karamo (MI SoS): **Declared loser**, 42% // 56% (95% reporting)
- Audrey Trujillo (NM SoS): **Declared loser**, 43% // 54% (95% reporting)
- Mark Finchem (AZ SoS): **Down & underperforming top of ticket**, 48% // 52% (65% reporting)
- Jim Marchant (NV SoS): **Up slightly, but uncouned ballots project loss**, 48% // 47% (75% reporting)

All other endorsed candidates lost Republican primaries (GA, ID, SC, KS, CO, NE, CA, AL).

Every America First Secretary of State Coalition-backed candidate underperformed nearly every other statewide Republican on the ticket. Republicans’ gamble—nominating extreme, anti-democracy candidates for positions to oversee our elections—was soundly rejected by voters. In a historically favorable political environment for Republicans, they lost these important races in swing states by nominating candidates who ran on platforms of subverting democracy.

2022 pro-democracy Secretary of State candidates lead top of ticket in Democratic vote share for first time (2014, 2018, & 2022 comparison)



2022			
Dem Vote Share	SoS	Governor	Senate
Arizona	52.7%	50.7%	51.7%
Michigan	55.9%	54.5%	X
Minnesota	54.6%	52.3%	X
Nevada	48.2%	46.6%	48.1%
New Mexico	54.5%	51.9%	X
Indiana	40.2%	X	37.9%
2018			
Dem Vote Share	SoS	Governor	Senate
Arizona	50.1%	41.8%	50.1%
Michigan	52.9%	53.3%	52.3%
Minnesota	52.3%	53.9%	60.3%
Nevada	48.3%	49.4%	50.4%
New Mexico	57.6%	57.2%	54.1%
Indiana	40.3	X	45.1%
2014			
Dem Vote Share	SoS	Governor	Senate
Arizona	47.7%	41.6%	X
Michigan	42.9%	46.8%	54.6%
Minnesota	47.1%	50.1%	53.2%
Nevada	46.1%	23.9%	X
New Mexico	48.2%	42.7%	55.4%
Top vote share			

Pro-democracy Secretaries of State

In contrast to how the “America First” candidates underperformed, the pro-democracy Secretary of State candidates that ran against them all outperformed the top of the ticket. These candidates, while not part of any formal coalition, were united in their experience as defenders of elections in their respective states:

- **Adrian Fontes (D-AZ)**, the former Maricopa County Recorder, administered the 2020 election in Arizona’s most populous county, expanding early voting options, increased the number of ballot drop boxes locations, and implemented a new ballot tracking and notification system for voters to check the status of their ballots.



- In her first term as Secretary of State, **Jocelyn Benson (D-MI)** prioritized expanding voting access and options, mailing all voters a vote by mail application, and implemented automatic voter registration. Benson won her re-election on Tuesday with 55% of the vote, the highest vote share of any statewide candidate.
- **Cisco Aguilar (D-NV)** focused his campaign on safeguarding Nevada's right to vote, early voting options and access to vote by mail, and protecting election workers.
- As Secretary of State, **Maggie Toulouse Oliver (D-NM)** has expanded voting access in New Mexico, including automatic voter registration, same-day voter registration, and helping to pass a pro-voter reform package that restored voting rights to felons and expanded absentee ballot access.

A roadmap for future elections

As we reflect on the outcomes of these races, there are several common threads that helped pro-democracy campaigns win and give us a roadmap to win future elections:

- **Broad, cross-partisan coalitions:** Republican and independent leaders came together to form a united front against these candidates. In Arizona, Congressman Adam Kinzinger (R), Congresswoman Liz Cheney, Former Phoenix Mayor Paul Johnson (I), and Republican Maricopa County Supervisor Andy Kunasek all endorsed pro-democracy candidate Adiran Fontes. In Michigan, the business friendly and Republican leaning Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce backed Democratic Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson.
- **Clear message and choice for voters:** The paid communication (TV, digital, radio, and direct mail), from both pro-democracy campaigns and outside groups focused on framing a clear choice for voters: Who do you trust to oversee our elections? An extremist, anti-democracy, candidate or a pro-democracy candidate committed to free and fair elections and making voting more accessible for voters? Here's a sample of TV ads in the three most competitive races: [Arizona](#), [Nevada](#), [Michigan](#).
- **Pro-democracy candidates had the resources, and outside support, needed to win toss-up races:** In the 3 most competitive Secretary of State races (AZ, MI, & NV), pro-democracy candidates outraised Trump-backed candidates nearly 3-to-1 ([\\$8.9 million, compared to \\$3.2 million](#)). Across these three races, democracyFIRST PAC raised \$500,000 directly for pro-democracy campaigns and was a significant funder of outside spending efforts.
- **Pro-democracy Republican voters split their ticket, overwhelming support from independents, and fully consolidating Democratic voters:** These tactics and this message built a coalition of voters, Republican, independent, and Democrat, who united to elect the pro-democracy candidate to oversee their state's elections. Going into election day, polling showed that independent voters, and even a share of Republican voters, were breaking for pro-democracy candidates. In Michigan, a [WDIV/Detroit News poll](#) found Jocelyn Benson was winning 49.8% of independent voters, 18.4% of leaning Republican voters and 9.6% of strong Republican voters. In contrast, the Democratic nominee for Attorney General was



only winning 39.1% of independents. In Arizona, a [NYT/Siena Poll](#) found the pro-democracy candidate Adrian Fontes was winning 14% of registered Republicans and 51% of independents. His opponent, Mark Finchem was only winning 4% of registered Democrats and 31% of independents.

What these results mean for the state of our democracy, the 2024 presidential election, and the challenges ahead for preserving free and fair elections

With wins on election night in the key races at the state and national level, voters sent a clear message: they will not stand for these threats to the foundations of our democracy. They refused to support the right-wing, anti-democracy, candidates who ran to seize control of our elections with plans to subvert our democratic system. With our democracy on the brink, stretched to its limits by rising political violence and fringe conspiracy theories, the mainstream, pro-democracy majority took a stand to save free and fair elections in America. It's time for Republicans to reckon with voters' clear response to who they want overseeing, administering, counting, and certifying our elections and take note that **voters will hold them accountable if they attempt to subvert our democracy.**

The 2022 midterm elections are a wake-up call for America. If we don't unite in a broad pro-democracy coalition of Democrats, Republicans and independents to confront this dangerous right-wing threat to free and fair elections, we will lose democracy in our country.

Looking ahead, there will be important 2023 off-year elections for democracy. Kentucky, Mississippi, and Louisiana will all host elections for Governor and Secretary of State. Both the Wisconsin State Supreme Court and Pennsylvania State Supreme Court will be on the ballot.

Over 100 members of Congress who voted against certifying the 2020 election held onto their seats in the 2022 election and we will continue our campaign to hold these politicians for their vote to overturn a free and fair election.

In less than a month, the Supreme Court will hear a case, *Moore v. Harper*, based on a dispute over political gerrymandering in North Carolina, in which it could embrace some version of a radical legal theory: the Independent State Legislature Theory. Under this theory, state legislatures alone would have the power to set Federal election laws—including, potentially, related to which presidential electors are certified in 2024—without any review by state courts or any checks and balances under state constitutions.

Meanwhile, though Democrats and allied groups invested more deeply in state legislative races than they have in quite some time, pro-democracy Republicans overwhelmingly suffered in primaries against MAGA Republicans, particularly in match ups in key battleground states like Arizona. As [NBC News reports](#), according to the States Project, of the 450 Republican nominees in Nevada, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Michigan, and Minnesota, 58% espouse Trump's lies that the 2020 election was stolen. Electing pro-democracy leaders, from both parties, at the state and local level, is a critical step to building a broad cross partisan coalition to safeguard free and fair elections.



As we look to 2024 and beyond, defending American democracy is going to be a marathon, not a sprint. And it's going to take all of us working together in a broad, pro-democracy coalition to ensure that our democracy, which was once a shining beacon to the world, can return to a system that safeguards the rights and freedoms of all.



Appendix A: Polling showed democracy as a top issue for voters

Going into Election Day, the polling and data painted a clear picture of where the American people—Democrats, Republicans, and independents—stand on democracy. **They are united in their belief that our democracy is under threat and that preserving it is a high priority.** Voters are tired of candidates kowtowing to Donald Trump’s conspiracy theories and denialism about the electoral system. They want to move on from right-wing anti-democracy rhetoric and restore the consensus of support for American democracy that’s existed for most of American history. **It’s clear voters understand democracy was on the ballot and voted to protect it from this unprecedented threat.**

- [Associated Press’s VoteCast survey](#) of more than 92,000 voters found that **44% of voters described the future of democracy as the “single most important factor” in determining their vote**, only 6% of voters said the future of democracy wasn’t a factor in deciding their vote.
- Heading into the election, **28% of all registered voters** (and 23% of independents) **identified “preserving democracy” as their top issue**, according to an NPR/PBS poll. In that same poll, the majority of voters said that Democrats (47% to 36%) would do a better job than Republicans in “preserving democracy”. Democrats also led with independents on the issue (37% to 31%) [NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist poll, Oct. 2022](#)
- In a New York Times/Sienna poll, **voters identified “state of democracy” as the most important issue in deciding their vote this election**, after the economy and inflation, but ahead of crime, immigration, and abortion. The poll also found that 71% of voters believe “American democracy is currently under threat”. [NYT/Sienna Oct. 2022](#)
- **77% of voters in Arizona said they preferred a governor who “accepts the results of Arizona elections, whoever wins,”** not one who would “challenge and investigate Arizona elections” when her party loses. [CBS News \(Arizona\) Oct 4 2022](#)
- **70% of registered voters said that “the future of democracy in our country” was very important to their vote.** Only behind the economy at 79%. [Pew Research, Oct. 2022](#)
- **82% of voters surveyed by PPP said that politicians changing the rules of voting to benefit their party is a major threat**, including 78% of independents. Only 6% said it isn’t much of a threat. [PPP October 2022](#)
- **29% of voters said “threats to democracy” was among the top issues facing the country**, ranked second only to “jobs and the economy” at 35%. [NBC News, November 2022](#)
- **57% of voters said they are less likely to support a candidate who says “Donald Trump won the 2020 presidential election.”** This was the least popular position tested in a recent NBC poll. [NBC News, Oct. 2022](#)
- **58% of voters—including 1 in 4 Republicans—said Trump’s “MAGA” movement is “threatening America’s democratic foundations.”** [Reuters/Ipsos poll, September 2022](#)