

Wisconsin Republicans wrote the book on killing democracy

We've seen the [headlines](#) about Donald Trump proudly stating his intentions to be a dictator on Day One. And none of us can forget the violence and fear perpetrated on Jan. 6, 2021 when his supporters attempted to overturn the 2020 election, even going so far as threatening former Vice President Mike Pence's life.

But these threats to our democracy are not limited to national politics.

My office requested a [memo](#) from the nonpartisan Legislative Reference Bureau outlining election law changes since 2011, when Republicans took the majority in both houses of the Legislature and held the governor's office.

The memo details the many ways in which Republicans have skewed our democratic institutions in their favor. From eliminating the Government Accountability Board to overhauling our campaign finance system to allow for dark money in our elections, to placing strict time limits on early in-person voting – every action has made our democracy less transparent, less accessible, and more favorable to those with the biggest donors.

Long before Trump lifted antidemocratic talking points to the national stage, Wisconsin Republicans were chipping away at our democracy, one piece of legislation at a time. Let's break this down to understand how this playbook works and what we can do to take back our democracy.

First, let's look at access. Many of the first items on the Republican checklist concerned access to the ballot box. By implementing voter ID, shortening the residency requirement from 28 to 10 days and stopping municipalities from holding longer hours for in-person absentee voting (some Republicans even argued for eliminating early voting altogether) people had less access to voting. In order to create the best version of a representative democracy we should be pursuing ways to expand voting access, not limit it.

Second, Republicans rigged the maps in the 2011 round of redistricting in such an extreme way that Wisconsin has been cited as the most gerrymandered state in the nation. They later doubled down in 2021 with what some called "a gerrymander on top of a gerrymander."

These maps furthered Republicans' antidemocratic agenda in two ways. They insulated the GOP from any political accountability with their districts, shielding them from any chance at viable opposition. With the partisan outcome of most general elections all but set in stone, the only possible challenge to both parties would likely come from a primary, resulting in candidates taking more polarized positions to appeal to the most engaged, yet extreme, members of their party.

Thankfully, Gov. Tony Evers has signed fair maps into law after a successful legal challenge at the state Supreme Court. The positive benefits to the people of the state should be felt immediately after the November 2024 election. Finally, after years, the voters of Wisconsin will get to choose their state Legislature rather than the other way around.

However, even with the writing on the wall as their days of unchecked legislative power dwindle, Republicans have still sought to weaken our democracy. Over and over again, Republicans have sought to rewrite the rules to benefit themselves.

We can't let that happen.