

# The 2020 Battleground States: Updates on the Swing Voters

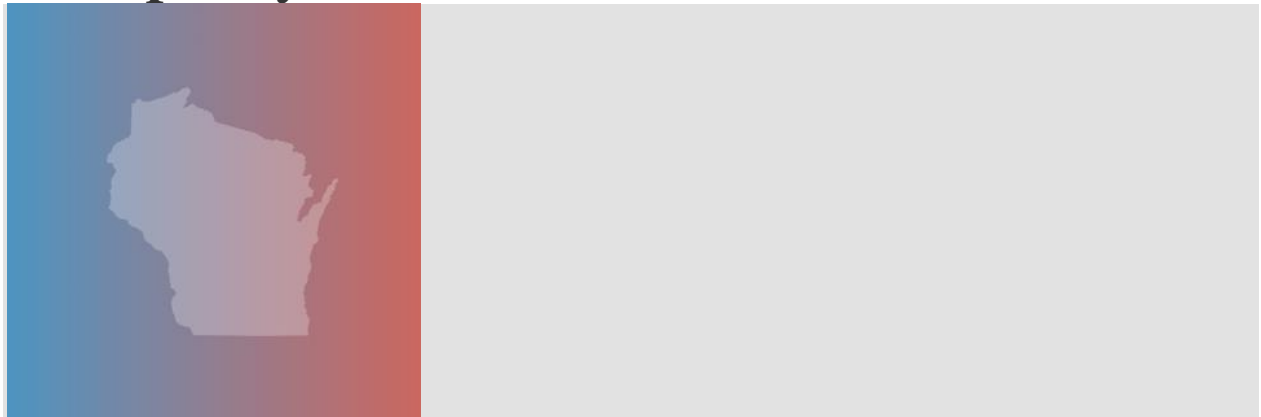
The path to the presidency runs through about a dozen states that [President Trump](#) and [Joseph R. Biden Jr.](#) are seriously contesting — [battlegrounds that will decide who wins](#) the Electoral College.

The New York Times is bringing you dispatches from the swing states to help explain how voters see the race and what issues are driving it.

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By Kay Nolan

## Wisconsin: In a college town at a crossroads, a Trump rally is canceled.



*Wisconsin has 10 electoral votes. In 2016, Trump won the state by 0.8 percentage points. In 2020, it's rated Lean Democratic.*

LA CROSSE, Wis. — Every year since 1961, crowds have filled La Crosse's streets during the last weekend of September for what is billed as the longest-running Oktoberfest in the Midwest, a time when everyone shares Gemütlichkeit, a spirit of welcome and good cheer.

The coronavirus pandemic scuttled the 2020 event. The streets were nearly empty last weekend, and the mood in La Crosse was hardly cheerful.

Coronavirus cases have surged in Wisconsin recently, and the White House coronavirus task force has designated both the state and La Crosse County as “red zones” with high rates of infection.

Mr. Trump had planned a campaign rally this weekend in La Crosse, but on Thursday his campaign moved it to Janesville — before suspending its events entirely after the president’s coronavirus diagnosis.

Last Saturday evening, some students from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse partied on lawns and some residents hit the downtown taverns. That annoyed Brianna Oliver, 29, who is working nights so she can help her 7-year-old daughter with virtual schooling during the day.

“People were posting yesterday on Snapchat that they were confirmed positive for Covid, but they were out and about — no one was wearing masks, not even the police,” Ms. Oliver said.

Mr. Trump’s response to the pandemic has shaped the political views “of everyone I know,” she said, especially after he “made light of it.”

“Most people are ready for a change,” she said.

By Sunday afternoon, the U.W.-La Crosse campus was mostly silent. “Everything is closed,” said Lucas Joniaux, 18, a freshman who sat at a picnic table with his classmates Kaden Appleton, 19, and Elliot Sankey, 19.

Mr. Sankey noted that with coffee shops shuttered, he sometimes walks to a Kwik Trip gas station for snacks.

Kwik Trip is a well-liked employer headquartered in La Crosse, which is also home to a large hospital and a Mayo Clinic facility, providing a mix of professional and blue-collar jobs as well as Democratic and Republican voters.

But like so many other communities, La Crosse, a city of 50,000, has been hit economically by the pandemic. Mark Goede, a co-owner of the Breakfast Club & Pub on Main Street, said many restaurants and taverns were struggling.

The La Crosse area is home to many Catholic voters; the La Crosse Diocese includes 158 parishes across 19 counties in west-central Wisconsin. Both Mr. Trump and Mr. Biden [have been pursuing white Catholics in the Midwest](#), some of whom they see as persuadable voters.

The differences at two churches in La Crosse on Sunday morning illustrated how both parties see opportunities among the faithful here.

The mood was somber at St. James the Less, whose pastor, the Rev. James Altman, has drawn attention for a YouTube video posted in August in which he denounced Democrats’ support for abortion rights, the Black Lives Matter movement and other issues. “You cannot be Catholic and be a Democrat, period,” he said.

“We’re seeing Satan unleashed and his minions working,” Father Altman said on Sunday before distributing communion, leaning forward to place the hosts on the tongues of the shoulder-to-shoulder faithful, who, like the priest, eschewed the diocese-mandated masks.

Jean Weymier, 58, who drove from West Bend across the state to see Father Altman, said: “He says the truth. The Democrat Party is evil.”

But at St. Joseph the Workman parish in downtown La Crosse, where masks were ubiquitous, one churchgoer, who declined to give her name, strongly disagreed.

“It saddens me because it’s not what the church is about,” she said of Father Altman’s video. “Abortion is a complicated issue, and Catholics can certainly be Democrats.”