



Written by [James Murphy](#) on June 11, 2021

Wisconsin Senate Passes Bills to Increase Election Integrity in the State

After a chaotic, confusing, and COVID-19-affected general election in 2020, the GOP-controlled Wisconsin State Senate recently passed several measures intended to strengthen election integrity in America's Dairyland. Among other things, the new measures would limit the number of drop boxes for absentee voters that cities can have, as well as impose new and stricter penalties for violating election laws.

In 2020, former President Donald Trump lost the state by a razor-thin margin of just 0.63 percent. Current President Joe Biden's margin of victory came from Milwaukee and Madison — the state's two largest cities.



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Republicans in the state have already approved an investigation of the ballots cast in the state during last year's presidential election, which Biden won by less than 21,000 votes statewide. Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Burlington) has already hired three retired police officers who will be overseen by an attorney to do the investigation.

While nobody really believes that this audit under the auspices of the nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau will change the results of the 2020 election, the GOP hopes that if enough evidence of malfeasance is discovered, it might make Democrat Governor Tony Evers less inclined to veto some of the legislation.

One measure, which passed on a voice vote on Wednesday, would limit the number of drop boxes in most cities to one. Larger cities — with populations over 70,000 — would be allowed to have up to four drop boxes with one in the city clerk's office and up to three more on municipal properties such as police and fire stations, but not in public parks. The drop boxes would need to be under 24 hour video surveillance as well as be tamper- and moisture-resistant.

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State Senator Alberta Darling (R-River Hills) argued that the new system would boost voter confidence in elections as well as ballot security.

"This bill enables voters to have another option to vote, and it's in a secure place," Darling said. "I think people care about the integrity of elections."

Democrats, on the other hand, cried foul, arguing that restricting the number of ballot boxes a city can have amounts to voter suppression.

"The idea that we're going to have secure drop boxes [is] great, the idea that we are going to make sure that the public, in certain parts of this state and certain parts of cities, can't get to [the drop boxes] is not great," said Senator Jon Erpenbach (D-Middleton). "I mean, why have drop boxes at all?"



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Madison Democrat Melissa Agard was even more blunt: “These bills are in search of a problem that does exist in the State of Wisconsin,” Agard said. “They’re making it harder for our friends and neighbors across the state to vote, especially our seniors, especially our people with disabilities, especially people of color.... Plain and simple this is voter suppression and to me that is not ok.”

But the increase in drop boxes in 2020 was a direct result of the panic surrounding the Chinese virus, social distancing, and the Democrat push for lax mail-in and absentee ballot rules. Do Democrats believe these measures should be in place in perpetuity?

GOP senators also approved a measure that would require nursing homes and other community-based residential facilities to notify family members of days that voter assistants will visit those facilities. In addition, they approved legislation that would make it a felony for employees of nursing homes or other residential facilities to attempt to influence the votes of residents.

Another provision of the new legislation would require “indefinitely confined” voters — a voter who is “confined because of age, physical illness or infirmity, or is disabled for an indefinite period — to apply annually for absentee ballots instead of having them automatically sent to them prior to elections.

The sponsor of that legislation, Senator Duey Strobel (R-Saukville) argued that many who were not actually “indefinitely confined” took advantage of the COVID-19 situation in 2020 and should not be allowed to continue voting by mail-in ballot.

“It’s important that we accommodate truly indefinitely confined voters, but unfortunately in the last election we saw other people who weren’t truly indefinitely confined, and they were abusing that system,” Strobel said.

In addition, the State Senate passed provisions that would require voters to include a copy of their ID with every absentee-ballot application, bar election officials from automatically sending out absentee ballots or applications for absentee ballots to anyone who hasn’t specifically requested one, and mandates that absentee-ballot applications be separate from absentee-ballot envelopes. Currently, the envelope is used as an application.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos has already hinted that the legislation will have strong support in the State Assembly, which currently has a Republican majority of 60-38. But unless ironclad evidence is found during the coming audit, there’s a high probability that Governor Tony Evers will veto all of it.



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