



# How Wisconsin Elections Would Look Different if the Freedom to Vote Act Had Been Enacted

By Greta Bedekovics, Sydney Bryant, and Alice Lillydahl | October 7, 2024

The Freedom to Vote Act (FTVA) would expand access to the ballot box for millions of Americans and ensure that all citizens can easily exercise their right to vote, regardless of their ZIP code. At the same time, this transformational voting rights legislation would strengthen election security, improve election administration and campaign finance transparency, and ban partisan gerrymandering.

The FTVA would make voting easier and more secure for 4.5 million voting-age Wisconsin citizens, including 3.2 million currently registered voters. A new report from the Center for American Progress provides analysis and statistical extrapolations to illustrate how the 2024 and subsequent election cycles would be transformed if the FTVA's key voting policies had been enacted in 2022, when the legislation was blocked through the use of the filibuster on the U.S. Senate floor.<sup>1</sup>

Analysis and projections for Wisconsin, based on previous academic and expert research as well as original research, demonstrate the transformative impact the FTVA could have for voters in the state.

Unless otherwise cited, the author conducted original analysis and created projections primarily based on data published by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission for past federal election cycles. For a comprehensive look at the data analyzed for this fact sheet, see [here](#).

To put some of the below findings into perspective, the 2022 Wisconsin U.S. Senate election was decided by 27,000 voters, the 2020 Wisconsin presidential election was decided by 21,000 voters, and the 2016 Wisconsin presidential election was decided by 23,000 voters.<sup>2</sup>

**Read the full report:**  
[Pass the Freedom to Vote Act: How Elections Would Look Different This Year and in the Future](#)

# 23,000

voters decided the 2016 Wisconsin presidential election

# 21,000

voters decided the 2020 Wisconsin presidential election

# 41,000

additional Wisconsin voters would likely vote in the 2024 presidential election

## Automatic voter registration

The FTVA would ensure eligible Wisconsin citizens can automatically register to vote through the department of motor vehicles.<sup>3</sup> Automatic voter registration (AVR) has been shown to be critical not only for registering voters and keeping voter rolls up to date but also for closing racial gaps in voter registration rates. Given the measured impacts that AVR has had in other states:

- Approximately **85,000 voters** likely would have newly registered to vote through AVR, including more than 27,000 Black Wisconsinites.
- Approximately **551,000 already registered voters** would have updated their voter registration information using AVR ahead of the 2024 general election.
- Approximately **41,000 additional Wisconsin voters** would likely cast a ballot in the 2024 general election, including 13,000 Black voters.

## Re-enfranchisement

The FTVA would restore the right to vote for returning citizens who have served time for felony sentences. Black Americans are incarcerated at five times the rate of white Americans, while Hispanic/Latino Americans are incarcerated at nearly two-and-a-half times the rate of white Americans.<sup>4</sup> With enactment of the FTVA:

- More than **44,000 Wisconsinites** could have regained their right to vote and become eligible to cast a ballot for the 2024 general election.<sup>5</sup>

## Ballot drop boxes

The FTVA would ensure Wisconsin voters have access to ballot drop boxes 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, in order to efficiently, cost effectively, and securely return mail-in ballots. In states that allow all voters to request a mail-in ballot and provide drop boxes, on average, 27.9 percent of mail-in ballots are returned by drop box.

While Wisconsin will permit the use of ballot drop boxes for the 2024 general election, this election administration practice has been the focus of numerous lawsuits over the past few years as well as a major target of disinformation.<sup>6</sup> The FTVA would standardize the use of drop boxes across the country and ensure that regardless of the county they live in, all Wisconsin voters have easy and secure access to drop boxes, including 24/7 drop boxes, and can depend on their use every federal election cycle. With its enactment:

- At least **72 drop boxes** would be available to voters across Wisconsin.

## Endnotes

- 1 Greta Bedekovics, "Pass the Freedom to Vote Act: How Elections Would Look Different This Year and in the Future" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2024), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/pass-the-freedom-to-vote-act-how-elections-would-look-different-this-year-and-in-the-future/>; Freedom to Vote Act, S. 2747, 117th Cong., 1st sess. (September 14, 2021), available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/2747>.
- 2 Ballotpedia, "United States Senate election in Wisconsin, 2022," available at [https://ballotpedia.org/United\\_States\\_Senate\\_election\\_in\\_Wisconsin\\_2022](https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Senate_election_in_Wisconsin_2022) (last accessed October 2024); Ballotpedia, "Presidential election in Wisconsin, 2020," available at [https://ballotpedia.org/Presidential\\_election\\_in\\_Wisconsin\\_2020](https://ballotpedia.org/Presidential_election_in_Wisconsin_2020) (last accessed October 2024); Ballotpedia, "Presidential election in Wisconsin, 2016," available at [https://ballotpedia.org/Presidential\\_election\\_in\\_Wisconsin\\_2016](https://ballotpedia.org/Presidential_election_in_Wisconsin_2016) (last accessed October 2024).
- 3 National Conference of State Legislatures, "Automatic Voter Registration," available at <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/automatic-voter-registration> (last accessed September 2024); Movement Advancement Project, "Automatic Voter Registration," available at [https://www.lgbtmap.org/democracy-maps/automatic\\_voter\\_registration](https://www.lgbtmap.org/democracy-maps/automatic_voter_registration) (last accessed September 2024).
- 4 NAACP, "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet," available at <https://naacp.org/resources/criminal-justice-fact-sheet> (last accessed September 2024); Lauren-Brooke Eisen and Hernandez D. Stroud, "The Federal Government Must Incentivize States to Incarcerate Fewer People," Brennan Center for Justice, March 14, 2023, available at <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/federal-government-must-incentivize-states-incarcerate-fewer-people#:~:text=Black%20Americans%20are%20incarcerated%20in,incarceration%20rate%20of%20white%20people>.
- 5 Christopher Uggen and others, "Locked Out 2022: Estimates of People Denied Voting Rights" (Washington: The Sentencing Project, 2022), available at <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/locked-out-2022-estimates-of-people-denied-voting-rights/>.
- 6 Because Wisconsin law allows for the use of drop boxes and the state did not report how many drop boxes were in place for the 2022 midterm election, the analysis did not project any increases in drop box use or ballots delivered to drop boxes for Wisconsin. See Alice Herman, "Mayor in Wisconsin removes ballot drop box as tensions rise over voting method," *The Guardian*, October 2, 2024, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/02/election-wisconsin-mail-ballot-box>; Alexander Shur, "Wisconsin legalized ballot drop boxes, but some local officials are fighting them," *Votebeat*, October 3, 2024, available at <https://www.votebeat.org/wisconsin/2024/10/03/wisconsin-drop-box-fight-reaches-boiling-point/>.