



INSTITUTE FOR REFORMING GOVERNMENT

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Chris Reader, IRG Executive Vice President
DATE: February 2, 2022
RE: Plurality of Wisconsinites want an elected official in charge of elections

In August, 2021, IRG [released a proposal](#) for reforming elections in Wisconsin. The proposal is centered on the idea that an elected official, rather than appointed individuals, should be in charge of elections – as is the case in a majority of states. See the [IRG Solution Series on making the elections official accountable to voters here](#).

At the end of 2021, IRG contracted with Brice Kornegay and BK Strategies to conduct a statewide poll on this matter in order to see what Wisconsinites think about the current elections oversight system in Wisconsin, and if there is support among voters to move to the system utilized in a majority of states where an elected official such as the Secretary of State manages elections. 300 likely Wisconsin voters were interviewed by phone on Dec. 7-8, and the poll results have a margin of error of +/-5.7% at the 95% confidence level.

Background

A majority of states empower an elected official, most often the elected Secretary of State, to oversee elections. Such a system allows voters to hire the candidate running for office who they believe will oversee elections the best, and it allows voters to fire officials at the next election if they are seen as doing a poor job.

In Wisconsin, elections are managed by the Wisconsin Elections Commission, a six-person commission of appointed partisan individuals, three Republicans and three Democrats. This split commission often leads to an inability to make decisions when a partisan disagreement comes before the Commission.

Voters are open to reforming elections oversight in the state.

The results of our polling show that Wisconsinites are not satisfied with the current system. When asked if election oversight should stay with the current appointed commission, or be moved to a statewide elected office such as the Secretary of State, **by a 38-33 margin Wisconsinites support vesting the authority with a statewide elected official.**

Interestingly, plurality support for vesting elections oversight is one of the very few items that enjoys bipartisan support. **Democrats support this oversight reform by a 44-35 margin, while Republicans support it by a 38-31 margin.**

While there is still a very large share of likely voters who are undecided on the issue, voters are clearly open to reforming elections oversight in the state, a plurality supports empowering a statewide elected official like a Secretary of State.

Question asked:

THE WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE IS CURRENTLY CONSIDERING ELECTION OVERSIGHT REFORM. CURRENTLY WISCONSIN ELECTIONS ARE ADMINISTERED BY A SIX-PERSON PARTISAN COMMISSION APPOINTED BY POLITICIANS. IN THE MAJORITY OF STATES, THE TOP ELECTION OFFICIAL IS A STATEWIDE ELECTED OFFICIAL LIKE THE SECRETARY OF STATE. IN YOUR OPINION, DO YOU THINK WISCONSIN ELECTION OVERSIGHT SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE DONE BY AN APPOINTED PARTISAN COMMISSION, OR SHOULD IT BE MOVED TO AN ELECTED OFFICE, SUCH AS A SECRETARY OF STATE?

	Appointed Commission	Elected Office	Don't Know
ALL Voters	33%	38%	28%
Liberal	37%	41%	22%
Moderate	41%	34%	24%
Conservative	26%	39%	35%
Democrat	35%	44%	20%
Independent	35%	33%	31%
Republican	31%	38%	31%
Less than College Grad.	36%	40%	24%
College Grad. +	32%	37%	31%