

# Montana's Suspicious 2020 Election Irregularities Are Still Unaddressed

If we are going to avoid the type of debate that we saw after the November 3, 2020 election and restore confidence, then transparency is important. Take one of the least obvious places where people have concerns about the election — Montana.

Donald Trump won the state in 2020 by 16.4 percent. But there is an election transparency problem in Missoula County, Montana's second-most populous county.

If errors can occur in even relatively uncontested parts of the country, we should be broadly concerned. What went wrong? Well, it all got worse after Covid-19 made mail-in voting mainstream.

Last January 4, a recount of the 2020 election in Missoula [made national news](#) when it found 4,592 fewer envelopes than the County Election Office's tally of 72,491 votes. That is a 6.33 percent difference in votes counted. The county's election was entirely mail-in, and envelopes were crucial for checking dates and signatures.

During that recount, the Missoula County election board [provided 31 boxes](#) of envelopes to be counted. On March 28, in a count commissioned by the Missoula County Republicans, the count resulted in [only 71 fewer envelopes than votes](#).

Why the difference? For the March 28 count, the election board [provided 33 boxes](#) — two more than were provided in the first count

(affidavits available [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

With a total of [67,899 envelopes](#) in the January 4 recount, having them in 31 boxes would imply an average of 2,200 envelopes per box. Throw in two missing boxes, and you come remarkably close to the original difference of 4,592 envelopes and the remaining difference of 71 envelopes.

## What Explains the Discrepancy?

So, there are two options, and neither is good. First, perhaps the county originally misplaced two boxes of envelopes. "It could mean that the Election Office is merely incompetent and lost track of two boxes," [said](#) state Rep. Brad Tschida, R-Helena, in a statement on Monday. Tschida organized the January 4 recount.

The second option is that the two boxes of envelopes magically materialized. Tschida was less diplomatic about this: "The other alternative is that in the 15 months since January 4, 2021, two extra boxes of counterfeit envelopes were generated deliberately by wrongdoers."

It is crucial to watch the video that the county election office made of the envelope-opening on election night, as one could simply count envelopes as they open. Indeed, that's precisely why these types of videos are made. But there is a big problem. The county [erased the video](#).

Missoula County regulations call for all video records to be preserved for at least 60 days. Importantly, federal law [requires](#) that "all records and papers... relating to any... act requisite to voting in such election

[for federal office]" be kept for 22 months.

Obviously, the November 3, 2020 election had federal elections from the U.S. House of Representatives to the presidency. But the Montana Election Integrity Project specifically asked County Election Administrator Bradley Seaman on [December 22, 2020](#) to preserve the videos, only 42 days after the election, well within both time periods. Now they're allegedly gone.

Without the video, there is no way to determine how many envelopes were opened on November 3, 2020. The erasure of the video doesn't instill confidence.

## **Other Problems**

In April of last year, after the original count by the Integrity Project, Montana Secretary of State Christi Jacobsen [promised](#) her office would create new statewide requirements. Specifically, she vowed to "protect the integrity of elections by enhancing election transparency through video requirements and retention." But a year has now passed and additional elections have gone by. Jacobsen's office has issued no related requirements or further statements.

The Integrity Project had found other problems not examined on March 28. When testing a smaller, random subsample of 15,455 mail-in envelopes, the project found that [55 lacked postmark dates and 53 never had their signatures checked](#). That's a total of 0.7 percent of all ballots in the sample. Dozens of ballots also appeared to have duplicate signatures from nursing homes.

The more recent recount was performed entirely by the county. As

Tschida notes, "The Election Office required citizen observers to sit at least six feet away — too far to see the signatures or dates on the affirmation envelopes."

In addition, during the January 2021 recount, the Missoula County Election Office refused to allow any pictures and claimed Covid restrictions made it impossible for those doing the recount to share envelopes — it thus wasn't possible to accurately document the duplicate signatures.

If Americans don't trust the election results, they will be discouraged from voting in the future. Montana is hardly on anyone's radar for vote fraud. But the concern is that if these problems can happen in Montana, they can happen anywhere.

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