



MICHIGAN: PROTECTIONS AGAINST INTIMIDATION OF VOTERS AND ELECTION WORKERS

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This resource details state and federal laws protecting against the intimidation of voters and election workers and the disruption of the voting process.

Voters in Michigan have the right to vote free from intimidation under federal and state law.¹ The federal protections that apply to all states are explained [here](#). The following actions are specifically prohibited by Michigan law:

- Attempting to directly or indirectly influence another person's vote or deter or interrupt them from voting.²
- Obstructing or attempting to obstruct another person from voting.³
- Challenging a voter's qualifications "for the purpose of annoying or delaying" the voter.⁴

The following addresses the laws that serve as guardrails against specific threats of intimidation.

Voter Challenges

Michigan permits any registered voter or person appointed by a political party or other qualified organization to observe the electoral process to challenge another voter's eligibility.⁵ However, state law also provides for some guardrails:

- Michigan law limits the grounds upon which a voter may be challenged.⁶
- Challenges cannot be made "indiscriminately," "without good cause," or "for the purpose of annoying or delaying voters."⁷
- Challenges cannot be made to intimidate or deter voters from or interfere with the exercise of their right to vote.⁸
- Challenges must be based on knowledge or "good reason to suspect" that a voter is not registered or qualified to vote.⁹

1 See, e.g., 18 U.S.C. §§ 241, 594; 52 U.S.C. § 10101(b); Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.932(a), (d).

2 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.932(a).

3 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.932(d).

4 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.727(3).

5 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *Election Officials' Manual: Chapter 12: Election Day and the Voting Process*, July 2024, 24, <https://perma.cc/9FNB-GNQK>.

6 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *Election Officials' Manual: Chapter 12*, 28–29.

7 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.727(3).

8 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.932(a), (d). See also Michigan Bureau of Elections, *Election Officials' Manual: Chapter 12*, 29 ("The challenger must make the challenge in a discrete manner not intended to embarrass the challenged voter, intimidate other voters, or otherwise disrupt the election process.").

9 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.727(1).



- Challenges must be directed to the challenger liaison or the challenge liaison's designee before the voter is issued a ballot.¹⁰
- If an individual disrupts the voting process while making a challenge, poll workers (known as election inspectors in Michigan law) may contact election officials or law enforcement to eject the disruptor from the polling place.¹¹
- Even when challenged, a voter may continue to vote if they answer questions regarding their qualifications and take an oath administered by a poll worker. If the voter confirms their eligibility under oath, they must be permitted to vote, and their ballot is marked as challenged. Poll workers are required to make a written report regarding the challenge.¹²

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) provides additional safeguards to protect voters from mass challenges before an election:

- The NVRA expressly recognizes that National Change of Address information is not sufficient on its own to serve as the basis for canceling a voter's registration.¹³
- The NVRA prohibits the systematic removal of voters from the rolls within 90 days of a federal election.¹⁴

More information about the limitations and process for voter challenges in Michigan can be found [here](#).

Intimidation of Poll Workers and Election Officials

In addition to federal protections against the intimidation of election workers, it is a felony in Michigan to knowingly and willfully obstruct a public officer who is acting in the performance of their duties.¹⁵ Additionally, it is a crime to intimidate an election official because of the person's status as an election official, with the intent to interfere with the performance of that person's election-related duties.¹⁶

Voter Intimidation by Poll Workers

Information about the rules and constraints on poll workers in Michigan can be found [here](#).

10 See Michigan Bureau of Elections, *Election Officials' Manual: Chapter 12*, 29-32 (emphasis added) (A voter who is challenged is given a challenged ballot to vote after taking an oath to affirm their eligibility).

11 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *Election Officials' Manual: Chapter 12*, 1-2, 35.

12 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *Election Officials' Manual: Chapter 12*, 29-30; Mich. Comp. Laws §§ 168.729, 168.727(2) (b).

13 52 U.S.C. § 20507(c)(1)(B).

14 52 U.S.C. § 20507(c)(2)(A).

15 Mich. Comp. Laws § 750.479.

16 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.931b.



Intimidation by Election Observers

In Michigan, election observers are referred to as “poll watchers.” Michigan permits both election observers and credentialed “challengers” to observe the conduct of elections. Anyone, other than a candidate for elective office being voted on in the election, can serve as a poll watcher in Michigan. Challengers must also be registered to vote in Michigan and cannot be a poll worker.¹⁷ In addition to Michigan’s voter intimidation laws detailed above, state law limits the conduct of these observers:

- Challengers must be designated by a political party, incorporated organization, or organized committee of citizens. These entities can designate no more than two challengers per precinct and no more than one per counting board.¹⁸
- Challengers must carry the Michigan Challenger Credential Card signed by their appointing political party, group, or organization.¹⁹
- Challengers wishing to serve at an absent voter ballot processing facility are required to take and sign a written oath to keep confidential information regarding any ballots or the tabulation of votes until the polls are closed.²⁰
- Poll watchers are subject to the same restrictions as challengers.²¹
- Poll watchers must remain in a “Public Viewing Area” designated by election workers and may not issue challenges or handle pollbooks or other election equipment or materials.²²
- Challengers and poll watchers are forbidden from approaching voters or talking to voters directly for any reason.²³
- Challengers and poll watchers are forbidden from threatening or intimidating voters or poll workers at any stage of the voting process.²⁴
- Challengers and poll watchers are forbidden from interfering with or unduly delaying the work of poll workers.²⁵
- Challengers and poll watchers are forbidden from providing or offering to provide assistance to voters.²⁶

17 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.730(2); Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, July 2026, 2, <https://perma.cc/T5MS-7SX5>.

18 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.730(1).

19 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, 6.

20 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, 7.

21 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, 26.

22 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, 26.

23 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, 26.

24 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.733(4); Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, 23, 26.

25 Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.727(3).

26 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, 23–24.



- Challengers and poll watchers are barred from wearing clothing or other apparel advocating for or against the election of a candidate or the passage or defeat of a ballot measure.²⁷
- Challengers and poll watchers may not photograph or make video or audio recordings inside the voting location of the polling place or early voting site.²⁸

Poll workers may remove from a polling place any poll watcher or challenger who abuses their role.²⁹

Guns, Law Enforcement, and Federal Agents at Polling Places

Michigan law prohibits carrying firearms openly:

- In a polling place, and within 100 feet from any entrance, while the polls are open on election day,³⁰
- At an early voting site, and within 100 feet from any entrance, on any day early voting is conducted³¹
- Within 100 feet from any absent voter ballot drop box within 40 days of an election,³² or
- In a city or township clerk's office, or an official satellite office of a city or township clerk that is staffed by employees of the city or township clerk, or within 100 feet from any entrance, for the 40 days before an election³³

All firearms, including those carried concealed by licensed individuals, are also prohibited in an absent voter counting place or a combined absent voter counting place, or within 100 feet from the entrances to those locations.³⁴

Even at locations where firearms are not expressly prohibited, firearm carry may constitute unlawful intimidation.³⁵ Such conduct may consist of:

- Carrying a visible firearm at or near a polling location, drop box, or vote-counting site,
- Displaying a concealed firearm during a discussion or argument with a voter or election worker, or
- Approaching a voter or election worker while displaying a firearm.

27 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, 23–24.

28 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, 22; Michigan Bureau of Elections, *Election Officials' Manual: Chapter 12*, 33.

29 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *The Appointment, Rights and Duties of Election Challengers and Poll Watchers*, 27.

30 Mich. Comp. Laws § 750.234d(3)(a).

31 Mich. Comp. Laws § 750.234d(3)(b).

32 Mich. Comp. Laws § 750.234d(3)(c).

33 Mich. Comp. Laws § 750.234d(3)(d).

34 Mich. Comp. Laws § 750.234d(6).

35 See *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association, Inc. v. Bruen*, 142 S. Ct. 2111, 2133 (2022) (prohibitions on firearms in “sensitive places,” specifically “polling places,” are “presumptively lawful.”)



Poll workers may contact law enforcement in “extreme cases”—such as when a poll worker or voter has a reasonable fear of physical harm—to remove any person who disrupts the peace, regularity, and order at the polling place. Law enforcement officers are required to enforce lawful directives issued by election officials.³⁶

Federal law limits the presence of the military and other armed federal agents at polling places:

- It is a felony for any federal official to send troops or armed persons to a polling place, unless such force is necessary to repel armed enemies of the United States.³⁷
- It is a felony for a member of the military to intimidate voters or interfere with elections.³⁸

Door-to-Door Intimidation

Michigan and federal law prohibit canvassing efforts that are used to intimidate voters.³⁹ Any voter who receives a visit from a privately organized canvassing group does not have to answer any questions and should report any incidents of intimidation to their local officials. Additionally, it is illegal in Michigan to falsely represent oneself as a public officer or employee.⁴⁰

36 Michigan Bureau of Elections, *Election Officials’ Manual: Chapter 12, 2*.

37 18 U.S.C. § 592.

38 18 U.S.C. § 593.

39 18 U.S.C. §§ 241, 594; Mich. Comp. Laws § 168.932(a).

40 Mich. Comp. Laws § 750.217c.