



WISCONSIN: PROTECTIONS AGAINST INTIMIDATION OF VOTERS AND ELECTION WORKERS

BRENNAN
CENTER
FOR JUSTICE

ALL
VOTING
IS LOCAL

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

Voters in Wisconsin 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 Wisconsin law:

- Making use of or threatening to make use of force, violence, or restraint to induce or compel any person to vote or refrain from voting.²
- Impeding or preventing the free exercise of the franchise at an election by abduction, duress, or any fraudulent device or contrivance.³
- Compelling, inducing, or prevailing upon a voter to vote or refrain from voting for or against a particular candidate or referendum.⁴

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

Voter Challenges

Although Wisconsin permits properly registered voters and election officials to challenge another voter's eligibility, state law also provides for some guardrails. For example, challenges must be "for cause."⁵ Individuals who abuse the challenge process may be subject to sanctions, including removal from the voting area.⁶ Frivolous challenges are also subject to fines. In April 2022, the Wisconsin Elections Commission [fined a man \\$2,400](#) for filing repeated frivolous complaints of voter fraud. A challenged voter who answers the election inspector's questions, swears to the required affirmation, and is determined by the election inspector to meet the voting requirements can vote a regular ballot.⁷

1 See, e.g., 18 U.S.C. §§ 241, 594; 52 U.S.C. § 10101(b); Wis. Stat. § 12.09.

2 Wis. Stat. § 12.09(1).

3 Wis. Stat. § 12.09(2).

4 Wis. Stat. § 12.09(3).

5 Wis. Stat. § 6.925.

6 See Wis. Admin. Code § EL 9.02 referencing Wis. Stat. Ann. § 7.41(3).

7 Wis. Stat. § 6.94.



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.⁸
- The NVRA prohibits the systematic removal of voters from the rolls within 90 days of a federal election.⁹

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

Intimidation of Election Inspectors and Election Officials

In addition to federal protections against the intimidation of election workers, Wisconsin law prohibits any person from impeding or preventing the free exercise of the franchise at an election, engaging in disorderly behavior at or near a polling place, or interrupting or disturbing the voting or canvassing proceedings.¹⁰ It is also a felony to physically harm a public officer either to influence their actions or as a result of some official action taken.¹¹

Voter Intimidation by Election Inspectors

Information about the rules and constraints on election inspectors in Wisconsin can be found [here](#).

Intimidation by Election Observers

In addition to Wisconsin's voter intimidation laws detailed above, state law places limits on who may serve as an observer and what they may and may not do:

- Any member of the public, except for a candidate on the ballot, may be an observer, subject to the limitations imposed by the lead election worker.¹²
- Municipal clerks can limit the number of observers representing the same organization who are allowed to serve at a time and may also limit the areas that observers are allowed to access within a polling place.¹³
- Observers must present photo identification to the head election inspector upon arrival and sign in with their full name in the election observer log.¹⁴

8 52 U.S.C. § 20507(c)(1)(B).

9 52 U.S.C. § 20507(c)(2)(A).

10 Wis. Stat. §§ 12.09(2), 12.13(3)(x).

11 Wis. Stat. § 940.20(4).

12 Wis. Stat. § 7.41(1).

13 Wis. Stat. § 7.41(1)–(2).

14 Wis. Stat. § 7.41(1); Wisconsin Elections Commission, *Wisconsin Election Observers: Rules-at-a-Glance*, December 2025, 2, <https://perma.cc/39DD-CVZ5>.



- Observers must wear a badge or tag identifying themselves as an “election observer” when inside a polling place.¹⁵
- Observers may not interact directly with voters unless requested.¹⁶
- Observers must remain within the area designated for observation by the chief election inspector.¹⁷
- Observers are prohibited from engaging in any form of electioneering, including wearing any materials that may influence an election.¹⁸
- Observers are prohibited from handling any official documents or viewing confidential information on the poll list.¹⁹
- Observers are prohibited from using video or still cameras during voting hours.²⁰

Election officials and election inspectors may remove any observer who disrupts the operation of a polling place or clerk’s office.²¹

Guns, Law Enforcement, and Federal Agents at Polling Places

Wisconsin law prohibits firearms in certain buildings often used as polling places and drop box locations, including schools and courthouses.²²

Even at locations where firearms are not expressly prohibited, carrying a firearm may constitute unlawful intimidation.²³ Such conduct may consist of

- Carrying a visible firearm at a 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.

15 Wisconsin Elections Commission, *Wisconsin Election Observers: Rules-at-a-Glance*, 2.

16 Wisconsin Elections Commission, *Election Law & Administration: Manual for Statutory Requirements & Best Practices*, June 2026, ch. 14, p. 21, <https://perma.cc/8DA2-N47H>.

17 Wis. Stat. § 7.41(2).

18 Wisconsin Elections Commission, *Election Law Manual*, ch. 14, p. 111.

19 Wis. Stat. § 7.41(4); Wis. Adm. Code § EL 4.03(9); Wisconsin Elections Commission, *Wisconsin Election Observers: Rules-at-a-Glance*, 2.

20 Wisconsin Elections Commission, *Wisconsin Election Observers: Rules-at-a-Glance*.

21 Wis. Stat. §§ 7.37(2), 7.41(3).

22 Wis. Stat. §§ 941.235, 948.605, 175.60(16)(a)(6)–(7).

23 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.”)



The chief of police is required to station a police officer at any polling place designated by the municipal board of election commissioners.²⁴

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

- It is a felony to deploy troops or armed persons to a polling place, unless such force is necessary to repel armed enemies of the United States.²⁵
- It is a felony for a member of the military to intimidate voters or interfere with elections.²⁶

Door-to-door Intimidation

Wisconsin and federal law prohibit canvassing efforts that are used to intimidate voters.²⁷

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.

²⁴ Wis. Stat. § 7.22(5).

²⁵ 18 U.S.C. § 592.

²⁶ 18 U.S.C. § 593. See also 52 U.S.C. § 10102.

²⁷ 18 U.S.C. §§ 241, 594; Wis. Stat. § 12.09.