



Election Observers



Poll watchers, sometimes referred to as "election observers", are individuals who may observe steps in the election process. Each state has its own laws and procedures on when and where observers can be present, as well as who can observe the election. Observers are typically individuals appointed by political parties, candidates, or issue groups supporting or opposing a ballot measure. Below are descriptions of three types of observers – the public, poll watchers, and challengers. For more information, visit [EAC's webpage on Poll Watchers](#).

Members of the Public

Election officials take steps to ensure that the public has access to observe the election process. In some jurisdictions, this may include inviting the public to view activities such as pre-election testing of voting equipment, in-person voting, and the counting of ballots.



Case Studies: Members of the Public



In [Wisconsin](#), anyone other than a candidate for election has the right to observe the conduct of an election, including at polling locations, central counting locations, and during recounts. Observers must check-in with election officials and provide basic identity information.



[Georgia](#) permits the public to observe in-person voting, as long as they stay outside the enclosed voting space. Additionally, the public may observe the counting of ballots at tabulating centers. Post-election audits and recounts are also open to the public.

Poll Watchers



The role of a poll watcher is to observe and monitor the election, without violating voter privacy or disrupting the election. Poll watchers may include members of political parties or nonpartisan groups, candidate representatives, international observers, exit polling groups, academics or relevant federal and state agency representatives. In most jurisdictions, poll watchers must be authorized, which may include having a letter from their appointing entity and filing a form with a state or local elections office. Most jurisdictions require poll watchers to take an oath or attend training. Observers are often required to wear an identification badge.

Case Studies: Poll Watchers



In North Dakota, non-partisan poll watchers are authorized to observe the election process, as long as they do not interfere with voters or election officials performing their duties. There are no formal limits on how many election observers may be at a polling place, but the lead poll worker may limit the number based on space restrictions.



In Colorado, candidates, political parties, and issue committees appoint election watchers. Watchers must receive a certificate of appointment and take an oath before a local election official. Trained watchers may observe election processes, including logic and accuracy testing of voting equipment, voter check-in and registration, signature verification of mail ballot envelopes, canvassing, and recounts.

Challengers

Challengers are individuals who are authorized to raise concerns either with the election process or to challenge whether a voter is eligible to cast a ballot. Most jurisdictions that allow challengers place limits on the types of objections that are grounds for challenges. They may also restrict challengers from interacting with voters directly. Depending on the state, challengers may be required to have specific permission from an election official to be at a polling location.



Case Studies: Challengers



In Iowa any registered voter in the county may challenge the qualifications of another voter. Challenges must be in writing. Challenges are only permitted for certain circumstances, including citizenship, age, residency, incompetence, or falsifying information on a registration form.



Arkansas requires that challengers be registered poll watchers. They must utilize a Challenged Ballot Form provided by the state. Challenges are only permitted based on eligibility or that the voter has already voted.