



Wisconsin Elections Commission

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Media at the Polls: Wisconsin Guidelines

MADISON - Members of the media often visit polling places, central count, and in-person absentee voting (IPAV) locations seeking to shoot “b-roll” footage or take still photos as part of Election Day stories. To balance media access with voter privacy, there are clear guidelines you should be aware of.

1. Arrival & Identification

- Self-Identification: Upon arriving at a designated polling place, central count facility, or IPAV location with the intent to take photos, videos, or audio recordings, media members must identify themselves with the organization they represent to the designated election official. [Wis. Admin. Code § EL 4.07\(1\)](#)
 - **Best practice:** Contact the municipal clerk prior to sending photographers or journalists to polling places before Election Day.
- Briefing: The municipal clerk, chief inspector, or designated election official should brief media members on acceptable conduct, referencing Wisconsin administrative code (see below).

2. Filming and Recording

- Official Discretion: The designated election official, Chief Inspector, or clerk may allow video and still cameras *outside* the voting area. [Wis. Admin. Code § EL 4.07\(1\), \(2\)](#)
 - **Bottom line:** It’s up to the Chief Inspector or clerk to determine what outside the voting area is. For example, that could be deemed the hallway or outside the main entrance doors. Remember, there is no one-size fit approach because polling places differ in size and capacity. Chief inspectors will always prioritize the privacy of voters and voter information.
- Interviews: Interviews should take place outside the voting area, so entrances remain clear and voting continues without interruption.
- Restrictions: Any camera use must never capture confidential information—such as voted ballots—or disrupt or interfere election activities. [Wis. Admin. Code § EL 4.07\(1\)](#)
- Time Limits: Election officials may limit how long cameras are used, but any time limits must apply equally to all media members. [Wis. Admin. Code § EL 4.07\(2\)](#)

See Sec. 14.5.9: “Communications Media” in the [Election Law & Administration \(ELAW\) Manual](#) for more information about media in the polling place.

3. Election Observer Rules

To observe from *inside* the voting area, journalists must sign in as official observers and follow all observer rules. [Wis. Admin. Code § EL 4.07\(3\)](#).

NOTE: Media members who are filming, taking pictures, or making audio recordings must remain *outside* the voting area, giving them less direct access than observers. They cannot see or hear all election activities unless they sign in as observers and agree to abide by those rules (including camera restrictions).

4. FAQ's

Q: Can I record or take photos within the voting area where voters are receiving and casting ballots?

No. Even though there may be some value in recording the voting process for media purposes, that benefit is outweighed by the risks of voters feeling uncomfortable being recorded and the possibility of accidentally recording or capturing confidential information.

Q: Can I record or take photos in the hallway? What about recording or photographing through a window or doorway into the voting area?

This is only allowed at the clerk's discretion. Clerks can say no to these types of media requests.

Q: But what is the voting area? The entire room? Or just the parts where people are getting ballots and voting?

The voting area is any area where a voter receives, prepares, or deposits/casts their ballot. The exact boundaries of the voting area are set by the election official. Media interested in filming at the polling place are encouraged to contact the clerk ahead of the election.

Q: When did this change? I've always been able to record at polling places.

This change went into effect when the observer rule became law in August 2025. [*See Wis. Admin. Code Chapter EL 4.*](#) The Wisconsin Broadcasters' Association and Wisconsin Newspapers Association were both a part of the advisory committee that were involved in the drafting of the observer rule.

Q: Why are there restrictions on photos, videos, and audio recordings?

Voters have a fundamental right to a private and secret ballot. In many polling places, voting spaces are compact, which can make it difficult for cameras to operate without capturing how an individual is voting, even if media has no intention of recording that.

Additionally, cameras risk capturing sensitive information such as photo ID's or proof of residence documents for voters registering on Election Day. For these reasons, the rule prohibits photos, videos, and audio recordings within the voting area, but allows a clerk to use their discretion of these activities outside of the voting area.