

WISCONSIN

PROGRAM

This year Election Protection Wisconsin dispatched hundreds of volunteers throughout the state to assist voters and poll workers. Even with high turnout, the voting process ran relatively smoothly. Wisconsin's primary and recall Election Protection programs early in the year contributed to the success of Election Day.

Most of the major issues in Wisconsin stemmed from recent changes in the law, which included an attempt to institute a photo identification requirement and changes in the residency requirements as they related to Election Day Registration. The effective operation of Election Protection and the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board (GAB) kept other problems to a minimum.

BEFORE ELECTION DAY

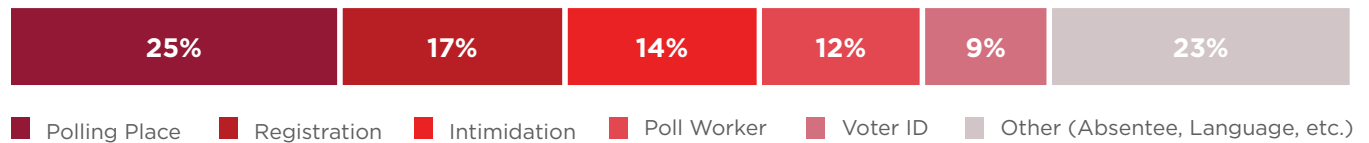
Wisconsin's New Photo Identification Law

In 2011, Wisconsin passed a restrictive photo identification law, but two different state courts subsequently issued injunctions barring the law from going into effect. The state appealed these injunctions. The state sought to bypass the state's intermediate appellate court, the Court of Appeals, and asked the Wisconsin Supreme Court to hear a direct appeal from the trial courts. This was done in an attempt to cause the law to go into effect in time to be used in the November general election, which would have provided very little time during which to educate voters and poll workers prior to the election. The Wisconsin Supreme Court refused to grant such a direct appeal, and the law was not in effect for the November election.

Role of the Government Accountability Board

Because of Election Protection's work to assist voters during the recall, along with the guidance from Wisconsin's independent Government Accountability Board (GAB), Election Day ran relatively smoothly. Setting aside the photo identification and residency issues, the most significant problem in Wisconsin on Election Day came out of Racine, where polling

2012 VOTING PROBLEMS IN WISCONSIN



places ran out of ballots, causing long lines and confusion. This has been a problem in other Wisconsin jurisdictions in past elections, and Election Protection has worked to implement plans in those jurisdictions for emergencies such as ballot shortages and will continue to encourage the state to implement statewide plans.

Throughout the year, the GAB issued helpful guidance for voters and poll workers that clearly improved voting administration state-wide by providing uniformity and clarity to new laws and regulations. The GAB interpreted the state's law requiring voters to provide proof of residency to allow voters to provide electronic proof. As a result, on Election Day, voters were able to show utility bills, bank statements, and other acceptable proof on the screens of their mobile devices in order to prove residency. Additionally, the GAB responded to Election Protection's inquiries as to what proof was acceptable and clarified the law by creating a clear list of acceptable proof of residency documents.

Proof of Residency Restrictions and Confusion

In 2011, the legislature passed a law that expanded the amount of time required to establish residency from ten to 28 days and repealed a safeguard that allowed a voter who lacked proof of residency to vote if another voter affirmed their residency. Most disturbing was the fact that these new laws were implemented without an effective voter education campaign to alert voters to the changes to their longstanding and long relied-on Election Day Registration (EDR) procedures. During the June 2012 recall, this caused widespread confusion among voters and poll workers. Election Protection received reports of poll workers rejecting acceptable forms of proof of residency and requiring photo identification from voters.

College students who had recently left school for the summer and wanted to vote at home felt the brunt of the confusing new changes for Election Day registration. Under the old law, voters had to establish ten days of residency, but now they were required to meet a 28 day requirement. For example, Joanna, a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, had her last day of classes on May 11th. Had she returned to her parents' home in Green Bay, she

would only have been able to establish 25 days of residency before the election. Thus, she could only vote at home in Green Bay if she had not voted at school during the 2011-2012 school year (as registering and voting in Madison would have removed her claim to Green Bay residency). Meanwhile, if she had voted at school during the 2011-2012 school year, she would have been required to return to Madison (two-and-a-half hours away from Green Bay) in order to vote on Tuesday, June 5.

ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, there were a significant number of poll sites with long lines and disorganization. At a polling location in La Crosse, there was no seating for voters waiting in line and several people fainted while waiting to vote. One way to relieve the lines is by splitting the poll books, which Election Protection has long advocated for. While many sites followed the procedure, others didn't. At Sandburg Hall in Milwaukee, voters lines exceeding an hour. Election officials split the poll books and wait times were substantially diminished.

Insufficient staffing contributed to the long lines and disorganization. Election Protection has found that polls in high-turnout wards need to include a dedicated greeter or site coordinator who can ensure voters are in the correct polling place, and in the correct line for registration, and, in a site with multiple wards, in the correct line for voting. Unfortunately, many of these locations did not have this dedicated staff. A voter had received a flyer in the mail erroneously directing him to vote at one location. He waited in line only to learn that he had to go to a different location to vote. At another location in Oshkosh, a number of voters waited in line to vote only to learn they were not listed as registered and they had to go back to the registration line. Had there been a greeter or site coordinator, these problems may have been identified when the voters arrived.