

# Wisconsin Elections Commission

## State of Wisconsin

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:  
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## Media Advisory: Covering the April 2019 Spring Election

Madison, WI – As a reminder to news organizations interested in covering Wisconsin’s Spring Election, the Wisconsin Elections Commission is issuing this advisory with guidance for news editors, reporters and photographers. This advisory is designed for planning purposes, but news media are free to quote from it as well.

Meagan Wolfe, Wisconsin’s chief elections official, will be available for media interviews about the upcoming election the week of March 25. Contact Reid Magney, 608-267-7887 or [reid.magney@wi.gov](mailto:reid.magney@wi.gov) to arrange an interview.

### Before the Election

To find out what offices are being elected in your coverage area, visit the Elections Commission website, where you will find a spreadsheet containing the names and contact information for more than 10,200 state and local candidates. There is also a list of 87 local referendum questions on the ballot around the state. <https://elections.wi.gov/elections-voting/2019/spring>

Another easy way to find out what’s on the ballot in your area is to visit the MyVote Wisconsin website and enter your own address. <https://MyVote.WI.gov>.

### Absentee Ballot Reports

You can find daily reports of how many absentee ballots have been issued and returned in your county on our website: <https://elections.wi.gov/publications/statistics/absentee>. For information about a specific municipality, please contact the clerk’s office.

### At the Polling Place on Election Day

Members of the news media may be inside polling places on Election Day, subject to most of the same restrictions on other election observers. Please refer to our election observer brochure (<https://elections.wi.gov/publications/brochures/observer-rules>) for details. Reporters and photographers may wish to print the brochure to take with them in the event there are questions.

Unlike voters and regular election observers, media may record sound, images and video inside the polling place as long as it is not disruptive. You may use cell phones or tablets to take pictures and video, something regular observers are not allowed to do. However, no media may broadcast live or tape broadcasts (stand-ups) from within a polling place because of the potential to disrupt the voting process.

When you arrive at a polling place, find the Chief Election Inspector and tell him or her who you are and what organization you represent. The Chief Inspector keeps a list of media observers, but you are not required to sign in.

## **Voter Interviews**

You may not contact (interview) voters when they are in line waiting to vote. The only people authorized to have contact with voters prior to voting are the election workers. Please do not take images/video of voters' faces as they're going into polling places, which some voters find intimidating. Photographing lines of voters from the back should not be a problem. After voters have finished, you are free to ask them for interviews outside the polling place. Please do not block the exits.

Which polling places are good locations for stories? The best sources of information about polling places are municipal clerks, who are responsible for them. A directory of clerks is on our website: <https://elections.wi.gov/clerks/directory>.

## **Election Day Issues and Misinformation**

For updates on how voting is going on Election Day, follow our Twitter feed: [https://twitter.com/WI\\_Elections](https://twitter.com/WI_Elections). When we know something, we'll post it. You are also welcome to contact the public information officer.

We also realize that there may be misinformation and disinformation out there about elections and voting. We will be monitoring social media and putting out correct information if we see errors. If you see something questionable, please contact the Elections Commission.

## **Cyber Security**

Working closely with our technology and law enforcement partners in state and federal government, Wisconsin has taken extraordinary steps to enhance security of its systems and prevent interference with our statewide voter registration system and vote counting systems. We have also conducted extensive security training with county and municipal clerks. There is no evidence that Wisconsin's election systems have ever been compromised.

More information is available here: <https://elections.wi.gov/elections-voting/security>.

## **Counting, Reporting and Certifying the Vote**

Wisconsin does not have a statewide system for reporting unofficial results on Election Night, and there is not a central website where results will be reported. Our website contains links to the 72 county clerk websites, where clerks are required to post unofficial results: <https://elections.wi.gov/clerks/directory/county-websites>.

County clerks post unofficial results in a few different formats, including HTML, PDF and spreadsheets. The most reliable and accessible source of statewide totals is the Associated Press, which gathers information from all 72 counties and provides unofficial results to its members. Some media organizations in Wisconsin that are not AP members also collect unofficial election results.

These unofficial results must be certified by the municipality, county and state before they are official. Therefore, there may be additions/modifications/changes to the originally reported unofficial numbers.

## **Public Meetings to Count Ballots**

After the polls close at 8 p.m., the election workers will count any absentee ballots that have not been counted throughout the day and announce the vote totals for that polling place. They will also take care of the administrative work required before taking the results to the municipal clerk. This activity is a public meeting of the board of local canvassers, and the media and public are welcome to attend. You may also view or photograph the results tapes from voting equipment.

Municipal clerks provide unofficial results to their county clerks, who will post them to the county's website. Under a recently-enacted law, municipal clerks must forward results to the county clerk within two hours of the results being tabulated, and county clerks must post the results within two hours of receiving them from the municipal clerk.

## **Central Count Absentee**

Twenty six municipalities, including Milwaukee, count their absentee ballots at a central site instead of at the polling place. If your media organization covers elections in a city or county where absentee ballots are counted centrally, it is important to remember that the early returns for those cities may not include absentee ballots, which are added in later after they have all been processed.

**By law, municipalities that use central count are required to post the number of absentee ballots that the clerk has mailed or transmitted to voters and that have been returned by the closing hour on Election Day.** Including that number of returned absentee ballots in your early reporting will help avoid confusion among viewers and readers if those numbers end up affecting the results of the election, as happened in Milwaukee in November 2018. A list of Central Count Absentee municipalities is available on our website: <https://elections.wi.gov/clerks/guidance/central-count-absentee>

## **Provisional Ballots**

Municipalities are also required to post the number of provisional ballots on the internet on Election Night, though these numbers are usually very small. Provisional ballots are generally issued to voters who do not have an acceptable ID on Election Day. Voters have until 8 p.m. on Election Day or 4 p.m. on Friday, April 5 to bring an acceptable photo ID to the municipal clerk's office to have their vote counted.

Counties must convene their boards of canvassers by 9 a.m. on Tuesday, April 9 to begin certifying official results. The deadline for counties to provide certified results to the Wisconsin Elections Commission is Friday, April 12. The statutory deadline for the Commission to certify statewide results is Wednesday, May 15.

## **Reporting Turnout**

To determine preliminary turnout statewide on Election Night, divide the total number of votes for Supreme Court Justice by Wisconsin's voting-age population (VAP), which is 4,498,576. For example, there were 997,485 votes for Supreme Court Justice in April 2018. That number divided by the VAP (at the time) of 4,469,475 is 22.32 percent.

For local turnout, you can look up VAP for counties and municipalities at the Wisconsin Demographic Services Center: <http://www.doa.wi.gov/divisions/intergovernmental-relations/demographic-services-center/estimates>.

Some clerks may report turnout based on the total number of registered voters, which produces a higher percentage. The state uses VAP for several reasons, including that Wisconsin has Election Day Registration, so the pre-election number of registered voters does not reflect the total number who can vote.

## **Recount Rules**

Wisconsin does not have automatic recounts, even if the unofficial results are extremely close. For state offices, a losing candidate who wants to ask for a recount must wait until the last day a county board of canvassers meets, which is at least one week after the election. The deadline for requesting a recount is three business days after the Elections Commission receives the last statement from a county board of canvassers. For local offices, the deadline to request a recount is three days after the municipal board of canvassers certifies results, the deadline for which is Monday, April 8.

The rules for who may request a recount have changed since 2016, when Wisconsin was the only state to conduct a presidential recount. Only an aggrieved candidate, defined as a candidate for an office whose total votes were within 1 percent of the winner's vote total when at least 4,000 votes were cast or within 40 votes of the winner's total if fewer than 4,000 votes were cast, may request a recount of results for an office.

There is no cost to the losing candidate if the difference between the leading candidate is 0.25 percent or less. If the difference in a state office race is more than 0.25 percent, the WEC will estimate the cost, which must be paid before the recount begins.

Much more information about recounts is available here: <https://elections.wi.gov/elections-voting/recount>.

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The Wisconsin Elections Commission is responsible for administration and enforcement of election laws in Wisconsin. The Commission is made up of six Commissioners – four appointed directly by the State Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly and the Minority Leaders in the State Senate and Assembly. The remaining two Commissioners are by the Governor with confirmation by the State Senate from lists of former municipal and county clerks submitted by the legislative leadership in each party.