

2024 ELECTION TRAINING SERIES

October 10, 2024

# Bearing Witness: Active Bystander Intervention & De-Escalation

# Introductions



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# Community Norms

1. **Be respectful:** Assume positive intent but understand impact
2. Understand privilege and position
3. **Be present:** Practice **active listening**, **bring your full self**, and limit distractions
4. **Courage over comfort:** embrace hard conversations and conflict
5. **Step up, step back:** Allow space for conversation and flexibility
6. We are here to learn!

# Logistical Reminders

- We're discussing all election work with a **nonpartisan lens** and a **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion lens**
- **This session is being recorded:** content will be shared post-training on [lwv.org/2024electionwebinars](https://lwv.org/2024electionwebinars)
- We are using **Zoom's transcription service**. This is automated, and we can't guarantee 100% accuracy.



# Agenda

- Welcome and Grounding
- Know and Exercise your Rights when Voting
- Non-violence active bystander training
- What can we do?
- Next steps

# By the end of this training, you will understand:

- Your right to vote free from intimidation
- Background and principles of non-violent de-escalation
- Improved skills of de-escalation
- Available resources

# Know Your Rights

**You have the right to feel safe  
when you vote.**

*Federal law prohibits intimidation, threats,  
or coercion that interfere with, or that  
attempts to interfere with, your right to vote.*

42 U.S.C. § 1985(3); 52 U.S.C § 10101(b); 52 U.S.C. § 10307(b)



# Voter Intimidation

**Voter Intimidation** is any act that causes voters to feel unsafe about exercising their right to vote.

You may not be:

**Threatened**

**Coerced**

**Frightened**

**Assaulted**

**Compelled, or**

**Discouraged**

To vote one way or another or to not vote at all.



# Voter Intimidation Today Can Include

- **Threatening you** for registering to vote or helping others to vote
- **Misrepresenting** oneself as an election official
- **Aggressively** asking questions about prior voting record or voter registration
- Claiming that you or someone you know has committed **voter fraud**
- Phone calls or **robocalls** that voting makes certain personal information available to the public or government/law enforcement authorities
- Disseminating **personal information** causing you to be the target of harassment
- Open-carrying **weapons** near polling places or ballot drop-box locations (depending on circumstances)
- **Following** you to, from, and within the polling place
- **Recording** voters' license plates
- **Threatening** violence or prosecution
- Behaving in other intimidating or **deceptive** ways that make you feel unsafe

Voter intimidation is  
prohibited for *any* voting-  
related activity



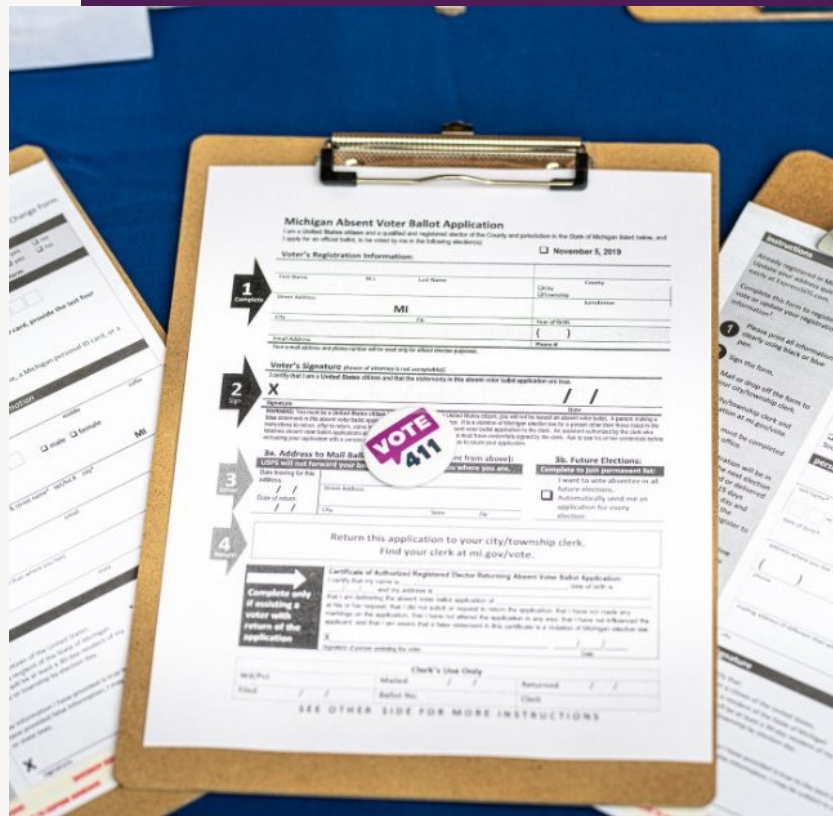
# Beyond Election Day

- You need not be a **registered voter** to be a subject of voter intimidation.
- Voter intimidation can occur **before, during, and after** an election.
- Voter intimidation can occur at the **polls, at home, or any place where** voter activity is occurring.

# Examples of Voter Intimidation

## BEYOND ELECTION DAY

- Threatening people when they **register or attempt to register** to vote
- Threatening people engaged in **voter registration activities**
- Threatening people door-to-door at their homes **after** they have voted
- Threatening people when they leave their **mail-in ballot** at a drop-off box or a mailbox



# Poll Watchers

**Poll watchers** are individuals who observe steps in the election process.

- Some states allow poll watchers to **inspect** poll books and **challenge** voter qualifications.
- The rules governing poll watchers are **defined by each state**, but poll watchers are still **subject to federal laws** that prohibit voter intimidation.
- They generally cannot be present in **enclosed voting spaces** or otherwise impede on your right to vote.



# Examples of Voter Intimidation

## BY POLL WATCHERS

- **Challenge** voter eligibility
- **Prevent** assistance to a voter
- **Prevent** deposit of a ballot or registration
- **Fail to secure** voting equipment
- **Spread misinformation**, like not updating the wait times
- **Make political commentary** to sway your vote



# Protections for Voters



# Protections Under Federal Law

Congress has passed two statutes that include protections from those who seek to threaten, coerce, or suppress your right to vote.

- ***The Voting Rights Act of 1965*** (VRA)
- ***The Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871*** (KKK Act)

The ***National Voter Registration Act*** also prohibits the intimidation of persons for registering or attempting to register to vote.



### Section 11(b):

*"No person, whether acting under color of law or otherwise, shall intimidate, threaten, or coerce, or attempt to intimidate, threaten, or coerce any person for the purpose of interfering with the right of such person to vote or to vote as he may choose . . . ."*

## Voting Rights Act of 1965

- Creates **the right to sue an individual** who seeks to intimidate, threaten or coerce voters
- Covers **both acts and attempted acts** of intimidation
- **Prohibits most acts** related to voting, like attempts to vote or urging/aiding another to vote
- Intimidation need not be violent or physical
- Applies to **federal, state, and local elections**

*"[I]f two or more persons conspire to prevent by force, intimidation, or threat, any citizen who is lawfully entitled to vote, from giving his support or advocacy in a legal manner, toward or in favor of the election of any lawfully qualified person as an elector for President or Vice President, or as a Member of Congress of the United States . . . ."*

## *The Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871*

- Creates the **right to sue a group** for voter intimidation
- The group must be a **conspiracy of two or more people** who seek to prevent "by force, intimidation, or threat" those who give "support or advocacy" to a candidate for federal office
- The group seeking to intimidate need not act with **intent** or even have an **explicit agreement** to carry out acts of intimidation
- Applies only to **federal elections**



# Protections Under State Law

Most states have also passed protections against intimidation of voters:

- **Michigan:** It is a felony to “menace” voters to “influence an elector in giving his or her vote, or to deter the elector from, or interrupt the elector in giving his or her vote.”
- **Wisconsin:** Voters are protected from threats, duress, and other interference with the right to vote and the “exercise of the franchise at an election.”
- **Pennsylvania:** state law protects from the use and threat of force, intimidation, coercion, or undue influence in the context of voting, refraining to vote, and supporting or disavowing any particular candidate or political issue.

# Protections for Election Workers

**Since 2022**, 1 in 6 election workers have reported feeling threatened and harassed at their jobs.

- The **federal criminal code** protects legally authorized election workers from intimidation.
- **Most states** have also passed laws against intimidation and harassment of election workers.
- Some states are more thorough in their protection than others, having been recently updated to include protections against **cyberbullying and doxing**.



# Reporting Voter Intimidation

- Use your **rapid response network** to track what happened.
- **Document** the intimidation (who, what, when, where, etc.) thoroughly and timely.
- **Report**
  - **Elevate** the report through the League network, either to your State League or to LWVUS.
  - **Report** to Election Protection at **866-OUR-VOTE**
  - **Alert** your local election official
- Refer to our guide **if press reach out** about the incident





# 1-866-OUR-VOTE

**You can also call:**

**888-VE-Y-VOTA (888-839-8682)**

Spanish language hotline

**888-API-VOTE (888-274-8683)**

Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Bengali, Hindi,  
Urdu, and Tagalog hotline

**844-YALLA-US (844-925-5287)**

Arabic language hotline

# Bearing Witness



# Bearing Witness

*“If we are aware of an injustice,  
there is a responsibility on us to  
do what we can to reduce that  
injustice”*

# Non-Violence Principles

- Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people
- Nonviolence seeks to win through friendship and understanding
- Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people
- In peaceful protest and civil disobedience, Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform
- Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate
- Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice

When you engage in nonviolent activism, you are a part of a long line of activists who have done the same thing across history



# Bystander Intervention Training assumes that:

- We have an ethical, social and political obligation to help each other, when we are in a position, *situationally and/or psychologically*, to do so
- Stepping up to act in solidarity with others can help to reduce the impact of a problematic situation
- The best way of responding as a bystander is through de-escalation
- As a bystander, you are there to support what the targeted person wants
- Practicing how to respond helps us to get past our hesitations so we can step up when necessary





## How to be Ready

- Be aware of what's happening around you
- If you see something happening, really pay attention
  - Examples: take off your headphones, pause your conversation, pause what you're doing on your phone, position yourself to get a better view
- Don't assume someone else will do something
  - The "Bystander Effect" or "Responsibility diffusion"
- Teamwork: Point out the situation to people around you. Tell them you're going to support the targeted person and ask if they'd like to help





## When you first approach a person being targeted:

- Introduce yourself
- Quietly explain you saw what's happening and want to offer support
- If the person says they are fine and don't need support, move back but remain monitoring the situation
- If the person does accept your support, use methods to de-escalate by centering the needs of the targeted person

## What to do if you are witnessing Islamophobic harassment

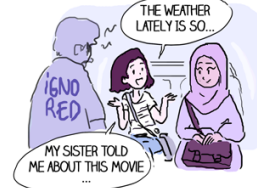
A bystander's guide to help  
the person who's being targeted



- 1 Engage conversation.**  
Go to them, sit beside them and say hello.  
Try to appear calm, collected and welcoming.  
**IGNORE THE ATTACKER.**



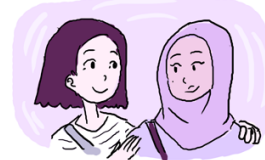
- 2 Pick a random subject and start discussing it.**  
It can be anything: a movie you liked,  
the weather, saying you like something  
they wear and asking where they got it...



- 3 Keep building the safe space.**  
Keep eye contact with them and don't  
acknowledge the attacker's presence : the  
absence of response from you two will  
push them to leave the area shortly.



- 4 Continue the conversation until the  
attacker leaves & escort them  
to a safe place if necessary.**  
Bring them to a neutral area where they can  
recollect themselves; respect their wishes if  
they tell you they're ok and just want to go.



# Bystander Intervention Principles



- We want to show moral courage:
  - By acting from a centered place despite our fears
  - By choosing principles over emotion (anxiety, anger, self-righteousness)
- We want to engage in De-Escalation:
  - By limiting the ability of a situation to become more intense
  - By reducing the drama in the situation
- We want to shift the attention in the situation:
  - By interacting as much as we can only with the targeted person
  - By ignoring the attacker - freeze them out, even if they escalate verbally
  - By creating a safer space for the targeted person
  - By bringing in other people for additional support and varied responses

# Bystander Intervention Principles

## We want to reach out to the targeted person:

- By being present as an ally and equal
- By not taking away the ability of the targeted person to respond
- By asking if they want our help
- By asking before we touch them
- By asking how we can best help them
- By offering possible solutions – *that the targeted person might reject*
- By offering emotional support and empathy – befriending and connecting





# What would you do?

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# Scenario 1

## DEMONSTRATORS

It's early voting and a group of demonstrators arrive at the polling location where you are at, displaying banners and signs, and chanting very loudly in support of their preferred candidate. The voters around you are as clueless as you are.

**What do you do?**





## *Scenario 2* **WOMAN GETTING TARGETED**

As you are making line to vote, you see a man begin verbally harassing a women wearing a hijab who is 10 ft ahead of you waiting her turn to vote.

**What do you do?**

# Scenario 3

## MAN SPEAKING SPANISH

A person starts harassing a Latino man that's speaking Spanish while waiting in line to vote.

**What do you do?**



# Resources

# 1-866-OUR-VOTE

**You can also call:**

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Spanish language hotline

**888-API-VOTE (888-274-8683)**

Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Bengali, Hindi,  
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Arabic language hotline





# Additional Resources

Setting up your rapid response:

<https://www.lwv.org/league-management/voter-services/election-rapid-response-setting-your-response-network>

Spotting Voter Intimidation: <https://www.lwv.org/league-management/advocacy-litigation/election-rapid-response-spotting-voter-intimidation>

# Share Your Feedback!

Please scan the QR code  
and **take two minutes to  
complete our training  
session feedback form!**  
Responses are anonymous.



# Questions?