



HB0054: Independent Candidate Requirements

Wyoming voters already have few choices — and this bill would make it harder for independents to run.

In Wyoming's 2024 general election, 77% of state legislative seats were uncontested¹ and voter turnout was the third lowest of the last eight presidential elections.² A lack of electoral competitiveness can affect governance outcomes, representation, and public engagement, raising concerns about polarization, accountability, and governmental responsiveness. In legislative elections, independent candidates can offer diversity of ideology and bolster political competition. Since 1970, three independents have served in the Wyoming State House. None have served in the State Senate.³ The proposed election bill HB0054 would change independent candidate requirements for the state and make it more difficult for candidates unaffiliated with a political party to get on the ballot.

CURRENT ELECTORAL LANDSCAPE IN WYOMING

Qualification for the General Election in Wyoming

There are three ways to get onto the November general election ballot in Wyoming.⁴

1. Winning the August Major Party Primary Election
2. Selection through a minor party convention
3. Filing a petition with the required number of signatures as an unaffiliated candidate

The State of Electoral Competitiveness in Wyoming

In 2024, Tim Forbis from HD10 was the only independent candidate on the general election ballot.⁵ Five other independent candidates started the process but were unable to make it onto the ballot.⁶ Cheyenne resident Rocky Case submitted a petition to run for HD43, but it was repeatedly denied by the Elections Division for lacking preapproval. When he attempted in-person submission, it was verbally rejected amid skepticism about his ability to gather sufficient signatures quickly. Case and his team pushed back, but he ultimately withdrew for personal reasons.⁷ This case highlights how preapproval requirements and shortened timelines can limit the feasibility and accessibility of independent candidacies.

In 2022, seven independents were on the ballot for the state legislature in November's general election with one candidate running in the Senate and six running for seats in the House. None won their races; however, in all but one case, the eventual winner would have run unopposed without their participation. 9 minor party candidates were on the 2022 general ballot.⁸ According to the Secretary of State record, this election had the highest number of minor-party and unaffiliated candidates since at least 1998.⁹

Wyoming's voter turnout in the 2024 primary election was the lowest since 2016.¹⁰ Between 2022 and 2024, there was a sharp decrease in independent and unaffiliated candidates who ran for office. While voter participation is based on many factors, this pattern is an important consideration, and it is not limited to Wyoming. Nationally, data from the Unite America Institute shows that nearly 90% of U.S. House and State House races were uncompetitive in 2024, providing broader context for Wyoming's electoral landscape.¹¹ When voters lack meaningful electoral choice, participation and engagement can be affected. The patterns in recent Wyoming elections highlight the need to carefully consider how changes to ballot access requirements may influence already diminished electoral competition and voter participation.

HB0054 INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE REQUIREMENTS

Proposed Changes under HB0054: Independent Candidate Requirements:

1. Candidates must swear that they are unaffiliated/not registered with a major or minor political party.
2. The bill increases the number of signatures required for independent candidates to appear on the general election ballot.
3. It accelerates the filing deadline for a prospective independent candidate.¹²

Implications of HB0054:

- Under the proposed bill, independent candidates would be required to swear that they are unaffiliated and not registered with a major or minor political party.¹³
- HB0054 would increase the signature requirement for all prospective independent candidates. The changes are dependent on the type of office a candidate is seeking, the general 2% of prior election votes would be raised to 5% in countywide, statewide, and legislative district races.¹⁴
- Currently, the deadline to file as an independent candidate for the 2026 election is Monday August 26, 2026. If this bill were to be passed in late February/early March, independent candidates would have until May 29, 2026, to file.¹⁵ The deadline is three months earlier, meaning prospective candidates would have less than three months' notice—and only three months total—to meet the new requirements.

Independent Candidate Requirements in Other States:

Idaho requires a set 1000 signatures for statewide office, 500 for congressional districts, 50 for state legislative seats, and 5 for county seats.¹⁶ This range allows for independent candidates to obtain a reasonable number of signatures while ensuring candidates meet a minimum threshold of public support. Nineteen other states practice similar methods.¹⁷ Idaho is roughly three times the size of Wyoming, yet requires independent candidates to collect far fewer signatures, thereby creating an electoral environment more accessible to prospective candidates.

CONCLUSION

At present, Wyoming is facing a serious voter participation and electoral competition decrease. With high percentages of uncontested races and low turnout levels, the present environment is lacking the electoral diversity and choice that can compel greater participation. If passed, HB0054 would likely worsen this problem, making it more difficult for independent candidates to run for office. The bill represents a departure from Wyoming's conservative principles and free-market traditions, which emphasize limited government intervention and the free exchange of ideas. To introduce further limitations and restrictions into an already uncompetitive electoral landscape may narrow the range of candidates available to voters and reduce opportunities and inclination for electoral engagement.

Resources

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7. Shields Eagle, H. (2025, October 2). [Rocky Case Withdraws Petition to Run in HD 43 after Secretary Gray Questions Its Validity](#). Wyoming Tribune Eagle.
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The Equality State Policy Center is a non-partisan, coalition-based organization that works to advance fair elections and transparent government in support of all Wyoming communities.