



Protecting and serving
all of America's voters
on Election Day

Firearms and Open Carry at and Near Polling Locations

The laws surrounding the open carry and display of firearms vary significantly from state to state, including which types of firearms may be openly carried. Law enforcement executives should ensure that they are able to educate the community, through the media coordination and other communication platforms, on relevant laws concerning the carry and display of firearms at or near polling locations. They should consider coordinating with the media and using their own communication platforms to ensure the general population is aware of these laws as well. At present, 45 states permit some form of open carry of firearms, and among those, 26 permit it with few or no restrictions. Very few states completely restrict the open carry of firearms (see Analysis at www.policefoundation.org/elections).

Agency executives should consider the following public messaging about the possession and display of firearms at or near polling locations on Election Day:

- Citizens are urged to exercise good judgment in the possession and display of firearms at and near polling locations on Election Day
- The unlawful possession of firearms at or near polling locations will be strictly enforced
- The display of firearms by citizens in conjunction with an obstructive presence at polling locations or in other places that would deter voters will result in police action, consistent with local laws
- Loitering in the vicinity of a polling location with a firearm displayed may result in police action, consistent with local laws

Citizens who see armed individuals at the polls and call 9-1-1 will be asked to articulate the specific conduct of the person(s) with the firearm that is causing them to feel threatened or intimidated. Questions - such as the individual's location in relation to the polling location, any statements or gestures, whether or not they are following other people around, whether they are displaying or pointing the firearm, etc. - will be asked to provide responding officers with complete information.

Safe Escort of Voters to and from Polling Locations

If a situation develops where voters feel intimidated by the presence of people displaying firearms at or near a polling location, but it falls short of taking enforcement action or disbanding the group, police should have a plan to provide voters with safe passage to and from the polls. A field supervisor may designate a staging location in the vicinity of the polling location and escort groups of voters to and from the location. This role should be considered in advance when staffing levels and assignments are determined.

Voters should feel that the presence of local police ensures their safety and means they can cast their vote without fear of intimidation or violence.