

Guide to Preparing for Federal Agents at Polling Places

Local election officials and poll workers can take steps to protect voters and staff.

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Federal and state law prohibit troops and federal agents from being at polling places or otherwise engaging in conduct that intimidates voters or interferes with elections.* Troops and armed federal law enforcement, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, Department of Homeland Security, and FBI agents, should never be present at a polling place. The only exception to this prohibition is if a polling place is under armed foreign attack. There is no exception for general law enforcement activities, including immigration enforcement, or for any other emergency.

This guide is designed to help local election officials and poll workers prepare for and respond to an unlawful deployment of troops or federal agents to the polls. State laws vary, so officials should adjust this guidance to account for their state's requirements.

What should local election officials do to protect voters and staff?

In advance of in-person voting:

- Consult with counsel about: (a) the possibility of troops or armed federal agents arriving at in-person voting locations or election offices, and (b) drafting template court filings requesting that any polling place where troops or federal agents disrupt voting stay open longer.

* See, e.g., 18 U.S.C. § 592; 18 U.S.C. § 593; 18 U.S.C. § 594; 18 U.S.C. § 595; 52 U.S.C. § 10307(b); 52 U.S.C. § 10101(b); 42 U.S.C. § 1985(l); 42 U.S.C. § 1985(3); 52 U.S.C. § 10102; 52 U.S.C. § 20511(l)(A); 18 U.S.C. § 241; 52 U.S.C. § 10308(a); 18 U.S.C. § 598.

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- Ensure local law enforcement, election staff, and poll workers are aware of state laws governing the presence of local law enforcement at polling places. The Committee for Safe and Secure Elections offers a [guide](#) for working with law enforcement.
- Ensure election staff and poll workers know that the obstruction of a warrant signed by a judge is a crime and that they should immediately contact you if federal agents show up at an election office or a polling place to make an arrest.
- Consider listing prohibitions on firearms and intimidation on signage posted at in-person voting locations, including ballot drop box locations, and in election offices. The Center for Civic Design offers a [guide](#) with customizable gun safety signage templates.
- Provide or cite relevant state and federal statutes — e.g., 18 U.S.C. § 592 (troops at polls) or 18 U.S.C. § 593 (interference by armed forces) — when responding to concerns about armed federal agents at in-person voting locations or election offices.
- Consult with the state’s chief election authority, state attorney general’s office, and local law enforcement about the possibility of troops or armed federal agents arriving at in-person voting locations or election offices.
- Keep abreast of developments in cases involving the deployment of federal agents or troops and evaluate with their counsel to determine whether policy changes are warranted.
- Have a communications plan in place to ensure voters feel safe at the polls, including rapid-response communications to affected voters if federal agents or troops show up at a polling place. Test email and text blast capabilities in advance, to the extent possible.
- If you do not already provide a 1-800 number for voters to get updated information, consider providing one, which voters can call in the event of a disruption at a polling location.
- Reassure local partners, community stakeholders, and other agencies that election officials are engaged in preparations. Urge community groups to remain peaceful in exercising their civil rights.

If there are reports of federal agents or troops at a polling place, local election officials should do the following:

- Verify the report. Is it coming from someone at the polling place? Does the person have videos or photos confirming that the officers are federal agents or troops and not local or state law enforcement? Be wary of unverified reports on social media.
- If the reports are confirmed, immediately contact counsel, the state’s chief election authority, and the state attorney general’s office.
- If the troops or federal agents refuse to leave the polling place, immediately contact local law enforcement, the state’s chief election authority, and the state attorney general’s office.
- If the federal agents claim they need access to the polling place to serve an arrest warrant, do not obstruct. Ask to see the warrant if it feels safe to do so. If the warrant is signed by a judge and names the individual to be arrested, ask the agents to execute the warrant outside the vicinity of the polling place to avoid

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scaring voters and staff or disrupting voting. Immediately contact counsel, the state's chief election authority, and the state attorney general's office.

- If the troops or federal agents cause a disruption or delay in voting, consider requesting emergency relief from the courts to keep any affected polling places open for as long as the disruption or delay occurred.
- Communicate only verified facts to the public if appropriate, and promptly update voters on any adjustments to voting hours or locations.

What should poll workers do?

In advance of in-person voting:

- Learn any relevant prohibitions against troops or federal agents at polling places.
- Learn any relevant state laws governing the presence of local law enforcement at polling places.
- Consult with polling place supervisors on protocol for responding to local law enforcement, troops, or federal agents at the polls.

If troops or federal agents show up at a polling place, poll workers should do the following:

- Remain calm and immediately contact their supervisor. Poll workers should not interact with the federal agents or obstruct them in any way.
- If voters ask questions, inform them that supervisors have been contacted and encourage them to proceed with the voting process as normal. Voters moving to leave without voting should be reminded of their available options, such as alternate vote centers, ballot drop boxes, and returning to the polling place later.
- Ask any voters who wish to leave if they would be willing to share their name and contact information to provide to local election officials. Poll workers unable to record voters' names or contact information should keep a tally of the number of voters who left without voting.
- If it feels safe doing so, collect the following information so that it can be provided to the local election official, the state's chief election authority, the state attorney general's office, and local law enforcement:
 - **Size:** How many agents or officers were present?
 - **Activity:** What were the agents doing?
 - **Location:** Where in or around the polling place were the agents?
 - **Uniform:** What letters, details, or patches were visible on the agent's clothing?
 - **Time:** What precise time did the agents show up?
 - **Equipment:** What did the agents have with them? Were they armed?
- Do not post about suspicious behavior on social media, as this can cause a panic.

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