



Memorandum

Date: August 4, 2022
To: Secretaries of State
From: Wendy Via and Heidi Beirich, Ph.D
Global Project Against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE)
www.globalextrémism.org
Re: GPAHE Survey on Voter Fears

We are writing as co-founders of Global Project Against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE) to apprise you of some significant opinion research results. In July, GPAHE conducted a nationally representative survey and the results regarding people's sense of fear at polling places are alarming.

Our survey found that voters are worried about a violent attack on election day and that one third are very worried about intimidation at the polls. If confronted with harassment at the polls, a significant number say they will leave without voting. This was especially true for young people and Black and Hispanic Americans. Additionally, 33 percent of people are worried about election fraud and 27 percent fear not being able to cast a ballot.

There are some differences in fears depending on who is responding. Only a quarter of young people, 28 percent of Black people, and 37 percent of Hispanic people feel safe or very safe at their polling places. For the entire population surveyed, only about 40 percent feel safe or very safe. Thirteen percent of respondents indicated that they feel nervous or afraid to vote. Among young people, that number jumps to 23 percent. For Black and Hispanic people, nearly 20 percent are afraid to vote.

Notably, nearly one in three Americans are afraid that groups like the white supremacist Proud Boys will be acting as poll watchers and that Black and Hispanic people will be harassed at the polls. Nearly a third of all surveyed fear a violent attack or shooting on election day. That number rises to 48 percent for young people and about 45 percent for Black and Hispanic people.

The fears surrounding elections and the democratic process are real and have the potential to suppress participation and infringe upon Americans' right to vote. Given the nationwide concerns around the November elections and the harassing behavior already witnessed during the primaries, GPAHE's survey data is a call to action for secretaries of state to communicate early and clearly plans and assurances that the elections will be fair and honest, that the authority of the office will be used to counter any misinformation about the elections, and importantly, that the polls will be safe for voters, workers, and volunteers. Instructions for what a voter should do if intimidated or harassed should also be clearly communicated to the public.

GPAHE recommends that secretary of state offices treat polling places as special places of concern for the carrying of firearms to make people feel safer when voting. Currently, a total of 12 states have prohibitions on carrying firearms at polling places, eight states prohibit both open-carry and concealed carry at the polls, and four prohibit concealed carry only. We recommend that all states ban all weapons in and around polling places.

Our survey found that taking such measures to restrict firearms in polling places has widespread support. Sixty-three percent of those surveyed support the banning of guns at the polls. Among Democrats, that number rises to nearly 80 percent, but more than 50 percent of Republicans and Independents support such a ban. Importantly, 62 percent of gun owners also support a ban with only 22 percent of gun owners opposed. Given the level of anxiety found in voters, especially among young and minority voters, secretaries of state and other governmental entities should exercise their ability to prohibit firearms at polling places.

The banning of guns at polling places is a sensible precaution. There is considerable evidence that fears by those surveyed are warranted when it comes to guns and voter intimidation. The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence has [documented](#) such instances and provides guidance on what states and localities can do to keep the polls safe from gun violence (the situation in each state is considerably different).

Georgetown Law's Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection (ICAP) has additional information and [legal advice](#) regarding guns in polling places and the use of weapons to intimidate voters. ICAP also has [advice](#) for public safety agencies to plan for safe elections.

As those surveyed also fear intimidation by extremist groups, it is clear that state and local laws restrict voter intimidation by such groups and armed militias from appearing at the polls. Most states have laws or constitutional provisions prohibiting private groups from engaging in unauthorized paramilitary or law enforcement activities. ICAP [published](#) a 50-state guide documenting the laws that state and local governments can use to stop private militias from engaging in paramilitary activities in public spaces.

If you would like to discuss GPAHE's poll results, please don't hesitate to contact us. We are happy to assist in any way in making our elections and polling places safe and fair.

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