

Election 2020: Police in cities nationwide bracing for potential unrest in days before, after Nov. 3

Many police departments hoping for the best, planning for the worst around Election Day.

The backdrop of a summer of civil unrest in America's largest cities and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic looms large as motivated voters prepare to submit their ballots for president in less than two weeks.

Police departments – many of which saw days, weeks, and even monthslong anti-police brutality protests and riots this summer – said they are hoping for the best when voters hit the polls on Nov. 3, but are also preparing for the worst in the days before and after.



New York police take security measures as Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump arrives to vote at the Beckman Hill International School in New York City on Nov. 8, 2016. (Photo by Volkan Furuncu/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

"There is no secret that this election is more contentious than in years' past,"

said New York Police Department's Chief of Department, Terence Monahan, during a Tuesday press conference covering election preparedness. The NYPD is one of many departments throughout the country with a plan in case any protests devolve into criminal activity.

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Chicago, much like New York City, has seen spurts of civil unrest, including devastating looting downtown. Its police department is now working with several city agencies in a coordinated effort to be prepared for any fallout, whether at the polls or on the streets, during the election period.

Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown said at a recent news conference that police and emergency officials are training to make sure they're ready "regardless of whatever scenario happens on Election Day."



Police officers inspect a damaged Best Buy store in Chicago after parts of the city suffered from widespread looting and vandalism over the summer. (Getty Images)

"Many cities across the country are doing similar planning," he said last week. "We are all in conversations with our counterparts across the country about what we might expect, but everything is uncertain, and so we're trying as best we can to anticipate any hazard that might happen, including a weather hazard, snow might happen in our city, along with anything related to protests, embedded

agitators that might loot or cause violence or destroy property.”

Even without the prevalent unrest in certain parts of the country, this year’s election will nonetheless look different. People have the option of voting early and by mail, and officials anticipate clear results might take days, if not weeks.

Here are what some police departments in big cities have to say about their plans to best ensure every American stays safe before, during, and after Election Day.

MIAMI

Miami Police Chief Jorge Colina told Fox News this week that it was “difficult to tell” what kind of unrest – if any – the city will face in the days leading up to the election.

“We’re going to have more people working, a bigger, more robust uniformed presence. And then we’re going to have some undercover officers that will go by polling places,” he said.

Colina said the city will also be prepared with groups of officers who could mobilize at short notice, “especially those groups that want to create havoc.”

He told Fox News he believes the protests could look different depending on who is ultimately elected president.

“This state [Florida] is up for grabs, according to the polls. This is a state that both candidates covet, obviously, and that’s always been the case,” he said. “I can’t help but wonder that if that’s not going to inspire some fringe groups to want to do their part to win it for one or the other. And that’s where it gets a little dangerous because people, you know, they become extreme.”

His concerns, he said, are not based on any credible threats, but he plans to be ready, nonetheless.

“I know that these kinds of things exist, right? Where people want to come out and they want to create an issue and then blame it on the other. I mean, we’ve seen that we’ve seen that. So I’m hoping that that’s not the case again,” Colina said. “Again, I think we’re gonna be fine, but I recognize that, certainly, that could happen because this state is up for grabs.”



City of Miami police officers gear up as they prepare for any problems with protesters Sunday, May 31, 2020, in Miami. (AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee)

During a press conference on Monday, Colina said the department had canceled vacation days and days off during the election period and will deploy additional officers. The department has also instructed every sworn officer, whether assigned to a desk job or patrol duty, to bring their uniform to work in case a greater police presence is needed.

“The truth is, this is a very contentious election cycle. Unlike we haven’t seen in many, many years,” he said during the news conference. “We have a very savvy community here who understands that some people may want to take actions into their own hands and try to and swing some votes. We just want to make sure that we don’t allow that to take place.”

NEW YORK CITY

Said to be the largest police force in the nation, the NYPD is directing its officers to be “prepared for deployment” beginning Oct. 26, as it braces for increasing protests in the lead-up to and following Election Day 2020, according to an internal memo from Oct. 13 obtained by Fox News.

NYPD brass are planning for potential civil unrest as New York City and the nation begin a contentious series of weeks, starting with the U.S. Senate

confirmation hearing for U.S. Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett and coupled with the upcoming presidential election, Police Commissioner Dermot Shea said in the internal announcement.

“This November 3rd will be the (sic) one of the most highly contested presidential elections in the modern era,” Shea wrote, noting that Barrett’s confirmation hearing was set to begin at the same time of the missive’s release. “Accordingly, we should anticipate and prepare for protests growing in size, frequency, and intensity leading up to the election and likely into the year 2021.”

Shea also noted that the election winner “may not be decided for several weeks,” and the confirmation hearing was also expected to continue for weeks.

During an interview later that day, Shea told local news station NY1 that the department wanted to be ready for anything.



A New York City police officer stands guard outside a polling station in a public school Nov. 2, 2010 in New York. (DON EMMERT/AFP via Getty Images)

“It would be nice if we had an uneventful fall season, but this is 2020,” he said during the Oct. 13 interview. “It’s really all-hands-on-deck across the NYPD and this is really about, listen everyone is well aware of the climate right now in this country, certainly here in this city and the election coming up and it’s our job to prepare for the worst and hopefully it’s not needed.”

Accordingly, the NYPD has instructed hundreds of officers to come to work in uniform and ready for duty beginning on Oct. 26, Monahan said during a Tuesday afternoon news conference.

PORTLAND



Portland police officers push protesters past a dumpster fire during a dispersal from in front of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility in the early morning on August 21, 2020 in Portland, Ore. (Photo by Nathan Howard/Getty Images)

No stranger to violent protests that have, at times, devolved into riots, Portland Police Bureau is working with Multnomah County Sheriff's Office and will be upping law enforcement staffing during and following the election period "as a precaution," the department said in a press release last week.

"In the past, some individuals and groups have gathered and marched following the election results, both in celebration and sometimes because they are angered or upset. In some instances, significant damage was done to local businesses, which did not change the election outcome, but hurt our community members," the release states. "While we promote and support the exercise of the First Amendment rights to assemble and engage in free speech, engagement in

criminal activity will not be tolerated.”

PPB officials said they will not tolerate any demonstrators blocking pedestrian and vehicular traffic, lighting fires, “vandalizing and damaging property,” illegal use of weapons and violence.

“We’re just trying to prepare and coordinate to increase safety during that time,” Officer Derek Carmon, a PPB spokesperson, told Fox News on Monday. “We’ve seen in the past where people come out because they’re either excited about the election results or they’re completely unhappy with the election results and they come down causing damage and things like that in the past. So we’re just trying to be prepared for that by having more officers available.”

Carmon said the department is not allowing officers to take any vacation days during and in the days following the election period, but had not established specific requirements of personnel during that time.

PPB Chief Chuck Lovell said in a prepared statement that this election season “has increased fear and uncertainty for many of our community members.”

“We want our community to know we are prioritizing public safety by adding resources and collaboration during this important time. We ask for the public to help us by reporting criminal activity, staying informed, and engaging in lawful activities. Together, we can achieve a safe election season in Portland,” Lovell said.

Anyone interested in learning more about the Oregon city’s election-related safety and security measures can visit the Multnomah County Elections website.

SEATTLE

In gearing up for the election period, Seattle Police Department set a limit to the time off allowed for personnel around the time of Election Day “to ensure the department is able to adequately provide public safety services at any events, gatherings or demonstrations related to the election,” said SPD spokesperson Sgt. Randall Huserik.

Huserik also said SPD recently launched its Community Response Group, to “dynamically deploy to unplanned large-scale events and ensure SPD is able to

quickly respond to 911 emergencies,” in case such a response is needed.

ORLANDO

Though not particularly known for experiencing unrest in recent months, Orlando Police Department officials are working with the Supervisor of Elections office to ensure the election period goes smoothly, Sgt. David Baker, a spokesperson for OPD told Fox News.

“The Supervisor of Elections does have a protocol in place to contact law enforcement if individuals are disruptive and unruly and violating Florida statutes related to voting, including the 150-foot no-solicitation zone near the entrance of polling places,” Baker wrote in an emailed statement.

Additional information was not provided.

MINNEAPOLIS



In this May 29, 2020, photo, a check-cashing business burns during protests in Minneapolis. Protests continued following the death of George Floyd, who died after being restrained by Minneapolis police officers on Memorial Day. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

Minneapolis is also no stranger to civil unrest, which rocked the city in the wake of the alleged police-related death of local resident, George Floyd. Floyd, a Black man, died at the end of May after a White police officer held his knee on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes, despite his shouts that he couldn't breathe. Days of protests and destruction in the city followed.

Minneapolis Police Department's public information officer, John Elder, said in an email to Fox News the department continues to "plan for the worst and hope for the best."

"We are aware of current and future possible flashpoints that present challenges on both a local and national level," Elder said. "We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners, local, regionally, and federally in order to properly respond to situations as they unfold. Additionally, we are keeping lines of communication open with the communities we serve and working with everyone we can to ensure 1st Amendment rights are preserved and providing a safe environment for all."

Elder could not provide any more specific details regarding the department's plans.

CHICAGO

Superintendent David Brown said during a press conference earlier this month that the police department and several other city agencies have scheduled several tabletop exercises in the lead-up to Election Day to ensure officials were prepared for whatever might happen.

The department, he said, was "making sure that we are in our neighborhoods in a very strong posture to make sure our, not only our First Amendment, but that our assets, that our critical infrastructure, that our retail corridors are all protected from any wrongdoers."

Just months ago, caravans of looters descended upon Chicago's Magnificent Mile, where they looted and destroyed property just hours after allegedly false information about a police-involved shooting spread. The looters coordinated their

efforts through social media, Brown said at the time.

The police department has now prepared for similar instances, as well as any other election-related crimes, by assigning specific groups to oversee protests and protect “critical infrastructure,” Brown said at last week’s election-related press conference.

CPD has also extended certain officers’ shifts and canceled the days off for those members who have been assigned to the specific teams, he said.

Brown noted that he believed there was a “coordinated effort” during summer protests “to embed agitators” within the otherwise peaceful demonstrations. He’s planning, he said, in case that’s also a feature of election-related protests.

“So from those lessons learned from over the summer, we are planning for that to be a feature of peaceful protests: a slight embedment of people who have no intention of protesting but every intention of committing crime,” Brown said. “So, instead of being caught off-guard we are planning for that to happen and we have operations in place to ensure that they don’t destroy property, that they don’t cause any further violence and that they’re held accountable.”

PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw said in a statement provided to Fox News that the department is working with city agencies to protect the “propriety” of the election.

On the local level, Philly PD and other agencies are preparing “for all possible scenarios for Election Day,” whether before, during or after, she wrote. In addition to working with federal prosecutors, Outlaw said PPD will be “embedding Assistant District Attorneys with our officers to work as co-respondents, if called upon.”

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“We will ensure enhanced security measures, conduct advance training and ensure adequate staffing are present throughout the election operation,” she wrote. “It is paramount to myself, the Mayor, and the City Commissioners that we coordinate a unified command group, protecting the community for election

safety.”

Stephanie Pagones is a Digital Reporter for FOX Business and Fox News. Follow her on Twitter at @steph_pagones.

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