

As threat of militia violence looms

Michigan sheriffs and police refuse to enforce state government ban on guns at polling places

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In a move that raises questions as to which political institutions hold power in the state of Michigan, police leaders announced Monday they would not enforce a recent order by the elected secretary of state banning guns at polling places.

By stating they will ignore orders from elected officials, police in Michigan are declaring themselves a law unto their own. The decision raises further questions about the connection between fascist county sheriffs and the 14 militia members, who plotted to kidnap and kill Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

On October 16, Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson announced a new guideline prohibiting open carry of assault rifles, long guns and handguns within 100 feet of polling places. The guidance makes clear the state government believes the threat posed by militias for election day violence remains ongoing:

“The presence of firearms at the polling place, clerk’s office(s), or absent voter counting board may cause disruption, fear or intimidation for voters, election workers and others present.”

On Monday afternoon, the head of the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police denounced the guidance and said police officers would not follow it.

“There’s nothing in the law that gives police the authority to enforce these rules,” said Robert Stevenson, the organization’s director. The police organization represents 385 police chiefs.

Matt Sexton, director of the Michigan Sheriffs Association, made a similar statement Monday, saying, “This administrative order does cause concern.” He told sheriffs in each county to consult local prosecutors

as to whether to follow the guidance, effectively guaranteeing that counties with Republican district attorneys will order police to refuse to follow orders from Lansing.

In anticipation of the growing police rebellion, Michigan Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel said on Sunday that if local police stand with militias and refused to enforce the election order, she would deploy state police to order local police to stand down.

Referring to the prospect of militia violence on election day, Nessel said on Showtime’s *The Circus*, “If you have a county sheriff that seems to be sympathetic to any of these organizations and we think they’re not going to enforce the laws, then we’ll get somebody else who will, the Michigan State Police.”

This remarkable statement reveals that the state government knows of deep connections between the police and fascist militia groups, including those like the Three Percenters, Oathkeepers and Wolverine Watchmen, who had ties to the men who were arrested this month for planning to kill Whitmer.

A spokesperson for Nessel’s office told *The Detroit News* that state police had agreed to enforce the order, but a spokesperson for the state police seemed to demur, telling the press, “I won’t get into speculation about enforcement action, but the Michigan State Police does have statewide jurisdiction.”

More information is emerging about the many Michigan police officials who belong to the Constitutional Sheriffs and Police Officers Association (CSPOA), the fascist organization that believes sheriffs are the highest law in the land. Monday’s statements by

both the Michigan Sheriffs Association and the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police essentially adopt the perspective of the CSPOA.

Those sheriffs who are supporters of the CSPOA now include Leelanau County Sheriff Mike Borkovich, Benzie County Sheriff Ted Schendel, Livingston County Sheriff Mike Murphy and Shiawassee County Sheriff Brian BeGole. Barry County Sheriff Dar Leaf won the CSPOA's "Sheriff of the Year" award in 2016 and recently praised the conspiracy to kidnap and murder Whitmer.

Immediately after Benson announced the order on Friday, Livingston County Sheriff Murphy issued a statement saying he would refuse to enforce the guidance, saying: "She [Benson] just threw gas on an ember." Livingston County includes Howell, Michigan, the longtime center of the Ku Klux Klan.

In addition, Mason County Sheriff Kim Cole and Manistee County Sheriff Ken Falk signed a letter earlier this year refusing to enforce Whitmer's coronavirus restrictions. Their letter also implies CSPOA support or membership. It reads that violating the orders is just because "each of us took an oath to uphold and defend the Michigan Constitution, and well as the US Constitution, and to ensure that your God given rights are not violated. We believe that we are the last line of defense in protecting your civil liberties." This is the outlook of the CSPOA.

Benny Napoleon, Democratic Sheriff of Wayne County, the state's most populated county where Detroit is located, spoke to the *Detroit News* about the decision to ban guns at the polls: "I can't control what the individual police chiefs do. That's a decision that they have to make with their respective city leaders."

The *News* reported, "Napoleon expects to meet this week with the offices of Whitmer, Nessel and the Michigan State Police to discuss the upcoming election. He then plans to meet with the 43 local police chiefs to coordinate efforts."

Notably, the *News*—the traditional paper of the state's Republican Party—published an editorial board statement Friday opposing Benson's move. "Michigan officials can't continue to subvert representative governing," the statement reads, a concession to the conspirators' claim that anti-coronavirus measures represent tyranny.

Secretary of State Benson announced the decision as

evidence mounts that fascist groups will attempt to intimidate voters or spark violence on election day. Trump has called for his supporters to join his "army" of poll watchers to "fight" election fraud.

An October 13 article in *Bridge Michigan* entitled, "Crush of poll watchers expected at Michigan election raises intimidation fears," notes:

"Thousands of poll watchers and challengers are expected to descend on precincts throughout Michigan" on election day. "They're folks like Marian Sheridan, who leads the Michigan Conservative Coalition's Guard the Vote project and is training more than 100 volunteers to watchdog absentee ballot counting in Detroit."

The Michigan Conservative Coalition was founded by Matt Maddock, a Republican state legislator, and his wife, Meshawn, who serves on the advisory board for Trump's Michigan campaign and is a leader of the "Women for Trump" organization. The Michigan Conservative Coalition funded the anti-lockdown protests used by the militiamen to meet and plan their efforts to kidnap and kill the governor. The Maddocks are politically close to Ed Swadish, the owner of Huron Valley Guns, which employed Paul Bellar, one of the arrested conspirators.



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