



SITUATION UPDATE

Security Risks Surrounding the US Presidential Election





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PURPOSE

This report is the first in a series monitoring the security environment leading up to, and during, the U.S. general election scheduled for November 03, 2020. It examines security risks (1) currently ongoing, (2) in the run-up to the election and (3) on and immediately after the election. The report is aimed at identifying potential threats that could impact the safety and operations for businesses and their assets in the U.S. Additionally, based on a holistic view of risk and considerations of business continuity, a secondary objective is to identify reputational, financial, and other forms of risk.

KEY POINTS

- G4S has determined that the **immediate security risk in the days surrounding the 2020 Presidential Election will be large protests** in multiple cities and towns across the U.S.
- The **primary risks to US businesses** in the days leading up to the election and the period after are assessed as (1) restricted safe access to sites or routes near protests; (2) property damage to buildings, offices, and/or commercial spaces that are located near protests; and (3) risk to personnel commuting to and from facilities in areas near protest locations or due to road closures.
- The main **security risks to individuals** during protests are likely to be traffic delays due to road closures and road blocks, acts of vandalism against personal property, and a possible delay in response time of emergency services to areas in and around protests
- **Protest hotspots can be identified on state and local levels.** Generally, protesters continue to **gather in and near major downtown metropolitan areas and public spaces.** These particularly include areas around government buildings, police department headquarters, and parks.
- While **most protests remain peaceful, the risk of violence has increased.** This risk is higher after dark.
- Some individuals will likely take advantage of mass protests to commit crimes, including **vandalism, arson, and looting.** The risk of these types of crimes has increased in some areas and is likely to continue until the large size of the protests subside.
- There is a **risk of property damage to private/business property, and public transportation.** Local **emergency services may be delayed.**
- Companies can adopt a number of **security measures to help reduce risk.**

CURRENT SITUATION

PREVIOUS ELECTIONS

The primary security concern during previous U.S. elections has been protests.

Protests are part of the U.S. political landscape and are not uncommon after presidential elections, especially ones that are tightly contested. In a review of U.S. presidential elections within the last 50 years, G4S analysts noted a consistent trend of protests occurring on the **night of the presidential election, the few days after the election** was concluded, and then usually **larger organized protests on and around Inauguration Day** in January. The protests in January, historically, have been focused in Washington, D.C. to coincide with the presidential inauguration.

In 2000, the contested results of the presidential election resulted in protests a **week after Election Day** in a dozen cities throughout the U.S. The average turn out at these events were a few hundred participants and later thousands protested President Bush at his inauguration in January 2001.

The night of the 2016 election, people took to the street to protest the election of then President-elect Trump in November 2016. In January 2017, Women’s Marches across the U.S. were held in response to President Trump’s inauguration. Those protests were organized to bring together as many people as possible on a single day at focused locations and estimates range from 3.6 to 5.2 million participants making it the largest single event (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1: Estimated Number of Attendees, and Locations of Nationwide Women’s Marches on Jan 22 2017



Source: Eric Compas (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater)

2020 PROTESTS

Protests and civil unrest activity related to various **concurrent and overlapping political, economic, health, and environmental issues are currently taking place** in multiple cities across the country. Since late May 2020, widespread demonstrations have been planned and sustained by intersecting calls to action over racial and social injustice, police brutality, COVID-19 response, the incumbency of President Donald Trump, and natural disasters/climate events, amongst other matters. State, local, and federal law enforcement, including U.S. Marshals, as well as National Guard troops, have been deployed in a number of states. Emergency orders and curfews have also been imposed at times.

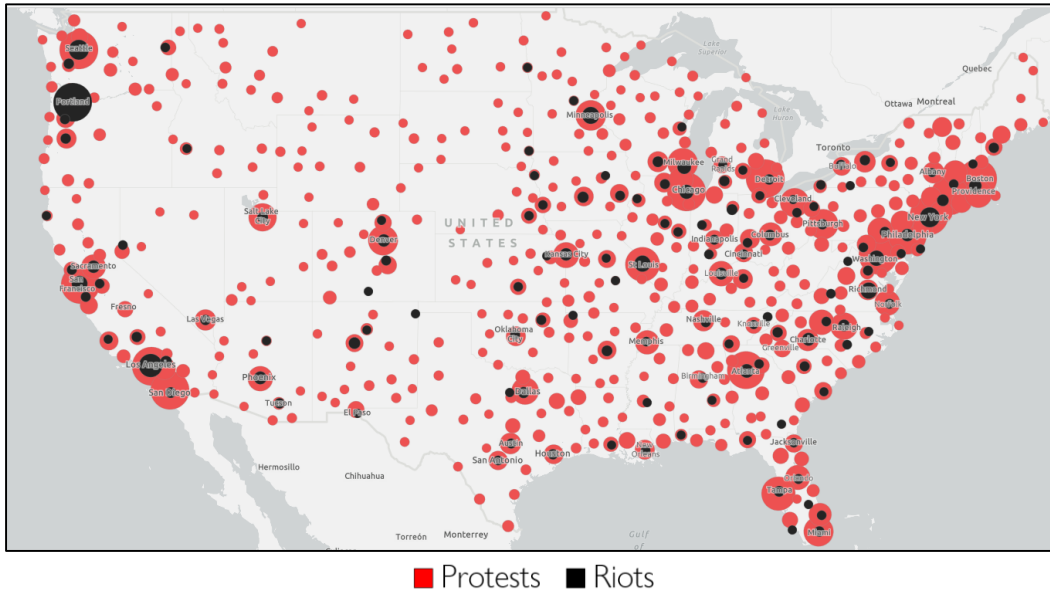
Protesters continue to gather in and near major downtown metropolitan areas and public spaces. These particularly include areas around government buildings, police department headquarters, and parks. While the majority of demonstrations have been peaceful, incidents involving clashes between protesters and police, along with associated acts of looting, arson, vandalism, and car-ramming attacks have occurred. Mass shooting incidents, some of which are classified as hate crimes, have taken place sporadically on multiple occasions and across multiple locations. In total, at least 51 fatalities have been confirmed, with hundreds of others injured or arrested.¹

¹ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) (Sept 27 2020) 'Data, United States of America, 24 May – 19 September 2020'. *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project* [online] Available: <https://acleddata.com/special-projects/us-crisis-monitor/>, retrieved Sept 27 2020.

TRENDS

G4S Corporate Risk Services reviewed nationwide demonstrations between May - September 2020 and noted the following characteristics and trends:

Figure 2: Protests and Riots Nationwide May 24 – September 19 2020



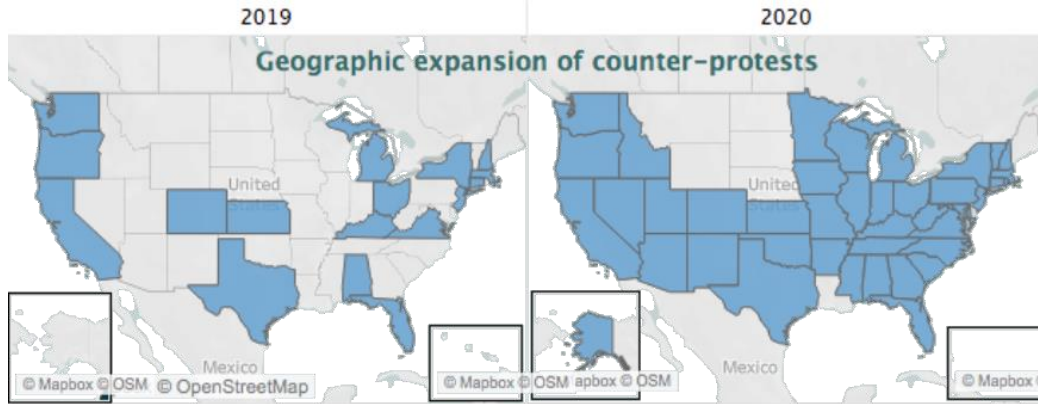
Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

- **Timing:** Demonstrations often occur simultaneously or immediately following key events and/or dates (e.g. shootings, arrests, criminal trials, memorials, policy announcements, public/corporate controversies, etc.) Demonstrators typically mobilize with the first 24-72 hours of sudden or prompt calls to action.
- **Location (Specific):** Demonstrators gather at common locations (e.g. downtown metro areas and public spaces, such as government buildings, police department headquarters/precincts, and parks, as well as scenes of specific key events or incidents); they mostly stay within the vicinity.
- **Location (Cities):** Cities that have sustained relatively long periods of consecutive protests include Portland, Seattle, New York, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta.
- **Location (States):** States with the most incidents of political violence or demonstrations were California (as many as 1,404 incidents), New York (786), Florida (652), Texas (568), and Pennsylvania (558).²
- **Violence:** Demonstrations are by and large peaceful; however, demonstrations have reached new levels in 2020 and the number/percentage of violent demonstrations is significant.
- **Violence:** Acts of violence (e.g. property damage, arson, and looting) usually occur in the evening or overnight.

² ACLED, 2020

- **Counter-Protests:** There has been an increase in counter-protests, which has increased the risk for violence at protests. 7 times more counter-protests were recorded across twice as many states in 2020 vs. 2019.³

Figure 3: Counter-Protests Recorded in 2019 vs. 2020



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

- **Non-State Groups:** Non-state groups have become more active. Since May, over 100 events have been recorded where non-state actors engaged in demonstrations (primarily in response to the Black Lives Matter [BLM] movement.) These non-state actors include groups from both sides of the political spectrum. In July 2020 nearly 30 events were recorded in which non-state actors engaged demonstrators, compared to none recorded in July 2019.⁴ Overall, this trend indicates an increased risk of violence.

Figure 4: Events Associated With Non-State Actors (May 24 – September 19 2020)



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

- **Response:** Police and other government forces have resorted to the use of force for crowd control as many as 468 times across 43 states (including measures such as the use of tear gas and rubber bullets).⁵

³ ACLED, 2020

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.



SECURITY RISKS

PROTESTS

G4S has determined that the immediate security risk in the days surrounding the 2020 Presidential Election on November 3, 2020 will be large protests in multiple cities and towns across the U.S. G4S security and intelligence analysts gamed out over half-a-dozen different election scenarios and outcomes. Analysts considered different candidates winning, the results being accepted, the results being contested, delays in counting, allegations of fraud, and various high impact / low probability scenarios such as assassination attempts and election delays. In each scenario, analysts focused on the security impact of these outcomes and not the political impact. G4S security and intelligence analysts assessed that the likelihood of widespread protests was the primary security outcome in every scenario and regardless of who wins the presidential election.

G4S analysts determined that a variety of factors will have an impact on the actions and movements of protestors. These include but are not limited to: weather, new allegations of police brutality, official appointments and resignations, the easing or tightening of COVID-19 restrictions, imposed curfews, population size, law enforcement posture, local gun-carry laws, and the presence of the National Guard. Based on an analysis of protests in the U.S. during the last few months, G4S security and intelligence analysts have determined that these factors can impact the scope, duration, and potential for violence and/or destruction of property and other property crimes of the protests.

According to G4S Corporate Risk Service security and intelligence analysts, the primary risks to US businesses in the days leading up to the 2020 election and the period after will likely be:

- Restricted safe access to sites or routes near protests;
- Property damage to buildings, offices, and/or commercial spaces that are located near protests;
- Risk to personnel commuting to and from facilities in areas near protest locations or due to road closures.

G4S security and intelligence analysts have not seen any specific, actionable intelligence to date that specific companies' employees or properties are being targeted as part of the current political protests.

Although protests have tended to take place in common areas (i.e. hotspots for protests can be identified on state and local levels), **protest locations can remain fluid as police control or shutdown some areas.** When this occurs, protesters may move to other areas according to U.S. local and federal law enforcement officers assessing the situation. These locations could be in and around police stations, federal government buildings, the location of "core actors"—prosecutor, U.S. attorneys, mayor, chief of police, accused officers, or other public officials, or common communal gathering places such as parks.

Civil Disorder

The United States continues to be a relatively stable, strong democracy whose institutions are robust and are founded on the rule of law at the federal, state, and local levels. The protests this year do not inherently indicate a collapse of the U.S. government. Nevertheless, the level of tensions in the lead up to the election are higher than average for the U.S., political parties are more polarized, and G4S assesses that there is a significantly higher likelihood that any election result may be contested both on an official level and/or by large numbers of the population.

Due to this, there is a risk that protests will occur on a larger scale or be more prolonged than has typically been seen on/around US elections. The scale of such unrest will be determined by a large variety of factors, particularly the exact events that occur in early November and the aforementioned secondary factors. However, the **effect of wider civil disorder for businesses will center primarily on the length of which the above three risks could last.**



A protester carrying an upside down flag on May 28 2020 as in Minneapolis, in response to the death of George Floyd. (Julio Cortez / AP)

RISKS TO PERSONNEL AND PROPERTY

As is typical with mass protests, some individuals take advantage of the situation to commit crimes, including vandalism, arson, and looting. The risk of these types of crimes is now higher in some of the areas and is likely to continue until the large size of the protests subside. Criminals are opportunistic and will take advantage of the mass of people to move around. The concentration of police force in certain areas also leaves other areas potentially more vulnerable in the short-term

The risk for violence and crime will continue during periods of protests. Criminal activity – such as theft, looting, and arson – is more likely after dark, particularly in urban environments where there is easier movement between areas and a mix of residential, commercial, and business districts. The main security risks to individuals during protests (assuming they are transiting and not part of protest activity) are likely to be traffic delays due to road closures and road blocks (official or unofficial); acts of vandalism against personal property (cars); and a possible delay in response time of emergency services to areas in and around protests.

Overall, there is no pattern to the locations of these events, it is **mostly driven by opportunity and accessibility**, according to initial law enforcement assessments. There could be cadres of criminals who will use the chaos to target locations with higher payout, such as jewelry stores, cash loan offices, car dealerships, or any other merchandise that is readily available and not well secured. Offices and businesses near these higher risk locations would also be at risk for possible damage or theft.

If law enforcement police are given instructions to provide minimal engagement with protesters, then the possibility for clashes may be lower, however, some isolated incidents have occurred where protestors have acted violently against law enforcement regardless of their posture. **The use of more forceful crowd control methods increases the likelihood of violent clashes resulting in injuries and violence to both law enforcement officers and civilians.**



RISKS TO INFRASTRUCTURE

Risk To Private/Business Property – The **biggest risk of damage will be to private property** (including businesses and vehicles), which is not protected by law enforcement, and is located in or near protest sites. In recent weeks there has been a concerted effort by local government officials in several cities to limit the use of law enforcement in the protection of some public buildings. Businesses have adapted quickly to the threat of vandalism, arson, and looting. Prior to the latest grand jury announcement in Louisville, Kentucky in late September, several news sources reported businesses boarding up windows and locking doors in preparation for future protests.

Risk to Public Transportation – **Public transportation will likely be impacted by protests.** Bus stations and public buses are likely targets of vandalism in those areas of intense protests and recent acts of arson and destruction of property. Metro or subway stations may see some damage if they are located in protest areas, resulting in delays or cancellation of services. There is a minimal risk to electric substations, water treatment plants, and other elements of critical infrastructure and G4S security and intelligence analysts have seen no actionable intelligence that protests groups are targeting critical infrastructure.

Risk To Emergency Services – **Local emergency services may be delayed**, as seen during several protests this summer in Seattle, Portland, and Minneapolis. The areas in and around protests are likely to be stressed and response times may be impacted due to the shortage of personnel and/or road closures. Local emergency personnel may also be restricted from entering areas due to safety concerns or being attacked while trying to render aid.

Arson – **Arson is a high risk in the areas in and around protests and firefighters may be delayed** in being able to reach the fires due to protests or if it is unsafe to approach. Police stations and substations, campaign offices for politicians, government officials' offices and residences are at a higher risk of being specifically targeted. The risk to other public buildings such as libraries, schools, municipal offices is lower. These buildings are not frequently targeted for arson or vandalism, although in recent months a housing development for underserved communities was destroyed by arson and vandalism, as were buildings housing after school programs, job training, and other social services.

Cyberattack – G4S has not identified any actionable intelligence that companies are being targeted for cyberattacks as part of a broader attack on the integrity of the U.S. presidential election. **Companies that are direct participants in the election process** as part of contracting work with federal, state, or local governments, however, **may be at some risk.** G4S Corporate Risk services can provide these companies with a tailored cybersecurity assessment.

Counterintelligence Risk – G4S security and intelligence analysts have not seen any current actionable intelligence that specific companies are being targeted in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election. According to U.S. government intelligence assessments, **foreign actors are focusing their efforts on political candidates and parties. Companies that have an overseas presence could face an increased risk of foreign intelligence actions if the company is viewed as having a strong and overt tie to a presidential candidate.** Companies should remind employees to remain vigilant and use strong security practices to protect personal and company data. Companies with offices overseas are advised to connect with the local Regional Security Office to stay informed of any threats to U.S. businesses in the area. G4S Corporate Risk Services can help facilitate this connection if needed.

REPUTATIONAL RISK

Recent trends indicate that reputational harm, with a financial impact, can be caused when a business or its key leadership is associated with a political party and/or candidate. There are multiple examples of this from opponents of both political parties. Notable examples include the #GrabYourWallet movement which encourages boycotting businesses with ties to President Trump, as well as the recent – August 2020 – case of President Trump calling for a boycott on Goodyear due to the company banning “Make America Great Again” (“MAGA”) attire. The impact of such movements will depend largely on a company's customer base; some locations may experience increased support from customers who support the same cause/candidate.



RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to protests that are likely to continue through September/October, **US businesses should anticipate protests on the eve of November 3, 2020 and continuing at least for 48 hours and in some locations 72 hours or longer.** Protests are more likely to continue for the following weeks if election results are contested. Further larger, organized protests are **likely on and around Inauguration Day** in January.

The following security procedures are specific actions that businesses are recommended to take in the couple of days leading up to the presidential and general election on November 3, 2020.

- Facilities within a designated radius of locations that have experienced regular protests in recent months, and/or of federal government buildings and/or police precincts or police departmental headquarters should **consider closing the office starting at 16:00 on November 3, 2020 through 08:00 on November 5, 2020 at which point the local security situation can be reassessed.** G4S security analysts recommend that businesses use the following as guidance in deciding if their facility should be closed: the business' location is within a radius of 400 meters if the location has had previous protest and property damage and/or there are planned protests in the area, or the business' location is within a radius of 800 meters if the location has not had large, violent protest activity previously. Protests can change quickly and companies are urged to monitor local police social media feeds and reach out to G4S Operations Center for situational updates.
- **Transportation routes should be reviewed, and contingency plans made** with alternative backup routes, particularly if the primary route comes near the aforementioned higher risk areas. This is especially the case when moving people or goods after dark.
- All **unsecure motor vehicles should be moved.** If facilities do not have secure parking (underground garage or fenced in) any vehicles left in open parking lots or on the street should be moved, if it is safe to do so.
- Businesses should **remove any unattended merchandise** or other valuables that are not well secured and either stow them in a non-visible, non-accessible location, or move them off-site if possible and if it is safe to do so.
- Companies should **assess the outside of their critical infrastructure** to see if there are any unsecure objects that could be used by individuals for blockades or projectiles. These items should be removed and secured. If renting, work with the landlord to secure items or mitigate access to them.
- Businesses should **review emergency procedures with staff members.** Employees that may be working at business sites should not be alone and be prepared with an evacuation plan if needed. Employees should remember that emergency services response times may be impacted in areas where there are protests.
- Businesses should **ensure that all smoke detectors are functioning, fire extinguishers are available, and exit doors are clear and working.**
- Employees at business facilities should **continually monitor local news coverage** to stay up to date on protests and any breaking events. The default should be to act with extreme caution and leave sooner rather than later.
- **No employees should be at facilities after dark when there are ongoing protests in the area** until the situation appears to be calming down. G4S security and intelligence analysts, after a review of protests during the summer, noted that most acts of violence — clashes with police, clashes among individuals, vandalism, looting, and arson — occurred in the evening and night. If physical presence is absolutely necessary, additional security measures should be adopted to ensure employee safety. G4S is able to provide tailored assessments for this purpose.
- Business facilities within a 15-20 block radius of protests should **consider locking doors and covering up any large glass windows** that face the street.
- Companies may wish to remind employees of **the risk associated with political stickers on personal cars** parked near busy streets or other highly transited areas that could become easy targets for property damage and vandalism.
- Companies may want to consider the **presence of any political signs on their property** that could highlight their business as a target for property damage and vandalism.

G4S Corporate Risk Services can provide companies with a **customized hotspot map** to determine if their office(s), facilities and/or critical infrastructure are in a high risk location.



METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This Situation Update relies on an analysis of intelligence gathered via open-source networks such as online search engines, media and social media pages. Darknet sources were also reviewed. All information below was found through the surface and deep web, unless the dark web is specified as a source.

This report is analytical and should be viewed as a method for preparing for potential security risks rather than a list of guaranteed outcomes. This report is intended for a wide audience, and individual businesses' risks will vary depending on their business type, key leadership, and the locations of their assets. G4S is able to provide tailored risk assessments upon request.

This Situation Update is not intended to examine how different political policies or ideologies may impact businesses.



G4S RISK OPERATIONS CENTER

For questions regarding this report or for immediate assistance, please call:

- **G4S Risk Operations Center:** (866) 604-1226
- **Alternate Phone:** (866) 943-8892

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- GSOC as a Service (GSOCaaS)
- Intelligence as a Service
- Remote Video Monitoring

