



Written by [Steven Yates](#) on August 18, 2009

Guns Now Visible Outside Venues of Obama Appearances

President Obama spoke to a veterans group in Phoenix Monday, KVIA News reported. Outside, amidst protesters, were roughly a dozen people carrying guns, one of them with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle.

This was the latest case of firearms openly visible at a presidential event. Last week in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a man stood outside an Obama healthcare town hall meeting carrying a sign reading "It is time to water the tree of liberty," with a pistol strapped to his leg.

According to Second Amendment advocates who do not trust the present administration's stand on gun rights, they are just exercising their constitutional right to bear arms. Advocates of more gun control call this a disaster waiting to happen.



The man with the assault rifle [told the Arizona Republic](#), "In Arizona, I still have some freedoms."

The man in New Hampshire had commented, "It's a political statement. If you don't use your rights, you lose your rights."

Both Arizona and New Hampshire are "open-carry" states, meaning that anyone legally allowed to carry a firearm can carry it in public so long as it is visible. Only someone with a concealed weapon is required by law to have a permit.

No arrests were made at either event. Authorities and other observers were acutely uncomfortable, though. Political scientist Fred Solop, of Northern Arizona University, described this recent turn of events as potentially signaling a disturbing trend. "When you start to bring guns to political rallies, it does layer on another level of concern and significance. It actually becomes quite scary for many people. It creates a chilling effect in the ability of our society to carry on honest communication." He added, "The larger the gun, the more menacing the situation."

Other responses were more sharply worded. Paul Helmke, president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence based in Washington, D.C., said, "To me, this is craziness. When you bring a loaded gun, particularly a loaded assault rifle, to any political event, but particularly to one where the president is appearing, you're just making the situation dangerous for everyone. The more guns we see at more events like this, there's more potential for something tragic happening."

Ed Donovan, speaking for the president's Secret Service, said, "In both cases, the subject was not entering our site or otherwise attempting to. They were in a designated public viewing area. The main thing to know is that they would not have been allowed inside with a weapon."

Conservatives will obviously support the right to bear arms. But individuals and groups bearing them at



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political events, especially events where the president is scheduled to appear, should be conscious of what message they are sending out. Otherwise they might unintentionally provide the anti-gun lobby with ammunition of a different sort.



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