Top tips to prepare for covering protests in a contentious election year

**ESTABLISHING** a communication protocol with your editor/trusted contact will increase your physical safety in case of detention or if you encounter physical threats. This may include monitoring your live location using a third-party app in a volatile situation.

**IF AN EDITOR/TRUSTED CONTACT** monitors you while covering protests, consider having a “safe word” to use in case you are about to get detained by the police; often, we only have a few seconds to react if we get kettled. “Kettling” is a riot-control technique that police use, also known as “trap and detain.” It is used to corral and arrest protesters, leaving them with no escape routes.

**SAVE THE NAME OF YOUR EDITOR,** lawyer, and the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press hotline not only in your phone but also on your person. A good practice is to have the numbers written on laminated cards. Keep one in your wallet and the other inside the sole of your shoe.

**CARRYING BASIC PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)** including a respirator and safety goggles could help during a protest in case police deploy tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets.

**DESIGNATE ONE PLACE NEAR THE PROTEST** as a shelter-in-place location or “safe haven” in case you face intimidation or you don’t feel safe. Having a pre-determined secure place in a volatile situation improves your reaction time and helps your editor know where to find you in case of an incident.

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**BEFORE**

If possible, try to work with someone using the “buddy system.” Working as a pair increases your situational awareness and can reduce your risk, especially in an intimidating situation. Situational awareness is the ability to understand what is happening in your surroundings (ex. being watched or followed by bad actors).

**DURING**

Your identity can increase your risk profile and make you a target in a crowd or from the police. Pay special attention to your positioning and distance from the crowd.

Read the crowd. If people are staring or yelling at you, stop reporting and get some distance from them. It is recommended that you move 50 feet away to break visual contact.

While covering a protest, keeping distance, strategic positioning and constant movement can help you report more safely.

**AFTER**

After a protest, someone could follow you; a good practice to avoid this is to add a “cover stop.” Don’t return directly to your residence, hotel, or workplace—instead, go to a restaurant, coffee shop, or other public place. This will allow you to observe your surroundings to see if anyone around you seems suspicious.

Have a self-care routine, rest, and recover, and make sure to debrief with your editor as soon as possible.

For more information and resources visit www.iwmf.org/safety