

10 Tips for safe election COVERAGE



Situational Awareness

Know what political, racial, religious or other conflict exists within a region. Be aware of local laws and know your rights as a journalist. Try to avoid routine and change daily routes. Notify your colleagues or editors if you believe you may be under surveillance. Examine the location of polling stations in advance and know exits from buildings, ways to leave areas of unrest, and locations of hospitals and police stations. If you are covering a major protest march or political rally, survey the route or venue beforehand. Have some first aid knowledge and bring basic first aid supplies as well as water and food.

Secure Apps & Social Media

Use different accounts for private vs public life. Your private account should include only family and friends and have high privacy settings. Be mindful of sharing your recent locations on social media. Consider downloading these apps for improved security in the field: CameraV for hiding photos, Signal & WhatsApp for secure communications, and Psiphon for potential internet interruptions and to safely and securely use public wifi.



Personal

Before leaving for a potentially stressful assignment or coverage, make sure all personal matters and plans at home are taken care of. This will help you reduce your anxiety or stress while in the field and will allow you to focus more clearly on your own physical safety and psychosocial care while reporting.

Press Card & Clothing

Use local laws or your own judgement on whether to keep your press card visible or not. If your card is not visible, keep it in a place it is easily accessible, such as your shirt pocket. Do not put your press card in your wallet. Wear comfortable, neutral clothing and footwear that is not associated with a political party. If you do not have access to a gas mask, bring swimming goggles and handkerchiefs to cover your face and eyes in case of tear gas.



Equipment & Data

Age cameras and other electronic equipment with brown repair tape to make them look old, broken, or repaired to prevent thefts during civil unrest situations. Back up and clean up all data storage hardware before the elections. Identify different internet access points and bring extra batteries and storage as well as an emergency cheap phone with emergency numbers.

Stress Management

Election coverage is often an intense and stressful job. Practice daily stress management and anxiety techniques, such as meditation, to assist in reducing these effects. Make sure you are getting good sleep and eating well during the time you are reporting. Form networks with other journalists that you can talk to and who can relate to the work you are doing.



Interactions

Do not be seen being too friendly with security forces. Remain neutral and avoid confrontations or arguments with both protestors and police. Try to watch conflicts from aside. Do not move from one side of the conflict, directly to another or cross a police line. If you find yourself in the middle of a disturbance, move away without running as people running are often seen as targets.

Emergency Communications

For smartphones, each journalist should install emergency/SOS button apps as well as put emergency contacts in their speed dial. Memorize an emergency number in case you lose your phone.



Debrief & Relax

Following coverage of elections in the field, schedule debriefs with editors, solidarity groups, and a counselor. It is important for your mental health to be taken care of during and after assignments. Debriefs allow you the opportunity to work through anything disturbing you may have seen or any feelings of anxiety, stress, or anger you may feel. Do things you enjoy – keep social contacts, walk, run, nap, cook etc. These are positive coping mechanisms and do no harm in the long run.

Solidarity

Never travel alone. Always inform your colleague, editor, and family where you are going and when you expect to return. Set up a security check-in system within your media outlet or with other freelance journalists covering the election to increase the possibility of emergency response.

