

Reporting Civil Protests

Safety Tips



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Reporting from civil protest sites requires special care and preparations. The reporting circumstances are fluid and can change quickly, sometimes becoming extremely dangerous. Another layer of concern is that media personnel can themselves become targets of aggression.

Preparation



Location: find out where the protests are to be held in advance, have a good idea of roads leading into and out of the site (scan Google maps, make a note of easily recognisable landmarks), and pay attention to the type of transport you would be using.

Prepare your equipment and batteries, carry only what is required, and make plans for how equipment would be secured during dangerous conditions (riots, attacks, weather).



Wear light clothing, and footwear which allow for ease of movement, make sure your attire does not attract attention to you. Carry identification documents, cash/credit cards (not in excess) securely. Don't carry unnecessary valuables, and jewellery.

It is advisable to limit wearing make-up, contact lenses and clothing items that could get entangled, grabbed at like scarves, and long necklaces.



You need to be physically fit to work on the ground. If you have special medical needs, make necessary plans.



Depending on the nature of protests, decide and prepare if you would need specialised gear (googles, vests, helmets, masks etc.).

Similarly, prepare for supplies like food and water.



If you plan to stay overnight or report during night hours, make plans (supplies, security, transport, communication).

Have a clear, tested communication plan. Ideally someone trusted should know your movements via regular check-ins. A hardcopy list of important phone numbers is always a good backup.



Have a clear plan in case of an emergency — who to contact, code words etc.

Plan out your coverage, discuss beforehand with desk manager's content, deadlines and how you plan to file the story.



Remember, plans need to be flexible.

Get an idea of the ground situation at protest site, scan coverage but also social media and messaging groups for related content. Speak to colleagues regularly.





If you have trusted colleagues working at the same location, discuss with them on how you can collectively ensure each other's safety.

At site

Situational awareness: constantly assess the situation and surroundings around you, look for signs that could warn of dangers.



Self-awareness: be mindful that who you are, gender, ethnicity, professional affiliations, equipment and even what you are wearing could create potential for danger.

Unless there is persistent danger directed at the media, clearly identify your profession and what you are doing.



Unless necessary, report from a safe distance from protestors, make sure you are aware of possible escape routes. Don't get caught between clashing protestors and/or security units.

Be aware of first aid sites, buildings, structures offering cover (in case of clashes avoid glass fronted/roofed structures).



Judge when you have gathered sufficient material for your reporting and move out.

Returning to site

Be mindful of the reactions to your reporting and the reception to the media by protesters, security units, other organisations and at protest sites.



Speak to reliable, trusted sources to update yourself before you return to site.

At all times, before, during and after reporting, assess the situation against your professional duties and responsibilities.