ILS RISK FOCUS >>

THE MEDIA SERIES



High Stakes, Smart Choices:

How to prepare and stay safe when reporting on elections

Around the world, many elections are contested. In reporting on them, media professionals often cover campaigns, conferences, rallies and related protests. Their work can expose them to risks, both physically and online.

Planning and taking steps in advance are crucial to mitigating risk and ensuring journalists and news teams stay as safe as possible, while doing their jobs responsibly.

Planning and Preparing

Before deploying, consider the following:

- **Context:** Make sure you have a solid understanding of the recent history of elections, contentious policy topics, significant events and wider socio-economic and political context. This will help you understand *what* to expect and understand the '*why*'.
- **Legal:** Journalists should know in advance the law in terms of what and where they are permitted to film/record, how they should identify themselves what accreditation and ID is required, their rights, potential tactics of police and authorities.

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Planning and Preparing

- **Security outcomes:** Plans should be made to deal with a variety of potential, including: physical harassment, arrest/detention, seizure of equipment, injury, communication/internet black-outs, and online harassment.
- **Communications:** Who to call, and in what order, if things go wrong (team, newsroom, next of kin), noting there can be official blackouts, as well as delays from saturated data/phone networks.
- **Medical:** What medical support is available on the ground, including details of the medical conditions and medication requirements of staff.

Planning and Preparing

- **Clothing and equipment:** Should be chosen with care, since they can change how an individual is perceived. Preparing for the weather conditions is important, since there may be no shelter from the elements, and events may take many hours. Staff should know how to use and carry their own PPE if required.

Remember: *Requirements scale with risk and environment - from body armour, helmets, and respirators, to a first aid kit and backup reporting devices in case primary equipment is lost or seized.*

- **Travel:** A detailed travel plan with contingency vehicles and multiple options for routing.

Planning and Preparing

- **Digital Risks:** Journalists should ensure they have secured their devices. They should not carry any sensitive material that would compromise them or sources if they are detained, or if equipment is seized, lost or stolen (often a significant risk in crowds).
- **Online Risks:** Editors and journalists should consider in advance the risk of online harassment, taking steps to mitigate, protect against exposure, and offer support to those attacked.

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During

Situational awareness at the event is key and comes down to one principle: **safety before coverage.**

- **Know your exit** before you need it and favour the edge of a crowd, or higher ground, over the centre, where access can be quickly compromised.

- **Agree a meeting point** with your team, with **emergency numbers stored** somewhere they can't easily be lost.

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During

- **Monitor the crowd's mood;** atmospheres can turn with little warning.
- **Judge whether blending in is necessary** without compromising ethics, stay conscious of how your own reactions might inflame a situation, and know in advance what de-escalation looks like.
- **Dress to move quickly**, in sturdy shoes and nothing loose enough to be grabbed, with ID always within reach.

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After

- Recognise that these experiences can be stressful, especially where your safety is compromised, be that physically, digitally or online. **Find someone to speak with about your experiences.**

- Be aware that **digital harassment can be experienced long after** the initial event too.

- Review and update procedures and security plans to reflect experiences and lessons learned. **Share these with your wider team.**

ILS helps global media organisations and NGOs operate safely and effectively in environments affected by civil unrest, political instability, and high-risk elections through Risk Advisory support and safety and security training.

With several significant and potentially contentious elections on the horizon, now is the time to ensure your teams are prepared to navigate heightened risks, and continue operating with confidence.

👉 **Let's talk.** If you or your organisation are looking for support, we'd love to hear from you.