

## **JOURNALIST SAFETY WHEN COVERING AMERICAN PROTESTS**

On the one year anniversary of the Charlottesville unrest, the city and other parts of Virginia will be under a [state of emergency during Unite the Right protests this weekend](#). Police in Washington DC are [increasing security deployments](#) with counter rallies also planned in the city. Based on events at other similar protests in US and Europe in the past two years, journalists should be aware of the physical and online threats when covering this weekend's events.

The resurfacing of nationalist and right wing rallies in the US in tandem to growing rhetorical attacks on the media in an era of so-called “fake news” has fuelled hostility to journalists among some protest groups. While recent protests in [Portland](#) and [Berkeley](#) have underlined the wider hazards from general crowd violence, tear gas and intimidation, political rallies have also exemplified the specific targeted threats journalists now face during such events. A [report](#) released by the US Press Freedom tracker reported that that last year, the most dangerous place to be a journalist in America in 2017 was at a protest, with 29 arrests and 31 known physical attacks on journalists documented. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that [22 of these arrests occurred when journalists were refrained in police kettles](#).

Threats to journalists extend beyond just attending a protest, especially in the online realm. Many journalists covering [far right protests](#) have been subject to severe online abuse, including death threats and the release of personal and family details, known as doxxing. [Women and non-white journalists](#) writing on far right demonstrations have been particularly common targets for online trolling. Online threats of a Molotov cocktail attack on the house of the parents of journalist Michael Edison Hayden after a doxxing campaign against him exemplify the porosity between online and physical threats.

### **NO CHANGE IN SIGHT**

The current political climate suggests that the aforementioned threats to journalists are unlikely to go away. In the US, the mid-term elections in November will serve to reinforce existing political divisions and likely inspire both new rallies as well as continued hostility towards journalists covering political affairs.

The extent of security deployments for this weekend's rallies illustrates authorities' concern about the threat from general protest violence while similar past events highlight the direct threats these events can pose to media workers.

General advice when covering political rallies includes:

- Plan your assignment and ensure that you have a full battery on your mobile phone.
- Know the area you are going to. Work out in advance what you would do in an emergency and identify evacuation plans should you need to quickly leave the scene. It is sensible to keep to the outside of the crowd and don't get sucked into the middle where it is hard to escape. Plan an emergency rendezvous point if you are working with others. Avoid being located between rival protest groups due to the threat from clashes.
- Avoid working alone and always try to work with a colleague.
- Wear clothing and footwear that allows you to move swiftly. Avoid loose clothing and lanyards that can be grabbed.
- Prepare for kettling and carry sufficient water, snacks and clothing in the event you are contained for a long duration of time.
- In the US, keep the phone number of a local criminal lawyer and bail bondsman handy, in case of arrest.
- The Fourth Amendment protects you from unreasonable searches and seizures, while the Privacy Protection Act of 1980 restricts law enforcement from searching for and seizing journalists' rushes, notes and material. Always identify yourself to law enforcement that you are a journalist; and if you work for a media company the police will have to contact your company's attorney to gain access to these materials.

Multiple open-source resources provide advice and support to journalists on the subject of online abuse and intimidation. At HP Risk Management we have built dedicated in-house expertise to support increasing demand from our clients about this growing threat.

**HP Risk Management provides risk management support to various media organisations, including many in the US. For more information about our services, please visit: our website or email [info@hpriskmanagement.com](mailto:info@hpriskmanagement.com)**