

SAFETY RESOURCES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND JOURNALISTS DURING ELECTORAL PERIODS

Around the world, journalists and human rights defenders (HRDs) are facing increased threats to their safety during electoral periods. This page highlights resources to assist journalists and HRDs in their crucial work during these periods.

Journalists and HRDs are Essential for Effective Elections

When governments restrict the work of civil society, opposition groups, journalists, and human rights defenders, they foster a closed environment where citizens are unable to express or be informed about opinions critical of those in power, and thus unable to effectively participate in the public affairs of their country. This is particularly important during elections because casting an informed vote requires the general public to have been able to receive information, exchange ideas, and engage in debate about candidates, issues, and party platforms.

The human right to vote and participate in government, recognized in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the regional human rights instruments, requires the full enjoyment and respect for the human rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

Journalists and HRDs Face Unique Threats during Electoral Periods

Given the inherent nature of their work, journalists and HRDs face opposition and increased risk by investigating, analyzing, critiquing, and exposing the work of political parties, governments and other individuals with power. As a result, they are often victims of arbitrary arrest, detention, criminalization and harassment. Specifically, during electoral periods, journalists and [HRDs](#) call attention to and critique the stances of political candidates, political parties, political systems, and incumbent administrations. Journalists and HRDs play an essential role in making sure the public is generally well-informed, which becomes even more important ahead of elections.

Select Examples of Recent Threats during Electoral Periods

Ethiopia

June 2021 elections

In June 2021 Ethiopia [held](#) twice-delayed general elections. One activist [described](#) for the NGO CIVICUS that the postponement of these elections created civil unrest and the detention of opposition leaders. Journalists are at particular risk in Ethiopia, where authorities are cracking down on [media outlets critical of the government](#), particularly of foreign journalists [covering](#) the Tigray conflict. At least [21 journalists and media workers](#) were detained and two killed between early 2020 and May 2021. In March 2021, Ethiopian authorities [Media](#) withdrew the credentials of a New York Times journalist and later [expelled him from the country](#). There was also a trend of [repressing civil society groups and opposition parties](#) in the months leading up to the June 2021 elections, including mass arrests of opposition party supporters, prohibitions on opposition parties organizing and holding rallies, and general incapacitation of opposition party activities.

To learn more about important safety measures in Ethiopia, please see the Committee to Protect Journalists' Ethiopia elections 2021: Journalist safety kit linked [here](#); Article 19's Safety Handbook for journalists covering elections (2015) [here](#), and [this article](#) from the International Journalist Network.

Honduras

March 2021 presidential primary elections

Based on previous threats and acts of political violence during prior elections, journalists in Honduras are fearful of covering elections. In the weeks leading up to the presidential primary on March 14, 2021, journalists on the ground expressed how a general atmosphere of political [violence including shots fired at voting centers](#) made it dangerous to report on the elections. Recently, multiple reports describe journalists being attacked and [harassed](#), due to their election-centered reporting.

Mexico

June 2021 elections.

In anticipation of Mexico's [largest election in its history](#), which took place on June 6, 2021, journalists who already face threats to their well-being are being advised to take additional precautions to ensure their safety. Past threats have included [physical attacks, harassment, intimidation, online bullying, surveillance, government restrictions on reporting](#), and even murder due to their reporting. Currently, Mexico is the world's [deadliest country](#) for journalists. Between 2015 and 2020 alone, [26 journalists](#) were murdered.

To learn more about the important safety measures in Mexico, please see the Committee to Protect Journalists' Mexico elections 2021: Journalist safety kit linked [here](#).

Uganda

January 2021 elections

In the months leading up to the Ugandan national election, civil society organizations [noted](#) an escalation of violations that created a climate of unprecedented fear and intimidation by State security and other regulators, seemingly intended to silence dissent, undermine political opposition participation, and deprive Ugandans of their enjoyment of fundamental rights. Ahead of the presidential election, prominent human rights lawyer Nicholas Opiyo - who was [arrested and detained](#) in December 2020 - [described](#) an ever-worsening atmosphere for civil society, its defenders and journalists ahead of January. Just two days before the elections, the government [shut down](#) all social media platforms. Security forces used excessive and deadly force to quell public gatherings and intimidate the protesters, including human rights defenders, journalists, opposition politicians and their supporters, and vulnerable groups such as women and children. In April 2021, UN human rights experts [expressed alarm](#) over "the brutal crackdown on [Uganda's] political opponents which began in the lead-up to January's disputed general elections and continues to suppress opposition supporters."

To learn more about the important safety measures in Uganda, please see the [CPJ Safety Advisory: Covering Uganda's elections](#) (December 2020)

Venezuela

December 2020 parliamentary elections.

Venezuela's most recent elections took place on December 6, 2020. In the weeks leading up to the parliamentary elections, Nicolás Maduro's regime [cracked down on journalists](#). During 2020 Maduro's regime [threatened, harassed, and arrested journalists](#), among other individuals, for speaking out on COVID-19 and Maduro's response to the pandemic.

Resources for HRDs and Journalists

The critical need to protect journalists and HRDs during electoral periods is receiving more attention and support from leading organizations. The resources below may help prepare and assist HRDs and journalists in conducting their crucial work during electoral periods.

- [Best Practices for Journalists Covering Election Day](#)
 - Published by: Africa Centre for Media Excellency
 - Year published: 2021
 - Source type: Article
 - Dedicated to: Journalists

- [Safety & Security During Elections: Guidelines for Human Rights Defenders](#)
 - Published by: Defend Defenders

- Year published: 2020
- Source type: Article
- Dedicated to: Human rights defenders
- [Covering Elections: Journalist Safety Kit](#)
 - Published by: The Committee to Protect Journalists
 - Year published: 2019
 - Source type: Article
 - Dedicated to: Journalists
- [Ten Tips for Journalists' Safety When Covering Elections](#)
 - Published by: IREX
 - Year published: 2017
 - Source type: Article
 - Dedicated to: Journalists
- [Handbook for Journalists During Elections, 2015 Edition](#)
 - Published by: Reporters Without Borders
 - Year published: 2015
 - Source type: Downloadable handbook
 - Dedicated to: Journalists
- [Media and Elections: An Elections Reporting Handbook](#)
 - Published by: IMPACS Associate Ross Howard
 - Year published: 2004
 - Source type: Downloadable handbook
 - Dedicated to: Journalists
- [Safety of Journalists Guidebook](#)
 - Published by: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
 - Year published: 2012
 - Source type: Downloadable handbook
 - Dedicated to: Journalists
 - Note: Page 54 of this general resource has specific guidance for journalists during electoral periods.
- [Holistic Security Protocol for Human Rights Defenders](#)
 - Published by: Open Briefing
 - Year published: 2020-2021
 - Source type: Downloadable handbook
 - Dedicated to: Human rights defenders
 - Notes: Available in multiple languages, not election specific