



How Communities Can Prepare for Protests in 2024

A 'KNOW YOUR RIGHTS' GUIDE FROM FREE PRESS



The First Amendment provides broad protections for our rights to protest and hold government officials accountable. During times of heightened civic engagement – including election periods and moments when big news stories break – it's important to know your rights so you can safely exercise them.

Knowing your rights and being able to assert them is important. However, there is no way to guarantee that law enforcement will respect your rights when you participate in demonstrations. On the ground, the First Amendment cannot protect you from being harassed or even arrested for attending a protest or attempting to film the police.

You have the right to organize and attend a protest in public spaces, like streets or sidewalks. You may need a permit if you plan to block streets, assemble at certain hours, use sound equipment, or have a large gathering in places like parks or plazas. These rights generally do not protect you on private property unless you have the property owner's consent. Residential areas often have heightened local restrictions.

You have the right to document demonstrations and other activities in public spaces – and that includes filming the police. You cannot interfere with police carrying out their duties, but filming or photographing them is not, by itself, interference.

While the First Amendment equally protects everyone's right to protest, individuals face varying degrees of risk. Even permitted protests can end with police conducting arrests. While those arrests might not lead to charges, arrests alone can have significant consequences depending on your job status, immigration status or prior legal record.

If police stop you at a protest: Ask if you are being detained. If they say no, you can walk away. If they say yes, you can ask why. **You do not have to answer any questions** (in some states, you might be required to identify yourself). Do not provide false information. Instead, assert your right to remain silent. **You also do not have to consent to a search** of your body or your belongings. If police carry out a search anyway, state clearly and calmly that you do not consent.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ACLU: [Know Your Rights: Protest Rights](#)

National Lawyers Guild: [Know Your Rights for Campus Protests](#)

PEN America: [Guide for Combating Protest Disinformation](#)



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KNOW BEFORE YOU GO



SECURE YOUR DEVICES

Disable biometric passwords. Use end-to-end encrypted messaging and calling applications, like Signal.



EMERGENCY CONTACT

Identify an emergency contact who will not be attending the protest with you. Make sure you memorize the phone number of your emergency contact.



ID AND MEDICINE

Carry a valid ID. If you have medicine that you need to take regularly, ensure that you have it with you with its original prescription label intact.



CARETAKING OBLIGATIONS

Being arrested at a protest could lead to being detained overnight. Make arrangements to ensure the people and animals who rely on your care are looked after.