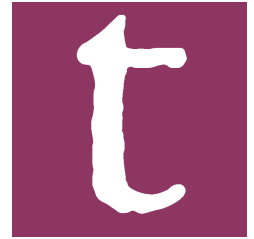


Journalists Covering 2024 Election Face Hostilities and Fear Police Action



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Meanwhile, mainstream media organizations have offered little in terms of guidance to ensure the safety of journalists.

By Ailia Zehra, Published June 10, 2024

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In 2016, as *The New Republic* reporter Walter Shapiro wandered around a hockey arena in eastern Pennsylvania where former President Donald Trump was holding a rally, he could find no one willing to speak with him. He remembers a middle-aged woman attendee telling him, “Why should I talk to you? You are from the liberal press.” Just days earlier, Trump had falsely accused *CNN* of turning off its camera to censor his rally.

liberal. Trump’s remarks led his supporters and major right-wing groups to launch a “Defund NPR” campaign on social media.

Fears of Election Violence

According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, a nongovernmental organization tracking political violence, right-wing groups including the Three Percenters, Proud Boys, Patriot Prayer and Boogaloo Bois have a well-documented history of using violence during elections. The organization’s research shows that since the 2020 election, 91 percent of violent

demonstrations were organized by far right-wing militias. Moreover, a *NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist* poll revealed in April that more than 20 percent of the most right-leaning Americans think violence may be needed as a means to secure political objectives in 2024.

While election officers are said to be most vulnerable to such attacks, given that they are already being bombarded by threats, reporters covering the elections on the ground also face safety concerns.

At least 40 cases of assaults against journalists were recorded in 2023, according to the U.S. Press Freedom Tracker’s annual report. In September 2023, Phil Williams, a chief investigative reporter for a local TV station *WTVF-TV*, was assaulted during his coverage of a mayoral forum in Franklin, Tennessee. In October 2023, Isafas Amaro, a journalist and publisher of a Spanish-language newspaper, was shot in the arm by a leader of a community organization in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. The leader had previously criticized his depiction in the publication.

In September of 2022, Jeff German, an investigative reporter for a Nevada-based local newspaper, was stabbed to death outside his home in Las Vegas. Robert Telles, a local elected official whose potential wrongdoings German had reported on, was arrested and charged with his murder.

Hostile Crowds

Journalists covering the elections who face allegations of bias often have to deal with hostility in the field. Laura, a reporter cover-



Photojournalist Stephanie Keith is detained outside the Broadway-Lafayette subway station during a “Justice for Jordan Neely” vigil and protest on May 8, 2023, in New York City. Alexi Rosenfeld / Getty Images

Shapiro, who is currently covering his 12th presidential campaign, tells *Truthout* Trump’s attacks on the media have grown since then.

“When a presidential candidate singles out a news outlet for rebuke, it may lead to reporters from that organization facing a hostile treatment during their reporting,” Shapiro said. “It poses a great danger.”

On April 10, 2024, Trump slammed *NPR* as “a total scam” in an all-caps post on his social media platform Truth Social, demanding the federal funding it receives be cut, after a former *NPR* senior editor publicly criticized the newsroom as overly

ing the Trump campaign for a legacy media outlet who asked to be identified by a pseudonym, tells *Truthout* Trump directs the crowd to boo journalists at every single rally.

“Turn around and look at fake news,” the former president said at a recent rally in Georgia as he pointed at Laura and her colleagues standing in the back. “The crowd then started booing us and giving us thumbs down. It felt jarring the first time it happened to me in 2022 when I began covering Trump, but I am used to it now,” she says.

On April 18, Arizona Senate candidate Kari Lake, while denouncing what she called “fake news media” at her campaign event outside a restaurant in Golden Valley, Arizona, singled out a *Reuters* reporter who was the only journalist in the crowd. Following her outburst, a man in the crowd shouted that such reporters should be arrested and charged with treason.

Reuters has issued no public statement about this incident, but when contacted, a spokesperson for the organization condemned Lake’s remarks. “Such actions are irresponsible and can compromise the safety of journalists covering political events,” the spokesperson, who requested her name be withheld, said. “*Reuters* is committed to delivering factual, unbiased news on the election in keeping with the Thomson Reuters Trust Principles, as we do around the world.”

The spokesperson added that *Reuters* runs a security check-in fortnightly for its U.S. election coverage team, open to all of its reporters and editors to discuss and review any safety concerns.

A spokesperson for *The New York Times*, Charlie Stadlander, when asked about the organization’s policy on security training for its reporters covering the election, told *Truthout* that the *Times* offers several resources to those reporting from dangerous or divisive situations where their safety might be under threat. “We support our people and ensure they are able to report fully, fearlessly and without intimidation.” However, he did not answer if the *Times* has had an election-specific security training.

Ben Fishel, *NPR*’s media relations manager, said that the organization provides hostile environment training for its journalists “on a rolling basis several times a year,” but declined to say if *NPR* has had a security training for election reporters, citing the media outlet’s confidentiality policy.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) recently released a “journalist safety kit” with a set of guidelines for journalists ahead of the election. “Media workers covering the election should be aware of the increased risk of online abuse, including doxxing, and targeted disinformation campaigns designed to undermine the press,” a statement accompanying the safety kit said.

Crackdowns on Pro-Palestine Protests

Meanwhile, the crackdown on student protesters on college campuses where pro-Palestine encampments were set up has added another layer to the issue of journalists’ safety. Apart from protestors, a number of student journalists who were covering the encampments were arrested or faced violence from police called by university administrations.

When the cops in riot gear entered an academic building at Columbia University on the night of April 30, they arrested more than 100 people and barred journalists from covering the crackdown. Samaa Khullar, a Palestinian student at Columbia, wrote in an article that she and her

fellow Palestinian student journalist were both pushed outside the campus and onto the street, where they “remained trapped in the cold for almost an hour and a half.”



In northern California, local journalists who were reporting on the campus protests were arrested and detained. Reporters from the student-run newspaper at UCLA reportedly faced violent attacks “including being slapped and sprayed with irritants.”

Chenjerai Kumanyika, a journalism professor at New York University, who was arrested when the administration called the NYPD at the protest encampment at Gould Plaza on April 22, says he saw student journalists being brutally treated at the protest.

Kumanyika was teaching his undergraduate “Introduction to Journalism” class when he heard about the NYU encampment. He decided to give his students an alternative assignment to go out and cover the protest if they wanted. “The encampment was set up right on our campus, so I thought it would be weird not to talk about it in a journalism class,” he told *Truthout*.

A few hours after he and some of his students arrived at the encampment, the NYPD launched a crackdown and arrested more than 100 students and faculty members, including Kumanyika and two students in his class. After his release a few hours later, Kumanyika learned that a student journalist who was covering the protest for the university’s student-run newspaper, *Washington Square News*, had been pepper-sprayed by the police. The injured student, who requested anonymity, said that no one from the university apart from Kumanyika reached out to him after he was pepper-sprayed.

2024 DNC and RNC

The police’s mistreatment of student protesters and even journalists covering these protests portends similar crackdowns on the planned pro-Palestine protests during the upcoming Democratic National Convention (DNC) and Republican National Convention (RNC).

Thomas Kennedy, a former member of the Democratic National Committee, said that he was arrested outside the 2016 Democratic Convention in Philadelphia while covering the protests as a journalist. “They let me go after I flashed my press badge,” he told *Truthout*. Kennedy, who resigned from the DNC earlier this year over concerns about the Biden administration’s policy on Gaza, anticipates the potential crackdown on protests outside this year’s Democratic Convention to be worse. “Police have been particularly hard on pro-Palestine protesters,” he said. “Ensuring safety will likely be a bigger challenge this year.”

As Israel’s latest military offensive in Rafah sparks widespread condemnation, March on DNC, a coalition of several antiwar organizations, is preparing to disrupt the Democratic Convention, which is scheduled to take place on August 19-22 in Chicago. According to the organizers, 30,000 protesters are likely to be present outside the venue. Some observers are drawing parallels between this year’s Democratic Convention and the 1968 convention of the party, also held in Chicago, where police clashed with protesters who were denouncing the U.S.’s role in the Vietnam War. In demonstrators’ clashes with Chicago police, Army troops, Illinois National Guardsmen and Secret Service agents over five days, hundreds were arrested or injured.

March on DNC says its demonstration outside the convention, calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to U.S. support for Israel, will be “historic.” The coalition has vowed to go ahead with the protest with or without a permit. Nadia

