

RESOURCE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS



LOCAL POLITICIANS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ARE TARGETS:

Government officials are sometimes targets of extremist harassment, threats, and intimidation tactics. These threats are not only meant to scare the targeted person, but to intimidate local government officials broadly. They mean to cause fear and intimidation. Extremist groups will often put the local politicians who openly speak out against hate, antisemitism, racism, or anti-Democratic politics on 'enemy lists' shared among other extremist groups. The victims may not even know they are the targets of a coordinated harassment campaign until the threats start rolling in.

Harassment can look like death threats, threatening phone calls, showing up at one's home or office, mailing threatening letters or packages, and doxxing (i.e. releasing a person's full name, home address, phone number, and/or other personal and identifying information to the public.). Doxxing is done in order to help those who would do harm to or intimidate government officials to find them and contact them more easily. Note that it is not just politicians who are being targeted. Administrative staff also face threatening scenarios, ranging from bomb threats, to threatening mail, to attacks, or the targeted harassment of them and their work.

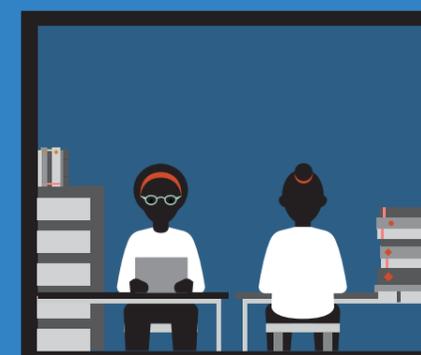
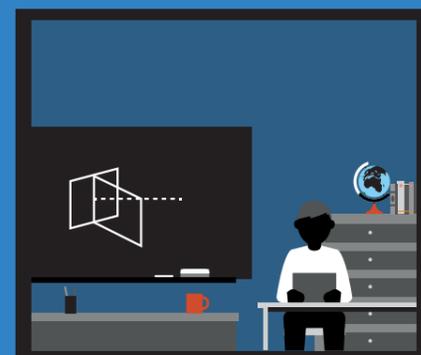
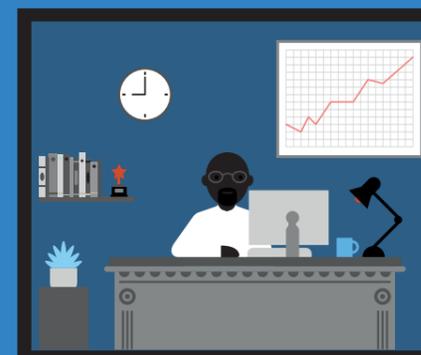
WHAT TO DO:

1. Speak up and Speak out. Victims and targets of this behavior often wish that more local politicians, local government officials, and their colleagues spoke out in support of them. Publicly discussing the harassment you personally experience or hear about lets others who are in a similar situation know that they are not alone.
2. Respond Quickly. The faster, more comprehensive, and more publicly the victims are supported – by employers, work friends, colleagues, etc. – the more resilient they are. Importantly, this solidarity signals to the perpetrators and their sympathizers that the victims are not alone, and that their behavior is not supported or tolerated. An early response is key in sending a clear message that establishes the public's mood in the neighborhood, in the city, or in the county, and sends a message that there is no space for extremist intimidation.
3. Build a Coalition. Many community actors can contribute to a response, depending on who is being targeted and how: party representatives, administrative representatives, associations of migrants, of workers, Christian churches, Jewish synagogues, Islamic mosques, and racial-ethnic community agencies, local peace-building organizations, and/or local charities and nonprofits.
4. Support your Employees. Government agencies and political staff have a great deal of responsibility to ensure individual security for their employees and for engaged citizens visiting their premises. In addition to security, this could include support and resources, such as legal aid, as well as providing training on managing extremist threats in cooperation with external organizations and/or law enforcement. In terms of hate mail, ask the IT department to create a central email address that receives all inquiries, and have a dedicated official that is charged with receiving all hate mail that employees have forwarded to them. This relieves the targeted individuals from having to read and archive the email themselves.

HOW TO ASSESS THE SERIOUSNESS OF A THREAT

- Are the authors of the threat known as violent?
- What are the sources of information regarding the threat?
- Are the authors of the threat from your own region?
- Are specific threats made?
- Were there any previous groups or individuals threatening you?
- Were threats also made on family members, children, or friends/acquaintances or have they already been threatened/attacked?
- Is there data publicly accessible about your home address or work address?

Ideally local law enforcement have an understanding of the local extremist scene and local extremist groups, and can advise those targeted by threats or attacks. Victim support groups could also be valuable support for this assessment process.



DEALING WITH DISRUPTIONS AT OFFICIAL POLITICAL ACTIONS AND ELECTION CAMPAIGN STANDS

PRE-EVENT PREPARATION:

When planning a political action, such as an information or election campaign stand, it makes sense to imagine possible threat situations and escalation levels, and play them out among your team. Talk about security concerns and related concerns carefully. It is important to recognize that every person experiences threatening situations differently and will respond differently. Thus, how to respond will depend on individual strengths and resources present in the team. The following points will help you to prepare to respond well in the event of an emergency:

1. Analyze the Social Environment

- Are there meeting places for extremists or do meetings with groups centered on conspiracy theories take place regularly in the neighborhood?
- Have there been racist attacks or extremist propaganda in the area? Look for this information at local community agencies and counseling centers, websites of antifascist groups, or online news stories.
- Do other political parties hold political actions there?
- Are there local organizations or community initiatives that are already working to counter extremism, conspiratorial thinking, and racism? Does it make sense to contact them and build a network of support? Creating a coalition for your political action can improve its effectiveness and keep all participants safer.

2. The Design of the Information Stand

- What is the spatial layout of the site? Are there any ways to get away in case of an emergency? It can be useful, for example, to have a wall or a barrier behind the stand.
- Where is the nearest public transport stop?
- Can the material be packed up quickly in an emergency?
- Clarify the different roles and the number of people involved in your political action. There should be at least three people in charge of the booth. In neighborhoods, where incidents have already occurred or are to be expected incidents, there should be at least five people on site.

3. Develop Emergency Strategies

- What circumstances constitute a threatening situation?
- Which person takes over which task in threatening situations?
- In which situation is it necessary to inform the police? Who is responsible for this?
- Which reactions or interventions are possible and reasonable for the team, and what do those involved have the personal confidence to do? Not everyone has to do everything (some may feel most comfortable in a support-only role for instance), but it's good to know ahead of time who on your team feels comfortable engaging with the police (if needed), engaging with counter-protestors, or engaging with curious citizens who approach the stand.
- Under what circumstances will the political action be canceled? How can the departure be organized? Establishing these guidelines ahead of time will make the decision to cancel the action faster and easier than having to figure it out in the moment.

DURING THE EVENT - COUNTER-PROTESTORS AND EXTREMISTS APPEAR:

1. Reacting to rightwing extremist statements.

Do not get tempted to engage by throwing slogans at each other. Slogans are not geared toward dialogue and are not amenable to objective debate. They are not based on an open inquisitive mind, but a closed one. Racist, anti-Semitic, sexist, derogatory statements, or the denying of trivializing of the atrocities committed by White Nationalists, Nazis, and other extremists should not be tolerated, however. Take a clear stand.

2. Dealing with conspiratorial, ideological statements.

Conspiracy theorists and their ideological statements can center on a variety of topics, such as climate change, the COVID vaccines, or migration. They are based on a worldview (“good versus evil”) and the assumption of a “secret power” that controls events behind the scenes. Conspiratorial ideologues usually reject established media, scientific institutions, and democratic parties. This rejection can lead to aggression or violence against representatives of political parties. Therefore, a factual discussion with conspiracy theorists at an information or election campaign stand can be difficult, especially if the conspiratorial ideological worldview of the other opponent is well established.

Even in such encounters, we still recommend not letting dehumanizing statements go unchallenged. Having said that, it is also okay to tell this person or people that you have other tasks to accomplish, other people to talk to, and to please move on. If their goal is to simply be disruptive, then monopolizing your time and intimidating others from participating in your political action or approaching your campaign stand will be an effective strategy on their part.

3. Dealing with harassment and intimidation.

Do not respond substantively to verbal abuse and provocation. Discussing issues with someone is reasonable, but being harassed or insulted is not an acceptable byproduct of engaging in a political action. Instead, state the consequences of continued harassment clearly (refer to criminal law). Remain cordial and always address the person formally, like Ma'am or Sir: This verbal distance puts you at a distance from your counterpart. Avoid aggression, sarcastic humor, irony, polite requests or verbal submission. You will achieve more if you are as self-confident as possible. As soon as you suspect that you may be targeted with intimidation efforts, inform possible supporters and report the threats or threatening actors to police if necessary. Reporting hate can lead to more responsive and comprehensive tools to combat future incidents. There are a range of advocacy groups who collect reports of witnessed or experienced harassment, hate speech, bullying and violence and can refer you to resources for reporting, pursuing legal action, financial assistance, or support for physical and mental health needs.

4. Theft of Information Material.

If the information material of the party is on the stand, it is your property. Only when the material is handed over directly to other persons, does it become their property. In the event of unwanted theft of material, make it clear that it is your property and, if necessary, report it to the police. File a complaint.



INTERVENTION IN AN EMERGENCY

Develop criteria and definitions with your team in advance to guide you in determining what constitutes an emergency. If you decide to dismantle the information stand, make sure that the team leaves the site together and that no one is left alone. Inform people who wanted to join you later. No one should go home alone. If possible, give people without a car a lift, or have the police accompany you and the team to public transport. Afterwards, follow up with your team to make sure that everyone involved in the stand has arrived home safely.

IN THE AFTERMATH

If you experienced threats or disturbances at the information or campaign stand, the follow up work is just as important as good preparation. Talking about what your team did during the event helps those affected come to terms with their experiences, and become more confident in the actions they took.

- 1. Reflect on the experience.** We recommend you process, reflect, and share the experiences and lessons learned so that you and your team can be prepared for future crises, should they arise. Some questions to help you and your team process the situation:
 - Were you satisfied with the way the information stand was run and the demeanor of the team? Did the arrangements we made in advance work? How did you feel? At which points were you personally unsettled?
 - Were you satisfied with your appearance and behavior? Can lessons be passed on to others?
 - Do you have the impression that you were able to convey your attitude/positioning to bystanders well?
 - Where do you see a need for improvement?

- 2. Documenting the experience.** Creating a document that details what you did, how you did it, and what you liked and didn't like about your procedures will help you improve your team's approach to political actions. Some specific recommendations when documenting the experience are:
 - We recommend you document how you prepared, implemented and then evaluated your safety preparations of the information stand.
 - If there have been any harassments or even threats by racists, extremists, or conspiracy ideologues, inform your party structures, the local party representatives, and the local registration offices.
 - Immediately after the harassment, write a short protocol outlining how you remember the events transpiring: How many people were on the scene? What did the person look like? How would you classify their statements ideologically and in terms of content? What argumentation strategies/ techniques did the person pursue?
- 3. Public Relations.** If appropriate, prepare a press release about the incidents. You can also use social media to address incidents and generate publicity around the problem of extremist harassment.

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