

Personal Security for Election Officials

PROTECTING YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

Three Domains of Personal Security

Drawn from real-world experiences of election officials who faced serious threats, this guide provides practical, field-tested advice with a focus on securing three facets of your life:

1

SECURING YOUR HOME

Physical changes and
tech upgrades
Support from family
and trusted neighbors

2

SECURING YOUR COMMUTE

Measures to avoid
being recognized or
followed
Practicing situational
awareness

3

PRIVACY AND ONLINE SECURITY

Limiting personal info
in the real world
Reviewing your
online presence for
unnecessary details

The goal is not to frighten you, but to *empower* you with concrete steps to protect yourself and those you love.

THE THREAT LANDSCAPE

While election officials welcome public input and feedback, when this turns into harassment or threats, it catches many officials off guard. Threats may be:

- Unsurprising, due to heated local issues, campaigns, or false information
- “Out of the blue” when a disturbed person fixates on an election office
- Rapid onset, when an announcement has a major impact, or an innocent mistake is interpreted as intentional

THREAT LEVELS RISE AND EBB

Cues can help you understand when danger may be greater – for instance, when you or your office are targeted online or at key moments in the election cycle such as a close election night, or certification.

- While threats can persist, we find that an acute threat is likely to diminish after 5 to 10 days.
- If you are targeted, as you take action, take consolation that it will lessen.

At moments of heightened danger, you can build on your normal level of preparedness by following the stronger advice in the “When Threat Levels Rise” sections below.

1 | Securing Your Home

When harassment starts, the deepest concern is that it could turn physical, harming you or your family. **Make your home harder to surveil, harder to access, and easier for neighbors and law enforcement to monitor.**



BASIC PHYSICAL SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

- **Upgraded locks:** Deadbolts are stronger than handle locks; security bars for sliding doors; and window stops can strengthen access control. *Use them even when you are at home.*
- **Cameras and/or alarm systems:** A doorbell cam lets you screen visitors; motion sensors allow you to review activity in front of your house for anything unusual. Additional cameras can cover other areas. An alarm system may offer more protection.
- **Curtains or blinds** will limit what others can see or learn about you.
- **Exterior lighting:** Motion sensor lights illuminate the perimeter and can help alert you to intruders.

CONDUCT A HOME SECURITY ASSESSMENT

Ask law enforcement to walk around your property and honestly answer:

- Where are blind spots and hiding places from your view inside and from a patrol car?
 - Are there landscaping changes that could help?
- What spot would someone choose to force entry?
- What could someone learn about your habits from watching your house?

STRENGTHEN AND RELY ON KEY RELATIONSHIPS

- Be candid with family about the security situation.
 - They may need to take precautions; they will watch out for you, and understand if stress affects you.
 - Consider how to encourage children and teens to take precautions seriously.
- Seek out and strengthen your relationship with local law enforcement.
 - Make sure they know who you are and where you live.
 - Know who to call not only for emergencies, but also to report worrisome behavior.
 - Building a relationship today can strengthen the protective response if an incident occurs.
- Talk about your concerns with friendly neighbors. Ask for an alert about anything unusual.

SELF-DEFENSE OPTIONS

Learning self-defense may give you confidence in the event of a confrontation. Consider taking a course in self-defense or other options available in your state or jurisdiction.

WHEN THREAT LEVELS RISE

Being prepared will make you feel calmer and give you assurance that you can act to protect yourself. Here are options if online harassment or other developments raise the threat level.



- **Safety in numbers:** Can trusted friends stop by? Friendly activity can ward off an unfriendly presence. Would they park a car out front to make the house look full, or let you dog sit?
- **Law enforcement presence:** Protective services could include patrols at intervals, a parked squad car or even active monitoring at your home.
- **Code words:** A family code word, a neutral-sounding phrase to signal danger, can help you communicate distress discreetly.
- **Unexpected packages:** Treat any unexpected delivery with caution.
- **Plan for staying elsewhere:** Be prepared to leave quickly if you feel unsafe at home.
 - **Have a site:** Could you stay with relatives, trusted friends or a hotel?
 - **Prep a Go Bag:** Pre-pack a bag for you and family members to leave quickly.

2 | Security Considerations for the Commute

PRECAUTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

- **Make your vehicle more anonymous:** Consider removing vanity plates, plate frames or bumper stickers that make your vehicle easily recognized.
- **Learn situational awareness:** Watch for anyone lingering in the parking lot or following your car or your path to transit.
- **Dashcam:** A dashcam or rear-facing camera can document incidents or suspicious vehicles.

WHEN THREAT LEVELS RISE

- **Vary your routes:** Avoid predictable routes to and from work or public appearances.
- **Location sharing:** If traveling alone, share your location with a trusted friend using FindMy or a similar app.
- **Buddy system:** When leaving the office late, or from a public event, ask someone to walk to the car with you or watch as you head out.

3 | Privacy, Cyber Security and Personal Information

One vulnerability for public figures is the ease with which personally identifiable information (PII) like home addresses, family member details, and phone numbers can be found and weaponized.

PERSONAL INFORMATION IN THE REAL WORLD

- **Consider who may be listening** before sharing personal information in public and semi-private settings like restaurants, public transit, or waiting rooms.
- **Put away toys and items visible in the yard** that may alert someone that you have children.
- **Remove bumper stickers that provide information,** like the schools your children attend.
- **Explore whether your state has a “safe at home” law** to shield your address in government databases like the voter file or provide a P.O. Box as an alternative to your home address.

CAUTION WITH ONLINE PII

Consider how much information you share on social media. Avoid posting pictures that identify your address or current location, especially at events like meetings of election officials.

Consider whether to make social media accounts private. This can be difficult – you may enjoy being rediscovered by old friends or feel a commitment to your public presence. And, harassment online, while disturbing, may help you recognize rising threat levels. But it can impede those targeting you.

Companies offer inexpensive removal ("scrubbing") of online personal information, by searching for it online and pushing data broker sites and other sources to take it down. Consider enrolling family members too.

WHEN THREAT LEVELS RISE

Since taking social media accounts private may reduce your situational awareness, consider asking someone, such as one of the organizations mentioned in this document, to monitor social media for you, to help you remain aware of important developments.

- They should not forward every ugly message, provoking more anxiety. Instead, they should:
 - **Look for actionable intel:** specific threats or awareness of details of your life that could prompt you to make changes.
 - **Provide general situational awareness** as levels of anger directed at you increase or subside

Among organizations offering threat monitoring, Social Scout (socialscout.llc) is one whose founder has presented on threat intelligence and patterning at CSSE conferences.

Outside Assistance

You may find advice, services like PII Scrubbing offered and security products like doorbell cams, discounted or gratis at these sites: DemocracyProtectionNetwork.org, PublicServiceAlliance.com, and ProtectOurElection.com.

Documentation

Documenting threatening incidents and suspicious behavior is critical, not only to increase the odds of prosecution, but also to facilitate law enforcement's decision process to deploy resources to help keep you and your colleagues safe.

- **When anything feels wrong, write it down.** Date, time, location, what was said or done, what the person looked like, vehicle description and plate number.
 - Odd details may assist in identification of a suspect.
 - Screenshot threats on your phone or computer, including the timestamp.
- Creepiness or surveillance behavior should be documented *even when it seems minor*.

Mental Health & Emotional Resilience

The psychological toll of threats and harassment is significant. It is not a weakness to seek support. It is a normal response to an abnormal situation.

- **Seek a therapist or trusted confidant:** They are part of your security infrastructure.
- A vile or deeply personal message reflects on the person harassing you, not on you.

OTHER RESOURCES

CSSE: FIVE STEPS TO SAFER ELECTIONS

Approach personal safety in the context of an office security plan using the Five Steps as a guide to cooperation with law enforcement and to best practices that can help.

CSSE: FOUR STEPS TO WORKING WITH CHALLENGING VISITORS

This guide offers tips for de-escalation, crisis management and law enforcement support when dealing with First Amendment Auditors, and other visitors who provoke concern or apprehension.

