

Tips for Covering Immigration

For Journalists and Editors

There are several safety measures and best practices you can follow before starting your coverage on immigration issues – like an ICE raid or meeting undocumented immigrants, or even an anti-deportation protest – to keep you safe and mitigate risk.

Evaluating and identifying your risk includes taking a holistic approach to your physical, digital, legal and psychosocial safety as well as the safety of your sources.

Protecting Sources:

When meeting with sources, could you or they be under surveillance, or, by meeting with them, are you exposing or endangering them to possible detention and/or deportation?

- **Pattern of life:** It's ideal not to meet sources at their home, workplace or any location they frequent on a daily or weekly basis.
- **Cover stops:** This counter-surveillance technique involves stopping at a public location – such as a mall, parking lot, or coffee shop – before or after meeting a source to observe if anyone is following you.

Communications Protocol

Establishing a communications protocol is a good way to inform your editor or colleague of your whereabouts, especially if the risk of unlawful or arbitrary detention is likely.

Asking someone to monitor your movements for an extended period can challenge resources. Instead, have someone monitor you for a short period of time, such as 3-4 hours, while covering an ICE operation or anti-deportation protest (for example).

A good communications protocol includes where you are going, including your itinerary and location, as well as your schedule.

- **Safe words:** During an interview, use a code word to inform a source of a possible detention or altercation with the police or other entities.
- **Identity risk:** BIPOC journalists, especially Latine journalists, are most likely to be attacked or arrested while covering immigration stories. Consider pairing with someone else while in the field or reduce your exposure by spending less time in the field or by widening your distance from authorities. Always be mindful of your positioning on the ground.

Entering the United States as a Journalist

At any U.S. port of entry, CBP agents have the authority to search electronic devices, including phones and laptops. These searches have increased recently at the most popular ports of entry when individuals come back into the country.

- If you are returning from reporting abroad, especially in the Middle East or Latin America, send sensitive footage and pictures through an encrypted application before entry
- Clean your phone of any sensitive pictures
- Work with a burner phone and/or laptop while traveling instead of your personal or professional phone. As an additional measure, ensure no sensitive information is stored on burner devices.
- Apply to Global Entry to reduce the scrutiny of having to speak with an agent one-on-one, reducing the likelihood of a second screening.

For Green Card holders and work visa holders:

- Conduct only essential travel outside of the U.S. Before traveling, speak with an immigration lawyer, especially if you are from any country on the travel ban or partial suspension lists.

U.S. Border

The U.S./Mexico and U.S./Canada borders are official ports of entry, and you should take the same protective measures you would when entering by air.

- U.S./Mexico border: CBP conducts checkpoints at almost every route within 100 miles of the U.S./Mexico border. Some of these checkpoints are permanent while others are temporary. CBP holds more authority than the police and can conduct more searches as well as arrest and detain non-U.S. citizens.
- U.S./Canada border: CBP conducts checkpoints at almost every route within 100 miles of the U.S./Canada border, too; and, although the same level of resources does not exist at the northern border, checkpoints have increased in recent months.

Note: The 100-mile border enforcement zone also includes 100 miles from any land or maritime border, including cities like Washington, D.C., or San Francisco.