

HOW TO

# PROTECT YOUR PHONE AND IDENTITY AT PROTESTS

To ensure that you and your community are able to participate in protest freely and safely it is important to understand the risks posed to your devices and the implications of facial recognition technology registering your identity.

**CONTEXT MATTERS FOR HOW  
YOU PLAN FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY  
AND THAT OF YOUR COMMUNITY**



Familiarizing yourself with these risks not only helps improve your readiness for a protest but also contributes to the digital safety of your communities and friends. Keep the following prompts in mind as you plan:

**Does your immigration status put you at greater risk? Does your race, ethnicity, gender identity and/or sexual orientation subject you to greater risk of being targeted?**

## **YOU MAY WANT TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:**

**CAN YOU MAKE CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR GETTING OUT OF THE PROTEST IF YOU FEEL UNSAFE?**

**DO YOU KNOW WHO TO CALL, AND HOW, IF THINGS GO WRONG OR IF YOU ARE DETAINED?**

**WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE TO GO WITH A GROUP OF TRUSTED FRIENDS OR COMMUNITIES WHO CAN SHIELD YOU?**

**DO YOU KNOW YOUR RIGHTS?**

**ARE YOU SURE IT IS SAFE FOR YOU TO CARRY AN IDENTITY DOCUMENT THAT DISCLOSES WHERE YOU WERE BORN?**

**DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE DETAINED?**

If you feel unsafe about attending a protest, consider how you might be able to spread the word on social media, raise attention by contacting lawmakers, or help prepare protest attendees instead.

# ALEX, JULIAN, AISHA AND MANISHA ARE PLANNING TO ATTEND A PROTEST.

Here is how they're preparing:



**ALEX**

- Alex is protesting with a couple of friends.
- They are bringing their phones to stay in touch, should they lose each other and to document any potential wrongdoing.
- They have installed VPNs on their phones, and are only using messaging apps with end-to-end encryption, such as Signal, to communicate.
- They have turned off their location services and disabled Wi-Fi and Bluetooth (which reduces their risk but makes them vulnerable to cell phone eavesdropping technology, known as IMSI catchers).
- Alex has also disabled thumbprint lock and face ID to make it harder for police to break into the device.



**AISHA**

- Aisha is protesting with a group of potentially at-risk individuals. She is herself at higher risk than many others of being targeted.
- Aisha brings her phone but switches it to airplane mode, which turns off location services and disables the Wi-Fi, GPS, NFC (the chip that allows you to pay with your phone), and Bluetooth signals that can otherwise track her location.
- Like Alex, Aisha has also disabled thumbprint lock and face ID to make it harder for police to break into her device. She has taken extra care to use a long, complex alpha-numeric passcode required to unlock her device.
- Concerned with being identified, Aisha applies face paint to the entirety of her face to obscure it to potential facial recognition.



**JULIAN**

- Julian has felt targeted before. He decides not to bring a phone, and stays close to a friend who has one instead.
- Julian's colleague was previously identified by officers using facial recognition. He opts to wear a face mask, and paints the upper parts of his face to obscure any attempt at recognition.



**MANISHA**

- Manisha is concerned about police accessing the content of her phone. As an activist, this could endanger her and her broader network.
- However, Manisha needs a phone to stay in touch with her community in case of emergency or to broadcast updates throughout the event.
- Manisha brings a burner phone (unused disposable prepaid phone) she purchased cheaply with a top-up card in a local store. The phone is kept on airplane mode until she needs it.
- Like Alex and Aisha, she has disabled thumbprint and face ID, opting for a complex and secure alphanumeric passcode instead.
- Concerned with people in her network being identified, Manisha brings a handful of full face masks to distribute.

**THESE MEASURES ARE NOT FOOLPROOF AND ARE NOT INTENDED AS LEGAL ADVICE, BUT AS EDUCATIONAL. ONLY USE THEM IF YOU FEEL SAFE DOING SO, AND IN CONSULTATION WITH YOUR COMMUNITY OR ALLIES YOU INTEND TO ATTEND THE PROTEST WITH.**

# WHAT TO DO BEFORE A PROTEST



## PROTECT YOUR FACE

There are many ways to protect your face before attending a protest which go beyond the use of masks. Although there is no comprehensive method for “tricking” facial recognition, Adam Harvey and the CV Dazzle project provide some useful tips.

1

### MAKEUP

**Avoid enhancers:** They amplify key facial features. This makes your face easier to detect. Instead apply makeup that contrasts with your skin tone in unusual tones and directions: light colors on dark skin, dark colors on light skin.

2

### NOSE BRIDGE

**Partially obscure the nose-bridge area:** The region where the nose, eyes and forehead intersect as a key facial feature. This is especially effective against OpenCV’s face detection algorithm.

3

### EYES

**Partially obscure one of the ocular regions:** The position and darkness of eyes is a key facial feature.

4

### MASKS

Note that anything you put on your face that’s not your face will help to reduce the face recognition similarity score. Even smiling will slightly change geometric and reduce your match score. Face accessories that are non-obvious will work best. Objects, such as glasses, have little to no effect.

5

### HEAD

Research from Ranran Feng and Balakrishnan Prabhakaran at University of Texas, shows that obscuring the elliptical shape of a head can also improve your ability to block face detection. Link: [Facilitating fashion camouflage art](#).

6

### ASYMMETRY

Facial-recognition algorithms expect symmetry between the left and right sides of the face. By developing an asymmetrical look, you may decrease your probability of being detected.

# WHAT TO DO BEFORE A PROTEST



## BE MINDFUL OF TRANSPORTATION

- Automated license plate readers that are installed all across New York City track nearly all cars and motorcycles.
- Police may photograph those parking near a protest.
- Police can access cashless payment records, such as E-Z Pass RFIC Transponders.



## BE MINDFUL OF YOUR ATTIRE

- Clothes with visible logos or slogans and visible tattoos can easily be tracked by police. Police often identify protesters in surveillance by what they are wearing.



## PROTECT YOUR PHONE

- A clean phone is a safer phone! Using a previously unused disposable prepaid phone can be far more private than a phone you've used before.
- By switching your cell phone to airplane mode when not needed to communicate, you can turn off cell reception (GSM and 3/4G), location services and disable the Wi-Fi, GPS, NFC, and Bluetooth signals that can track your location. These services can all be tracked by law enforcement even when the phone isn't being used.
- Disabling thumbprint lock and facial recognition can make it harder for police to break into the device. Setting your phone to use a long, complex alpha-numeric passcode that's required immediately upon locking can also make it harder for police to access your device.
- Messaging apps with end-to-end encryption, like Signal, add an additional layer of protection. Familiarize yourself with the apps you plan to use at the protest and make sure that they are all up to date.
- Backup your phone: make sure to back up all content, including contacts, SMS, media and any other personal content. Remember to back up your messaging apps too.
- Make sure your phone is charged. Pack a spare mobile battery or fully charged power bank if you can.
- Write down on a piece of paper, or even on yourself with a marker, important information such as an emergency contact or a lawyer's number.
- Top up your mobile phone credit and make sure you have enough data allowance.
- Consider setting up the "Find Your Phone" function so you can locate and wipe your phone remotely if you need to. Most smartphones provide a method to do this. Make sure you are familiar with it. You can find instructions here for Android and here for iPhone.

# WHAT TO DO DURING A PROTEST



## YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO RECORD

Federal courts recognize that recording police misconduct is an important part of exercising your First Amendments rights.

In New York, **you have a right to record officers in any public place**, so long as you do not interfere with police activity and maintain suitable distance.

Make sure you **bring additional power to charge your phone** as recording quickly drains your phone. You can save your battery life by switching your phone to airplane mode and turning down its brightness.

**Speak out the date, location, and describe what you're seeing while you're recording.** If you can capture newspapers, street names, intersections and other key landmarks, the video will be easier to verify. Live-streaming what you're witnessing can also be a powerful way of alerting your network and uploading evidence (but remember to download/retain a local version of the video, as social media platforms at times take down material).



## DON'T BE FOOLED

Authorities might be using either tactical equipment, such as rogue cell towers, or requesting mobile operators to produce data, in order to identify protesters. **When you are not making calls or accessing internet services, set the smartphone in Airplane Mode** to block transmissions and minimize tracking. Reducing unnecessary activity to a minimum also helps save battery life.



## BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND

Officers collect DNA samples from discarded soda cans, cigarette butts, and more. In New York, it is unclear what happens to this sensitive genetic data after it's collected. **Avoid throwing away any item with your saliva, hair, or blood on at protest sites.** It can be dangerous to smoke, eat, or drink anything offered by officers – instead, to mitigate dehydration, bring water yourself.



## WHO CAN YOU CALL IF THINGS GO WRONG?

**1-833-3-GOODCALL**

(1-833-346-6322) to quickly get connected to a free lawyer, no matter what borough you're in. NLG hotline is also available at: **(212) 679-6018**

# WHAT TO DO AFTER A PROTEST



## TAKE CARE NOT TO IDENTIFY YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Law enforcement maintains growing databases of community members it claims are “suspicious,” monitoring their content and associates. **What you post may be used against you in a court of law.** Posting images of protesters or tagging their name/ location may put them at risk.
- Tools such as “Image Scrubber” remove metadata from photos that can be used by police to track protesters. Or you can redact images by posting screenshots of the original photos and covering people’s faces with multiple emoji stickers.
- Make sure that tattoos, logos, and other identifying features are either invisible or obscured before posting.
- Avoid checking in yourself or anybody else on social media at a protest.



## IN CASE OF ARREST

- Immediately say **“I demand a lawyer and invoke my right to remain silent.”** Do not explain or justify this and if questioned simply repeat the demand.
- Even offhand remarks to police or other arrestees can endanger your rights.
- Law enforcement cannot access your camera roll or unlock your phone without your consent or without a warrant.
- Do not sign anything or agree to anything without an attorney present.
- Police should not listen to communications between you and your lawyer, but personal phone calls might be recorded.

**DISCLAIMER** This is for educational purposes and does not constitute legal advice

### OTHER RESOURCES:

[https://nlgnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/What-If-I-Get-Arrested-While-Im-Protesting\\_Booklet\\_June2020.pdf](https://nlgnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/What-If-I-Get-Arrested-While-Im-Protesting_Booklet_June2020.pdf)

[https://nlgnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/What-If-I-Get-Arrested-While-Protesting-One-Pager\\_June2020.pdf](https://nlgnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/What-If-I-Get-Arrested-While-Protesting-One-Pager_June2020.pdf)

[https://nlgnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/What-If-I-Get-Arrested-While-Protesting\\_Handout\\_June2020.pdf](https://nlgnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/What-If-I-Get-Arrested-While-Protesting_Handout_June2020.pdf)

[https://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/SafeyDuringProtest\\_F.pdf](https://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/SafeyDuringProtest_F.pdf)

[https://www.instagram.com/p/CBL30\\_KncY6/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CBL30_KncY6/)

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