

DOCUMENTING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN SRI LANKA

Filming for human rights can be dangerous.
Be Safe. Be Ethical. Be Effective.



WITNESS
SEE IT FILM IT
CHANGE IT



PREPARE

- ▶ Respect voter privacy and assess risks to yourself, interviewees and communities before you film.
- ▶ Stay in touch with community media or civil society organisations for support.
- ▶ Understand the potential dangers and plan accordingly. Always prioritise your safety and maintain a safe distance from volatile situations.
- ▶ In the situation of protest or unrest, have the proper equipment for protection. This includes masks and eyewear to ensure your safety in case of tear gas deployment.
- ▶ Prepare food, water and a basic medical kit.
- ▶ Familiarise yourself with election laws and regulations, especially with regard to media coverage /publications.

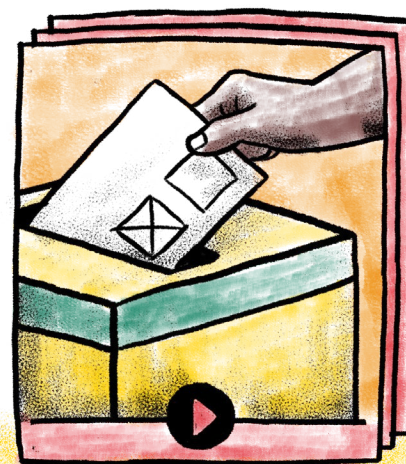


EQUIPMENT

- ▶ Prepare essential equipment and filter your devices by removing sensitive materials.
- ▶ Password-protect your smartphone. Do not use fingerprint identity sensors or facial recognition. Encrypt your smartphone or delete sensitive data.
- ▶ Charge your batteries. Consider getting a power bank or a portable power station for use during power outages.
- ▶ Always carry backup batteries, memory cards and recording devices in case of equipment failure.

CAUTION!

Filming inside polling stations is not permitted under Sri Lankan law.



WORK IN A TEAM

- ▶ Consider working in pairs or groups to increase your security and support. Plan and divide tasks between your team.
- ▶ Cultivate trustworthy connections within the community near the vicinity of the polling station, and engage with members of the election observers team to begin building a reliable network.
- ▶ If you're an election observer, journalist, or a member of the media, it is recommended to wear visibility items such as media vests, caps, or ID tags for easy recognition.
- ▶ Know your limits—both physically and mentally. Stay at the crowd's periphery and have a colleague keep watch whilst you film.
- ▶ Create a discussion group using an encrypted service like [WhatsApp](#)/[Signal](#)/[Wire](#) with your colleagues.
- ▶ In situations of electoral violence, it is crucial to strategise your exit plan. Ensure your vehicle is easily accessible, and your designated driver/team is on standby.



DATA PRESERVATION

- ▶ Free up storage space on your device.
- ▶ Enable auto-backup features, such as [Google Photos](#), [Save](#), or [Dropbox](#), to protect your data in case your phone is lost, damaged, or confiscated.

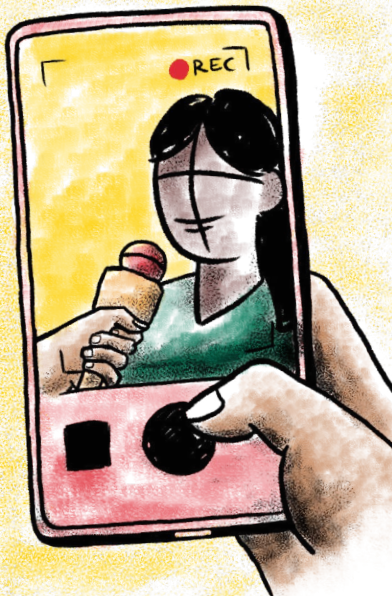
CAUTION!

Having a smartphone/ camera can make you a target. Keep a safe distance to stay clear of intimidation and/or attacks whilst filming.



VISUAL VERIFICATION

- ▶ Be vigilant about the integrity of media content. With the rise of Artificial Intelligence and new forms of media manipulation, verifying information has become increasingly challenging.
- ▶ Deepfakes can create realistic simulations of someone's face, voice, or actions, making it appear as though they said or did something they did not. There have been instances in Sri Lanka where doctored images misled voters about election outcomes.
- ▶ To fortify the truth, always verify information from multiple, credible sources and remain alert to misinformation that could impact public perception and electoral integrity.
- ▶ To help news media, courts and human rights organisations verify your video and prove its authenticity, turn on GPS (high accuracy).
- ▶ If safe to do so, speak into the camera/ mobile phone to verify that you are the one filming. Clearly state the date, the time and the location into the device.
- ▶ Confirm the location by filming street signs, intersections and/ or landmarks.
- ▶ You can use apps such as [Tella](#) or [ProofMode](#) to capture photos or videos with added metadata, location, and any additional details for verification.
- ▶ If you need to be anonymous for security reasons, use a code name and do not capture your own face or identity whilst filming.
- ▶ In certain instances, police and military personnel may conduct inspections of your mobile devices to check your apps, social media accounts, and/or files/media inside your phone.
- ▶ Always keep your original media files in a secure location. Do not make edits to the original file - always do so from a copy.



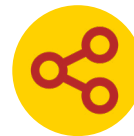
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FILMING TIPS

- ▶ Do no harm. Get permission from people before you film. Discuss potential safety risks if the video is to be shared publicly, online, or with authorities.
- ▶ Always keep a safe distance when recording. Record as much detail as possible when documenting human rights abuses and election-related misconduct.
- ▶ Capture a variety of shots to effectively document events. When possible, film incidents such as voters being intimidated, arrested, attacked, harassed, or turned away.
- ▶ Show whether candidates and their supporters were peaceful, or if they incited violence and/or carried weapons.
- ▶ If violators are members of specific groups or political parties, include details such as badges, flags, or stickers.
- ▶ Avoid zooming in if you can, as this blurs your focus. Get closer if safe to do so.
- ▶ Film in a way so that someone who is not present will be able to watch your video and understand what happened.
- ▶ When safe, get detailed shots of perpetrators, e.g. army, police, or government officials, as well as the surrounding crowds. Shots of injuries, election misconduct, electoral manipulations, or vote-buying need to be clear.
- ▶ Document those affected. To protect their identity, film crowds from behind and only record the backs of people's heads or their feet.
- ▶ If filming interviews, ensure that those you film are fully aware of how and where the video will be used.
- ▶ When it comes to filming sensitive details, protect interviewee, witnesses and/or victims. Only use audio to obfuscate their identity.
- ▶ If anonymity is needed, film only interviewees' hands while they speak or use blurring tools/apps such as [YouTube](#), [Signal](#), or tools in iOS.
- ▶ Remember that anyone can be identified by their voice, location, clothes and their companions, not just by facial identity.
- ▶ To maintain neutrality, avoid taking sides in a conflict during an election to minimise the risk of becoming a target. Cautiously record and provide facts. Be objective.



THINK BEFORE YOU SHARE

- ▶ Before sharing, consider speaking with a trusted activist/media organisation /international organisation or lawyer.
- ▶ Think twice before uploading your videos or livestream on a public channel (e.g. Facebook/X/ Youtube) as it may turn you or victims and their communities into open targets.
- ▶ If you do decide to upload your videos directly to social media or stream them live, reconsider disclosing your location. Avoid sharing GPS or a photo of well-known landmarks.
- ▶ If you decide to share the video on social media, e.g. Facebook/ Twitter/Youtube, add a brief descriptive title or caption that states that you are sharing this to expose a human rights violation.
- ▶ If you can, tag someone outside the country and ask them to save your videos.
- ▶ Always keep your original media files in a secure location. When sharing your video online, include the date, time and location in the video's title and tags, as well as details and contextualising links. Keep one edited and original copy of your footage offsite.
- ▶ If you are a victim of a digital attack, please report it to local digital security service providers.
- ▶ Consider sharing using alternative platforms, such as sharing your media via secure messaging apps like Signal.



VPN & ROAMING SIM

- ▶ If you can, be prepared with VPN and a roaming SIM in case of an internet shutdown. For more tips, check out our guide on [documenting during internet shutdowns](#).



SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

- ▶ [People's Action for Free and Fair Elections \(PAFFREL\)](#)
- ▶ [Centre for Monitoring Election Violence \(CMEV\)](#)
- ▶ [The Asian Network for Free Elections \(ANFREL\)](#)
- ▶ [Election Commission](#)
- ▶ [Manipulated media, and Sri Lanka's 2024 presidential election](#)

