



# Joint Guidance for Candidates in Elections

## When it goes too far



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## Why this guide?

Political debate and discussion underpin our democratic process. The freedom to engage in debate and disagree with others is a key component of public life.

Sometimes though, it can go too far. Over 50 MPs stood down at the 2019 UK General Election, many saying this was at least in part due to abuse they had received. Women suffer a disproportionate level of unacceptable behaviour. We all have a responsibility to challenge such behaviour, whether in public or in private.

This guide has been jointly produced by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), College of Policing and the Electoral Commission to help you recognise and respond to intimidatory behaviour.

## How will this guide help you?

It provides practical advice based on the past experiences of candidates and policing.

It also outlines relevant key indicators and offences, ways to protect yourself and links to other relevant information.

**Note:** Personal safety and cyber security briefings are available to all candidates – please contact your election force single point of contact (SPOC) for more information.

## What might happen in the election period?

The election period places pressures on candidates. This will include greater scrutiny on you and your political standpoint. You will be subject to heightened public exposure, and in some cases, unfortunately, so might those close to you.

For most candidates, and for most of the time, these pressures will not impact on your personal safety. However, there have been occasions where candidates have been exposed to unacceptable levels of harassment and intimidation. This can have a significant psychological impact on candidates and those close to them and can affect their wellbeing. In some cases, these behaviours and actions have reached the criminal threshold. The worst examples have led to violence and injury.

It is important to recognise what might happen and the action you can take. The advice contained in this guide applies to both your political and private life – harassment and intimidation may also be directed at your family, friends, and co-workers. In addition to occurring in public life, these behaviours and actions can primarily occur in virtual ('online') spaces.

## Protecting Yourself, Family, Friends and Colleagues

There are steps you can take to help protect yourself and others, for example:

- When at hustings or public meetings, be aware of your surroundings and if something or someone causes you to be concerned for your safety, report it to the police using 999 if the threat or danger is immediate and 101 to report suspicious activity that has already occurred.
- Consider your safety when canvassing and visiting voters at the door. While political debate is a key part of our democracy, if you feel unsafe then disengage. If possible, do visits accompanied, as a minimum tell someone where you are canvassing, and ensure you are making safe decisions on the doorstep.
- Keep records of any intimidating behaviour (what, where, when) – the more details the better.
- Do not engage with individuals who are stalking/harassing you (on and offline).
- Report intimidation to your internet service provider / mobile phone company.
- Use 'Report Abuse' tools on social media platforms.
- Block/report trolls. You can disable comments on the Meta platforms (Instagram and Facebook) on a post-by-post basis if necessary.
- Conduct an online health check - review online information and minimise availability of personal information.
- Seek advice from your local police force on personal safety and building security (e.g., home/workplace security survey)
- You should have been provided with a single point of contact for your force in your candidate letter, if you need to discuss crime or security concerns as a candidate then please use the contact details provided. Always call 999 in an emergency.

Further advice and information are available under the key contacts but if you feel you or others are in immediate danger, call police on 999.

## When Should I Contact the Police?

The actions and behaviours listed below may constitute a criminal offence and should be brought to the attention of your local police. [CPS guidance on responding to intimidating behaviour in elections and public office](#) provides more detail and information on types of criminal offences, for example:

- Communications, on or offline, which contain abusive or threatening language.
- Repeated unwanted contact may constitute harassment or stalking.
- Racial, homophobic or other discriminatory abuse or threats.
- Fixation on you or an issue associated with your campaign.

The following indicators ('red flags') may signal an escalation and should be brought to the immediate attention of your local police (dial 999):

- Threat of imminent violence.
- Fixated ideas – if someone seems set on a certain course of action or is making a very specific type of threat or reference to a plan.
- If you become aware that the individual has access to weapons or has weapons skills.
- If the person releases personal information about you not already in the public domain.

### Relevant offences

You can find further information on relevant offences from the link below:

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/responding-intimidating-behaviour-elections-and-public-office-cps-guide>

## Key Links

### Security guidance for elections

A collection of advice resources, including on cyber security, are available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/security-guidance-for-may-2021-elections>

### General advice, including on online safety

Get Safe Online: [www.getsafeonline.org](http://www.getsafeonline.org)

Suzy Lamplugh Trust: [www.suzylamplugh.org](http://www.suzylamplugh.org)

Victim Support: [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk) | Telephone: 08 08 16 89 111

### Advice for elected councillors and candidates

The Local Government Association also provides useful advice for councillors which is also relevant to candidates, for example, tackling online abuse. This is available from:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/civility-public-life-resources-councillors/handling-abuse-and>

And

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/communications-and-community-engagement/social-media-guidance-councillors>

### More general advice for candidates

Electoral Commission

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-guidance/candidate-or-agent>

College of Policing

<https://www.college.police.uk/app/policing-elections>

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