



How to Survive a Riot

Two Methods: [Surviving a Riot](#) [Additional Precautions for High-Risk Areas](#)

Though it may seem dramatic, an angry mob can be just as dangerous and unpredictable as just about any natural disaster. Thousands of people are killed in riots all over the world each year, and these riots erupt from a number of racial, religious, economic, political, or social causes that cannot be predetermined. If you've found yourself in the middle of a riot, you may not be able to run away immediately, but you can take some measures to protect yourself from harm. If you want to know how to survive a riot, just follow these steps.

Method
1

Surviving a Riot

1 Be prepared. If you know you're in an a riot-prone area but have no way to avoid being there, then taking a few simple precautions can have a big impact on your life. Though it's easier to assume that a riot won't happen in your area, it's better to be prepared for the worst. Even the calmest crowd can turn dangerous when its members are in a frantic, angry mood. Anger and hysteria are contagious, so it's best to know how to avoid these situations if they arise.^[1]

- Get familiar with your area. If you're just visiting a location for a season or two, you should still get to know your surroundings as intimately as possible. Study a map until you're very comfortable with the area where you work, the area where you live, and the routes between those.
- Think about your possible escape routes and safe havens before anything actually happens. Crossroads are good because you've got at least one road to race off down if rioters go crazy or the police start charging.
- If you work in a volatile environment, make sure you know several routes for getting home so that you have a number of methods of escape in the event of a riot.
- Carry small amounts of cash with you in case you need to quickly arrange transportation, pay off looters, or address your basic needs.

2 Remain calm. Riots bring intense emotions boiling to the surface, but if you want to survive one you'd be better off keeping your own emotions in check. Your adrenaline and survival instincts will kick in, but strive to think rationally and pursue safety methodically.

- Avoid confrontation by keeping your head down.
- Walk at all times. If you run or move too quickly, you might attract unwanted attention.

3 Keep your loved ones close. If you're not alone, then the first thing you should do is grip the hands or lock elbows with all of the people who are with you. If you're with a child, hold him in your arms so he doesn't get trampled. Sticking together with your loved ones should be your first priority -- your second should be finding a way out. Reassure the people you're with that you have strength in numbers and that you'll be fine if you stick together.

4 Don't get involved. If you're caught in a riot, the last thing you want to do is try to take sides, help out, or stand out. In fact, you should stand out as little as possible as you move to the outside of the mob and away from the action. To do this, stay close to the walls and other barriers, though avoid bottlenecks, or any areas where a lot of people are squeezing through a small space.

5 Drive appropriately if you're in a car. Unless your car is the focus for the angry mob in the riot, you should stay in the car and continue driving as calmly as possible. Try to keep to the streets that are clear of riots, and avoid the main roads that are more likely to be occupied. Keep moving forward and don't stop to assess the situation. If someone tries to block your car, honk your car and keep driving until he gets out of the way (of course, this doesn't mean you should hit the person.) Drive at moderate speed so they have time to back off and realize that you mean business.

- Remember that you're in a position of power when you're driving. Don't let a few angry people stop you from driving your car and keep going unless you absolutely can't.
- Many activists are afraid of cars because there have been cases of any drivers running down the protesters on the roads. Remember to be firm, but not aggressive, to avoid giving the wrong impression.

6 Move away from the riot as calmly as possible. If you're on foot, you should move away by going with the flow of foot traffic, not against it. If you go against the traffic, you're much more likely to stand out, to get stampeded, or just to get pushed or blocked. If you feel that you may fall down in the big crowd and get trampled, use your elbows to push down on the crowd so that it carries you. Though you may want to run for your life, you should move calmly and relatively slowly.

- Continue to move with the crowd until you can escape into a doorway, an alley, a side street, or a safe building.
- If you're in the middle of a crowd, it's especially important to try to move in the direction of the crowd until you may your way to the outside of the crowd.

7 Avoid heavy-traffic areas. To maximize your chances of safety, you should avoid the areas that are most likely to be crowded and show stay off the beaten path so you don't put yourself in a dangerous situation. Even if the heavy-traffic areas are your quickest path home, they won't be safest path if they are the targets of any rioters. Here's what you should do:

- Avoid major roads. Major roads, squares, and other high traffic areas are likely to be crowded with rioters. If possible, stick to less-traveled side streets to avoid the mobs.
- Avoid [public transportation](#). Buses, subways, and trains will likely be out of service, and stations and depots will probably be packed with people.

8 Move to a safe enclosed area. Riots most commonly happen outside on the streets, not inside buildings. Just by moving inside a sturdy and controlled building, you can protect yourself from the brunt of a riot. Any building with a basement, or even a sub-basement, can help you hide from a mob. Being in any safe building at all is safer than being out on the streets. Look for homes that can serve as "safe houses" in advance if you're really concerned about finding a safe space in the event of a riot. If you can, talk to the owners first.

- Lock the doors and windows and stay away from them. Though you may be tempted to watch the riot from the windows, this will increase your chances of getting hurt.
- Move to rooms that do not lead directly outside, to avoid getting hit by stones, bullets or other missiles.
- Look for at least two exits in the building in case you need to leave in a rush.
- Just look out for fire. If the angry mob turns toward the building, it can be a target.

9 Stay informed. Use the [social media](#) to alert you as to where to stay away from, as well as the local radio and news. Just as the rioters have started using social media and texting to alert one another where to go, you can flip this on its head and ask people to help you know where to stay away from. Messages informing you of which streets and areas are currently being targeted provide you with instantaneous warnings of where to avoid.^[2]

- Social media may provide new information as rapidly as possible, though it may not be as accurate, so keep your bases covered.
- Remember that staying informed can help you avoid a riot even better than it can help you survive it. Staying on top of the news can help you know which areas should be avoided in advance.

Method 2

Additional Precautions for High-Risk Areas

1 Wear safe clothes. Wear clothes that minimize the amount of exposed skin, such as long pants and long-sleeved shirts, when you go out. Do not wear clothing that could be interpreted as military or police wear. Do avoid wearing anything that looks like a uniform. Furthermore, if you do not want to be mistaken for a rioter by the police, avoid dark colored clothing, especially black hooded sweaters, since this type of clothing is associated with rioters in many countries around the world.

- Every crowd of rioters is unique. Though you can't do a costume change in the middle of a riot, you should try

to avoid looking like the rioters if you can. For example, if you're caught in a riot and are wearing the same sweatshirt as the rioters, take it off.

2 Carry a solution for rinsing your eyes in case you're exposed to tear gas. If you're worried that you may be exposed to tear gas, you should have a solution of half liquid antacid and half water (spray is better than stream and it's available in many drug stores and larger stores) and use it to rinse eyes in case you are exposed to tear gas.

- You can also carry toothpaste with you and smear it under your eyes if tear gas is released and you have nothing else available to protect you.
- Another good thing to bring is a rag soaked in lemon juice or vinegar in a plastic bag, this can be used to breathe through for some protection against gas.^[3]

3 Keep your documents on your person if you're traveling abroad. If you're traveling abroad, register with your country's consulate and carry your [passport](#) and/or visa with you at all times. Even domestically, have ID and emergency contact information on you in case you are arrested or become unconscious.

4 Carry an extra cell phone. If you're walking around a high-risk area, you should take your telephone, two if possible (one in your pocket and one in a bag). If one is lost or taken, you still have another one.^[4]

5 Have sugar candy on hand to keep up your energy. Adrenaline will drain you of energy quickly and a sugar hit will help you move out faster.^[5]

6 Avoid being hit by riot control chemicals or weapons. Police may deploy riot control agents (tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets, for example) to disperse a crowd. These weapons and chemicals can cause severe pain, respiratory distress, and blindness. Try to stay away from the front lines of a riot, and learn to recognize the signs that a riot control agent has been used and how to handle exposure.

- Avoid wearing oil based moisturizer or sunscreen as chemicals cling to these on your skin. Remove with detergent-free soap before going near the riot.^[6]
- Wear glasses rather than contact lenses; tear gas behind contact lenses is unimaginable pain. Swimming goggles can protect eyes, or a gas mask.^[7]
- Put wet bandannas in a plastic bag and carry these for your mouth. Wrap them around your mouth if tear gas is released. They need constant replacement as they will keep soaking up the gas.^[8]
- Wear vinyl or [latex gloves](#) to protect your hands from pepper spray; the nerve endings will make them feel like agony if sprayed.^[9]
- Carry spare clothes to change if you're hit by chemicals or a water cannon. Put them in a plastic bag for protection.
- Avoid rubbing your hands or fingers into eyes, nose, mouth etc. after a chemical attack. [Stay calm](#).

Tips

- Riots don't start out of thin air. Generally, there may be signs of public anger and violence at least one day (in some cases even 3-4 days) before the actual riot. Reading the newspapers and following the news may give you a warning about impending protests, rallies, marches etc. Being informed and avoiding troubled areas may be your best defense.
- When in the middle of a tear gas attack, stay out of the fire line of police. Gas canisters fired from launchers will cause significant injury upon impact.
- If a riot breaks out in a stadium, your response should be different depending on where you are in relation to the rioters. If you are in the midst of a riot, you should try to quickly move to an exit.
- Don't run and try not to jostle others. If you are at some distance from the action, stay where you are unless instructed to move by police or security personnel. Don't rush for the exits unless you're in imminent danger. People are frequently trampled by stampeding crowds near exits.
- Some gas is not very heavy, and some is, so it's best to avoid clouds and gas at all. Never touch your eyes or try to clean your tears; you will only smear them in your face causing yourself more pain.
- Stay away from contact all times.

Warnings

- Do not try to confront rioters or looters to prevent property damage. No material thing is worth your life.
- Do not approach police lines to attempt to cross to safety. Police are in place to confine the unrest and prevent its spread. Their orders are usually not to allow anyone to pass. The use of riot control measures, including rubber bullets, tear gas, and water cannons originate from the police line, and the likelihood of injury is greatest there.
- If you fall down, pull yourself up into a ball. Protect your face, ears and internal organs. In this position you are a smaller object that can be avoided. You will receive less damage if you are stepped on. If others trip on you they will help create a larger "pile" that rioters will avoid.
- Watch your footing in a mob situation. If you stumble and fall to the ground you're likely to be trampled. This is especially dangerous in stadiums and other enclosed areas, where many unfortunate victims have been crushed to death.
- Never touch a tear gas canister with bare hands; once discharged they're very hot.^[10]

Things You'll Need

- Dark clothing, not uniform or militaristic style
- Toothpaste, vinyl or latex gloves
- Helmet
- Safe places to go to
- Social media tools
- Personal medical kit, including asthma inhaler or allergy gear
- Documentation such as a passport or ID in case you're arrested
- Bulletproof vest (for war zones, for journalists, for anyone who uses this gear for work purposes)

Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.atmosphericunlimited.com/blog/2013/05/how-to-survive-a-riot/>
2. <http://www.atmosphericunlimited.com/blog/2013/05/how-to-survive-a-riot/>
3. Rosie Garthwaite, *How to avoid being killed in a war zone*, p. 92, (2011), ISBN 978-1-60819-585-5

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