

# COMBATING PRESSURE FROM ‘CITIZEN JOURNALISTS’

## WHO IS BEING TARGETED

- Mayors and city managers
- Judges and judicial officers
- County commissioners
- Police officers and command staff
- Police chiefs and police commissioners
- City council members and agency leadership

These campaigns are often personalized, persistent, and designed to create public pressure rather than inform constituents.

## HOW THESE CAMPAIGNS OPERATE

These actors frequently:

- Publish confrontational videos styled as “investigative reporting”
- Conduct ambush interviews or public confrontations
- Selectively edit content to provoke outrage
- Conceal who is funding or directing their efforts
- Advance a litigation agenda, political objective, or personal grievance
- Attempt to provoke emotional reactions that can lead to legal or ethical missteps

Because these individuals are not attorneys, they are not constrained by the ethical rules that govern legal advocacy, allowing litigants or political actors to apply indirect pressure that would otherwise be prohibited.

## RISKS TO PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND INSTITUTIONS

- Damage to personal and institutional credibility
- Increased legal exposure
- Disruption of government services
- Emotional and professional stress on staff
- Undermining public trust in institutions
- Interference with judicial independence and due process

Reactive responses or emotional engagement often escalate the situation and worsen outcomes.

## OPERATIONAL DISRUPTION TACTICS

Beyond reputational harm, these campaigns can intentionally disrupt government operations. By mobilizing followers, pressure actors can:

- Flood phone lines with coordinated calls
- Overwhelm staff with emails and messages
- Consume time and resources responding to non-constituents
- Interfere with routine government services

In many cases, participants live far outside the area sometimes hundreds or thousands of miles away but their coordinated actions can severely impact local operations.

## IMPORTANCE OF ADVANCE PREPARATION

These campaigns are difficult to counter once they begin. Playing catch-up after an onslaught is underway is costly, disruptive, and rarely effective. Public officials and agencies must prepare in advance by:

- Identifying potential vulnerabilities
- Establishing response protocols
- Coordinating legal and communications strategies
- Training staff on escalation and message discipline
- Preparation is the most effective defense.

## STRATEGIC RESPONSE AND SUPPORT

Margulies Communications Group collaborates with legal teams and public officials to:

- Analyze third-party pressure efforts
- Assess reputational and operational risk
- Develop response strategies aligned with legal objectives
- Neutralize misleading narratives without escalating conflict

As digital media increasingly intersects with litigation, governance, and public accountability, public officials must be prepared for this emerging form of extrajudicial pressure before it happens, not after.