

ELECTION 2023:

MANAGING ANTI-DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES



FACT
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ANTI-DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE'S MEETING DISRUPTION TECHNIQUES

In private and limited-access social media groups, a small number of prospective candidates and their supporters are sharing unpopular, hateful, misinformed and anti-democratic sentiments and viewpoints. Sometimes they have no expectation of getting elected.

They simply want to spread ideas that are unpleasant to most of us. As they are consistently deplatformed and deprived of opportunities to spread hate, distrust and misinformation, they intend to use an election meeting as an opportunity to share their ideas with a generally reluctant public.

Community and local groups offering “meet the candidates” opportunities are likely to have to deal with such people. There were a small number in the last general election and numbers appear to be growing.

The experience in such groups was that candidates like this appeared with a small number of vocal supporters, talked off-topic to address their personal concerns and were supported by “audience” who dominated the questions, sidelining the rest of the public and issues relevant to the election. Attempts to include the general public were met with objections of silencing and loud claims that their statements were being ignored.

BALANCING DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

There are legitimate candidates with diverse views whose democratic engagement must be protected, as well as candidates with minority views who are also entitled to have their time in front of the electorate.

Public engagement is important and valuable, and protecting engagement opportunities is part of that. Thank you for the work you do. This information is designed to support the goal of keeping public engagement events useful and rewarding for the public.

RUNNING A PUBLIC EVENT

Problematic candidates will not declare themselves as such, but you can be prepared for them. The procedures we suggest will ensure that all candidates get a fair hearing and the needs of the audience are met. Events will be more engaging and informative for everyone. Organisers are not required to distinguish between legitimate candidates and others, but to ensure democratic engagement meets everyone's needs.

PREPARING FOR YOUR EVENT

When you invite candidates, ensure they know that the event will be actively moderated, and that agreeing to participate, they are agreeing with your moderation standards. If you have planned the structure of your event before the invitations are issued, it's helpful to share that with the candidates.

Most events allow a short speaking time for each candidate, and questions at the end after everyone has spoken. The audience should be told what the expectations are at the beginning of the meeting. Most audience members will appreciate good process.

You need to decide:


- If speaking is timed, will you have a warning before the time is up, so candidates can close?
- How will you manage candidates that don't stop when their time is up?
- If there is amplification (a PA) can it be easily turned off?
- Do you have an MC confident enough to interrupt a candidate?
- Can your MC manage audience interjections?

FACT Aotearoa recommends:

Have three facilitation roles. Support your M.C. with someone to keep time as well as a stage manager. Let the M.C. know what your policies are ahead of time, and help them adhere to them.


THE QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Questions from the floor can be an excellent way of responding to local concerns but can also be a place where the conversation is derailed. Long and personal statements can be presented as questions and sometimes the questions are confusing or irrelevant.



Tip: Prepare a process for written questions. Time the answers.

Note: not everyone is confident in writing, so some people will be excluded with this option.



Tip: using a timer and loud alarm on a phone will help time for all speakers. Questions from the floor can also be timed (to 30s, for example).

FACT Aotearoa recommends:

Written questions curated by the MC or a designated person ensure that the content is relevant, avoids repetition, and improves democratic engagement. The MC should be in charge of the process, should be firm about repetitious questioning and can also manage any confusion about the meaning of questions. This is also an opportunity to produce reserve questions when the audience has none. Preparation includes making question boxes, having paper slips and working pens available.

Other question-time advice

If your time allows for a refreshment/chat break, having it before question time is a good opportunity to offer “question writing support” that can help with reluctant writers who have something they struggle to share. You can let people know you will collate similar questions. By curating questions, you ensure a range of topics are covered. At the end of the meeting a shorter spoken questions round can be opened, which will be easier to shut down if things go bad.

A 2 minute “talk to the person beside you” before opening the floor can generate better questions. A local MC may be able to nominate reliable questioners from the floor, and if you have an identified disruptive candidate, any signs that they have a partisan support crew should be noted to avoid giving them all the time (they are entitled to some, of course).



Tip: There are some free apps (Sildo, Vivox, Kahoot! and more) that allow attendees to ask questions using their phones and support other questions which are being asked.

ADVICE FOR CANDIDATES

If you are invited to a meeting as a candidate.

If you have been invited to a meeting, it's a good idea to verify that the group that's organising the meeting is legitimate and committed to good democratic process. Give the organiser a ring and discuss their reason for the meeting and the process or procedures they intend to follow. Don't assume the venue indicates who is organising the meeting.

Bring at least one supporter with you for good vibes. Leave promptly if there is disruption - there is no benefit in trying to talk to those who don't listen. Be polite but honest. If you are concerned for your own or anyone's safety, call 111.

Concerned a candidate is going to be disruptive?

Email us for help identifying disruptive candidates.

media@factaotearoa.nz

For further information visit our website

Let's take on the misinformation.

factaotearoa.nz

Who are we?

This information is produced by

FACT Aotearoa (Fight Against Conspiracy Theories Aotearoa).

We are a grassroots group that fights misinformation in New Zealand. Contact us at **info@factaotearoa.nz**

The logo for FACT Aotearoa features the word "FACT" in a bold, orange, sans-serif font, with the word "aotearoa" in a smaller, black, lowercase sans-serif font directly below it. The text is contained within a white rounded square with a black border.

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