

Artist's Decision Tree

What To Do if You're Asked to Boycott, Withdraw or Take a Political Stance

Use this step-by-step guide to navigate the situation calmly, lawfully and strategically.

Step 1 - Identify the Nature of the Pressure

Ask yourself:

- Is this a **personal request** from peers or colleagues?
- Is it a **public campaign** (e.g. open letter, social media post)?
- Is it **institutional or contractual** (e.g. a venue, publisher or funder asking you to withdraw)?

➔ **If personal:** Go to **Step 2**

➔ **If public:** Go to **Step 3**

➔ **If institutional:** Go to **Step 4**

Step 2 - Personal Pressure from Peers

You have the right to **refuse political participation** and to protect your artistic integrity.

Ask:

- Am I being asked to make a political statement or to take part in a collective action?
- Could refusal lead to reputational damage or threats?

Action:

- Stay polite and firm: "Thank you for your view - I prefer to keep my work independent of political campaigns."
- Avoid debating online; if targeted, screenshot and document everything.
- Contact your agent, union or FITA for confidential advice.

➔ If threats escalate or you're being harassed, go to **Step 5 (Protect & Record)**.

Step 3 - Public Campaigns or Social Media Pressure

- Check if the campaign is legitimate, coordinated or anonymous.
- Never respond impulsively - screenshots can be taken out of context.
- Prepare a **brief, values-based statement** (see templates below).
- If possible, align your public position with your agent, venue or publisher's communications team.

➔ Go to **Step 5 (Protect & Record)**.

Step 4 - Institutional or Contractual Pressure

If a venue, festival or funder asks you to cancel or withdraw:

- Ask for written clarification: Who made this request?
What policy is it based on?
- Refer to **contract terms** (cancellation clauses, payment conditions).

- Seek immediate **legal or union advice** before agreeing to changes.
- You have rights under **freedom of expression and anti-discrimination law**.

➔ Go to **Step 6 (Respond & Document)**.

Step 5 - Protect & Record

- **Document all communications** (emails, DMs, screenshots).
- Avoid emotional replies.
- **Do not delete** social media posts or messages until advice is sought.
- If there's harassment, report it to the platform and/or police (if threatening).
- Write an **impact statement**, documenting the effect on you of the harassment.
- Notify FITA or your union for support.

Step 6 - Respond & Document

- Use a neutral, factual tone.
- Keep correspondence brief and courteous.
- Store all correspondence safely.
- Reflect before making any public statement.

➔ Proceed to **Step 7 (Aftercare)**

Step 7 - Aftercare

- Debrief with a trusted colleague or advisor.
- If the experience was distressing, consider professional wellbeing support.
- Update your personal or company **freedom of expression statement** for future clarity.

Tips for When You Are Under Pressure

When artists come under boycott pressure, public criticism or demands to withdraw, the experience can feel immediate and overwhelming. The instinct is often to respond quickly, explain yourself or try to regain control of the narrative. In reality, the most protective response is usually slower and more measured. The priority is not winning an argument – it is protecting your safety, your reputation and your agency.

What tends to help is creating space. You do not need to respond immediately. Time reduces risk and allows emotion to settle. If online pressure becomes intense, reducing direct exposure can make a significant difference. Stepping back from social media – even briefly – prevents reactive decisions. If necessary, ask someone you trust to monitor messages so you are not absorbing the impact alone.

In many cases, less communication is more effective. One short statement – or none at all – is often sufficient. Consistency matters more than detailed explanation. Multiple statements, clarifications or updates can unintentionally extend the life of a controversy. Quietly documenting what is happening is far more useful. Save messages, emails and posts. Keep dates and screenshots. Where possible, ask for concerns or demands to be put in writing. A clear record protects you if matters escalate.

It is also important to hold boundaries. You are not required to sign statements or adopt political positions as a condition of work. Pressure can make requests feel compulsory when they are not. Seeking support early strengthens your position. Agents, managers or unions can provide distance, perspective and practical advice before situations affect contracts or venues. Most campaigns diminish once they are no longer fuelled – what feels permanent in the moment is often temporary.

What tends to make situations worse is acting while distressed. Posting in the heat of the moment often escalates rather than resolves. Feeling compelled to speak immediately can create unnecessary exposure. Silence is not failure – you are allowed to pause. Trying to manage everything alone increases stress and narrows judgement. Fear can drive pre-emptive withdrawal, yet withdrawing too quickly often causes more reputational harm than waiting for clarity. Online outrage can feel all-consuming, but it is rarely sustained.

Above all, remember this. You cannot be compelled to take a political position as a condition of work. Protecting yourself is professional – not defensive. Calm, proportionate responses reduce risk. You are allowed to take time.