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Safe and Sane Campaigns

The appalling attack on Gov. George C. Wallace is already evoking a flood of sociological comment, some of it probably valid, but most of it too abstract to serve the overriding need of the moment. That need is to make it physically safe for men to campaign for high office and to govern when they attain it—in short, to carry on the processes of democratic government. The situation calls less for theorizing than for a hard look at some pertinent aspects of recent assaults on public figures—and some decisive steps to prevent their repetition.

Of the four men convicted or accused in the shooting of President Kennedy, Senator Kennedy, Dr. King and Governor Wallace, not one was a political assassin in the traditional sense of a disciplined and deliberate killer committing an act of terror on behalf of a coherent political group. Instead, all were "loners," apparently mentally or emotionally deranged in some degree. Since hundreds of thousands of people in the country fit this description, any of whom can buy a gun, and since the candidates constantly make targets of themselves, it is remarkable that attempts on the lives of the prominent are not even more frequent.