# Boris Johnson warns Britain risks police state amid rising free speech arrests under Starmer



Britain is at a critical juncture concerning civil liberties, with a stark warning from former Prime Minister Boris Johnson that the country risks becoming a police state under the current Labour leadership of Sir Keir Starmer. The alarm was sounded amidst a tumultuous debate over free speech, particularly highlighted by the case of Lucy Connolly, a mother sentenced to 31 months in prison for inciting racial hatred through a social media post following the tragic Southport murders.

Connolly's tweet, which urged followers to "set fire to the hotels" housing migrants shortly after three girls were killed, has ignited fierce nationwide discussions. Johnson condemned the court's handling of Connolly's case as a harbinger of a declining reputation for free speech in the UK. He emphasized that the police are now making over 10,000 arrests annually for online comments, a figure which, he claims, surpasses those in even more repressive regimes, such as Russia. This sentiment echoes concerns that a wider culture of fear is permeating society, where citizens may hesitate to express legitimate opinions due to the threat of legal repercussions.

The case has drawn comparisons between Connolly's lengthy sentence and the notably more lenient treatment of violent offenders. Justice spokesperson Robert Jenrick highlighted the disturbing reality of multiple offenders, including domestic abusers and shoplifters, receiving lighter sentences than Connolly for far graver crimes. This disparity has led to allegations of a two-tiered justice system, raising questions about priorities in law enforcement and societal treatment of different offences.

Connolly's supporters, including her husband Ray, argue that while her comments were indeed shocking, they were made in a moment of emotional turmoil following the murders. Ray Connolly insists that his wife has been unjustly isolated from her family for a social media post that was quickly deleted and deemed a "stupid mistake." The widespread criticism of Connolly's sentence reflects a growing unease around the balance between upholding social justice and preserving free speech.

The case occurs against a backdrop of escalating tensions fueled by misinformation, particularly regarding immigration and crime. Starmer's government is grappling with consequences related to recent far-right riots, which erupted following fatal incidents wrongly attributed to migrants. Riots swept through various parts of the UK, resulting in nearly 400 arrests and prompting significant discussions within government circles about the adequacy of current online safety legislation.

As misinformation spreads rapidly online, it complicates the response to such events. The government's Recent Online Safety Bill, designed to regulate and mitigate harmful content, faces pressures for an even more robust approach to tackle misinformation. Critics argue that this legislation does not adequately address the issue, leaving room for further escalation of online extremism, which Starmer has described as a "cesspit."

In light of these events, the government is contemplating an urgent approach to rework existing laws. Authorities are exploring options to broaden the scope of online regulations in the aftermath of the riots, which have exposed vulnerabilities in how social platforms handle incendiary content. Cases are being expedited, and additional police presence is being mobilised to counter the far-right's influence in these disturbances.

Starmer himself has committed to a firm stance against such extremism, promising that those involved will face swift legal action. His government has also begun working alongside law enforcement agencies to monitor online activities more closely, revealing a determination to confront the dangers posed by misinformation and politically motivated violence.

The intersection of these issues—civil liberties, free speech, and public safety—creates a complex tapestry that the current government must navigate carefully. With citizen concerns about justice, safety, and rights hanging in the balance, the conversations sparked by Connolly's case and related events will likely shape the political landscape for years to come.

### Reference Map

1. Articles [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14733351/Boris-Johnson-Starmer-turning-police-state.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/08/06/uk-s-prime-minister-starmer-experiences-first-major-crisis-with-far-right-riots_6710345_4.html), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/a6f39365-8f2a-4893-b6a1-72d255f15202), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/4e004944-f80d-4690-a25d-76cdcfe06678)
2. Articles [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/108be37c-b6d4-4694-9da5-45fa9a4f25ae), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/d026a8d1-26d1-494d-83dc-5ff0204388e8), [[7]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-58980384)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14733351/Boris-Johnson-Starmer-turning-police-state.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/108be37c-b6d4-4694-9da5-45fa9a4f25ae> - UK police have obtained a 36-hour extension to detain a 21-year-old suspect from Sydenham, London, in connection with a series of suspected arson attacks targeting Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer. The incidents include fires at Starmer's family home in Kentish Town, a vehicle previously owned by him, and another associated property in Islington. These attacks, which have caused property damage but no injuries, are being investigated by counterterrorism police, though the suspect is not being held under the Terrorism Act. Authorities are still determining whether the attacks were politically motivated or part of a coordinated campaign. In Parliament, Starmer described the incidents as assaults on his family, democracy, and shared national values. Opposition leader Kemi Badenoch expressed her support. Police investigations continue to explore various leads to determine connections between the incidents and any motives behind them.
3. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/08/06/uk-s-prime-minister-starmer-experiences-first-major-crisis-with-far-right-riots_6710345_4.html> - UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer is facing his first major crisis, only a month into his term, following intense far-right riots. On August 5, an emergency government meeting was convened after rioters attacked people of color, emergency shelters, and mosques across England and Northern Ireland. The violence stemmed from misinformation regarding a knife attack in Southport, falsely attributed to a Muslim asylum seeker. Starmer condemned the violence and pledged a robust police response, emphasizing that online and offline criminal behavior would be prosecuted. Nearly 400 arrests had been made by August 5, with some rioters already appearing in court. Although Starmer seeks to manage the situation swiftly, his government's efforts are hampered by the prison capacity crisis. The riots highlight the impact of social media misinformation, with platforms criticized for enabling far-right coordination. Conservatives have refrained from blaming the nascent government, while left-wing and charity leaders point to the long-standing anti-migrant rhetoric of previous Tory administrations as a contributing factor. Anti-racist organizations are preparing responses to potential future rallies.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/d026a8d1-26d1-494d-83dc-5ff0204388e8> - The UK government is reconsidering the implementation of controversial powers to compel internet companies to remove 'legal but harmful' content following recent far-right riots exacerbated by misinformation on social media. Authorities have not made definitive decisions yet, but there is a focus on tightening online laws within the country. The riots were fueled by false rumors spread on platforms like X and Facebook. The Online Safety Bill, passed last year, grants extensive powers to Ofcom to regulate large tech companies that fail to control illegal content. However, current legislation only addresses deliberate misinformation intended to cause harm. Some, such as London Mayor Sadiq Khan, have criticized the law as insufficient. The current administration is considering reactivating previous provisions to combat misinformation related to the recent riots. The new government is under pressure to act swiftly, as figures like Elon Musk have exacerbated tensions with provocative comments. Meanwhile, a new investigative unit has been established to address instigators of violent disorder both on the streets and online.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/a6f39365-8f2a-4893-b6a1-72d255f15202> - Keir Starmer will lead the government's Cobra emergency response team on Monday to counter far-right violence, promising 'swift justice' for weekend rioters. Courts and additional prosecutors are on standby to expedite cases, as arrests have reached 420 following violent clashes, looting, and attacks on hotels housing asylum seekers. Cooper, the home secretary, mentioned potential increased policing and legislation for social media companies to combat online incitement. Far-right activist Tommy Robinson has been accused of stoking tensions online. Senior Conservatives have also condemned the disorder, criticizing misinformation and irresponsible social media use.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/4e004944-f80d-4690-a25d-76cdcfe06678> - Sir Keir Starmer has stated that extremist groups involved in the recent violent riots across England will face the full weight of the law. These riots followed the tragic killing of three girls in Southport, which ignited further unrest fueled by far-right agitators. Over 90 arrests were made in cities such as Liverpool, Bristol, and Manchester after violent encounters with the police. In response, more than 4,000 extra police officers have been deployed nationwide, and courts may remain open around the clock to handle the increased number of cases. The government and local leaders are working to address the violence, with measures such as social media monitoring to curb misinformation and potential travel bans as enforcement options. Efforts are also being made to support affected communities and families, including increased access to mental health services.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-58980384> - Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer is demanding urgent government action to 'clean out the cesspit' of online extremism. He offered to work with Prime Minister Boris Johnson to fast-track new online safety laws. Mr Johnson promised to get the first stage of the long-awaited Online Safety Bill through the Commons by Christmas. He said it would include criminal sanctions for those allowing 'foul content' - but did not confirm whether that would include company directors. Labour is calling for the directors of internet firms to be held liable for the content of messages posted on their sites. Speaking at Prime Minister's Questions, Sir Keir said it was now three years since the government had promised a crackdown on online extremism and hate speech but the proposals had yet to begin their passage into law. 'Meanwhile, the damage caused by harmful content online is worse than ever,' he told MPs. He criticised 'dangerous algorithms' on Facebook and Instagram - and said he had been shown examples of 'violent Islamism and far-right propaganda' on TikTok, a social media site popular with teenagers. But he added: 'Telegram has been described as the app of choice for extremists.'