# Kneecap controversy exposes tensions between free speech and political responsibility in British music



The landscape of British music and its intersection with socio-political commentary has long been a contentious arena, marked by evolving norms of expression and public reception. Recently, the Irish hip hop group Kneecap has reignited debates surrounding free speech, political expression, and the implications of lyrical content, particularly following the release of clips from their performances that appear to encourage violence against politicians.

The controversy began with a video clip in which a member of Kneecap declared, “The only good Tory is a dead Tory; kill your local MP,” drawing significant backlash. Moreover, reports emerged of the group allegedly expressing support for Hamas and Hezbollah, organisations that are banned in the UK. These remarks quickly escalated into a broader discussion about the responsibilities of artists in their public statements and performances.

The Eden Project in Cornwall, where Kneecap was scheduled to perform, took action by cancelling their gig planned for July, citing concerns over the violent implications of the group's comments. This decision was mirrored by the cancellation of several shows in Germany. However, despite this pushback, Kneecap is still scheduled to perform at the TRNSMT festival in Glasgow, prompting speculation about whether that appearance would materialise given the heightened scrutiny.

In response to the outcry, former Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill, currently leader of the Alba party, described the backlash as “ludicrous”, suggesting that the statements were “throwaway remarks” taken out of context. This sentiment of contextual misunderstanding echoed through public discourse, with some defending the artistic freedom of the group while others condemned the remarks as incitements of hatred.

Niall Christie, a charity worker and supporter of the Scottish Greens, commented on social media regarding the backlash, indicating a preference for artistic expressions that support political causes, specifically noting, “Things welcome in Glasgow: Artists standing in solidarity with Palestinians.” This indicates a sentiment within certain segments of the public that prioritises political alignments over the consequences of inciting violence.

Conversely, notable figures from the Scottish music scene reacted more critically. First Minister John Swinney deemed Kneecap’s comments as "beyond the pale" and called for their removal from the upcoming line-up at TRNSMT. In contrast, some musicians, like Stuart Murdoch from Belle and Sebastian, attempted to navigate the complex terrain by framing the issue as one of free speech rather than outright incitement to violence.

Meanwhile, a coalition of over 40 musical acts, including renowned artists such as Paul Weller, Shirley Manson, and members of Pulp and Massive Attack, offered their support to Kneecap, framing the situation as a concerted effort to censor artistic expression. They invoked terms such as "democracy" and "political repression," suggesting that the response to Kneecap's remarks was disproportionate and stifling of artistic freedom.

As debates unfold across media platforms and public forums about the complexities of free expression and public accountability, Kneecap maintains that their comments were misrepresented and do not reflect an intention to incite violence. They have stated that their intention in performance is not to promote harm but rather to engage with political narratives that resonate with their audience.

The incident underscores the changing dynamics of cultural discourse in Britain, where expressions of dissent, even when veiled in artistic representation, can attract intense scrutiny. The ongoing discussion reflects a broader societal examination of the limits of acceptable discourse and the repercussions of public statements made by influential figures in music and art. As the festival season approaches and performances continue, the conversations surrounding Kneecap's engagements are likely to evolve, further emphasising the intricate balance between free speech and social responsibility within the arts.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://apnews.com/article/3cc86cf249c366554dee3cf5dd498fdc> - This article reports on British counterterrorism police investigating Kneecap following controversial comments made during concerts, including statements about violence against politicians and support for banned organizations.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/2a228472-da0f-4d7f-81f3-dbbbf23455ae> - This piece discusses the controversy surrounding Kneecap's performances at Coachella, where they displayed slogans such as 'Fuck Israel. Free Palestine,' leading to accusations of antisemitic hate speech and calls for prosecution.
* <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/irish-rappers-kneecap-apologise-families-murdered-uk-lawmakers-2025-04-29/> - This article covers Kneecap's apology to the families of murdered UK lawmakers Jo Cox and David Amess following resurfaced footage from their 2023 performance, where a member appeared to make violent remarks about MPs.
* <https://www.kingsbridge-today.co.uk/news/rap-group-kneecap-cancelled-from-eden-sessions-over-kill-your-local-mp-comment-788926> - This news piece reports on the cancellation of Kneecap's performance at the Eden Project in Cornwall due to controversy over a resurfaced clip in which a band member said, 'The only good Tory is a dead Tory.'
* <https://www.tenementtv.com/features/festival-round-up-2023/> - This article mentions Kneecap's inclusion in the lineup for the TRNSMT Festival in Glasgow, highlighting the band's scheduled performance amid the ongoing controversy.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kneecap_%28band%29> - This Wikipedia page provides detailed information about Kneecap, including their background, controversies, and the impact of their performances and statements on public discourse.
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14669651/JONATHAN-BROCKLEBANK-not-societal-hatred-troubles-Kneecaps-supporters-No-just-want-happy-targets-it.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data