# Kneecap sparks controversy with Gaza comments and political lyrics



Kneecap, the west Belfast-based rave-rap group known for their provocative blend of high-energy performances and politically charged lyrics, have once again found themselves at the centre of controversy. The trio—rappers Mo Chara (Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh), Móglaí Bap (Naoise Ó Cairealláin), and beatmaker DJ Próvaí (JJ Ó Dochartaigh)—have faced intense scrutiny following a recent incendiary performance at the Coachella music festival in California, where they described Israel’s military actions in Gaza as a "US-funded genocide." This statement prompted accusations of anti-Semitism and allegations of supporting terrorist organisations Hamas and Hezbollah, both proscribed in the UK.

Kneecap’s rise to prominence has been marked by their unique fusion of Irish and English in their rapid-fire lyrics, which address themes ranging from the party lifestyle to radical political aspirations, including the desire to free Northern Ireland from British governance. Their brand of dissent, echoing anti-establishment hip-hop icons like NWA and Run The Jewels, has earned them a dedicated cult following. Their live shows have been described as riotous, thrilling audiences at events such as Glastonbury, while their 2024 biopic film "Kneecap" won critical acclaim, including a Bafta for outstanding debut from a British writer, director, or producer.

However, their outspoken nature has also led to serious consequences. Following the Coachella controversy, UK counter-terrorism police have begun examining footage from two of their previous gigs. Allegations include calls for the deaths of Conservative MPs and chants of support for Hamas and Hezbollah. The band has denied supporting these groups and stated that some footage, such as the chant "the only good Tory is a dead Tory," was taken out of context. They issued an apology for any distress caused, particularly to the families of MPs Jo Cox and Sir David Amess, both of whom were murdered. Despite this, Cox's widower Brendan described the band's apology as "only half an apology," and Downing Street condemned the statement as "half-hearted" and "completely unacceptable." The matter was debated in the House of Commons, where Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp labelled the band's comments "evil."

Kneecap’s controversial image is rooted in their origins. Since forming in 2017, the band has intertwined their music with politically sensitive themes, drawing heavily on Republican slang and symbolism. Their name itself refers to a punishment method used by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the Troubles. Early incidents included DJ Próvaí losing his teaching job in 2020 after performing with "Brits out" painted on his clothing, and a 2022 mural commission that depicted a burning police vehicle with a slogan critical of Northern Ireland’s pre-Good Friday Agreement police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). The mural attracted condemnation from politicians across the spectrum, including Alliance party leader Naomi Long.

Their lyrics often blend satire and serious political commentary, reflecting the complex spectrum of Republicanism in Northern Ireland. The band members have expressed a desire for Irish unity, with Mo Chara stating, "The British government has failed us for 100 years... You've had enough time and it’s failed." Their music draws inspiration from American hip-hop groups known for their culture of resistance and revolt, such as Dead Prez and Wu Tang Clan. Uniquely, Kneecap perform predominantly in the Irish language, using rap to reclaim the language from traditional folk associations and to connect with Ireland's oral history and mythology.

Kneecap’s cultural and artistic impact was amplified by their 2024 film "Kneecap," which offered a semi-fictionalised and often humorous portrayal of their journey to fame. The movie, which co-starred Michael Fassbender as Móglaí’s father and examined themes of identity and rebellion, won the audience award at the Sundance Film Festival and garnered six Bafta nominations. Their debut album "Fine Art" further showcased their sharp wit and duality, combining satirical critiques of the music industry with reflections on Northern Ireland’s challenges, including mental health.

The band's pro-Palestinian messages, which have been present in their performances since the most recent Israel-Gaza conflict began, ignited heightened backlash at Coachella. Instances of chanting and screen displays deemed offensive by some were seen as crossing into hate speech. The organisers of Israel’s Nova Music Festival, the site of a Hamas attack in 2023 that claimed the lives of more than 360 people, expressed that Kneecap’s messaging caused deep hurt to their community, despite inviting the band to engage with an exhibition honoring the victims and survivors. Additionally, advocacy groups like The Creative Community For Peace and public figures such as Sharon Osbourne called for the revocation of Kneecap’s US visas.

As Kneecap navigates this latest wave of controversy, they remain a polarising presence in both the music world and political discourse, known for their provocative art and uncompromising stance. Venues and festivals are currently under pressure to reconsider hosting the band amid the ongoing debate over their political expressions and public statements. The BBC is reporting that this latest controversy has the potential to significantly impact the future direction and opportunities available to the once rebellious underground group now thrust into mainstream scrutiny.

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

## References

* <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/irish-rappers-kneecap-apologise-families-murdered-uk-lawmakers-2025-04-29/> - This article reports on Kneecap's apology to the families of murdered UK lawmakers Jo Cox and David Amess following controversial footage from their 2023 performance, where a member appeared to say, 'Kill your local MP' and 'The only good Tory is a dead Tory.'
* <https://www.ft.com/content/156e9143-caa7-4f6d-82b2-565b1004d15e> - This piece discusses how Kneecap, a Northern Irish rap trio, has made their mark with bilingual tracks in Irish and English, nationalistic themes, and provocative antics, highlighting their rise to prominence and the controversies surrounding them.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/9b22f8a5-2e06-4a9a-9799-1b4462bb8c16> - This article reviews Kneecap's debut album, 'Fine Art,' noting how the trio merges political themes with youthful nightlife, balancing support for a united Ireland with critiques of sectarian violence and a portrayal of rave culture's unifying effects.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/c54616b6-30c0-4fa9-b02c-fb312c465e0e> - This report details Kneecap's legal victory against the UK government after their funding was denied for allegedly opposing the UK, with the High Court in Belfast ruling the denial as 'illegal' and 'unfair.'
* <https://www.ft.com/content/156e9143-caa7-4f6d-82b2-565b1004d15e> - This article discusses Kneecap's use of the Irish language in hip-hop, aiming to normalize and popularize the language, which has faced historical suppression, and their music reflecting a mix of personal experiences and community narratives.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/9b22f8a5-2e06-4a9a-9799-1b4462bb8c16> - This piece highlights Kneecap's debut album, 'Fine Art,' showcasing their sharp wit and duality, combining satirical critiques of the music industry with reflections on Northern Ireland’s challenges, including mental health.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly5r4gg7l6o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data