# Kneecap charge exposes chaotic enforcement of UK terrorism laws



Kneecap member Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, known as Mo Chara, faces a charge under the UK's Terrorism Act by the Metropolitan Police for displaying a Hezbollah flag during a performance in London. This case has exposed significant disparities in the enforcement of terrorism legislation, pointing to a chaotic legal landscape that raises questions about justice in the UK.

The Terrorism Act, in theory, is meant to provide a uniform application of the law across the UK. However, its execution is notoriously inconsistent, particularly in Northern Ireland, where enforcement appears remarkably lax. Critics have long warned that this discrepancy is not just an oversight but a systemic issue. If the law were applied consistently, vast numbers of individuals across Northern Ireland could find themselves in legal jeopardy for actions ranging from flag displays to mere association with proscribed organisations.

The situation with Kneecap is emblematic of a broader pattern of leniency in Northern Ireland regarding terrorism laws. Such discrepancies are glaring when we see individuals like loyalist Winston Irvine receiving a mere 30-month sentence for firearms offences, highlighting a judicial system where political connections can skew outcomes. This lenient treatment starkly contrasts with the strict application of the law in other parts of the UK, where those actions would typically incur far harsher penalties.

The severe decline in the charge rate under the Terrorism Act in Northern Ireland—plummeting to just 12% of arrests leading to charges from 2017 to 2021—raises alarming questions about whether the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is genuinely committed to combating terrorism or merely adopting avoidance tactics. This situation not only undermines public trust but suggests a skewed application of the law that fails to hold certain groups accountable for actions that threaten community safety.

Kneecap has denied endorsing Hezbollah or Hamas, framing the charges as politically motivated assaults aimed at stifling dissent. They argue that their artistic expressions, including the controversial flag display, have been misrepresented. However, it is hard to overlook that their performances resonate amid rising political tensions while failing to grapple with the implications of glorifying groups that challenge the stability of the region.

Starkly, this case highlights the urgent need for a radical reassessment of how terrorism legislation is applied—not just in Northern Ireland, but across the UK. The disparity in enforcement is not merely a flaw but a potential gateway to further politicisation of the legal system. As discussions around policing and political accountability evolve, there is an imperative for leaders to advocate for a more equitable approach to law enforcement. The long-standing inequalities must be addressed to prevent any group from exploiting the legal system while undermining collective safety and community cohesion.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/newton-emerson-kneecap-charge-exposes-the-legal-fudge-in-terrorism-laws-B7VDQRMKZBEMFFZWUYXSB2E3CM/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/951643fa3345a152f86b59bbdcbd0a49> - Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, known as Mo Chara, a member of the Irish hip-hop group Kneecap, has been charged under the UK's Terrorism Act for allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag during a performance at London's Kentish Town Forum on November 21, 2024. The charge follows an investigation into videos purportedly showing the band endorsing Hezbollah and Hamas and inciting violence against lawmakers. Kneecap has denied these allegations, claiming their remarks were misrepresented by political figures. The group, based in Belfast, is recognized for promoting Irish-language culture but is controversial for its provocative lyrics and political stances. Ó hAnnaidh is scheduled to appear in court on June 18, and police continue to investigate footage from a separate 2023 concert. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/951643fa3345a152f86b59bbdcbd0a49?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/b88745d2-d29b-4613-8632-fa763eb4f924> - Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, known by his stage name Mo Chara and a member of the Belfast-based Irish-language rap trio Kneecap, has been charged with a terrorism offence under the UK's Terrorism Act 2000. The charge pertains to allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag during a concert at London’s O2 Forum in November 2024, an act believed to suggest support for a proscribed organization. Ó hAnnaidh is scheduled to appear at Westminster Magistrates' Court on June 18. If convicted, he faces up to six months in prison and/or a fine. Kneecap has rejected the allegations, calling the charges a political distraction and an attempt to silence artists critical of global injustices, particularly in Gaza. The group's performances, including a recent appearance at Coachella, have drawn attention for their political stance and symbolism rooted in Irish Republican sentiments. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/b88745d2-d29b-4613-8632-fa763eb4f924?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/irish-band-kneecap-say-terrorism-charge-seeks-silence-artists-2025-05-22/> - Irish-language rap group Kneecap has condemned a terrorism-related charge against band member Liam O'Hanna as an attempt to silence politically outspoken artists. O'Hanna, 27, was charged by London's Metropolitan Police for allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag—representing the Iran-backed militant group banned in the UK—during a performance in November. Kneecap stated the flag was thrown on stage and denied endorsing Hezbollah or Hamas, emphasizing their condemnation of all attacks on civilians. The band, known for advocating Irish identity and Irish unity, has been scrutinized recently for pro-Palestinian messaging during their Coachella performance. In April, they also apologized for previously controversial comments perceived as encouraging violence against MPs. O'Hanna is scheduled to appear in court on June 18. Despite mounting criticism, including calls from UK lawmakers for their exclusion, Kneecap is still set to perform at the Glastonbury Festival in June. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/irish-band-kneecap-say-terrorism-charge-seeks-silence-artists-2025-05-22/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/major-drop-in-terrorism-act-charge-rate-in-northern-ireland> - The charge rate for individuals arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000 in Northern Ireland has significantly decreased over the past two decades. Between 2001 and 2005, 31% of those arrested were charged, but this rate dropped to 12% between 2017 and 2021. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has called for a review of how the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) uses its powers under the act to ensure compliance with human rights obligations. While the PSNI relies on section 41 for security-related arrests, police forces in Britain mainly rely on the PACE Act. ([thedetail.tv](https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/major-drop-in-terrorism-act-charge-rate-in-northern-ireland?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/cta> - Between 2013/4 and 2016/17, wide-ranging counter-terrorism powers were used at Northern Ireland ports and airports a staggering 15,970 times—without a single detention under the UK’s Terrorism Act. This anomaly has been previously described as 'remarkable' and worthy of further investigation by a government-appointed counterterrorism expert in 2016. Although no one was detained, people were handed over to immigration officials; no records are kept of the number of referrals the PSNI have made to immigration officials and HMRC following the exercise of the powers. In 2017/18, a further 2,601 examinations were made—this time resulting in 11 detentions for questioning (0.4% of checks that year). A mandatory detention under Schedule 7 takes place where an examination under Schedule 7 lasts for longer than one hour. The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) is just one civil rights organization that has been monitoring this issue. According to CAJ’s deputy director Daniel Holder, 'the details on ongoing operations are scant' and 'it’s also not clear what power is being used in particular stops.' CAJ is concerned that the high unexplained use of stop and question powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 are being enacted to avoid the restrictions on routine immigration controls. UK ministers have given repeated assurances that checks will not be introduced in the Common Travel Area (CTA)—yet the evidence is to the contrary. The powers are being used for other purposes than that which they were granted or intended, and civil rights groups are adamant that such misuse corrupts the safeguards in the criminal justice system. ([thedetail.tv](https://thedetail.tv/articles/cta?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kneecap_%28band%29> - Kneecap is an Irish hip-hop trio from Belfast, Northern Ireland, composed of Mo Chara (Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh), Móglaí Bap (Naoise Ó Cairealláin), and DJ Próvaí (J.J. Ó Dochartaigh). They rap in a mixture of English and Irish. Their first single 'C.E.A.R.T.A.' was released in 2017, followed by their debut studio album 3CAG in 2018. Their second studio album, Fine Art, was released in 2024, and a biographical film about the group was released later the same year. The group's themes focus on working-class Belfast youth culture, Irish republicanism, and Irish language rights. Their name is derived from the extralegal punishment attacks meted out by Northern Ireland paramilitary groups. They are also outspokenly anti-Zionist. ([en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kneecap_%28band%29?utm_source=openai))