# UK government’s new police powers risk authoritarian overreach amid protest crackdowns



The UK government’s latest move to grant police new powers to restrict repeated protests illustrates a worrying trend of authoritarian overreach disguised as national security. In the wake of recent disturbances, including violent demonstrations linked to the pro-Palestinian cause and the attack at a Manchester synagogue, these measures threaten to silence dissent rather than address genuine public safety concerns. Instead of focusing on law and order, the government appears more intent on curbing civil liberties in the name of security, a tactic that echoes the failed policies of authoritarian regimes.

Empowering senior police officers to consider the cumulative effects of repeated protests—potentially moving them to less accessible locations or restricting their times—sets a dangerous precedent. Such restrictions could easily be exploited to suppress grassroots activism and civic engagement, especially by groups that challenge government narratives or policies. Arresting protesters for exercising their democratic right to dissent must be condemned, not legitimized. This heavy-handed approach is a clear attempt to intimidate citizens from holding authorities to account, particularly amid a climate of rising political unrest.

The crackdown on groups like Palestine Action—after their legitimate protests turned violent—serves as a pretext for further suppression. With over 2,000 arrests and more than 130 terrorism charges, it’s evident that the government is conflating protest with extremism to tighten its grip. The recent mass arrests during a London demonstration highlight a paranoid desire to criminalize oppositional voices. Such actions threaten to turn the UK into a surveillance state where peaceful opposition is sidelined, leaving citizens with little room to express their frustrations or challenge government policies.

Prime Minister Starker’s call to silence protests, especially following the tragic synagogue attack, ignores the fundamental importance of free speech in a healthy democracy. The government’s rush to impose limits on demonstrations under the guise of protecting communities only fuels división and resentment. Policies that target protests—particularly those related to contentious international issues—are often used as tools to stifle opinions they find inconvenient. The real solution isn’t to silence dissent but to address the root causes of social unrest.

Supporters of civil liberties rightly warn that these new powers could do more harm than good. Prince of freedom, such measures threaten to undermine the very foundations of democratic protest, leaving ordinary citizens voiceless. Instead of rushing into legislation that curtails rights, governments should focus on fostering open debate and safeguarding civil liberties. The spectacle of police powers expanding amid rising social tensions only fuels distrust and alienation.

The government’s review of protest laws and potential legislative changes, including amendments to the Public Order Act 1986, are clear signs that they are panicking in the face of opposition. Rather than defending the rights of individuals to assemble and speak freely, the authorities are preparing to tighten restrictions, unjustly criminalizing peaceful activism. This approach will only deepen societal divisions and undermine the principles of justice and free expression.

In this climate of growing repression, it is crucial that opposition voices stand firm against such oppressive measures. The push for greater police powers is a worrying sign that the government is more concerned with suppressing dissent than securing the safety and freedoms of its citizens. True security comes from protecting civil liberties, not eroding them—a lesson this government appears to have forgotten under the guise of protecting public order.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.gdnonline.com/Details/1364862> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.apnews.com/article/7e3ffac020a70643b7e2b6a7840b27be> - Following the arrest of nearly 500 demonstrators at a pro-Palestinian vigil in London, the UK government announced new powers to restrict repeated protests. The Home Office stated that police can now consider the cumulative impact of frequent protests on local communities when imposing restrictions. Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood emphasized the need to balance protest rights with public safety, noting that repeated large-scale protests could make some communities, especially religious groups, feel unsafe. The protest was in defiance of the ban on Palestine Action, a group accused of vandalizing military assets and now labeled a terrorist organization. Police made 488 arrests for supporting the outlawed group, as well as several for other offenses. Over 2,000 people have been arrested since the group's proscription in July, with more than 130 terrorism charges filed. Critics argue that the government is curbing free speech and dissent. The protests, largely peaceful, come amid Israel's military actions in Gaza, which have led to over 67,000 Palestinian deaths, according to local health authorities. Meanwhile, vigilance was heightened after a synagogue attack in Manchester and a suspected hate-motivated mosque arson in Peacehaven. Community tensions, rising antisemitism, and government responses remain under intense scrutiny.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-police-get-new-powers-after-latest-pro-palestinian-protest-2025-10-05/> - Following a recent pro-Palestinian protest in London, the UK government announced new powers for police to restrict repeat demonstrations in the same location. This decision comes in the aftermath of a deadly attack at a synagogue in Manchester, which prompted concerns within the Jewish community. The Interior Ministry stated that senior police officers would be able to assess the cumulative impact of repeated protests on local communities, aiming to protect public safety while balancing the right to protest. Interior Minister Shabana Mahmood emphasized that while protest is a fundamental freedom, it must be balanced against the safety and freedom of others, particularly vulnerable religious communities. Almost 500 individuals were arrested during the latest protest, which included participants from Palestine Action—a group banned earlier this year for damaging military facilities. Prime Minister Keir Starmer had asked organizers to cancel the demonstration due to recent violence, including the synagogue attack by a man believed to be inspired by extremist ideology. While some activists criticized the new measures as authoritarian, the Board of Deputies of British Jews welcomed the move, asking for further actions to ensure community security. Mahmood also plans to review existing police powers to ensure their adequacy and consistency.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-police-powers-to-protect-communities-from-disruption-caused-by-protests> - Police forces will be granted new powers to put conditions on repeat protests as the Home Secretary orders a fresh look at how protests are policed and organised. The new powers, which will be brought forward as soon as possible, will allow senior officers to consider the ‘cumulative impact’ of previous protest activity. If a protest has taken place at the same site for weeks on end, and caused repeated disorder, the police will have the authority to, for example, instruct organisers to hold the event somewhere else. Anyone who breaches the conditions will risk arrest and prosecution. The Home Secretary will also review existing legislation to ensure that powers are sufficient and being consistently applied. This will include powers to ban protests outright, and will also include provisions in the Crime and Policing Bill, which is currently going through Parliament. Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said: 'The right to protest is a fundamental freedom in our country. However, this freedom must be balanced with the freedom of their neighbours to live their lives without fear. Large, repeated protests can leave sections of our country, particularly religious communities, feeling unsafe, intimidated and scared ... . This has been particularly evident in relation to the considerable fear within the Jewish community, which has been expressed to me on many occasions in these recent difficult days. These changes mark an important step in ensuring we protect the right to protest while ensuring all feel safe in this country.'
5. <https://news.sky.com/story/police-to-get-new-powers-to-impose-restrictions-on-repeat-protests-13444970> - Police have been granted new powers to impose conditions on repeat protests to 'close a gap in the law', the home secretary has said. Shabana Mahmood told Sky News' Sunday Morning with Trevor Phillips that the changes, announced earlier in the day, would allow communities to 'go about their daily business without feeling intimidated'. It follows the arrests of nearly 500 people during demonstrations in support of the proscribed group Palestine Action in central London on Saturday. Protesters defied calls to rethink the event in the wake of the Manchester synagogue terror attack on Thursday, in which two Jewish worshippers were killed. The new powers will allow police forces to consider the 'cumulative impact' of protests, assessing previous activity, when deciding to impose limits on protesters. The limits that could be imposed include moving demonstrators to a different place or 'restricting the time that those protests can occur', Ms Mahmood said. She added: 'It's been clear to me in conversations in the last couple of days that there is a gap in the law and there is an inconsistency of practice. So I'll be taking measures immediately to put that right and I will be reviewing our wider protest legislation as well, to make sure the arrangements we have can meet the scale of the challenge that we face.' The changes will be made through amendments to the Public Order Act, and anyone who breaches the new conditions will risk arrest and prosecution. 'More flexibility to prevent disruptive protests' The home secretary has written to chief constables in England and Wales to explain the new powers. She wrote: 'The government will bring forward legislation to increase the powers available to you to tackle the repeated disruptive protests we have seen and continue to provide the reassurance to communities that they need. Through upcoming legislation, we will amend sections 12 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 to allow senior officers to consider the cumulative impact ... protests on local communities when they are imposing conditions on public processions and assemblies. This will allow you more flexibility to prevent disruptive protests from attending the same location and instruct organisers to move to a different site.' The Greens and the Lib Dems said it was an attack on the right to protest. Green Party leader Zack Polanski told Sky News: 'Giving police sweeping powers to shut down protests because of their 'cumulative impact' is a cynical assault on the right to dissent. The whole point of protest is persistence; that's how change happens.
6. <https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/ministers-to-grant-police-new-powers-to-curb-repeated-pro-palestine-protests/> - Speaking to Sky News on Sunday, Mahmood said there was “a gap in the law” requiring urgent action and pledged to act quickly. The planned changes to the Public Order Act 1986 would allow police to consider the “cumulative impact” of repeated protests at the same location. If a site experiences repeated disorder over several weeks, police could direct organisers to move their demonstrations elsewhere. Failure to comply could result in arrest. Mahmood will further review existing legislation to ensure police powers are adequate and consistently applied, including the ability to ban protests entirely when necessary. On Sky News, Mahmood clarified: “Cumulative disruption—the frequency of particular protests in specific places—should be reason enough for the police to restrict and place conditions.” She added that this could include moving the protest or imposing time limits. Later, speaking to BBC One’s Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg, Mahmood stressed, “This is not about a ban. This is about restrictions and conditions that would allow police to address cumulative disruption.