# UK government’s protest crackdown sparks fears of creeping authoritarianism



The UK government’s latest attempt to tighten control over protests reveals a concerning slide towards authoritarianism cloaked in rhetoric about public safety. Instead of defending the fundamental right to free assembly, the authorities now propose giving police sweeping powers to restrict, reroute, or even cancel protests, under the guise of Preventing Disruption and Protecting Communities. This move follows a pattern of heavy-handed responses to legitimate dissent — especially those protesting government policy or expressing unpopular viewpoints.

Amidst the turmoil, the government is exploiting recent tragedies, such as the attack against a Manchester synagogue, to justify authoritarian measures. Such incidents are tragic, but using them as a pretext to silence protests risks turning the UK into a police state where the right to speak out is actively undermined. Under the proposed amendments to the Public Order Act 1986, police could designate recurrent protests in the same location as a “cumulative impact,” enabling pre-emptive restrictions that set a dangerous precedent. Critics warn that this could lead to a chilling effect, where lawful dissent is stifled before it even begins.

This legislation seems designed not to foster safety but to safeguard an increasingly fragile political elite from the frustrations of ordinary citizens. The government’s framing brushes aside the crucial issue: the right to protest is a cornerstone of democracy, not a nuisance to be curbed at the government’s whim. Campaigners have already voiced fears that these restrictions could serve as a tool for suppressing protests on issues which challenge the establishment, from opposition to foreign interference to anti-government activism.

The response from civil liberties advocates has been predictably critical. Claims that the powers are necessary to prevent violence are deeply flawed when weighed against the risk of encroaching on political freedoms and targeting peaceful demonstrators. The attempt to introduce such sweeping powers echoes past failed efforts by ministers to curtail protests, which have been struck down by the courts for overreach. Nevertheless, the government persists, seemingly determined to push through measures that undermine democratic accountability.

This trajectory is further exacerbated by the political climate, in which pro-Palestinian protests have repeatedly been met with hostility and heavy policing. The law enforcement response has often appeared disproportionate, with elderly demonstrators arrested and police diverting resources away from community safety to manage protests. Empowering police with new powers to suppress further demonstrations only heightens concerns that the government’s approach is less about protecting the public and more about silencing dissent.

The wider context – an unstable political landscape roiled by recent elections and leadership changes – underscores the government’s craving for control. As the Labour government struggles to establish a stable footing, it remains clear that their priority is not the safety of communities but the suppression of opposition voices. These proposed measures are a step closer to a society where political disagreements are stifled and public protests are reduced to controlled, hollow spectacles.

In this environment, the push to restrict protests under the guise of safeguarding community safety is fundamentally flawed. The people deserve a government that upholds the right to speak freely, not one that uses crises as cover to expand police powers and silence critics. The fight for civil liberties must continue, and it’s imperative that these dangerous restrictions are challenged before they cement a new normal of censorship and state overreach.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15164845/Police-limit-protests-repeat-rallies-Labour-British-Jews.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-police-powers-to-protect-communities-from-disruption-caused-by-protests> - The UK government has announced new powers for police to restrict repeated protests, allowing them to consider the cumulative impact of frequent demonstrations on local communities. Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood stated that while the right to protest is fundamental, it must be balanced with the freedom of neighbours to live without fear. The changes will amend the Public Order Act 1986 to enable police to impose conditions on public processions and assemblies, including rerouting or cancelling protests. Organisers who breach these conditions could face arrest and prosecution. The government will also review existing legislation to ensure powers are sufficient and consistently applied.
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.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-urges-cancellation-pro-palestinian-protest-after-synagogue-attack-2025-10-03/> - Following a deadly attack outside the Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation Synagogue in Manchester, where a man killed two people by driving into pedestrians and stabbing them, the UK government is urging the cancellation of a pro-Palestinian protest planned in London. The attacker, identified as Jihad al-Shamie, a 35-year-old British citizen of Syrian descent, was shot dead by police. Interior Minister Shabana Mahmood called for a pause in protests to allow the Jewish community time to grieve. The planned demonstration by the group Defend Our Juries is in response to the British government's July decision to ban the pro-Palestinian organization Palestine Action under anti-terror laws. Over 1,500 people, including many elderly demonstrators, have been arrested related to protests supporting the group. The Metropolitan Police have expressed concern that resources are being diverted from protecting communities following the Manchester attack to managing the protest in London, expected to gather over 1,000 participants. Defend Our Juries condemned the synagogue attack and criticized the police focus on protest arrests. Clashes during other protests led to 40 arrests near the Prime Minister’s residence shortly after the attack.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-police-intervene-palestine-action-protesters-gather-despite-synagogue-2025-10-04/> - On Saturday, London police arrested dozens of protesters demonstrating in support of the recently banned pro-Palestinian group Palestine Action, despite police and government pleas to cancel the event following a deadly attack at a synagogue in Manchester. The attack, which killed two people, was carried out by a British man of Syrian descent believed to be influenced by extremist Islamist ideology. The protest, held in Trafalgar Square, proceeded even after Palestine Action was designated a terrorist organization in July for acts including damaging military aircraft at an airbase. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer urged calm and sensitivity during a period of mourning. Protesters, who criticized the arrests as suppressions of non-violent expression, chanted in support of those detained, with six more arrested for displaying a banner on Westminster Bridge. The incident is part of a larger pattern of pro-Palestinian protests in the UK, which have led to numerous arrests. Organizers condemned recent antisemitic violence while urging police to prioritize community safety over protest repression. Tensions remain high as Jewish and Muslim communities express concerns for their security amid continuing conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.
6. <https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/ministers-to-grant-police-new-powers-to-curb-repeated-pro-palestine-protests/> - The UK government is set to grant police new powers to curb repeated pro-Palestinian protests, following a series of demonstrations that have raised concerns within the Jewish community. Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood acknowledged that many Jews were frustrated by the Government’s failure to act earlier to restrict the wave of pro-Palestinian marches. She stated that repeated large-scale protests had caused 'considerable fear' for the Jewish community. 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. She clarified that this is not about a ban but about restrictions and conditions that would allow police to address cumulative disruption.
7. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1946899/uk-police-being-empowered-to-limit-pro-palestinian-rallies> - UK police are to be given greater powers to restrict protests as a minister said repeated large-scale pro-Palestinian demonstrations had caused 'considerable fear' for the Jewish community. The government initiative follows Thursday’s deadly knife and car-ramming attack on a synagogue in the northwestern city of Manchester. A pro-Palestinian demonstration in central London went ahead on Saturday despite pleas from Prime Minister Keir Starmer and the capital’s Metropolitan Police to delay it. The government said police would be authorised to consider the 'cumulative impact' of protests when deciding to impose limits on protesters. '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,' Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said in a statement.