



PROTECTING PROTEST

POLICE TREATMENT OF LEGAL OBSERVERS

2022



Defending
The Right to
Freedom of
Assembly



The Network for
Police Monitoring



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Legal Observers have been independently monitoring protests in Britain for decades. The role is internationally recognised in Human Rights guidance, which emphasises the legal duty of police to "protect... monitors and observers" and states that observers

"MAY NOT BE PROHIBITED FROM, OR UNDULY LIMITED IN, EXERCISING THESE FUNCTIONS... THEY MUST NOT FACE REPRISALS OR OTHER HARASSMENT". (UNHRC 2020)

Netpol and the Article 11 Trust conducted ground-breaking research building upon the experiences of nearly 20% of the estimated active Legal Observers in Britain today and the findings are stark.



78%

of Legal Observers experienced Police attempting to restrict their observations or effectiveness between 'somewhat' to 'extremely often'.



86%

of Legal Observers described Police attitudes towards Legal Observers as 'somewhat' or 'strongly negative'.



90%

of Legal Observers experienced aggression or physical force from Police while volunteering.

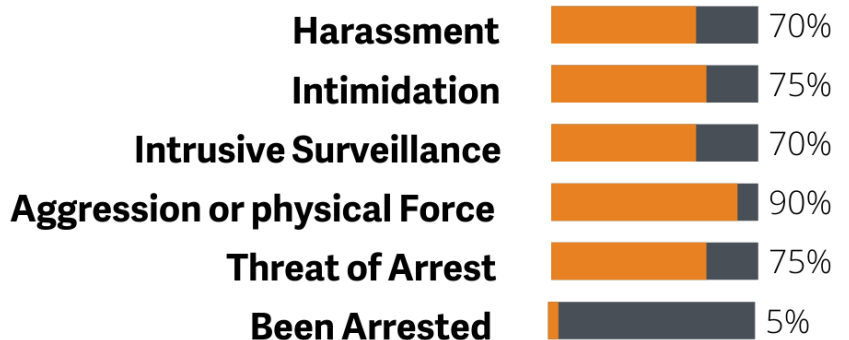
"I've been charged with horses, been chased with dogs... pushed with a riot shield. Pushed backwards over some metal bike racks and got quite an injury... The presence of mainstream media cameras is the number one thing that keeps you safe at a protest. As soon as nobody is watching Police violence will follow" (LO 19).



56%

of female Legal Observers experienced gender based discrimination from Police, from being patronised to sexually harassed or assaulted.

% of Legal Observers who reported the following negative experiences from the police while volunteering



"[Police Officers] commented on me being too pretty to be involved, that I would look better without high vis on, that I should talk to them after work" (LO 12).

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Legal Observers noted that discrimination against observers and protestors on the grounds of class, race, gender and age was common.

"THE POLICE'S INTERACTION WITH BLACK AND BROWN PROTESTERS AND LEGAL OBSERVERS ALIKE HAS BEEN STARKLY DIFFERENT TO THEIR INTERACTION WITH WHITE PROTESTERS" (BLACK PROTEST LEGAL SUPPORT, 2020).

An overarching theme in responses was that protest policing in Britain is inconsistent and influenced by the opinions and prejudices of senior officers.



"Police's approach to protest is totally inconsistent. The treatment LOs and protestors experience or whether protest is allowed to continue or is shut down, totally relies on whether the senior officer in charge wants to let you have that protest that day, whether they feel like it or whether they support the protestors views" (LO 2).

Younger and racialised protestors, or those using more "effective" tactics such as direct action or civil disobedience, were identified by observers as more likely to experience harsh or violent policing.

"Police discretion to use powers is so wide that individual psychology and instability is given free reign which is concerning" (LO 8).



LEGAL OBSERVERS PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS:

1 DETER
repressive protest policing through a highly visible presence, monitoring incidents.



2 EMPOWER
protestors to exercise their Article 10 and 11 rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, by providing a reassuring presence and 'Know Your Rights' information.



3 ACCOUNTABILITY
for police, by producing independent evidence that can "help identify authoritarian trends in policing", (LO 3) and be used in civil and criminal cases and legal challenges.



"I think of LOs as a domestic version of international Human Rights observers. The presence of LOs helps to support people's basic Human Rights on a very practical active manner that feels more tangible than more bookish activities" (LO 6).