



PROTECTING PROTEST

POLICE TREATMENT OF LEGAL
OBSERVERS

2022



Defending
The Right to
Freedom of
Assembly



The Network for
Police Monitoring



Barry Amiel &
Norman Melburn Trust

PROTECTING PROTEST: POLICE TREATMENT OF LEGAL OBSERVERS



A report by the Network for Police Monitoring (Netpol) and Article 11 Trust based on testimony from legal observers who submitted evidence regarding the policing of the UN COP26 conference and those who participated in structured interviews and completed a research survey about their experiences legal observing in Britain.

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**BarryAmiel &
NormanMelburntrust**

Author:
Rachel Currie, Article 11 Trust Research Fellow

Editors:
Kevin Blowe, Kat Hobbs, Emily Apple (Netpol), Rowan Constantinou-Stygal (Article 11 Trust)

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Durning Hall
Community Centre,
Earlham Grove,
London E7 9AB |
netpol.org



Defending
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Assembly

162a Southwark
Bridge Road,
London SE1 0DG |
article11trust.org.uk

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Introduction

Independent Legal Observers (from here on, “LOs”) have monitored the policing of demonstrations and assemblies in Britain and around the world for decades.¹ Despite the broad body of literature concerning policing methods used against protesters, “the role played by Legal Observers is often only mentioned as an aside”.² This means the nature of the role (and the extent of its effectiveness³) is not well understood. LOs rarely speak publicly about their experiences, particularly because they are often involved with, and called to provide evidence in, ongoing court cases.

This research aims to contribute to the public understanding of the way LOs are treated by police in Britain, and to compile their insights and experiences of protest policing over the last 5 years. Our research aims to:

- Provide an indication of police awareness and treatment of LOs in England, Wales and Scotland;
- Understand trends between and across police forces;
- Explore the importance of independent LOs for Article 11 rights to freedom of association and assembly, and:
- Highlight key case studies of concerning incidents and trends.

Netpol and the Article 11 Trust believe that independent scrutiny of police powers is necessary to protect Article 11 rights to freedom of assembly and expression,⁴ as is internationally recognised by United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC).⁵

The project was originally conceived in 2020, in response to the police treatment of members of Black Protest Legal Support (BPLS) attending Black Lives Matter protests across Britain following the murder of George Floyd in the US.⁶ Our analysis is also informed by the evidence the Article 11 Trust and Netpol gathered during and after the COP26 Conference in Glasgow, 2021, predominantly from LOs trained by Scottish Activist and Community Legal Project (SCALP).⁷

This research was made possible by the hard work and generous assistance of LO networks and collectives including Black Protest Legal Support (BPLS), Scottish Community and Activist Legal Project (SCALP), Green and Black Cross (GBC) and its regional group GBC Manchester, and the Independent Legal Observer Network (ILON). We are extremely grateful to these groups and the individuals who took the time to submit evidence and share their experiences, which has enabled us to produce this important research.

¹ Walsh, T., 2016. [‘Public Order’ Policing and the Value of Independent Legal Observers](#). *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 28(1), p.33.

² Ibid.

³ This is beyond the scope of this project.

⁴ Article 11 [Human Rights Act 1998](#)

⁵ United Nations Human Rights Committee, 2020. [General Comment No. 37 \(2020\) on the right of peaceful assembly](#) (Article 21). UN Doc CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 6.

⁶ Netpol, 2020. [Britain is Not Innocent](#).

⁷ Netpol and The Article 11 Trust. 2021. [Respect or Repression: An independent report on Operation Urram \(Respect\), the policing of the COP26 Climate Conference in Scotland](#).

Executive Summary

Legal Observers (LOs) have been volunteering in Britain and across the world for decades. They are independent and don't participate in protest activity such as chanting or carrying placards. They monitor police operations and conduct, compiling independent notes as evidence of incidents including arrests, and distribute legal advice to protesters "in the form of 'bust cards' containing a summary of protesters' rights and useful legal contacts".⁸ LOs are, we found, frequently subject to police violence, discrimination and targeting in a similar way to the protesters they support.

The people who participated in this research had 135 years and 8 months of cumulative experience volunteering as an LO in Britain. The findings herein, therefore, represent a significant body of expertise, certainly sufficient to provide a *general* indication of police treatment of LOs in Britain.

How do LOs define the role, and why do they do it?

The UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC)⁹ describes monitoring as necessary for the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly, emphasising the duties of law enforcement officials to "[protect] journalists, monitors and observers".¹⁰ Respondents described the role and their understanding of its importance: "The overriding purpose is to *protect the right to protest and to free assembly* against police mistreatment and state monitoring" (LO 5, emphasis added). They do this, we found, **firstly by deterring repressive policing, secondly, empowering protesters by providing a reassuring presence, and finally, ensuring accountability by compiling detailed, independent evidence.**

Police Knowledge and Attitudes

We submitted Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), College of Policing (CoP) and 17 forces across the UK for any documentation or policy relating to LOs. Of the 15 replies received, only three explicitly mentioned Human Rights. Police Scotland were the only force to formally recognise LOs. However, significant discrepancies between official policy and treatment of LOs on the ground were raised by testimony received from LOs who volunteered at COP26 in Glasgow during Police Scotland's Operation Urram in Autumn 2021.¹¹

We asked LOs about police knowledge and understanding of the role of LOs, and respondents expressed significant variety, particularly based on rank or seniority. **38% indicated police had poor or no knowledge of the role of LOs. 86% of respondents indicated police attitudes towards LOs as "somewhat" or "strongly negative".** Again, significant variety was identified: "some officers are super friendly and smiley... others are angry and hostile" (LO 2). The Tactical Aid Unit with Greater Manchester Police, the Metropolitan Police, Ministry of Defence, Police Scotland and Merseyside Police were identified as particularly hostile towards LOs and protest.

Police Treatment

We identified categories of police treatment of LOs from testimony of LOs at COP26 and asked respondents to this research project about their experiences of them, with the following results: 70% had experienced harassment, 75% had experienced intimidation, 70% had experienced intrusive surveillance, 75% had experienced threat of arrest and **90% had experienced aggression or physical force:** "Shoving

⁸ Knight, S., Goold, M. and Elliott, E., 2013. *New threat to the right to protest: Stephen Knight on the new arrest tactic to include Legal Observers and Michael Goold and Emily Elliott on an important victory in the High Court against the Met Police and its kettling actions.* *Socialist Lawyer*, (65), pp.14-17.

⁹ UNHRC, 2020. [General Comment No. 37](#)

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Para. 74. *Emphasis added.*

¹¹ *Netpol and The Article 11 Trust.* 2021. [Respect or Repression.](#)

and pushing is routine. I've been charged with horses, been chased with dogs. Knocked over by being pushed with a riot shield. Pushed backwards over some metal bike racks and got quite an injury" (LO 19). Respondents also identified trends of discrimination particularly based on gender, class, age and ethnicity. This LO explained, frequently informed police perceptions of how 'respectable' or authoritative they were. **56% of female LOs explicitly described an element of gender based discrimination**, ranging from sexual harassment and assault by police, to being "patronised and dismissed" (LO 10).

Contrary to UNHRC guidance that observers "may not be prohibited from, or unduly limited in, exercising these functions", ¹² **78% of LOs indicated experiencing police attempting to restrict or obstruct the activity or effectiveness of LOs, somewhat often to extremely often.** Participants described being misled, threatened with arrest or subject to use of force to prevent observation. The impact of police treatment was described by several as having a negative effect on their ability to trust the police, or ability to keep volunteering. 45% of respondents, however, expressed feeling undeterred or spurred on by police treatment to continue observing. Many commented on the importance of solidarity and community support to avoid burning out.

Protest policing trends since 2020

Whilst only 21% of respondents indicated noticing a change in police treatment of LOs since the beginning of COVID restrictions in March 2020, many noted changes in protest policing more generally. Several commented on being **threatened with arrest more frequently, and the use of COVID powers to discourage protest.** Others identified an escalation of protest policing, attributed to a changing political landscape, a series of scandals surrounding the Metropolitan Police and the rise of BLM.

When asked whether they had noticed trends in policing of protests based on protest issue, location or tactic, respondents indicated that **protest policing was influenced by personal opinions and the discretion of senior officers:** "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).

LOs indicated that **creative, mobile or more "effective" protest methods such as direct action and 'lock-on's are policed most harshly**, whereas vigils and marches are usually more tolerated. **Protest issues and crowd composition by ethnicity, age and gender were also commented on:** young people, Muslim and "Black and brown protesters" (LO 2), BLM, environmental groups, and Palestine solidarity movements were more harshly policed. LO 19 explained how: "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".

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this report is to **amplify experiences**, not produce a detailed set of recommendations. However, a number of concerning trends in police treatment of LOs and protest policing are apparent from this research. A lack of accountability and clarity about international Human Rights law and guidance in British policing has led to volunteers using their presence to protect protesters having their *own rights* ignored or undermined by police officers. This has further negatively impacted on the rights to freedom of assembly and expression of protest participants.

In light of the passing of the PCSC Act, introducing new police powers to curtail protest, it is more vital than ever **for LOs to independently monitor protest policing in Britain.** We remain convinced that the best way to protect LOs, and protesters alike, is for **police forces to have a proper benchmark – like the**

¹² UNHRC, 2020. [General Comment No. 37](#)

Charter for Freedom of Assembly Rights¹³ – that sets out what a Human Rights based approach to protest policing should look like in practice.

¹³ Netpol, 2021. [A Charter for Freedom of Assembly Rights](#)

What is a Legal Observer?



Figure 1 Photo: Keith Gentry

Over the years, independent LO training and coordination has evolved from an ad-hoc but essential element to the planning of major mobilisations, particularly for the Camps for Climate Action from 2006, into a permanent part of the infrastructure of support for protest movements in Britain. Green and Black Cross (GBC), the main organiser of LO monitoring, has been active since November 2010.¹⁴

The role of LOs covers, broadly, “monitoring the policing of protest, gathering evidence on the conduct of the police, and distributing legal advice to protesters in the form of ‘bust cards’ containing a summary of protesters’ rights and useful legal contacts”.¹⁵ They are marked out by “wearing high-vis vests, often orange, with “Legal Observer’ printed clearly on them”.¹⁶ As GBC explains, a key component of the role of an LO is to “act as a deterrent to police wrongdoing”.¹⁷

LO organisations and collectives provide free training to LOs periodically. In the run up to COP26, for example, staff from Article 11 Trust and Netpol attended LO training from SCALP, where topics covered included differences between English and Scots Law, and how to document and report incidents to back office. Training also include briefing on the role of an LO, appropriate conduct while LOing (independence from protest, not chanting or carrying banners) and guides to police numbers and rank, or powers that may commonly be used at protests to assist with accurate note taking.

Collective care and self-care also forms an important component of training from LO Networks such as GBC, which specifically covers information and advice on looking after yourself and others. This is vital,

¹⁴ The Meteor, 2022. [Protecting those who protest – Manchester Green & Black Cross on police bills, legal mutual aid and how we can protect our rights](#)

¹⁵ Knight et al, 2013. New threat to the right to protest. *Socialist Lawyer*, (65), pp.14-17.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Green and Black Cross, 2022. [What is a Legal Observer?](#) emphasis added.

particularly given the potential proximity to police violence, discrimination and risks involved for those who come from a group already disproportionately targeted by police. GBC also has procedures in place such as buddy systems and debriefs to try and support people to process difficult experiences.

LOs “observe police behaviour and procedure during protests to *ensure safety and just treatment of protestors*” (LO 4, emphasis added).

Observers are independent of the protests they attend, meaning they are not participants, and are strictly instructed *never* to join in with chants or carry placards. However, many organisations emphasise in their training that this does not mean LOs are impartial. As one volunteer told us:

“[We] monitor and record police behaviour at protests, with the intention of discouraging inappropriate and discriminatory policing and providing notes which can be used to hold officers accountable for such policing. [We] distribute bust cards and provide a reassuring presence for protesters” (LO 11).

Netpol, in *Local Police Monitoring – A Practical Guide* says LOs hold “no official legal status or privilege, but the police are often aware of the role”.¹⁸ It is certainly the case that the role is internationally recognised by the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) as necessary for the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly:

“It is a good practice for independent national Human Rights institutions and non-governmental organizations to monitor assemblies”.¹⁹

UNHRC emphasise the duties of law enforcement officials to “respect and ensure the exercise of the fundamental rights of organizers and participants, while also protecting journalists, *monitors and observers*”²⁰ and also stresses the right of “Human Rights observers to document any assembly including violent and unlawful ones”.²¹

*“They **may not be prohibited from, or unduly limited in, exercising these functions,** including with respect to monitoring the actions of law enforcement officials. They must not face reprisals or other harassment, and their equipment must not be confiscated or damaged. **Even if an assembly is declared unlawful or is dispersed, that does not terminate the right to monitor**” (Emphasis added).*

A report from Newham Monitoring Project in 2013 outlines how street monitoring involves not just documenting incidents but disseminating legal rights information.²² This frequently comes in the form of ‘Bust Cards’²³ or ‘Know Your Rights’ Cards: small leaflets with advice and the contact numbers of trusted protest



Figure 2 GBC ‘Bust Card’

¹⁸ Netpol, 2022. [Local Police Monitoring – A Practical Guide](#) p.21.

¹⁹ UNHRC, 2020. [General Comment No. 37](#) Para. 6.

²⁰ Ibid. Para. 74. Emphasis added.

²¹ UNHR Office of the High Commissioner, 2020. [UN Human Rights Committee publishes interpretation on the right of peaceful assembly](#).

²² Newham Monitoring Project, 2013. [Monitoring Olympics policing during the 2012 ‘Security Games’ A report on community-based legal observing organised](#)

²³ Green and Black Cross, 2022. [Bustcard](#)

solicitors and legal support groups to call if you are arrested at a protest.

GBC emphasise the importance of having access to such information, as they “often hear stories from people who weren’t carrying a bust card as they didn’t expect to be arrested”.²⁴ It is important to note, here, that street or local police monitoring and community ‘cop watch’ groups fulfil a different, but related,



Figure 3 Structure of Legal Observer Support Organisation

function to LOs, but there is sometimes crossover.

An important component of the role is provision of arrestee support. This involves observing and taking detailed contemporaneous notes of arrests in case of, for example, excessive use of force or police misconduct, and reporting the arrest to a back office team that can follow up with the arrestee. GBC describes as “SUCH an important role that often gets forgotten” (emphasis original).²⁵ LOs monitor arrests, take detailed notes and report them to ‘back office’. Back Office is a different section of LO organisations that collate information and provide support to arrestees and LOs while they are out on duty on the streets.

Arrestee Support volunteers, who are separate to LOs, use information recorded by LOs with Back Office to ascertain what station arrestees are being taken to. They wait for detainees to be released and bring things like food and water for supporters and phone chargers for the arrestee. Volunteers offer the

²⁴ Green and Black Cross, 2022. [Bustcard](#)

²⁵ Green and Black Cross, 2022. [Twitter post](#)

arrestee support after they are released by offering “food, water, warm clothes”,²⁶ and providing them with the protest support/back office phone number, as well as release forms if arrestees want to receive ongoing support. Arrestee support volunteers also let Back Office know when people are released to ensure everyone is accounted for.

Evidence from LOs can be used in criminal or civil proceedings. For example, LOs provide witness statements and/or give evidence in criminal prosecutions or when people take civil action against the police. The passing of the PCSC Act²⁷ has meant changes to the law introducing harsher penalties and criminalising new aspects of protest activity, making it likely that more protestors are going to face arrest that would not have before. This changing context means arrestee support is more vital than ever.



How do LOs define the role, and why do they do it?

Figure 4 Photo: GBC

We asked 21 LOs “how do you define the purpose and role of a Legal Observer?”. Responses included:

“To monitor the policing of political demonstrations, helping to support the right to protest by informing people of their rights and holding police to account for unlawful behaviour. I see Legal Observers as one way we can try and challenge the power police and the carceral state hold over movements for change” (LO 19).

Several responses mentioned the aim of protecting the rights of activists and protesters, “and support[ing] protestors to exercise their rights safely”. Part of this entails “seeking to empower protestors to know their rights”, (LO 11) by providing “legal information to protestors and people who have been searched” (LO 5).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ UK Government, 2022. [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#)

One LO described their knowledge through personal experience that “the police grossly overstep their powers... so [the LOs role and purpose is] keeping them accountable” (LO 1).

“The overriding purpose is to protect the right to protest and to free assembly against police mistreatment and state monitoring” (LO 5).

Many also mentioned the importance of gathering evidence and holding Police accountable, as well as directly discouraging abuse of police powers:

“To monitor and record police behaviour at protests, with the intention of discouraging inappropriate and discriminatory policing and providing notes which can be used to hold officers accountable for such policing. Also to distribute bust cards and provide a reassuring presence for protesters” (LO 10).

The importance of LO’s legal training and expertise was emphasised by LO 11 to “record whether the police have behaved lawful[ly] and seek to empower protestors to know their rights by providing information/assistance/bust cards”.

When asked “why did you volunteer?”, LOs described a number of personal and political reasons. One LO, who had experience working in the Hillsborough inquest, described “an interest in ensuring that people’s voices are heard through protest”. Another explained how:

“I am appalled at frequent police abuse and believe Legal Observers are a crucial way to hold the police accountable for their actions. I love being able to use my understanding of the criminal justice system and Police procedures to explain legal rights to protesters” (LO 5).

Several mentioned a desire to support or act in solidarity with protest movements, particularly those who had experienced or witnessed “harsh policing” (LO 10) of protests. For example, LO 11 cited “the way in which the Police brutalised protestors and abused their power during the BLM protests”. Several mentioned having witnessed “excessive use of police brutality and force at protests” (LO 17). LO 14 said that they had “Seen too much police brutality and impunity” (LO 14).

Another described how they were “appalled at police violence backed by government. Horrified at targeting minorities” (LO 16). For several, it was a natural progression out of necessity for protest groups that they were involved in. However, they continued after developing an appreciation for the importance of the role as helping to “hold the police accountable and facilitate protest, which are vital for a democracy” (LO 10).

Article 11 Rights to freedom of assembly and association

LOs were asked about their understanding of the importance of the role for Article 11 Human Rights to freedom of assembly and association. All participants identified one or more ways in which their volunteering can serve to protect and advance Human Rights: **94% of LOs described their role as serving to protect and advance Human Rights, democracy or the rule of law.**

“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).

Of the 18 responses to this question, three clear themes were identified. First, respondents described how their visible presence helps to protect the rights of protesters at the time, by serving as a *deterrent* or challenge to repressive protest policing on the ground: “police see LOs on actions and know they'll have to respect protesters' Human Rights” (LO 18). LO 8 described the need for this: “Although the police are tasked with facilitating protest, if they could they would rather not at all”. LO 1 agreed that **“the default approach to policing of protest is infringing not facilitating”**. (Emphasis added.)

“I've seen it where it's been clocked that LOs are present and it's changed how the police have decided to police. You can see it's deterred them. You can see they are about to do something and [when] it's pointed out they stop” (LO 1).

Second, LOs described how their visible presence helps to *empower* protesters to exercise their Article 11 rights by serving as a reassuring presence. “LOing encourages protesters to feel safe in some situations... this encourages people [to] exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly” (LO 10).

Finally, 50% of responses explicitly described a fundamental aspect of their role as ensuring police are *accountable*: both at the time, as highly visible independent witnesses, and afterwards, by providing detailed eyewitness evidence for legal challenges and court cases. LO 3 explained how they “ensure evidence is gathered and passed on to appropriate legal bodies in case of Human Rights infringements” and “can also help identify authoritarian trends in policing”. LO 7 described the significance of impartial contemporaneous notes for use in court compared to notes written up “days [or] even weeks later” by officers.

“LO's notes can support defences when protesters are taken to court in particular when defendants are insisting on their Human Rights as part of their defence. If cases get to higher courts then these successes can become case law” (LO 18).

Police Knowledge and Attitudes

Knowledge

In January 2022, we asked the following questions through Freedom of Information requests to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), College of Policing (CoP) and 17 forces across the UK:²⁸

1. Whether [public body] formally recognises the role of Independent Legal Observers (ILOs) at protests and public assemblies. What is [public body]'s official position regarding ILOs?
2. What (if any) actions does [public body] take to protect the role of Independent Legal Observers at protests and public assemblies.
3. Any training documentation, relevant meeting minutes or internal documents regarding Independent Legal Observers, or used to train officers on how to treat ILOs.
4. Any training documentation, relevant meeting minutes or internal documents regarding Independent Legal Observers, or used to train officers on how to treat ILOs in light of COVID restrictions during national lockdowns.

42% responded that there was no information held. 47% provided some information, mainly relating to questions 1 and 2. At the time of writing (May, 2022) Greater Manchester Police (GMP) had not provided any response.²⁹ Last year, GMP sparked controversy after four legal observers lodged complaints of assault, one of whom described being sexually assaulted by an officer while volunteering.^{30 31}

NPCC refused the request, but did state that “the NPCC is aware that ‘independent Legal Observers’ are often present and identifiable at modern protests. No information is held in relation to an official position relating to ILOs”. The College of Policing provided an identical response, as did South Wales and Avon and Somerset Police. No responses mentioned the duties of law enforcement officials to “respect and ensure the exercise of the fundamental rights of organizers and participants, while also protecting journalists, monitors and observers” as outlined by the UNHRC.³² Only 16% of responses (3 forces) explicitly mentioned ‘Human Rights’: Police Scotland, Sussex and Heddliu Gwent Police.

“Police Scotland work extremely hard to recognise Independent Legal Observers through recognised lines of communication with Protest Liaison Officers. Where it is safe to do so Police Scotland will facilitate their role at protests and public assemblies.”

While this may be the official position of Police Scotland, it stands in sharp contrast to the experiences of LOs volunteering in Scotland, whose reports during COP26 painted a very different picture. A significant element of this research was the testimony of LOs during the Glasgow COP26 Climate Summit protests, who experienced harassment, intrusive surveillance, intimidation, interference and threat of arrest from police during Police Scotland’s Operation Urram. **No other forces formally recognised LOs.**

²⁸ The following forces were selected due to having a significant protest presence in their jurisdictions: Metropolitan Police Service, Greater Manchester Police, South Wales Police, Leicestershire Constabulary, Police Scotland, Northumbria Police, Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Sussex Police, Gwent Police, Merseyside Police, West Midlands Police, West Yorkshire Police, City of London Police, Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Thames Valley Police.

²⁹ Contrary to their obligations under the [Freedom of Information Act, 2000](#)

³⁰ The Meteor, 2021. [Three legal observers at ‘Kill the Bill’ demonstration lodge assault complaints against Greater Manchester Police](#)

³¹ Netpol, 2021. [Police assault Legal Observers and Demonstrators in Manchester](#)

³² UNHRC, 2020. [General Comment No. 37](#) Para, 74. Emphasis added.

London's Metropolitan Police regularly oversee significant protest activity, and have been centre of repeated controversies in recent years. A recent High Court ruling confirmed that their handling of a vigil for Sarah Everard, a woman raped and murdered by a serving police officer, was unlawful.³³ In May 2021, in response to controversy around the arrest of four Black Protest Legal Support observers at a BLM protest, the Metropolitan Police dropped charges, acknowledging that LOs "have an important role to play in providing independent scrutiny of protests and the policing of protests".³⁴ Despite this, in April 2022, less than a year later, they responded to our Freedom of Information Request that

"The role of Independent Legal Observer (ILO) is not a formally recognised / accredited legal position and as such those acting as ILO's are deemed to be members of the public. Via protest liaison teams the MPS seek to build a rapport and dialogue with all present" (emphasis added).

A journalist who had embargoed early access to this research reached out to the Metropolitan Police Press Office for clarification on this inconsistency, but did not receive a response. It is important to note, here, that one of the 'key accountabilities' of Protest Liaison Officers is to "produce intelligence reports"³⁵ about protests and their attendees: "so as to inform the tactical plan and allow for other intelligence development opportunities".³⁶ As with Police Scotland's response, this emphasis on 'communication and dialogue' indicates a misunderstanding of the role of an LO, which is an *independent monitor of*, rather than a *participant in or organiser* of protest activity.

The predominant response to questions regarding a position on LOs from all forces is that they are informal, self-identifying and are treated the same as any member of the public.

LO Perception of Police Knowledge

We asked LOs: "Generally, in your experience, how would you describe police knowledge of the role of LOs?" 62% indicated police had some knowledge, 28% indicated poor knowledge and 10% indicated police had no knowledge of the role of LOs. None indicated that police had a good or excellent knowledge.

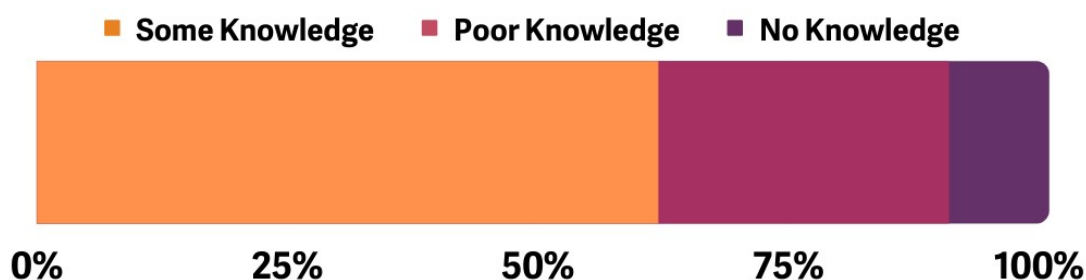


Figure 5 Legal Observer's description of Police Knowledge of the role of Legal Observers

"A very very few have a basic idea, but majority have zero. Some seem to be threatened by us! Many just... don't know the meaning of observer, [I'm] often asked to tell protesters instructions" (LO 16).

³³ The Guardian, 2022. [How damaging is Met's high court loss over Sarah Everard vigil?](#)

³⁴ The Guardian, 2022. [Met drops case and accepts the role of legal observers at protests](#)

³⁵ College of Policing, 2022. Professional Development: [Police Liaison Team Officer](#)

³⁶ College of Policing 2022. ['Public Order Public Safety' Police Liaison Team Trainer guide Version number 3.0](#) [Accessed 26/04/2022]

Several indicated that an officer's rank influenced their knowledge and awareness of the role: LO 1 described being prevented from carrying out their role by frontline officers, "kicking off when we try to give [arrestees] advice. Then senior officers come and tell them to leave it." LO 21 and LO 19 both mentioned a senior rank (such as Level 1 and Public Order Commanders) and more public order experience increasing police's awareness of the LO role. LO 19 described how Level 2s, by contrast, view LOs as a nuisance while Level 3s are largely unaware of the role.

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

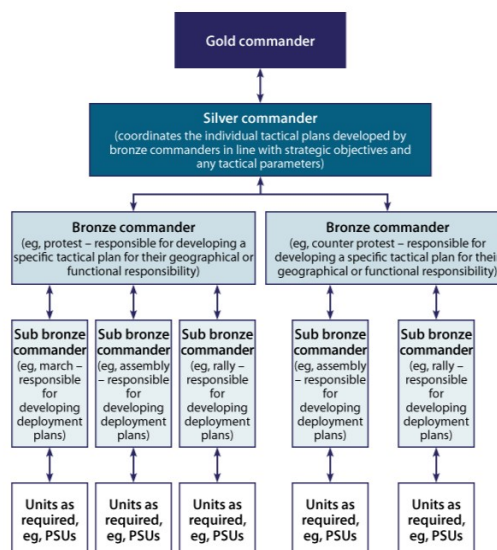


Figure 6 Public Order Command Structure
[College of Policing](#)

"They might ignore and not bother you at the beginning of a protest [then] they might deliberately obstruct and harass and intimidate. Their knowledge doesn't matter because when it suits them they will go on the offensive. They have some elementary knowledge of law... LOs wouldn't be as effective if the police didn't have SOME understanding of the role- they restrain themselves based on being observed to an extent" (LO 8).

Attitudes

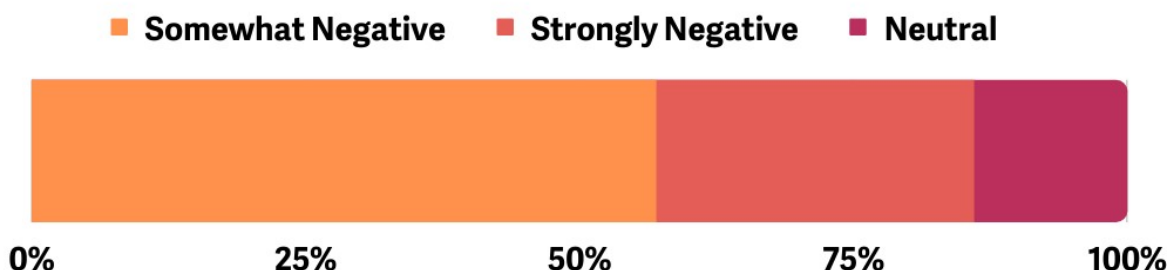


Figure 7 LO's perception of Police Attitudes towards them.

We asked LOs: "Generally, in your experience, how would you describe police attitudes towards LOs?" 57% indicated "somewhat negative" and 29% indicated "strongly negative attitudes".

In the section entitled 'Discrimination and impact of Police Treatment', findings indicate that Police attitudes towards LOs are influenced by gender, class, age and racial discrimination.

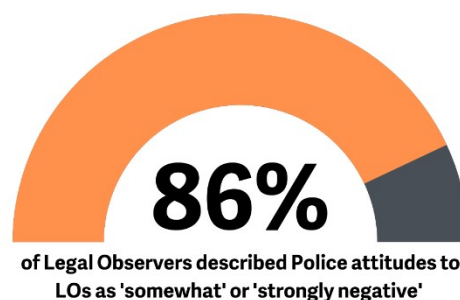


Figure 8

"Generally I think they [police] think we're a nuisance at best and they're hostile to us at worst because they see us as "on side" with the protesters and "making their job harder!" (LO 19).

14% indicated "neutral" and none indicated somewhat or strongly positive. One explained they had selected 'neutral' because "it seems to vary significantly between police officers depending on their roles" (LO 4). This was a persistent theme: "Some cops have a good attitude towards LOs others hate us" (LO 6).

"The attitudes are really inconsistent, some officers are super friendly and smiley and others are angry and hostile. It's also really hard to predict when the friendly officers might just flick like a switch and become really aggressive. I'm not really sure whether the friendly approach is just a tactic to try and win us over" (LO 2).

Forces around the country seemed to demonstrate varying levels of awareness and perceptions of LOs. LO 5 described how London officers had good awareness of the role of LOs but the attitude was hostile and 'information gathering in tone'. Meanwhile, Oxford officers were described as friendlier but less aware of the role. The Tactical Aid Unit with GMP were identified as particularly aggressive:

"Some officers particularly the tactical aid unit in Manchester are aggressive towards us, a lot of our Legal Observers have been physically assaulted by them and some sexually assaulted. Also threatened with arrest" (LO 7).

Police Treatment



Figure 9 Photo: GBC

During COP26 in 2021, Netpol and the Article 11 Trust identified a number of trends in police treatment of LOs. We separated these into categories and subsequently asked LOs taking part in this research project: 'have you experienced any of the following from police while LOing?', providing a multiple choice selection.

- 70% had experienced **Harassment** (unwanted behaviour which you find offensive or which makes you feel intimidated or humiliated.)
- 75% had experienced **Intimidation** (the act of frightening or threatening someone, usually in order to persuade them to do something that you want them to do)
- 70% had experienced **Intrusive Surveillance** (being filmed, photographed or followed by Police, either undercover, or overt such as FIT)
- 90% had experienced **Aggression or physical force** (forceful and hostile behaviour toward another person that can result in emotional or physical harm, this includes shoving, hitting, grabbing, physical restraint)
- 75% had experienced **Threat of arrest** while volunteering.
- 5% (one) had been arrested while volunteering.
- 10% indicated that they had experienced none of the above.

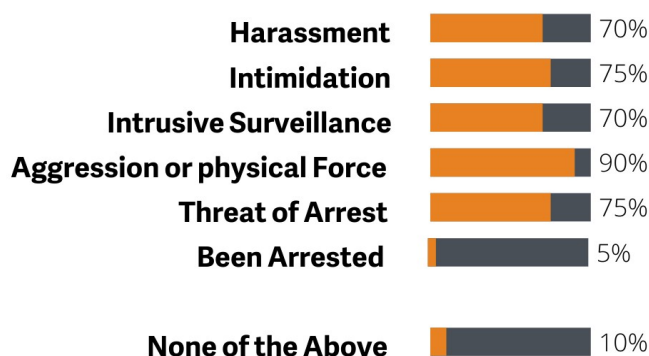
The two LOs that indicated they had experienced none of the above explained their experiences: LO 5 explained attitudes were "Hostile where good knowledge, friendly where unsure of what LOs role was, treated me like I was a marshal and there to control protestors behaviour". LO 3 described how "Whenever I ask for uniform numbers, some seem impatient and put out, some overly friendly, like they were instructed to show their best side. Occasionally you get one that seems sincere, but it's hard to take at face value".

We asked participants: 'In your own words, how would you describe your interactions and treatment by Police while you are volunteering as an independent Legal Observer?':

"It's hard to generalise. There are dynamics intertwined with that, I'm a woman, I'm Black and I'm 5'0 so that feeds into the dynamic. I also don't necessarily look like I might know the law. I've had massive male officers standing over me pointing in my face shouting: "you don't know public order law". It's intimidating. It's really inconsistent, you don't know whether Police are going to be friendly or hostile and when that might just flip all of a sudden" (LO 2).

A persistent theme in responses was that the way police treat LOs varies widely.

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



"Varying heavily from physically being pushed out the way, from being threatened with arrest and intimidated or lied to as well, to being very well facilitated in making sure that you're able to fulfil your role. And everything in between" (LO 13).

Figure 10 Legal Observer's treatment by police.

Use of force and harassment

LO 1 described how larger groups of officers behave differently towards LOs: "if it's part of a mobile protest and the officers feel a bit more vulnerable because they're spread out there won't be any sniping at you, but a lot together seem to feel a bit emboldened. They will ridicule or mock what you are doing". Some "officers are actively hostile, sometimes refusing to give badge numbers, obstructing access, and sometimes using force (e.g. pushing, shoving) while you're trying to make notes or see what's going on... I've had PLOs [Police Liaison Officers] and EG [Evidence Gathering] teams try and read notes over my shoulder or photograph my book" (LO 19).

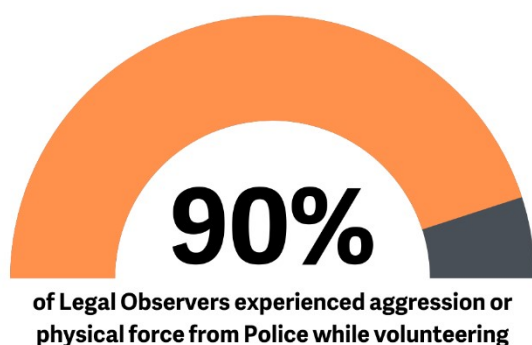


Figure 11

"Shoving and pushing is routine. I've been charged with horses, been chased with dogs. Knocked over by being pushed with a riot shield. Pushed backwards over some metal bike racks and got quite an injury... worst examples in Bristol are in particular context of revenge policing: some of the worst public order policing I've seen in the UK. End of the night, dark, media cameras gone home and they are clearing an area no matter what. Quite violent" (LO 19).

"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).

Several indicated that police attempt to provoke or antagonise LOs: “They try to provoke the situation by standing so close that at any minute they can say you touched them and hence arrest” (LO 9). LO 1 noted that “particularly when you’re being effective they will try and deter you”. LO 2 who self-described as a 5’0 woman explained:

“I’ve faced a lot of hostile and aggressive officers, I’ve been shoved, pushed, screamed at. Sometimes they form like a line or a circle to trap people and push forwards against you. One incident this really big male officer was shoving his body against me and kept saying that I couldn’t touch him and to stop touching him. I wasn’t touching him he was pushing against me and I could have fallen over. It felt like I didn’t know what to do because if I snapped back and shouted or pushed back I could have faced being arrested but then this person is almost intentionally trying to rile you up. My colleague eventually pulled me away and I hadn’t realised before but I was literally shaking”.

LO 13 explained their experience of harassment and surveillance, with officers “trying to film inside my bag, shoving the camera into the bag to film in the bag. Just the usual surveillance teams just filming you, moving around you and just capturing everything. I did once get followed home after a protest so that was a bit mad”.

Discrimination

38% of LOs indicated that they had experienced discrimination while Legal Observing. We asked them to provide as much detail as they felt comfortable with. Class, ethnicity, height and gender were identified as particular indicators of discrimination.

“you can feel them looking at you and deciding whether to respect you or not. I’ve been repeatedly asked ‘are you a lawyer’ in a patronising tone, I’ve heard colleagues handing bust cards to people being called a nuisance” (LO 2).

Gender based harassment and discrimination

Many respondents indicated having experienced gender based discrimination. 56% of female LOs explicitly described an element of gender based discrimination in their responses. LO 12 described experiencing harassment: “I have been sexually and otherwise harassed multiple times by police officers, who seem to particularly enjoy doing so in front of protesters I am supporting”.

LO 15 also described sexual harassment: “Witnessed sexualised actions by police, in the main on women, being grabby, lifting items of clothing and in one case lifting a person’s cycle so aggressively they were lifted with their genitals. I have been followed and filmed by the evidence ‘gatherers’.”

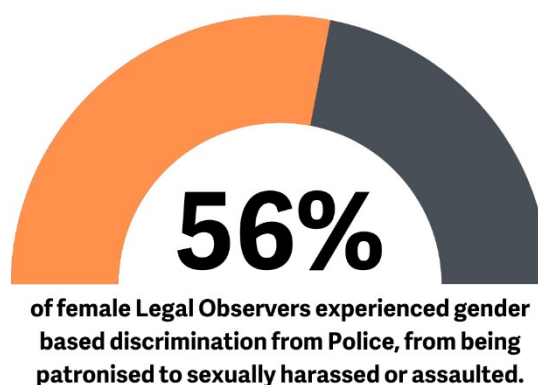


Figure 12

“[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).

Following an incident on the 1st of May 2021 three LOs lodged complaints of assault against GMP,³⁷ including one allegation of sexual assault where “a male officer grabbed a female Legal Observer’s chest”.³⁸ LO 1 explained how they witnessed this incident from a metre away”. On two occasions that day, LO 1 witnessed police pushing “two women LOing... very forcefully. A line of officers came across with the aim of pushing people back from the square. Pushing multiple times, at chest height really aggressively. They were highly visible in orange bibs, they [police] knew they were LOs”. LO 19 explained that the woman who submitted the complaint for sexual assault was pushed so forcefully during this incident that police broke the underwire in her bra.

LO 17 noted that such experiences aren’t exclusively from male officers: “as a female, often female officers [are] over aggressive. Several occasions [I] have been physically harmed”. LO 7 explained how their size and gender affected treatment:

“I am petite in size and find the male officers use their size to intimidate... [and] attempt to physically move me and our other female Legal Observers. Also at an anti-fracking demo male officers were pressing themselves up against my back as well as female activists. It was disgusting and made me feel sick”.

LO 10 described being treated differently than male LOs based on perceptions of authority or intelligence.

“I feel that the way I’m treated by police (being patronised and dismissed, told I know nothing or officers suggesting I didn’t train as an LO) is often related to my gender and age (female and young). I have often experienced very different treatment by police compared to male LOs who I’ve had equal training and experience to, not being allowed into cordons male LOs have gained entry to etc.”.

LO 4, who indicated ‘no’ to having experienced discrimination explained: “I don’t think so but there have been some supposedly-friendly-but-patronising questions about why a middle aged small middle class woman is doing something like this”. One non-binary LO described how their experience of treatment by police can be influenced by their perceived gender expression:

“I’ve found police behaviour sometimes but not always varies according to how they perceive my gender. I’ve gotten in the habit of dressing very androgynously while LOing (in part to protect my identity), and especially with a facemask and hat on have found that police are less likely to allow me to move through police lines and more likely to obstruct me if I’m dressed ambiguously” (LO 19).

They did, however, note that they have experienced violence from police, and that they “haven’t noticed that they’re less likely to use force if I’m more femme presenting.” The same LO noticed a more hostile attitude towards them based on being tall.

³⁷ The Meteor, 2021. [Three legal observers at ‘Kill the Bill’ demonstration lodge assault complaints against Greater Manchester Police](#)

³⁸ Netpol, 2021. [Police Assault Demonstrators and Legal Observers in Manchester](#)

Similar findings were made found in testimony recorded by LOs at COP26:³⁹

There was a consistent pattern of male officers speaking to female Legal Observers in derisory or mocking ways, behaving in a physically intimidating manner and then backing off when lone females are joined by others. At 16:09 on 7th November, a female Legal Observer (C) was observing an arrest when approached by an officer in the following way, which she described as 'patronising and sleazy' psychological intimidation tactic.

"An officer with a yellow cap but red shoulder insignia (which was confusing), ... approached me and said "Do you want a sticker?" whilst offering me a sticker with police insignia which said 'Well Done' on it which was clearly for children. He followed this up with "Do you need any more details? Are you not allowed to talk? These stickers are highly sought after in Glasgow". Needless to say I found this pretty creepy".

Another female Legal Observer (F) was threatened and intimidated by Evidence Gathering Team officers who were "filming right in her face then up and down her whole body" and who then followed her down the dimly lit and isolated Holland Street after dark. The three male officers then surrounded her. Footage of this incident was recorded by an OSCE-ODIHR monitor. Another Legal Observer (C) who was present described how "the EGT officers were very macho in their attitude towards us".

Age

Several LOs described age as a factor for discrimination, with younger LOs being treated with less respect. LO 18 described being treated favourably by police due to her perceived seniority: "I was escorted down some stairs as an older woman allowing me to get past the cops to an arrestee!!". Another LO described how perceptions of age, ethnicity and class can affect their treatment:

"How I'm treated can... vary according to how much effort I put into looking, behaving, and talking like a middle class person. I am a 50 year old fat white male. This means that I can receive the sort of treatment that I didn't experience when I was a skinny homeless person in my 20s. When LOing I can "go in character" and achieve very different treatment" (LO 6).

Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination was another common theme in responses, both from LOs describing they had witnessed it, or those who had experienced it personally. LO 13, who self-described as white and male, explained that he had not experienced discrimination personally but had witnessed it: "I don't look very intimidating so get away with more than other LOs do. I have seen it with LOs of colour. For example, when they're [police] saying- we will allow x amount of LOs into a space, they choose me instead of multiple other LOs that are female". LO 8 also explained that they hadn't been discriminated against but "others have... [at a] substantial sized protest related to racial justice, or anti-colonial [it's] much more likely for police to block LOs as a matter of course".

In an essay published online, two members of Black Protest Legal Support (BPLS), Patricia Daley and Queenie Djan explain how:

³⁹ Netpol and The Article 11 Trust. 2021. [Respect or Repression](#). pp.44-45.

“The Police’s interaction with Black and Brown protesters and Legal Observers alike has been starkly different to their interaction with white protesters”.⁴⁰

They describe police subjecting an LO to verbal transphobic abuse, repeatedly threatening Black and Brown LOs for noting officer’s numbers and mocking and taunting Black, Brown and Racialised Group (BBRG) LOs.

In March 2021, four Black Protest Legal Support (BPLS) LOs, three of whom were BBRG, were arrested under COVID regulations at a London demonstration against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Bill. BPLS condemned this move as “an attack on vital community movements that hold the police to account”, continuing that:

“Since being established in May 2020, our Legal Observers from Black, Brown and Racialised Groups (“BBRG”) have disproportionately and consistently faced police intimidation, aggression and violence at protests. Despite this, all of our Legal Observers continue to show up for our communities who are resisting state violence and police brutality”.⁴¹

The Met subsequently dropped charges against them, publicly conceding that LOs “have an important role to play in providing independent scrutiny of protests and the policing of protests”.⁴²

Arrest

The implicit or explicit threat of arrest was identified as routine by our respondents: “usually related to S14s or obstruction of an officer. I was once threatened with assault of an officer after he shoved me backwards, with no other contact between us” (LO 10). LO 19 explained how:

“I’ve also had officers who have accused LOs of “directing” the demo or being “organisers”, and have disingenuously used that as an excuse to threaten arrest / target us. That’s usually happened when they’ve seemed actively annoyed by LOs being present, and they’re looking for an excuse to mess with you - often after you’ve refused to answer police questions or engage with them”.

LO 7 also outlined how “One of our Legal Observers was arrested in Liverpool a few years ago by Merseyside Police and he got a substantial pay out for wrongful arrest”. LO 2 described the implicit threat of arrest: “I am always aware of it. I have seen my colleagues threatened with arrest and I always know that at any time they could decide to arrest me”.

Case Study: Manchester, and ‘Kill the Bill’ protests Spring 2021

Several respondents identified particular issues with police treatment of LOs in Manchester. LO 7 described how “Most of this behaviour is on a regular basis by Manchester’s [Tactical Aid]... Unit. They also often don’t wear collar numbers which we have a massive issue with in Manchester.” The Tactical Aid Unit (TAU) is a faction of GMP that is often deployed to protests with riot vans, and heavily armoured, which LO 1 describes as “full robocop gear”.

The presence of armed TAU officers has been documented at protests. LOs documented firearms officers on the 1st of May and 24th of April 2021 at a demonstration “largely made up of young people”.^{43 44} Armed

⁴⁰ Black Protest Legal Support, 2021. [BPLS Legal Observers have both witnessed and been victim to police discrimination](#)

⁴¹ Statewatch, 2021. [UK: Arrest of legal observers “an attack on vital community movements that hold the police to account”](#)

⁴² The Guardian, 2022. [Met drops case and accepts the role of legal observers at protests](#)

officers were deployed, officers confirmed, “in the defence of property”.⁴⁵ However, a GMP spokesperson asserted: “Greater Manchester Police *does not deploy armed officers to Police protests* and no armed officers were deployed to the protest on either 27 March 2021 or 1 May 2021” (emphasis added).⁴⁶



Figure 14 Armed TAU officers attending a ‘Kill The Bill’ demonstration in Manchester. Photo: Netpol

LO 10 also identified the TAU as particularly forceful: “Shoving and physical force is mostly related to interactions with the TAU in Manchester, particularly when they aim to clear protests without using arrest.”

Regarding an incident at another ‘Kill the Bill’ demonstration against the proposed Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill on the 27th of March 2021, where 18 peaceful protesters were arrested for blocking tram tracks, LO 1 described “a really high level of violence by the police against young protesters. I was going to give advice to one young lad who was being dragged off to van 200 metres away and the officer was shouting at me telling me to go away and threatening me with arrest. I was asking questions like where’s he being taken and they told me to do one”. One of the arrestees concerned described being “grabbed from behind” and being put in “a painful armlock” despite not resisting arrest, that took place with “barely any warning”.⁴⁷ Footage was circulated online of police “kicking and pushing protesters sat on the ground” before making arrests.⁴⁸

LO 1 also noted witnessing a female protester being stripped to her underwear and dragged across the ground by police on the 29th of March 2021 at a “protest against sexual violence”.⁴⁹ LO 1 described “they were targeted because they were perceived as different. The same person was also singled out 6 weeks ago. I think they are trans. Identifiable difference that police latched onto”. The protester concerned described the incident as “such a traumatising experience”,⁵⁰ and images of the police dragging and carrying her nearly naked body were publicised worldwide against her wishes.

⁴³ The Meteor, 2021. [Three legal observers lodge assault complaints against Greater Manchester Police](#)

⁴⁴ Netpol, 2021. [Police Assault Demonstrators and Legal Observers in Manchester](#)

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The Meteor, 2021. [Three legal observers lodge assault complaints against Greater Manchester Police](#)

⁴⁷ The Tab, 2021. [‘I was grabbed from behind’: 18 arrested by police at Manchester Kill The Bill protest](#)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Erin Dawson, 2021. [“The Power of Being Nice”](#)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The complaints of assault against GMP, including one allegation of sexual assault, by four LOs in Manchester (as outlined on page 17) came at a time an internal investigation was underway after TAU officers were accused of throttling a student; an incident that was filmed by a female student who described how officers “shoved me to the floor and laughed in my face afterwards”.⁵¹

Police interference

We asked LOs: ‘How often have you experienced or witnessed police attempting to restrict the activity or effectiveness of Legal Observers/observing? (For example, by blocking your view/ability to hear/ forcing you to move away from incidents)’. Respondents indicated their experience on a scale from 1 (Not at all often) to 10 (extremely often).

As illustrated in figure 16, *all respondents* had experienced police attempting to restrict their observations or effectiveness, with 78% of LOs indicating they had experienced police attempting to restrict the activity or effectiveness of LOs between somewhat often to extremely often. LO 1 describes their experience of police attempting to block or restrict the view of LOs as

Frequency of police obstruction of Legal Observers

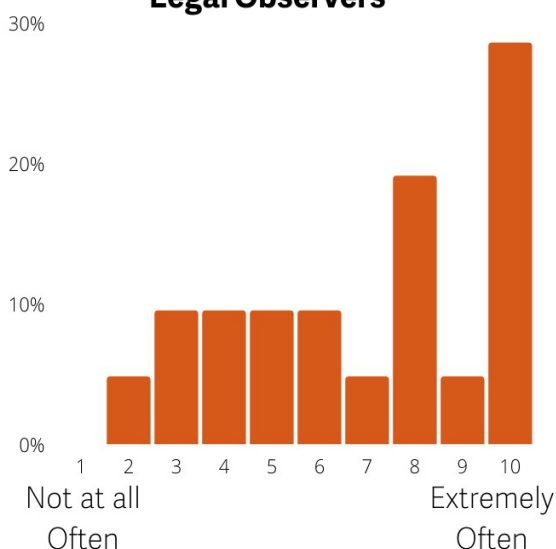


Figure 16 Frequency of Police obstruction of Legal Observers

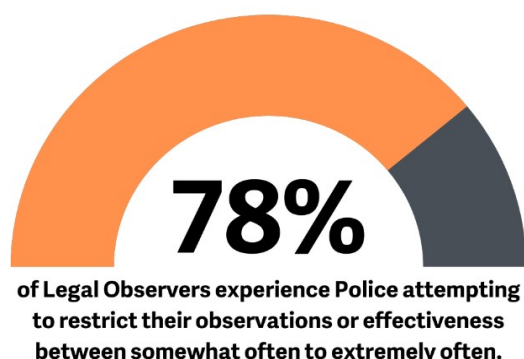


Figure 17

“When you’re trying to get that angle to view and look in and then they keep walking into you or budging or pushing you. Or backing into you, that was a big one at G7 that was really weird, that was a tactic they seemed to be using it seemed to be happening every time you were trying to legal observe. A police officer would stand in front of you and whoever you were trying to observe at the time and then back into you. They were obviously trying to escalate but I’m very difficult to irritate” (LO 13).

happening “every time there’s an arrest. I’ve got experience of officers trying to form a cordon so people can’t see what is going on or get near enough to give advice. Standard tactic if there’s enough of them”.

LO 19 explained how some “officers are actively hostile, sometimes refusing to give badge numbers, obstructing access, and sometimes using force (e.g. pushing, shoving) while you’re trying to make notes or see what’s going”.

Impact of Police Treatment

Several respondents described how the threat of arrest discouraged them from continuing to volunteer. One LO, who works in a regulated profession, describes the “Threat of arrest... [as] a deterrent, even if I get

⁵¹ The Guardian, 2021 [Greater Manchester police to investigate after teenager says officer throttled him](#)

de-arrested do I want to explain that to... [professional regulatory authority]? I don't want to risk my regulatory body not understanding the validity of the role and the fact that the police's account of events might not be entirely accurate. Rather than assert my rights I swerve it. That's done on purpose".

LO 1 explained witnessing physical violence against LOs on the 1st of May 2021⁵² despite LOs being "highly visible in orange bibs". Fifteen minutes later a lone male LO "was standing in the road, the protest was stationary or partially stationary. He was forcefully pushed by a senior officer very aggressive. I think he was picked out [because] they were trying to stamp their authority on the protest and the LOs, by pushing someone you might regard as untouchable. Quite a lot of force, considerable force". LO 1 continued:

"Maybe a new LO witnessing that might be like 'do I fancy being treated like that' and it will have a deterrent effect".

LO 21 described the impact of police treatment as "A few bruises. Dream about cops sometimes," whilst LO 19 explained that they weren't "put off by police violence" until becoming pregnant "as the risk of being shoved, hit or knocked around by police is too great". LO 11 also described taking breaks "when it feels overwhelming":

"They discourage me, it feels hard to sign up to spend a day in conflict with people for the whole day. Behaviour I perceive as discriminatory is particularly discouraging, as I feel there is little point in LOing if an older man could do it far more effectively than me, just by virtue of their age and gender. It also feels like my identity lets down protesters, who should be supported by the best LOs possible, which I don't feel able to be" (LO 10).

LO 7 expressed a negative effect on their relationship to police: "I don't trust the police at all and I am very conscious of my personal space when they are nearby. I don't feel safe and often after a demo have felt physically unwell. I do love being a Legal Observer, I feel I'm doing my bit to help others keep on fighting for social change. The team we have in Manchester is amazing and we all look after each other".

"I will keep LOing anyway, but it has definitely had an impact on the enthusiasm. It is physically and emotionally exhausting and definitely has an effect on you. One protest they brought the riot police out and that really affected us, you hear about police violence but you don't really understand it until you experience the reality of it, it was so different and so intense. The effect over time is that it is exhausting and we all just feel more angry and more burnt out having to witness that all the time" (LO 2).

Other LOs explained the importance of solidarity and felt more determined to continue: "[I] try to speak to LOs working with to reassure them and listen to their concerns" (LO 16). "Support from other LOs, back office people... help[s] me carry on". (LO 18) 45% of respondents to this question said they were un-deterred or more determined to continue LOing due to their treatment by police.

"Not really, I'm a fairly resilient person. I think it has changed my opinion of the police. I think a lot less of the police than I did when I started" (LO 13).

LO 12 expressed being "fuelled by anger so the level of mistreatment compels me by emphasising how much of a threat we clearly pose because otherwise they would not be interested". LO 9 explained how they were not deterred and would "make official complaints either with the police or M.P. or both".

⁵² Netpol, 2021. [Police Assault Demonstrators and Legal Observers in Manchester](#)

"Until I get a serious injury I will keep doing it. I do enjoy scrutinising the police, I think it's worthwhile and gives me a certain degree of satisfaction. Until I get seriously traumatised I will keep going" (LO 8).

A common theme in responses from LOs was that what kept them going in the face of police violence was strong relationships and a sense that their work really mattered. Collective care was an important aspect of this, which is underlined in training from networks such as GBC.

COVID and Protest Policing

Following the onset of the COVID pandemic in March 2020, a series of national lockdowns and emergency powers increased Police pressure, with the ability to disperse gatherings and issue fixed penalty notices. There was significant confusion over whether lockdown restrictions applied to political protest, with many police forces interpreting the powers as allowing them to effectively ban protests. This has been subject to legal challenge and subsequently found to be unlawful, but not before many protest groups and organisers were subject to fines or had their events threatened.

Notable examples include the policing of the vigil for Sarah Everard. The actions taken leading up to and during the vigil by the Metropolitan Police were subsequently ruled by High Court Judges as unlawful.⁵³ An NHS nurse in Manchester was fined £10,000 for organising a 40 person, socially distanced protest against a real-terms pay cut for NHS workers.⁵⁴ In London, four Black Protest Legal Support LOs were arrested at a BLM demonstration and issued fines under COVID regulations, before charges were eventually dropped.⁵⁵

"A spokesperson for BPLS described the arrests as part of a wider chilling effect on the right to protest, that was coloured by racism and enabled by Covid regulations and the proposals to crack down on protest contained in a new policing bill".⁵⁶

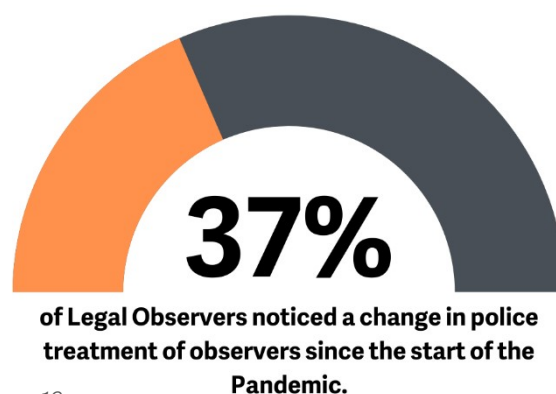


Figure 19

We asked LOs whether they had noticed a change in the treatment of LOs by Police since the beginning of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic restrictions in March 2020. Of the 15 who indicated no change, 8 either had not volunteered before or since the beginning of the pandemic. 37% of those who responded to this question, and had been volunteering since the start of the pandemic, indicated having noticed a change in the treatment of LOs by Police since the beginning of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic restrictions in March 2020.

Many respondents explained that they had not noticed different treatment of observers but had noticed changes in policing of protest more generally.

⁵³ *The Independent*, 2022. [Statement from Reclaim These Streets in full](#)

⁵⁴ *Sky News*, 2021. [NHS nurse: 'I was given a £10,000 COVID fine - but I will take it to the High Court'](#)

⁵⁵ *The Guardian*, 2021. [Met drops case and accepts the role of legal observers at protests](#)

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

"In Lockdown and tier 3, the police have acted as though all public gatherings including protests, were unlawful and both protesters and Legal Observers have been told to disperse and threatened with arrest" (LO 19).

LO 11 and LO 19 described being threatened with arrest more frequently in London by police "looking to use powers to hand out covid fines" (LO19). LO 2 explained, "Generally I know there was a lot of using covid regs as a way to get people not to gather or protest at all".

"LOs have needed to understand that they're at greater risk of arrest, even if we know those arrests would be considered unlawful. This has changed who was willing to LO, and the kinds of risks we were prepared to take on the street to support people. We've also had to be conscious that anyone in a hi-vis vest is at greater risk of being seen as an organiser and given a covid fine" (LO 19).

LO 16 described how "some LOs didn't come out. Police ignorant of actual legislation, thus increasing their aggression". LO 18 explained how there is "More legislation to understand - in more danger of arrest and FPN [fixed penalty notice]". LO 13 described how they "feel generally that police responses have escalated, but I don't think that's because of the pandemic but because of the changing political scope".

"Don't think it's covid related but maybe more BLM being more significant. Definitely an impact on all protests and organisers. All of the scandals and controversies surrounding the met have made the officers develop more of a siege mentality. Because they feel more under threat they feel more of the thin blue line between order and anarchy. You can see them feeling embattled and finds an outlet in aggression. Probably one of the times the Met has been most up against it since McPherson. Because the aggressive policing is condoned by the govt as well they have the endorsement of the top level" (LO 8).

Protest Operational Advice

A persistent theme in responses was that public order and protest policing was inconsistent. At the time of data collection, there was no national guidance issued on protest policing. After three years of lobbying by Netpol, in August 2019, the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) published their first draft of a Protest Operational Advice document. Netpol called this first major review of operational policing of public order and protest in almost a decade "fundamentally misguided" and with no basis in law.⁵⁷ This draft document was circulated to forces during a public consultation but the College Of Policing asserted that it "does not currently constitute [sic] national guidance as contained within the College's Authorised Professional Practice".⁵⁸

In the conspicuous absence of national guidance, LOs observed protest policing as dictated by the opinions and personal discretion 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).

⁵⁷ Netpol, 2019. [Netpol challenges fundamentally misguided major review of protest policing.](#)

⁵⁸ College of Policing, 7/4/21. [Freedom of Information Response.](#)

They continued: “I have heard an officer trying to persuade a more senior officer not to let a Palestine protest to move into the street to march because it was a small crowd and it was too much of an inconvenience to have to shut the road and redirect traffic...” (LO 2).

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

The Article 11 Trust requested access to the most recent version of the Protest Operational Advice document in November 2021 and were refused on the grounds that it was due to be published in December 2021. Subsequently, NPCC delayed publication until Spring 2022. On the 29th of April 2022, close to the scheduled publication of this research project, the Article 11 Trust received a copy of the document from NPCC, which sets out the intended approach to protest policing in future.⁵⁹

This document may serve as an important step for the issues under investigation in this project, as it is the first recognition of LOs as “a modern feature of public protest”⁶⁰ in official policing guidance in Britain. However, the document did note that, unlike journalists who should not usually be subject to “the same conditions/restrictions... as protestors”,⁶¹ and, for example, should usually be able to move freely through police cordons, any conditions on protests would automatically apply to LOs.

*“Legal observers have no formal legal status and are not automatically entitled to be treated differently to any other person attending... **Where it is necessary to give directions to all of those participating in procession or assembly, these will normally also apply to the legal observers**” (emphasis added).*⁶²

This stands in contrast to UNHRC guidance that “Even if an assembly is declared unlawful or is dispersed, that does not terminate the right to monitor”,⁶³ and indicates a lack of understanding, as demonstrated by the experiences of LOs herein, that LOs are independent from the protests they observe. On this contradiction, NPCC may face some form of legal challenge.

Nevertheless, a comprehensive analysis of the document is beyond the scope of this project: Netpol and the Article 11 Trust welcome the release of this long awaited guidance and await evidence on what this will mean in practise.

Trends in Protest Policing

Race/ethnicity

Black led protests and Black and Brown protesters have historically experienced disproportionate and heavy handed policing. In 1981, *the Scarman report* into the Brixton riots was the first state acknowledgement⁶⁴ of discriminatory policing of Black people.⁶⁵ Such discrimination was once more identified, 40 years on, in *Britain Is Not Innocent*: a report into the policing of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests against racist Police violence and deaths in custody. Key issues of concern identified were excessive use of force, targeting of Black protesters by Police, unbridled far right violence and neglect

⁵⁹ NPCC, 2022. [Protest Operational Advice](#). [Accessed 29/4/22] [Freedom of Information Disclosure document](#) [Accessed 29/4/22]

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p.32.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ UNHR Office of the High Commissioner, 2020. [UN Human Rights Committee publishes interpretation on the right of peaceful assembly](#).

⁶⁴ *The Independent*, 2021. [Brixton riots 40 years on](#)

⁶⁵ In 1999 evidence of institutional racism in the Metropolitan Police Service was revealed by the Macpherson Report: [The Steven Lawrence Inquiry, 1999](#).

from police towards victims of racist attacks: “One young Black boy was searched and moved on by officers after sustaining serious injuries including a stab wound to the face”.⁶⁶

“Excessive use of force, including baton charges, horse charges, pepper spray and violent arrest were commonly reported and well-evidenced”.⁶⁷

Britain is not Innocent identified hostile attitudes towards, and use of force against LOs “particularly against those who are Black or another racialised minority”,⁶⁸ and the findings served as key inspiration for this research project. In June 2020, LOs from Black Protest Legal Support noted “concerning police aggression” during BLM demonstrations, including the use of batons against peaceful protesters.



Figure 19 Mounted police at a Black Lives Matter protest in London on 6 June 2020. Photo: Bradley Stearn.

We asked our respondents ‘Have you noticed differences in how the police treat different protest groups and issues?’. Several respondents noted a difference between the policing of protests based on the composition of attendees and on the protest issue concerned. LO 1 and 11 noted how far right and “white fascist” protesters were policed less heavily than Black, Brown and racialised protesters.

“I went on a counter-protest to national action (Nazis) in Bolton around 2016. They were giving a Nazi salute walking around the town centre and police were well aware of this and they weren't intervening. A group of young lads from Muslim community in Bolton protesting against the Nazis present. They received a lot of attention and challenge from Tactical Aid Unit (Full Robocop gear)” (LO 1).

⁶⁶ Netpol, 2020. [Britain is Not Innocent](#). p.4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.3.

⁶⁸ Netpol, 2020. [Britain is Not Innocent](#). p.4.

LO 8 also noted a difference in treatment, particularly for Palestine solidarity protests: “Generally the crowd is young, Muslim and the officers are not entirely but mostly white. They *do have racialised fears which does play out in the policing of the protest and that does extend to LOs as well* definitely... There is a difference, but don't want to underplay the violence that white protesters experience from police as well” (emphasis added). They also commented that police treatment “will vary a lot depending on the action and what kind of disruption it's causing” and that Insulate Britain and BLM receive more police aggression.

LO 2 described how, at Women's Strike in March 2022: “It was a majority white crowd although still diverse. I heard a PLO radioing that more officers weren't needed as it was a *mainly 'well-mannered'* crowd. There was 2000 people and not many police at all” but that:

“Black and brown protesters are treated absolutely differently, Yemen or Palestine protests are treated so much more harshly than a majority white crowd. For example I was LOing a protest outside the Nigerian embassy for end SARS on Northumberland street which was a small peaceful gathering and there were officers everywhere, and they were telling protesters where they had to stand. We could see from where we were that there were thousands of [majority white] people at an anti-vaccine in Trafalgar square being treated completely differently” (LO 2, emphasis added).

LO 17 described how at “QTIPOC [Queer, Trans, Intersex, People of Colour] protests the police have no idea what's going on and at every turn try and undermine the feelings and reactions of protestors vs what I have seen with white protestors who are allowed to act how they want (to a point)”.

One respondent explained their experience of protest policing in South Wales as “not just tactics at the day of but also afterwards- raiding BLM organisers homes and trying to recruit spies” (LO 8). As a result of the “massive impact”⁶⁹ of one attempt by covert police to recruit an informant from BLM Swansea, the local chapter closed down, indicating a significant detrimental effect on Human Rights of campaigners by certain protest policing tactics. LO 8 continued:

“Palestine [protests]- lots of riot police, batons shields helmets. Also the way they use the van. Sometime there is a rogue officer striking down with a baton very dangerous, using shields as weapons to slam down. Sometimes on the front line between police and protesters you can get a sense of the psychology of the officers...”

Gender, Age and Class

Many respondents noted protesters and LOs experiencing different treatment based on how police perceive them, for example on whether they appear ‘respectable’.

“Police a lot more impatient with people they don't see as outwardly respectable. People who aren't white or middle class. Have seen on occasion police more gentle with femme presenting people but while LO'ing being out in a skirt doesn't protect you from police violence in any way shape or form” (LO 19, emphasis added).

A common theme in responses was that younger protesters and LOs can expect to be treated with more force and restriction on Article 11 Rights. LO 7 commented on how “The use of the tactical aid unit at peaceful environmental demos and more student led demos like Kill The Bill has been really harsh”.

“Generally if you're with an older group of protesters they are a lot more respectful. With a younger group of protesters they will be a lot more forceful and deploy a lot

⁶⁹ The Guardian, 2022. [British BLM group closes down after police infiltration attempt](#)

more dirty tactics with young people being there even though they might be just as calm and good" (LO 13).

By contrast, LO 2 described police as imposing stronger restrictions on crowds they perceive as more obedient: "I've noticed as well that police push their luck with older protesters that they expect to be more compliant by, for example telling them where they can stand and what time they have to leave and they do it even though there is no legal obligation for them to do it. If they think a group is more vulnerable and compliant they will try their best to limit their protest".

LO 13 also noted a significant difference between the way majority white crowds of football fans in Glasgow are policed versus, for example, young environmental protesters and LOs attending to observe: "They are a lot more serious with us than with football fans. They take a big step back. For example, the riots of statue protecting people in George square. Police are present but not in the crowd, not invading people's personal space. Whereas for us they are all over us". This is not necessarily a universal difference, however, as crowd psychology theory and crowd control tactics are often trialled by police on football crowds.⁷⁰ For example, Section 60 'suspicion-less searches'⁷¹ and Forward Intelligence Teams (FIT) were introduced to football crowds first before being mapped onto protests.⁷² LO 2 described how since the major escalation of policing during COP, "it's like they [Police Scotland] are trying to get their reputation back".

Protest Issue

Regarding protest issue, LO 7 described feeling that "the right wing get treated less harshly than say anti fascists..." Likewise, LO 15 explains how "Environmental protestors have always been tagged with derogatory names and are subject to belittling abuse from all, it has also been noted that the cops have occasionally turned a blind eye when a member of the public, not as a protestor takes their own actions". LO 3 explained how "police definitely show more activity and bring out the bigger metaphorical (and sometimes literal) guns whenever Young Communists or similar groups are involved. There was also a gigantic show of force during an anti-Tory march that seemed frankly unnecessary and like a waste of taxpayer money".

Another LO explained that an officer policing a protest in central London had commented, in a throwaway manner, that police **"only tend to impose conditions on left or right groups"** (emphasis added). This comment, LO 2 explains, does "highlight the mentality behind the way officers regard groups and decisions to use particular strategy/tactics".

Tactic

Respondents indicated the significance of the protest tactic being used. Several explained how marches and vigils were the forms of protest with the least police presence and interference, but mobile, 'creative' or "more effective" protests were policed harshly. LO 16 described their experience that over policing "incites violence":

"Obviously the police would rather no protest at all but when it's a march there's no issue at all. Not just tactic but also location and target" (LO 8).

⁷⁰ Williams, N. and Stott, C., 2022. *The role of psychological science in public order policing*. In *Police Psychology* (pp. 149-171). Academic Press.

⁷¹ Stop Watch, 2021. [Section 60 Factsheet](#).

⁷² Monbiot, 1996. [Defective Inspectors](#).

Lock-ons and road blocks were described as attracting more severe policing responses by LOs 10, 8 and 12:

"The more serious/effective the protests, the more aggressive and unpleasantly policing response seems to be. Marches mostly seem to receive very little police aggression, while lock-ons receive far more" (LO 10).

Forces identified by LOs as being particularly violent or hostile to protest were the Metropolitan Police, Ministry of Defence, and "Manchester & Scottish Police are more pumped and aggressive" (LO 16), "In Liverpool and Manchester they attempt to remove us 'for our own safety'" (LO 7).

Conclusion

As we note in this report, the value of independent monitoring of protests is recognised in international Human Rights guidance. This is why it is specifically mentioned in Netpol's Charter for Freedom of Assembly Rights, which aims to provide a Human Rights benchmark for how protests are policed. The Charter recommends, in point nine, that the work of LOs is seen as "essential for defending the right to organise and participate in public assemblies".⁷³

The previous absence of national guidance, and ambiguity in recent guidance on protest policing allows forces to operationalise a Human Rights narrative⁷⁴ to mitigate against reputational risk, without providing any meaningful way of testing whether operations are in fact human rights compliant. This was evident with Police Scotland's 'human rights based' operation Urram, which in fact used no human rights measures to claim an "overwhelming success" and reject calls for independent scrutiny⁷⁵ in response to numerous human rights concerns raised by campaigners and human rights organisations.^{76 77 78 79 80}

With no formal ways to monitor the police's Human Rights compliance, or compliance with the law, on protests, it's extremely hard to challenge the potential for misrepresentation or misleading accounts of protest policing, as police oversee their own complaints system. **With few, if any, effective mechanisms to hold officers accountable for racist, violent, or discriminatory policing, LOs serve as an important means of monitoring and resisting threats to Article 11 Human Rights in Britain.**

Indeed, several respondents noted how police in Britain were reluctant to fulfil their legal obligation to facilitate protest: that "if they could they would rather not at all" (LO 8) and that more "effective protest[s]" (LO 10) are policed more aggressively. The treatment of protest by police as a public order threat to be managed, leaves Article 11 Rights at risk. This is particularly true in the context of the PCSC Act 2022, which introduces new police powers and penalties for protest related offences, including the ability to impose 'noise conditions' on demonstrations.

It will be absolutely crucial for LOs to effectively monitor the implementation of these new police powers on protestors, without obstruction or prohibition, in order to defend Article 11 Rights in Britain.

LOs and legal support organisations came into existence as a reaction to this lack of accountability, and LOs see their role as offering scrutiny of police behaviour that isn't being done by anyone else. As such, they have a vital role to play, recognised by a number of official bodies. However, The National Police Chiefs Council says only that it is "aware" that LOs are a "modern feature of public protest"⁸¹ but it does not recognise the significance of independent monitoring as set out by the UNCHR. The NPCC also, in new guidance, state that conditions on assemblies will "normally also apply to legal observers",⁸² contrary to human rights guidance that "Even if an assembly is declared unlawful or is dispersed, that does not

⁷³ Netpol, 2021. [A Charter for Freedom of Assembly Rights](#)

⁷⁴ Police Scotland, 2021 [Police Scotland puts human rights at the heart of COP26 protest plans](#)

⁷⁵ Article 11 Trust, 2022. [Scottish Police Authority reject calls for independent scrutiny of COP26 Policing](#)

⁷⁶ TFN, 2021. [Concerns raised over COP26 'intimidating policing'](#)

⁷⁷ The Guardian, 2021 [Cop26 police tactics creating atmosphere of fear, protesters say](#)

⁷⁸ Morning Star 2021 [COP26: Police Tactics 'suffocated' peaceful protest and put public in danger, campaigners claim](#)

⁷⁹ Huck Magazine, 2021. [COP26: the inhumane tactics police are using on activists](#)

⁸⁰ COP26 Coalition, 2021 [Open Letter to Nicola Sturgeon on Policing at COP26](#)

⁸¹ P.32 Protest Operational Advice

⁸² Ibid.

terminate the right to monitor”,⁸³ and that observers “may not be prohibited from, or unduly limited in, exercising these functions” by law enforcement or other arms of the state.⁸⁴

The NPCC not only refuse to recognise the important role of LOs for human rights, our findings demonstrate that **police frequently actively prohibit this important work and are hostile towards observers. This includes Police Scotland who do formally recognise the role.**

78% of LOs have experienced Police attempting to restrict their observations or effectiveness between somewhat to extremely often. As LOs themselves have told us, the consequence of trying to simply ignore the presence of independent monitoring of protests means frontline public order officers invariably have little knowledge of the difference between LOs and protesters, are confused about the limits of the role they undertake and are largely negative about the scrutiny that it entails.

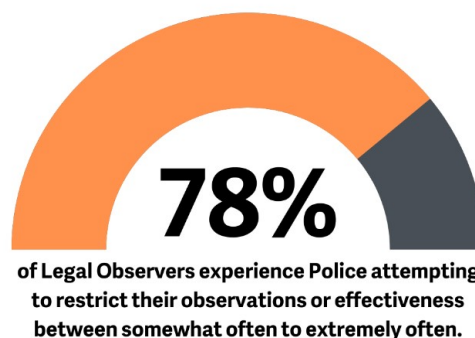


Figure 20

Organisations like GBC are not seeking, and do not need, any formal endorsement of the role of their volunteers: LOs do not require the permission of the state to undertake their activities.

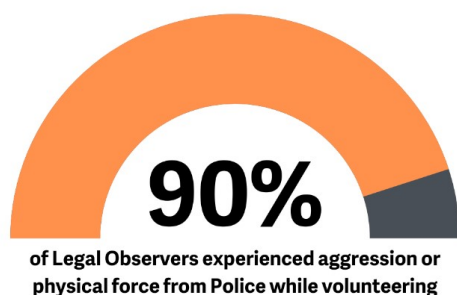


Figure 21

In too many instances, as this report has highlighted, however, this ignorance has escalated into high levels of aggression, active hostility, harassment and arrests: 90% of Legal Observers experienced aggression or physical force from police while volunteering.

As this report has demonstrated, this has led to volunteers using their presence to protect protesters having their own rights ignored or undermined by police officers. This in turn has further endangered the rights to freedom of assembly and expression of protest participants.

After over a decade of the continuous presence of LOs at hundreds of protests across the country, the studied hostility to this important work from police forces is not sustainable or compatible with international human rights guidance, and became acutely problematic when coronavirus restrictions were introduced.

This report highlights how LOs are prepared to volunteer their time, go out onto the streets into potentially confrontational situations at protests and document what they see, because they firmly believe monitoring the conduct of the Police is particularly important to the full enjoyment of Article 11 Rights to Assembly and Association.

They see their role as actively protecting protesters, first, by acting as a disincentive against abuses of Police power. Second, as an independent witness when their presence is no longer a deterrent, and third, as a source of positive reassurance, giving demonstrators the confidence to continue exercising their Article 10 and 11 rights.

⁸³ UNHR Office of the High Commissioner, 2020. [UN Human Rights Committee publishes interpretation on the right of peaceful assembly.](#)

⁸⁴ UNHRC, 2020. [General Comment No. 37](#)

This report has tried to amplify the experiences of the volunteers and the groups we have spoken to, rather than produce a detailed set of recommendations.

- **However, it is clear that frontline officers should know by now that LOs are not protesters or stewards and are independent of the protests they monitor. This information is publicly available and has been for many years.**
- **Officers should also know that attempting to impose unnecessary and unjustifiable restrictions on LOs is contrary to their legal duties to both facilitate and protect Human Rights.**

Allegations of aggressive policing, including violence, racism, misogyny and wrongful arrests, are not unique to independent LOs. Undoubtedly the treatment of protest participants is much worse and occurs far more often. LOs are independent from protest but as our research shows, they are still subject to the same patterns of violence, discrimination and racism that communities and protest movements experience every day. Despite facing harassment, violence and racism from the Police, LOs continue to carry out a vital role, protecting protest.

This is why we remain convinced that the best way to protect Article 11 Rights to freedom of Assembly and Association is for Police forces to have a proper benchmark – like the Charter for Freedom of Assembly Rights – that sets out what a Human Rights based approach to protest policing should look like in practice.

Appendix 1

Method

An accurate count of how many LOs are active in Britain is extremely difficult to calculate. Many volunteers give their time on an ad-hoc basis, and because much of the support LOs give is organised through grassroots groups, there are no official records of how many people have been trained or volunteer regularly. Most LOs frequently dip in and out of active volunteering, and some are trained but never volunteer. We asked for an estimate of active volunteers from the key groups: BPLS, GBC, ILON and SCALP. They believe there are around 100 active LOs in the South of England and Wales, 40 in the North (mainly Manchester and surrounding areas) and 40 in Scotland, bring the total to around 180. Northern Ireland is not covered by our research.

The sample for this research was 21 LOs, who either responded to the online survey or took part in structured interviews. This is examined along with the experiences of 16 LOs who submitted detailed evidence and contemporaneous notes during the Glasgow COP26 climate summit in Autumn 2021. A number of trends and incidents in police treatment of LOs were noted in 2021 in the Netpol and Article 11 report *Respect or Repression?*,⁸⁵ which we build upon here. This means we were able to analyse the experiences of 37 people, which represents close to 20% of the estimated number of active LOs in Britain. We see this as certainly sufficient to provide a *general* indication of police treatment of LOs around the country.

Data collection was undertaken through an online survey and structured interviews. The survey link was distributed directly to LO networks, email lists and the call for participants was publicised online. The link was not made publicly available to avoid data corruption.

The aim was to provide a general indication of the way LOs in Britain are treated by police using rich qualitative data. The intent, therefore, is not to demonstrate any particular trends to statistical significance ($p \leq 0.05$) or to conduct detailed quantitative analysis. Importantly, this research was not conceived with any hypothesis in mind, but rather with recognition of the need for compilation of personal experiences, stories and trends. Any quantitative data analysis is intended purely in an indicative way, and cannot reliably be extrapolated. This means that any statistics used in this report provide a general indication of police treatment of LOs, but that it cannot be taken as an accurate viewpoint of *all* LOs in Britain.

In this vein, there is certainly scope for further research. Any percentages are intended as indicative only, and may not always sum 100% due to rounding or methods of tagging responses.

Ethics

Data was securely encrypted at the point of submission and then downloaded onto an encrypted drive used exclusively by the Netpol and Article 11 staff team. Participants were made aware that their data would be stored securely, and were reminded at the start of the survey and interviews that they had the right to withdraw at any time. They were also informed that they could request to view and delete any data relating to them at any time. When interviews were recorded for later transcription, participants provided informed consent and any audio was deleted immediately after transcription.

Some questions touched upon potentially distressing content, such as experiences of violence, discrimination and harassment. At the start of the survey/interview, and during any section with

⁸⁵ Netpol and The Article 11 Trust. 2021. [Respect or Repression](#).

potentially distressing questions, participants were reminded that all responses were totally voluntary, and that they do not have to provide any more information than they felt comfortable giving.

Demographics

Demographic data such as ethnicity, class and gender were not available for the LOs who submitted evidence about the policing of COP26, as many responses were submitted anonymously or with very limited personal information.

For the respondents to our online survey, of the 19 who indicated an age range, 15% were age 18-24, 36% were aged 25-34, 16% were age 55-

64 and all other age categories up to and including 65+ were 11% respectively.

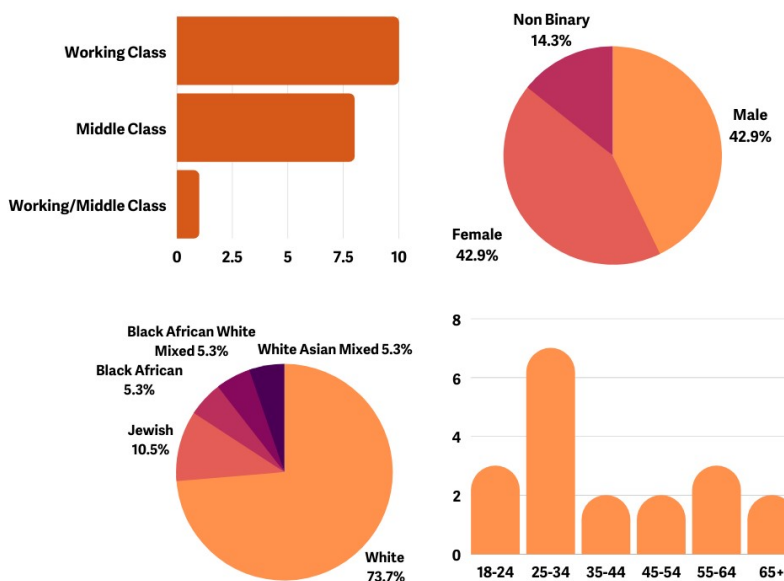
Within this group, 43% were male, 43% were female and 14% were non-binary. Ethnically, 74% of participants self-described as white, white-British, Scottish or Irish, while 11% said Jewish, 11% as Black African and Black African mixed, and one person (5%) described themselves as mixed white Asian. Of the 19 who self-described their social 'class', 53% stated working class, 42% were middle class and one person (5%) described themselves as working/middle class.

In a multiple choice question, respondents indicated experience observing with Green and Black Cross (GBC, 68%), Black Protest Legal Support (BPLS, 26%), Independent Legal Observers Network (ILON, 21%), Extinction Rebellion (XR, 21%), Scottish Community and Activist Legal Project (SCALP 10%), Bristol Defendant Solidarity (BDS, 10%) and Legal Defence Monitoring Group (5%). A number of other smaller, local, and regional campaign groups were mentioned.

GBC, the largest LO organisation in Britain, operate mainly in the south of England and Wales. Their offshoot, Green and Black Cross Manchester, covers the north of England: "everywhere from Birmingham upwards. We do training for people living in Bolton, Salford and further North in Preston and Lancaster",⁸⁶ whilst Scottish Community and Activist Legal Project (SCALP) are the main coordinators of Legal Observers across Scotland.

135 years and 8 months of cumulative experience volunteering as a Legal Observer in Britain.

The cumulative experience of those who participated in this research is 135 years and 8 months of volunteering as an LO in Britain. 48% of respondents had between 5 and 22 years of experience as an LO. The findings herein, therefore, represent a significant body of expertise on legal observing protest policing in Britain.



⁸⁶ *The Meteor*, 2022. [Protecting those who protest – Manchester Green & Black Cross on police bills, legal mutual aid and how we can protect our rights](#)