

Palestine Action banned after judge denies temporary block

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BBC News

A Long Time

Coming



Last week's proscription of Palestine Action is a significant escalation in the British state's crackdown on popular protest. →



Social Unrest

In recent years, Britain has experienced an almost **continuous wave of social unrest.** In 2019 Extinction Rebellion established a mass climate movement engaged in sustained waves of blockades, occupations, and marches.

While the pandemic had a cooling effect, hundreds of thousands of people still took to the streets in 2020 to join the Black Lives Matter movement – *“the largest anti-racist protest seen in the UK since the slave abolition movement.”*

Source: Young, British & Black, *The Guardian* (2020).

Image: Extinction Rebellion blocks Oxford Circus, Facundo Arrizabalaga/EPA



Then in 2021, as lockdown restrictions were lifted, the climate movement returned, this time **not with the same numbers but with more confrontational tactics,** including shutting down refineries, smashing petrol pumps, and blocking high-way traffic.

Just as the potency of that movement began to wane, **the Palestine movement erupted in October 2023, with both a mass and militant character.**

State Crackdown

The state responded by **passing legislation* that dramatically expands police powers.** Police gained the ability to criminalise protests around “key infrastructure” (e.g. public roadways) and to pre-emptively stop protests on suspicion that they “may result in serious disruption,” including being “unjustifiably noisy.”

These new powers were quickly put to use →

* Specifically the Police Crimes Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023.

Sources: Public Order Act, gov.uk (2023); Noise-related provisions: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 factsheet, gov.uk (n.d.). **Image:** Andy Rain, EPA.





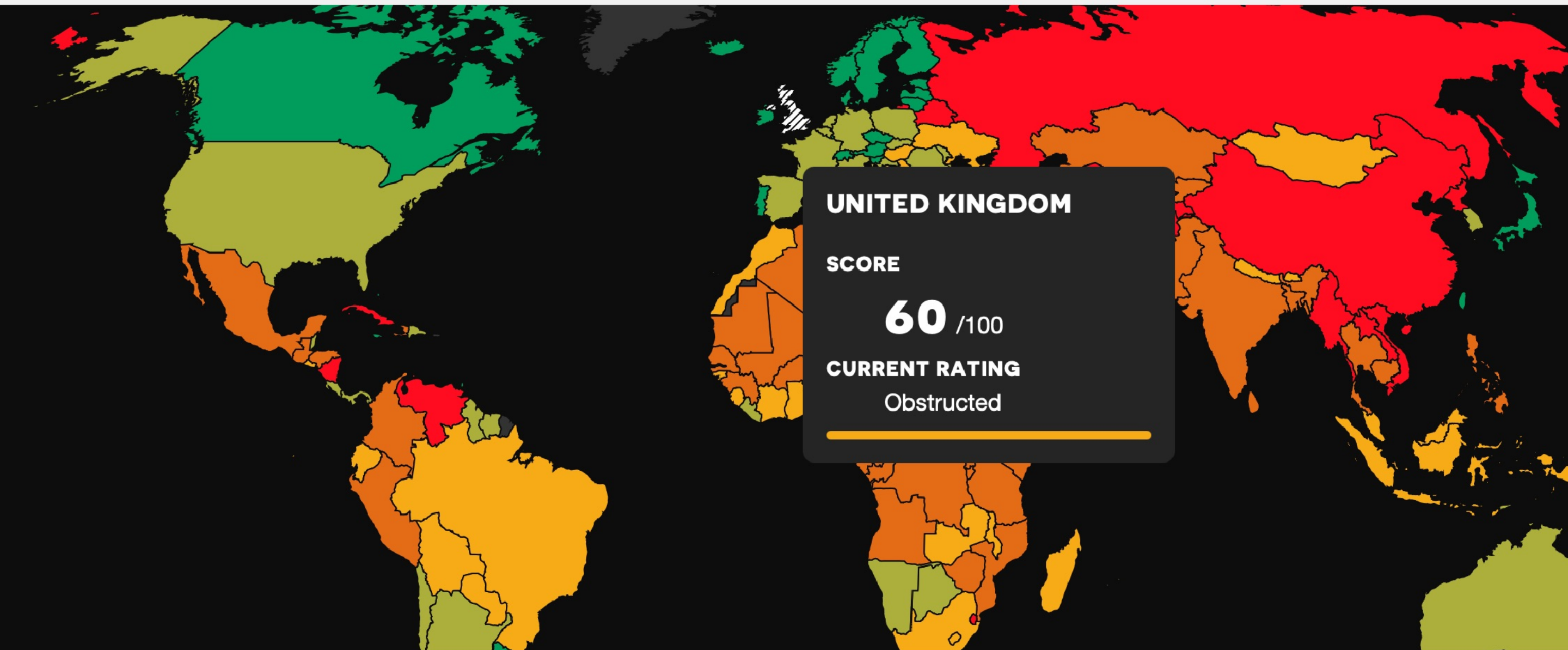
In May 2023, 64 people were arrested during King Charles' coronation, most on "conspiracy to cause a public nuisance." Three of these people were women's safety volunteers, arrested for possessing rape alarms that the police suspected could be used to disrupt the parade.

In October 2023, more than 60 Just Stop Oil activists were arrested for marching on a road outside Parliament for less than 30 minutes. Arrests were made using the Public Order Act, claiming interference with "key national infrastructure."

Sources: Warren, BBC (2023); Gayle, The Guardian (2023).

The treatment of activists in court has also become more severe.

- ↪ It has become commonplace for judges to prohibit climate activists from mentioning climate change (i.e. the reason for their actions) in their legal defense.
- ↪ In 2024, five Just Stop Oil protesters were sentenced to a combined 21 years in prison for conspiring to obstruct a motorway – the longest prison sentence for non-violent protest in British history. The trial prompted Michel Frost, UN special rapporteur on environmental defenders, to express concerns of “judicial persecution.”
- ↪ In August 2024, a group of activists – the Filton 18 – broke into an Elbit Systems site and damaged military equipment. They are still being held in prison without trial.



“Increasingly Authoritarian”

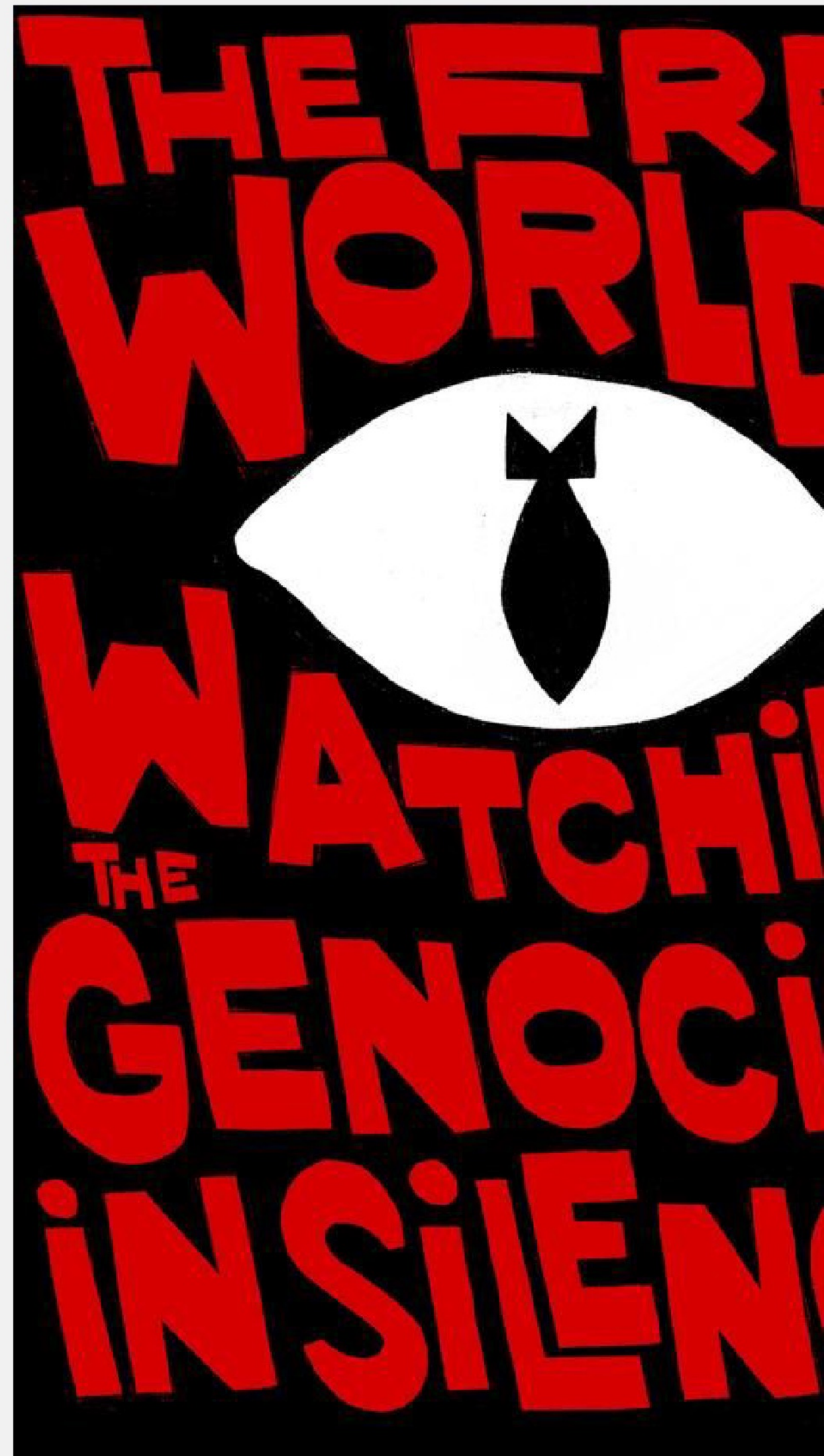
In 2023, the UK was downgraded to an “obstructed” democracy by the Civicus Monitor, which tracks the democratic health of 197 countries. This puts it in the same category as Hungary.

The use of the Terrorism Act* to proscribe Palestine Action is a watershed moment in the British state’s “increasingly authoritarian” trajectory →

* The Terrorism Act 2000 was itself a marked shift in “anti-terror” legislation. It established a notably broad definition of terrorism, enabling a significant expansion in the number and type of groups that could be banned. **Pre-2000, only 14 groups were proscribed under UK law. The number now stands at nearly 100.**



Never before has the Terrorism Act 2000 been used to proscribe a domestic non-violent protest group.



It not only criminalises activity, but also the freedom of political thought and association. Expressing an opinion in support of Palestine Action could now lead to 14 years in prison. Wearing a Palestine Action t-shirt could lead to a 6-month prison sentence.



The Genocide Continues with British Support

The proscription of Palestine Action has coincided with new evidence that shows the Labour government has allowed three Israeli Air Force planes to land in the UK. These planes were used to refuel F-35 fighter jets, which Israel deploys to massacre Palestinians in Gaza.

This comes after a recent report found that the British state had authorised the shipment of over 160,000 military goods to Israel since October 2023, including mines, bombs, armoured vehicles, and F-35 parts.

Meanwhile, flight tracking data indicates that the Royal Air Force continues to send near-daily Shadow R1 spy planes to monitor Gaza from its base in Cyprus, RAF Akrotiri, producing intelligence for Israel.



7 in 10 British people support banning all arms sales to Israel. Proscribing Palestine Action is unlikely to stop people from taking direct action to enforce a popular arms embargo on Israel.



Indeed, on July 3rd, a new group called “Yvette Cooper,” the name of the Home Secretary, sabotaged a lorrie belonging to Time Logistics, a major transporter for Elbit Systems.

It remains to be seen if Yvette Cooper will proscribe Yvette Cooper.