

NEWSLETTER

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
Human Rights in the UK**NEWSLETTER 1**
June 2026

PROTECTING RIGHTS. DEMANDING JUSTICE.

amnesty.org.uk

FEATURE**Why we need a Coordinator for Human Rights in the UK**

Helping to understand the UK's steady slide towards authoritarianism that threatens our democracy — and sharing ideas for what we can do about it. →

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FROM AMNESTY UK'S NEWLY APPOINTED COUNTRY COORDINATOR FOR THE UK

Hello everyone,

For the first time in the history of Amnesty there is a Country Coordinator for the UK, and this is the first newsletter. I am very honoured to have been given the role and will do my best to make it effective - but- **Why do we need a Coordinator for the UK you might ask, and Why now?**

Here's why! – There is increasing evidence that human rights in the UK are under serious threat and there is a worrying steady slide towards authoritarianism that threatens our democracy. We have evidence of: -

- Increasing restriction and criminalisation of protest.
- Erosion of democracy with increasing use of secondary legislation and statutory instruments taking power away from Parliament and giving it to the Executive.
- Increasing use of multiple big databases where our highly personal information is gathered and shared. We can't know who accesses it, what exactly is on it or what it is being used for.
- Facial recognition and surveillance used alongside AI to inform decisions made about us, despite well documented flaws in the technology.
- A rise in racism which is becoming "normal" and is seldom challenged.

We need to know about these frightening developments. We need to help others to know what is going on. We need to turn our concerns into actions.

You or your local group can opt in on the Amnesty website and Community Platform to receive Actions, Campaigns and Updates on the UK.

We need to turn our concerns into actions, and for that I will need your help.

We will hold a webinar in the Autumn which will be a **'Call To Action'** aiming to learn about concerns and hear ideas for practical things we can do., Please look out for it and join us - more details to come. -

I am also making a more personal call for help! I 'd be grateful for volunteers to help monitor things like new Secondary Legislation that affects our human rights, publication of Government Consultations and maybe putting together responses and Looking out for personal experiences connected to human rights of people in the UK I need help too with getting things out on social media - so anyone with time and interest, please get in touch.

The Collective for Human Rights in the UK has been running for a few years now and is open to anyone to join. If you sign up to the Collective's Google group, you will receive the regular snapshots which give a 'deep dive' into specific UK issues.

If you want to be more directly involved and discuss issues and plans in more detail, or to help with preparing material for actions and presentations, you can join the Collective's On line Special Interest group.- Or find me with the Country Coordinators at the AGM and Amplify event in Brighton at the end of the month.

If your local group would like an online presentation and discussion on Authoritarianism or for more information, please email me – Elena.fowler@amnesty.org.uk

About the Newsletter - This is a look at significant national policy changes made in the last two months that affect human rights in the UK. I have shown (in the footnotes) where the information came from, so you can follow it up, and take your own view.

In future, newsletters will be briefer, less detailed and circulated widely to Amnesty members, anyone interested in digging deeper into issues in the UK should also send a quick email and sign up to receive the Snapshot.

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Amnesty, along with Medact, The Good Law Project and others, is campaigning to keep Palantir out of the NHS - see the Amnesty website for details.

And join the campaign!

A quick reminder about the Council of Europe and the ECHR because it can all get a bit confusing! -

FACT: The Council of Europe is an international organisation dedicated to upholding human rights and democracy. The United Kingdom is one of the 46 countries that are members. They have all signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, - sometimes called the ECHR or the Convention. The ECHR is an international human rights treaty, that protects the basic rights and freedoms of everyone in the country that has signed it.

In the UK, the ECHR is brought into our law by the Human Rights Act, which also ensures that public authorities such as Government departments, local councils, police, schools, certain care providers, and prisons are acting fairly and according to the Convention. If they don't, we can go to court, and if that fails, we can take a case to the European Court. The ECHR and the Human Rights Act give us all equal value and give us all the same legal rights.

"For over 70 years, these laws have quietly underpinned our daily lives: giving us the ability to speak freely, love who we want, and hold those in power to account."

Liberty ¹

The Chisinau Declaration. 15 MAY 2026- A DEFINING MOMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UK

¹ <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/human-rights-day-celebrating-the-human-rights-act-and-the-echr/>

All the members of the Council of Europe, including Britain, have said they want a more flexible approach to ECHR Protections so that not everyone would have the same rights.

On 15 May 2026 in Chisinau, Moldova, all 46 member states of the Council of Europe — including the United Kingdom — adopted a non-binding political declaration re-interpreting how the European Convention on Human Rights should apply, particularly in immigration and asylum cases. It is a declaration – so not law yet. It shows that all the member countries are agreed on what they would like to happen and reflects the significant shift to the Right across Europe. It is important because it could pave the way to changes to the European Convention on Human Rights. Yvette Cooper, The UK Foreign Secretary, called it ‘a more modern approach.’²

The declaration proposes **Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) and **Article 8** (right to private and family life), should be interpreted more flexibly, making it easier for governments to deport people even where serious concerns about safety or family life exist. In other words, when governments want to deport someone, human rights courts should give governments more benefit of the doubt and be less likely to stop them.

The agreement says that countries should comply with the rules in the ECHR but also says it is important that States, including those that are exposed to mass arrivals, can try new approaches.

The text has been described as a ‘shopping list of migration issues faced by different states’.³

“Attempts to pressure courts into interpreting human rights protections in ways more politically convenient to governments risk undermining respect for the rule of law.”

Kerry Moscojiuri, Chief Executive, Amnesty International UK — 15 May 2026⁴

The UK played a key negotiating role in the Declaration. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office statement,⁵ welcomed it as “a more contemporary interpretation of the ECHR,” arguing it would help ensure serious criminals cannot exploit human rights law to avoid deportation and that Article 8 family rights are properly weighed against national security concerns.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Human rights are universal; they apply to everyone because we are all human. The Convention isn't just for migrants. If rights only apply to some people or when it's convenient, they're not really rights — they're just permissions that can be taken away. Weakening the framework weakens it for everyone. These proposed changes make other rights reducing changes possible.

Evidence does not support the claims that triggered this agreement. Immigration applications account for just 1.5% of all ECHR cases. Violations are found in only 6% of

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reforms-to-secure-british-borders-to-be-agreed-by-foreign-ministers-in-moldova-this-week>

³ <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/will-the-chisinau-declaration-on-the-echr-and-migration-make-any-difference/>

⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/latest/uk-council-of-europes-political-declaration-on-the-echr-weakens-protections-for-refugees-and-migrants/>

⁵ <https://www.ein.org.uk/news/new-council-europe-declaration-clarifies-echr-interpretation-immigration-and-asylum-law>

those. In 45 years, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled just three times that UK immigration rules breached the Convention.⁶

The Chisinau Declaration confirms the shift to the right and helps to consolidate a harsher approach across Europe. It indicates the UK governments' willingness to dilute the ECHR and ignore the Refugee Convention.

The British Institute of Human Rights has called it “a defining moment for universal human rights.”

English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026

Royal Assent on 29 April 2026

Power to the People — or to the Executive?

FACT: “Devolution” is the term used to describe the process of transferring power from the centre (Westminster) to the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. The Act expands devolution and empowers mayors and local people. It shifts power from Westminster to local leaders by creating 'Strategic Authorities'.

The Act applies only to England. - Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have devolved powers each with some different 'reserved matters'.⁷

The Act has been described as ‘**a genuine attempt to create robust English regional units of government**’,⁸ moving power over transport, skills, housing and economic regeneration away from Whitehall. The main driver is the government's quest for growth and the belief that ‘networks of accountable leaders (referring to directly-elected Mayors) of more efficient units (referring to larger strategic authorities,) encourage economic and social innovation and growth’.⁹

As well as making changes for the control of communities and high streets, the Act introduces ‘the London model,’¹⁰ - a structured, tiered system of Strategic Authorities (SAs), where areas with higher tiers have broader devolved powers and more streamlined funding arrangements. This structurally advantages metropolitan areas with existing combined authorities over rural and smaller urban areas.

Mayors can direct development and manage planning across their area and have been given the decision making power that previously sat with elected local councils. meaning a mayor's regional plan can take precedence over what an individual borough or district council decides¹¹.

The Act introduces new **COMMUNITY RIGHTS**: a Community Right to Buy giving local people first refusal on assets of community value; - though there might be a problem if they don't have the money!

⁶ <https://bihr.org.uk/our-work/our-policy-projects/protecting-our-hra/council-of-europe-proposals-a-defining-moment-for-universal-human-rights>

⁷ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8599/>

⁸ <https://ukconstitutionallaw.org/2026/05/19/thomas-poole-and-elena-de-nictolis-the-english-devolution-and-community-empowerment-act-2026/>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/english-devolution-bill-receives-royal-assent>

¹⁰ <https://localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/314-governance-a-risk-articles/100441-the-english-devolution-and-community-empowerment-act-2026>

¹¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmpublic/EnglishDevolutionCommunityEmpowerment/memo/EDCEB34.htm>

CONCERN: This advantages mayors, but not necessarily communities because it devolves power downward from Whitehall but simultaneously concentrates it upward from elected local councils. ‘There is very little community empowerment as proposed’ as power moves from many locally accountable councils to fewer, more powerful mayors — elected but far less locally embedded.¹²

The Act in action. - London Mayor, Sadiq Kahn, intends to use the new law to ‘call in’ new licensing hours applications because Some Soho residents concerned about their quality of life, have decided to challenge all new applications and license renewals for bars and restaurants in the area, and to object to any venue that wishes to open beyond “core hours”, which Westminster council decrees end at 11pm, to protect local residents from noise and disturbance. Kahn will use the new powers to override decisions made by individual boroughs, and the Soho Society’s objections entirely¹³, to “make it easier to extend opening hours and expand what’s on offer at night for Londoners and visitors, (so)we can continue to grow our capital’s nightlife offer and build a better London for everyone.”¹⁴

A pilot to give the London Mayor these new licensing powers **aims to start in Summer 2026** and is intended to be reviewed after two years. However, those powers also depend on **secondary legislation still to be laid throughout 2026** — regulations the Secretary of State must make to define exactly what counts as an “application of potential strategic importance” and the procedures for exercising the call-in powers.¹⁵

“The Act has important implications for the relationship between central and local government and the long running ‘English question’ in UK constitutional politics... The Act seeks to effect ‘a permanent shift of power away from the centre.’”

Prof. Thomas Poole & Dr. Elena De Nictolis, UK Constitutional Law Association, 19 May 2026

Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 (CWSA)

Royal Assent on 30 April 2026 with staged commencement by secondary legislation.

The Act is a ‘curate’s egg’- good in parts, it creates bad powers with good intentions.¹⁶ ***Is it a Landmark Protection or Overreach Into Family Life and the route to lifelong surveillance?***

¹² <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2026-04-13>

¹³ <https://haringeycommunitypress.co.uk/2026/05/15/khan-gains-new-city-hall-powers-on-tax-transport-and-licensing/>

¹⁴ <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-sets-out-bold-new-licensing-plans-boost-capitals-hospitality-and-nightlife-industries>

¹⁵ <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-sets-out-bold-new-licensing-plans-boost-capitals-hospitality-and-nightlife-industries>

¹⁶ <https://thingsdavidthinks.substack.com/p/the-schools-bills-why-we-think-about?Redirect=true>

*It's a terrible way to create legislation and bypasses huge amounts of Parliamentary scrutiny. That's why we've ended up with a motion to ban all 16 year olds from social media in a bill that was about improving standards in schools."*¹⁷

James Baker Open Rights Group.

POSITIVE: Strengthens Children's Everyday Rights.

Free School Breakfast Clubs in every Primary School from September 2026:

School Uniform Cost Caps: Schools are instructed to strictly limit the use of logos and compulsory branded items to a maximum of 3.

Teacher Qualifications & Pay: The Act requires all Academy and maintained school teachers to hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). (Academies have nearly three times more unqualified teachers, than local authority maintained schools.¹⁸)

Local authorities must offer **family group decision-making for children on the edge of care**, but social workers can leave families out of decision making about a child if they believe it will do more harm than good to the child."¹⁹

Education settings named as 'relevant partners' are to take equal responsibility in local safeguarding arrangements. but many professionals say that *Duty to share information* 'upends expectations of privacy and confidentiality between children or their families with professionals'²⁰.

Placements For Troubled And Difficult To Manage Young People.

The Act establishes **a statutory deprivation of liberty placement** to reduce reliance on emergency High Court orders, bringing more children under formal legal safeguards but without judicial oversight.

It will save court time, but children should have the same right as an adult, - not to be detained without judicial authorisation (the right to liberty) which is a core principle in the ECHR. Children are less able to challenge decisions made about them, and judicial oversight is a check on executive power and ensures that they are given a voice.

In response to illegal care homes which charge "exorbitant fees," **Ofsted is given new powers** to levy fines on unregistered children's homes. but it is estimated it will take two years for things to change, and there is a dysfunctional market where the need for homes, particularly for children with complex needs, exceeds the number of places available.²¹

"Children's rights cannot depend on a placement lottery. What matters now is whether this legislation becomes a foundation for meaningful change or another moment where the system moves forward, but not far enough for the children who need it most."

Article 39, Statement on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, 1 May 2026

¹⁷ <https://www.computerweekly.com/feature/Childrens-Wellbeing-and-Schools-Bill-prompts-ethical-concerns>

¹⁸ <https://educationuncovered.co.uk/news/almost-one-in-10-teachers-at-some-of-englands-largest-academy-chains-are-unqualified-new-analysis-reveals#:~:>

¹⁹ <https://frg.org.uk/family-group-conferences/what-is-a-family-group-conference/>

²⁰ <https://rightsforchildren.uk/open-letter-on-schools-bill/>

²¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c70lxggoe6yo>

NUMEROUS CONCERNS Under **changes to the SEND system**, every child with additional needs will have a new a digital Individual Support Plan (ISP) while reserving traditional Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for the most complex cases. There are concerns that reforms would reduce provision for children with moderate needs and that the legal rights attached to new Individual Support Plans (ISPs) aren't as strong as the rights that come with an EHCP.²²

New Breaching School Attendance Rules accompanied by Live Attendance Tracking, is Introduced because Fines do not act as much of a deterrent. Families know the risk and budget for the fine²³. The new fast-track to a Parenting order has significantly higher fines criminalisation and a possible three month imprisonment for more than one breach of a School attendance order.²⁴

There have been numerous enquiries into the death of children when concerns about their well being was not shared or passed on as they moved from one area to another,²⁵ but **mandatory registers for home educated and children thought to be missing education** require the state to store and distribute extensive volumes of information about children and their families.

A Single unique identifier (SUI) using the NHS number, will be used to track and monitor children.

WHY THIS MATTERS: It creates a digital ID for children under the guise of safeguarding. The SUI has been acknowledged by Government to be a lifelong identifier²⁶. It creates a comprehensive cross-agency tracking system for the entire English child population using the NHS number. (Devolved nations have similar but administratively different systems, so that records of children moving to a different nation will not automatically transfer under a single number). Changes to the use of the NHS number is a classic example of scope or function creep. Assurances had previously been given that the NHS number would only be used for the direct provision of health care.²⁷

Critics argue it creates a digital ID for children under the guise of safeguarding, resulting in highly personal information and subjective judgements about every child being widely available across agencies, including law enforcement. There is a lack of transparency, **parents will have no knowledge, input, or oversight of that information.**²⁸ The Information will then follow the child into adulthood, and become merged into their adult digital ID credentials, with lifelong repercussions. 'Known to social services' is a stigmatising label

²² <https://www.ipsea.org.uk/send-reforms-must-strengthen-legal-foundations-not-weaken-them>

²³ <https://www.mumsnet.com/talk/holidays/2107217-Booked-holiday-during-term-time>

²⁴ <https://www.orlandofromuk.co.uk/post/term-time-holiday-fines-uk-2026-how-many-school-absences-before-you-get-fined>

²⁵ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/news-and-blogs/the-childrens-wellbeing-and-school-act-passes-into-law/>

²⁶ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2025-05-22/debates/C2BE2D04-8414-4ADD-AE2D-CA3DA2E71DDA/Children%E2%80%99SWellbeingAndSchoolsBill#contribution-7511331A-3086-4EAA-9AA0-5817C9CF78B9>

²⁷

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8157e5ed915d74e6231bd2/Consistent_identifier_report_July_2016.pdf

²⁸ <https://parentpower.family/a-grave-risk-to-privacy-the-proposed-single-unique-identifier-sui/>

which stays with individuals through adulthood and increases the chance of State intervention.²⁹

Under the catch -all of legitimate interests in the Data Use and Access Act³⁰, specified public authorities can share personal data with each other for defined purposes **without requiring your consent each time**. This can include details of life events and activities, concerning for example, finance, immigration, living arrangements, and political activity.³¹

Not only does the Bill create a dangerous expansion of powers to store and distribute children's information it involves an unprecedented shift of power

*Reclaim Rights for Children- open letter.*³²

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act grants **sweeping delegated powers to ministers to restrict children's access to Social Media**. These powers allow ministers to make new rules quickly. They aren't debated by Parliament, have minimal parliamentary scrutiny, and can't be amended- only overturned completely- which almost never happens.

There has been increasing pressure on the government to ban children from accessing social media³³ although opposers say a ban could drive children into less regulated online spaces where they may be at greater risk.³⁴ It became law in April, enabling the delegated powers to be exercised before the publication of the government's own progress statement which is due on 29 July 2026.

Making the links- more knock-on effects of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and the pervasive power and scope creep of Digital ID!

Following on from the GDPR, the Online Safety Act, and Children's Wellbeing Act it has been unclear how best to meet requirements for privacy-protection and age-assurance. In March 2026 Ofcom and the ICO published a joint statement identifying an "age gate" as the best way to minimise the risk of unlawful data processing of children's data. effectively mandating that platforms verify users' ages before granting access.³⁵

Providers of digital services are 'desperate for a 'single source of truth' of users' age as they are effectively legally forced to verify users' ages before granting access.³⁶ This applies to both mainstream social media and gaming, like YouTube and Roblox as well as 'adult' sites. **As a result, there has been a surge in online age-gating**, often using third party companies contracted to the government.

²⁹ [https://notoschoolsbill.uk/surveillance-state/#:~:text="](https://notoschoolsbill.uk/surveillance-state/#:~:text=)

³⁰ <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/what-we-do/legislation-we-cover/data-use-and-access-act-2025/the-data-use-and-access-act-2025-what-does-it-mean-for-organisations/>

³¹ April 2026 Snapshot. Collective for Human Rights in the UK.

³² <https://rightsforchildren.uk/open-letter-on-schools-bill/>

³³ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/apr/16/keir-starmer-social-media-firms-no-10-meeting>

³⁴ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10468/>

³⁵ <https://ico.org.uk/media2/5ybpmbaf/ofcom-ico-joint-statement.pdf>

³⁶ <https://ico.org.uk/media2/5ybpmbaf/ofcom-ico-joint-statement.pdf>

The age verification requirements mean that millions of users are being subjected to it. It can take many forms: collection and analysis of government ID, biometric scans, algorithmic or AI-based behavioural or user monitoring, such as quietly done by TikTok, Meta, and Google. This analyses various data points that reflect online behaviour, including content and activities liked and shared, a person's social connections, public posts, private chats, browsing and purchase history, mouse, and keyboard use, etc and allows providers to legitimize the profiling of users, including children.³⁷

Government justifies using a Single User Identifier for children- "By making digital ID accessible from age 13 - or even birth - the government can provide a standardised, legal-grade solution for age verification. This isn't just about identity; it's about providing the infrastructure needed to make the internet both functional and compliant for the next generation." But critics claim The legislative infrastructure around the CSWA essentially dismantles online anonymity and leads to wider problems of censorship and surveillance. – Evidence that many users view these measures as thinly veiled digital surveillance is shown by the 1,800% spike in VPN usage when UK porn and social media age checks took effect, last July.³⁸

A coalition of 18 organisations say that age assurance technologies are either inaccurate, privacy-invasive, or both. They say what is missing are 'meaningful efforts to address the underlying drivers of online harm' and. call on UK policymakers to 'hold companies accountable for these systemic practices and to prioritize user rights by design'.³⁹

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill risks fundamentally reshaping the internet in harmful ways. Chief among these proposals are sweeping age-gating requirements and access restrictions that would apply not only to young people, but effectively to all users.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill risk fundamentally reshaping the internet in harmful ways. Chief among these proposals are sweeping age-gating requirements and access restrictions that would apply not only to young people, but effectively to all users.
Jillian C York. Electronic Foundation ⁴⁰

WHY THIS MATTERS

THE GOVERNMENT'S DIGITAL ID CONSULTATION closed on 5th May 2026 and was a clear attempt to address previous criticisms from the Select Committee⁴¹ and nudge

³⁷ <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/07/age-verification/>

³⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn72ydj70g5o>

³⁹ <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2026/05/eff-and-18-organizations-urge-uk-policymakers-prioritize-addressing-roots-online>

⁴⁰ <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2026/05/eff-and-18-organizations-urge-uk-policymakers-prioritize-addressing-roots-online>

⁴¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmhaff/986/report.html#>

respondents into agreeing that Digital ID would be beneficial, make access to services easier, and save time.⁴²

The scheme proposes a “**single unique identifier**” connecting personal data across all government databases — enabling any current or future government to track, profile and link individuals’ private data across systems including immigration, tax, benefits and health records.

CONCERN - Plans for a “kill switch” would allow the state to immediately revoke someone’s digital ID — ending their right to work and access public services without due process.

A Digital ID is described as Not mandatory - but it will be difficult to access public services without it, and without it employers will not be able to check it as the required evidence of your right to work in this country.⁴³

More function creep - There are plans for police to use facial recognition integrated with digital ID.⁴⁴

Millions of marginalised people lack digital access ⁴⁵— creating a further exclusion risk.

Police Deploy Facial Recognition While Government’s Consultation response is unpublished.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission acknowledges facial recognition interferes with “a wide range of protected rights” and calls a “detailed legal framework essential”, but that does not exist yet.⁴⁶ The Consultation on a new legal framework for the use of facial recognition and biometrics was only concerned with **law enforcement** organisations, ⁴⁷omitting consideration of the role of the retail sector within the systemic infrastructure.

Liberty Investigates found multiple police forces are already expanding use of handheld devices before results of the consultation have been published⁴⁸.

⁴² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/making-public-services-work-for-you-with-your-digital-identity>

⁴³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-id-scheme-explainer/digital-id-scheme-explainer>

⁴⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-use-of-facial-recognition/police-use-of-facial-recognition-factsheet>

⁴⁵ [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/internet-based-services/technology/exploring-how-people-in-the-uk-are-affected-by-digital-](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/internet-based-services/technology/exploring-how-people-in-the-uk-are-affected-by-digital-disadvantage#:~:text=Research%20suggests%20that%202.8%20million,halved%20since%20before%20the%20pandemic.)

[disadvantage#:~:text=Research%20suggests%20that%202.8%20million,halved%20since%20before%20the%20pandemic.](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/internet-based-services/technology/exploring-how-people-in-the-uk-are-affected-by-digital-disadvantage#:~:text=Research%20suggests%20that%202.8%20million,halved%20since%20before%20the%20pandemic.)

⁴⁶ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/met-polices-use-facial-recognition-tech-must-comply-human-rights-law-says-regulator>

⁴⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/legal-framework-for-using-facial-recognition-in-law-enforcement/consultation-on-a-new-legal-framework-for-law-enforcement-use-of-biometrics-facial-recognition-and-similar-technologies-accessible>

⁴⁸ <https://libertyinvestigates.org.uk/articles/police-expand-use-of-facial-recognition-apps/>

Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026:**A Generational Health Milestone — With Broad Ministerial Powers Attached**

Royal Assent was received on 29 April 2026. The Act creates a rolling generational ban: nobody born on or after 1 January 2009 will ever be legally sold tobacco, herbal smoking products or cigarette papers. It raises **questions of public health vs. personal autonomy**

POSITIVE: Public Health Gain- Inequality for the good of some.

Tobacco is uniquely harmful: no other consumer product kills two thirds of its users. Smoking accounts for the largest share of preventable premature death and health inequality across the UK.

“A once-in-a-generation opportunity to protect children and young people from the harms of tobacco and nicotine.”

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

WHY THIS MATTERS: Rights and Delegated Powers - Another Skeleton!

Excessive Delegated Powers and "Henry VIII" Powers: The Hansard Society warned of ‘creeping’ ministerial powers in this Act.⁴⁹ The legislation granted the Secretary of State over 60 delegated powers to make and amend policy via secondary legislation. Rules governing vape descriptors, flavours, advertising restrictions and vape-free zones remain entirely to be settled by ministers via statutory instrument. The powers to extend smoke-free zones to outdoor spaces raise proportionality questions under Article 8 ECHR (right to private life).

It also included over a dozen "Henry VIII" clauses, allowing Ministers to repeal or amend Acts of Parliament without a full parliamentary vote.

These shifts Power away from Parliament, transferring massive law-making authority from elected representatives in the legislature to government ministers and civil servants. **The increasing use of such powers creates a national infrastructure that is ripe for authoritarianism.**

There has been repeated criticism of secondary legislation by parliamentary authorities. For more detail see Hansard’s Delegated Legislation review.⁵⁰

Victims and Courts Act 2026:

Royal Assent was received on 29 April 2026

⁴⁹ <https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blog/tobacco-and-vapes-bill>

⁵⁰ <https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/projects/delegated-legislation-review>

POSITIVE: Significant Advances in Victims' Rights- a more victim-centred criminal justice system.

The Act voids non-disclosure agreements used to prevent victims from speaking about criminal conduct — a major advance for domestic abuse and sexual assault survivors;

It extends the timeframe for victims to challenge unduly lenient sentences;

It limits parental responsibility for offenders convicted of serious child sexual abuse, including where a child was conceived through rape; and enhances the statutory powers of the Victims'

CONCERNS: It requires offenders to attend their own sentencing hearings (courts can sanction refusal). This was consistently opposed by legal professional bodies, who noted it could raise Article 6 ECHR (right to a fair trial) questions and create practical difficulties in custody management.⁵¹

It will be implemented on a phased basis and depends on secondary legislation. A probation service retaining only 90% of officers annually raises serious questions about whether expanded victim notification and support obligations can be resourced. The government has not outlined how the new Victims Helpline will be adequately staffed.

Pension Schemes Act 2026:

Royal Assent on 29 April 2026

Workers' Retirement Rights Reformed — and Employer Surplus Powers Raise Concern

POSITIVE:

The Act covers around £2 trillion in pension savings and benefits workers by requiring pension schemes to demonstrate value for money and face scrutiny if underperforming; automatically consolidates small dormant pension pots (£1,000 or less, inactive for 12 months) to prevent savings being lost between jobs;

It introduces a default 'guided retirement' solution ensuring members receive structured income advice;

Protects members from retrospective benefit reductions caused by contracted-out rights⁵²

CONCERN: Surplus extraction powers

Trustees of defined benefit schemes can release surplus assets to sponsoring employers while schemes are ongoing.⁵³ Critics — including trade unions consider that any surplus belongs ultimately to members and that making it easier for employers to extract it weakens the security of defined benefit promises.

WHY THIS MATTERS

⁵¹ <https://murrayhughman.co.uk/forcing-defendants-to-attend-sentencing-hearings-justice-or-disruption/>

⁵² <https://techzone.aberdeennadviser.com/public/pensions/Tech-guide-contracting-out>

⁵³ womblebond Dickinson.com/uk/insights/articles-and-briefings/pension-schemes-act-2026-key-changes-private-sector-schemes

The government now has broad regulation-making powers over where pension assets are invested, exercisable by statutory instrument, creating an infrastructure which in the wrong hands enables the enrichment of favoured bodies.

“The reforms will also bring challenges for some schemes, particularly DC schemes faced with a raft of changes including new value for money, guided retirement and small pots requirements.”

Linklaters, Pension Schemes Act 2026 Analysis, May 2026 ⁵⁴

The Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Act 2026

Came into force in April 2026

POSITIVE: Two-Child Limit Abolished: Significant Poverty Reduction Comes Into Effect

The Act ends a policy that prevented families from receiving Universal Credit for a third or subsequent child. removes a form of unequal treatment — the two-child limit — rather than creating one. It is a clearly written act with a level of transparency that stands in sharp contrast to several of the other Acts that were enacted or came into force during this period. It equalises entitlement across all children regardless of birth order and is rare rights enhancing legislation.

FACT: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has reported that nearly 9 in 10 low-income families with three or more children experience severe material deprivation, such as going without food or basic heating. They identified the limit as placing low-income families with three or more children at significantly higher risk of poverty.⁵⁵

Almost 9 in 10 (88%) families affected have three or four children - well within the range most people would consider a typical family size. Only 4% of affected families have more than five children. Some of these larger families are "blended" families, where two parents who already have children move in together.⁵⁶

Not all families will see the full increase. Families subject to the Benefit Cap - which limits total Universal Credit to £22,020 per year outside London and £25,353 in London - may not receive the additional support. The government estimates around 70,000 families will be in this position

Crime and Policing Act 2026:

⁵⁴ <https://www.linklaters.com/insights/blogs/pensionlinks/2026/may/pension-schemes-act-2026>

⁵⁵ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2026) UK Poverty 2026

⁵⁶ <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2026/two-child-limit-fact-sheet#>:

The UK is now more restrictive than most Western democracies,⁵⁷ and The Crime and Policing Act meets all the criteria for authoritarian legislation. It heralds 'a fundamental constitutional shift in the law – away from a framework for facilitating peaceful protest towards a system for expanding state control and pre-empting dissent'.⁵⁸

It received Royal Assent on 29 April 2026

"Bringing power back to our local police"

The Tony Blair Institute

"A significant shift in the national approach".

Rebecca Bryant, CEO of Resolve

This is a vast Act with a long list of new laws and more severe punishments. It is a legislative catch-all for problem areas and specifically creates new offences such as 'Spiking', 'Cuckooing', 'screenshotting of intimate images and creation of 'Deepfakes'. The Act covers Knife Crime, Retail Crime, Child criminal exploitation, administration of and access to Internet sites, Child sexual abuse, Abuse & Violence Against Women and Girls, Possessing or publishing pornography, Anti-Social Behaviour, Fly Tipping, Begging, Trespassing, Protest and Terrorism.

POSITIVE: The Act also widens corporate criminal liability so that a company faces criminal liability if a senior manager commits any criminal offence in a much wider range of areas than previously, including areas such as Harassment or Discriminatory behaviour, or Health and Safety; Even where a company has implemented sophisticated compliance programmes, comprehensive training and strong governance controls, the company may still be liable if a senior manager commits an offence within the scope of their authority.⁵⁹

POSITIVE: This is the first legislative change for #LGBTQ+ rights passed in Westminster in over a decade! - to ensure equality across all strands of hate crime.⁶⁰

Under the new legislation, the punishment for anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes will be equalised. They will be considered more serious offences in the eyes of the courts, perpetrators will get stronger sentences and victims will have more time to access justice.

It will be important for the police to put the new law into practice.

"We know from our services that public life is becoming less safe for LGBT+ people in the UK, especially for trans+ people. This legislative change means LGBT+ victims and

⁵⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/10/britain-protest-laws-tories-climate-labour>

⁵⁸ <https://www.justice.org.uk/work/striking-the-balance-protest-rights-and-public-order>

⁵⁹ <https://gardencourtchambers.co.uk/preparing-for-the-crime-and-policing-act-2026-expanding-corporate-criminal-liability-and-the-growing-exposure-for-uk-businesses/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/news/law-change-equalises-punishment-for-anti-lgbtq-hate-crime>

survivors will now be given the same protections and access to justice as other groups impacted by hate crime.” Ben Kernighan, Galop⁶¹

Mass lobby organised by Trans Solidarity Alliance on 24th June. <https://www.transsolidarityalliance.com/mass-lobby-2026>

POSITIVE: Violence against women and girls. The Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act was passed three years ago, by Parliament in 2023. But it never took effect as there was no start date included.⁶² On April 1st, 2026, a Commencement Order was made by Secondary legislation. The Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023 (Commencement) Regulations 2026 bring the already-enacted primary provisions into force on April 1, 2026. It inserts a new section 4B offence of causing intentional harassment, alarm or distress to a person because of their sex, or presumed sex. The offence carries a sentence of up to two years’ imprisonment and aligns with the Government’s mission to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the next decade.⁶³ Despite being designed to target public sexual harassment, the wording allows the offence to be committed in both public and private spaces (including workplaces).

SEVERAL CONCERNS: The Government factsheet sets out the penalties in detail,⁶⁴ and reveals a cultural shift towards favouring a harsh approach to crimes frequently committed by the most vulnerable. For example, All shoplifting is now treated as general theft regardless of the value of the goods, and anyone who steals low price goods that may be essential, such as tampons or nappies, can face a maximum of seven years in prison. The Act is loosely worded allowing arresting officers to make subjective judgements.

The vagrancy Act has been repealed but Rough Sleepers can be charged with trespassing if police consider they are on private property with intent to commit a criminal offence.

We are ensuring the repeal of the Vagrancy Act 1824 does not create unwanted gaps in the powers available to the police by retaining two key offences, currently provided for under the 1824 Act. These are: an offence of facilitating or arranging begging for gain and an offence of trespassing with intent to commit a criminal offence.⁶⁵

Crime and Policing Act 2026 Factsheets

Huge use of Secondary Legislation: One example- The Online Safety Act amendment power in the Crime and Policing Act 2026, allows the Secretary of State to regulate online speech by statutory instrument, for any purpose connected with loosely defined, AI-

⁶¹ <https://www.galop.org.uk/news/anti-lgbt-hate-crime-law-changed-aggravated-offence>

⁶² Memorandum from the Home Office to the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee. Home Office 29 March 2023

⁶³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protection-from-sex-based-harassment-in-public-act-2023/protection-from-sex-based-harassment-in-public-act-2023-statutory-guidance-for-the-police-accessible>

⁶⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-and-policing-act-2026-factsheets/crime-and-policing-act-2026-public-order-offences-factsheet>

⁶⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-and-policing-act-2026-factsheets/crime-and-policing-act-2026-anti-social-behaviour-asb-factsheet>

generated harm. This empowers a single minister to change that Act and regulate online speech without returning to Parliament.

The Delegated Powers Memorandum (and supplementary memoranda) outlines the powers granted to the Secretary of State and other bodies to make secondary legislation, issue guidance, and set regulations. The original Delegated Powers Memorandum, prepared by the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defence and DEFRA, identified 30 separate categories of delegated powers in the Bill which became the Act, and many of those categories contain multiple individual SI-making powers. In addition, Nine Supplementary Delegated Powers Memoranda were published during the Bill's passage — each adding further powers.⁶⁶ There is no official published tally for the exact total number of distinct statutory instrument (SI)-making powers enacted in the Crime and Policing Act because the SIs are dispersed across hundreds of individual sections and schedules throughout the vast legislation. The true count of individual powers exercisable by statutory instrument is difficult to verify without clause-by-clause reading of the enacted text, and there undoubtedly many more than 39.⁶⁷

The Act was reviewed by both the Delegated Powers Committee (41st Report)⁶⁸ and the Constitution Committee (11th Report)⁶⁹ before it was passed and both raised major concerns regarding the breadth of powers being taken by the executive and the police. They wanted explicit justification and improved parliamentary procedure for the delegated powers. The Constitution committee said the Bill was so large that proper Parliament scrutiny was almost impossible.

PROTEST.

It is Part 10 of the Crime and Policing Act 2026 — covering protest — that has drawn the most sustained civil liberties objections. It is riddled with subjective clauses, giving power to the police to interpret as they see fit.

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 introduces **five new sweeping powers that give police effective authority to licence — and refuse — demonstrations**

1. powers to impose conditions based on 'cumulative impact'. Suella Braverman and the Conservative government had attempted precisely this through secondary legislation. The courts rejected it twice. Now, repackaged in response to community safety concerns, the government has resurrected the idea, but omitting the previous definition of 'serious disruption' as being that which is 'more than minor'.⁷⁰
2. A new offence of concealing identity during protest; Police may now designate an area a 'mask-free zone' for up to 24 hours where a protest is planned. Within that zone, wearing anything that conceals identity — broadly defined to include scarves, hoods or religious face coverings — is a criminal offence, even before any disorder has occurred.
3. Restrictions on Outside Homes of Public Officials; The government states this is targeted at intimidatory conduct — critics note the definition is broad enough to

⁶⁶ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3938/publications> — nine supplementary DPMs listed under publications

⁶⁷ <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/62387/documents/6970>

⁶⁸ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5901/ldselect/lddelreg/238/23804.htm>

⁶⁹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/62387/documents/6970>

⁷⁰ <https://ukconstitutionallaw.org/2025/10/22/richard-martin-counting-cumulative-impact-more-public-order-law-additions/>

affect any lawful vigil or demonstration near an elected representative's private address.⁷¹

4. Police may impose conditions on any protest planned to pass a place of religious worship, irrespective of the protest's purpose. This was introduced following Palestine solidarity marches near synagogues, though its application extends to all protests near all religious sites.
5. New offences for possessing smoke flares, also apply to music and sporting events. Many supporters express frustration that the law penalizes "harmless fun," even though authorities and clubs maintain an absolute ban.⁷²

The Act grants the police sweeping powers to justify increased and severe restrictions and solidifies in law the idea that protests are little more than disruption, rather than expressions of democratic rights. **Netpol**⁷³

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 is framed as targeting sustained protest campaigns that cause community harm,⁷⁴ backed by the police having a "reasonable belief" of intimidation.

How senior officers interpret "cumulative impact" across different forces, varies enormously. That variation in interpretation then influences where the authoritarian effect is actually produced. Reports from⁷⁵ Big Brother watch revealed a huge disparity in arrest rates between police forces for communications offences. They found that 'over two years 16,108 speech-related arrests were made by just 40 police officers across the UK, and Cumbria police made 2.5 times more arrests than the national average.'

"Freedom of speech is a universal right in a democracy, but our research shows that it is a postcode lottery in Britain. In Britain your right to free speech often depends on where you live rather than on the law itself."

Maya Thomas, Legal & Police Officer. Big Brother Watch.

TERRORISM: The Act includes nine counter-terrorism measures most of which expand or broaden existing law but do not bring new penalties. They are largely incremental updates to existing counter-terrorism law rather than fundamental restructuring, responding to specific gaps or challenges identified in operational practice.⁷⁶

However, the cumulative effect of the nine provisions is to significantly expand the territory of civil orders that carry quasi-criminal consequences without criminal trial — imposing

⁷¹ <https://theconversation.com/why-a-proposed-law-to-criminalise-protests-near-homes-is-too-vague-to-do-much-good-263794>

⁷² <https://thefsa.org.uk/news/flare-play-pyro-and-the-law/>

⁷³ <https://netpol.org/2026/05/08/explainer-the-crime-and-policing-act-2026/>

⁷⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-police-powers-to-protect-communities-from-disruption-caused-by-protests>

⁷⁵ https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3027487/1/200982359_Oct2018.pdf

⁷⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-and-policing-act-2026-factsheets/crime-and-policing-act-2026-counter-terrorism-and-national-security-factsheet>

conditions, restrictions and obligations on individuals through courts operating at the civil standard of proof, with breach constituting a criminal offence.

In other words, the Crime and Policing Act 2026 uses civil court orders to place serious restrictions on people's lives. These are easier to obtain than criminal convictions. **The catch is: if you break one of these orders, it becomes a criminal matter.** So, the government effectively gets criminal-style punishments through the back door, without needing to meet the higher burden of proof required in a criminal trial.

Liberty has raised concerns about the scope of some of the terrorism measures, arguing that the safeguards against disproportionate use are insufficient. Liberty believes the UK's definition of terrorism is so broad that it risks undermining people's fundamental rights, including free speech and protest.

Laws that were designed to address serious threats to national security are increasingly being used beyond their original purpose.

*Liberty.*⁷⁷

POSITIVE? Terrorism - Youth Diversion orders enable courts to impose conditions on young people (aged 21 or under) who have come to the attention of counter-terrorism police, without proceeding to criminal prosecution. It requires engagement with support services and imposes restrictions on activity and associations.

FACT: as of October 2025, young people in particular comprised 20% of Security Service casework and majority of terrorist offences committed by young people in recent years relate to online activity, mostly the possession and dissemination of terrorist material.⁷⁸

Government Appeals Palestine Action Ruling Before Five Senior Judges

The Home Secretary appealed the High Court's landmark February ruling — *R (Ammori) v SSHD* [2026] EWHC 292 (Admin) — before a five-judge panel including the Lady Chief Justice and Master of the Rolls, on April 28 and 29.

The High Court had found the proscription of Palestine Action “**disproportionate and unlawful**,” breaching Articles 10 and 11 ECHR. Of hundreds of the group's activities, only three met the statutory definition of terrorism.

“We are relieved – and encouraged – that the Court has recognised the dangers of treating direct action as terrorism. This decision halts a pattern of escalating restrictions, aggressive policing tactics, and an ever-expanding definition of what constitutes ‘terrorism’. It draws an important line in the sand against attempts to narrow the democratic space and undermine public confidence in the right to speak out.”

*Tom Southerden Law and Human Rights Director, Amnesty International UK*⁷⁹

⁷⁷ <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/fundamental/counter-terror/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/director-general-sir-ken-mccallum-gives-threat-update>

⁷⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/02/uk-court-draws-line-in-the-sand-against-misuse-of-terrorism-powers/>

FACT:

Over 2,700 people have been arrested since the ban. The proscription remains in force during the appeals process and whilst Judgment is awaited. — displaying support is still a criminal offence. Liberty and Amnesty International UK intervened as parties before the Court of Appeal.

URGENT ACTION: - Amnesty is continuing to call on the relevant UK authorities to drop the existing charges and take no further action.' Amnesty Individuals At Risk Team are asking for support for Defend our Jury peaceful protesters.

On 11 April, **over 500 protesters** were arrested for opposing the ban on the 'Palestine Action' group at a series of peaceful protests organized by grassroots campaigning group 'Defend Our Juries'. Over 3300 arrests have now been carried out across the UK since the ban came into force in early July 2025 and over 1200 protesters have been charged with terrorism-related offences under the UK's counter terror legislation, with more charges likely to come.

Message from the Individuals At Risk Team: Sent: 26 May 2026 15:51

As you may have heard, in February 2026, the UK's High Court ruled that the proscription of Palestine Action was unlawful but suspended the effect until a decision from the Court of Appeal, estimated to arrive sometime in June. Following the ruling, police in England & Wales have continued to arrest peaceful protesters in a reckless use of police power which risks breaching the principle of legality.

Please find [attached and online Fifth UA 77/25](#), continuing to call on the relevant UK authorities to drop the existing charges and take no further action against these and any other individuals arrested and charged simply for the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Further information can be found on the Amnesty [IAR Platform](#).-

Conclusion - This legislation has been introduced in the last 2 months and reflects the speed of change in the UK. Together, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and the Crime and Policing Act 2026 are hugely significant for the reduction in our rights. They have taken the UK a step further along the route to Authoritarianism.

For more detail sign up for the Snapshot and help us stop the UK sliding into greater intolerance and authoritarianism.
