

# Index of Repression maps huge scale of anti-Palestinian crackdown in Britain

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The European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) launched an Index of Repression last Wednesday, in collaboration with Forensic Architecture. Their Index collects 964 UK instances of repression against pro-Palestinian speech and protest between January 2019 and August 2025.

Visualised in a searchable database, these instances are broken down into acts of censorship, disinformation and smearing; legal threats; arrest or other intervention by law enforcement; workplace sanctions; harassment, violence and surveillance; financial and professional repercussions; threats to employment or funding; and protest bans, event cancellations and refused services.

They are also categorised by the actor instigating these actions, most prominently the police, members of educational institutions, Israeli advocacy or “lawfare” groups, journalists or media figures, and their targets, including activists, students, teachers and academics, public sector workers and cultural figures.

The ELSC provides free legal advice and assistance to groups and individuals advocating for Palestine across Europe. It has fought cases including Dr. Ghassan Abu-Sittah’s unlawful barring from speaking in Germany and the false accusation of two Birmingham University students of intimidation.

Speaking on the panel, Assistant Director at Forensic Architecture Bob Trafford explained the value of the database in making clear “system-wide characteristics, behaviours and ambitions which may not be legible in each individual incident.”

The data “revealed the operation of a system, not something which is centrally directed but something which is multipolar and self-reinforcing. A system which seeks to raise, intolerably, the personal cost to individuals” who speak out and act.

Tara Mariwany, Senior Monitoring Officer with

ELSC, ran through the key findings. “Nearly a third of people targeted are activists, 22 percent are students, and 13 percent are within the category of academics, writers and teachers.”

A written introduction to the database produced by ELSC explained, “This system, while far-reaching, concentrates deliberately on sectors fundamental to shaping public discourse and holding public trust. The repression strategically targets the core pillars of the solidarity movement: its intellectual foundation, its public organisers, and its trusted public voices.”

Tara added, significantly, that 119 of the recorded incidents “showed journalists or media institutions as the actors of oppression.”

Also on the panel was secondary school teacher Sajia Iqbal, who spoke publicly for the first time after being targeted by UK Lawyers for Israel, the Jewish Chronicle and GB News for taking part in a protest against Israel: “an organised smear campaign to break my spirit and destroy my livelihood.”

Sajia, in a personal capacity, while in a larger group of protesters, removed Israeli goods from the shelves of a Sainsbury’s shop and placed them in a shopping trolley, which was draped with a Palestinian flag. “No complaints were made, and the police were not called.”

Amid widespread public smears, UKLFI wrote to her school claiming she had committed aggravated trespass and was an unsuitable role model. The school began an investigation into her. Sajia’s case was taken up by the ELSC and she announced she was now taking her employer to an employment tribunal.

Amira Abdelhamid, ELSC’s Research Officer, summed up the findings: “Anti-Palestinian repression is justified through the allegation of, one, antisemitism and, two, support for terrorism. You can think of this as the master narrative attached to the Palestine solidarity

movement in Britain. Obviously also beyond Britain, but in the British context they are given particular force by powerful tools such as the IHRA definition of antisemitism and the Terrorism Act.”

She continued, “The whole point is to create a chilling effect... The system of repression is designed to make us believe that speaking out will always lead to punishment. The immediate goal is to convince us that the Palestine solidarity movement is not a legitimate ethical and political struggle.”

The WWSW asked during a Q&A whether the panellists felt “this campaign could be used to set a precedent for attacks on democratic rights in a broader context. Two examples that spring to mind are the injunctions against ‘persons unknown’, which were used widely against student protesters for Palestine; a similar injunction has now been used against supporters of an ongoing strike in Birmingham.

“The other example is we’re meeting under the looming threat of a potential US-led war against Iran and it seems the whole architecture [of repression] that has been built up here could be very easily applied to attacking an anti-war movement.”

Multiple UK universities have secured injunctions against persons unknown (that is, anyone), preemptively ordering such persons not to carry out protest activity on university property, on pain of a two-year jail sentence, a £2,500 fine, or both. The process is extremely anti-democratic, going ahead without a defendant who can be legally represented and often with an extremely short notice period.

Birmingham City Council has recently secured such an injunction against people protesting in support of striking bin workers at their depots, coming on top of an injunction against the workers themselves and putting the final brick in a legal wall against effective picketing.

ELSC’s senior legal officer for Britain, Anna, spoke to note that these injunctions had had a “broad impact, especially against the climate justice movement.”

Their use against students was “quite extraordinary” as it represented a move “from private organisations and private property rights to an educational institution which has duties to protect freedom of speech and academic freedom on campus.” It was “a real disappointment to see universities engaging in these kinds of tactics against their own students and

weaponising their codes of freedom of speech against protesters.”

The ELSC had intervened in those cases “to try and at least have a presence in the court and be able to put forward some of the human rights arguments. We really exposed the way that our legal system privileges property rights.” Anna pointed to an ongoing case being fought by Friends of the Earth in the European Court of Human Rights, challenging “persons unknown” injunctions under Articles 10 and 11 (freedom of expression and assembly) and 6 (the right to a fair trial).

Amira explained that the Index of Repression project was “describing a process of a de-politicisation. And that means this can be used over and over again: these kinds of processes of depoliticising movements and ‘securitising’ them.” This was connected “with the rise of fascism” and the “success of these reactionary movements.”



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