Laws Commonly Used at Protests

Having a basic knowledge of the laws the police most commonly use to disrupt protests can increase your confidence on actions and help you stand up to repressive police tactics.

This guide may be useful for people who are aware of their key rights, and would like to learn a bit more detail, or for legal observers to print off and refer to. It would also be useful to read our guide on Stop & Search powers.

We think that knowledge of the law can help your confidence in planning actions and standing up to police, but unfortunately it will not necessarily protect you from arrest. The police frequently arrest first, and then work out if there is anything they can charge you for later. At most types of actions though, the risk of actually being arrested is low. The risk of being convicted is even lower, and first time offenders would be very unlikely to receive the maximum penalties.

If asked to do something by a police officer, we recommend that – if safe to do so – you ask "What Power" to challenge whether they are acting lawfully. If you get an answer, please note it down, and let us know what powers are being used (or tell a legal observer if they are present).

1. Obstruction of a Police Officer
2. Assaulting a Police Constable or emergency worker
3. Conditions on a protest – inc. Section 12/14 of the Public Order Act
4. Obstruction of the Highway
5. Breach of the Peace
6. Trespass/Aggravated Trespass
7. Criminal Damage & Theft
8. Violent Disorder and Affray
9. Prohibiting face covering
10. "Anti-Social Behaviour" – Section 50 of Police Reform Act
11. Public Nuisance
12. Dispersal Order – Section 35
13. Obstructing Workplaces: Trade Union Law
14. Injunctions