

A RESOURCE ZINE FROM NETPOL x SOOFIYA

to mask is to care



WHY MASKING AT
PROTESTS
MATTERS

* WHAT IS THIS ZINE?

AND WHO IS IT FOR?

This zine is full of info on why masks are important tools of resistance and solidarity.

* The zine is for anyone wanting to learn more about supporting each other. We talk about staying safe as the power to stop people wearing masks excludes our fellow protesters or makes them more likely to face arrest.

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 created new police powers (in England & Wales) enabling officers to decide to impose 'mask-free zones' where a protest is taking place (or may do).

THE LAW:

WHAT DOES MEANINGFUL SOLIDARITY LOOK LIKE?

THE CRIME+POLICING ACT 2026

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 means the police can arrest you just for wearing a mask if they decide they want to. That is all you **NEED** to know, but if you want to know the details of this terrible law...

READ ON →

PREVIOUSLY

SECTION 60AA IN PLACE

Previously the police had to use 'Section 60AA' to designate a zone where they had powers only to instruct people to remove a mask, confiscate a mask and arrest you only if you failed to comply.

THIS POWER STILL EXISTS

Under the new powers, an area (for instance, a whole city centre) is designated by a senior officer because they say a protest is "likely to involve or has involved the commission of offences". A mask-free protest zone can last for up to 24 hours and can be extended for up to 48 hours.



HEALTH

There are three grounds for a defence against this offence:

1

health

2

religious

3

work reasons

Within the area, any police officer can now arrest any protester for wearing a face covering or *"using [any] item that conceals their identity or another person's identity"*. Police must notify their intention to use this power and are likely to announce this in advance.

But these only apply if you are charged.

TRY TO IMAGINE

For many, the COVID-19 pandemic never ended. **Many people remain vulnerable and therefore need to wear a mask.**

Solidarity means caring about other people's health at a mass event.

We don't yet know what this means in practice.

The risk of arrest includes people travelling to and from a protest within the 'mask-free protest zone', not just at the protest itself. **If convicted, the maximum sentence is a fine not exceeding Level 3 on the standard scale (currently £1000) or a prison sentence of up to a month.**

If you can't see why anyone would need to protect their health, try to imagine:

Regardless of your disability, health condition, religion etc, the police will probably arrest first, and ask questions later.

- that your immune system is compromised by a long-term illness.
- or that you are having cancer treatment.
- or you are immuno-compromised or living with someone who is.

Should sick people hide away and not take part in trying to change the world?

Some say protesting is about taking a public stand in support of individual beliefs. They say if you cover your face, you are refusing to take personal accountability for how you act. But protesting is not an individual

activity, **it's a collective one.** Our presence together – *as part of a wider movement nationally or globally* – is what helps make protesting a successful tactic for building movements.

You would feel worried that joining a crowd of other protesters without a mask may have serious outcomes for your health.





ANONYMITY

If you can't image why anyone would need to protect their anonymity **try putting yourself in the shoes of:** an international student worried that their participation in a demonstration might impact on their studies or even their immigration status.

Dana Abuqamar,
19 years old
Palestinian
Law Student
University of
Manchester.



Did you know?

Dana Abuqamar had her visa revoked by the Home Office in May 2024 for participating in a pro-Palestine demonstration.

IMAGINE

You are awaiting the outcome of an

asylum claim:

- You feel understandably concerned that the Home Office will use your political activities against you.
- Or protesting may endanger your relatives still living under a repressive regime.

WHAT IF

- you work with young people.
- You have been warned by your employer not to take part in anti-fascist demonstrations or you could risk dismissal.

Example: Sayed AlWadaei.

Sayed's brother-in-law, mother-in-law and a cousin were arrested, tortured and sentenced to jail terms in Bahrain in reprisal for Sayed protesting in London.

Netpol has heard stories about pressure from employers for over a decade.



CONSIDER

How might young Muslims feel, when their faith already makes them a constant target for state surveillance and their mere presence at a protest leads to labels like 'hate marches' being used in media and reporting?



DID YOU KNOW...

Antifascists who regularly take part in protests against the far right, or hunt sabs gathering evidence of illegal hunting, are regularly filmed by so-called 'auditors'.

Auditors film their faces and share them on a far-right or pro-hunting websites, leading to harassment and doxxing.



If many of these allies are excluded from participating in the actions of our movements, all that may remain are the people still arguing about the importance of personal accountability

Driving a wedge between people to disrupt or crush opposition movements is exactly what the state is hoping for.



Often it's easier for police to film and share photos of 'persons of interest' with the press, then raid and arrest people afterwards.

Until now, these images have been poor quality, although often still good enough to identify people, leading to arrests.

But police surveillance is changing...

More and more permanent 'live facial recognition' cameras are appearing on our streets.

The software behind them, which can rapidly search for faces on a 'watch list', has become more sophisticated.

Live facial recognition is racist. It is 140 times more likely to misidentify Black men, and 250 times more likely to misidentify Black women.

Often the police will now film everybody on a demonstration.

I don't care if the police film me on a protest - why should I if I've done nothing wrong?

The trouble is, the police aren't just interested in what you might have done, but what you believe and who you associate with. Their interest is the perceived 'threat' from new or growing protest movements.

PRIVACY

Consider

Do you have to have done something wrong to end up a target?



Pick up a megaphone?

Then you're probably
an organiser.

Refuse to talk to police? Stand
too close to a placard that
they've decided is 'extremist'?

Then you could be a
troublemaker.

Do you have to have done something wrong to end up a target? These lists
are secret, so we can't know for sure: but history suggests not.

CONSIDER

Britain's black,
working-class, and
queer communities:

Since when did
"doing nothing
wrong" stop us
getting harassed
and arrested?

This kind of collective
anonymity has real
power and is a
rejection of leaders,
hierarchy and
authoritarianism.

**The Zapatista EZLN in Mexico argue that
wear masks is a way for indigenous
peoples who have been ignored for
centuries to finally be seen.**

It feels like ordinary people in Britain are
ignored too – that protesting is seen as
simply the noisy backdrop to 'real' politics in
Westminster or in City boardrooms.

Imagine:

What impact of thousands of people visibly
wearing a face covering could have.

a mask is
POWERFUL!



READ MORE: netpol.org/2015/11/02/ezln-masks

TIME TO MAKE A CHOICE:

For the first time, we now face a collective choice:

A

Either mass non-compliance with new laws by making masks normal for everyone and restrictions unenforceable.

B

Or we resign ourselves to excluding vast swathes of people from our movements.

If neither option seems palatable to you, then what might another alternative be?

What does solidarity look like?

Mass non-compliance is unquestionably hard to make happen in many situations.

The last thing anyone wants is to make people a police target by calling for them to become a symbol of the lazy stereotype of a 'violent' minority wearing a mask.

Yet, if everyone strategically decided to wear a mask at more protests, it can become a symbol of our collective solidarity and of our rejection of intrusive police surveillance.

Police can easily arrest ten people for wearing a face mask in a mask-free zone.

Police will be less eager to arrest hundreds.



FAQ



FAQ

Q. Are there ways to avoid police mistakenly assuming our Covid masks are only to hide identity?

A. We suggest that ALL publicity for a march mentions wearing a mask to protect from Covid and flu.

Flyers to this affect could also be distributed on the day too.

This will make it more difficult for police to claim ignorance later.

Q. What should I think about when posting photos

A. With the current repression of protest criminalising lots of things, it is important to be careful when posting photos publicly. If you do, make sure to blur faces or cover them with emojis.



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You can find more info and resources at netpol.org

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SAFETY • NETPOL • ORG • PLEASE WEAR A MASK AT THIS DEMONSTRATION FOR YOURS + OURS

to mask
is to
care



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