

Your Money or Your Life



London's Knife Crime, Robbery and Street Theft Epidemic

David Spencer



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Acknowledgement

The author is particularly grateful to those serving within policing and the criminal justice system who confidentially contributed their experience and views in the writing of this report. Universally, they wanted to better serve and protect the law-abiding majority of the public – almost all believed that creating a criminal justice system which is willing to take a tougher approach to crime and criminals was essential to doing that. Any mistakes within this report are of course the responsibility of the author.

Endorsements

“Ensuring the public are safe to walk our streets is one of the foremost responsibilities of any government. In London this is particularly the case for the Mayor of London as the effective Police and Crime Commissioner for our capital city. Yet when people decide not to walk home for fear of being robbed and when businesses relocate because of the risk their staff may be assaulted, something is going very wrong.

This excellent report by Policy Exchange is a sobering examination of the rise in knife crime, robbery and theft offences in London. The analysis lays bare the scale of the challenge for police chiefs and policy makers alike. But this report is not a counsel of despair – it is a call to action.

The “zero-tolerance” approach advocated within this report is one that I support – it will closely inform my policy thinking in this area. Policies such as those outlined in this report have the potential to turn the tide: tougher sentences for repeat offenders and those who carry knives; intensive use of stop and search where crime is most concentrated; the deployment of Live Facial Recognition to quickly identify wanted men of violence.

It is incumbent on political leaders to back the police when they strongly enforce the law. Too often police officers are stymied by bureaucracy and over-zealous oversight which inevitably leads to a withdrawal from the streets – something which benefits only the criminals.

Implementation of a “zero-tolerance” approach to crime requires a combination of clear policy, political will and savvy operational policing. It also requires policing and political leaders to put public safety ahead of ideological dogma on issues such as stop and search. This report provides a route map for that approach and I wholeheartedly commend it as a vital contribution to the direction for law enforcement in this country.”

Rt Hon Chris Philp MP, Shadow Home Secretary and former Minister of State for Crime and Policing

“This is a thought-provoking paper, including some truly astonishing statistics on how the most prolific offenders somehow avoid a prison sentence. Our criminal justice system has been left utterly broken, and we urgently need to properly resource our courts and prisons if we are to restore public faith that justice is being done. In the meantime, the law-abiding public want a

strong police force to have the confidence to take on criminals, and it's time for politicians of all colours to give the police their full backing to do just that."

Jonathan Hinder MP, Member of Parliament for Pendle and Clitheroe and former Metropolitan Police Inspector

"London is in the grip of a public safety crisis. Robbery, knife attacks, and phone thefts have become routine, yet while street crime surges, the criminal justice system has faltered. This hard-hitting report from Policy Exchange exposes the scale of the problem and sets out clearly where things must change. Every Londoner deserves to feel safe, and this report shows how we get there."

Margaret Mullane MP, Member of Parliament for Dagenham and Rainham

"This insightful report by Policy Exchange sets out a clear direction, not only for the capital but for police chiefs and political leaders across the country. Central to the fight against crime is providing police officers with support when they use their lawful powers to take on the criminals who cause such misery – in London we have seen the consequences when political leaders fail to do so. Acting on the recommendations in this report would cut crime and make our neighbourhoods safer for the law-abiding majority of people – that is the core of the policing mission."

Katy Bourne OBE, Police and Crime Commissioner for Sussex

"This important report by Policy Exchange sets out the shameful reality that in recent years criminals have been able to persecute the public with near impunity in London's West End. The police seem to be either unable or unwilling to tackle the problem. Meanwhile the Government is committed to doing away with many short sentences and reducing recalls to prisons – leaving the public unprotected from the predations of brazen criminals. In effect, the persistent and often violent criminals who plague our streets know that the chance of capture is slim and the imposition of effective sanctions negligible. For this to happen at a time when the probation service is still recovering from the destructive 'reforms' of the 2010s is foolhardy and endangers the public. This report's approach – principally focused on how to relentlessly target the thieves, robbers and criminals who carry knives – is timely. New Scotland Yard, City Hall and Government should take the recommendations seriously."

Peter Clarke CVO OBE QPM, Former Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police and former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

"This powerful Policy Exchange report lays bare the rise in street crime across London. It sets out a credible blueprint to reverse it. Public safety is one of the Government's most basic duties. If we are not safe and especially if we do not

feel safe, pious talk of the rule of law is meaningless. Yet too many Londoners are afraid to walk home; businesses fear for their staff. It is a clear signal that this basic duty is not being met. This paper offers practical solutions. The author shows that there are 20 knife crime “hotspots” in London. The worst, almost unbelievably, is the heart of London’s West End. David Spencer must be right to call for increased police numbers here. I urge policymakers and police chiefs to take these recommendations seriously, and to act.”

Lord Sandhurst KC, former Deputy High Court Judge and former Recorder of the Crown Court

“This Policy Exchange report into London’s street crime epidemic is a timely and important intervention at a time when police chiefs, Government and City Hall seem to have lost their way on the fight against crime. In particular, this report examines the issues of race and ethnicity alongside violent crime and policing tactics such as stop and search. Too often this is an issue treated with kid gloves by policy makers and police chiefs – here the authors of this report have been courageous in standing up against the ideological dogma which has led to so many young black men dying on our streets. Policy Exchange is to be commended for such a clear and direct approach which, if adopted, would save lives and cut crime.”

Chris Donaldson, former Metropolitan Police Inspector and Founder Member of the Black Police Association

Contents

About the Author	2
Acknowledgement	4
Endorsements	5
Summary of Recommendations	9
Executive Summary	12
1. Knife Crime, Robbery and Theft in London	16
2. Catching and punishing thugs, robbers and thieves (or not)	30
3. “Hotspot” Patrolling and Stop and Search	36
4. Targeting offenders – Live Facial Recognition and Court Orders	51
Conclusion	59

Summary of Recommendations

1. The Top 20 “hotspots” (LSOAs or smaller) for knife crime in London should be subject to an enhanced “zero-tolerance” enforcement of the law through the deployment of police officers on patrol – explicitly tasked to conduct very high-volumes of stop and searches. The highest LSOA hotspot for knife crime in London (in the vicinity of Oxford Circus and Regent Street) should have very large numbers of officers on patrol (at least 100 officers) in this single area during peak times.
2. To combat the epidemic of knife crime there must be a surge in stop and search. The government should amend section 60 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to explicitly allow “without suspicion” searches to take place in the most intense violent crime “hotspots” at any time. These hotspots should be identified by the police and approved on an annual basis by a Magistrate.
3. The Government should invest in the deployment of permanent Live Facial Recognition systems in each of the Top 20 LSOA knife crime “hotspots” in London. Officers should be physically deployed to these locations at peak offending times to respond to offenders being identified by the Live Facial Recognition system.
4. In addition to targeting the Top 20 LSOAs knife crime “hotspots” in London, the Metropolitan Police should also undertake similar “zero-tolerance” enforcement at a small number of “Highly Iconic Sites” with the deployment of very high volumes of police officers undertaking patrols at peak times. These sites should be: Westminster Bridge, Parliament Square, Picadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square and Leicester Square.
5. Any Metropolitan Police officers not currently in a frontline operational policing role should immediately be transferred to contribute to the “zero-tolerance” policing of the Top 20 knife crime LSOA “hotspot” locations and “Highly Iconic Sites” within London. At a minimum this would enable the redeployment of 850 police officers to undertake the visible and intensive policing necessary in these locations.

6. The explosion of knife crime in the capital over recent years reveals a clear failure of leadership at both a political and operational policing level – the Home Secretary should use section 40 Police Act 1996 to direct the Mayor of London to take specific actions to rectify this.
7. The Prime Minister, Home Secretary, Mayor of London, London’s Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, and the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police should issue a joint statement explicitly stating that they support a substantial increase in the number of properly conducted stop and searches – whatever the ethnicity of those being searched.
8. Police forces should publish data for the rates of stop and search by ethnicity of those searched compared to the ethnic make-up of those suspected of committing homicide, knife crime, robbery and other similar offences – rather than making comparisons to the resident population.
9. The Government should pass legislation which requires that courts pass a mandatory immediate custodial sentence of two years for all “hyper-prolific” offenders (an additional 4,555 offenders being sentenced to prison for the year to December 2024) and of one year for all “super-prolific” offenders (an additional 9,483 offenders being sentenced to prison for the year to December 2024) on conviction of a further either-way offence. Both Magistrates and Crown Courts should be able to pass such a sentence.
10. The Government should create a mandatory sentence for those convicted of robbery to receive an immediate custodial sentence of at least three years.
11. The Government should amend Section 315 of the Sentencing Act 2020 in order that it is genuinely mandatory for all those convicted of repeat possession of a knife to be sentenced to a prison sentence – removing the opt-out for judges and magistrates to deliver an alternative non-custodial or suspended sentence. The minimum sentence in repeat knife-carrying cases should be increased from six months to two years imprisonment for adults. The Government should legislate in order that every adult offender caught in possession of a knife on a single occasion be dealt with by the courts (rather than receiving a “community resolution” or caution) with a minimum prison term of one year in custody. Magistrates Courts should be empowered to deal with all such cases.
12. In line with the Government’s intention to reduce knife crime

by half over the next decade, the Prime Minister and Home Secretary should convene the police chiefs and Police and Crime Commissioners (or Mayors where appropriate) for the top four knife crime police force areas on a quarterly basis at Number 10 Downing Street to review their progress in fighting crime through the “zero-tolerance” enforcement of the law.

13. The Home Office should publish data for the volume of offences (knife crime, robbery and theft person), arrests, stop and searches and crimes solved for the top four knife crime police force areas on a quarterly basis.
14. The Government should legislate to require Apple and Google to prevent stolen devices being able to connect with cloud services, as the Metropolitan Police has been requesting for over 18 months. This would enable mobile phones to be quickly rendered less useful and limit the criminal market for the devices.
15. The Government should legislate to amend the responsibilities of the Independent Office for Police Conduct – this should include limiting their involvement to misconduct cases involving chief officers or cases which involve death or serious corruption, with other cases dealt with entirely by police forces. The IOPC’s powers to overrule chief constables in other cases should also be curtailed.
16. The Government should legislate to amend the Police Reform Act 2002 to raise the threshold for a misconduct investigation to be launched from a mere “indication” of misconduct to there being “clear evidence” of misconduct at the outset of an investigation. As part of such an assessment complaints against police officers should consider at the earliest stage the previous convictions of complainants (particularly convictions for dishonesty or violence offences) to determine whether a complainant’s account of events can be relied upon.
17. The Government should legislate in order that a Knife Crime Prevention Order or Serious Violence Prevention Order is mandatory for all individuals convicted of a relevant offence including knife possession and offences of violence. Individuals subject to such an Order should be subject to “without suspicion” stop and search by the police in a public place at any time. All individuals subject to such Orders should be added to Live Facial Recognition system watch lists. The number of Knife Crime Prevention Orders and Serious Violence Prevention Orders secured per force area should be published on an annual basis.

Executive Summary

London is in the grip of a crimewave of robbery, knife crime and theft.

Police chiefs have prioritised other issues while allowing the streets to be surrendered to criminals and thugs. Political leaders have sacrificed effective policing to ideological preferences. Bodies such as the Independent Office for Police Conduct have shown themselves only too willing to criticise and pursue police officers doing their best to enforce the law. Given this confluence it should be no surprise that knife crime, robbery and “theft person” offences have rocketed in recent years.

This report examines what has gone wrong – and importantly, what the police and government must do now to stem the tide.

Chapter 1 examines the rates of knife crime, robbery and theft person offences both nationally and in London. We show that knife crime in England and Wales has risen sharply over the past decade, increasing by 78% since 2013/14, with 50,510 offences recorded in 2023/24. Even accounting for population growth, this represents a 68.3% rise over the last decade. London accounts for a disproportionate share of knife crime offences, representing 32.1% of all knife crime and 45.9% of knife-point robberies in England, compared to only 15.5% of the population.

Within the capital, knife crime is highly concentrated: 4% of neighbourhoods accounted for nearly a quarter of offences and 15% accounted for half of offences in 2024. One small geographic area – consisting of around 20 streets around Oxford Circus and Regent Street in the City of Westminster – recorded more knife crime offences than the 716 (or 14.35%) least-affected of London’s 4,988 LSOAs combined. Most knife crime in London involves robbery, with mobile phones the most common target. In 2024, 61.6% of knife crime offences were robberies. Combined robbery and theft person offences led to over 81,000 mobile phone thefts in the capital last year. There are clear insights which can guide the law enforcement and policy response. Within London: knife crime offending is highly geographically concentrated, a significant majority of knife crime offences are robberies, and mobile phones are one of the items most commonly targeted by robbers and thieves.

Chapter 2 examines how effective, or otherwise, the Metropolitan Police is at catching robbers, knife crime offenders and thieves alongside the criminal courts approach to sentencing for those who are prosecuted and convicted. The proportion of criminals caught by the Metropolitan Police is pitiful – with only 1 in 20 robberies and 1 in 170 theft person offences solved in 2024. Even for those few who are caught the proportion of offenders being sentenced to immediate custody by the courts are

falling – dropping from 66.1% in 2014 to 55.4% in 2024. For violence-related offences, imprisonment rates have also decreased, with just 36.5% of offenders sentenced to custody in 2024. Despite laws mandating prison for repeat knife offenders, around a third evade immediate incarceration. It appears likely that these rates of incarceration will fall even further in the coming years given the Government’s apparent intention to send fewer offenders to prison following the Independent Sentencing Review led by Rt Hon David Gauke¹ and the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts led by Rt Hon Sir Brian Leveson.²

The failure to adequately deal with the most prolific offenders presented before the courts is perhaps the gravest sign of the permissiveness with which the criminal justice system treats those most dedicated to committing crime. In the year to December 2024, of the 8,207 “hyper-prolific” offenders who already had 46 or more previous criminal convictions or cautions, only 44.5% were sentenced to an immediate term of imprisonment on conviction for a further indictable or “either-way” criminal offence – 4,555 hyper-prolific offenders were released on conviction without receiving an immediate term of imprisonment. Of the 16,386 “super-prolific” offenders with between 26 and 45 previous convictions or cautions, only 42.1% were sentenced to an immediate term of imprisonment on conviction for a further indictable or “either-way” criminal offence – 9,483 super-prolific offenders were released on conviction without receiving an immediate term of imprisonment. It is difficult to conceive of a collection of statistics which better demonstrates the contempt with which the criminal justice system is treating the law-abiding majority.

Chapter 3 examines the effectiveness of high-visibility policing in crime “hotspots” – citing evidence which demonstrates that the tactic is highly effectively at reduces crime. However, the use of a key element of proactive police patrolling – stop and search – has fallen significantly over the last decade, partly because of the policies of the Conservative-led coalition government (supported by the now Home Secretary Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP). The reduction in stop and search coincided with substantial increases knife crime, suggesting the reforms introduced in all likelihood significantly undermined the fight against crime. We cite research by the criminologists Piquero and Sherman (2025) which demonstrates that increased stop and search correlates with reduced knife crime.

Stop and search in London has been widely criticised for racial disproportionality, often framed as evidence of “racist” policing. Critics argue that black Londoners are unfairly targeted – claims we robustly challenge. Data shows that black people are “over-represented” among victims of the most serious knife crime – within London black people are 3.38 times more likely to be killed in a knife-enabled non-domestic homicide than white people. Similarly black people are 5.0 times more likely than white people in London to be charged with murder. While only 13.5% of London’s population are black, 48.6% of robbery suspects are described as black by victims when reporting the crime to the police. In

1. Ministry of Justice, Independent Sentencing Review: Final report and proposals for reform, May 2025, [link](#)
2. Ministry of Justice, Independent Review of the Criminal Courts: Part I, July 2025, [link](#)

contrast to allegations of police “racism”, outcomes of stop and search in London reveal that black suspects are 64% more likely than white suspects to receive ‘community resolutions’ when a prohibited item is found when searching for a weapon (rather than be charged or summonsed and sent to court). This suggests there may well be a leniency being shown towards black suspects compared to white suspects.

It is not the role of policing to correct for all of society’s ills – to quote the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police Sir Stephen Watson QPM: “It’s really important in policing that you play the ball that is bowled – you describe the problem, you faithfully attack the various ingredients of the problem and you do so without fear or favour in the public interest”.³ We agree and strongly reject the political ideology and timidity of police leaders which has led to the precipitous reductions in stop and search. As part of better serving the law-abiding majority there should be a surge in stop and search within those parts of London where knife crime, robbery and theft is most prevalent.

Chapter 4 examines how offenders can be targeted – specifically through innovative Live Facial Recognition technology and innovations in court orders which limit the activities of known offenders. The Metropolitan Police’s deployment of Live Facial Recognition as a tool to identify wanted individuals, particularly within crime hotspots, has been remarkably successful. In 2023 the force undertook 24 deployments in the capital – in 2024 there were 179 deployments and by mid-June 2025 there had been 94 deployments. An Independent evaluation by the National Physical Laboratory confirmed that the technology can be deployed with a high degree of accuracy and – notably, an absence of significant demographic bias when properly configured. Despite demonstrable results – including 1,045 arrests since 2023 – several London councils have passed motions opposing its use. This includes Islington Council which at the time was led by Kaya Comer-Schwartz – who was subsequently appointed by the Mayor of London Sir Sadiq Khan as the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime.

The chapter also reviews a series of legal tools, including Knife Crime Prevention Orders and Serious Violence Reduction Orders, which can be utilised to restrict repeat offenders’ behaviours but have seen limited or inconsistent application. We recommend that their application is made mandatory for certain violent and knife-carrying offenders.

Londoners and visitors to the capital face a street crime epidemic – one which includes a very real risk of becoming a victim of serious violence, robbery or theft. The steps taken by the Metropolitan Police, Mayor of London and Government have so far been unequal to the task. The Metropolitan Police must take an unequivocal “Crime Fighting First” approach – in those locations where rates of knife crime, robbery and theft are highest that should mean a “Zero Tolerance” approach to crime and criminals. The Government and Mayor of London must demonstrate the necessary political leadership to explicitly reject the policies and ideologies which have led us to this point.

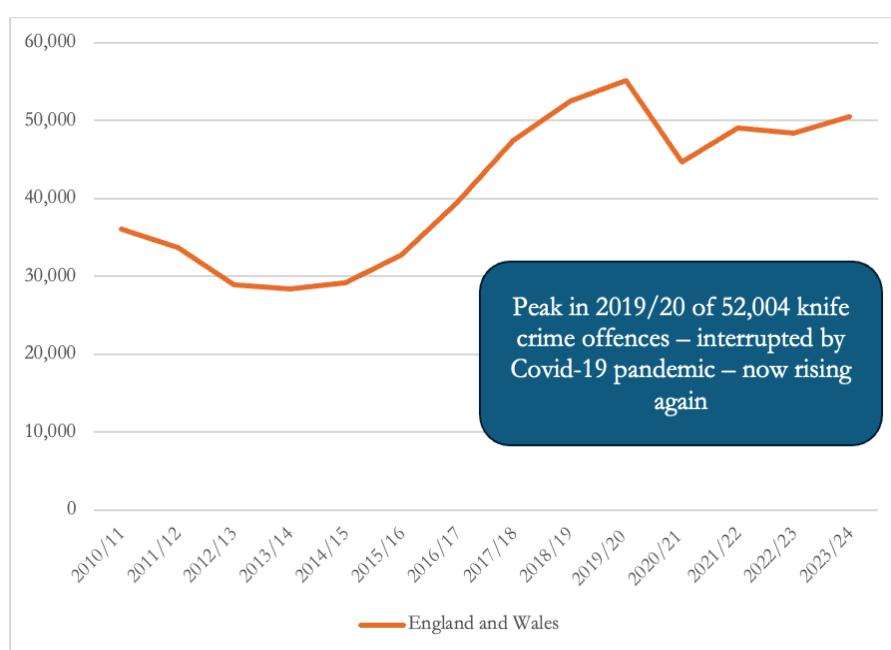
3. Sir Stephen Watson QPM, “The Fight Against Crime and Disorder: Turning Round Greater Manchester Police”, Policy Exchange, 18th June 2025, [link](#)

The law-abiding majority of people do not accept the status quo, and neither do we at Policy Exchange – this report should act as a call to action for political leaders and police chiefs alike.

1. Knife Crime, Robbery and Theft in London

The prevalence of knife crime in England and Wales has increased substantially over the last decade.

In the year 2010/11 there were 36,068 knife crime offences – this fell to 28,337 in 2013/14 but has since risen consistently over the last decade (with the exception of a sharp fall in 2020/21 due to the Covid-19 pandemic). In the year to 2023/24 there were 50,510 knife crime offences – a 78% increase on 2013/14 levels. Even accounting for population increases over that period the increase in knife crime over the last decade has been 68.3%.



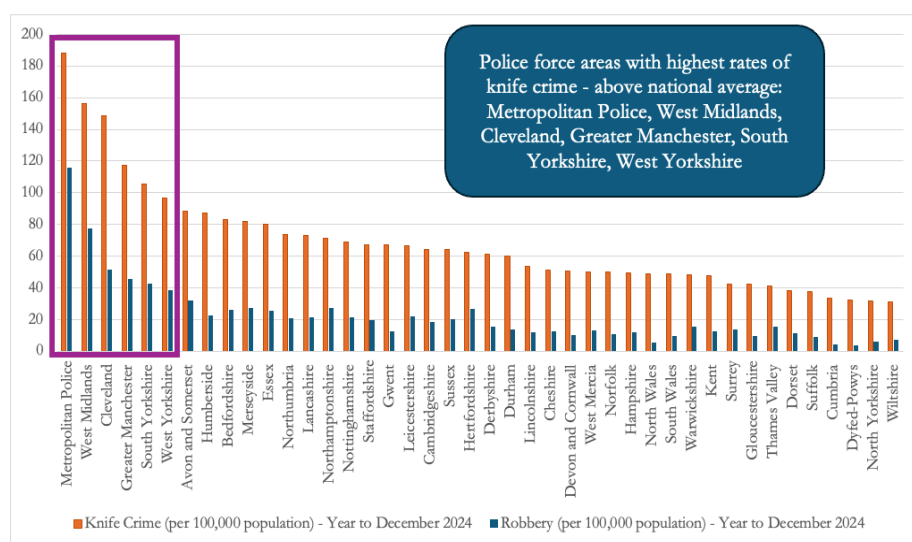
Knife Crime Offences in England and Wales (2010/11 – 2023/24)^{4 5}

4. Crime Survey of England and Wales, Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area Tables, Table P5, [link](#)

5. Offences included: Homicide, attempted murder, assault with injury and assault with intent to cause serious harm, threat to kill, robbery, rape and sexual assault. To be included the knife or sharp instrument should be present at the time of the offence – or believed by the victim, or where only part of the weapon (eg a knife handle) is seen. Offences do not include broken bottles, but do include implements such as chisels and screwdrivers.

London far outweighs other parts of the country – not only, as would be expected given the city's size, in terms of volume of offences – but also in terms of rates of offending. Across the country, rates of knife crime are significantly higher in a small number of police force areas than in most of the country. London (Metropolitan Police), West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Cleveland, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire all have significantly higher rates of knife crime than other force areas. These

six forces each have rates of knife crime above the average rate for England and Wales as a whole (90 offences per 100,000 population) with the remaining 36 forces (excluding the City of London Police due to the very small residential population size) all recording rates of knife crime below the national average.



Knife Crime per 100,000 population in England and Wales (Year to December 2024)^{6 7}

Partly due to London's size the volume of knife crime offences in the capital dwarfs that of other forces with high rates of knife crime. However, London's size is only part of the story: in the year to December 2024 London represented 32.1% of all knife crime in England and 45.9% of all knife-point robbery in England – compared to only 15.5% of the population of England.⁸

Force	Number of knife crime offences	Number of knife-enabled robbery offences
Metropolitan Police	16,789	10,346
West Midlands	4,664	2,309
Greater Manchester	3,452	1,354
West Yorkshire	2,319	921
South Yorkshire	1,481	603
Cleveland	875	302

Knife crime and knife-enabled robbery offences for police forces with rates above the average (England and Wales) for the year to December 2024⁹

- Crime Survey of England and Wales, Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area Tables (to December 2024), Tables P5, P6 & P7 [link](#)
- Due to the very low residential population of the City of London Police area the Crime Survey of England and Wales does not provide this data. There were 58 relevant knife crime offences in the year to December 2024 in the City of London Police area.
- Crime Survey of England and Wales, Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area Tables (to December 2024), Tables P5, P6 & P7 [link](#)
- Crime Survey of England and Wales, Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area Tables (to December 2024), Table P5 [link](#)

The concentration of knife crime offences in this relatively small number of force areas does provide policing and Government with an opportunity.

Recommendation: In line with the Government's intention to reduce knife crime by half over the next decade, the Prime Minister and Home Secretary should convene the police chiefs and Police and Crime Commissioners (or Mayors where appropriate) for the top four knife crime police force areas on a quarterly basis at Number 10 Downing Street to review their progress in fighting crime through the "zero-tolerance" enforcement of the law.

Recommendation: The Home Office should publish data for the volume of offences (knife crime, robbery and theft person), arrests, stop and searches and crimes solved for the top four knife crime police force areas should be published on a quarterly basis.

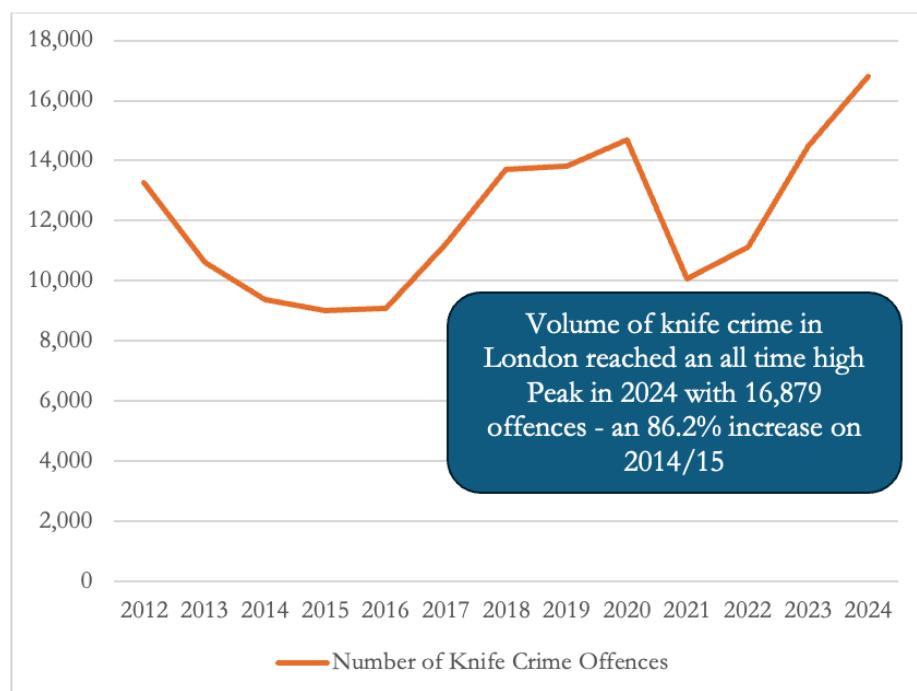
Knife crime offences in London have risen to record levels in recent years.

Broadly coinciding with Boris Johnson's second term as Mayor of London and Bernard Hogan-Howe's term as Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police the levels of knife crime in London fell by nearly a third – from 13,260 offences in 2011/12 to 9,072 offences in 2015/16.¹⁰ Broadly coinciding with the Mayoralty of Sadiq Khan, from 2015/16 the number of knife crime offences steadily increased to 14,680 offences in 2019/20 – with falls during the Covid-19 pandemic to 2012/13 levels.¹¹ Since the pandemic the volume of knife crime offences have increased every year – with the number of knife crime offences in the 2024 reaching 16,879 offences – an 86.2% increase on 2014/15 levels.¹²

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.



Number of knife crime offences in London's Metropolitan Police area (2018 – 2024)¹³

Knife crime offending in London is highly geographically concentrated.

Based on data received through Freedom of Information requests to the Metropolitan Police, analysis shows that while knife crime in London is prolific, it is also highly geographically concentrated.

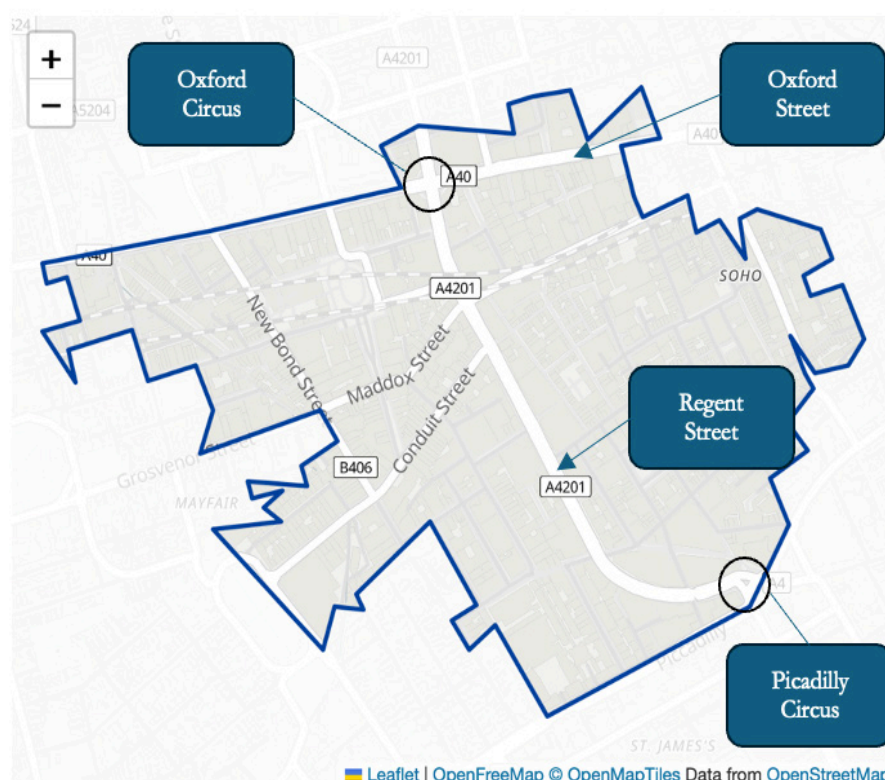
Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are geographic areas which allows for statistical analysis across a wide range of factors—including policy areas such as crime, immigration and housing. They usually comprise a resident population of between 1,000 and 3,00 people with between 400 and 1,200 households. There are 35,772 LSOAs across England and Wales and 4,988 LSOAs in London (excluding the City of London).¹⁴

The top 200 LSOAs for knife crime within London reported 3,615 knife crimes in 2024. This 4% of the capital's LSOAs represented 25.6% of all knife crime across the city.¹⁵ In 2024 there were more knife crime offences (108 offences) in one single area of London's West End (LSOA: E01035716) than in the 716 LSOAs with the lowest levels of knife crime combined. This area includes Oxford Circus and parts of: New Bond Street, Oxford Street, Regent Street and Picadilly Circus.

13. For the years 2012 – 2022 the data relates to the financial year (ie for 2012 the data relates to the financial year April 2011 – 2012). For the years 2023 and 2024 the data relates to the calendar year (January to December): Office for National Statistics, Crime Survey of England and Wales, Police force area data tables, year ending December 2024, table P6, [link](#)

14. Office for National Statistics, Census 2021 geographies, [link](#) & London Datastore, Estimates for London wards and LSOAs, [link](#)

15. Metropolitan Police Service, Freedom of Information Request Ref: 01/FOI/25/045143/R



Lower layer Super Output Area (E01035716): part of London's West End in the City of Westminster

Across a substantial portion of London no knife crime was reported in the entirety of the 2024 calendar year.¹⁶ This finding replicates similar results from analysis conducted for the 2022 and 2023 calendar years.¹⁷ In the entirety of 2024, 14.1% of the capital's LSOAs reported no knife crime. A further 24.3% of the capital's LSOAs reported only one instance of knife crime in the entirety of 2024.¹⁸

These findings align with a wealth of evidence which shows that certain locations are “hotspots” for crime.¹⁹ The evidence shows that hotspots of crime and disorder often persist over long periods of time – one study showed that 5% of ‘street segments’ accounted for half of all crime over a 14-year period.²⁰ The evidence also suggests that the benefits of police officers focusing on hotspots are diffused beyond the hotspot area itself, with nearby locations also benefitting from reduced crime and disorder.²¹ These insights must inform the Metropolitan Police's deployment strategy. We advocate that in these areas there should be a “zero-tolerance” approach to crime, criminals and disorder with an overwhelming police presence at peak times of offending.

16. Metropolitan Police Service, Freedom of Information Request Ref: 01/FOI/25/045143/R

17. Metropolitan Police Service, Freedom of Information Ref: 01.FOI.24.037276, [link](#) & Metropolitan Police, Freedom of Information Ref: 01.FOI.23.031535, [link](#)

18. Metropolitan Police Service, Freedom of Information Request Ref: 01/FOI/25/045143/R

19. A. Braga, B. Turchan, A. Papachristos, D. Hureau (2019), Hot spots policing of small geographic areas effects on crime, Campbell Systematic Review, 8 September 2019, Vol 15(3), [link](#)

20. D. Wesiburd, S. Bushway, C. Lum, S. Ying (2004), Trajectories of Crime at Places: A Longitudinal Study of Street Segments in the City of Seattle, Criminology, vol 42 (2), pp 283-321, [link](#)

21. Ibid.

Lower Layer Super Output Area Code	Number of knife crime offences (2024)	London Borough	Parliamentary Constituency	Member of Parliament
E01035716	108	Westminster	Cities of London and Westminster	Rachel Blake (Labour)
E01004734	95	Westminster	Cities of London and Westminster	Rachel Blake (Labour)
E01004763	80	Westminster	Cities of London and Westminster	Rachel Blake (Labour)
E01004736	71	Westminster	Cities of London and Westminster	Rachel Blake (Labour)
E01003047	42	Lambeth	Dulwich and West Norwood	Helen Hayes (Labour)
E01002002	41	Haringey	Hornsea and Friern Barnet	Catherine West (Labour)
E01035718	40	Westminster	Cities of London and Westminster	Rachel Blake (Labour)
E01032582	39	Lambeth	Vauxhall and Camberwell Green	Florence Eshalomi (Labour)
E01001943	36	Hammersmith and Fulham	Hammersmith and Chiswick	Andy Slaughter (Labour)
E01002968	34	Kingston	Kingston and Surbiton	Ed Davey (Liberal Democrat)
E01003074	34	Lambeth	Dulwich and West Norwood	Helen Hayes (Labour)
E01033708	33	Hackney	Hackney South and Shoreditch	Meg Hillier (Labour)
E01001013	30	Croydon	Croydon West	Sarah Jones (Labour)
E01002356	30	Havering	Romford	Andrew Rosindell (Conservative)
E01002069	29	Haringey	Tottenham	David Lammy (Labour)
E01034473	29	Barking and Dagenham	Romford	Nesil Caliskan (Labour)
E01003102	28	Lambeth	Vauxhall and Camberwell Green	Florence Eshalomi (Labour)
E01003531	28	Newham	East Ham	Stephen Timms (Labour)
E01000912	27	Camden	Hampstead and Highgate	Tulip Siddiq (Labour)
E01033327	27	Lewisham	Lewisham North	Vicky Foxcroft (Labour)

The Top 20 LSOAs for knife crime in London (2024)²²

Recommendation: The Top 20 “hotspots” (LSOAs or smaller) for knife crime in London should be subject to an enhanced “zero-tolerance” enforcement of the law through the deployment of police officers on

22. Metropolitan Police Service, Freedom of Information Request Ref: 01/FOI/25/045143/R

patrol – explicitly tasked to conduct very high-volumes of stop and searches. The highest LSOA hotspot for knife crime in London (in the vicinity of Oxford Circus and Regent Street) should have very large numbers of officers on patrol (at least 100 officers) in this single area during peak times.

In addition, there are a small number of locations within central London which are “Highly Iconic Sites” that should also be the subject of intense “zero-tolerance” policing. These locations have very high levels of foot traffic due to their historic and cultural appeal to both residents and visitors to the capital. Policy Exchange has previously written in relation to the area in and around Parliament Square and Westminster Bridge in ‘Tarnished Jewel: The decline of the streets around Parliament’ (2023)²³ and ‘A Culture of Impunity: The ongoing erosion of disabled people’s access to Parliament and Westminster’ (2023).²⁴

Recommendation: In addition to targeting the Top 20 LSOAs knife crime “hotspots” in London, the Metropolitan Police should also undertake similar “zero-tolerance” enforcement at a small number of “Highly Iconic Sites” with the deployment of very high volumes of police officers undertaking patrols at peak times. These sites should be: Westminster Bridge, Parliament Square, Picadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square and Leicester Square.

The response of the Metropolitan Police to these recommendations may well be to claim that it is simply not possible to deploy officers in these numbers to these hotspot locations due to other demands. However – we believe this is entirely possible with sufficient leadership and a willingness to prioritise. As of the 31st May 2025 the Metropolitan Police had 32,785 officers – 2,861 more than seven years ago in March 2018, an increase of 9.6% over the period.²⁵ While many officers are currently deployed to vital frontline policing tasks, many are not. Given the current scale of the knife crime, robbery and theft epidemic in London, every single warranted police officer not currently in a frontline operational role must be redeployed. This will require entire departments to be closed or for posts to be taken over entirely by civilian staff.

23. A. Gilligan (2023), Tarnished Jewel: The decline of the streets around Parliament’, Policy Exchange, February 2023, [link](#)

24. D. Spencer (2023), A Culture of Impunity: The ongoing erosion of disabled people’s access to Parliament and Westminster, June 2023, [link](#)

25. Metropolitan Police Service, Workforce Data Report, May 2025, [link](#)

Department	Number of Officers
Royal Parks OCU	56.90
Central Specialist Crime	869.11
Specialist Crime North	420.81
Specialist Crime South	466.21
Specialist Crime Review Group	10.00
Serious & Organised Crime	230.52
Op Northleigh (Grenfell Investigation)	133.16
Crime Recording Investigation Bureau	358.90
Frontline Policing Delivery Unit	212.45
Frontline Policing Headquarters	68.80
Met Ops Chief Officer Team	18.60
Met Intelligence	770.62
Covert Policing	504.28
Forensic Services	133.71
Covert Governance	8.90
Public Order Command	283.59
Taskforce	1,013.66
Roads & Transport Policing	1,002.95
Met Detention	518.47
Met Prosecutions	118.43
MetCC (Command & Control)	307.91
Performance Tasking & Insight	30.29
Specialist Firearms Command	792.00
Commissioners Private Office	4.00
Digital Data & Technology	34.22
Human Resources	24.00
Learning & Development	450.55
Learning & Development – Officers in Training	592.00
Met Business Services	3.80
Operational Support Services	9.00
Long Term Absence	259.22
Inquiry & Review Support Command	61.17
Culture Diversity & Inclusion	20.75
Professional Standards	677.97
Professionalism Headquarters	26.80
Transformation	142.42

Number of Metropolitan Police officers posted to non-Borough based Operational Command Units (May 2025)²⁶

26. Metropolitan Police Service, Workforce Data Report, May 2025, [link](#)

At a minimum, every police officer in the following departments should be redeployed away from their existing role to an operational frontline policing role focused on the crime hotspots outlined in this report:

- Transformation: 142.42 officers
- Frontline Policing Headquarters: 68.8 officers
- Digital, Data & Technology: 34.22 officers
- Human Resources: 24 officers
- Culture, Diversity & Inclusion: 20.75 officers
- Met Business Services & Operational Support Services: 12.80 officers

At a minimum there should also be a 30% police officer headcount reduction in the following departments in order that officers can be redeployed to an operational frontline policing role focused on the hotspots outlined in this report:

- Professionalism & Professionalism Headquarters: 704.77 officers
- Frontline Policing Delivery Unit: 212.45 officers
- Crime Recording Investigation Bureau: 358.9 officers
- Performance, Insight & Tasking: 30.29 officers
- Learning & Development: 450.55 officers
- Inquiry & Review Support Command: 61.17 officers

Together this would provide around 850 officers for deployment to the policing of the hotspot locations and Highly Iconic Sites identified in this report.

That there are any police officers currently posted to some of the departments listed above suggests that the process of posting officers has gone seriously awry – clearly demonstrating that the force’s Human Resources department is failing to ensure the maximum possible number of officers are serving the public on the frontline. Given the impact of this failing on the force’s ability to deliver effective policing across the capital, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police should urgently review whether the senior leadership of the force’s Human Resources function is fit for purpose.

Recommendation: Any Metropolitan Police officers not currently in a frontline operational policing role should immediately be transferred to contribute to the “zero-tolerance” policing of the Top 20 knife crime LSOA “hotspot” locations and “Highly Iconic Sites” within London. At a minimum this would enable the redeployment of 850 police officers to undertake the visible and intensive policing necessary in these locations.

Recommendation: The explosion of knife crime in the capital over recent years reveals a clear failure of leadership at both a political and

operational policing level – the Home Secretary should use section 40 Police Act 1996 to direct the Mayor of London to take specific actions to rectify this.

Most knife crime offences in London are robberies – mobile phones are a particular target.

Any murder is a tragic event and understandably each one attracts significant media attention. In London they are, however, mercifully rare – with 65 murders committed with a knife in 2023.^{27 28} Of the 16,789 serious knife crime offences committed in the year to 2024 the majority, 10,346 offences or 61.62% of all knife crime offences, were robberies – far higher than any other offence type.²⁹

Offence Type	Number of Knife Crime Offences	Proportion of Knife Crime Offences
Robbery	10,346	61.62%
Assault ³⁰	4,732	28.19%
Threats to kill	1,277	7.61%
Rape and sexual offences	295	1.76%
Attempted murder	78	0.46%
Homicide	61	0.36%
Total	16,789	100%

Volume of different types of serious knife crime offences committed in London's Metropolitan Police area in 2024³¹

Mobile phones are, perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the items most frequently stolen by robbers and thieves. Of the 35,061 robbery offences (all robbery offences – not only knife crime offences) committed in London's Metropolitan Police's force area mobile phones were stolen in 31.5% of them.³² While the total number of robberies has increased over the last three years – by 18.3% or 5,416 offences – the proportion where a mobile phone was stolen has increased at a faster rate.³³ In 2021 21.6% of robberies were of mobile phones – in 2022 and 2023 the proportions increased to around half of all robberies.³⁴ In 2024 the proportion of robberies where a mobile phone was stolen in around one third of offences.³⁵

For so-called “theft person” offences (where an item is stolen from a person, but unlike a robbery no force is used or threatened) the proportion of crimes where a mobile phone was stolen are even higher – representing between 68.5% and 72.6% of offences during the last four years.³⁶

Taking robbery and theft person offences together 81,279 mobile phones were stolen in London's Metropolitan Police area in 2024.³⁷

27. Excluding domestic violence offences which are usually committed in the home or another private space.

28. Metropolitan Police Service, Homicide Dashboard, Homicide Victims, [link](#)

29. Crime Survey of England and Wales, Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area Tables (to December 2024), Table P5 [link](#)

31. Crime Survey of England and Wales, Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area Tables (to December 2024), Table P5 [link](#)

32. Metropolitan Police Service, MPS Crime Dashboard, [link](#)

33. Ibid.

34. Metropolitan Police Service, MPS Crime Dashboard, [link](#)

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

30. Offences included are: Assault with injury, ABH, GBH or assault with injury with intent to cause serious harm

	Total robbery offences	Robbery offences where a mobile phone was stolen (volume & proportion of total offences)	Total theft person offences	Theft person offences where a mobile phone was stolen (volume & proportion of total offences)
2021	29,645	6,402 21.6%	37,736	21,050 55.8%
2022	27,659	10,762 38.9%	57,472	39,637 69.0%
2023	33,863	14,283 42.2%	72,713	52,820 72.6%
2024	35,061	11,056 31.5%	102,517	70,223 68.5%

Volumes of robbery and theft person offences and the proportion of offences where a mobile phone was the property stolen (2022-2024)³⁸

Organised criminality is a key driver for the current robbery and theft person crime epidemic in London.

The Metropolitan Police state that 80% of mobile phones stolen in London are Apple iPhones with a resale value of £300-400.³⁹ Approximately 75% of mobile phones stolen are then shipped abroad – with Algeria and China currently being the two most prevalent end-point locations.⁴⁰ In evidence to the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee on the 3rd June 2025, Commander James Conway of the Metropolitan Police stated:

“[Previously we] would regularly see criminal gangs who might, a few years ago, have been involved almost exclusively in drug dealing. They pivoted a few years ago back into mobile phone theft and robbery in a way we probably haven’t seen since the early noughties. They exploit young people to become involved in that. The classic image is very much as you described earlier [...]: teenagers on stolen bikes riding down the A10 corridor and committing 10 or 20 robberies or thefts on the go, packaging the phones very swiftly into silver foil or Faraday bags to make it more difficult for us to identify their ultimate location, and then swiftly passing them on to a middle market handler and, ultimately, transport out of the UK...”⁴¹

38. Ibid.

39. House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee, Oral Evidence: Phone Theft, HC 882, 3rd June 2025, [link](#)

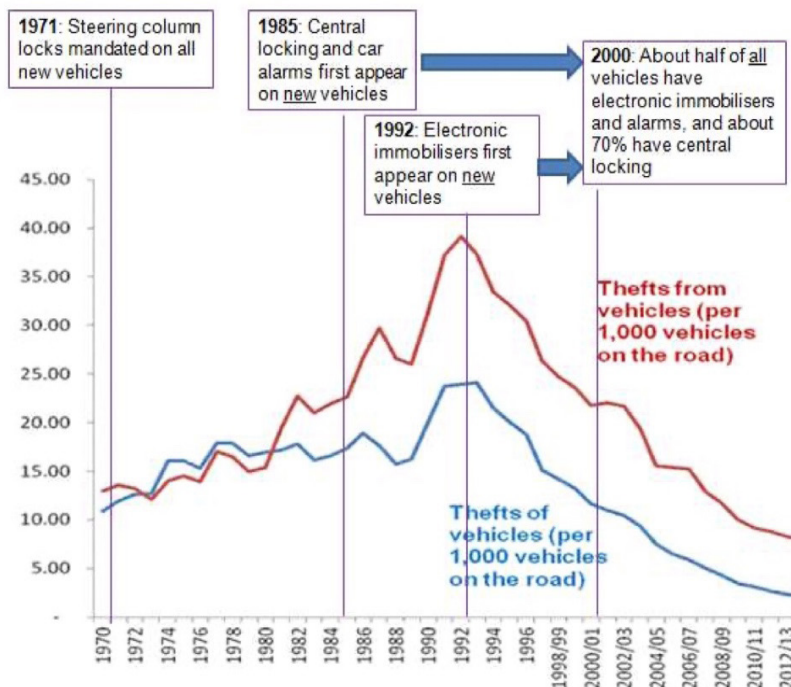
40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

As part of tackling the market for smartphones the Metropolitan Police have, since October 2023, requested that Apple and Google take steps

to prevent stolen smartphones from being able to connect to their cloud networks. Despite being a potentially key means of limiting the market for the £50 million worth in devices being stolen on the streets of London every year, with the associated trauma and pain to victims of crime and the public as a whole, to date Apple and Google have declined to do so.⁴²

The potential of this intervention, and therefore its importance in the fight against the crime epidemic currently impacting the capital, could potentially be significant. A previous example of manufacturers taking action which led to substantial reductions in criminality can be seen in the reduction of vehicle thefts and “joy-riding” following the introduction of security devices such as vehicle immobilisers during the 1990s and beyond.



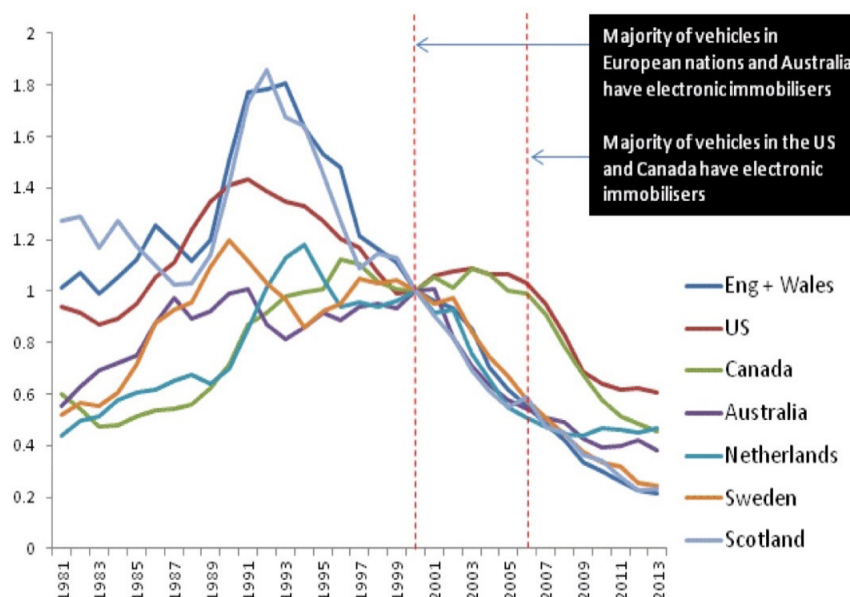
Police recorded thefts of and from vehicles in England and Wales (per 1,000 vehicles on the road) and accompanying security developments⁴³

Legislation (through European Union Directive 74/61/EEC) requiring the installation of electronic immobilisers on all new passenger cars sold in the European Union from October 1998 appears to have been particularly important factor in leading to the suppression of vehicle crime across several European jurisdictions.⁴⁴

42. Ibid.

43. N. Morgan, O. Shaw, A. Feist and C. Byron (2016), Reducing criminal opportunity: vehicle security and vehicle crime, Research Report 87, Home Office, January 2016, [link](#)

44. Ibid.



Recorded vehicle thefts in various nations (1981 to 2013), indexed to 2000 (2000=1)⁴⁵

The historic example of the vehicle theft, alongside the apparent unwillingness of technology companies to respond in a timely manner to the requests of the Metropolitan Police, demonstrates the need for Government to legislate to require manufacturers and service providers to act.

Recommendation: The Government should legislate to require Apple and Google to prevent stolen devices being able to connect with cloud services, as the Metropolitan Police has been requesting for over 18 months. This would enable mobile phones to be quickly rendered less useful and limit the criminal market for the devices.

*

The sense felt by many – that London is in the grip of a crimewave of knife crime, robbery and theft person offences is, as shown in this chapter, backed up by the data. Attempts to downplay this by some commentators, police chiefs and political leaders are quite simply wrong.

In 2024, London recorded nearly 17,000 knife crime offences – an 86% increase since 2014/15.⁴⁶ In the same year there were over 35,000 robberies – an increase in only three years of 18.2%.⁴⁷ There has been an even greater explosion in ‘theft person’ offences – with over 100,000 offences reported to the police in 2024 – representing a 170% increase over only three years.⁴⁸

However, within the data there are clear insights which can guide the

45. Ibid.

46. Crime Survey of England and Wales, Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area Tables (to December 2024), Table P5 [link](#)

47. Metropolitan Police Service, MPS Crime Dashboard, [link](#)

48. Ibid.

law enforcement and policy response. Within London:

- knife crime offending is highly geographically concentrated,
- the vast majority of knife crime offences are robberies,
- mobile phones are one of the items most commonly targeted by robbers and thieves.

Subsequent chapters will examine specific aspects of how these insights can be translated into both a policy response and a practical operational policing response. What is clear is that the principal challenge is not a lack of information – there is an abundance of data available to Government and the police which can assist in the fight against crime. Instead, it is a failure of coordination, leadership, urgency and political ideology. If knife crime, robberies and theft person offences continue to rise despite our knowledge of where and how it occurs, then the issue lies not with our understanding, but with policing and Government's unwillingness to act decisively on what we already know.

2. Catching and punishing thugs, robbers and thieves (or not)

The rate that robbers and thieves are caught by the Metropolitan Police in London is incredibly low – and is falling.

For the calendar year 2024 in London’s Metropolitan Police area, only 1 in 20 robberies were solved while for theft person this was as low as 1 in 170. Such low rates of crimes being solved contributes to the public’s perception that there are limited consequences for those committing crime and that there is a desperate need for the police and criminal justice system to take a tougher approach to crime and criminals.⁴⁹

Year	Robbery	Theft Person
2021	6.8%	1.1%
2022	7.9%	0.8%
2023	5.5%	0.8%
2024	5.1%	0.6%

Rate of robbery and theft person offences which were ‘solved’ (ie a suspect was charged, cautioned or other “positive disposal”) in London’s Metropolitan Police area (2022-2024)⁵⁰

Even when caught robbers and violent criminals are less likely to be sent to prison than they were ten years ago.

The maximum sentence that a court can impose on an individual convicted of robbery is life imprisonment. It is vanishingly rare for courts to impose such a sentence – however the possible punishment demonstrates the seriousness with which Parliament considers the offence of robbery to be. The actual rates of imprisonment for those convicted of robbery reveal that many of these criminals escape an immediate custodial sentence entirely – with the likelihood of being imprisoned falling significantly over the last decade. In 2014, 66.1% of convicted robbers were sentenced to immediate imprisonment – rising to 71.3% in 2017 – this has now fallen to only 55.4% of robbers being sentenced to immediate custody in 2024.

49. D. Spencer & A. Tait (2025), A Portrait of Modern Britain: Crime and closing the ‘Toughness Gap’, [link](#)

50. Metropolitan Police Service, MPS Crime Dashboard, [link](#)

Year	Robbery	Violence Against the Person
2014	66.1%	42.0%
2015	68.2%	40.5%
2016	69.7%	41.1%
2017	71.3%	42.0%
2018	68.0%	43.2%
2019	66.1%	37.1%
2020	58.5%	38.8%
2021	57.6%	36.0%
2022	59.7%	36.1%
2023	61.2%	36.4%
2024	55.4%	36.5%

Rates of those convicted of robbery and violence offences being subjected to an immediate custodial sentence⁵¹

For those convicted of a violence against the person offence (which includes, but is not limited to: murder, manslaughter, threats to kill, grievous bodily harm, actual bodily harm and harassment) the likelihood of being sentenced to an immediate custodial sentence is even lower. In 2014, 42.0% of those convicted were sent to prison – by 2024 this had fallen to just over a third, at 36.5%.⁵²

Recommendation: The Government should create a mandatory sentence for those convicted of robbery to receive an immediate custodial sentence of at least three years.

Despite the law requiring repeat ‘knife carriers’ to receive a custodial sentence, up to a third are not – with the likelihood of incarceration falling over the last 7 years.

Section 315 of the Sentencing Act 2020 provides that those over the age of 16 years old who are convicted of repeated possession of offensive weapons and pointed or bladed articles should be sentenced to a minimum custodial term of at least six months in custody.⁵³ However around a third of adults (over 18 years old) convicted of a relevant offence over the last eight years have not been sentenced to immediate custody.⁵⁴ Not imprisoning offenders in such circumstances is permitted under the legislation if the judge or magistrate concludes that such a sentence would, in the circumstances relating to the offender or offences, be “wholly unjust” for such a provision to be applied. However, that this is being applied in as many as a third of cases suggests an approach towards this type of criminality by the courts which is in contrast with the public’s expectations of a tough on crime and criminals approach.

51. Ministry of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly: December 2024 (Overview Tables), Table Q5.2b, [link](#)

52. Ibid.

53. Section 315 Sentencing Act 2020, [link](#)

54. Ministry of Justice, Knife and Offensive Weapon Sentencing Statistics: January to March 2024, [link](#)

Year ending	Total Number	Conditional Discharge	Fine	Community Sentence	Suspended Sentence	Immediate Custody	Other	Committed to Crown Court for Sentence
2017	3,739	0.9%	1.2%	6.5%	20.8%	67.5%	3.0%	0.2%
2018	4,013	0.5%	1.1%	5.3%	20.0%	69.4%	3.2%	0.4%
2019	4,343	0.3%	1.2%	5.9%	17.7%	71.8%	2.9%	0.2%
2020	3,493	0.1%	0.7%	6.6%	17.3%	72.2%	2.7%	0.3%
2021	3,891	0.5%	0.9%	6.8%	20.1%	68.5%	3.0%	0.3%
2022	3,924	0.5%	0.9%	7.8%	21.8%	65.2%	3.5%	0.3%
2023	4,134	0.4%	1.3%	7.2%	22.5%	64.9%	3.2%	0.5%
2024	4,236	0.4%	1.1%	5.9%	23.5%	64.9%	3.5%	0.7%

Sentencing outcomes for offenders (over the age of 18 years) under section 315 of the Sentencing Act 2020 – relating to repeated possession of offensive weapons and pointed or bladed articles⁵⁵

Given the substantial increases in knife crime over recent years, an approach to sentencing is required which provides less opportunity for offenders who have chosen to carry knives – with the awful consequences of doing so in lost lives and traumatic injuries – to claim in mitigation that they should have the opportunity to receive a less severe sentence.

The sentencing requirements for possession of a firearm are vastly more severe than those relating to possession of a knife. Section 311 Sentencing Act 2020 requires that adult offenders convicted of certain firearms possession offences on a single occasion be sentenced to a minimum term of imprisonment of five years unless “exceptional circumstances” apply.⁵⁶ Given there are vastly more homicides and serious assaults committed with knives than firearms in the UK, the sentencing regime for knife possession should reflect the seriousness of the threat such offences pose to the public and more closely mirror the regime for possession of a firearm by also introducing a minimum term of imprisonment for a single offence of knife possession.

Recommendation: The Government should amend Section 315 of the Sentencing Act 2020 in order that it is genuinely mandatory for all those convicted of repeat possession of a knife to be sentenced to a prison sentence – removing the opt-out for judges and magistrates to deliver an alternative non-custodial or suspended sentence. The minimum sentence in repeat knife-carrying cases should be increased from six months to two years imprisonment for adults. The Government should legislate in order that every adult offender caught in possession of a knife on a single occasion be dealt with by the courts (rather than receiving a “community resolution” or caution) with a minimum prison term of one year in custody. Magistrates Courts should be

55. Ministry of Justice, Knife and Offensive Weapon Sentencing Statistics: 2024, Table 7, [link](#)

56. Section 311 Sentencing Act 2020, [link](#)

empowered to deal with all such cases.

Even the most prolific offenders are more likely to receive a non-custodial sentence on conviction than be sent to prison.

Policy Exchange has long advocated for a less permissive approach to crime – this paper continues that tradition. The reality is that there are many individuals who are highly prolific in their offending. The Policy Exchange paper, *The Wicked and the Redeemable* (2023), summarised examples of individuals with over a hundred previous convictions who, having been convicted of a new tranche of offences, were sentenced to community or suspended sentences rather than terms of imprisonment.⁵⁷ In the year to December 2024, of the 8,207 “hyper-prolific” offenders who already had 46 or more previous criminal convictions or cautions, only 44.5% were sentenced to an immediate term of imprisonment on conviction for a further indictable or “either-way” criminal offence – 4,555 hyper-prolific offenders were released on conviction without receiving an immediate term of imprisonment.⁵⁸ Of the 16,386 “super-prolific” offenders with between 26 and 45 previous convictions or cautions, only 42.1% were sentenced to an immediate term of imprisonment on conviction for a further indictable or “either-way” criminal offence – 9,483 super-prolific offenders were released on conviction without receiving an immediate term of imprisonment.⁵⁹ Of the 30,274 “prolific” offenders with 11 and 25 previous convictions or cautions, only 36.2% were sentenced to an immediate term of imprisonment on conviction for a further indictable or “either-way” offence – 19,311 prolific offenders were released on conviction without receiving an immediate term of imprisonment.⁶⁰ It is difficult to conceive of a collection of statistics which better demonstrate the contempt with which the criminal justice system is treating the law-abiding majority.⁶¹

57. D. Spencer (2023), *The Wicked and the Redeemable*, Policy Exchange, November 2023, [link](#)

58. Ministry of Justice, Freedom of Information Requests, Ref: 250522028 (19th June 2025) & Ref: 250619079 (18th July 2025)

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

Category of Offenders	Number of previous convictions or cautions	Not Sentenced to Immediate Custody (2024)		Sentenced to Immediate Custody (2024)	
		Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
Offenders	0	33,507	84.3%	6,246	15.7%
	1 - 2	24,151	81.4%	5,526	18.6%
	3 - 6	21,082	75.4%	6,892	24.6%
	7 - 10	11,235	69.3%	4,966	30.7%
Prolific Offenders	11 - 14	7,385	66.3%	3,754	33.7%
	15 - 25	11,926	62.3%	7,209	37.7%
Super-Prolific Offenders	26 - 35	6,049	59.0%	4,204	41.0%
	36 - 45	3,434	56.0%	2,699	44.0%
Hyper-Prolific Offenders	46 - 60	2,593	55.8%	2,058	44.2%
	61 - 75	1,125	56.1%	880	43.9%
	76 or more	837	54.0%	714	46.0%

Rates sentencing for an immediate term of imprisonment and other sentences for offenders by number of previous convictions or cautions (year to December 2024)⁶²

The likely impact on prison places of setting a mandatory prison sentence for prolific offenders, as previously recommended by Policy Exchange, depends on where the number of previous convictions and cautions benchmark is set. This is set out in the table below.

Category of Offenders	Number of previous convictions or cautions	Number Not Sentenced to Immediate Custody (2024)	Cumulative Total
Hyper-Prolific Offenders	76 or more	837	837
	61 - 75	1,125	1,962
	46 - 60	2,593	4,555
Super-Prolific Offenders	36 - 45	3,434	7,989
	26 - 35	6,049	14,038
Prolific Offenders	15 - 25	11,926	25,964
	11 - 14	7,385	33,349
Offenders	7 - 10	11,235	44,584
	3 - 6	21,082	65,666
	1 - 2	24,151	89,817
	0	33,507	123,324

Impact on prison places of setting mandatory sentence at different benchmark number of previous convictions and cautions⁶³

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

Recommendation: The Government should pass legislation which requires that courts pass a mandatory immediate custodial sentence of two years for all “hyper-prolific” offenders (an additional 4,555 offenders being sentenced to prison for the year to December 2024) and of one year for all “super-prolific” offenders (an additional 9,483 offenders being sentenced to prison for the year to December 2024) on conviction of a further either-way offence. Both Magistrates and Crown Courts should be able to pass such a sentence.

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The data within this chapter presents a stark and troubling picture of the state of policing, sentencing, and public safety in London and beyond. It not only reflects operational failings in law enforcement but also a broader failure within the criminal justice system – one which increasingly tolerates serious and repeat offending without imposing meaningful consequences.

The Metropolitan Police’s apparent ability to solve street-level crimes such as robbery and theft person has collapsed to almost negligible levels. Over the past decade, the likelihood of offenders receiving an immediate custodial sentence for serious crimes has fallen – even in cases of robbery, where Parliament has set the maximum sentence as life imprisonment. Despite legislation requiring custodial sentences for repeat knife offenders, courts are choosing to waive this in a significant number of cases. This pattern reveals a justice system increasingly reluctant to use the tools at its disposal, even when Parliament has made its intent clear.

Perhaps most striking is the treatment of repeat and prolific offenders. Individuals with long histories of criminal behaviour are more likely than not to avoid prison when convicted of further offences. If those with dozens – and in some cases hundreds – of prior convictions continue to receive fines, suspended sentences, or community orders, it becomes difficult to argue that the criminal justice system is genuinely protecting the public.

The cumulative effect of these trends is the steady erosion of the rule of law with a message sent to the law-abiding public and criminals alike: that the risks of getting caught and adequately punished are minimal. When crime goes unpunished – or is punished so lightly that it becomes a mere inconvenience rather than a deterrent – the social contract breaks down. Victims lose faith in justice; communities lose their sense of safety; and law-abiding citizens are left with the impression that their protection and wellbeing are secondary to the rights of offenders. It is a status quo which cannot continue.

3. “Hotspot” Patrolling and Stop and Search

There is a wealth of evidence showing that “high visibility” police patrols in hotspot areas reduces crime.

Police officers conducting patrols in specific hotspot locations is a law enforcement intervention which has been frequently and rigorously tested – with the evidence clearly demonstrating that it is effective at suppressing crime and disorder.⁶⁴ The targeting of hotspots can particularly reduce drug offending, anti-social behaviour and disorder offences, property crime and crimes of violence.⁶⁵ A common concern with hotspot policing – that crime will be dispersed to other locations – is not borne out by the evidence, with several studies showing that this is limited.⁶⁶ Indeed, there is evidence which suggests that the benefits of police officers focusing on hotspot locations are diffused beyond the hotspot area itself, with nearby locations also benefitting from reduced crime and disorder.⁶⁷

Case Study: High-Visibility Policing in Southend-on-Sea, Essex⁶⁸

Between July and October 2020 Detective Chief Inspector Lewis Basford of Essex Police’s Serious Violence Unit led a study to assess the impact of high-visibility foot patrols in Southend-on-Sea hotspot areas. The 20 highest harm hotspots of only 150m² were selected for intervention (a far smaller area than other similar studies). The hotspots represented just 2.6% of Southend’s geographical area but contributed 41% of the most harm over the preceding 12 months.⁶⁹

Officers were tasked to drive to the designated hotspot, park their police car in a highly visible location, and undertake foot patrol for 15 to 20 minutes. The officers received a briefing that covered the evidence base on hotspots policing and information about the previous day’s patrols and crime levels. An electronic tracker was used to plot the officers’ whereabouts on their patrols. During the study there were 88.5% fewer instances of serious violence compared to the control areas which were not patrolled.

The last Conservative Government allocated £29.4 million to fund the “Grip” programme, to deliver hotspot policing in twenty police force areas as part of their Serious Violence Strategy.⁷⁰ The programme delivered

64. A. Braga, B. Turchan, A. Papachristos, D. Hureau (2019), Hot spots policing of small geographic areas effects on crime, Campbell Systematic Review, 8 September 2019, Vol 15(3), [link](#)

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. C. Koper (1995) Just enough police presence: Reducing crime and disorderly behavior by optimizing patrol time in crime hot spots, Justice Quarterly 12(4), pp 649-672

70. Home Office, Serious violence: funding allocations, 29th August 2023, [link](#)

68. L. Basford, C. Sims, I. Agar, V. Harinam and H. Strang (2021), Effects of One-a-Day Foot Patrols on Hot Spots of Serious Violence and Crime Harm: a Randomised Crossover Trial, Cambridge Journal of Evidence Based Police Practice, Vol 5 (3-4), pp119-133, [link](#)

69. As measured against the Cambridge Crime Harm Index – see L. Sherman, P. Neyroud and E. Neyroud, The Cambridge Crime Harm Index: Measuring Total Harm from Crime Based on Sentencing Guidelines, Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, Vol. 10 (3), pp. 171–183, [link](#)

121,185 additional patrols in hotspots, claimed to have taken 80,000 weapons off the street and was estimated to have reduced instances of violence against the person and robbery offences in hotspot areas by 7%.⁷¹

The Grip programme’s evaluation particularly highlighted the variability in different police forces’ capabilities to implement targeted policing interventions. At one end of the scale were those forces who had the capability to undertake analysis to identify target locations down to 150m² in size and to then utilise accurate GPS data to identify where officers had been on patrol. Meanwhile other forces could only collect data manually with a police Inspector noting down where officers were believed to have patrolled. Two forces (Bedfordshire and West Yorkshire) were unable to return separate data for all of the activities conducted by their officers.⁷²

Stop and search is a vital law enforcement tactic, particularly when deployed in hotspot locations.

One of the most vital tactics when undertaking effective hotspot policing is stop and search. The effectiveness of stop and search at combatting serious criminality, in particular murder and serious assaults, is clearly demonstrated in the recent analysis published by criminologists Alexis Piquero and Lawrence Sherman (2025). Their study considered whether Stop and Search Encounters (SSEs) in London led to reduced weapons-related deaths and injuries by examining 15 years of data (2008 to 2023) encompassing 4.3 million SSEs and 58,503 recorded knife injuries.⁷³ In the paper the authors particularly examine two “quasi-experiments”: a “Cutback” in SSEs between 2014 and 2017 and a “Surge” in SSEs between 2018 and 2020.⁷⁴ They found that knife injuries significantly increased following the start of the Cutback period and fell significantly following the Surge period. The authors concluded, having conducted a series of detailed and rigorous statistical tests, that:

“increased SSEs [Stop and Search Encounters] can significantly reduce knife-related injuries and homicides in public places”.⁷⁵

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. A. R. Piquero & L. W. Sherman (2025), Did More Stop and Search by Police Cause Less Knife Injury in London? Evidence from 2008–2023, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, March 2025, [link](#)

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

Stop and Search Legislation

Stop and search powers are set out in various acts of legislation. The most used non-terrorism powers are:

- Section 1, Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984: A police officer can stop and search an individual or vehicle, in a public place, when they have reasonable grounds to suspect that person is in possession of stolen or prohibited articles – such as a weapon or stolen goods.⁷⁶
- Section 23, Misuse of Drugs Act 1971: A police officer can stop and search a person (or vehicle) if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the person is in possession of a controlled drug.⁷⁷
- Section 60, Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994: Where a police officer at or above the rank of Inspector reasonably believes that serious violence may take place, or serious violence has taken place and a weapon may be being carried, or weapons are being carried without good reason they can authorise police officers to stop and search individuals within the locality, whether or not they have reasonable suspicion that the person is carrying a weapon.⁷⁸

Since 2010/11 there has been a substantial fall in the use of stop and search nationally – broadly coinciding with substantial increases in knife crime.

Under the Blair and Brown Governments, between 2003/4 and 2010/11, the number of stop and searches conducted by the police in England and Wales increased year on year.⁷⁹ The number peaked in 2010/11 at 1.2 million searches.⁸⁰ The number of arrests resulting from stop and searches peaked in 2007/8 at 120,351 arrests.⁸¹

A change of government in 2010 – from Labour to the Conservative-led Coalition Government – heralded a very sharp drop in both the number of stop and searches conducted by the police and the volume of arrests as a result of stop and search. By 2017/18 the number of stop and searches conducted by the police had fallen by 77.3% since the 2010/11 peak (representing nearly 950,000 fewer searches). By 2017/18 the number of arrests resulting from stop and search had fallen by 60% since the 2007/8 peak (representing 72,000 fewer arrests). Over the last five years the number of searches and arrests has increased modestly since the lowest levels in the mid-2010s: in the year to 2023/24 there were 530,100 searches (still less than half of 2010/11 levels) with 75,700 resultant arrests (still 37.1% fewer than the peak of 2007/8).

79. Stop and search, arrests and mental health detentions, March 2024: stop and search summary data tables, year ending 31 March 2024, table SS_02, [link](#)

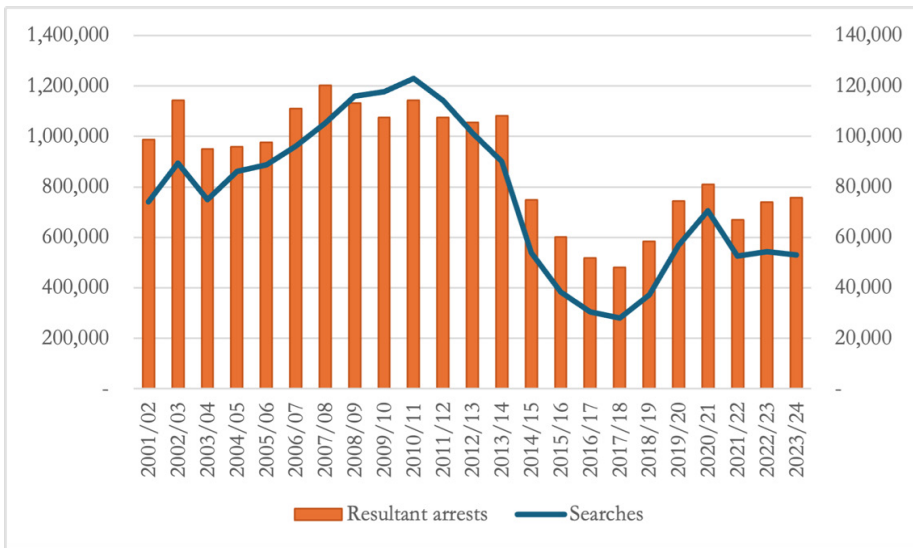
80. Ibid.

81. Stop and search, arrests and mental health detentions, March 2024: stop and search summary data tables, year ending 31 March 2024, table SS_02, [link](#)

76. Section 1 Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, [link](#)

77. Section 23 Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, [link](#)

78. Section 60 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, [link](#)



The number of Stop and Searches (under section 1 PACE and associated legislation) in England and Wales (2001/2 – 2023/4)⁸²

The fall in stop and search between 2010 and 2018 was principally due to the policies of the Conservative-led Coalition Government, supported by the Labour Opposition.

In April 2014, the then Home Secretary Rt Hon Theresa May MP – latterly Baroness May of Maidenhead – told the House of Commons:

“As I have told the House before, I have long been concerned about the use of stop-and-search. Although it is undoubtedly an important police power, when misused it can be counter-productive. First, it can be an enormous waste of police time. Secondly, when innocent people are stopped and searched for no good reason, it is hugely damaging to the relationship between the police and the public. In those circumstances it is an unacceptable affront to justice.”⁸³

She went on to say:

“The proposals I have outlined today amount to a comprehensive package of reform. I believe they should contribute to a significant reduction in the overall use of stop-and-search, better and more intelligence-led stop-and-search, and improved stop-to-arrest ratios. But I want to make myself absolutely clear: if the numbers do not come down, if stop-and-search does not become more targeted, if those stop-to-arrest ratios do not improve considerably, the Government will return with primary legislation to make those things happen, because nobody wins when stop-and-search is misapplied.”⁸⁴

The key features of the “Best Use of Stop and Search Scheme” introduced by the Home Secretary included:⁸⁵

- Data Recording: forces were required to record a broader range of stop and search outcomes (such as: arrests, cautions, penalty

82. Ibid.

83. Hansard, HC Deb, Col 831, 30th April 2014, [link](#)

84. Hansard, HC Deb, Col. 833, 30th April 2014, [link](#)

85. Home Office & College of Policing, Best Use of Stop and Search Scheme, 2014, [link](#)

notices for disorder). Forces were also required to show any difference between the purpose of the search and the result of the search – for example where the original purpose may have been to search for unlawful drugs but the outcome was an arrest for the possession of a knife.

- Lay observation policies: providing the opportunity for members of the “local community” to accompany police officers on patrol using stop and search. Following the widespread use of Body Worn Video devices by police officers over the last decade these observation policies have extended to “community panels” examining a selection of stop and searches conducted by officers.⁸⁶
- Stop and search complaints “community trigger”: Complaints policies which required the police to explain to local community scrutiny groups how the powers are being used where there is a large volume of complaints.
- Reducing the number of stop and searches under section 60 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Within the “Best Use of Stop and Search” document, published by the Home Office at the time, the Government said:

“The measure of the success of stop and search is not necessarily a ‘hit’, or positive outcome, as there may be occasions where the outcome of a stop and search is unconnected to the reasonable grounds for suspicion. Such an outcome is likely to represent a chance detection rather than professional judgement and the use of reasonable grounds by the officer in question.”⁸⁷

Such a statement, which is so apparently dismissive of a situation where an officer successfully removes a prohibited item from the streets, reveals the disconnect between those in government and the reality of fighting crime. The statement downplays the only real outcome which matters – locating a prohibited item and enabling the opportunity for the police and criminal justice system to deal with an individual committing a criminal offence. Further, the success is likely to be reflective of, not merely chance, but the officer having a broader situational awareness to be in that location in order that the opportunity to search the individual in question arose in the first place. It is also worth noting that in conducting searches, police officers are permitted to search only to the extent that any prohibited item they are looking for might realistically be found. Given drugs are more easily secreted in small pockets than weapons, it would therefore be logical for an officer who had developed reasonable grounds to search for both drugs and weapons to record the search as being for the smaller rather than larger item (as it would be the norm for only one reason to be given in any relevant paperwork).

On 5,014 occasions in the year 2023/24, when searching for another prohibited item, police officers found a weapon or firearm.⁸⁸ On 3,221 of these occasions the officers recorded that the original item they were looking for was drugs.⁸⁹ The recovery of these 5,014 weapons is not as a

86. See for example: Essex Police, Stop and search review panel, [link](#)

87. Home Office & College of Policing, Best Use of Stop and Search Scheme, 2014, [link](#)

88. Stop and search, arrests and mental health detentions, March 2024: stop and search summary data tables, year ending 31 March 2024, table SS_42, [link](#)

89. Ibid.

result of “chance” as the Home Office in 2014 would contend – they are the result of savvy and effective on-the-street policing. In each case the police should be applauded, rather than as implied by the Home Office in 2014, criticised.

Original reason for search	Weapon Recovered
Offensive Weapons	10,111
Drugs	3,221
Firearms	870
Stolen Property	788
Going Equipped	699
Other	160
Criminal Damage	142
Section 60 CJPOA	71
Terrorism Act	3
Items related to protest	1
Total	16,066

Searches conducted where a weapon or firearm were found – showing the original reason for the search (2023/24)⁹⁰

The Government was not alone in seeking to reduce the volume of stop and searches. In response to the April 2014 statement in the House of Commons by the then Home Secretary, the then Shadow Home Secretary, Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP (who herself became Home Secretary following the 2024 election of the Labour Government), said:

“Last year there were a million stop-and-searches; of those, only 10% led to an arrest. That means hundreds of thousands of stops and searches led only to resentment.

“The Home Secretary and I agree that resentment creates barriers between communities and the police, particularly in ethnic minority communities that are most affected. That is bad for the innocent people who are regularly and unfairly stopped, bad for the police because it is an expensive waste of time, and bad for community safety because it undermines the very relationships we rely on for policing by consent.”⁹¹

Indeed, the Shadow Home Secretary argued the Government should have gone further:

“What about the things that we called for? Why is the Home Secretary not banning the use of targets given to police officers to stop and search a certain number of people? Why will she not put the guidance on race discrimination

90. Ibid.

91. Hansard, HC Deb, Col. 834, 30th April 2014, [link](#)

on a statutory basis? Why will she not insist that all forces abide by case law, rather than some?”⁹²

Further demonstrating that antipathy to stop and search – despite its effectiveness as a law enforcement tactic – cuts across the political divide, Sir Sadiq Khan has made clear his views. Prior to his election as Mayor of London, he reportedly said:

“The last few years have shown what can be achieved when there’s a concerted effort to reduce the overuse of stop and search. But there’s still much more to be done, and if I’m Mayor I’ll do all in my power to further cut its use. Overuse of stop and search can have a dramatic effect on communities. It undermines public confidence in our police if Londoners are being stopped and searched for no good reason.”⁹³

The Mayor of London’s role and influence over policing in the capital is significant. Section 3 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 establishes the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) with the office occupied by the Mayor of London.⁹⁴ Section 3(6) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 provides that MOPAC must secure the maintenance of the Metropolitan Police and that the force is efficient and effective. Section 3(7) provides that MOPAC must hold the Commissioner to account for the exercise of the Commissioner’s functions and the functions of persons under the Commissioner’s direction and control.

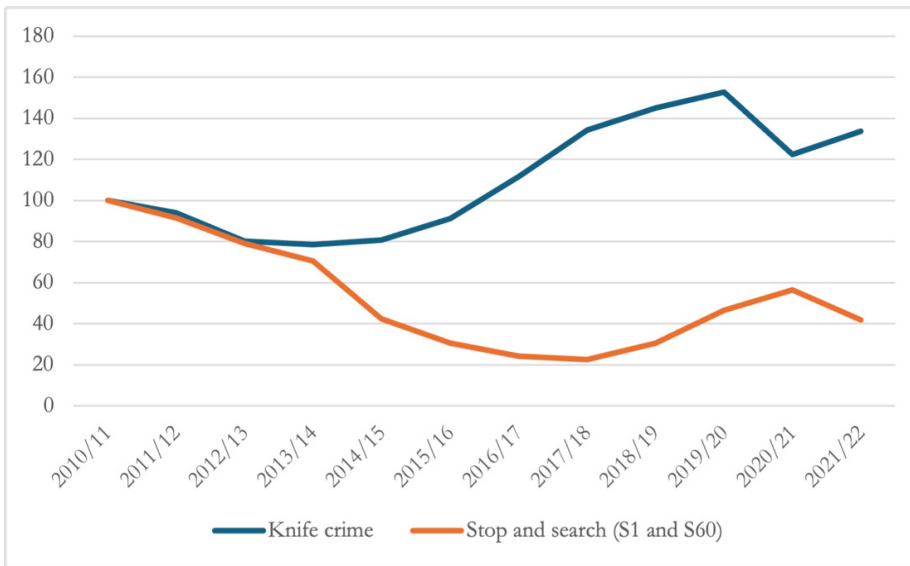
The decision to substantially roll-back stop and search has had a catastrophic impact on the fight against violence and knife crime.

The overarching objective of both the Conservative-led Coalition Government and the Mayor of London – to substantially reduce stop and search because it was seen as a problematic policing tactic – delivered (at different times and in different places) the outcome they were seeking: substantial falls in the numbers of stop and searches. However, another outcome of this policy, appears to have been a significant increase in knife crime. The graph below demonstrates that the fall in stop and search across England and Wales coincided with a remarkable increase in knife crime. While it may be that there were a range of causal factors behind the trends in knife crime, the graph is telling, nonetheless.

92. Hansard, HC Deb, Col. 834, 30th April 2014, [link](#)

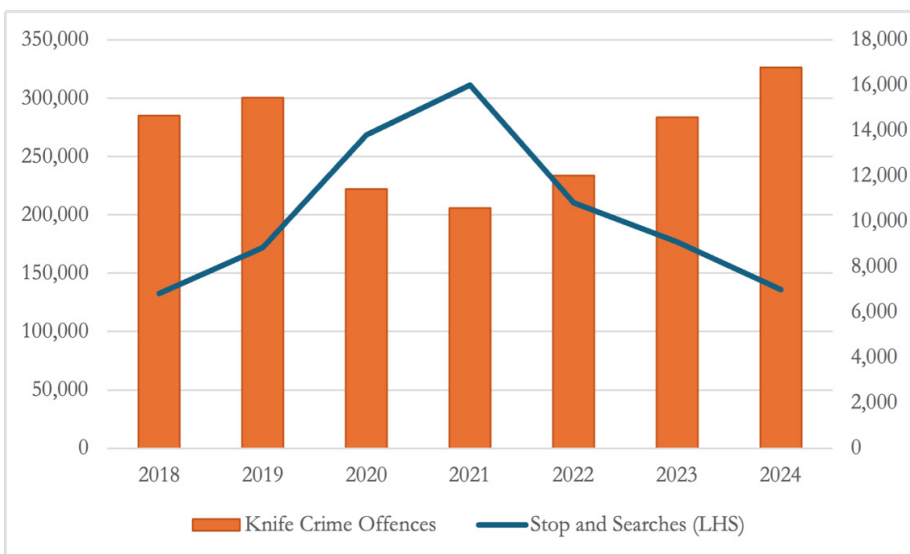
93. Evening Standard, Sadiq Khan: ‘I’d do everything in my power to cut stop and search’, [link](#)

94. Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, [link](#)



Trends in knife crime and stop and search in England and Wales (2010/11 – 2021/22) – Index, base year: 2010/11

Within London, following the Covid-19 pandemic and under Sir Sadiq Khan’s leadership as Mayor of London, the number of stop and searches fell precipitously between 2021 and 2024 – from 311,352 to 135,739. Meanwhile, the volume of knife crime offences increased substantially over the same period. In 2024, the number of knife crime offences in the capital reached 16,879 offences in 2024 – an 86.2% increase on 2014/15 levels.



Levels of knife crime and stop and search in London's Metropolitan Police area (2018 – 2024)⁹⁵

95. Stop and search data relates to the financial year (April to March) while Knife Crime data relates to the calendar year (January to December)

As Chief Constable Sir Stephen Watson QPM, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police, told Policy Exchange in 2025:

“If you don’t back your officers to do stop and search, they will stop doing stop and search. And if you stop doing stop and search, you’ll see street robberies going up.”⁹⁶

The detailed statistical analyses conducted by Piquero and Sherman (2025) into the connection between stop and search and knife related violence in London demonstrates with near certainty the impact of the policy choices to substantially reduce stop and search. They state:

“...if the volume of SSEs increased from its 2023 level of around 10,000 per month to its 2011 level of some 45,000 per month, there would be an estimated reduction of about 30 knife murders per year—about one-fourth fewer total homicides in London.”⁹⁷

“Additionally, changes in SSE frequency were associated with notable crime rate shifts. A 66% reduction in SSEs from May 2014 led to 44 more knife murders and 1276 more injuries than expected. Conversely, a 55% increase in SSEs in January 2018 resulted in 27 fewer knife injuries per month.”⁹⁸

Stop and search is often framed as being an example of “racist” policing – incorrectly claiming that “disproportionality” in its deployment is evidence of discrimination.

One of the most prominent examples of efforts to claim that stop and search is a problematic police tactic can be found within *The Lammy Review* (2017). Conducted by Rt Hon David Lammy MP the Review was an independent examination of racial disparities in the criminal justice system, with the stated aim of reducing the proportion of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic offenders within it.⁹⁹ Commissioned in 2016 by then-Prime Minister Rt Hon David Cameron, the review was later supported by Rt Hon Theresa May on becoming Prime Minister. The review particularly identified stop and search as being problematic in relation to race, stating: “In particular, the disproportionate use of Stop and Search on BAME communities continues to drain trust in the CJS as a whole.”¹⁰⁰

It is a reality that the black people are more likely than white people to be stopped and searched in London. However, it is also a reality that black people are vastly “over-represented” amongst: victims of non-domestic knife crime homicides, those charged with non-domestic knife crime homicides, and those suspected of committing robbery offences when described by victims.

96. Sir Stephen Watson QPM, “The Fight Against Crime and Disorder: Turning Round Greater Manchester Police”, Policy Exchange, 18th June 2025, [link](#)

97. A. R. Piquero & L. W. Sherman (2025), Did More Stop and Search by Police Cause Less Knife Injury in London? Evidence from 2008–2023, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, March 2025, [link](#)

98. Ibid.

99. D. Lammy (2017), *The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System*, September 2017, [link](#)

100. D. Lammy (2017), *The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System*, September 2017, [link](#)

	Stop and Searches		London Population by Ethnicity
	(July 2023 – June 2025)		
	Volume	Proportion	
Black	99,454	39.5%	13.5%
White	95,730	38.0%	43.8%
Asian	35,961	14.3%	20.7%
Other	14,388	5.7%	17.0%
Not Recorded	6,233	2.5%	-
Total	251,756	100%	100%

Volume and proportion of stop and searches in London by ethnicity recorded at the time of the search (July 2023 – June 2025)¹⁰¹

Of the 2,358 non-domestic violence murders recorded by London’s Metropolitan Police between 2003 and 2024 1,263 (53.56%) were committed using a knife or sharp implement. Of the 1,263 victims: 1,164 were male (92.2%), 296 were aged 13 to 19 (23.4%) and 23 were aged 12 years old or younger. Compared to London’s population (2021 census) black victims are “over-represented” as victims of murder: in London black people are 3.87 times more likely to be killed in a knife-enabled non-domestic homicide than white people.

Ethnicity of the victim (officer recorded)	Non-domestic knife crime murder		London Population by Ethnicity
	2003 – December 2024		
	Volume	Proportion	
Black	576	45.6%	13.5%
White	482	38.2%	43.8%
Asian	165	13.1%	20.7%
Other	24	1.9%	17.0%
Mixed	-	-	5.7%
Not Known	16	1.3%	-
Total	1,263	100%	100%

Ethnicity of murder victims killed with a knife or sharp implement (non-domestic homicides) in London (2003 – September 2024)¹⁰²

As former Chair of the London Assembly, Sir Trevor Phillips OBE told Policy Exchange in 2022:

101. Metropolitan Police Service, MPS Stop and Search Monthly Report, 1st July 2023 – 30th June 2025, [link](#)

102. Metropolitan Police Service, MPS Homicide Dashboard, [link](#)

“There are more than 100 young men being killed every year in this city. Many, many, many more being maimed in unpleasant and vicious ways. We do not hear a single word about it, actually. The police think about it, a bit. But in a sense, they think it’s, they appear to think it’s not really their problem. It’s happening somewhere else. Why is this an issue? Well, of course, because all these people are black. Literally, almost all of them are black. And of course, let’s not beat the beat about the bush here, the perpetrators are also black.”¹⁰³

Prior to his appointment as Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Mark Rowley QPM wrote:

“A young black man growing up in London is 9 times more likely to be murdered than his white peers; taking the UK as a whole, the risk of a young black man being unlawfully killed is 24-fold that of his white contemporary. Pause and reflect on why we don’t hear that number frequently in debate on policing yet reports on the ‘disproportionality of stop and search’ seem to be released weekly. Why are we more concerned with criticising police operations than with understanding the reason for the tragic concentration of crime in a few communities? It is frankly immoral that we are obsessed with stop and search rather than concentrating on the true injustice faced by young black men.”¹⁰⁴

In London for the period 2003 to February 2024, compared to the capital’s population (2021 census), black people are 5.0 times more likely to be charged with murder than white people.

Ethnicity of the accused (self-declared)	Murders		London Population by Ethnicity
	2003 – February 2024		
	Volume	Proportion	
Black	1,805	43.5%	13.5%
White	1,183	28.51%	43.8%
Asian	411	9.91%	20.7%
Mixed	214	5.16%	5.7%
Other	139	3.35	17.0%
Not Recorded	98	2.36%	-
Refused	299	7.21%	-
Total	4,149	100%	100%

*Ethnicity of individuals charged with murder in London (2003 – September 2024)*¹⁰⁵

103.T. Phillips, “What do we want from the next Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police?” Event, 30th June 2022, [link](#)

104.M. Rowley (2021), Foreword in S. Falkner, Knife Crime in the Capital, Policy Exchange, October 2021, [link](#)

105.Metropolitan Police Service, MPS Homicide Dashboard, [link](#)

When individuals who have been the victim of robbery are asked to describe their attacker – and specifically the ethnicity of their attacker –

black people are significantly “over-represented” compared to London’s population, while white people and Asian people are “under-represented”.

Ethnicity of the suspect (victim described)	Proportion of robbery suspects (2018 – 2023)	London Population by Ethnicity (2021)
Black	48.6%	13.5%
White	19.1%	43.8%
Asian	5.4%	20.7%
Other	2.3%	17.0%
Unknown	24.6%	-

Ethnicity of individuals suspected of committing a robbery in London as described by the victims of the offence (2018 – 2023)¹⁰⁶

To summarise:

Proportion of non-domestic knife crime murder victims who are black (2003 – December 2024)	45.6%
Proportion of murder suspects who are black (2003 – February 2024)	43.5%
Proportion of robbery suspects who are black (2018 – 2023)	48.6%
Proportion of those stopped and searched who are black (July 2023 – June 2025)	39.5%
Proportion of Londoners who are black (2021 census)	13.5%

When comparing the distribution of stop and search by ethnicity against the distribution of non-domestic knife-enabled murder victims, murder suspects, or robbery suspects who are black any “disproportionality” against black people is eliminated.

Denying the reality of the distribution of serious offending does not benefit anyone who lives, works or visits the capital – particularly those who are most likely to be involved in serious violence as victims. That black people are “over-represented” compared to the resident population when stop and search tactics are used is not evidence of a police force or police officers pursuing a racist – whether institutional or otherwise – approach to policing. It is evidence that the police are being realistic about both the tragedy that is the number of young black men who die on our streets every year and those who are committing serious offences of knife-enabled homicide and robbery.

Despite the claims by some that the police use of stop and search is “racist” against black people and other ethnic minorities, the eventual outcomes of such encounters suggest an alternative. When individuals are

106. Metropolitan Police Service, Freedom of Information Request: 01.FOI.24.038763, [link](#)

caught in possession of an unlawful item and subject to a formal sanction known as a “positive outcome” (i.e. being charged, summonsed to court, cautioned, receiving a Penalty Notice for Disorder or a “community resolution”), black suspects are far more likely – 64% more likely – to receive a “community resolution” than white suspects.

	Arrested	Caution	Community Resolution	Other	PND	Summons	NFA	Total	Positive Outcome Rate	‘Community Resolution’ Rate
Black	1241	31	203	33	108	38	3761	5415	30.5%	12.27%
White	932	16	81	17	19	18	2313	3396	31.9%	7.48%
Asian	349	9	41	10	25	11	1094	1539	28.9%	9.21%
Other	139	3	17	1	11	2	481	654	26.5%	9.83%
Not Stated	72	1	6	2	2	0	177	260	31.9%	7.23%

Distribution of outcomes of Stop and Searches for Weapons in London's Metropolitan Police area by ethnicity (2024)¹⁰⁷

Recommendation: To combat the epidemic of knife crime there must be a surge in stop and search. The Government should amend section 60 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to explicitly allow “without suspicion” searches to take place in the most intense violent crime “hotspots” at any time. These hotspots should be identified by the police and approved on an annual basis by a Magistrate.

Recommendation: The Prime Minister, Home Secretary, Mayor of London, London’s Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, and the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police should issue a joint statement explicitly stating that they support a substantial increase in the number of properly conducted stop and searches – whatever the ethnicity of those being searched.

Recommendation: Police forces should publish data for the rates of stop and search by ethnicity of those searched compared to the ethnic make-up of those suspected of committing homicide, knife crime, robbery and other similar offences – rather than making comparisons to the resident population.

Oversight bodies – such as the Independent Office for Police Conduct – have contributed to an environment which makes the catching of criminals less, not more, likely. An over-zealous oversight regime has led to an environment where many police officers are now less likely than they might otherwise have been to search or confront individuals when it is entirely appropriate for them to do so. When officers fail to use the lawful powers which have been afforded them by Parliament,

107. Metropolitan Police Service, MPS Stop and Search Monthly Report, 1st January 2024 – 31st December 2024, [link](#)

the public are less safe. Meanwhile, too many criminals use the police complaints process to impede the actions of those police officers who are simply attempting to do their job fighting crime. There have been numerous cases in recent years of officers undertaking important – and at times life-saving – operational frontline policing who have subsequently been subject to lengthy and misplaced misconduct investigations. Several have been subject to criminal prosecution. A lengthy survey of these cases is beyond the scope of this paper – however it is essential to rebalance the system in favour of those police officers who are in good faith undertaking proactive frontline policing on behalf of the public.

Recommendation: The Government should legislate to amend the responsibilities of the Independent Office for Police Conduct – this should include limiting their involvement to misconduct cases involving chief officers or cases which involve death or serious corruption, with other cases dealt with entirely by police forces. The IOPC’s powers to overrule chief constables in other cases should also be curtailed.

Recommendation: The Government should legislate to amend the Police Reform Act 2002 to raise the threshold for a misconduct investigation to be launched from a mere “indication” of misconduct to there being “clear evidence” of misconduct at the outset of an investigation. As part of such an assessment complaints against police officers should consider at the earliest stage the previous convictions of complainants (particularly convictions for dishonesty or violence offences) to determine whether a complainant’s account of events can be relied upon.

*

Claims that the way stop and search is deployed is “racist” are overly credulous in attributing disparities primarily to discrimination and systemic flaws, rather than considering alternative explanations – such as differences in the levels or severity of offending across different ethnic groups. While inequalities may well warrant scrutiny, it is misleading to assume that disproportionality is inherently the result of bias: disproportionality alone is not evidence of discrimination. Attempting to “correct” disparities through a countervailing bias is unjust and risks undermining the principle of equality before the law.

The analysis, conducted by Piquero and Sherman, using a vast amount of data, cannot be ignored. Those who continue to oppose stop and search are allowing ideology to have primacy over the evidence. In doing so they continue to put at risk the lives of many thousands of those who live, work and visit the capital. If the current Government are to achieve their laudable objective of halving knife crime within a decade there must be

a substantial surge in the volume of stop and search conducted by police officers – particularly in those locations where violent crime is endemic.

4. Targeting offenders – Live Facial Recognition and Court Orders

Live Facial Recognition technology has been developed by the police over the past decade – primarily to target wanted offenders in crime hotspots.

Live Facial Recognition is a tool used in real-time to identify individuals as they move through public spaces. It involves deploying overtly marked cameras in specific locations where digital images are captured from live video feeds and then converted into biometric data. When deployed in London by the Metropolitan Police the cameras are usually fixed on the roof of brightly coloured red transit style vans. That data is then compared against a pre-defined list of persons of interest, known as the “watchlist”.

Where the system evaluates that there is a potential match between a passer-by’s face and an individual on the “watchlist” an alert is generated to a police officer. The officer then reviews the alert and decides what, if any, further action is warranted – such as stopping and speaking with the individual concerned. On speaking with the individual, further action may be justified – such as making an arrest on suspicion of a criminal offence or conducting a stop and search under section 1 Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

When Live Facial Recognition cameras are in use by the police signs are used to notify members of the public about the deployment. Within London’s Metropolitan Police images of members of the public which are gathered and do not match anyone on the watchlist are automatically deleted from the system within seconds, while matched images are retained for audit or evidentiary purposes for up to 31 days unless they are required for evidential or legal reasons.¹⁰⁸

Within the Metropolitan Police there are three “use cases” for Live Facial Recognition:¹⁰⁹

1. To support the policing of “crime hotspots” or “missing persons hotspot” in an effort to locate a “sought person”. “Hotspots” are defined by the force’s policy as being of approximately 300 to 500 metres across.
2. To support the policing of “Protective Security Operations” in a specific location in relation to the protection of critical national

108. Metropolitan Police, MPS Overt LFR Policy Document, [link](#)

109. Ibid.

infrastructure or in relation to an event where there is intelligence that indicates there is likely to be a threat to public safety.

3. To locate a specific person who is eligible for inclusion on the “watchlist” where there is specific intelligence that they may be at the deployment location.

Every deployment of Live Facial Recognition by the Metropolitan Police in 2025 was for the purpose of policing “crime hotspots”.¹¹⁰

The Metropolitan Police Service began exploring the use of Live Facial Recognition technology in the mid-2010s. Early deployments were conducted as limited trials, designed to assess the operational feasibility, technological accuracy, and legal implications of the technology. Between 2016 and 2019, the Metropolitan Police carried out a series of pilot deployments at public events and high-footfall areas in London, including at the Notting Hill Carnival and Remembrance Day services.

The Court of Appeal clarified in *Bridges v South Wales Police* (2020) that Live Facial Recognition could be used lawfully, so long as robust safeguards to ensure compliance with human rights and data protection laws were in place.¹¹¹ The first regular, operational deployments of Live Facial Recognition began in early 2020 – using updated legal, ethical, and technical standards.

The Metropolitan Police’s use of Live Facial Recognition technology was evaluated by the National Physical Laboratory.

The National Physical Laboratory conducted an independent equitability study of facial recognition technology used by the Metropolitan Police Service and South Wales Police.¹¹² The report was published in March 2023. The study focused on assessing whether the technology demonstrated performance disparities across demographic groups – particularly ethnicity, sex, and age.

The study evaluated:

- **Live Facial Recognition:** real-time scanning of people in public spaces against a watchlist.
- **Retrospective Facial Recognition:** searching archived CCTV or images against police databases.
- **Operator-Initiated Facial Recognition:** mobile scanning by officers using a device to identify individuals in the field.

For both Retrospective and Operator-Initiated Facial Recognition the study found no statistically significant variation in performance across demographic groups. True Positive Identification Rates were 100% for all tested groups.¹¹³

For Live Facial Recognition, performance varied slightly but remained high. When tested with watchlists of 1,000 and 10,000 people the True Positive Identification Rates were 89%. However, with a larger watchlist there was a higher likelihood of a false positive identification. The study

110. Metropolitan Police, Live Facial Recognition, Deployment Records, [link](#)

111. *R (on the application of Bridges) v Chief Constable of South Wales Police* [2020] EWCA Civ 1058, [link](#)

112. T. Mansfield (2023), Facial recognition technology in law enforcement equitability study: final report, National Physical Laboratory, March 2023, [link](#)

113. *Ibid.*

examined whether different demographic groups were more likely to experience false positives. At lower threshold settings, which increase the system's sensitivity, there were statistically significant increases in false positives for black individuals – however, when the threshold was set at the level which is operationally used by the Metropolitan Police these disparities disappeared.¹¹⁴

The National Physical Laboratory study therefore offers substantial evidence that, when properly configured, the Live Facial Recognition system – as utilised by the Metropolitan Police – can function without significant demographic bias.

The deployment of Live Facial Recognition is leading to the arrest of offenders in crime hotspots across the capital.

The Metropolitan Police has been increasing the deployment of Live Facial Recognition across London over the last two years. From a relatively low 24 deployments in 2023, the Met – since 2024 – has deployed the technology on an average of once every 2 days at locations across London.¹¹⁵ Between 2023 and June 2025, the force had arrested 1,045 individuals during Live Facial Recognition deployments for a wide range of offences including violent and sexual offences.¹¹⁶

During 2024 the force conducted 179 deployments with an average of 3.2 arrests on each occasion.¹¹⁷ For 2025 the force is conducting deployments at a marginally higher rate with the number of arrests per deployment also increasing – to 4.6 per deployment.¹¹⁸ This suggests that the Metropolitan Police is both increasing the tempo of deployments as the force becomes more confident in its use and is becoming more effective at identifying offenders as the technology matures. Both are to be applauded.

	2023	2024	2025 (to 12/6/25)	Total
Number of deployments	24	179	94	297
Total hours	124	880	526	1530
Average hours of deployment	5.17	4.92	5.6	5.15
Total arrests	37	572	436	1045
Total false alerts	2	27	7	36
Average arrests per deployment	1.5	3.2	4.6	3.5

The number of Live Facial Recognition deployments and resulting arrests by the Metropolitan Police (2023 – June 2025)¹¹⁹

114. Ibid.

115. Metropolitan Police, Live Facial Recognition, Deployment Records, [link](#)

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid.

Borough	Number of Deployments
Croydon	42
Westminster	39
Newham	23
Greenwich	16
Southwark	15
Haringey	13
Barking & Dagenham	12
Lewisham	12
Brent	11
Hammersmith & Fulham	11

The top 10 London Boroughs by number of Live Facial Recognition deployments (2023 – June 2025)¹²⁰

While most of the deployments by the force appear to correlate with hotspots for recent non-domestic knife crime and homicide offences there are several locations which appear not to be receiving sufficient levels of deployment. In particular, the London Borough's of Brent, Lambeth, Waltham Forest and Hackney are not within the top ten London Boroughs by volume of Live Facial Recognition deployments but are among the eight Boroughs which had in excess of ten non-domestic homicides between 2022 and 2024. Similarly, despite not being in the top ten of Boroughs for Live Facial Recognition deployments the Boroughs of Lambeth and Hackney had at least one of the top 20 LSOAs for non-domestic knife crime in 2024.

Number of non-domestic homicides (2022 to 2024)	Boroughs	Within top 10 LFR Deployments (2023 to June 2025)	Has a Top 20 LSOA for knife crime (2024)
17	Brent	No	No
15	Lambeth	No	Yes
14	Waltham Forest	No	No
13	Westminster	Yes	Yes
	Haringey	Yes	Yes
	Croydon	Yes	Yes
	Newham	Yes	Yes
11	Hackney	No	Yes

The London Boroughs with the highest number of non-domestic homicides (2022 to 2024) compared to LSOA hotspots (2024) and Live Facial Recognition deployments (2023 to June 2024)

¹²⁰.Ibid.

Recommendation: The Government should invest in the deployment of permanent Live Facial Recognition systems in each of the Top 20 LSOA knife crime “hotspots” in London. Officers should be physically deployed to these locations at peak offending times to respond to offenders being identified by the Live Facial Recognition system.

Several London councils have passed motions against the use of Facial Recognition technology – despite its potential to fight crime.

On the 11th July 2024 Islington Borough Council passed a motion stating: “No to Live Facial Recognition in Islington”.¹²¹ The motion was proposed by Councillor Jenny Kay (Labour) and seconded by Councillor Jason Jackson (Labour). Despite the findings of the evaluation of Live Facial Recognition by the National Physical Laboratory, published in March 2023, the 2024 Islington Council Motion claimed:

“Surveillance technology will always be used disproportionately against Black, Asian and ethnically minoritised communities and that the Metropolitan Police have often used LFR in ethnically diverse areas such as Notting Hill Carnival.”¹²²

“That over 3000 people have been wrongly identified by LFR and that research has shown that LFR technology has an error rate of up to 35% when identifying Black women.”¹²³

Given the evaluation conducted by the National Physical Laboratory it is remarkable that Islington Councillors specifically chose to highlight “disproportionality” against ethnic minorities. This is particularly the case given the Borough has experienced 40 non-domestic homicides over the past decade with over half of the victims being from an ethnic minority.¹²⁴

The Minutes of Proceedings for the London Borough of Islington Council Meeting held on the 11th July 2024 state:

“The Leader also highlighted efforts to improve the lives of working people, including migrant workers, and expressed pride in pushing back against the disproportionate use of live facial recognition by the Metropolitan Police.”¹²⁵

The Leader of the Council at the time was Kaya Comer-Schwartz (Labour) who was subsequently appointed in October 2024 as the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime for London by the Mayor of London Sir Sadiq Khan. While the Metropolitan Police has rightly chosen to continue Live Facial Recognition operations in Islington following the Council’s motion, it demonstrates the battle the police face in trying to fight crime when elected officials have chosen to take steps which only make the police’s job fighting crime far harder than it might otherwise be.

On the 16th January 2023 Newham Borough Council passed a motion stating that:

“This Council rejects the use of live facial recognition surveillance in Newham.

121. London Borough of Islington, Council Meeting Minutes, 11th July 2024, [link](#)

122. London Borough of Islington, Council Meeting Notices of Motion, 11th July 2024, [link](#)

123. Ibid.

124. Metropolitan Police, Homicide Dashboard, [link](#)

125. London Borough of Islington, Council Meeting Minutes, 11th July 2024, [link](#)

Council calls upon the Executive to write to the Home Office, the Mayor of London, and the Metropolitan Police making clear our opposition and to request a suspension of its use in Newham until sufficient biometrics regulations and anti-discrimination safeguards have been put in place.”¹²⁶

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Areeq Chowdhury (Labour) and seconded by Councillor Lewis Godfrey (originally elected as a Labour Councillor but later sitting as an Independent).

In the ten years to 2024 there were 52 non-domestic homicides in the London Borough of Newham.¹²⁷ A Newham LSOA in Stratford (E01034220) had the fourth highest number of knife crime offences in 2023 in London – with 63 attacks in the course of a single year within this single small geographical area.¹²⁸ A Newham LSOA in East Ham (E01003531) was one of the top 20 LSOAs for knife crime offences in 2024 in London – with 28 attacks in the course of a single year.¹²⁹

On the 19th March 2020 Haringey Council considered a motion relating to Facial Recognition proposed by Councillor Alessandra Rossetti (Liberal Democrats) and seconded by Councillor Julie Ogiehor (Liberal Democrats). The motion stated:

“That the operational deployment of Facial Recognition by the Metropolitan Police will likely adversely affect Haringey Residents”¹³⁰

The Council resolved:

“To declare a moratorium on the use of facial recognition technology in Haringey.”¹³¹

In the ten years to 2024 there were 57 non-domestic homicides in the London Borough of Haringey.¹³² A Haringey LSOA incorporating Finsbury Park (E01002002) was the sixth highest LSOA in the capital for knife crime in 2024 – with 41 attacks in the course of the year.¹³³ A Haringey LSOA in Wood Green (E01002029) was one of the top 20 LSOAs in the capital for knife crime in 2023 – with 26 attacks in the course of the year within this single small geographical area.¹³⁴ It is notable that the Councillors who proposed and seconded the motion were Liberal Democrats – the Liberal Democrats 2024 general election manifesto stated their intention to: “immediately halt the use of facial recognition surveillance by the police and private companies.”¹³⁵

The Metropolitan Police piloted the use of Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs) to target specific offenders between July 2021 and March 2023.

Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs) are civil orders issued under section 14 Offensive Weapons Act 2019 which can be applied to any person over the age of 12 who (on the balance of probabilities) has repeatedly carried a bladed article in public over the preceding two years.¹³⁶ Orders can prevent individuals from associating with certain people, restrict them from specific geographical areas, or set curfews. They can also include positive requirements such as attendance at educational courses, life skills

126. London Borough of Newham, Council Meeting Minutes, 16th January 2023, [link](#)

127. Metropolitan Police, Homicide Dashboard, [link](#)

128. Metropolitan Police, Freedom of Information Request (Ref: 01/FOI/25/045143/R)

129. Ibid.

130. Haringey Council, Minutes of meeting full council, 19th March 2020, [link](#)

131. Ibid.

132. Metropolitan Police, Homicide Dashboard, [link](#)

133. Metropolitan Police, Freedom of Information (Ref: 01/FOI/25/045143/R)

134. Ibid.

135. Liberal Democrats General Election Manifesto 2024, [link](#)

136. Section 14 Offensive Weapons Act 2019, [link](#)

programmes, participation in group sports, drug rehabilitation and anger management classes.

In the first 18 months of the programme in London 138 KCPOs were granted by the courts. 61 applications were refused by the courts. Of the 138 individuals who were subject to KCPOs 36 had breached the conditions.¹³⁷ Of the 138 individuals subject to KCPOs 98.5% were male, 64% were black and 69% were aged under 20 years old. The low number of KCPOs – compared to the level of offending and number of offenders in London – issued during the period and the geographic distribution (only one was issued to a Westminster resident while fourteen were issued to Croydon residents) suggests that they were not widely rolled out for use by the force.

The previous Conservative Government introduced Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVROs) in 2022.

Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVRO) are civil orders issued under Section 165 Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 which can be applied to anyone over 18 who has been convicted of an offence and (on the balance of probabilities) a bladed article or offensive weapon was used in the commission of the offence.¹³⁸ The Court applies an SVRO for a period between 6 months and 2 years. An SVRO gives the police the power to stop and search that person for a bladed article or offensive weapon.

The pilot for SVROs commenced in April 2023 in four forces – Merseyside, Thames Valley, Sussex and West Midlands.¹³⁹ SVROs are now subject to an evaluation and as a result no further SVROs are currently being applied with existing orders phased out over a period of six months – with Orders no longer being enforceable after October 2025.

The use of SVROs has been highly variable between forces. In the first six months of the pilot, by October 2023, Merseyside Police had obtained 44 SVROs.¹⁴⁰ Sussex Police during the same period had obtained only one.¹⁴¹ During the full two years Merseyside Police secured 270 SVROs against offenders who pose a significant risk to the public – something for which the force should be applauded.¹⁴²

Recommendation: The Government should legislate in order that a Knife Crime Prevention Order or Serious Violence Prevention Order is mandatory for all individuals convicted of a relevant offence including knife possession and offences of violence. Individuals subject to such an Order should be subject to “without suspicion” stop and search by the police in a public place at any time. All individuals subject to such Orders should be added to Live Facial Recognition system watch lists. The number of Knife Crime Prevention Orders and Serious Violence Prevention Orders secured per force area should be published on an annual basis.

*

137. Metropolitan Police Service, Freedom of Information: 01.FOI.23.027998, [link](#)

138. Section 165 Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, [link](#)

139. Letter from Lord Sharpe of Epsom to peers, 31st March 2023, [link](#)

140. Merseyside Police, 44 Serious Violence Reduction Orders secured during first six months of knife crime pilot, 18th October 2023, [link](#)

141. Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner, Granting of first court order helps Sussex Police to tackle knife crime, 5th October 2023, [link](#)

142. Merseyside Police, Hundreds of court orders secured during knife crime pilot in Merseyside, 16th April 2025, [link](#)

The deployment of Live Facial Recognition and the use of court-imposed orders such as Knife Crime Prevention Orders and Serious Violence Reduction Orders represent key opportunities to tackle those who would commit serious criminality on our streets. Live Facial Recognition is now showing demonstrable results in locating offenders who might otherwise have been able to continue their criminality unimpeded. That it has been the subject of substantial independent evaluation of its accuracy is further reason for its use to be expanded. Yet, despite this, political and ideological resistance – often in boroughs disproportionately affected by violent crime – risks undermining the police’s ability to protect the public. Those responsible are making the police’s job fighting serious crime more challenging rather than less – something which should be unequivocally condemned.

The police’s limited use of Knife Crime Prevention Orders and Serious Violence Reduction Orders to date suggests a reluctance to fully embrace innovative legal mechanisms which might enable the more effective targeting of individuals who have chosen to commit crime. Government and policing should take additional steps to ensure these tools to be more widely used. We should not be hesitant in their use when the alternative is allowing criminals to operate unimpeded, thus compromising the safety of the public.

Conclusion

The Labour Party, in their 2024 General Election manifesto, rightly described knife crime as a “national crisis”.¹⁴³ It is their stated aim to “halve knife crime in a decade”.¹⁴⁴ The Party outlined an array of measures intended to support the prevention of crime and rehabilitation of offenders – including: the creation of a new Young Futures Programme with a “network of hubs reaching every community”, local prevention partnerships to “identify young people who could be drawn into violence”, and pathways to support young people out of violence by placing “youth workers and mentors in A&E units and Pupil Referral Units”.¹⁴⁵ Some of these activities may well contribute to turning the tide, but with almost nothing in the Party’s manifesto on the enforcement activities also necessary to combat knife crime they will be insufficient.

Since coming into government in July 2024, the Strategic Policing Requirement – a document which the Home Secretary is obliged to issue under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to set out the national threats and the national policing capabilities needed to counter them – has not, as of July 2025, been updated. In the current version of the Strategic Policing Requirement, knife crime is mentioned only once and is not specifically listed as a “national threat”.¹⁴⁶ Robbery and theft are mentioned only in passing.¹⁴⁷

As shown by Policy Exchange’s previous work, timidity in supporting enforcement activity by the police and other agencies against all criminals, of whatever ethnicity, is not one shared by the public.¹⁴⁸ Yet there is a fear amongst many policy makers of grappling with the issue of race in relation to crime. As this report shows, that fear does not serve the law-abiding majority of people – of whatever ethnicity.

As has been outlined in this report, those geographic areas with the highest levels of theft, robbery and knife crime should be the subject of intense enforcement activity by the police. A “Zero Tolerance” approach is required. In London, in the highest crime areas, police officers should be on patrol in their hundreds at the times when offending is most likely. There should be huge increases in the numbers of stop and search. Live Facial Recognition technology should be permanently deployed to these locations. Criminals operating in these places should feel that the law enforcement activity targeting them is nothing less than relentless. The Metropolitan Police must take an unequivocal “Crime Fighting First” approach to their mission.

If the Government is to be taken seriously on crime, ministers cannot only focus on delivering policies which the most vocal progressive activists

143. Labour Party, 2024 General Election Manifesto, [link](#)

144. Ibid.

145. Ibid.

146. Home Office, Strategic Policing Requirement (February 2023), [link](#)

147. Home Office, Strategic Policing Requirement (February 2023), [link](#)

148. D. Spencer & A. Tait (2025), Portrait of Modern Britain: Crime and closing the ‘Toughness Gap’, Policy Exchange, February 2025, [link](#)

are comfortable with. The public want and expect the Government to vigorously support police enforcement and tough sentencing against those who commit crime. Anything less will leave the Government open to the accusation that they are “soft on crime, soft on the causes of crime”.



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