

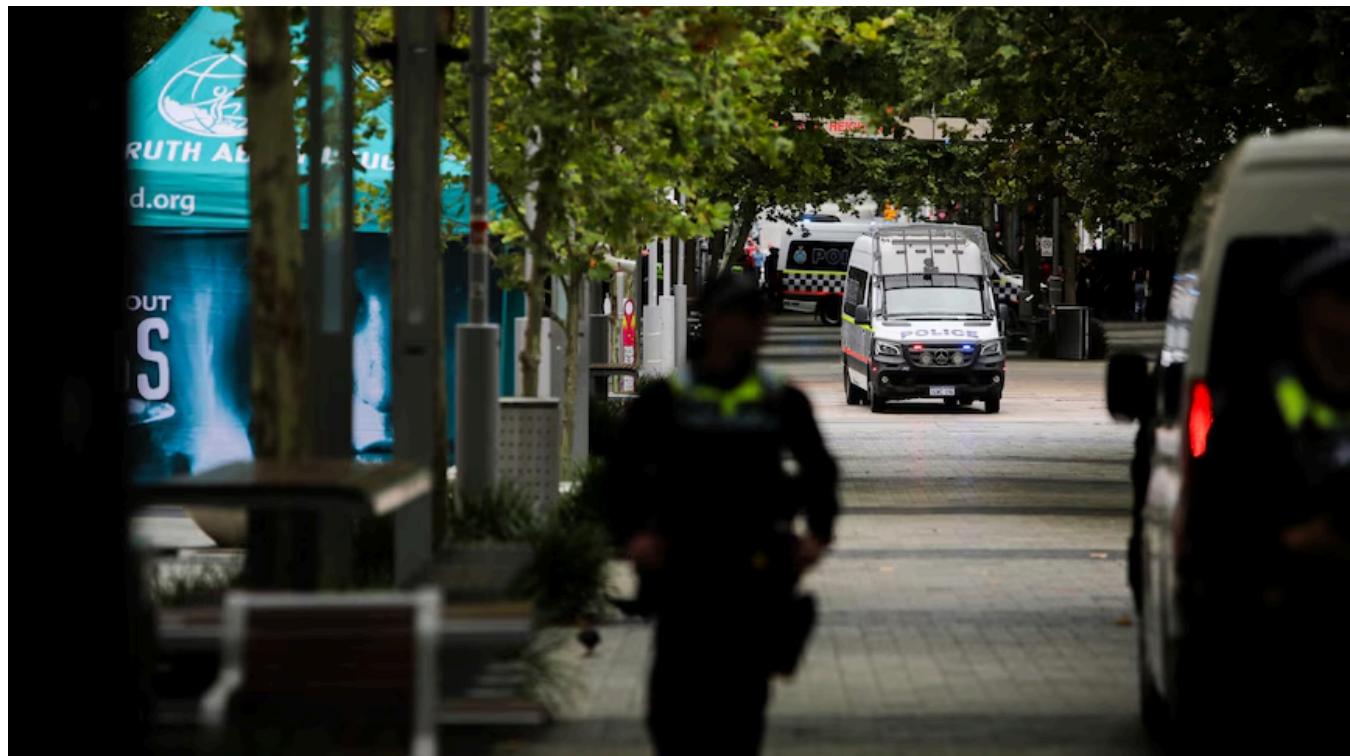
Analysis

Why it took nearly half-an-hour for police to start evacuating Perth's Invasion Day rally

By WA state political reporter Keane Bourke

Crime

Thu 29 Jan 2026 at 2:56am



Police have been criticised for the way they handled the evacuation, but a law enforcement expert described it as a "no-win situation". (ABC News: Keane Bourke)

It didn't take long for confusion to spread through the crowd of hundreds at Perth's Invasion Day rally on Monday.

In a matter of minutes they went from listening to speeches to being pushed back by a line of police dressed in black, yelling at them, some with pepper spray on their hips.

What few knew at the time was some 30 minutes earlier, when [police](#) [allege a man threw an improvised explosive device into the gathering](#), with the intention of it exploding and sending fast-moving ball bearings and screws into the crowd.

Invasion Day rally alleged attack

Forrest Place, Perth CBD — January 26, 2026

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The Joint Counter Terrorism Team has now confirmed it is [investigating the attempted attack as a "potential terrorist act".](#)

At face value, it seems hard to understand how it could take nearly half-an-hour to respond to such a seemingly serious threat.



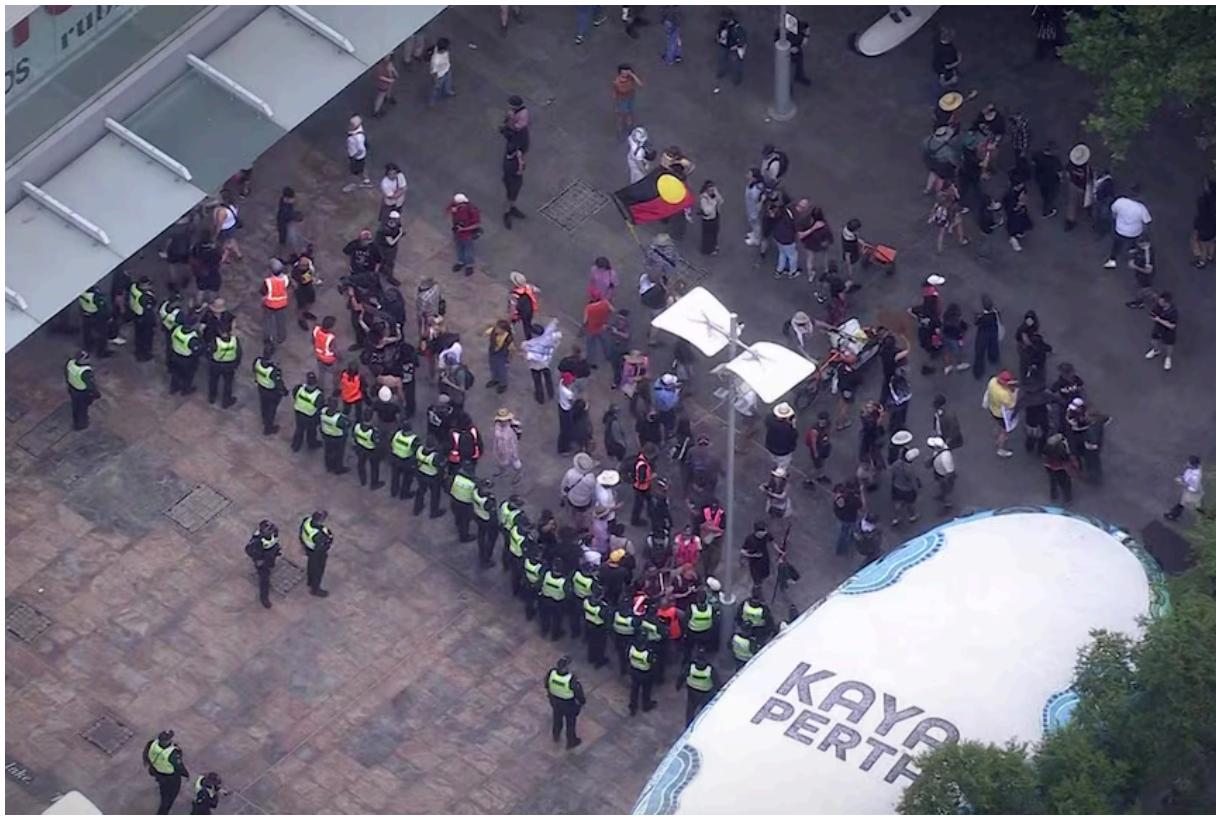
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Vision released by police of the Perth Invasion Day incident (*Supplied: WA Police*)

Surely people should have noticed, police should have raised the alarm, and the group moved to safety much sooner?

But it's not that simple, according to former police officer-turned criminologist, Terry Goldsworthy.

"You have to be careful with these type of things, I mean, you can't evacuate public spaces lightly," the Bond University associate professor said.



Police forming a line holding the crowd at bay after most people dispersed in Forrest Place. (ABC News)

"You need to make sure there's a justifiable reason for doing so."

'No-win situation'

Dr Goldsworthy believed the fact police had not laid eyes on the bomb until about 10 minutes after it had been thrown when it was handed to them by a member of the crowd — and that nothing had happened in that time — could have seen officers assess the threat as being relatively lower.

They would have also been weighing, he expected, the potential reaction if they had allowed the free speech of organisers and attendees to be unduly suppressed by what turned out to be a hoax or a minor threat.

"It's really almost a no-win ... situation for the police," he said.

Also on their minds, Dr Goldsworthy said, could have been how the crowd would respond to their requests.



Dr Terry Goldsworthy was a police officer for nearly 30 years. (*Supplied: Bond University*)

"And in this case, there was a rally taking place there that was probably highly charged in terms of issues that were being discussed," he said.

"So I could understand the police perhaps being reticent to try and move all those people on if they weren't sure of exactly what the threat level was."

The hundreds of years of colonisation and oppression by authorities, including police, which they were protesting might explain some of the crowd's initial reaction and police's concerns.

"Today we stand together, united, and we will not be silenced," Noongar Elder Hedley Hayward had told the crowd around the time the item was thrown.

The Invasion Day rally continued after the incident, with people marching down William St in the CBD.
(ABC News)

Not long after, police took to the stage and did silence speakers — not because of what they were saying, or anything the crowd had done — but because they had decided the risk was too great.

"It had the potential to explode and injure many people or kill them," Police Commissioner Col Blanch said of the bomb after initial testing had been completed.

It took about 10 minutes from when the bomb was thrown until it was handed to police. (*ABC News: Keane Bourke*)

Despite organisers trying to help the evacuation, with one using the microphone to explain "they reckon someone planted a bomb", there was some reluctance to accede to the requests of a line of police.

"No justice, no peace, no racist police," some chanted as confusion spread.

Dr Goldsworthy said in situations like that, clear communication was essential, without worrying people more.

"You don't want to create a sense of panic because that in itself brings risks of people being injured, etc, stampedes," he said.

"It would have been important in that context to ensure that people knew they were being moved for a reason external to the protest, and the issues around that, and that there wasn't any kind of confusion there was an attempt to shut down the protest."

Police criticised

That is where attendees and organisers felt police had fallen short in their response.

"They was pretty slow on the evacuation and they didn't give clear communication or direct communication," organiser Fabian Yarran said.

Mr Yarran said police were "very vague in their description of the actual situation", leaving the crowd confused.

Fabian Yarran felt communication from police could have been better. (*ABC News: Keane Bourke*)

"They didn't explain why we needed to evacuate, they didn't give details on that."

He said police were "very aggressive, heavy handed".

Mr Yarran said he wanted to see an independent review of how police handled the situation.

A WA Police spokesperson did not answer a question about how the force's response would be reviewed, but said officers had taken a balanced approach in response to a "potential mass casualty threat".

"The police response balanced an urgent need to evacuate but also a need to stop a level of panic which may have itself resulted in serious injury through crowd crush," they said in a statement.

Commissioner Col Blanch had backed in his officers in the day after the attempted attack, and yesterday met with Aboriginal community leaders "to reassure them WA Police respect the public's right to lawful protest, but that in this instance, protecting the community from harm took precedence".

"What happens the next year's event, what's the next thing that's coming?" elder Herbert Bropho asked yesterday, as the community weighs how to safely hold similar rallies in future.

Herbert Bropho has concerns for future gatherings of Indigenous Australians. (*ABC News: Keane Bourke*)

The test for authorities in the wake of the incident is how quickly trust with the community, which could have been damaged in those frantic moments after the bomb was thrown, can be repaired.

Any further charges they choose to lay — and how they explain those charges to the public — will no doubt play a big part in shaping the community's reactions.

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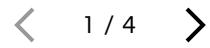
New horizons

The Horizon Ball in Geraldton has been drawing large crowds of tourists after it was popularised online, including on Chinese social media.

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