

Democracy cannot exist without the right to free speech.

Free speech should be robustly defended as a fundamental freedom.

The National Secular Society has defended free speech from religious threats since our founding. We played an instrumental role in abolishing "blasphemy" laws in Britain, but serious concerns remain. **Blasphemy laws still exist in Northern Ireland.** And throughout the UK, religious fundamentalists seek to impose their blasphemy taboos on others through violence and intimidation.

There are also increasing attempts to categorise offending religious sensibilities as 'hate speech', making criticism, mockery or perceived 'insult' of religion a criminal act akin to racial hatred or inciting violence – in other words, a 'blasphemy law by the back door'.

Without free speech no search for truth is possible; without free speech no discovery of truth is useful; without free speech progress is checked... Better a thousand fold abuse of free speech than denial of free speech.

NSS founder Charles Bradlaugh

We are further concerned by a developing 'culture of offence' in which any speech or action deemed likely to offend religious sensibilities is considered taboo. Enforced by a toxic mix of terrorism and religious deference, this is chilling free speech through self-censorship.

We also campaign against blasphemy laws around the world, where they continue to be used to target religious and political minorities. These are sometimes described by UK politicians as 'misuse' of blasphemy laws, but we contend there are never any legitimate uses for blasphemy laws.

Being offended from time to time is the price we all pay for living in a free society. Rather than trying to silence those we disagree with, we believe the answer to speech we don't like is more speech – better speech.

We therefore campaign to protect and preserve freedom of expression, including offensive, critical and shocking speech.

What you can do

1. Share your story

Tell us why you support this campaign, and how you are personally affected by the issue. You can also let us know if you would like assistance with a particular issue.

- [Share your story](#)

2. Join us

Become a member of the National Secular Society today! Together, we can separate religion and state for greater freedom and fairness.

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Posted: Fri, 26 Apr 2024 09:08

Creeping restriction of free expression illustrated in report's account of increasingly spurious accusations of 'Islamophobia'.

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Posted: Wed, 17 Apr 2024 10:33

Kenan Malik, Joan Smith and more speaking at NSS Secularism 2024 conference in London.

- [1](#)
- [2](#)
- [3](#)
- [4](#)
- [5](#)
- [6](#)
- [7](#)
- [8](#)
- [9](#)
- [10](#)
- ...

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