

Election 2015: Where the parties stand on secularist issues

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Find out where the parties stand on collective worship, faith schools, multiculturalism, sex and relationships education, religion in society and a range of other secular issues.

While the National Secular Society is not party political, that doesn't stop us from looking at what individual policies are on offer in the General Election. Here we present relevant policies on secularism and religion- whether good or bad- from each party.

NSS members and supporters represent a broad spectrum of political opinion, and we've rated the parties impartially so that our members and supporters can decide which political party is best on the secular issues that they think are important.

Conservatives

The Conservatives will "protect methods of religious slaughter, such as shechita and halal" and state that while they "want people to integrate fully into British society" that "does not mean they should have to give up the things they hold dear in their religion."

The Conservative Party will scrap the Human Rights Act and introduce a British Bill of Rights "which will restore common sense to the application of human rights in the UK."

The party will "stand up for British values", and for "the freedom of people of all religions – and non-religious people – to practise their beliefs in peace and safety, for example by supporting persecuted Christians in the Middle East."

Prime Minister David Cameron recently said that the UK was "[still a Christian country](#)", despite 62% of Britons saying they weren't religious. In his recent Easter message the Prime Minister praised Christians for living out their beliefs in faith schools, pointed out that the Coalition had invested tens of millions for church repairs, and praised the recently passed legislation which allows local authorities to hold [prayers during council meetings](#).

"We will tackle global terrorism and the poisonous ideology of Islamist extremism while taking a patient, long-term approach to preventing conflict and state failure."

The manifesto states: "We have always believed that churches, faith groups and other voluntary groups play an important and longstanding role in this country's social fabric, running foodbanks, helping the homeless, and tackling debt and addictions, such as alcoholism and gambling."

On LGBT rights, the party notes their "historic introduction of gay marriage" which has "helped drive forward equality and strengthened the institution of marriage." They also promise to introduce a new law pardoning people convicted under historic "gross indecency" laws.

The full manifesto can be read [here](#).

DUP

The DUP write, "in the last Parliament, the DUP urged the government to take seriously international human rights abuses against Christians and other faith groups."

At this election their manifesto notes they "continue to be concerned about the persecution of religious minorities."

They say they "will continue to use our influence to ensure that this issue is taken seriously and that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office actively engage with the leadership of the countries in which these human rights violations occur."

The DUP support a 'religious freedom' bill which would allow religious people to discriminate against gay people.

The full DUP manifesto can be read [here](#).

Greens

The Greens have pledged to "phase out public funding of schools run by religious organisations". They say "schools may teach about religions, but should not encourage adherence to any particular religious beliefs."

The Greens also pledge to integrate academies and free schools into the local authority system and make PSHE, including sex and relationships education, compulsory.

The manifesto is also committed to "ensuring that all schools that serve particular vulnerable communities, for example the Jewish, Muslim or Sikh communities, are adequately protected from sectarian attacks."

The party would "uphold the principles of freedom of speech and peaceful protest, including support for vulnerable communities of all religious faiths and none."

In their manifesto the party also sets plans to "make equality and diversity lessons mandatory in all schools, from the first year of primary education onwards, to combat all forms of prejudice and bullying, to promote understanding and acceptance of difference and to ensure community cohesion."

They would also "implement a UK-wide strategy to tackle violence against women, including domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse, female genital mutilation and trafficking."

The full manifesto can be read [here](#).

Labour

The Labour Party will take "a zero-tolerance approach to hate crime, such as anti-Semitism and Islamophobia."

Ed Miliband has called for 'Islamophobia' to be banned, without defining what he means by the term. He said, "We are going to make it an aggravated crime. We are going to make sure it is marked on people's records with the police to make sure they root out Islamophobia as a hate crime."

"We will challenge prejudice before it grows, whether in schools, universities or on social media. And we will strengthen the law on disability, homophobic, and transphobic hate crime."

Labour applauds "those faith communities who have pioneered an inter-faith dialogue for the common good" and will "overhaul the programme to involve communities in countering extremist propaganda."

The manifesto argues that "to defeat the threats of Islamist terrorism" the Government "must also engage with the personal, cultural and wider factors that turn young people to extremism."

On radicalisation, Labour argues that the Prevent programme set up under the last Labour Government to stop young people becoming radicalised has had its funding cut and has "narrowed its focus." They also state that "much of the work to engage Muslim communities has been lost."

The party will also implement "a much more rigorous strategy for dealing with people returning from the Syrian conflict." They state that "alongside appropriate police action and prosecution, it will be mandatory for anyone returning to engage in a de-radicalisation programme designed to confront them with the consequences of their actions."

On education, Labour pledges to "introduce compulsory age-appropriate sex and relationships education. We will encourage all schools to embed character education across the curriculum, working with schools to stop the blight of homophobic bullying."

They will also end "the wasteful and poorly performing Free Schools programme."

"We will appoint a Global Envoy for Religious Freedom, and establish a multi-faith advisory council on religious freedom within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. And we will appoint an International LGBT Rights Envoy to promote respect for the human rights of LGBT people, and work towards the decriminalisation of homosexuality worldwide."

The full manifesto can be read [here](#).

Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats have pledged to "allow parents to continue to choose faith-based schools within the state-funded sector and allow the establishment of new faith schools."

However, the party promised to "ensure all faith schools develop an inclusive admissions policy and end unfair discrimination on grounds of faith when recruiting staff, except for those principally responsible for optional religious instruction."

The LibDems are also proposing a "minimum curriculum entitlement" which will include PSHE and "age-appropriate sex and relationship education."

"To ensure all children learn about a wide range of religious and nonreligious world views, religious education will be included in the core curriculum; however we will give schools the freedom to set policy on whether to hold acts of collective worship, while ensuring any such acts are strictly optional."

Party leader and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg recently said that he opposed "vociferous secularism", in an interview in which he [appeared to conflate secularism with atheism](#).

The party is concerned about "religious discrimination" and seeks to "support faith and belief communities." The LibDems will "work closely with faith and community organisations, such as the Community Security Trust (which works to protect the Jewish community against antisemitic attacks) and the Muslim Council of Britain, to prevent hate crime, including at places of worship like synagogues and mosques. We are determined to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate in the UK and internationally."

The LibDems call for a "proportionate response" to extremism and pledge to "work with religious and community leaders, civil society groups and social media sites to counter the narratives put forward by extremists, and create the space for the expression of contrary viewpoints and religious interpretations."

The party will "ensure efforts to tackle terrorism do not stigmatise or alienate Muslims or any other ethnic or faith group, and that government supports communities to help prevent those at risk of radicalisation from being drawn into illegal activity."

It will also "review the process of assessing threats against different ethnic and religious communities to ensure all groups in the UK are properly protected."

The full manifesto can be read [here](#).

Plaid Cymru

"Plaid Cymru will work across our communities, whatever their backgrounds, to promote a Welsh civic identity. Our Welsh civic identity is inclusive, offered to anybody who chooses to make Wales their home. This will be promoted through schools, by faith and community organisations, encouraging everybody in Wales to participate in our wider Welsh society, in contrast to the UK Government's divisive and stigmatising proposals that blame particular groups."

On education, Plaid Cymru pledge that "all children and young people should receive a comprehensive programme of healthy relationships education. Values of equality, tolerance and respect should be embedded in everything schools do to tackle sexist, racist, homophobic and other discriminatory bullying."

The party also states that it is "committed unswervingly to human rights."

The full manifesto can be read [here](#).

Scottish National Party

The SNP will vote for the abolition of the House of Lords and say that an "unelected second chamber is not acceptable in a modern democracy."

Their manifesto states: "Those with no democratic mandate should not be writing the laws of the land and SNP MPs will vote for the abolition of the House of Lords."

The party will promote quality and protect human rights and "oppose scrapping the Human Rights Act or withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights."

Their full manifesto can be found [here](#).

UKIP

UKIP have issued a 'Christian Manifesto' which calls for a "[muscular defence](#)" of Christianity in the UK. In the document, Nigel Farage wrote that the UK is "fundamentally a Christian nation" with a "Christian Constitution."

The party has also pledged to extend the legal concept of "reasonable accommodation", allowing religious believers to refuse services to same-sex couples.

UKIP rejects multiculturalism, and seeks to "promote a unifying British culture, open to anyone who wishes to identify with Britain and British values, regardless of their ethnic or religious background."

The party describes this as "genuine inclusiveness" and warns that multiculturalism "has led to an alarming fragmentation of British society." The manifesto argues that different ethnic and religious groups have been "encouraged to maintain all aspects of their cultures" and this has meant they have not integrated into British society. It also warns that some of these groups have "values and customs" which "conflict with British ones."

Farage said that the UK has to be "more robust in defending our Judeo-Christian culture" in the face of Islam.

UKIP pledge to "uphold freedom of speech within the law as a fundamental British value." They "believe all ideas and beliefs should be open to discussion and scrutiny and we will challenge the 'culture of offence' as it risks shutting down free speech."

UKIP "recognise that British values include tolerance of religion. UKIP is committed to protecting religious freedoms for all believers in the UK, in accordance with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We believe, however, that those faiths and beliefs must exist firmly within a British framework. We will not condone any faith position which is itself intolerant and refuses to recognise the human rights of others."

The UKIP manifesto states that the party will not "condone parallel or conflicting systems that deny equality under the law", and insists that "those attending faith-based tribunals must be informed that they cannot be forced to attend and that the rulings from such hearings may not be legally binding under British law."

The party also promise support for a "mandatory reporting requirement for suspected cases of Female Genital Mutilation." They also argue that "a misplaced sensitivity to issues of race and religion, combined with fear, has been shown to have stopped many investigations into the abuse of children."

On education, UKIP "will continue to monitor British values, but with a view towards combatting extremism and radicalisation, rather than criticising widely-held Judeo-Christian beliefs."

The full manifesto can be read [here](#).

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