

# Veil debate: Should the UK ban the veil?

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The wearing of the full face veil in public has caused controversy throughout Europe. In some countries bans are being put in place — sometimes complete and sometimes partial — with women being denied access to state offices if they insist on wearing face coverings.

We asked NSS supporters for their views on the issue. Should the UK introduce legislation to ban the veil? Below is a selection of the responses we have received.

### **From Celia Hart:**

Have you tried blacking out the faces of women in a newspaper or magazine so that they show none of the face or just the eyes? How would you or members of your family react if such a person so dressed appeared at your door? Who were they and could you identify them later? Such is the nonsense talked about personal freedom to dress how we like, that the important freedom of seeing the face and identity of who we talk to or who confronts us is in danger of being lost.

The French government should be applauded for bringing to public attention the importance of facial expression and identification to social integration and relationships. As a picture researcher for The Open University I purchased images of multicultural facial expressions from the distinguished American psychologist Professor Paul Ekman of the University of California, San Francisco. These were for a chapter in a course book for DD201 Sociology & Society. His research into the importance of 'reading a face' for information about another person is a continuation of Charles Darwin's theories in his book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 1872.

The ways in which people of different cultures express their feelings and indicate their views, intentions and differences has been with mankind since the beginning, and the subject of much research. In a modern Western democracy it makes sense to want to see the whole face to make an intelligent judgement about the other person. Only Muslim women from certain cultures and countries insist on continuing with this custom, but others do not, so it is not Islamic in origin. These women have often immigrated here through an arranged marriage from a very different culture and society. As with many other aspects of this culture, it contradicts the rights and norms of British Society. If 67% of the polled public are against facial masking, why don't politicians listen and respect their views?

Francis Fukuyama warned that multiculturalism grants too much autonomy to group rights and communities are setting their own standards. The wearing of a facial cover or mask - for a mask is what it is - is now associated with groups within our society that wish to hide their identity from cameras and authority, and a reminder of the use of the balaclava by terrorists and criminals. Immigrants must be encouraged to adapt to the adopted cultural norms and this discussion should be widened to show the advantages of seeing clearly who we are trying to relate to.

### **From Kevin Bradhaw:**

I write a daily blog featuring articles, opinion pieces and occasional diary type ramblings. I am attempting to raise some money for Christie's cancer research and hospital.

The 6 August post is the first of my Great Film posts, and is a discussion about the positive atheist and rationalist messages I see in the film *Monsters Inc.* You can read it [here](#). I wonder if any Newsline readers have discovered other similarly positive atheist messages in such unlikely places?

**From Jill Farquhar:**

As an atheist and feminist I feel the burqa to be a vicious expression of misogyny. However, I also feel that legislating against the burqa or similarly extreme versions of the veil would be hugely problematic.

I do not think that you can 'force' people to be free. Legislation that would curtail the burqa is likely, in practice, to adversely affect those it purports to protect. Those women who wear the burqa may become, in effect, housebound (and therefore 'less free' and more invisible) through enforcement by their relatives or by self imposition due to an internalisation of a misogynistic ideology.

I do not feel that we can sustain an argument for freedom of choice and expression where we restrict the rights of people to wear the clothes of their choice (whilst ensuring that these clothes cannot be worn when they affect the rights or security of others).

Banning the burqa is a simplistic attempt at solving a complex problem.

**From Paul Brown:**

Regarding the increasing European trend towards banning the burqa and niqab, I think that the humdrum reality is that we have to win the argument. It is superficially appealing to introduce a blanket ban, but all this will do is breed resentment, fuel the 'we're the most offended and oppressed' lobby, and allow Muslim husbands and fathers to keep their wives and daughters locked up. The best thing we can do is constantly declare ourselves to be a secular society, and develop a culture that empowers and enables our young women to be independent. Schools and local authorities can also train staff in issues such as honour-based violence and forced veiling, and this should be discussed at the highest level of government (of course, we have to elect a vaguely progressive government first).

The first thing we can do is end the mentality of cultural relativism and stop tip-toeing on eggshells around religious minorities; instead talking in terms of universal values and rights, including cultural and social freedom for all. If we stop regarding religion as sacrosanct and accept that superstition is no excuse for oppression, we can enable teachers, social workers, youth workers, etc, to talk to women and girls from Muslim communities about their rights and their wishes, without any accusations of being 'insensitive' towards another 'culture'.

**From George Ross:**

There is a very simple - and obvious - solution to the burka problem: legislation to make them compulsory for all Muslim women.

An uproar of protest would surge, with the Muslims demanding their human right not to be singled out and exposed to the ridicule of an offensive garb or insignia, and thus confined to the isolation of the ghetto.

Having endured this experience, the Jews know better. It seems that Caliph Omar II was the first ruler - in the 8th century - to order that every non-Muslim, the dhimmi, should wear vestimentary distinctions (called giyar, i.e., distinguishing marks) of a different colour for each minority group.

The ordinance was unequally observed, but it was reissued and reinforced by Caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-61).

In the Christian world, such idiosyncratic sartorial details, including funny hats and badges, were imposed by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.

They got shot of such humiliating constrictions only in the post-Enlightenment intellectual and ethical climate and, in the West, especially after the noxious Nazi relapse, they are unlikely to clamour for identifying emblems and artificial barrier to integration.

**Paul Braterman:**

People in a public place should be publicly identifiable as a matter of public safety.

**From Charlie Klendjian:**

I find the full veil intimidating. And besides, why should I reveal my identity to someone only for them to hide theirs from me?

I acknowledge that many women argue it is their choice to wear the veil. But I think it was Sam Harris who posed a question along the lines of: *“What exactly does ‘choice’ mean in the context of a culture where a woman might be murdered by her own father for the ‘crime’ of having been raped?”*

If someone obsessively concealed their identity in public for any reason other than a religious one (other than, perhaps, hideous disfigurement), or for absolutely no reason at all, that behaviour would be considered plain weird. So the question is: does the religious motivation for obsessively concealing one’s identity in public justify the behaviour? The answer is no: it’s still just plain weird.

But I would not argue for a ban: our police officers are not school prefects. I would simply argue that we have to discard fear of causing offence in relation to the veil. You want to wear a veil? Absolutely fine. But if you want to wear it in normal daily life, understand that you can expect to be turned away from many public places and also deprived of career opportunities. And you can’t expect to be fully part of normal western society. That’s a real shame, but it’s your choice.

**From David Flint:**

Women should be free to cover their faces except where identification or effective communication requires faces to be shown. No covering in court, at passport checks, etc. But we should discourage such covering.

**From Kelvin Mansbridge:**

In one way this is a difficult issue because how can we differentiate between those women who actively want to cover up from those who are being coerced against their will?

I do believe, however, that it is the right of any individual to see the face of any person who is requesting something from them – be it a shop assistant, bank clerk, solicitor or doctor. Human TWO-way discourse where an element of trust is involved requires both parties to recognize who

they are dealing with and the unquestionable fingerprint of identity is the face. I, personally, could not do business with anyone who was not willing to show me their face. Every individual has the right to refuse to conduct any transaction with a person who cannot reveal or prove their identity beyond doubt. Women who wear burqas and won't unveil should be warned that other individuals have the right to refuse to transact with them without fear of persecution or prosecution and governments should ensure that this is the case.

**From Ian S. Fielding:**

I am alarmed by Baroness Warsi's assertions. Should we as a society shrink from freeing women from an oppressive form of dress that is not required dogmatically in Islam for fear of being branded Islamophobic? Unequivocally not. But, do we end up with a situation where women become prisoners in their own homes? Life is so much simpler when these sorts of issues and whether you are appeasing some mythical being is not a daily encumbrance...Love life, not the afterlife...

**From Paul Pettinger:**

The issue of banning face veils provides secularists in the UK with an opportunity to reinforce how we genuinely want to defend personal freedom and separate the state from matters of religion and belief. Our protractors so often paint secularism as just cover for anti-theism. Let us take this opportunity, oppose suggestions to ban religious garments and show that our principled ideals pervade everything that we say and do.

**From Darrall Higson:**

One quick thought while I construct a serious response.....why aren't Muslim men made to wear burqas in case they stir up lustful thoughts in gay men?

**From John Griffin:**

In a society where ordinary people have fought for human rights such as the freedom to love and equality for all, and where the protection of these hard won rights means public security measures, face concealment is unacceptable in public places, and the maintenance of gender and sexual orientation discrimination - indeed institutionalised hatred - is unacceptable. The answer must legally be no.

**Roger Titcombe:**

The crux of this is nothing to do with people's rights to wear what they like, or a person's right to look into the face of someone they are conversing with or even the issue of identification for formal purposes.

It comes down to sexual equality. A male may decide to initiate and further a relationship with any female on the basis of seeing her face and her facial responses to his chatting up. It is unacceptable for a father to prevent his daughters' ability to ever develop a romantic relationship of her own choosing and initiation. Having your head completely covered except for an eye slit is not likely to help in the building of any kind of intimate relationship. This about the right of a woman of any age to choose who she wants to develop a relationship with. The face veil is a physical impediment forced onto females by males.

This is therefore an infringement of basic human rights. That some veiled women may welcome such restriction is irrelevant.

**From David Hinton:**

Some years ago I was a Citizen's Advice Bureau Adviser and found that I could not get myself to advise a woman with her face covered. The effect on others (white, male in my case) needs to be considered in all this as well as the woman wearing the veil.

**From Tony Edwards:**

Covering the face is not culturally acceptable in our society. We should not shirk from putting in place whatever restrictions seem appropriate to limit the freedom of those who insist on covering their faces to engage in public activities. Antisocial behaviour is best dealt with by social exclusion. Counter charges against us based on the over-used principle of human rights would be derisible. On the other hand, an outright ban on face covering would be un-British.

**Tim Huitson:**

I am completely opposed to the burka and veil etc. It depresses me to see it in the street e.g. a man strutting along with his entombed wife 3 paces behind pushing a pushchair laden with shopping. The idea that this empowers women is laughable. When on a beach in Turkey in sweltering August weather I saw a man in trunks sipping cold drinks on a lounge while his Burka clad wife in sodden clothing entertained the kids in the sea. If they want to follow their religious ideas so completely (although the veil is not required in the Koran anyway) they should move to a suitable country to live that life.

**Ryan J. Bury:**

This should be a very clear-cut issue. It simply cannot be the business of the state to tell people how to dress. Anyone, religious or otherwise, should be free to dress however they choose - but certainly with no special consideration where it would otherwise be deemed inappropriate; if a motorbike helmet might be expected to be removed for security purposes, a face-veil should be treated no differently.

If the concern is that women are being forced to wear a veil by indoctrination, then it seems to me that this isn't an argument against the veil itself, but perhaps a better argument against the religious indoctrination of children in the first place.

**From Nina Boyd:**

I have a strong objection to people hiding their faces with crash helmets, balaclavas, Klan hoods, veils. Not a religious prejudice, but a desire for everyone to be open. It just doesn't seem much to ask, that people show their faces. I can't see how anyone can claim the right to hide.

**From David Eppel:**

1. the Saudi foreign minister stated quite calmly that women are not allowed to drive in his forward thinking country because they would be raped.
2. The revolting evil that poses as a 'faith' is merely brain washing reinforced with terror. There is no joy or humour in their miserable existences.
3. Why don't men wear the burqa?
4. Who says bodies have to be covered up? I don't see the San bushmen or Australian aborigines

behaving like arabs.

**From Iain Howarth:**

Difficult one this. My instinct is not to have a formal ban which might well be counter-productive. I remember being a weekend hippy in the late 60s and my long hair drew a fair amount of ridicule derision from "straight", Brylcreamed, horn rimmed spectacled, respectable types. I used to claim "You should judge me for who I am, not the length of my hair!" Substitute the word "Burqa" and you get a sense of the oppression these women might be feeling.

However, there are always limits to anyone's freedoms. Apart from the security threat of not being able to identify someone, numerous scientific studies have proven that non verbal communication is 10:1 more powerful than verbal communication. If we are to avoid friction and resentment, good communication between all members of our society is vital. The Burqa prevents this by removing the main non verbal element – visual, facial expressions etc. I think it is better to encourage these misguided women to accept that if they choose to live in a western society for the benefits it provides, face veils are neither appropriate, nor required by Islam. I'd like the media to give far more prominence to the numerous moderate Islamic preachers who state this – they'd probably have more influence than us infidels!

**From John Dillon:**

Baroness Warsi and fellow apologists argue that many women opt for the full face veil out of choice, but their case is not based on evidence because there is none. No one has dared to carry out a poll of these women. It appears therefore to be a preference for a vocal few. If it were a real choice, we would see hordes of Muslim women demanding the right to cover their faces. What we see instead, is an oppressed and silenced group who long for the day when they are compulsorily freed from this oppressive cultural meme by law.

**From Dave Leonard:**

I deplore the fact that women are forced or conditioned to wear face veils, but I am against a total ban. A total ban will either force already oppressed women to stay at home, or provide ammunition for those who oppose our liberal ideals. Certain times and places should incur a ban e.g. airport security, court appearances etc. and this should be subject to an open discussion in a democratic society.

**From Michael Hall:**

I would personally feel quite uncomfortable if the law interfered with ones choice of clothing. Practical reasons - such as going through airport security - I can understand. Bans for cultural reasons are something else entirely.

The problem is, once society has a taste for banning things that threaten the cultural status quo it becomes very hard to stop. Clothing laws will also do little to stop the detrimental effect of religious hegemony on society. Today it is women in veils; in the past it was hoodies, punks and teddy boys. Tomorrow - who knows?

**Colin M. Cameron:**

I wonder if those European Muslim women who choose to cover themselves feel any sympathy for their contemporaries living under theocratic regimes? There seems to be very little evidence of solidarity or political activism on the part of British/European Muslim women on behalf of their abused sisters overseas. Whenever I see a woman with her head and face covered, I immediately

think of those abuses. The lack of input into the debate would seem to reflect the "hiddenness" of many British Muslim women's opinions. Why not have the N.H.S. treat the small minority of Muslim men who are obviously seriously sexually dysfunctional and then their female family members would truly be free to choose.

**From Jack Harrison:**

It offends me that some British women are forced (or chose) to be second class citizens. The genders should enjoy equal status (I do believe that is the law). Unfortunately the view of the secularist who takes offence at the overt disparity displayed by some communities

is apparently disregarded. But the "so-called rights" of the religious are however paramount. It would seem that secularists are also second class citizens.

**From Peter Curtis:**

Let Islamist trouble makers have their burqas. Institute alternative - preferably expensive and intimidating - methods of checking identity that bypass the burqa. Biometric data for example, such as finger prints, iris patterns and blood grouping. Biometric data collection for a passport, driving licence and/or a bus pass, etc. will require attendance at a Police Station - for a sizeable fee. Identity checks of biometric data for public service and travel purposes shall be carried out in public - not in private - to emphasize the burqa wearer's claim to be different and to reassure other members of the public.

**From Peter Crystal:**

Please can we choose not to pick this battle. It is a distraction from the real issues associated with fundamental religious belief. We will only entrench opposing views. It is a personal choice but should not be allowed at the expense of the safety of non-believers. The wearers will experience prejudice and miss out on life experiences, in Europe this is their choice. Don't ban it.

**From Les Beaumont:**

Secularism stands for reason and rationality. Laws and regulations about the niqab must be reasonable and rational. Security, public safety, the need for identification, a jury's assessment of a witness's truthfulness, these are all valid reasons for a woman to remove her veil and must not be compromised for religious reasons.

I find the veil objectionable, but that is no reason for a blanket ban, however much I'd like to be rid of this alien garb from our streets.

**Dorothy Bishop:**

A woman should have the right to cover herself up when out and about, provided there are no security concerns. However, in face-to-face interactions, wearing a burqua is discourteous, because it creates an unequal relationship, when the unveiled person cannot read facial cues. There is also the offensive implication that all men are sexual predators. Just as British people must learn to respect the culture of others by not wearing skimpy clothing in Arab countries, Islamic women should respect cultural expectations that we have a right to see the face of someone we interact with in person.

**From Paul Spargo:**

In my opinion there has to be a right for women to wear what they want whether religious or not

but this should not mean 'burqa wearers' are exempt from showing their face in places where everyone has to show their face. Anyway in legal terms it does not even necessarily have anything to do with the burqa but just with clothing that covers the face. Motorcyclists have to take their helmets off at petrol stations, people going abroad have to show their faces to passport control, why should anyone be exempt from this on religious grounds?

If a child or adult decided they wanted to go to school or work with a balaclava on they would not be allowed, others around them would feel uneasy and would not know who it is under the clothing. If there was a ruling for followers of say a newer religion (such as Mormonism or Scientology) decided balaclava wearing was a must, do you think it would be allowed? At the end of the day followers of Islam deserve no greater respect than these 'newer' religions or of people of no religion.

**From Olly Dean:**

People should be allowed to dress in whatever way they like, and so a complete ban on face coverings is not compatible with the values of a liberal society. If, however, it's a genuine matter of security – airport security, a courtroom, a bank, etc – people should not be expected to allow it, nor feel obliged to do so. No one would think that a security guard in a bank was being overzealous to ask someone in a motorcycle helmet or balaclava to take it off or else leave, for example, and a religious garment should be treated no differently, regardless of whether or not it's a 'requirement' of a particular religion – which these aren't.

**From Dinah Foweraker:**

The burqa is demeaning not only to women but also to Muslim men, in suggesting they are unable to control their sexual appetites in the presence of normally-clothed women. Women who choose freely to wear a burqa should be reminded that many of their sex do not have such a choice, and they are undermining those who have fought and sometimes died for women's equality.

An outright ban on burqas would be difficult to enforce, but employers should be allowed to prevent employees from wearing them, and shops and businesses to deny entry and/or service to those whose faces are covered.

**From Simon Johnson:**

The burqa must be banned in order to preserve our society from the influence of Islam and its associated medieval culture. It is already illegal to wear no clothes at all, wearing the burqa is equally antisocial (perhaps more antisocial) and should be made illegal. The English way of life involves social contact in the street, seeing people's faces and smiling at each other as we pass. I want to keep this way of life.

**From Hamish Renfrew:**

Three questions arise from the French Ban (not of the Burqa but of covering the face in public):

Where do I stand in this regard wearing a full face helmet while riding a motorcycle or a ski-mask while skiing?

If the above is allowed, what about a woman wearing a Burqa under a helmet or ski-mask?

When will people understand that misconceived laws are of no help in advancing the type of society I'm pretty sure most of us want to live in?



**From Alistair Banton:**

I believe there should be laws that prohibit the covering of the face, but these laws should be entirely to do with issues like health and safety, crime prevention and what might be called 'occupational appropriacy'. To target Islamic veils specifically would be wrong in principle and might create a nasty backlash. Women who choose to wear a veil in public should be free to do so. Men who tyrannise women by forcing them to wear veils should expect criticism and social ostracism, but not legal sanctions.

**From Harry Perry:**

Wearing the veil is regrettable. It cuts the wearer off from normal human interactions through which communication, understanding and friendship can grow. But our commitment to the freedom of the individual to do as they wish, as long as it harms nobody else, means we cannot support legislation to bar certain types of clothing. However, there are circumstances where freedom may be circumscribed owing to the need for the individual to undertake particular roles in employment or to satisfy reasonable security requirements for identification and openness. These limitations are best defined by employers, agencies and trading organisations in their particular circumstances.

The courts must be careful to ensure the veil is not recognised as a religious requirement (which could make it unchallengeable) and that the rights of others to withhold jobs, services, passage and participation from veil wearers are protected.

Wearing the veil may demonstrate hostility to Western traditions but it is everybody's right to demonstrate that. When wearing the veil is forced upon women by relatives or communities the means of combating that must be through education and campaigning and clear support for Muslim women fighting for their rights.

**From Thomas Winwood:**

Banning the veil because of husbands forcing their wives to wear it is absurd - deal with the marital inequality and the only veils left will be those worn voluntarily. I, a man, intend to protest any bans on the veil by wearing one. Anyone else?

**From: Emma Luther:**

No, the burkha should not be specifically banned because people should be free to dress as they wish. BUT places such as airports, banks etc where identification is necessary should insist that ALL face-coverings are removed prior to entry, including any face veils. Other places eg schools, airplanes etc should also be allowed to request that faces are fully visible for the ease or comfort of other people there. In addition, UK Law should make it clear that burkhas are not to be seen as a religious necessity and will not be given special treatment. They're merely a dress choice.

**From Ian Norris:**

As far as I'm concerned, if a person doesn't want me to see them, I won't - in fact I'll act as if they are not there. If that offends their (or anyone else's) idea of human rights, tough. I don't answer cold callers on the 'phone for similar reasons.

**From Jack Laverty:**

Whichever way you look at it, any face covering is a 'disguise' designed to conceal the face. There

is no place in any society for disguises to be worn in public.

**From Bob Hamilton:**

Balaclavas and crash helmets are often not permitted in, say, banks, and some shops (I've seen a recent sign at a Curry's store).

Who likes to be walking down a narrow street at night past a group of hoodies who are deliberately hiding their faces?

Where faces are seen as an identifying feature, there should be no reason at all to hide behind any kind of mask. Like Banks, cash machines with cameras, and where passports are being checked against their owners' features.

But face masks at a carnival; balaclavas for cyclists in winter; and covering your head and face with a jacket against a bitter wind are probably OK.

It seems then that the issue is one of perceived deliberate effrontery to the society hosting people from an "alien" culture.

I should think that it would be very easy to implement a ban on face coverings in what in England we term "face to face communication", but incredibly difficult to enforce a ban on face coverings while in the street.

But for me, it's the feeling that somebody is being deliberately offensive when wearing a face covering for no reason other than just to hide their face. We identify and assess each other by facial expression, any attempt to make that impossible (including hoodies) should make anybody wary.

**From John Ridell**

To me, a garment that completely conceals a person, including their face, indicates a seriously unhealthy mind, either in the wearer or in whoever coerces her to adopt it. I also think women who cut themselves off so completely from normal behaviour must be made to accept that the rest of us are free to refuse to take any notice of them, as Philip Hollobone says.

**From William Starling:**

I am against the forced or coerced veiling of women, but banning the veil solves nothing. If an interpretation of the Islamic modesty requirements means that the veil is the only way a woman may be allowed out of the house, then the veil really is liberating for these women. Freedom from oppression can not be achieved through further oppression. These women must be educated and supported, but ultimately if from a point of education and safety they still choose to wear the veil then we (the non veil wearers) must accept that as their right.

**From Robert Nance:**

I think it outrageous and totalitarian that anybody should be banned from wearing anything. Nevertheless I think that anyone who covers their face should take the consequences of doing such a thing and not be expected to be treated normally. I would interact as little as I possibly could with anyone who had their face covered.

**From Karen Wood:**

I can see no reason to ban the wearing of the headscarf. Until the 1960's most women wore one. It does not conceal identity and is not really a religious issue at all. It is purely a matter for individual choice.

Not so the full face veil or any variant of it. That too is not essentially a religious issue although it will be promulgated as such, as that is where Western liberalism is weakest especially in the UK. We have such a horror of religious intolerance, not without good reason, that we will give yield the field rather than fight a battle which appears to be about religion. However it is not. It is a cultural diktat and needs to be addressed on those grounds. In our society everyone is equal before the law and everyone needs to be identifiable in public. Covering ones face is perceived at best as rude and at worst as dishonest. No one should be permitted to enter a Bank, government building or any commercial premises or indeed any building where there are other people, with their identity concealed. No crash helmets, no hoodies, no balaclavas, ski masks, niqabs or burqas. No exceptions. One law, one nation, one community

**From Paul Martin:**

I am not in favour of a law that means you can be arrested simply for what you are wearing. Nor can I see why you should have to reveal your face to receive a service e. g. to pay your bill in a supermarket. I am unaware of any documented cases of patients refusing to unveil at a dentists. But I would hope that a doctor, nurse or counsellor would not stay veiled when helping me.

**From Jeanette Heffernan:**

When the biblical religions can prove scientifically with DNA evidence that 'Eve' actually committed the 'crime' that forces all Islamic women to wear a veil so as not to impede a man's right to salvation then perhaps a veil could be considered as necessity.

There is no scientific evidence for this couple, Adam & Eve are not the parents of modern homo sapiens, mankind is not guilty of this so called 'Crime'. Treating women as less than human because of this myth is obscene and should stop.

Banning all face coverings that impede recognition in public should be mandatory for public safety everywhere. Helmets, hoodies, masks, sunglasses anything that gives offense and causes anxiety in casual public contacts.

However if anyone wants to cover up in the privacy of their own home that is their business.

**From: Mcds** (name and address supplied):

It is already accepted in this society there are restrictions on what you can wear. For example, you will be arrested by the police if you walk down a street in the UK naked; they would probably still arrest you in your underpants. In Monte Carlo a man cannot stroll around the streets with a bared chest without getting attention from the authorities.

Veiling the face when talking to someone is just rude and disrespectful.

Let's not ban it, but people should be free to have the choice whether they wish to talk to such rude and ignorant veiled individuals. Liberty have got a hold of the wrong end of the stick with their threat to Philip Hollobone MP. This is not a religious freedom issue, especially as the veil is not strictly Islamic at all, but it is a rudeness issue.

**From Red Kite** (name and address supplied):

A young man who wore a balaclava in public would be considered suspect. It is both racist and sexist to accept a hidden face from only one gender within a single community.

**From Rosemary Ewles:**

This is a highly emotive issue and I struggle within myself to separate what I recognise as my own prejudice against any religious diktat concerning people's dress and appearance from what I believe is the right of people to dress as they wish. However, I believe the latter must be tempered by wider social considerations that respect broader human beliefs everywhere. In most social contexts it is not acceptable for people to walk around naked because it offends a wide variety of social conventions and taboos. Similarly, I believe that to refuse to reveal the face - its character and expression, the means by which we recognise and test our confidence in each other as individuals - is fundamentally anti-social. It seems to me that leaving aside all other issues about Islamic beliefs - or those of any other cult which feels the need to obliterate the public persona of women - the habit of covering the face is something we must object to as essentially anti-social.

**From Matt Beeson:**

I would like to see a ban on the face veil as it is a tool of repression. Also I think this society has no qualms in banning hoodies, balaclavas and crash helmets as ways of covering identity so why not veils. They have already been used in crimes to cover identity. There is no compulsion in Islam to wear one so ban it. I feel that anyone who wishes to move to a more liberal society (in terms of Burkas) could try Saudi or Afghanistan.

**From Sue Cauty:**

I blame 'Political Correctness'. PC was supposed to prevent small pockets of racism. Instead it has grown to be a monster which divides Britain into 'factions with issues'. Less and less can be criticised. We are self-censoring ourselves into social impotence. We are rapidly losing the ability to differentiate between right and wrong - let alone correct it. E.g. the veil and sharia. What is right and beneficial about the face veil?

**From Ron Cooper:**

For me the issue is not whether women can function wearing a face mask (which is what a veil is) but whether society can function with a proportion of the population masked. I think not!

**From Chris Condon:**

The burqa and niqab serve as very useful reminders that men invented gods to oppress women and should not be banned, any more than members of the Klu Klux Klan should be banned from wearing their religious robes.

**From Jean Clark:**

Personally I detest the burqa and niqab veil forms. I can't begin to understand how anyone could wish to wear one, but I do understand man's controlling tendencies and insecure jealousies that may lead to forcing "their" woman to wear one. Submission to Allah is one thing, but submission to another human was never meant to be. We already have laws against this sort of freakish behavior, but they require sufferers to protest. The full face-veil is an affront to an open and liberal society. People wearing them are choosing (or are forced by someone else) not to accept our

society, openly shunning us.

However, the Government should only outlaw them in public service buildings, and I would give businesses the choice whether to allow people to wear them or not. We know that some malls have outlawed the wearing of hoodies and baseball caps. If they allow burqas, where is the consistency?

As full-veils are a clear indication of extremism, the wearer and their family become an easy target for our security forces to follow and watch. It is better these people are known; out in the open instead of hidden.

The hijab, on the other hand, is merely the equivalent of a headscarf, no different from the habit a nun wears, or the coverings my Gran used to wear. And a little bit of mystery is always a good thing.

**From Dave Hawkins:**

Any legislation should be worded not to specify religious garb ,just the act of face covering where it would interfere with others safety and liberty and effectiveness of communication of those in key roles eg eachers police bank clerks etc

The galling position of exemption from legal obligations based on a stated belief in a magical being should not be allowed in a modern democracy.

**From Douglas Varney:**

The religious significance of the face veil is of interest to the wearer only. For the rest of us it is simply something covering the face and ought to be regarded in the same way as a crash helmet or a Halloween mask. A person ought to be free to go about with their face covered, but should expect to uncover it in a bank, or to be asked to do so on private premises such as shops at the discretion of the proprietor. It shouldn't be necessary to legislate for this.

**From Elrick Dodd:**

As a liberal secular humanist, I don't really have a problem with what people wear.

However, covering the face is very different, and I can't find any religious justification for it.

I have no doubt whatsoever that this is simply men controlling 'their' women.

These 'men' believe that in the Western Democracies, we (western males) will be driven wild with desire at the sight of a woman's face !!

This is worse than medieval, and is the result of fundamentalist 'education' (the Christian Taliban in the USA is moving in the same direction !), nothing more.

**From Peter Arnold:**

If a woman is not to be allowed to cover her face maybe it is time face-obscuring motor-cyclists helmets were also made illegal.

There must be circumstances in which it is officially necessary to see a person's face but for most of us masking ones face suggests that we have an ulterior motive.

Among non-Muslims we may suspect that it is a hang-over from a time when Muslim men

regarded wives and daughters as their private property, so I wonder how many who are living in Europe still do. Perhaps it is just a small minority and that other Muslim women are accepted and often welcomed as part of our local community and dress more or less like other European women.

I think the 19th century European imperialists made a similarly bad impression when they refused to adopt the local dress codes so today we should encourage Muslim women to adopt the dress code of the natives.

**From Nicholas Clode:**

As a small-government Libertarian, I am of the view that it is no business of the State's what a private individual may wear in a public place: such a law has no place in any liberal society. Anybody who calls themselves a liberal, but demands that the State prohibits the wearing of certain items of clothing, is anything but.

On the other hand, it should be entirely at the discretion of a private citizen, business, or public body, to prohibit the wearing of any facial coverings on their property, without having to justify their actions. Moreover, the law should not censure such people, or bodies, should they choose to exercise that prerogative.

**From Sylvia Trench:**

It is no more acceptable to wear a burqua than it would be to wear a balaclava or a motorcycle helmet. I am frightened of anyone hiding their face: who will defend my right to refuse to be treated by a nurse or a doctor or served by check out assistants, teachers, carers, etc hiding their face?

This practice, is not a religious requirement and is at the very least an extreme discourtesy, certainly as un-British as is religious intolerance, and can pose both a security risk as well as a cover for fraud.

**From Helen B (full name and address supplied):**

Legislation preventing citizens freedom to wear what they want, where doing so does no harm to others, is a dangerous line to cross. It would simply reflect the intolerance of societies where religious diktat results in such repression. Umbrage taken by the wider public is not sufficient.

Being a woman with a transsexual history, I strongly believe in individual choice and freedom to present oneself as one chooses. Education, persuasion and debate are far better tools than draconian law which will only damage a tolerant society and create religious "martyrs".

**From Alan Lay:**

Apart from hiding identity Burqas should come with a Health & Safety and Risk assesment warning.

Shielding skin from sunlight can cause a lack of vitamins in northern climates, leading to foetus developing skeletal problems that cannot be made better once born. The lack of clear sight has been the cause of women being run over when crossing roads wearing the full veil that stops their eyes from being seen, and how do these females recognise each other.

**From Elaine Ansell:**

I feel that face veils should be banned for security reasons. We have already had one man escape from UK justice as he got on a plane dressed as a woman in a face veil. If these people are not required to show their faces where does that leave the rest of us? Therefore what is the use of a

passport for anyone?

Women should be proud of their bodies which includes their faces.

It is difficult to see a facial expression and to understand someone speaking with their face covered.

Women should not be made to cover their faces.

**From Ken Broughton:**

In societies where it is not the norm to cover one's face, it is a matter of common politeness not to do so in public; "When in Rome" etc.! Responsibility for the provision of special facilities such as have been suggested for airport security, in order to accommodate one or more belief systems, cannot be made incumbent upon a society that truly believes in equality. It is immaterial whether alternative facilities can be provided easily or not. Equally irrelevant, but true, is the fact that the contentious attire is not a Koranic religious requirement.

**From Andy Langdon:**

Some say wearing the veil is exercising freedom of choice but if you are forced to wear the veil then it's a deprivation of choice! The veil is a device for the dehumanisation of women unfortunately some Muslim women can't see that religion blinds reason.

**From Jonathan Agar:**

The law must not presume that anyone is brainwashed by a culture, otherwise all sorts of people could be endangered, like sex workers. I don't believe in banning clothing, but the Equality Act should be disapplied to anyone who covers their face, whether with burqa or balaclava. No one should expect to receive a service in public while so dressed, just as if they dressed in "Ku Klux Klan or Nazi regalia".

Warsi may think they can function in society, but society shouldn't have to accommodate those consciously distancing themselves from it.

**From Meredith Doig:**

As a feminist, I have struggled with this matter. On the one hand there is a view that women should be free to choose to wear whatever they like; on the other hand, there are severe doubts that women so choosing are genuinely free to choose.

I admit to feeling extremely uncomfortable with the idea of seeing any person, be they a woman or not, with their face completely hidden from view. Underlying this discomfort is, I suspect, an innate psychological feeling that interactions between free and equal citizens should be reciprocal and that if someone can see my face and therefore judge my body language, I should be able to see their face and judge their body language.

As a rationalist, I believe modern democratic societies do operate on the basis of a social contract between society's members. That contract, explicit in our laws and implicit in our culture, includes this sense of fair reciprocity as well as non-discrimination. To test the latter, I ask myself "Would I feel equally uncomfortable if a group of men claimed the right to cover their faces with a mask in the name of their cultural traditions, for example?" The answer is, yes, I would. My attitude is not related to gender nor to the freedom to express one's religion. I have no objection to the wearing of headscarves or crosses.

Apart from any feminist objections, the full niqab or burqa is incompatible with modern democratic values of fair reciprocity and non-discrimination.

**From Steve Rudhall:**

My position is as follows:

Paragraph (a): Subject to para. (b), a person is free to wear (or not wear) anything they like.

Paragraph (b): Paragraph (a) does not apply where:

- a person's safety is at risk, or
- a person's legal rights concerning property is compromised.
- a person's legal rights concerning conduct of business or employment is compromised.

Therefore for a general banning of veils would be a breach of the wearer's freedom. However, there will be many instances where they be required to at least temporarily remove clothing, for example:

- whenever visual identification is legally required (e.g. court, security areas, bank, government dept., etc.)
- whenever legally required for employment reasons (e.g. uniform, dress code, safety, etc)
- whenever the Police/Customs/Prison officer suspects stealing or smuggling or where safety is compromised.

The existing law already covers most situations where 'lifting the veil' would be reasonable. I would welcome any review of the law to ensure it is comprehensive and clarified with respect to:

rights of employers, business owners, non-profits and Government to establish dress standards.

adequate protection for people who feel they are forced to wear, or not wear, clothing against their wishes.

In short, being offended by the burqa/veil/shoes/haircut - the list is endless - is not a good enough reason to ban it.

**From Andrew Irvine:**

I don't believe that arguments about sexism are the right way to go in this argument. These women are being fooled in to wearing them and education, rather than force, can stop that. The idea should be to stop religion affecting law, on the basis that it should have no authority over anyone other than those that choose it. Using those guidelines, I think that any religious clothing should not be exempt from safety law. If face covering is not allowed, like in banks, then it should be all face coverings. Eek, I seem to have used exactly 100 words.



**From Patricia Marsh-Stefnowska:**

The first job I had as a teacher of English as a Second Language was with recently-arrived women in Leicester in the early 70s. Many of them were Muslim. I shall never forget their joy in being treated as individuals and able to wear whatever they liked in this country.

Although this is nearly 40 years ago, I cannot believe that these women, their daughters and granddaughters now think so differently that they do not still appreciate the protection of British law in the enjoyment of hard-won equal rights for women. There is a lot of justifiable fear of their menfolk and it seems to me beyond question that a law banning the burqa would assist many of them considerably, even if they are afraid to say so.

**From Robert Kaye:**

Stand up for human rights and oppose the enslavement of women via the burqha. If you were forced to live as someone's property like many Islamic women in burqhas do you would be hoping that someone took a stand to free you.

Be that someone for their sake.

**From Anthony Niall:**

A recent Yougov poll put 2/3 of the British public in favour of a ban on the burqah.

I would therefore urge everyone to write to their MPs to reiterate the point that this oppressive garment should be outlawed.

If MPs do not vote for the ban in Hollobone's forthcoming Bill, it will be a slap in the face for the British people and the secular democracy we all cherish - and a victory to the Islamist lobby .

**From Kath Richardson:**

Veils represent the subjugation of women. Whether it's for cultural or religious reasons is irrelevant. Whether women are brainwashed into believing it's their choice is irrelevant. However I also believe in the freedom of people to make their own choices so would reject an outright ban and go for a compromise ban in state places (statutory meeting places such as government or education buildings). As to John Stuart Mill's litmus test, it does harm. It helps maintain a culture that encourages female genital mutilation.

**From Paul Tavener:**

In my opinion it is simply rude to hide your own face whilst expecting to reading everyone else's facial expressions.

Whilst this is a matter of personal freedom, society already restrains personal freedom in public places based on public attitudes. For instance it is not permitted for people to walk around naked in public places. Ultimately perhaps it would be best to be guided by public opinion for what is appropriate in public.

**Gloria Moreno-Castillo**

- 1) The law is too blunt. We don't really understand whether they see it as a statement of cultural identity, a symbol of their own set of "values", a status symbol among themselves, a sense of belonging.
- 2) Making it illegal would give the men an excuse for not letting them go out at all.
- 3) For someone to become open-minded and brave enough to decide for herself what to wear, she needs to have opportunities available to her. Better go to college wrapped up and stifled from top to toe than not to go at all.

**From Malcolm Hutton:**

This is a [big issue](#) in Australia at the moment. Radio talk shows are getting many phone calls and all I have heard disapprove of the woman called Tasneem being allowed to wear the Burka while giving evidence in court.

I believe that it is only fair that a jury be allowed to see her face, just as they can see facial expressions from all the other witnesses. Otherwise any decision handed down could be challenged in an appeal.

The really crazy part of this account is that the Judge is going to take two whole weeks to decide whether or not she can wear the veil while giving evidence.

**From Mark Francis:**

I do not favour a burka ban partly because mainstream Muslims deny that this is a religious requirement but more a product of tribal cultures. If people want to go around dressed in a gorilla suit (as many London Marathon runners do for some odd reason) then they have the same right to do so. That said, appearing in a gorilla suit in your passport photo is not acceptable. Perhaps the people who want to ban the burka are religious bigots anyway. Countries where it is banned such as Turkey or Syria – or for that matter, France, are hardly models for us in the field of human rights.

**From Jean Grant** (author: *The Burning Veil*)

In Saudi Arabia, as a foreigner I did not have to veil my face. I did have to cover up--legs and arms--and resented men in power telling me how I could and could not clothe myself.

In Europe, which is supposedly "free," are men in power to tell women what they can and cannot put on their faces? It's an abuse.

**From Martin Ambaum:**

Whatever the arguments for or against face veils, we can all observe that there are few (or no) women in public life, even in Islamic countries, that wear a face veil. To claim that it does not inhibit public functioning is naive. It may be illiberal to impose an outright ban, but at the same time we need not give the face veil some veneer of respectability by making it some untouchable personal freedom. It is, in the end, a pretty idiotic habit.

**From Graham Wright:**

Those who are against banning face coverings in public claim that it would restrict an individual's freedom to wear what they want. But there is no such right. Society has always dictated how people should dress. Muslim women who complain about persecution for wearing the veil would

do well to review the case of Stephen Gough, the so called 'naked rambler', who has spent most of the last four years incarcerated in various Scottish prisons, simply because he refuses to wear any clothes in public. He has harmed no-one, shown aggression to no-one, and I am not aware of any logical reason as to why he should not be allowed to walk around naked whenever he wants. But society deems it to be unacceptable, because some people find it offensive (mostly religious people, I suspect).

Well, I find the wearing of face coverings offensive, and if these people aren't prepared to show me the respect of allowing me to see them when I'm speaking to them, then I don't want to talk to them!

I do think that a ban might be problematical, because, in many cases, it targets the victims rather than the criminals. I would rather see a ban on coercing people to wear the veil, which would include any literature that tells people they should cover their faces (or indeed any other part of themselves) for religious reasons.

#### **From Christopher Church:**

Like most things in life, religion is a personal choice. The wearing of clothes is a matter of common decency, the covering of the face is a matter which causes exclusion which has many consequences particularly to the women wearing it.

To ban the covering of the face is pure and simple common sense. Currently only women choose to cover their faces. Will there be a time when men also decide to cover their faces, after all, it would be sex discrimination to not allow them to, can you imagine. I find the covering of the face totally inappropriate in this country on every level.

I run a hotel in Devon and this topic seems to be the one which makes almost everybody's blood boil. The phrase I hear most at the moment is the 'this country is finished' I'm at the point where I'm considering leaving this country.

#### **From Sidney Holt:**

An issue that should perhaps not be forgotten is the importance of body language, and especially facial expression in communication between humans. If I am talking to someone, perhaps having an argument, who is wearing dark sunglasses when there is no sun or other real reason for that I am uncomfortable, and if I was in the position of interviewing someone for a job, or discussing a security issue with them I would want to insist on their removing their "shades". I feel the same way about veiled women and men in balaclavas.

#### **From John Hunt:**

If we took 'personal freedom' to its logical conclusion, everyone would be able to behave just as they please. That would be anarchy and no society could thrive on that basis; it is not a viable option. Baroness Warsi's argument is fallacious and in any case misses the point that anyone who hides their identity in public is likely to be viewed with suspicion. Sadly, Liberty too is misguided. The Belgians have the right idea and for the right reason. For public safety we need to be able to identify everyone, irrespective of their politics, race or religion. There may be exceptions (e.g. genuine protection—inclement weather, motor-cyclists) but in general, hiding one's identity (face) in public should be prohibited for all of us.

#### **Kathy from Kettering:**

I think that the Burka should not be allowed in any public place because of security and ID issues.

Although the right to do what one wants in private should never be taken away unless it threatens or damages others. No matter what our individual ideals or beliefs are, as soon as we try to impose them on others we risk becoming a danger to liberty and freedom.

**From Peter Marshall:**

The veil is a fundamentalist statement, an incitement, an attention grabbing two fingers to the godless, a steadfast roadblock in the path of the gradual withdrawal of religion in the West. Do not see it as the choice of a woman, see it as the silent AK47 of a religion that refuses to blend with the modern Europe it so detests. The rights and freedoms that we enjoy as we slowly unshackle ourselves from religious dogma should not be used to excuse a faith that will happily turn our liberalism on ourselves in order to return us to the miserable oppression of enforced piety.

**Iftikhar Ahmad:**

In western democracies, we believe in freedom of religion, if that's what women decide to do, it's their right!! Whether it's accepted by others or not! Slaves are required to dress as others dictate. Free people can dress as they like.

If wearing a burka is not good, why are American and European women are raped everyday more then the Muslim women? But if a woman has a choice, and she chooses to wear whatever she chooses to wear then she's not oppressed is she?

Critics claim that the burka alienates Muslim women from the rest of society. But Lady Warsi said the burka did not act as a barrier in itself. She added: 'There are women who wear the burka who run extremely successful businesses – internet businesses, which don't actually require you to be there face to face.' I don't believe it's for the state to say what we can and cannot wear. Any woman who supports the burkha should wear one.

There is a social and economic pressure on Muslim women not to cover themselves with Hijab or Niqab. Syeda Warsi is a member of the Tory Cabinet because she does not cover herself with Hijab or Niqab. Only those Muslim women who are having post of responsibility are those who do not cover themselves. Only those Muslim women receive OBE, who do not cover themselves. Banning the veil or blocking the building of minarets would alienate the Muslim community and threaten social cohesion. There is no need for the British Establishment to ban Niqab because it is a Munafiq society. Those western European countries who have banned Niqab are Kaffir.

**From Clay Smith:**

I am not religious, and I do not have the fears of hell or the fears of not going to heaven. I believe in cultural evolution, and I think that the Muslim women will adopt to our cultural evolutions in time. They will become women, and not Muslim women. Although they will of course remain Muslims. It is only time that will determine the outcome of the burqa. For now, we will all see the burqa remain, until the women, and only the women decide to remove the burqa, for the better of the women, and of their culture (which they will have to invent). They will eventually see the disloyalty and ignorance in their men, within their culture. I'm not racist, but the world is getting smaller, cultures will, and are clashing. What we are seeing today, are the kind of things that we have already seen, and battled to eradicate for the better. It is up to them, the Muslim women to turn the tide. We can not force them, but we can display our kindness to the women, and acceptance with kindness. only this will force their own contemplation of their culture, and of their burqas.

**From Diesel Balaam:**

This issue has been debated in the Freethinker magazine, the majority favouring a ban, a minority preferring a partial ban. The majority view is predicated on the specious liberal-feminist notion that Muslim women are coerced into wearing their masks and ghoul gowns by their husbands and male relatives. In the majority of cases, this is not so. This turns the whole matter into a freedom of expression issue.

The burqa may be an unwelcome sight, but we must support the right of devout Muslim women to wear the burqa and veil if they genuinely so wish. A partial ban, in the interests of airport security, would seem to make sense, as well as a ban in face-to-face interactive situations like the school room, or at the supermarket checkout. There may also be a case on health and safety grounds - on rollercoasters or in swimming pools, for example. It's really just a case of accommodating other people's freedoms, wherever possible, even those freedoms one rather wishes they didn't exercise!

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