

# Britons and Blasphemy - Defending Free Speech in a Changing Britain



**Monday, 29 September**



**12:45 to 13:45**



**Sherwood Arena Room,  
Secure Zone, ACC Liverpool**



**Will Hazell**  
**(Chair)**  
The i  
Paper



**Lizzi  
Collinge MP**  
MP for Morecambe &  
Lunesdale



**Andrew  
Copson**  
Humanists  
UK



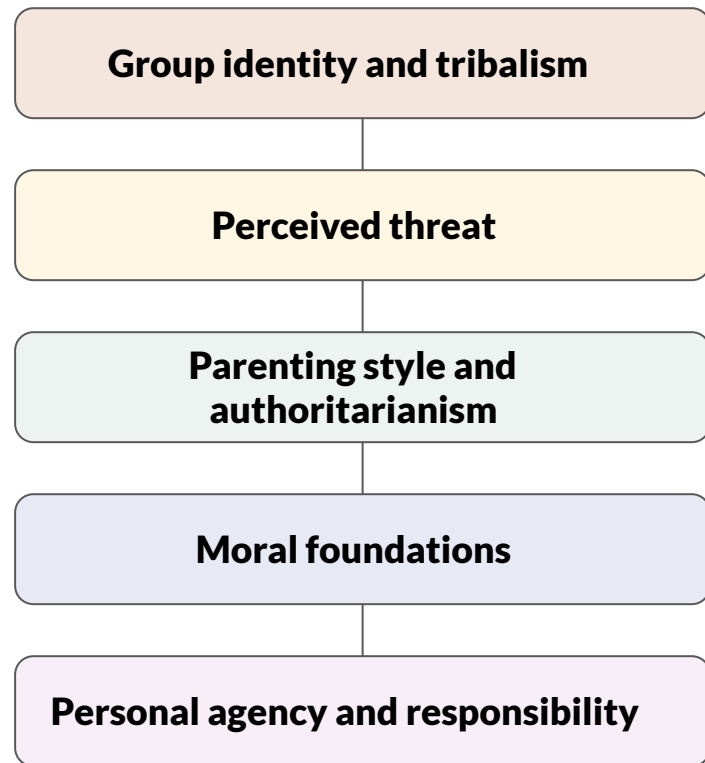
**Luke  
Tryl**  
More in  
Common



**Sam  
Rushworth MP**  
MP for Bishop  
Auckland

# Our unique lens - The British Seven Segments

- The 'British Seven' segments were formulated in our 'Shattered Britain' report, published in 2025
- They are created entirely from questions around areas of core beliefs, drawn from social psychology: group identity and tribalism, perceived threat, parenting style and authoritarianism, moral foundations, personal agency and responsibility
- No demographic information (race, class, or gender) is used for the segmentation, though the segments created by this process often have demographic differences
- Segmentation shows that values and beliefs are powerful in influencing how individuals form opinions about issues and their behaviour. Often, the segments are more predictive of beliefs than any other metric



## Progressive Activists



...an outspoken group that is politically engaged and globally minded, championing social justice but feeling alienated from mainstream politics

## Incrementalist Left



...a group that leans left and trusts institutions, often stepping back from the news and avoiding politically fraught debates

## Established Liberals



... a prosperous group that is confident in institutions, values expertise, and believes the system broadly works

## Sceptical Scrollers



...a disengaged group that has lost trust in mainstream institutions and increasingly looks online for sources of truth

## Rooted Patriots



...a patriotic group that feels overlooked by elites and wants leaders with common sense to protect local identity

## Traditional Conservatives



... a nostalgic group that respects tradition, authority and personal responsibility, while remaining sceptical of rapid change

## Dissenting Disruptors

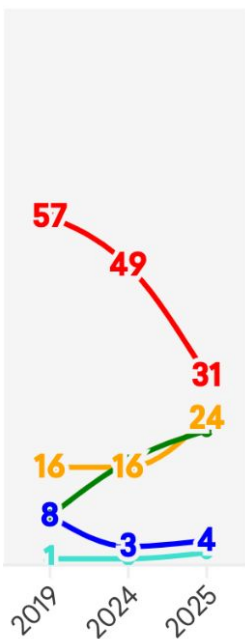


... a frustrated group that craves radical change and backs strong leaders who promise to shake up a broken system

# How would the seven segments vote?

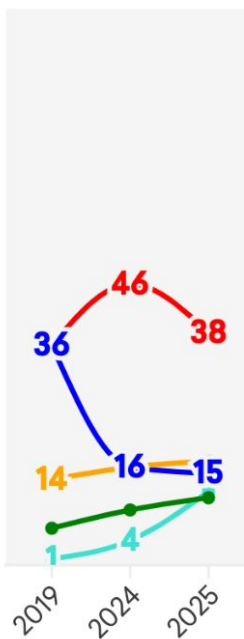
## Progressive Activists

"Corbynites"



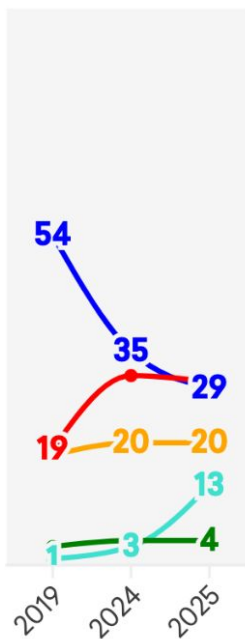
## Incrementalist Left

"Social democrats"



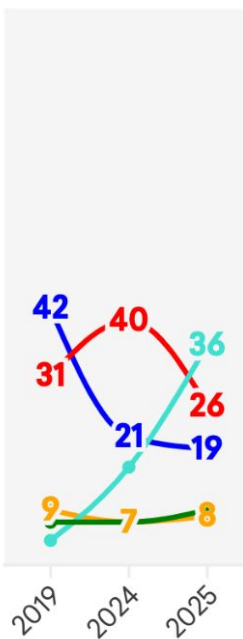
## Established Liberals

"Blue Wall"



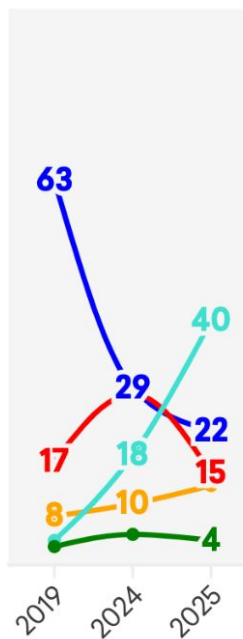
## Sceptical Scrollers

"Online Disengaged"



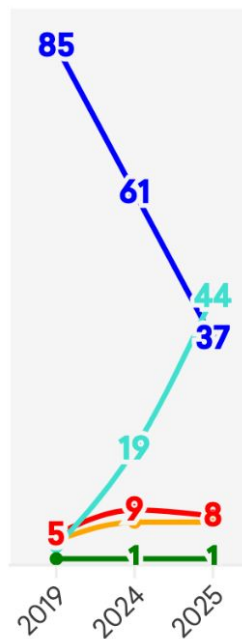
## Rooted Patriots

"Red Wall"



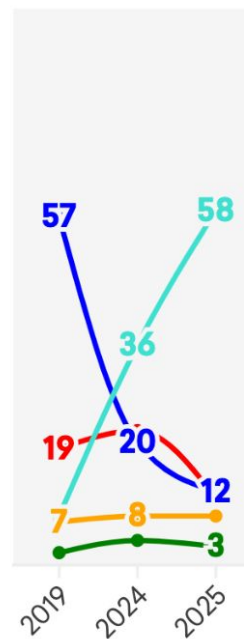
## Traditional Conservatives

"Shire Tory"



## Dissenting Disruptors

"Populist Right"



Labour's 2024 coalition

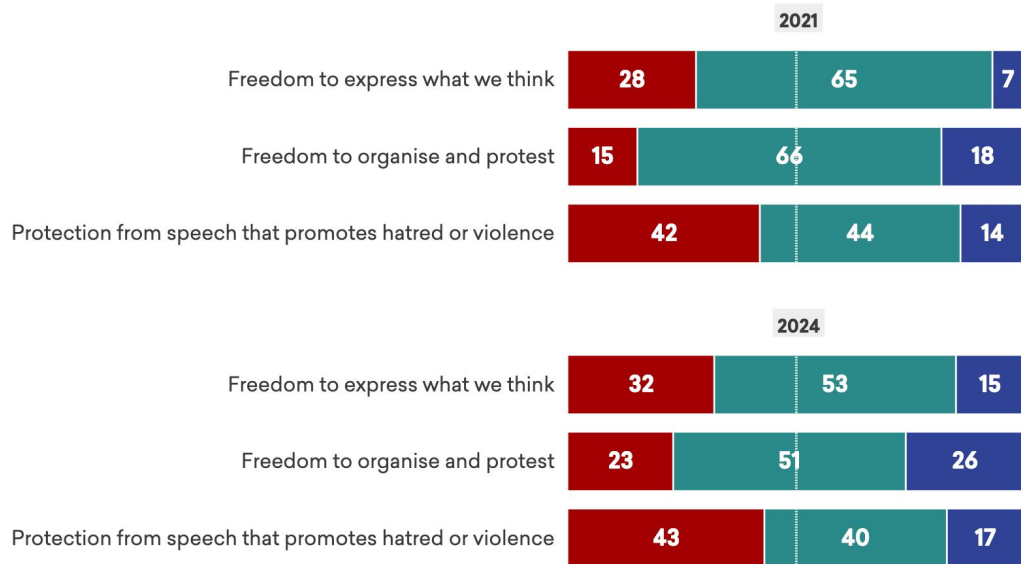


# **British attitudes to free speech**

# Falling satisfaction with the settlement on free expression

## A growing number of Britons say we have too little freedom of expression

● Too little ● The right amount ● Too much



Britons tend to be happy with the current settlement on freedom of expression in Britain - however this satisfaction is falling.

In 2021, 65 per cent of Britons thought we had the right amount of freedom to express what we think - a figure which had fallen to 53 per cent by 2024. The number satisfied with our freedom to organise and protest had fallen from 66 per cent to 51 per cent in the same time span.

# One of Britain's fault lines: Free speech for all v Protection from hate speech

Few Britons have a completely libertarian approach to free speech; however while some prioritise everyone's right to express their views freely, others prioritise protecting minority groups from hate and discrimination.

62% think political correctness is a problem in the UK, but a similar number (58%) think it is important we protect people from hate speech.

Half the country (52%) say they feel a pressure to speak about subjects like immigration in a certain way.

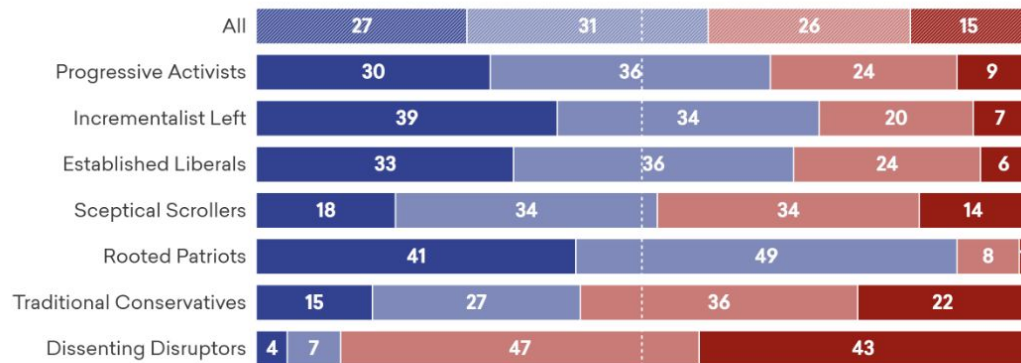
Which comes closer to your view?

● 1 - We need to protect people from dangerous and hateful speech.

● 2

● 3

● 4 - People should have the freedom to express their views, even if they are controversial or offensive.



*"I worry about saying the wrong thing sometimes. I'm sort of like self-policing to make sure that I'm not saying the wrong thing because things that were acceptable a number of years ago are not anymore, and it's just a case of keeping up to date with what is okay and what isn't. Okay. So sometimes I just don't say anything because I'm not really sure if it's alright."*

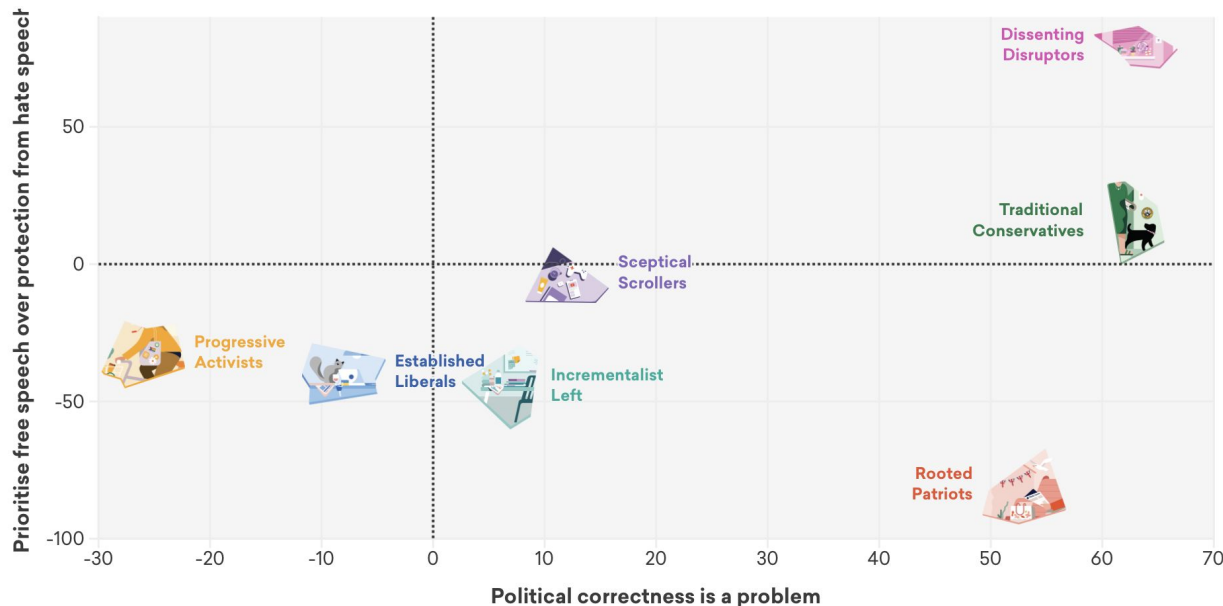
*Annette, Rooted Patriot, Bury*

# Free speech, political correctness, and hate speech

The more socially conservative segments believe political correctness is a problem, but differ in how to handle offensive speech. **Traditional Conservatives** and **Dissenting Disruptors** prioritise free speech, even if offensive, while **Rooted Patriots** lean toward protecting people from harmful speech.

Socially liberal segments see increased sensitivity to offence as positive, and often support no-platforming of extreme views.

## Exploring the segments' attitudes toward free speech

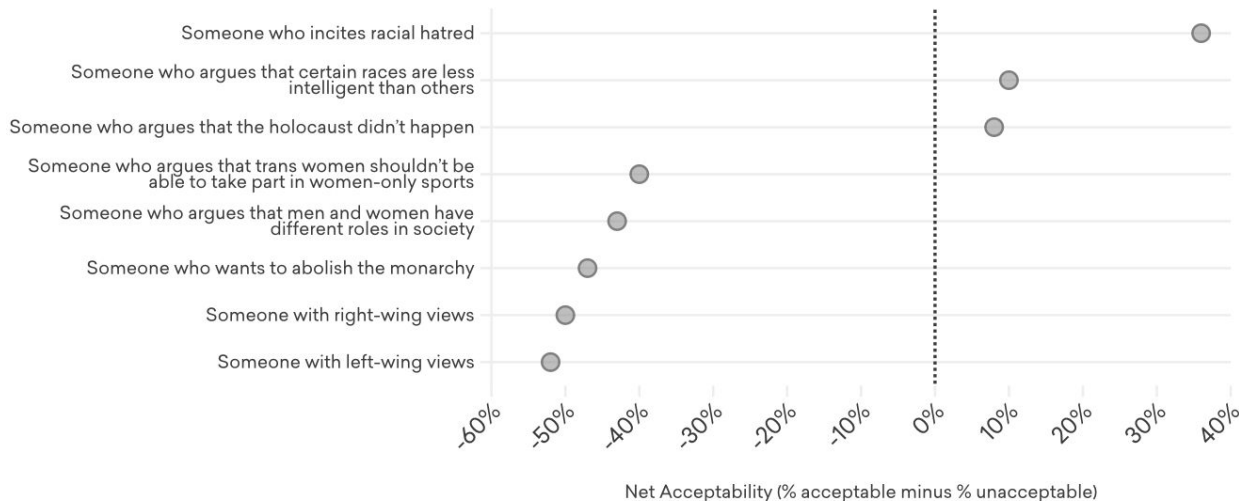




# Attitudes on no-platforming: It depends...

There are occasions when the public think it is appropriate to restrict free speech in the interests of safety or public protection, with inciting racism one clear line. However, all segments are likely to see no-platforming a speaker for expressing left or right wing views as unacceptable.

“No platforming” refers to preventing someone from taking part in a public debate or meeting, due to them holding views perceived as unacceptable or offensive. For each of the following speakers, please say whether you think it would be acceptable or unacceptable to prevent them from speaking in a public debate or meeting:



*“It's not about limiting free speech, I think it's about making sure people are aware that freedom of speech doesn't mean freedom from consequences.”*  
*Flo, Progressive Activist, Bristol*



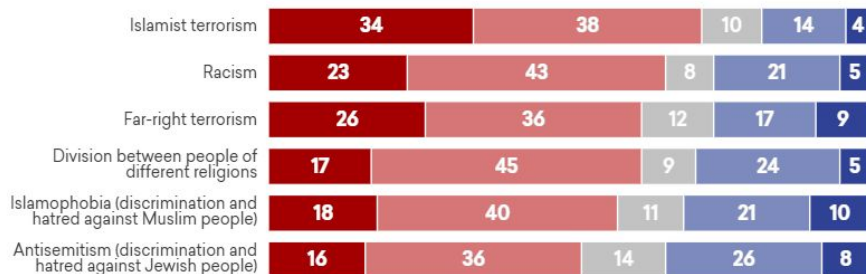
# **Attitudes to religious freedom and blasphemy**

# Broad concerns about division and extremism

## A majority of Britons see racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia as serious issues

In your opinion, how serious are the following issues in the UK today?

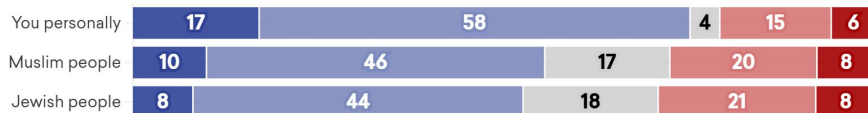
● Very serious ● Somewhat serious ● Don't know ● Not that serious ● Not serious at all



Source: More in Common • January 2025

Do you think the UK in 2024 is a safe or unsafe place for...

● Very safe place ● Mostly safe place ● Don't know ● Mostly unsafe place ● Very unsafe place



Source: More in Common, January 2025

There are high levels of concern about different types of extremism in the UK. However, the concern is far less politically polarised than in other countries, with overlapping concern across different political groups and broad agreement on the diagnosis of the problems facing the country. This is a strength when compared to elsewhere, including the US where concerns about extremism is more polarised.

**75 percent of those concerned about Islamist extremism are also concerned about far-right extremism, and 68 percent are concerned about Islamophobia.**

**However there are worries about the safety of minorities in the UK - 3 in 10 think the UK is an unsafe place for Muslims and Jewish people.**

# Higher expectations on integration

## Which of the following do you think should be part of the Government's policy on integration?

Select all that apply



What's clear from our polling is that the public want the government to set higher expectations for new arrivals to the UK to integrate, with particular concerns over extremism and learning English.

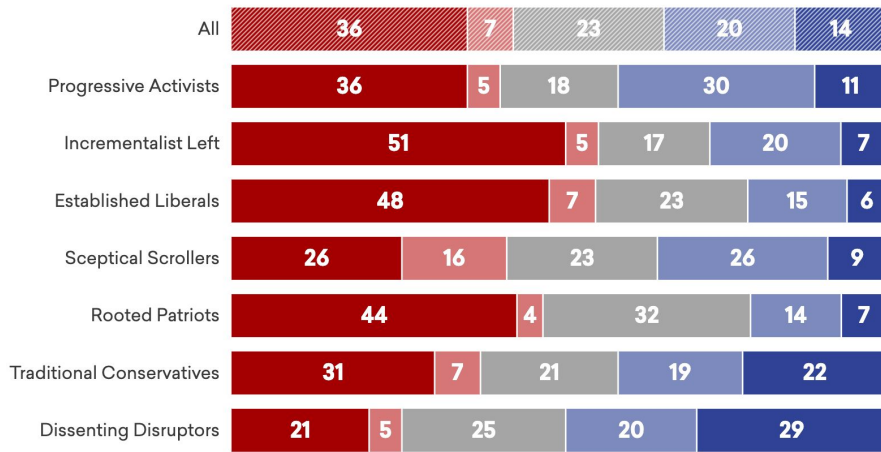
There is a clear demand from the public that British law takes precedence over religious law, and that non citizens who spread extremist ideology are deported.

# Four in ten Britons think there should be legal consequences for damaging religious texts

## 43 per cent of Britons think there should be legal consequences for damaging religious texts

'Religious hatred' means hatred against people of a particular religion or belief  
Which comes closest to your view...

- Damaging religious texts is an act of religious hatred and should have legal consequences
- Damaging religious texts is not an act of religious hatred but should have legal consequences
- Don't know
- Damaging religious texts is an act of religious hatred but should not have legal consequences
- Damaging religious texts is not an act of religious hatred and should not have legal consequences



While there is not majority support, Britons do tend to agree with the idea that there should be legal consequences for damaging religious texts.

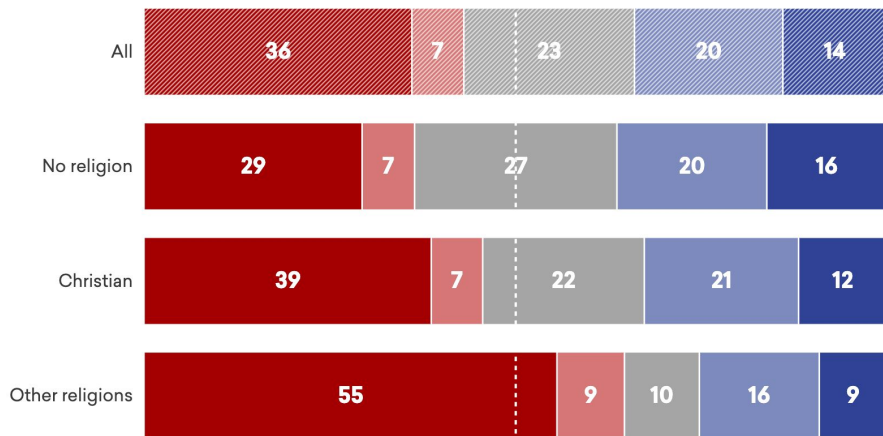
Dissenting Disruptors and Progressive Activists are the most likely to oppose this idea, whereas segments with higher trust in institutions tend to be more supportive of blasphemy laws - perhaps because they have greater trust that they would be implemented fairly.

# Religious people are more likely to support blasphemy laws

## Religious people, and particularly non-Christians, are more likely to support blasphemy laws

'Religious hatred' means hatred against people of a particular religion or belief  
Which comes closest to your view...

- Damaging religious texts is an act of religious hatred and should have legal consequences
- Damaging religious texts is not an act of religious hatred but should have legal consequences
- Don't know
- Damaging religious texts is an act of religious hatred but should not have legal consequences
- Damaging religious texts is not an act of religious hatred and should not have legal consequences



Despite this, there is significant variation in attitudes to blasphemy laws by Britain's religious groups. Atheists are more likely to say there should not be legal consequences for damaging religious texts, whereas Christians are more likely to say there should.

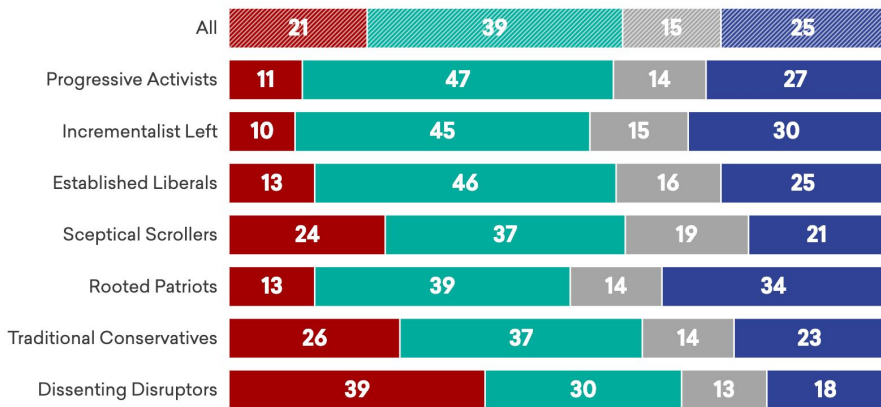
Members of non-Christian religions (most of whom are Muslim) are the most likely to support legal consequences for damaging religious texts.

# Blasphemy laws: A case study

## Britons tend to think a £300 fine for burning a Quran was about right

Below is a specific legal case which was taken to court in the UK earlier this year. An atheist asylum seeker from Turkey burned a Quran outside the Turkish Embassy in London while shouting, 'F\*\*\* Islam' and 'Islam is religion of terrorism'. He was convicted for disorderly behaviour within the hearing or sight of a person likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress thereby, which was motivated in part or in full by hatred towards a religious group, and ordered to pay fines of £336. Do you think this punishment was...

● Too harsh ● Fair ● Don't know ● Too lenient



When presented with information about a case earlier this year - where someone burned a Quran outside the Turkish Embassy in London - Britons tend to think that the £336 fine that person received was about right.

A quarter of the country think that this punishment was too lenient - most prominently the Rooted Patriots (the segment most concerned about hate speech more generally). In contrast, Dissenting Disruptors (who hold the most critical views of Islam and are most concerned about Government speech regulations) are most likely to think that the punishment was too harsh.

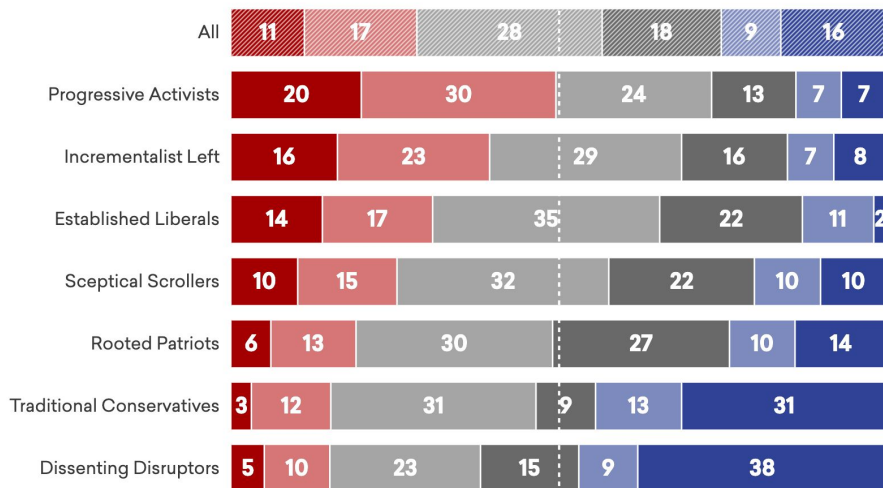


# Widespread indifference on Islamophobia definition

## Britons tend to be indifferent on the creation of a definition of Islamophobia

The UK government has set up a working group to develop a working definition of Islamophobia. To what extent do you support or oppose the government developing a definition of Islamophobia?

● Strongly support ● Somewhat support ● Neither support nor oppose ● Don't know  
● Somewhat oppose ● Strongly oppose



Few Britons have a strong view on the Government's plan to develop a definition for Islamophobia - with 46 per cent taking no view either way.

Progressive Activists - the group most concerned about Islamophobia generally - are most in favour of the policy (although even then just 50 per cent support). Conversely, Dissenting Disruptors are most likely to oppose the proposals, driven by their generally more critical views of Islam and their scepticism towards government regulation of speech.

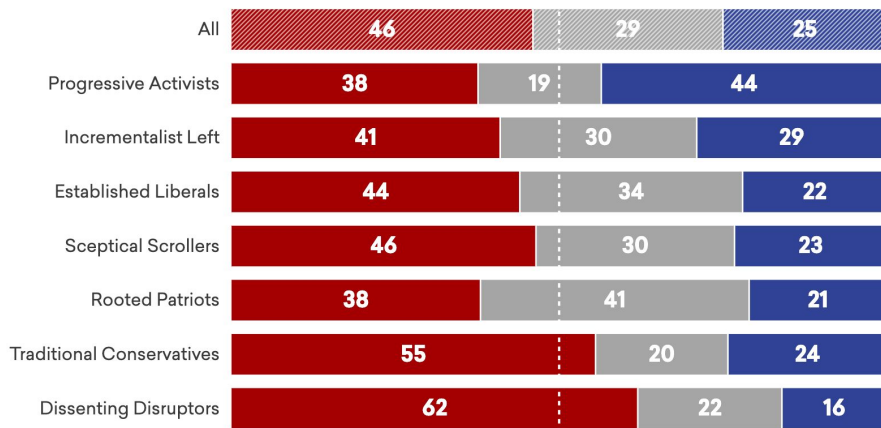


# Defining Islamophobia - impact on free speech

## 46 per cent of Britons would be concerned that an Islamophobia definition would shut down legitimate criticism of Islam

Which comes closest to your view?

- ☒ I would be concerned that if the government developed a formal definition of islamophobia it could be used to shut down legitimate criticism of Islam or actions of members of the Muslim community
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ I would not be concerned that if the government developed a formal definition of Islamophobia it could be used to shut down legitimate criticism of Islam or actions of members of the Muslim community



Although almost half the public express indifference to creating a definition of Islamophobia, many Britons have serious concerns about the definition plans.

**46 per cent of Britons say they are worried that a definition of Islamophobia could be used to shut down legitimate criticism of Islam, with just 25 per cent not worried.**

Progressive Activists are clear outliers on this as the only segment more unworried than worried about the impact of this definition.

# The segments' key attitudes

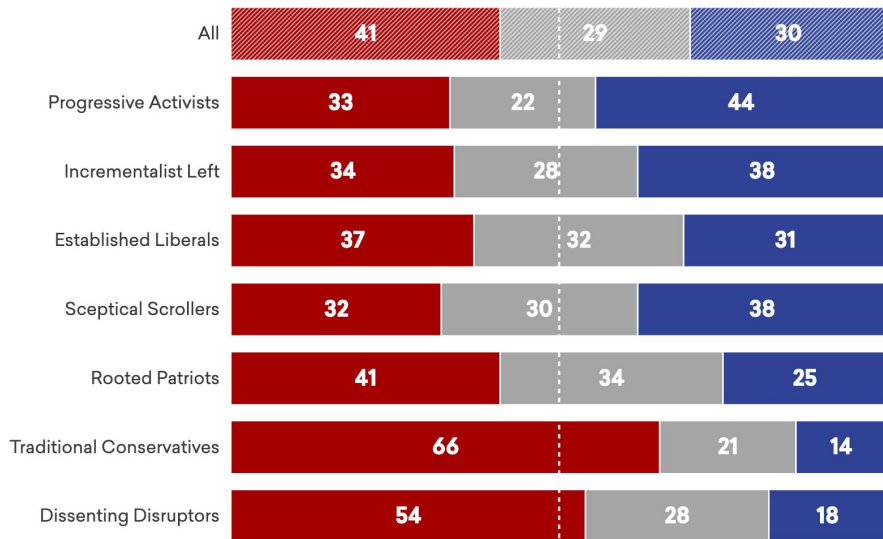
	<b>Progressive Activists</b>	<b>Sceptical of religious institutions, but deep concern about hatred against minority groups</b> - They are easily the group most likely to support a new definition of Islamophobia
	<b>Incrementalist Left</b>	<b>Concern about discrimination against religious groups</b> - They have the least absolutist approach to free speech, and are much more worried about hate speech than any other segment
	<b>Established Liberals</b>	<b>Committed to liberal values of freedom of expression, but worried about hate speech</b> - With the Incrementalist Left, they are the most likely to support legal consequences for damaging religious texts
	<b>Sceptical Scrollers</b>	<b>Fairly likely to think that people should be able to say what they want, even if it is offensive</b>
	<b>Rooted Patriots</b>	<b>Take a hard line on hate speech, and are happy with tough punishments for it (particularly compared to other conservative groups), but worry about political correctness and unfair language policing</b>
	<b>Traditional Conservatives</b>	<b>Concerned about certain views being sidelined</b> - Most likely segment to be worried that some religions will get greater protections than others
	<b>Dissenting Disruptors</b>	<b>Most concerned about government regulation of free speech, particularly silencing of critical views on Islam</b>

# Defining Islamophobia - three in ten think it is necessary

## 41 per cent of Britons think existing definitions of racism are enough to tackle discrimination against Muslims

Which comes closest to your view?

- Existing definitions of racism are enough to tackle discrimination against Muslims
- We need a specific definition of Islamophobia to tackle discrimination against Muslims
- Don't know



Few Britons think the proposal to create a definition of Islamophobia is strictly necessary. More Britons (41 per cent vs 30 per cent) say that existing definitions of Islamophobia are enough to tackle discrimination against Muslims.

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12:45 to 13:45



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# Later Today:

**The Guardian Podcasts**



**Politics Weekly**

**In conversation with Andy Burnham**

Hosted by Pippa Crerar and Kiran Stacey

Monday 29th September  
2pm-3pm

Nova Scotia Liverpool  
25a Mann Island

Hosted by UCL Policy Lab and More in Common

 **More in Common** 

 **More in Common**  **TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL UK**  **spotlight on Corruption**

**Who Pays, Who Decides?  
Big Money in British Politics**

Monday, 29 September  
16:30 to 17:30  
Nova Scotia



John Johnston (Chair)  
Politico



Ed Hodgson  
More in Common



Liam Byrne MP  
Chair, Business and Trade Committee



Baroness Hodge  
PM's Anti-Corruption Champion



Duncan Hames  
Transparency International UK



Susan Hawley  
Spotlight on Corruption

 **More in Common**  **THE NEUROLOGICAL ALLIANCE**  **MS Society**  **Parkinson's UK**  
For every Parkinson's journey

**Bold promises: Delivering quality neurological care under Labour**

Monday, 29 September  
14:00 to 15:00  
Sherwood Arena Room, Secure Zone, ACC Liverpool



Luke Tryl  
More in Common



Jas Athwal MP  
MP for Ilford South



Joanne Welsh  
Carer



Dr Martin Wilson  
Consultant Neurologist



Georgina Carr  
The Neurological Alliance

 **More in Common**

**How can Labour rebuild its electoral coalition?**

Monday, 29 September  
16:30 to 18:15  
Sherwood Arena Room, Secure Zone, ACC



Jon Sopel (Chair)  
The News Agents



Luke Tryl  
More in Common



Alistair Strathern MP  
MP for Hitchin



Christabel Cooper  
Labour Together



Anneliese Dodds MP  
MP for Oxford East



Jonathan Hinder MP  
MP for Pendle & Clitheroe



Richard Burgon MP  
MP for Leeds East