

# Contempt: time to lose the law

---

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/10/24/contempt-time-to-lose-the-law/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/10/24/contempt-time-to-lose-the-law/)

2008-10-24

Do juries need to be protected from media coverage that could prejudice their decisions in court?

In a lively public debate at Polis I felt that the ground had shifted. [Nick Davis](#) felt that it had shifted because of the decline in court reporting (along with all kinds of reporting). [Joshua Rozenberg](#) thought that it had shifted because of the Internet. Barrister [Mark Haslam](#) agreed that the Internet meant that it was now impossible to cut a jury off from full coverage of a suspect's life or details of a case. But he insisted that this did not mean that the system should abandon any legal attempt to restrict prejudicial coverage. I am deeply sympathetic to the view of American journalism academic Jonathon Kotler who enthusiastically endorsed the open US system which puts the freedom of speech before concerns for prejudice. But it is not just journalists, like Neil Wallis at the News of The World, who think contempt laws should be liberalised or removed. One factor that has pushed the boundaries of contempt is terrorism. The authorities want the public to realise the magnitude and seriousness of the terrorist threat. So they have deliberately put facts into the public domain which in the past would have been seen as prejudicial.

Is there any need for legal protection at all? If so, what would it look like? That's one of the issues for a BBC/Polis/LSE Law seminar today with some very high-powered judges, journalists and academics.

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science