

# About the Claim 'The People Are Not Ready'

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Those who propose radical (new), particularly progressive ideas frequently face criticism based on the proposition that *the people or the masses are not ready* for these kinds of changes. [Elsewhere](#) I argued that a distinction between a criticism and an insult is subjective; thus, any form of speech can be interpreted as an insult even though the speech is not intended as such. Therefore, I concluded, insult should be protected as a form of free speech; that is, a person should not be punished by any entity or individual because of an insult. For the sake of simplicity, I will facilitate my point by discussing responses to the claim that *insult is a form of freedom of expression* (you may read this as *insult should be considered a form of freedom of expression*) throughout this text. The purpose of this article is to show that the proposition *the people are not ready* is a fallacy, and that using this claim to oppose an idea is not a valid criticism of the idea itself.[\[1\]](#)

What do those who voice the claim that *the people are not ready* intend to say? They think that ideas like *insult is a form of freedom of expression* is so radical that the vast majority of Azerbaijanis will reject it, so defenders of this idea are wasting their time – they will not be able to convince anybody. At first glance, it seems that those who voice the claim that *the people are not ready* are trying to advise those who defend the idea and urge them by saying that *my friend, do not waste your time, the people will not accept your idea*.

But who are these individuals who say that *the people are not ready*? Relying on my personal observation, I divide these individuals into three groups. It seems to me that they voice

this criticism because:

- a. They themselves are not ready and for whatever reason they do not want to say *I am not ready* (maybe they are ashamed to say it), therefore, they blame the people;
- b. They themselves are not ready and they use *the people are not ready* claim to launch an attack against defenders of the idea and to tarnish their prestige because, while it is difficult to criticize the idea itself, it is easier to portray defenders of the idea as people unfamiliar with their country and culture.
- c. They are ready for the idea and they support it themselves, yet they sincerely believe that those who defend the idea are wasting their time.

I have rarely seen individuals that are described by group (c). The majority whom I have seen belong either to (a) or (b).

What is my purpose in defining these groups? My primary purpose is to explain to individuals of (c) why they are wrong, though I have reason to believe they are few. My second purpose is to compel individuals described in (a) to drop their excuses and to say instead: *I am not ready*. My third purpose is to prove that *the people are not ready* argument is just an excuse intended to tarnish the prestige of those who voice radical ideas, to show that it is a fallacy and to persuade readers that it should be rejected and thus to neutralize this weapon in the hands of people in group (b).

In Azerbaijan, every person who voices the idea *insult is a form of freedom of expression* is aware of the situation on the ground and knows that the majority of people do not accept this idea. (In the end why should an activist promote an idea accepted by the majority?). People who propose the idea that *insult is a form of freedom of expression* promote this idea exactly because it is not widely accepted, and they try to persuade as many people as they can to believe in this

proposition. If you agree with this idea, then support it; if you do not, then do not support it (or criticize the idea itself).

Acceptance of the idea that *insult is a form of freedom of expression* is neither against human nature, nor against the laws of nature. For instance, a thought that *people should fly from Baku to London without using any tool* is actually against the laws of nature. It is impossible to accomplish. However, if a sufficient portion of the population (it could be a majority or a plurality; it depends on the context) believes that *insult is a form of freedom of expression*, then this idea can be implemented – there would be no law prohibiting insult and nobody would physically attack others because of an insult. Ideas that *white and Black people are morally equal and should have equal standing before law* or *men and women are morally equal and should be equal before law* were radical not long ago in an almost every part of the world. Those who have read the history of abolitionist and feminist movements as well as the history of Civil Rights Movement in the US in the mid-twentieth century, know that activists of these movements faced criticism based on the argument *the people are not ready*. Yet today those propositions have been accepted by the majority of people, though they have not been perfectly implemented. I am not saying that *if the majority is convinced, everything can be achieved* or that *slavery was abolished because a majority was convinced by abolitionists*. I would like to say that ideas which once were considered radical are now accepted by an absolute majority and the fact that people believe in them facilitate, at least in part, the success of those ideas.

If with respect to a certain proposition X, individuals described in (c) only say *I support this idea*, instead of saying *I support this idea, yet people are not ready for it*, those individuals would help their cause much more if they did not reveal their lack of confidence. Just put yourself in the shoes of someone who has not yet formed a firm opinion on

proposition X. Below I will describe two situations:

1. A couple people say that *insult is a form of freedom of expression*, but they add the caveat that *the people are not ready*. The majority disagrees that *insult is a form of freedom of expression*.
2. A couple people say that *insult is a form of freedom of expression*, but they do not add the above caveat. The majority disagrees that *insult is a form of freedom of expression*.

I think everyone would agree that in the second situation, it is more likely that an undecided person would support the idea that *insult is a form of freedom of expression* or at least would try to think thoroughly and question one's own existing beliefs. Yet in the first situation an undecided person observes that, with the exception of a couple of people, no one, including those who accept the idea, believes in its success. Furthermore, if we take into account that those few promoters of the idea are described as *people unfamiliar with their country and culture*, then it is more likely that an undecided individual would not take those few promoters seriously. Thus, group (c), instead of saying that *the people are not ready*, should say *I support this idea* because they are far more likely to advance it if they do not immediately divulge their lack of confidence in the proposition. Just express your opinion, and you might well see that the people who share your view are greater than you expected.

Let us now discuss the people in group (a). If you reject an idea which you are not prepared to accept, do not resort to the excuse that *the people are not ready*. If you do not support an idea, just say that; or if this idea seems unacceptable to you, question your own beliefs, try to find out which is true – your existing beliefs or the idea you have just heard of. Try to clearly formulate your existing beliefs, try to change (challenge) them. It is beneficial to hear radical ideas, they help one to question and justify one's existing beliefs.

On the other hand, based on what proposition do you say that *the people are not ready*? Do you have any survey results? What percentage of the population do you mean when you say *the people*? Most importantly, the fact that the majority do not accept this idea now does not mean that they will not accept it in the future. There are plenty of examples from history which prove that. Why do you think that if the majority do not accept this idea now, they will not accept it in the future? Why do you think that voicing and defending the idea which is not supported by the majority is futile and waste of time? The fact that the majority do not accept an idea does not mean that the idea is wrong or bad.

Let us now switch to group (b). I already stated above that individuals belonging to group (b) use *the people are not ready* as an excuse and as an attack, so I do not think that I will be able to convince them of anything. Their aim is to oppose the idea by tarnishing the prestige of those who voice the idea. As long as this tactic works, they will not abandon it. I just hope that individuals I described in both (a) and (c) as well as those I described as undecided, based on what I have written above, will accept that the tactic used by the people of group (b) is a fallacy. The argument *the people are not ready* is an illegitimate rhetorical tactic. If you do not agree with an idea, demonstrate why it is wrong – nobody opposes this approach. However, do not say that *the people are not ready* because this is not an argument.

## Notes and References:

[1] The first version of this article was published in [rasional.org libertarian periodical](https://rasional.org/libertarian/periodical/Azeri) in Azeri: <https://rasional.org/columns/xalq-hazir-deyil-iddiasi-barede/>