

 bright blue

# Centre Write

Autumn 2020



## Family friendly?

Jesse Norman MP | Anne Longfield OBE | Victoria Atkins MP | Peter Hitchens

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Bright Blue is the independent think tank and pressure group for liberal conservatism.

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# Editors' letter

Co-Editors **Phoebe Arslanagic-Wakefield** and **Joseph Silke** introduce this edition



For the first time we at Bright Blue have created, edited and designed much of this magazine from home, instead of our perch overlooking bustling Ludgate Circus.

The pandemic has forced millions of Britons to hunker down in their homes and thrust typically external activities inside. Parents have found themselves tussling for workspace at home, while wrangling children underwhelmed by their remote lessons who miss their friends and don't care to understand the intricacies of social distancing. Drove of adults have abandoned studio flats and house shares to return en masse to their childhood homes and bedrooms, where they must relearn to coexist with their parents.

On the other side of the spectrum, rather than being trapped with family members, many elderly parents and grandparents have found themselves isolated and afraid, with social contact confined to a kindly neighbour dropping off groceries from a safe distance. Those with health problems that mean they must shield are in the same position. As winter marches on, these isolated groups are beginning to wonder if they will have to spend Christmas alone too.

The effect of the pandemic has, in part, been a new emphasis on the family and the household, but what is the shape of the modern family, does it face existential threat or is it more fundamental to the way we structure our lives than ever?

In this issue you will find *Mail on Sunday* columnist **Peter Hitchens** (p.10) and **Polly Mackenzie**, CEO of Demos, debate whether liberalism has eroded the family — did liberalism sound the death knell for stable marriages and families, or did it herald much-needed freedom and equality?

Meanwhile **Lord Willetts** (p.7) takes the

position that reports of the family's demise are much exaggerated, arguing that the modern family is actually a more important institution than ever.

Turning to consider the ways in which the family unit is imperilled and pressured, Chief Executive of the New Economics Foundation **Miatta Fahbulleh** (p.15) points out that many families are facing serious hardship in the wake of the pandemic's economic damage, and urges welfare reform in response. **Anne Longfield OBE** (p.25), the Children's Commissioner for England, is also greatly troubled by the levels of child poverty in the UK, arguing for radical government action to assuage childhood deprivation. **Joanne Cash** (p.24), CEO of Parent Gym, adds that the pandemic has starkly highlighted inequalities among very young children, as well as acting to exacerbate the gap between children from wealthier and more deprived backgrounds.

Alternatively, **Susan Hall AM** (p.14), leader of the GLA Conservatives, urges us to consider the pandemic an opportunity to make London a better and safer place for families — a chance to tackle violent crime.

Thinking about those for whom the home and family may be a dangerous rather than safe place, **Victoria Atkins MP** (p.13) argues that lockdown has importantly raised the profile of domestic abuse, and that the way forward is the successful passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill through Parliament.

**Sam Smethers** (p.6), Chief Executive of the Fawcett Society, looks beyond COVID-19, asking whether the pandemic is a chance to use policy to shift traditional gender roles in childcare, or if it will entrench them further and mothers will continue to do the lion's share of child-rearing. **Ben Lewing** (p.23), Assistant

Director of the Early

Intervention Foundation, also considers the relationship between parents, highlighting the profound and long-lasting negative effects a hostile relationship between a couple may have on their children. **Carey Oppenheim** and **Jordan Rehill** (p.26) of the Nuffield Foundation agree that the quality of family relationships is crucial to the long-term outcomes of children, and that public policy must support family relationships regardless of family structure.

**Robin Maynard** (p.16), Director of Population Matters, considers the question of children from an altogether different perspective, arguing philosophically that we should simply have less of them and embrace a smaller family model, for the sake of the environment but also for economic prosperity.

Shifting the focus somewhat away from children, **Harry Benson** (p.8) of the Marriage Foundation pops the question of marriage, proposing a new 'rule' to help couples commit.

Finally, we have an exclusive interview with **Jesse Norman MP** (p.18) on why negative campaigning isn't for him, conservative values and the intellectual tensions at the heart of the Conservative Party, and the effect that the pandemic has had on British society.

We hope that this edition makes the case that the benefits family confers on individuals and society speaks for itself, but that it faces real threats that COVID-19 will serve to intensify and compound. 

**Phoebe Arslanagic-Wakefield** is a researcher at Bright Blue and **Joseph Silke** is the Communications Officer at Bright Blue

# Director's note

Are conservatives falling out of love with merit? asks **Ryan Shorthouse**



**B**oris makes conservatives smile – not just because of his chirpiness, but his repeated electoral success too. His refusal to take himself too seriously has won over voters typically put off by what they can still see as a stuffy, snobby Tory Party.

But something gnaws. Today's parliamentarians are Thatcher's children, at heart believing deeply in the enterprising philosophy she espoused – that hard work, no matter your background, can yield success. The concept that our agency, rather than any privileges we were born with, can and should determine our lot in life rests deep in the soul of modern conservatives. It inspires, both personally and morally.

The sense is that Boris has walked too breezily through life, granted opportunities one after another, without much effort and despite controversies that would be career-curbing for most. There is resentment towards someone who is seen to have gained the top prize by blagging and bantering. Though without his wit and charisma, his predecessor, poring over papers when the rest of us were asleep, was perhaps a little more deserving?

However, the very desirability of thinking through the prism of merit is now being critiqued, from communitarian thinkers increasingly influential in conservative circles, on both sides of the Atlantic. Accordingly, the educated elites – the product of a ruthlessly meritocratic education and employment system – that have prospered in recent decades, have sowed disillusionment, disenfranchisement and deprivation among everyone else, hence the vote for Trump and Brexit. A humiliating and judgemental social stratification – by cognitive ability – has been created: the dystopia described by Michael Young in his 1958 book *The rise of*

*the meritocracy* has come true.

Harvard academic Professor Michael Sandel is one such thinker. His new book, *The tyranny of merit*, attacks the rhetoric of rising – the very idea of the 'American Dream' – that politicians of all hues now subscribe to as corrosive to human dignity and empathy: "These views about work and self-help have implications for solidarity and the mutual obligations of citizens. If everyone who works hard can be expected to succeed, then those who fall short have no one to blame but themselves, and it is hard to make the case for helping them."

“ From an early age, humans show a preference for fair inequality above unfair equality

This provides some intellectual heft to the successful anti-establishment campaigning deployed by the political right recently. The out-of-touch 'liberal metropolitan elite' are denounced for sneering at the culture and concerns of ordinary folk. There is little love lost here: the trends show that the highly educated are increasingly turning to left-wing parties, completely reversing previous voting habits. Universities in particular are coming under intense criticism: for being the motors of this meritocratic nightmare, but also producing woke graduates who increasingly don't vote for right-wing parties.

It is true that meritocracy framed in a way which makes success entirely about wealth and status is punishing, both for those trying to sustain it and the overwhelming majority of us who will never obtain it.

But how else should resources and roles be distributed, if not by merit? The public

widely perceive it to be the fairest way of doing so, above inheritance especially, but also even need. From an early age, humans show a preference for fair inequality above unfair equality. And, in actual society, there is no 'veil of ignorance', as John Rawls invented; our differing contributions can be seen.

There are some solutions. First, ensure that, culturally and economically, we as far as possible better recognise and reward a broader suite of meritorious activity – caring for the vulnerable at the start or end of their lives, most urgently. David Goodhart, in his new book, neatly argues for better appreciation of activities from the heart or the hands, not just the head.

Second, that we do not make merit the sole determinant when judging ourselves and others. It is perfectly possible to have social arrangements where success in different domains is cultivated and celebrated, but those with different priorities, capabilities and vulnerabilities are also respected and looked after. Even within ourselves, we can be both professionally ambitious and civic-minded. Graduates, for instance, have been much maligned as lonely liberals, pursuing credentialism at the expense of community life. But this doesn't sit with the fact that graduates are more likely to get married and volunteer.

We don't have to abandon merit altogether. There are multiple ways of measuring what is meritorious. There are multiple ways alongside merit to guide how we arrange our lives and our society. 

**Ryan Shorthouse** is the founder and Chief Executive of Bright Blue

# Letters to the Editors

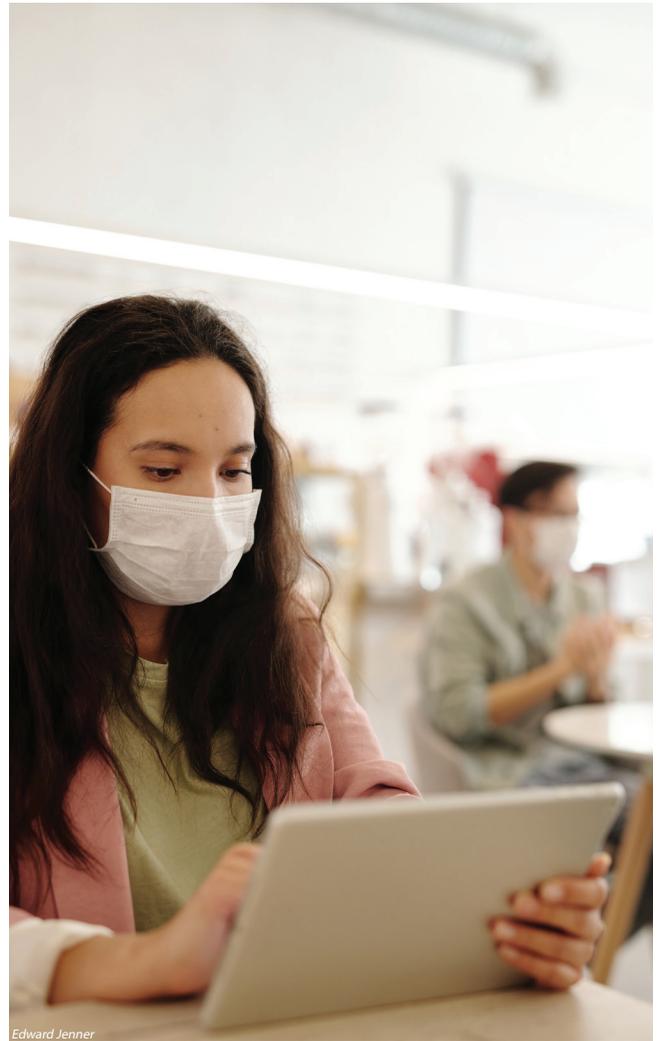
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Nick Molho's article ('Faster, cleaner, smarter', Spring 2020) emphasises the need for greater ambition in our innovation policy if we are to achieve net zero emissions. Molho outlines ways that government can support innovation, such as financing large-scale technological trials. He also emphasises that innovation is not just about inventing new technologies but making existing technology cheaper and more efficient. This is key. If renewable energy technologies, such as solar panels, remain more expensive and less efficient than fossil fuels, a sufficiently large adoption is unlikely to occur nationally or globally. Rather than castigating other countries for using fossil fuels, governments concerned about the climate should pump more money into green R&D, support technology rollouts and encourage more sustainable business models. With COP26 coming up, the UK Government is in a unique position to set an example for the world by following Molho's recommendations.

**James Paterson** | Bright Blue member

Jim Morrison's piece ('Our thoughts are not our own', Spring 2020) starkly highlights the political influence social media can have among an increasingly online-oriented society. It was troubling to read about the potency and prevalence of 'information gerrymandering', whereby research has found that around 10% of people's votes can be determined merely by social media companies increasing one's online interaction with friends of opposite voting intentions. This convincingly reveals the power social media companies can exert when they are shaping who we interact with online in order to maximise user engagement. Therefore, Morrison's pressing calls for the regulation of the "artificial construction of social echo chambers" appear to be of the utmost importance; otherwise, the outcome of future general elections really may be decided by the geeks who play the platforms' algorithms to shape our social circles.

**Cory Freeman** | Bright Blue member



Edward Jenner

Jim Morrison's column ('Our thoughts are not our own', Spring 2020) provides an insightful analysis of how social media impacts political behaviour. It is daunting to read that voting behaviour can be manipulated with such ease utilising our social group, and particularly by outside forces. As the Cambridge Analytica scandal has exposed issues regarding political manipulation, Jim Morrison however, is right in stating that social platforms hide more than what we expect. As much as Europe has tried to put laws in place to safeguard its citizens, such as ePrivacy rules, there are aspects of social media that still need to be regulated.

**Eleonora Vassanelli** | Bright Blue member

# A post-COVID caring revolution

We cannot ignore the childcare crisis wrought by the pandemic, **Sam Smethers** argues



The COVID-19 crisis is having multiple and profound impacts on our lives, one of which is the way care is shared within households, but will it hasten us towards equality or further entrench traditional gender roles? Worryingly, the evidence suggests that we are going backwards, but this can be reversed with the right policy response from government.

The amount of time fathers spend per day caring for children has increased by 15-20 minutes per day each decade since the 1970s, but pre-COVID-19, inequality persisted. The UK Time Use Survey shows that mothers with children aged 16 or under spent on average 118 minutes per day doing childcare work, compared with 67 minutes per day for fathers.

Since lockdown began, Cambridge academics found that mothers working from home were spending over 3.5 hours on childcare, compared with around 2.5 hours for men; while both mothers and fathers were spending around two hours on home-schooling, with mothers doing a little more. Overall this results in a 1.5-hour difference,

suggesting a widening gap.

We have also seen Institute for Fiscal Studies research which found that the time mothers spent on childcare had doubled when compared with 2014-15. Importantly, their time is more interrupted – they were combining paid work with other activities half the time, compared with a third for fathers.

“ If this crisis has illustrated anything, it demonstrates that we need to do much more to support couples to share care

Other research shows that a third of mothers, compared to a quarter of fathers, report always feeling rushed and found that mothers' time is more fragmented. Prior to the outbreak, research identified that women who worked from home tended to do more childcare, while men tended to do more overtime.

Fawcett's own survey, in partnership with the Women's Budget Group and academics

from LSE and Queen Mary University, found that mothers in couples were over one-and-a-half times more likely than fathers to say that they were doing the majority of childcare during school and nurseries closures.

This disparity rises between parents who work outside the home, suggesting that 'key worker' status does not alleviate women's childcare workload. These inequalities also hold for other domestic work, with three quarters of mothers in couples and nine out of ten single mothers, compared with half of fathers in couples, agreeing that they were doing the majority of tasks.

There is no doubt that school and nursery closures have had a significant impact on how families are sharing care, with mothers feeling the impact more profoundly than fathers. Existing inequalities are driving couples' responses to what is a period of stress. This is having an impact on maternal employment with early evidence suggesting mothers were more likely to have been furloughed and also more likely to have lost their jobs during the crisis.

As the furlough scheme ends and the Government tells us to get back to our workplaces it will disproportionately be mothers who feel unable to do that, potentially creating a two tier workforce. Employers are left in the invidious position of getting their businesses back to work, favouring those employees who can do that or supporting parents who find it difficult to return.

As schools return it will disproportionately be mothers who will be expected to interrupt their work when the suspected COVID-19



StandSome Worklifestyle

>> cases in school sends the whole class, or year group, home. It took a whole 20 years to get maternal employment rates up from 66% to 75%. We are now reversing that in just a few months.

Embracing home and flexible working is at least part of the solution for many of us, although there will always be jobs which cannot be done from home. Incidentally, those frontline jobs are also more likely to be done by women. I have long argued for default flexible working, the presumption that every job is a flexible one unless there is a business case for it not to be. COVID-19 has created that presumption for us.

If this crisis has illustrated anything, it demonstrates that we need to do much more to support couples to share care, enabling fathers to play a more active role in the first year of a child's life. This means a longer, better paid period of

leave for fathers which dads can afford to take, starting from a presumption of equal parenting responsibility. If we had introduced this policy ten years ago, perhaps we would be seeing a more equal sharing of care now, rather than the work still falling heavily on the mothers' shoulders.

Finally, we need a strategic investment in our childcare infrastructure, recognising that childcare is a vital part of the support system enabling parents to work.

Pre-COVID-19 childcare provision was inadequate, with only 56% of local authorities providing sufficient childcare places for parents who work full-time. We expect to see provision decline significantly as a result of a drop in demand during the current COVID-19 crisis. Take up of early years places has fallen from 77% pre-COVID-19 to 37% during COVID-19. Many

childcare providers simply won't survive without additional government funding.

This is economic madness and will undermine our recovery. Evidence shows that maternal employment can be boosted significantly with the availability of free, full-time childcare, particularly if provision is available for pre-school age children. This would boost our economic recovery and support maternal employment, helping to reverse current worrying trends which are taking us in the wrong direction.

The COVID-19 crisis, although unwelcome, presents us with the opportunity to finally get the sharing of care right and put the policy response in place which families, employers and the economy need. We have to seize that opportunity. [1](#)

**Sam Smethers** is the Chief Executive of the Fawcett Society

## How have families changed?

**Lord Willetts** asks if news of the demise of the family has been much exaggerated



The decline of the family has long been forecast by thinkers of both the Left and Right. For progressives, it was welcomed as the weakening of an old-fashioned instrument of repression. For conservatives, who often focussed particularly on marriage, there was regret at the weakening of another bastion of personal morality. From the 1960s to the 1980s, marriage rates declined, divorce increased, lone parenthood went up and the cultural gap between children and parents widened.

Now many of the key trends have been reversed. The family, albeit in a wider range of types, is if anything getting stronger. Some of the most powerful evidence comes from time use. I provide updated figures in the second edition of my book

*The Pinch.* The amount of time a mother devotes to caring for a child under five has increased over the past forty years from 78 to 160 minutes. For fathers it has gone up from 14 to 86 minutes – less in absolute terms compared to mothers but a bigger proportionate increase.

Parents today are putting more time and effort into their children than their parents did for them. It might not be the same story for teenagers but it is harder to know what 'childcare' is with them and measures are trickier. Then as children get older still there is some evidence of boomerang kids who move back into the parental home after university.

These trends reveal a change in the character of the family. Families used to be bigger and wider – more siblings and

cousins. Now they are smaller but also, thanks to improvements in longevity, there are more grandparents. So families have become tall thin bean-poles linking the generations. Meanwhile the rest of society has weaker intergenerational links. We are more likely to work and play with people the same age. Children are wary of adults who aren't parents unless they are in specific jobs such as teachers. So we have a more age segregated society, but with families by contrast becoming more intergenerational and so they have become more important.

If we shift from time use to the economic trends, we can see more evidence for

>> increase in importance of the family. Universities report a sustained increase in parental involvement in their child's choice of university. It looks as if the 'bank of mum and dad' has become one of our top providers of housing finance. Inheritance has also grown fast, but not quite as fast as expected, and one reason may be more transfers from parents to their kids while they are still alive – something we are researching at Resolution Foundation. I hope it is not too cynical to suggest the increased financial dependence of kids on their parents for longer may even contribute to closer family relations continuing for longer – it is not wise to row with your banker.

Given the predictions of the death of the family this might all seem to be good news. As always, however, it is not completely straightforward. There is a kind of parental

arms race of intensifying investment in their children. The desire to do the best for one's child is admirable but cannot be the only way we discharge our obligation to the next generation – otherwise there is a real threat to social mobility.

It is hard to buy a flat or house just out of earnings – at Resolution we estimate it would take 19 years for someone on average earnings to save enough for a deposit to buy a place to live – up from three years in the mid-1980s.

So parental support matters more. The rules on pension pots have also been changed so they are heritable as well. This means that inheritance has become more important as the route to obtaining the two key assets we build up during our working lives. Is that the sort of society we want for our children?

I find that parents who are doing their

best for their own children will also say they want their child to live in an open meritocratic society, not one where your place in life is shaped by heredity above all. That is why I have argued for a distribution of £10,000 to every young person at the age of 30. They can use it to get started on the housing ladder. Some people argue it is too little but most young people have got so little it more than doubles the assets of the vast majority of them. I see it as in the tradition of the property-owning democracy such as with council house sales and privatised industries at discounted prices.

So yes, the good news is that the family is back, but you can have too much of a good thing. 

**Lord Willetts** is President of the Resolution Foundation – a second edition of his book *The Pinch* was published last year

## Learn to commit or quit

Many get complacent in relationships that aren't going anywhere, says **Harry Benson**

**T**he way couples form relationships today is very different to the way our parents did it.

Prior to the 1970s, couples moved in together only after they had made a clear commitment to their future together, usually through marriage. We now tend to do it the other way round. Birth control has been the game changer, and with it, the link was broken between sex and commitment, children and marriage. Moving in together is here to stay and, on the face of it, seems sensible. More time together, shared costs, more sex: what's not to like?

What almost nobody thinks about are the two big risks.

The first is ambiguity, which is a lack of clarity about where the relationship is going. When couples have most of what they need

for everyday life together, conversations about the future that clear the air are easy to neglect. My latest research shows that living together for longer never actually improves the odds of staying together but steadily reduces the odds of getting married.

“ Birth control has been the game changer, and with it, the link was broken between sex and commitment

The second is inertia, that it becomes much harder to leave if things aren't working out. The sheer difficulty of unraveling a complex living arrangement tempts more fragile or ambiguous relationships to drift onwards in hope.

Women pay the price for this drift much more than men, because the biological clock is ticking and she needs to know the plan. Men's commitment – much more than women's – tends to be linked to a clear plan, an intentional act, a decision about the future. “Right, let's do this.” Moving in doesn't require men to commit.

In a survey of 2,000 unmarried cohabitants, the biggest reasons men gave for not marrying were the cost of the wedding and that it wasn't necessary. For women, there was a third equally important reason: he hasn't asked. It should be no surprise to learn that if the woman is less committed than the man, she's likely to end



>> the relationship.

Yet when men are less committed – which is more often the case when commitment is asymmetric – they allow the relationship to drag on.

A less committed man has no incentive to end the relationship whereas a committed woman has every incentive to keep it going and not rock the boat. As early cohabitation has become ever more the norm, the result is unreliable love and the highest levels of family breakdown in history.

So, here's the problem in a nutshell.

Birth control has liberated women from the risk of pregnancy, but so too has it liberated men from the need to commit. How can we help a generation who embrace living together before they commit yet still aspire to the dream of happily ever after?

“ While she was eyeing up wedding rings, he was eyeing up other women ... Six years wasted

Just over a decade ago, when my oldest children were teenagers, I wanted to give them some clear ideas about how to choose well and how to avoid getting stuck. I have now written about them in my new book: *Commit or quit – the two year rule and other rules for romance*.

Amazingly my six kids, now all young adults, have subsequently applied these rules really well. Several times, one of my girls has come to me and said they have a new boyfriend who is “marriageable”. That’s one of the “rules for romance” and I cheer secretly to myself when they tell me that! But some of them have also come to me and said they’ve dumped a boyfriend who wasn’t “fighting for her”. That’s another rule.

The ‘two year rule’ specifically counters the two problems of ambiguity and inertia. It encourages a choice: either make a clear plan or stop the drift and get out. Research



Ketut Subiyanto

on decision-making shows that once you get to a certain level of information, further information may make you more confident but doesn't make your decisions any better.

In a survey I did for the book, I asked over 300 adults if there was a best time for a couple to have a serious conversation about the future. The vast majority thought there was an optimum time within two years and a maximum time within three years. After two years together – for young adults, rather than teenagers – you're not likely to find out much more that helps you make that decision.

That's the time you should stop drifting, agree a plan for the future, and either commit or quit.

In the opening chapter, I tell a true story

of a couple who had been together for six years, only for the woman to find out that the man has been cheating. While she was eyeing up wedding rings, he was eyeing up other women. Their future was in her head, just not in his.

Six years wasted.

I doubt many people think this will happen to them, but it does. That's the risk of moving in early and getting stuck. The ‘two year rule’ will either put them on the same page of a shared plan for the future, or it will set them free to try elsewhere. [▶](#)

**Harry Benson** is Research Director for Marriage Foundation and author of *Commit or quit – the two year rule and other rules for romance*

## Sarah Sands appointed Chair of Bright Blue

In September we were thrilled to announce that Sarah Sands, the former editor of BBC Radio 4's *Today* and the *Evening Standard*, has been appointed as our new Chair of the Board of Directors.

Commenting on her appointment, Sarah Sands said:

“I am delighted to chair an organisation that champions liberal values and original, purposeful thinking. Society needs Bright Blue.”





# Has liberalism eroded the family?

Mail on Sunday columnist **Peter Hitchens** and Chief Executive of Demos **Polly Mackenzie** exchange letters



Dear Polly,

All my life energetic, admirable and courageous people have tried to help those who suffered in the cold glare of strict old-fashioned sexual morality. Who can blame them? The mothers of children born out of wedlock; the children themselves; the women deserted or abused by feckless men: all deserved better than they got in the chilly, disapproving Britain of the 1950s.

People love to disapprove, and the spiteful joy that can be obtained through looking down on others is a secret nasty pleasure which is too seldom admitted or described. It was horrid then, and it is horrid now. Oddly enough, that pleasure now survives mostly in the glow of righteous contempt which the enlightened liberal classes feel for the despised social conservatives who they have driven to the margins of society.

“

People love to disapprove, and the spiteful joy that can be obtained through looking down on others is a secret nasty pleasure

When, 20 years ago, I wrote my first book *The abolition of Britain*, I found a fascinating thing. Britain before the 1960s had been full of campaigners trying to make life better for the sort of people I described above, the outsiders in a society based on lifelong

marriage. They fought for changes in legal status, and for the use of kinder words to describe that status. But then they began to campaign instead for a social revolution in which the norms would change completely. In most cases, I think they thought these goals were identical. They were not.

The question that came to trouble me, and as an only partially-reformed six-cylinder 1960s bohemian they troubled me more than most, was: what will become of the children? Ending the stigma against children born outside marriage was laudable and right, but creating a society in which many more children were brought up in fatherless families, or even in children's homes, was not.

The same went for broken marriages. Who wants to force anyone to stay inside a dead or abusive marriage? Not I, but making marriage so easily dissoluble that it offered no stability at all was surely not the answer, especially where there were small children involved. Surely this was not what was meant to happen. Can anyone have actually wanted the scourge of fatherless families and broken homes which came upon us over the last 50 years?

Yet those who campaigned for these changes do not seem to regret them very much, or to call now for adjustments to make them kinder to children. On the contrary, they continue to push in the same direction. Have they just not noticed? Or was their target always a different kind of society, and are the children just collateral damage in a utopian war?

Regards,  
Peter

Dear Peter,

It's a funny thing, stigma. It is a society's ways of policing its boundaries and regulating behaviour. It works not just because consequences are imposed on those who don't obey - like being ostracised in the way you describe - but also because people internalise the shame. You acknowledge that, sometimes, leaving a relationship is the right decision, but you want people to be deterred from doing it so often, because you can't believe it's the right decision quite as often as it seems to happen these days.

What does that deterrent look like? Surely it is shame, and

its wearisome sister, guilt. To be deterred from creating 'broken families', people need to know in their hearts that it is harmful to children to bring them up in unstable or single parent households, and weigh that in the balance when they make choices about their relationships.

I'm afraid I have a problem with that, because shame is a poison.

Let's look at the evidence. Yes, children do seem statistically to do better in married couples. But that's largely because of the characteristics of people who get married. They are richer as

>> individuals and then, because there are two of them, they are infinitely more likely to have two incomes than a single parent family. And - though the data can't prove this - as marriage becomes rarer, the people who get married are likely to be those who are most committed to one another. That's probably why marriages are lasting longer these days than they used to.

As you say, since the 1950s, marriage has become rarer, and step-families and single parent families have become more common. If those modern types of family really were so harmful to children, then why are our children doing so much better than they did back then? Child and infant mortality rates are lower - even though there are far more cars on the roads. Literacy rates are higher - even though we have far more children in our schools with English as a second language. Child poverty rates are lower. The homes our children grow up in are warmer, cleaner and safer.

Given that children's lives have not deteriorated as family patterns have changed, on what basis should we be sending single or divorced parents on a guilt trip?

Perhaps you will attribute these improvements in children's lives to economic growth. But where has that prosperity come from? Much of it has come from women's liberation. Three quarters of working age women now have a job in the paid economy - or at least they did until COVID-19. Of course, it is more than possible to have a stable marriage as well as a job. But freedom is not easily divisible. Women who work have the choice to leave relationships; women who don't get stuck. We cannot have all the prosperity of the last 70 years without the freedom of the last 70 years.

You are right that if we liberate women, and destigmatise relationship breakdown, there will be more divorces and more single parents. We shouldn't pretend that away, but neither should we pretend we can precision engineer every family to be precisely

the way we want it. You cannot take away stigma from single parents and keep the shame that stops people becoming single parents. You cannot take stigma away from gay people without giving more people the confidence to come out.

Shame is poison. You believe a stable marriage is the best bet for a child. So you must also believe children in single or step parent families have been dealt a shabby hand. You surely want the best for them. That means we have to celebrate those families: we have to offer them pride instead of shame, whatever the consequences. Talk

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Given that children's lives have not deteriorated as family patterns have changed, on what basis should we be sending single or divorced parents on a guilt trip?

of “broken homes” and “fatherless families” does not help anyone, not least because you seem to have forgotten that there are stable marriages between women where children are brought up by two loving parents, neither of which is a father.

Perhaps you are right that the confident celebration of single parents, gay parents, step-families, trans-parents and blended families will mean a few more people leave a relationship that could, in fact, have been saved. But the alternative is worse. Children should not be collateral damage in a utopian war: I agree. But children are at risk in the crusade to homogenise human experience, too. Isn't your yearning for tidy little married families behind every door a version of utopia, too?

All the best,  
Polly

Dear Polly,

I don't think you have actually read what I have written. I occupy the position of the vanquished, seeking mitigation of the terms of my surrender. I am well aware that my side has lost the war, though I do not think we have lost the argument. That argument has never been had, as your response demonstrates. I ask only for the victors in the culture wars to ask themselves if they have got what they wanted. On what measure do you think “our children” are “doing so much better than they did back then”? I suppose a Thatcherite might measure the quality of life solely in material terms, but I am concerned about what sort of men and women we are bringing up, and I think that stability, constancy, parental love, good examples and authority - which used to be available in the poorest homes and now are not - are more

important than money, foreign holidays or material goods.

Nowhere do I call for stigma, or shame or guilt or ostracism. These forces, as I pointed out, always exist and belong to the dominant elite

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Children, especially boys, do better with fathers, and worse without them: this is observable and is not a statistical quirk caused by the fact that marriage is more common among the better off

>> in any society, which is at present you and your allies. I think they are often misused and nowadays they are cheerfully aimed against me by the revolutionaries, who are quick to classify people such as me as haters and bigots, marginalising our opinions as toxic pathologies, while misrepresenting them. If you are so against shame and stigma, then you should tell your own side to stop using them.

Children, especially boys, do better with fathers, and worse without them: this is observable and is not a statistical quirk caused by the fact that marriage is more common among the better off. In my childhood, stable lifelong marriage was universal in all classes and at all levels of income. Mine is a moral argument. Yours is an

economic one, and seems to be about what you call “prosperity”, and what you call “freedom”.

No man fights freedom, as Karl Marx rightly noted. He fights at most the freedom of others. In the last half-century, adults have fought and won a great deal of freedom at the expense of children, born and unborn. No doubt all our bank accounts have got bigger as a result, and our stock of material goods has grown too, but we are diminished as human beings. This is why I am not a Thatcherite, and, as it seems, you are.

Regards,  
Peter

Dear Peter,

Oh, Peter. You seem so sad and angry. Let me tell you where I think you're right, if only to prove that I have read your words, and thoughtfully.

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For generations, we placed unpaid duties at the feet of women, and left men to earn the money and the power that comes with it

There is a tendency in most public policy campaigns to advocate for change and systematically ignore the downsides it brings with it. You'll know GK Chesterton's adage about fences: we should only remove them once we understand why they were put there, lest we get charged by a bull. I understand your outrage that the shift in family norms is talked about by its advocates as if there are only upsides - whether they be abstract concepts like freedom, or practical improvements like fewer violently unhappy marriages. I do, however, agree with you that there are negative consequences, and we shouldn't pretend them away.

Let me give you an example: women used to be the mainstay of community networks, because they were at home all day. That provided the infrastructure for a huge amount of informal social and childcare, of neighbours as well as family. Now that more women than ever are working in the paid economy, communities are often more fragmented, and fewer people know their neighbours. We forgot to replace the unpaid work women did to keep our society going.

So what do we do about this? Do we send the women home again? Some conservatives will argue that we should. I think we

should be more creative. For generations, we placed unpaid duties at the feet of women, and left men to earn the money and the power that comes with it. Instead we need to split the work - paid and unpaid - more justly between the genders. Far more men should work part time enabling them to take on a fair share of the domestic chores, child rearing and community labour that women have traditionally done.

If liberals and conservatives could listen to each other better, I think our society would be stronger. Progressives always want to change things, and forget to worry about the consequences. Conservatives are so worried about the consequences that they never want anything to change. If progressives would notice what gets lost in the tidal wave of change, they might be better at

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If liberals and conservatives could listen to each other better, I think our society would be stronger

protecting it - or designing new ways to achieve it. If conservatives were open to new ways of achieving their old goals, they might not find themselves so sad and angry all the time.

We have a common goal, Peter. In your words: children brought up with stability, constancy, authority and parental love. My parents divorced and I had every one of those. My husband's parents did not and he had barely any of them. So let's be fixed in our ambition for what we want our children to experience, not the family structure in which they experience it.

All the best,  
Polly

# Stopping the rise in domestic abuse

**Victoria Atkins MP** urges us to focus on the issue of domestic abuse



**H**ome should be a place of love and safety but for many people in this country this is sadly not the case.

Their partner tries to control their lives in a number of ways, ranging from physical and sexual violence to mental and emotional torment, with often devastating consequences. The impact on children living in an abusive household can be life-changing too, and its effects can be felt outside in wider society.

“ A survivor told me that the mental and emotional abuse she suffered over the years was worse than having a hot iron smashed onto her face

The necessity of lockdown to tackle coronavirus has helped raise awareness of domestic abuse and the fear in which victims live. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline, online services and other specialist helplines have seen marked increases in calls. Working with domestic abuse and victims' organisations, the Government has taken rapid action.

Additional support has been provided including: £2.6million to national helplines to ensure that they have the capacity to respond to this increased demand as well as funding more than 100 domestic abuse charities to provide over 1,500 more safe bed spaces for victims during the pandemic and to support local community-based services.

The national campaign #youarenotalone has been launched to spread the message that victims are not alone and to help them seek support.

We have also pressed on with our work to pass the landmark Domestic Abuse Bill.

The voice of survivors is at the heart of this piece of work. It will improve our support for victims and transform the way we tackle the perpetrators of domestic abuse.

The introduction of the first ever all-purpose statutory definition of domestic abuse is vital for ensuring that everyone, from local authorities, the judiciary and health service, to the public, have a proper understanding of the many forms it takes. It is not restricted to physical violence, but can also be emotional, coercive or controlling, sexual and economic abuse.

Domestic abuse can be a single incident or a pattern of behaviour over a long period of time, even decades. A survivor told me that the mental and emotional abuse she suffered over the years was worse than having a hot iron smashed onto her face. Others have described being banned from accessing food cupboards, having their mobile phone confiscated to prevent them calling for help, and having their car keys hidden so that they could not get to work on time, thus risking their employment.

Some of these actions may be part of a journey that includes violence, yet other perpetrators may never commit an act of physical violence yet control victims through fear.

We are therefore strengthening the powers of the police and courts by introducing Domestic Abuse Protection Notices (DAPN) and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPO) to stop perpetrators and the cycle of abuse. They will provide immediate protection following a domestic abuse incident and provide flexible, longer-term protection for victims.

Our aim is always that the victim and children stay in their home; if anyone has to leave, it should be the abuser. We recognise, however, that this is not always possible and

in cases when a victim and their children must flee, there must be a safe place to go.

We will place a statutory duty on tier one local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children within refuges and other safe accommodation. This ground-breaking measure will ensure life-saving services are available to help survivors and their children rebuild their lives, safe from the danger of abuse.

“ Our aim is always that the victim and children stay in their home; if anyone has to leave, it should be the abuser

The Bill will also ensure that victims get 'priority need' status to access local housing services more easily once they leave refuge.

Before I was elected to the House of Commons, I worked as a barrister in the criminal courts. I saw, first-hand, cases of domestic abuse fail because the perpetrator intimidated the victim before the case came to court. It was clear that the approach to how these cases are handled needed to be transformed and I have drawn on this experience whilst working on this Bill.

We will help victims in the criminal courts give their best evidence by making it an automatic option to give evidence via a video link, behind screens and through other measures. In the family courts, many victims describe how perpetrators use the court process to find new ways to abuse them. We will stop abusers being able

>> to cross-examine their victims if they choose to represent themselves so that they cannot continue to torment victims.

We recognise, however, that legislation alone cannot make the changes needed, which is why a wider package of non-legislative measures sits alongside the

Bill and includes a review into support for victims within the workplace, training for frontline workers and funding to improve support and recognition of male, LGBT, BAME, disabled and elderly victims.

Ending this abhorrent crime is vital. We will be unyielding in our aim to ensure

that everybody understands that domestic abuse is everyone's business. If you are suffering please know that you are not alone, and we will support you. 

**Victoria Atkins MP** is the Minister for Safeguarding at the Home Office

## Crime is killing our capital

We need a Mayor who will protect families from crime, argues **Susan Hall AM**

**E**very family wants to feel safe. Parents want to know that their children will be safe when they meet friends, play in the park or go to school. Young people want to feel safe where they live, learn and work. When it comes to crime, however, too many families in London don't feel as safe as they should.

For all the darkness coronavirus has brought, lockdown has presented London with an opportunity to curb crime. If we are to grasp this chance, and make every family feel safe in London again, City Hall must work with the Government to get more officers on the beat and back the police to use stop and search.

At the end of last year, it was unthinkable that crime would sharply drop in 2020. Murder had reached an 11-year high with 149 homicides in the capital. Knife crime had reached a record high with more than 15,000 offences recorded by the Met. And in 2019 burglary, robbery and theft were up by 38%, 73% and 53% respectively since 2016.

However, lockdown significantly reduced crime in London. During the 'stay at home' period of lockdown, theft plummeted by 80%, robbery collapsed by 60%, knife crime fell by 44% and burglary dropped by 34%. After years of soaring crime, lockdown has presented a golden opportunity for City Hall to make London safe.

For its part, the Government's new determination to tackle crime is working. London will receive 1,369 new police officers this year in the first tranche of the Government's pledge to recruit 20,000 more officers across the country. This is vital to keeping crime low in London.

Sadiq Khan's failure to use his £18.5 billion budget to keep police numbers at 32,000 damaged local policing in London. Not only were officers over-stretched and overworked, but it became difficult to maintain local ties to the communities they were serving.

More police officers on the beat will reduce the strain on the Met and enable local policing to be restored. It means officers will be able to spend more time embedding themselves in the community and there will also be more capacity to investigate robberies and burglaries which are too often neglected.

If we are to keep violent crime under control, stop and search is vital. When Sadiq Khan was elected as Mayor his pledge to cut stop and search tied the hands of the Met when it came to stopping weapons flooding onto London's streets. As controversial as this policing tool is, it keeps Londoners safe.

Asking a person to turn out their pockets if you suspect them of carrying a weapon is a simple act, but one which could save their life or that of another person. It also acts as a

deterrent – if you know you may get caught, many will decide it's too risky to carry a weapon.

This should also be matched with more knife amnesties and bins. When a parent discovers their child is carrying a weapon, they need to know where they can safely return it without incriminating their child. To tackle knife crime, we need to all work together and that means helping parents to ensure their child never carries a knife.

“ Asking a person to turn out their pockets if you suspect them of carrying a weapon is a simple act, but one which could save their life or that of another person

That's why I welcome the Home Secretary's steadfast backing of the police, which has seen stop and search by the Met reach an eight-year high. After years of the Mayor's indecision on this vital tool, we need a Home Secretary prepared to offer the Met the political backing it needs to make London safe.

However, the Government cannot make London safe alone. The Mayor is responsible



>> for policing in the capital and unless Khan makes curbing crime his priority, this golden opportunity could be missed.

As lockdown eases we have already seen crime start to rise again in London. My fear is that unless there is a change of priorities at City Hall, crime may return to the record levels we witnessed last year in London. Lockdown may have largely paused some forms of crime but it hasn't solved London's

problems.

My fear is that despite the Government's good work, Sadiq Khan's proposal to cut London's policing budget by £110 million may allow crime to soar in the capital once again. This is not a small reduction in police funding either – it's the equivalent of nearly 1,700 officers.

Londoners need both the Government and City Hall to work tirelessly to stop crime

rising again in our city. No family wants their community to emerge from this crisis only to find that London's violent crime emergency is back.

If we are to seize this moment to make our capital safe, the Mayor of London must play his part. 

**Susan Hall AM** is Leader of the Conservatives on the London Assembly

## Net failure

**Miatta Fahnbulleh** calls for a radical overhaul of the welfare system to fight COVID-19

**T**he economic fallout from the pandemic is nothing short of grim: a projected 14% contraction in the economy this year; the deepest recession for 300 years and unemployment twice as high as before the crisis.

“ For too long, we have swept the inadequacies of our social security system underneath the carpet — the pandemic has laid it bare for all to see

Behind these headline numbers are millions of people who face a catastrophic hit to their livelihoods. We have yet to understand the full impact of this on ordinary people's lives. The early warning signs are alarming: 2.9 million new applicants for Universal Credit between 1st March and 19th May of this year, an estimated three million people going without meals since the lockdown and an 81% increase in food bank usage in March compared to last year. All of this points to the inescapable reality that many families across the country are facing real hardship.

This hardship is exposing the gaping

holes in our social safety net. We entered this recession with one of the weakest social security safety nets – both among advanced economies and in our own post-war history. Total out-of-work payments received by UK employees are on average 34% of their previous in-work income – the third lowest among 35 OECD advanced economies. At the outset of the crisis, the main adult unemployment payment was worth less than 15% of average earnings, lower than at any time since the creation of the welfare state. While the £20 per week boost to Universal Credit and working tax credits since then was a small step in the right direction, it only reversed one fifth of the overall cuts to welfare seen since 2010. And at £94 a week, many people who never imagined they would ever be on welfare are struggling to cope with an income that is simply too inadequate to live on. However we look at it, our social security system has been denuded to a worrying degree.

For too long, we have swept the inadequacies of our social security system underneath the carpet — the pandemic has laid it bare for all to see. We will have to respond – if not now, then when the swelling numbers relying on this system begin to make their voices heard. In

responding, we must rekindle the spirit behind Beveridge's welfare state: the ambition to deliver a minimum standard of living 'below which no one should be allowed to fall'. This was a key plank of the social contract that dominated for much of the post-war period. A contract that has slowly been broken.

“ We must rekindle the spirit behind Beveridge's welfare state: the ambition to deliver a minimum standard of living 'below which no one should be allowed to fall'

At the heart of our response should be a new minimum income guarantee. In the heat of the current crisis, when the priority is to get much needed income support to families quickly, this should take the form of a temporary, upfront, non-conditional payment of £221 per week to anyone that needs it. This would provide much needed relief to an estimated 5.6 million



>> people who are at risk of losing their jobs or hours and falling through the cracks of the Government's job retention and income support schemes – as well as for the millions more who may yet be left stranded as these schemes start to become unwound from August. The case for doing this to ease the hardship of those at the sharp end of this crisis is clear, but it also has the benefit of boosting spending and demand in the economy, which in turn has the power to create the jobs needed for recovery.

As we recover from this crisis, we should

then enshrine this principle of a minimum income guarantee into a social security system that badly needs reform. Through a combination of universal payments – that benefits all those who pay into the system – and means tested support for those that need it most, we must create an income floor that ensures that everyone can afford the basics for a decent standard of life.

We must move beyond the welfare state of old that was there to catch us when we fell on hard times to a wellbeing state that aims to provide everyone with the building

blocks they need to live decent, fulfilling, healthy lives. Alongside a minimum income guarantee should be access to well-funded education, childcare, health and social care and quality housing to everyone that needs it. This should form the basis of a new social settlement coming out of the pandemic to replace the one that has frayed. If we get this right, we have the chance to build back better from this crisis. [b](#)

**Miatta Fahnbulleh** is the Chief Executive of the New Economics Foundation

## Fewer births shouldn't worry us

**Robin Maynard** makes the case for smaller families as a solution for humanity's woes

**U**nderpinning the family unit, respecting the right to raise children and establishing a home appear central to conservative principles. The controversial philosopher, Sir Roger Scruton, emphasised those in a piece he wrote for *ConservativeHome* in 2013:

"There is no political cause more amenable to the conservative vision than that of the environment. For it touches on the three foundational ideas of our movement: trans-generational loyalty, the priority of the local and the search for home. Conservatives resonate to Burke's view of society, as a partnership between the living, the unborn and the dead; they believe in civil association between neighbours rather than intervention by the state; and they accept that the most important thing the living can do is to settle down, to make a home for themselves, and to pass that home to their children."

Scruton makes broader points, drawing out what he sees as an innate synergy between conservatism and conservation. He calls for conservatives to own the environmental agenda, given its roots in

concern for our habitat, the place we make home, and where we lead productive lives.

While the economy is more often seen as conservative 'home turf' than ecology – they share a common root in the ancient Greek word 'oikos', meaning related to the family, its property, and dwelling. Ecology focuses on living organisms and the environments that sustain them, economy on the management of the resources of the 'household', be those individual or national 'households'. The two 'ecos' have deviated from their common origins and should be reunited for the wellbeing of present and future generations.

“ Mainstream economists bewail falling fertility rates and the trend to smaller families as heralding economic decline

Perhaps I'm reading too much into Scruton's piece. Yet in citing Burke and the concept of society being 'a partnership between the living, the unborn and the dead', he makes a radical assertion, that

certainly resonates with the concerns of Population Matters.

Namely, that the choices, rights and freedoms of our present generation can and should be influenced and, if necessary, constrained due to the impacts of previous generations and to protect the rights of those to come.

Nowhere does this tension apply more pertinently than in regard to family size. Another philosopher, of a slightly different shade, nineteenth century Liberal MP and libertarian John Stuart Mill offers the reasoning. In *On Liberty*, published in 1859, Mill introduces the 'harm principle' defining the terms upon which the state might curtail individual liberties.

"The only purpose for which power can be rightly exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will is to prevent harm to others."

Mill distinguished between a self-regarding act and an other-regarding act, the latter being one where it is necessary



>> to consider the impact or potential harm upon others, and so where the state or society might intervene. Notably, Mill considered that having a child was an other-regarding act, given its impacts beyond the immediate home. Mill presaged Scruton in promoting the connection between ecology (home/habitat) and economy (household/resources) to conservatives.

150 years on, a study by Lund University, examining which lifestyle choices have the greatest potential in helping meet climate targets, confirms Mill's analysis. The researchers concluded that having fewer children, especially in a developed, high consuming country like the UK, had the greatest impact over the long term – around twenty times greater than the next most 'climate-friendly' lifestyle choices of living car-free, avoiding air travel and being vegan.

The natural connections between ecology, economy and family-size are raised in the Independent Review on the Economics of Biodiversity led by economist Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta and commissioned by the Treasury.

The interim report, just published, presents a compelling overview of the important relationship between biodiversity and the economy, calling upon policy makers to recognise 'demand-

side pressures' in modelling biodiversity loss. Dasgupta picks out population and consumption trends as key neglected factors in environmental and resource economics - even more so in high-consuming, developed countries as per the Lund University study.

Mainstream economists bewail falling fertility rates and the trend to smaller families as heralding economic decline. Certainly, as countries develop, universal education is provided, and women's empowerment enabled, a fall in fertility rates follows.

Adair Turner, former Director-General of the CBI, does not see population decline leading inevitably to economic regression: "In a world of rapidly expanding automation potential, demographic shrinkage is largely a boon, not a threat. Our expanding ability to automate human work across all sectors — agriculture, industry and services — makes an ever-growing workforce increasingly irrelevant to improvements in human welfare. Conversely, automation makes it impossible to achieve full employment in countries still facing rapid population growth. Automation has turned conventional economic wisdom on its head: there is greater prosperity in fewer numbers."

Although the latest statistics from the

Office of National Statistics (ONS) show that the UK's birth rate overall is falling, that doesn't mean our population growth has ended. On present trends the UK will be the most populous nation in Europe by 2050. ONS projections are for our population to reach around 73 million people by 2041, an increase of over seven million people - equivalent to seven more Birminghams, with the consequent resource and infrastructure demands.

The public are concerned by this projected growth and want to see positive action from policymakers. In a YouGov poll conducted for Population Matters in July 2018, three-quarters of UK adults polled believed the government should have a national strategy for addressing population, while 64% thought the rate of population growth projected by ONS is too high. A greater proportion of Conservative voters (81%) felt that the projected growth was too high, compared to 50% for Labour voters and 52% for Liberal Democrat voters.

The Conservative Party has the heritage, the recourse to a philosophical and economic rationale and a supportive constituency to address the neglected factor of human population. [D](#)

**Robin Maynard** is the Director of the Population Matters campaign group



## Latest report

### Going greener? Public attitudes to net zero

*Anvar Sarygulov*

The UK has made a legal commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050, but this is only the first step in a long and difficult journey. The profound changes that need to be made by individuals, government and businesses will be highly disruptive.

This report examines attitudes to the credibility of, responsibility for and the behavioural changes and policies for delivering net zero. There is a particular focus on perceptions around the decarbonisation of the supply of and demand for energy.



**THE INTERVIEW**  
**Jesse Norman MP**

**Phoebe Arslanagic-Wakefield**  
and **Joseph Silke** speak with the  
Financial Secretary to the Treasury  
about COVID-19 and what it means to  
be a conservative in modern Britain

### **Who are the people who have most influenced your political philosophy?**

I'd have to choose Michael Oakeshott, Edmund Burke and Adam Smith, since I have written so much about them, but that is by no means an exhaustive list. The joy of political philosophy is that it continues to be a very lively area of debate and thought. I've just written a piece for *Prospect Magazine* on John Rawls and his book *A Theory of Justice*, which presents a remarkably useful and prescient set of philosophical tools for thinking about where we are now with COVID-19.

### **You've said that people often ask you 'What happened to the big society?'. In your view, has the pandemic begun a revival of the 'big society'?**

That depends on how you interpret the phrase 'big society' — a set of ideas, a set of activities or a political programme? Considering those three, the 'big society' was in part an attempt to describe what was distinctive about British social and political life, with its astonishing abundance of independent institutions sitting between the individual and the state. As a political programme, much of Conservative policy between 2010 and 2015 — free schools, the returning of powers to local authorities, National Citizen Service, attempts made to devolve powers back to cities — can be brought under the 'big society' label. Though the Cameron Government pursued these policies it didn't brand them together coherently as part of the 'big society'. This meant that the 'big society' was vulnerable to charges that it was actually about philanthropy and volunteering, but it was about so much more than that. The institutions in Britain that make up the 'big society' remain vigorous and energised. We have an astonishing record of setting up independent institutions, both inside and outside the public sector.

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“ People have different reactions to these expansions, they may welcome extra support from government, or worry about the longer term financial implications of that support; they may welcome lockdown as a way of suppressing the virus, or worry that it is a suppression of individual liberty

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### **The extent of the expansion of the role of the state during the pandemic is something that a lot of conservatives feel deeply uncomfortable about. How easy will it be to roll back this expansion?**

There have been two broad extensions of the state in response to the pandemic. First, through the spending on programmes designed to address effects of COVID-19. Second, via lockdown. People have different reactions to these expansions, they may welcome extra support from government, or worry about the longer term financial implications of that support; they may welcome lockdown as a way of suppressing the virus, or worry that it is a suppression of individual liberty. There are colleagues across the House of Commons who fall into one or more of these four categories.

## **Do you think taxes might have to rise in the future because of the state spending during COVID-19?**

Thank you for inviting me to comment on tax policy outside a fiscal event, I'm not going to do that — but nice try! Across the House of Commons it's well understood that the level of expenditure we have undertaken with schemes designed to combat the effects of the pandemic cannot continue indefinitely. We will have to move to more selective interventions and support and ultimately, the bill will have to be paid. We hope that the economy will return to a trend of solid growth and that tax revenues will recover as part of that.

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“ You could look at many institutions and call them relics of a bygone era, or you could see them for what they are, the product of innumerable compromises that contain a great deal of knowledge and wisdom

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## **The Conservative Party has been able to survive and thrive for so long, in part because of its ability to evolve with the times and keep its values in step with modern sensibilities. This begs the question, however: what are conservative values today?**

People often misunderstand the nature of conservatism. Conservatism is an intrinsically evolutionary idea — it aims to keep the good stuff we have inherited while improving it and passing it on to the next generation. It contrasts with a reactionary position which wants nothing to change and a revolutionary position which wants everything to change immediately. The difficulty with the reactionary position is that no new, good things are absorbed or adopted, so what you are preserving gradually becomes less and less relevant to the circumstances people live in. The difficulty with the revolutionary position is that human beings are remarkably bad at making radical decisions that prove to be wise in the long term. Conservatism also means acknowledging that institutions are wiser than individuals. You could look at many institutions and call them relics of a bygone era, or you could see them for what they are, the product of innumerable compromises that contain a great deal of knowledge and wisdom. That we may fail to understand this is often due to our own limited understanding. When this approach is taken, it becomes obvious that radical change is profoundly foolish and that conservatism itself is a set of ideas that is reconciled to the

reality of intelligent reform.

## **In 2019, the Conservative Party achieved success across socioeconomic lines. Can the Conservatives maintain a viable voter coalition, keeping 'Red Wall' voters happy whilst retaining voters in the South East and the support of the City of London? What shared values hold these places together?**

Voter coalitions are inevitable in party politics. Many of those who voted for the Conservatives in 2019 did so because they were profoundly disenchanted with the other parties. Voters either felt they had been disingenuous in the case of the Liberal Democrats, or that they were not credible and the product of remote and elite disputes in the case of Labour. What has been fascinating is that the Conservative Party was able to draw many votes from seats which had not voted Conservative in living memory. The challenge now is to articulate a set of conservative values that encode all the good stuff the party has historically stood for, such as the family, financial soundness and the defence of the nation state, but in addition contains specific elements that acknowledge the concerns that voters had during the last election, such as completing the process of leaving the EU and 'levelling up' to spread prosperity and make the UK's economic growth fully nationwide.

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“ Conservatism is about the freedom to live one's life effectively and well, within a society that benefits from the rule of law, institutions and shared anchor points of civic life such as the family or even the pub

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## **Within the Conservative Party there is a growing conflict between liberals and libertarians who emphasise freedom of choice and opportunity, and communitarians who emphasise civic life and interdependence. What do you think the outcome of that conflict will be?**

I don't see the argument in the way you do. Conservatism is about the freedom to live one's life effectively and well, within a society that benefits from the rule of law, institutions and shared anchor points of civic life such as the family or even the pub. Often the libertarian view doesn't especially care about those things. The

“ Societies go through phases ... If we were threatened by an existential crisis in a war, after the initial shock, there would be equally vigorous debate about how to deal with the consequences and come out the other side

>> libertarian view is focused on the individual and removing the fetters from individuals. It's often confused with conservatism more widely because it is associated with American conservatism, but in terms of the British tradition I'm discussing, the conservative story is about individual aspiration as enabled by society. Of course there will always be those who will be more concerned about the authority of existing institutions, and those more concerned about personal liberties. That argument has played itself out within conservative thought for hundreds of years and I don't think anything much is going to change there.

**During the early months of the pandemic, it felt as if the country was coming together after a protracted period of division over Brexit, but these divisions are resurfacing. Are they here to stay?**

It's inevitable that societies go through phases of reaction to a shock. When a shock looks like it's clobbering a nation, there will be tremendous fellow feeling and a collective desire to resist. That is true in wartime and it has been true during the pandemic, but over a period of time people's feelings about the threat evolve. They may feel others are doing better unfairly, that there is no longer a crisis, or that the end is in sight. If we were threatened by an existential crisis in a war, after the initial shock, there would be equally vigorous debate about how to deal with the consequences and come out the other side. Social media serves to magnify this.

**You have said that you avoid negative campaigning and that politics is dying for lack of friendliness, warmth, and decency. Do you think that this Westminster problem is symbolic of a wider social malaise?**

I decided many years ago not to engage in negative campaigning — I hate it and I'm useless at being rude about anyone. I might say that their ideas are hopeless or positively counterproductive, but I'm not going to be rude. The counter-argument commonly made is that

negative campaigning may be painful to you, but hurts the other person more. My own view is that the British electorate is collectively extraordinarily wise and very rarely, if ever, makes mistakes in general elections. For these reasons, synthetic indignation and aggression contribute to the debasement of political life, but are unlikely to make much headway politically. My own Hereford and South Herefordshire constituency is one in which people are incredibly well grounded and community focused. We had trailed for 13 years before 2010, but we have been able to build up a majority there over time since then by tackling local issues, trying to do good things and reaching across political lines.

**What do you think of Keir Starmer's attempt to revive a sense of traditional patriotism within the Labour Party; is he taking the party in the right direction?**

Of course there are people of a conservative disposition who vote Labour — there's a Blue Labour movement led by Jon Cruddas and Maurice Glasman. Many have suggested that a failure to recognise a deep conservatism among many Labour voters is one of the things that doomed Mr Corbyn. When people saw an opposition leader who didn't respect The Queen, who did not feel a sense of pride in his country or its armed forces, who was not rooting out anti-Semitism, they reacted against him and voted Conservative. I hope that the Conservative Party can continue to reach out to those people.

“ When people saw an opposition leader who didn't respect The Queen, who didn't feel a sense of pride in his country or its armed forces, who was not rooting out anti-Semitism, they reacted against him and voted Conservative

**And, finally, is your current boss at the Treasury going to be the next Prime Minister?**

What I love about your questions is that I never see them coming! Needless to say, I have no idea, but it is an enormous pleasure to work with Rishi and see him in action. The Conservative Party is blessed with many people of great talent who would potentially make a great leader. That's a good thing because we want to generate conversation, a debate in or out of the Government that draws on and recruits as many principled, thoughtful and energetic people as possible. 

# CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE 2020

SATURDAY 3RD OCTOBER – TUESDAY 6TH OCTOBER

## SATURDAY

16:30 - 17:30  
Is deep decarbonisation deliverable?  
*inc. Alexander Stafford MP and Richard Walker*



## SUNDAY

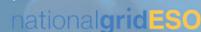
10:30 - 11:30  
Diversity in Parliament  
*inc. Caroline Nokes MP and Anita Boateng*



12:00 - 13:00  
How water can help deliver net zero emissions  
*inc. Jo Gideon MP and Tony Juniper CBE*



13:30 - 14:30  
Connecting communities with net zero  
*inc. Philip Dunne MP and Natascha Engel*



15:00 - 16:00  
Warming Britain's homes  
*inc. Bob Blackman MP and Adam Scorer*



16:30 - 17:30  
Care after COVID:  
future financing  
*inc. Damian Green MP and Cllr James Jamieson*



## MONDAY

09:00 - 10:00  
Green technologies of tomorrow  
*inc. Kwasi Kwarteng MP and Dr Rhian-Mari Thomas OBE*



12:00 - 13:00  
Care after COVID:  
Ensuring a resilient elderly care system  
*inc. Dean Russell MP and Peter Foster*



13:30 - 14:30  
Human rights on the battlefield  
*inc. Bob Stewart MP and Dominic Grieve QC*



15:00 - 16:00  
Delivering net zero  
*inc. Nadhim Zahawi MP and Mayor Ben Houchen*



16:30 - 17:30  
The effect of COVID-19 on child poverty  
*inc. Stephen Crabb MP and Baroness Stroud*



## TUESDAY

09:00 - 10:00  
Having healthy homes  
*inc. Lord Greenhalgh and Ben Everitt MP*



10:30 - 11:30  
The jobs and goods of a post-COVID,  
net zero economy  
*inc. Kwasi Kwarteng MP and Emma Pinchbeck*



"Bright Blue has been the source of radical and exciting ideas that have shaped government."

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

# A solid start

Reducing conflict between parents leads to happier children, explains **Ben Lewing**



**W**e know that the quality of parenting has a crucial impact on children's outcomes, and this has been driving public service investment decisions for decades, but what about the quality of the relationship between the parents? How important is that to children, especially at a time when local authorities are reporting an increase in parental conflict?

Conflict between parents is normal. In fact, seeing how their parents disagree is very important for children. Parents model constructive conflict for their children when

**“ Parents who are in a hostile relationship are typically more confrontational and aggressive towards their children**

they seek compromise with each other, demonstrate warmth, use humour and negotiation as they resolve their differences, and continue to show respect. For a child, the best ending to a fight between parents is a warm and meaningful resolution.

However, when children are exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict between their parents this can have a damaging and long-term impact on them. This kind of destructive conflict is characterised by intense quarrels, verbal or physical aggression, arguments that are about or involve the children, the 'silent' treatment, lack of respect and emotional control, and a lack of resolution.

This isn't a question of relationship structure. The evidence shows that parental conflict can harm children's outcomes regardless of whether parents are together or separated, or are not biologically related to the child, such as in foster families.

Doing something about the quality of parental relationships matters for children. It matters because decades of research shows exposure to destructive parental conflict for children and young people is associated with poorer academic outcomes, negative peer relationships, substance misuse, poor future relationship chances, low employability and heightened interpersonal violence. It is also associated with mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression, poor attachment and risk-taking behaviours.

It also matters because parents who are in a hostile relationship are typically more confrontational and aggressive towards their children, and less sensitive and emotionally responsive to their children's needs. This means that interventions which focus solely on supporting the parent-child relationship are unlikely to improve outcomes for children if they take place in a context of parental conflict.

Some families are more vulnerable to parental conflict. Financial difficulties, for example, can impact on parental mental health, which in turn can increase conflict between parents. The coronavirus pandemic and lockdown has created the ideal conditions for conflict – financial pressure, worklessness, bereavement, cramped living conditions, uncertainty about the future and lack of access to support services.

More than ever, responding to conflict between parents must be an urgent priority. However, taking action on parental conflict is complex. It touches on cultural attitudes towards the family, and what we think public services are for. It relates to how we train our workforce, and how local services work together. It depends on how we design support services, and reach out to families who don't trust us enough to ask

for or accept help. It's also very personal – many of us know destructive conflict, have seen the damage it can cause, and recognise how hard it is to talk about it.

Although the evidence on how parental conflict affects children is clear, it is less strong on what kinds of interventions make the difference in the context of the UK. There are, however, common features of effective interventions. They help couples to understand the impact of conflict behaviours, and what they could do differently, by focusing on stress management, effective coping and problem solving. They build skills through modelling, roleplay and feedback, to help parents to communicate more effectively and avoid conflict. For parents in the context of divorce or separation, they build motivation to

**“ The coronavirus pandemic and lockdown has created the ideal conditions for conflict**

strengthen the quality of parenting and not to undermine the other parent. They target the couple's relationship communication and conflict management skills at key transition points, such as becoming a parent or a child's school transition.

We also have much to learn right now about the local innovation we are seeing as local public services adapt their offer to the current context, particularly in the digital world. Our recent study, *Reducing parental conflict in the context of COVID-19*, reported that the vast majority of local authorities

>> and intervention developers, providers have adapted their provision to be available virtually or digitally, and are keen to find out more about the effectiveness and impact of this.

Parental relationship quality is no longer the 'neglected site for early intervention'

that EIF described in 2016 when we published our first evidence review on *What works to enhance interparental relationships and improve outcomes for children?*, but the job is certainly not done yet. We must make sure that the pressure created by the public health emergency

doesn't divert us from the importance for children of reducing destructive conflict between their parents. 

**Ben Lewing** is the Assistant Director for Policy and Practice at the Early Intervention Foundation

## Levelling up begins in the early years

**Joanne Cash** calls for early years to be a priority to close the life chances gap



**T**he coronavirus lockdown supposedly forced families across the UK into the same experience at the same time: confined to their homes, sharing the kitchen table for education, work and play. However, the pandemic experience of one family has been radically different to that of another.

A house, with a garden, technology and space for home-schooling and working, with parents who have the time, energy, and inclination to take an interest in a child's education, is not equivalent to a small flat with a stressed, overworked or unemployed parent and no access to a laptop. Far from being the great leveller, coronavirus has exacerbated inequalities that have always been present.

“ **Children from disadvantaged backgrounds lag behind their peers by an average of 4.3 months** ”

These inequalities begin early and have a dramatic effect in the first few years of a child's life. New parents are supported through antenatal classes, by midwives and by health visitors. As a society, we seem to recognise the need to teach parents at this stage. And yet, once a child receives their last injections, this support all but disappears – until they arrive at school.

These early years might better be termed the 'lost years', and life chances are severely diminished by them.

During these lost years, the gap between those from wealthier, and those from more deprived backgrounds, becomes pronounced. By the time they arrive at school, children from disadvantaged backgrounds lag behind their peers by an average of 4.3 months of learning. Once the gap appears, it is very hard to close. By GCSE stage, a chasm of 19 months has appeared.

This Government's commitment to social justice, with targeted regeneration initiatives such as the £24 million investment to drive up school standards in the North East, is very welcome. But interventions like these focus largely on school-age children. To level up opportunity and life outcomes, we need to address the early years.

There is overwhelming evidence that inadequate parenting is one of the most important drivers of social inequalities in a child's cognitive development before school. The Sutton Trust, Resolution Foundation, Early Intervention Foundation and many others have concluded that the quality of parenting impacts both cognitive and socio-economic outcomes.

Ten years ago I stood for Parliament in an inner London seat and was struck by the lack of parenting ability of many young

disadvantaged families. It seemed as obvious to me then as now that the best way to help improve these children's chances was to educate their parents in how to care for them. It led me to co-found Parent Gym, which now delivers 100 programmes a term in areas of greatest need.

The benefits of the programme on parenting outcomes and the mental health of participants have been verified by Warwick University. When Boris Johnson visited a Parent Gym programme as Mayor of London he described it as "one of the most hopeful things [he] had ever seen".

If the Government were to do one thing to improve the chances of future generations, it would be to develop a long overdue parenting support strategy for the early years. It should cover the first 1,001 critical days from conception to entry into nursery education, and coordinate efforts between the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care.

The other most reliable way to equip our children is by improved nursery provision. This is already the norm in Denmark and other Nordic countries, with 98% of children aged three to six attending quality nursery.

>> While the Government has committed to funding maintained nursery schools by 2021, our early years learning provision needs urgent attention to increase the number, duration and quality of places. There is a compelling case for it when children who attend quality preschool for two to three years gain eight months in their literacy development.

Along with parenting and early years learning provision, there is a strong case for the adoption of a universal measure for understanding children's vulnerability: the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) score. This is an impressive and proven measure

of early years development and risks. Many studies show that a number of ACEs – such as living with mental health issues, alcohol or drug dependency, violent or sexual abuse as well as childhood bereavement or family break-up – can have serious impact on health, education, opportunity and even life expectancy. The ACE score has been endorsed by the British Psychological Society and the Early Intervention Foundation and is successfully used in children's services in the US. Combined with the right interventions, it would provide a vital unifying framework for childhood support.

The likelihood is that we are about to enter a deep recession and interventions on the scale suggested here are expensive, but COVID-19 has shown us that the lost years cost us all. The correlation of poverty, obesity and chronic health conditions has meant increased rates of hospital admission and death among the disadvantaged. There is a moral imperative both to help these children and to invigorate our nation's prospects. The lost years can eventually mean lost lives. It is time to act. 

**Joanne Cash** is the Chair of Mind Gym plc and the Co-Founder of Parent Gym

## No child left behind

Such high child poverty in a wealthy country is shameful, decries **Anne Longfield OBE**

**F**or a country as wealthy as ours, it cannot be right that in 2018/19 over four million children were living in poverty — an increase of 600,000 children since 2010/11. For these children, being in poverty is not a statistic, it is an inescapable and all-encompassing element of their lives.

Poverty has been a reality for a substantial portion of children growing up in Britain for centuries. Even in the 21st century, before the coronavirus crisis hit, nine children in a classroom of 30 were living below the UK's relative poverty line.

What has changed in recent years is the profile of households in poverty. Most notably, child poverty has become more common in working households than in workless households. In 2009/10, 54% of children in absolute poverty were in working families. Nine years later, 72% of children in poverty were in working families. Many families work flat out to support their family — sometimes in multiple jobs — and are still unable to earn the income they need. The coronavirus crisis will worsen many of these alarming statistics.

As  
England's  
Children's  
Commissioner

I meet children from all sorts of backgrounds and not every child growing up in poverty is unhappy, doing badly at school or at risk. But the evidence is clear — poverty almost always makes existing vulnerabilities worse. Growing up in poverty puts at risk the building blocks of a good childhood like secure relationships, a decent home and an inspiring education.

Most obviously, poverty can be a huge source of stress and worry for the children who experience it. Children in poverty are also much more likely to experience material deprivation. Education and employment opportunities for children in poverty are also fewer. Research by my office has found that 37% of children who receive free school meals leave education without a Level 2 Qualification, compared to 18% of all children. The consequences for their life chances are obvious. Growing



>> up in poverty is all about the here and now, and constant uncertainty means that poor children cannot plan for their future like their more affluent peers.

It is staggering that in this wealthy country we have children regularly skipping meals while their parents struggle to buy food. I cannot tell you how heart-breaking it is to go on a school visit and to find that there is actually a food bank in the school itself. Too many children living in poverty are also growing up in temporary accommodation, such as office block conversions where families are cramming into flats the size of a parking space.

Tackling these problems will be tough and expensive. In my view, it can only be done nationally with the full weight of government behind it. Failing to do so means accepting there will always be millions of children with poor outcomes, poor health, poor prospects and social problems that end up costing billions to deal with.

The Chancellor's quick action to introduce a furlough scheme during the coronavirus crisis averted catastrophe for many families, but those living with poverty

will need more help in the months and years ahead. That is why I argued during the coronavirus crisis that there should be an immediate uplift in child benefit, of at least £10 per child, to help all families. I also believe the two-child limit on UC and tax credits must now go, as should the benefit cap. Many parents whose hours have been cut can no longer reach the earnings threshold at which they are exempted. I would also like to see families who need Universal Credit receiving their first payment straight away, not in five weeks which too often leads to family debt rising.

In the medium and long-term, I want to see a complete re-evaluation of how we tackle child poverty. This must range from investment in early help programmes like Family Hubs and Sure Start, to recasting our social security system so it does not penalise some of those who need it most. It must mean tackling the disadvantage gap in schools and making sure those areas that are struggling to cope with the effects of poverty, many of them in Northern England, are given the resources to tackle generational problems.

Undeniably, there are millions of

children who are not part of our national progress. Turning this around should be the priority for any party of government, and for a government elected on the promise of 'levelling-up' there is no excuse not to act now. Too many hard-working, tired, over-stretched parents are in low paid, insecure work, struggling to make ends meet. They contribute to society through their taxes and efforts, but live week to week. They are doing the right thing, but the odds are stacked against them.

The consequences for their children are obvious, and the problems of poverty cascade down through the decades. How the Government responds to this challenge will affect the lives of millions of children for years to come, and a failure to act will lead to failures in other policy areas, from gang-related crime to the rising costs of the care and special needs education systems.

Helping these children into the future must be a national ongoing mission, not just a temporary easing of the consequence of a once in a lifetime public health crisis. 

**Anne Longfield OBE** is the Children's Commissioner for England

## The changing face of early childhood

**Carey Oppenheim** and **Jordan Rehill** examine the evidence on family stability



**T**he story here is one of continuity and change. Family living arrangements in the UK are increasingly varied, with a growth in cohabitation, re-partnering and blended families. Family structures can also be transient in nature with parents, children and other family members sometimes experiencing a number of different family structures throughout their lives. Research suggests that children growing up in families which change in structure multiple times are more likely to have poor early

outcomes. However, these continue to account for a small proportion of all families, according to recent estimates. Indeed, the majority of children under five in the UK continue to grow up in married couple families.

In this context, the 'family' remains a heavily debated and ideologically contested concept, with diverging views about the importance of marriage and the impact of separation on children's early outcomes. Though 'family' as a word remains constant

in public discourse, what it describes has also changed markedly in the last 20 years. In the UK, we have not yet reached a broad political and ideological consensus on this issue, despite the growing evidence base.

Debates on the importance of family structure have roared on for decades, if not centuries. They have particular significance

>> at a time when issues of social well-being and inequality are being thrown into sharp relief by the COVID-19 crisis. Family circumstances have a powerful influence on how a baby develops and fares throughout its childhood and beyond. Understanding the pressures and dynamics of family life is fundamental to consideration of how we might build a more resilient and cohesive society. Without understanding the complexities of families today, the policies and initiatives that seek to address other key areas of our society — education, productivity, health, mental health and intergenerational equity — will falter.

It has often been said that for every complex problem there is a solution that is simple, neat and wrong. This maxim certainly rings true when it comes to the complex relationship between family structure and child outcomes. The research in this area is complex and nuanced. A growing consensus is beginning to form, however, about the ways in which family structure, socio-economic factors and inter-parental conflict intertwine to shape children's early outcomes and well-being.

## “ Public policy needs to support family relationships and children’s development regardless of family structure

We know there are marked differences in children's early outcomes when comparing married and cohabiting parent families, but when we take into account the differences in the characteristics of those who marry and those who cohabit — e.g. their educational background and socio-economic status — the differences in young children's outcomes, especially cognitive, between those growing up in married and cohabiting families largely disappears. While it is true that cohabiting parents are more likely to split up than those who are married, the evidence suggests this is because people in stable relationships



are more likely to get married, rather than marriage itself making relationships more stable.

Growing up in a lone parent household is also thought to be associated with negative socio-emotional and cognitive outcomes for children. However, the evidence is mixed on the age at which we would expect to see impact on the child. More research is needed to disentangle these factors and further test these associations, particularly in relation to social and emotional development. Again, the differences in the early cognitive development of young children in lone mother and two-parent families appear to be largely driven by differences in their economic circumstances rather than family structure or parenting practices.

We now have plenty of evidence from several decades' international research which shows the negative impact of poor-quality family relationships – for adults' health, and for children's long-term outcomes and life chances. The quality of a couple's relationship, whether together or apart, is also a key influence on how mothers and fathers parent and the presence of unresolved and hostile conflict in a family. Regardless of family structure, it has been shown to be damaging for early

childhood well-being and outcomes.

Children growing up with separated parents in a stable and harmonious arrangement may fare better than children who are growing up in a couple where there is a high degree of conflict. This suggests that public policy needs to support family relationships and children's development regardless of family structure, especially for families going through transitions, whether separation, forming a new partnership or facing other challenges such as bereavement or financial difficulties.

The Nuffield Foundation is exploring these changes in further detail as part of our *Changing face of early childhood in the UK* series of evidence reviews, events and engagement. The series will draw on an extensive body of academic research on early childhood, some 80 studies funded by the Foundation over the last eight years, alongside other key research. The first review of the series *How are the lives of families with young children changing?* is due to be published in late autumn. [🔗](#)

**Carey Openheim** is the Cross-cutting Project Lead at the Nuffield Foundation and the former Chief Executive of the Early Intervention Foundation and **Jordan Rehill** is a researcher at the Nuffield Foundation

# Why I'm a Bright Blue supporter

**Graham Simpson MSP** explains his political journey and why he backs Bright Blue



I joined the Conservative Party a long time ago. I was 15 and still at school.

It was just before Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister.

Me and my mate joined the Young Conservatives in Carlisle, which then had no chance of having a Tory MP. We were dubbed 'Maggie's Minions'.

“ I have always been of the view that the core belief of Conservatives is that variety is the spice of life

I attended a national Young Conservatives (YC) conference and spoke at it, so did Harold Macmillan. I think I spoke about the Brandt Report on international aid and I recall doing a local radio interview where the interviewer looked completely baffled.

At one conference I handed a petition to Maggie calling for a local community centre to be saved. Someone took our photo but never sent it to me. Not like nowadays.

I then went on to have career in local, then national newspapers where party politics was not part of my life.

But at some point during Tony Blair's premiership, I started to get annoyed and rejoined the party.

I turned up for my first association meeting and got elected chairman.

Subsequently I was elected as a councillor in East Kilbride, which was staunchly Labour at the time. I then got re-elected, topping the poll.

All that was down to hard work and putting people first.

And that's what drives me.

I have no time for vested interests. I can't stand it when I see money buying influence.

I was the Scottish Conservative's Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Communities and Social Security until Douglas Ross made me Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity.

I have always been of the view that the core belief of Conservatives is that variety is the spice of life. That's what makes me a Bright Blue supporter too.

In housing, if we left everything to the market, we would not get the variety of tenure, styles and places that we need.

We won't necessarily get places that people want to live in and we certainly won't get the space – indoors and out – that

are so important for quality of life.

We see the importance of space during the current pandemic.

I am attracted to some of the work colleagues have done in government down in London, particularly the idea of having a national housing agency which, in its words, 'disrupts the market'.

“ We should also think if our current model of leaving everything to the market is the right one

A similar body in Scotland could see the state driving development in places like the rural parts of our country that developers normally steer clear of.

My new role – transport – presents opportunities for some fresh thinking too.

I am really keen on the idea that public transport should be joined-up, that you should be able to hop on a train, the underground, a tram, bus, or ferry with just one card.

We should also think if our current model of leaving everything to the market is the right one. Too many communities are stuck in public transport deserts.

So if we are putting people first – not those vested interests I mentioned – then we should be open to rethinking things.

That's what Bright Blue is about and it's what I am about. 

**Graham Simpson MSP** is the Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity



Colin

# Tamworth Prize 2020 winner

Ollie Tinker answers our essay question: what should one-nation conservatism mean in the 2020s?



Number 10

One-nation conservatism has always been a relatively malleable concept. First conceptualised in 1837 by Benjamin Disraeli, it has constantly been reinvented throughout the party's history to meet the demands of an evolving society.

Historically, it has referred to the paternalistic duty of the privileged to look out for those less fortunate and a commitment to maintaining the unity of the United Kingdom, but following the result of the 2019 General Election, it should be reinvented once more to meet the demands of British society in the 2020s. With the advent of Boris Johnson's 'People's Government' amidst the increasing fragmentation of the Union, Britain needs one-nation conservatism more now than at any time since the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

Perhaps the most notable period of one-nation conservatism was between 1951 and 1964, when Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan and Alec Douglas-Home led pragmatic governments committed to narrowing inequality whilst helping Britain recover from the economic tribulations of the War. They were also faced with the challenge of establishing Britain's place within a changing international order. Boris Johnson's government also faces this challenge, as the task of re-establishing

Britain's global role in the wake of Brexit presents huge opportunities within economic and foreign policy.

Similarly, the flattening economic and social consequences of the coronavirus outbreak require policies which cater for everyone in society. Naturally, this requires different policies to those implemented after the War, but the principle remains the same – the Government must represent the interests of everyone in society, making no exclusions based on race, class, gender, sexuality or disability.

Such has been the transformation of British society, the Conservatives now represent constituencies outside their traditional support base, such as Blyth Valley and Bassetlaw. Transformations require new commitments. Where one-nation conservatism has traditionally aimed to narrow the degree of inequality between the richest and poorest sections of society, it should now strive to narrow regional inequality as well.

One of the worst countries in the world for regional inequality, Britain has seen a disproportionate yet necessarily high level of investment in infrastructure and employment in London and the South East, but often overlooked, 'left behind' working class and coastal communities in the north of England, Wales and Scotland. In 2017,

average annual disposable income in London stood at £28,000, compared to just £16,000 in the North East. To be a one-nation conservative in the 2020s should mean a commitment to investing in infrastructure projects in underfunded regions of the UK, improving standards of education in these areas and empowering local communities.

Infrastructure projects such as HS2 are therefore essential to combat Britain's increasing centralisation by making the north better connected. So too is the extension of subsidies to attract new employers to former manufacturing communities suffering from a high level of structural unemployment, to have a similar impact that Nissan has had in Sunderland. This is especially important in the context of an increasingly fragmented Union. The rise of Scottish nationalism, complemented by a lack of identification and engagement with London and the South East from other parts of the country has shrouded the future of the Union in uncertainty. This could be rectified by a commitment to promoting regional equality, by creating new opportunities for less developed areas of the country, without damaging progress already made in other areas. By adopting new principles, one-nation conservatism can remain committed to its traditional principles.

In order to understand what one-nation conservatism means, it is important to understand what it means to be British. Whilst historically concerned with addressing class differences, the latest evolution of one-nation conservatism should strive to promote inclusivity and

>> celebrate diversity. Post-war immigration from the Commonwealth, and more recently from Eastern Europe and the Middle East has seen Britain become a multicultural society where multiple faiths are practised. In 2018, 13.8% of the British public came from a minority ethnic background – a percentage which is much larger in urban areas. One-nation conservatives should promote inclusivity and tolerance, whilst aiming to narrow inequality between different ethnic groups. At a time where there is little that unites the British population, being British should be celebrated for the diversity it implies. Beyond ethnic diversity, one-nation conservatives should also promote inclusivity and equality of opportunity in terms of sexuality, disability and gender.

Traditionally a pragmatic form of Conservative ideology, one-nation conservatism in the 2020s should be

no different in this regard. It should be pragmatic in its attitude to the changing demands of society, and pragmatic in the means it adopts to achieve its socially liberal aims. This is not to say that one-nation conservatism should abandon Conservative economic principles. It should remain fiscally responsible, promote equality of opportunity and reward individualism and enterprise. It should find a balance between social and economic liberalism to forge a Conservative Party which works for the whole country.

As a new decade begins, so too should the new direction of one-nation conservatism. The Conservative Party, by embracing the latest evolution of one-nation conservatism, has the opportunity to reinvent itself, unite the nation and protect the future of the Union – an opportunity it can ill afford to waste, given the need to adapt, to avoid losing power after ten years

in government. The extraordinary election result, coinciding with the UK's withdrawal from the European Union presents a unique opportunity for Britain to forge its own path once more. By empowering the new communities that it represents, and celebrating the uniqueness of multicultural Britain, the Party can dispel the urban myth that it represents only the wealthiest in society, and establish a new reputation as a benevolent party committed to equality of opportunity by economically responsible means. Beyond enhancing itself, the party can also make the United Kingdom a more liberal, socially mobile country with one of the most advanced infrastructure networks in the world. Only by championing the latest form of one-nation conservatism will this be possible. 

**Ollie Tinker** is a third year History student at Newcastle University

## Research update

**Joseph Silke** provides an update on Bright Blue's research programme



Like everybody else, Bright Blue has been adapting to the disruption thrust upon the world by the pandemic.

In the space of only six months, the entire prism through which we view our research has changed beyond what we could have imagined before. Brexit, although still not entirely resolved, seems like an issue from a bygone age.

We lost some time to furlough and we are all working from home, but we still have a host of exciting research projects that have been released or are in the works.

In July, we released some snapshot polling and analysis on the *Experiences and expectations of businesses during COVID-19*. We have also just released major, comprehensive polling and analysis of

public attitudes to net zero: *Going greener?* and we are nearing the end of an exciting research project on citizenship.

This autumn, Bright Blue is relaunching with a new Chair: the former *Today* and *Evening Standard* editor Sarah Sands. We are thrilled to have her on the team, and we will soon be revealing our new programme of research with four major projects across a range of policy areas, as well as our new research themes, for the post-Brexit, post-COVID-19 world.

This year we will be attending Conservative Party Conference virtually, with 15 fringe events lined up with some great partners. If you are attending too, do join us for discussions on a cross-section of pressing issues including getting to net

zero, social care, COVID-19, poverty, human rights and more. A full list of events is on our website.

Despite the turmoil and uncertainty of the world around us, we guarantee that Bright Blue will continue to produce the original, impactful, and evidence-based research to defend and champion the liberal conservative values that are needed to come out of all of this stronger, even if its from our bedrooms. 

**Joseph Silke** is the Communications Officer at Bright Blue

## Remaking one nation

**Nick Timothy** demonstrates why he is still one of the Right's finest thinkers



**Ryan Shorthouse**  
Chief Executive, Bright Blue

**N**ick Timothy's new book is testament to his thoroughness and thoughtfulness. He is the type of person, from modest beginnings, that meritocrats in the conservative movement should be praising for reaching the heights of professional life as Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister. He does his homework.

He is humble about success, writing accurately and eloquently:

"Nobody, however successful they might be, has succeeded alone ... Precisely because nobody has succeeded alone, all have a debt to others." This book, however, leaves no doubt about Timothy's talent.

The breadth of his reading and thinking reveals an obsessiveness about politics. But this can also lead him to unsavoury personal vendettas against those he has clashed with – former colleagues George Osborne, Justine Greening and Philip Hammond, most strikingly.

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**“ He is the type of person, from modest beginnings, that meritocrats in the conservative movement should be praising**

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He has a rare ability to write illuminatingly on both complex philosophical principles and dense statistical evidence. His analysis of Britain's economic woes, in particular, is impressively factual, if not a little dystopian. But he tries to cover too many subject areas, sometimes offering bold conclusions based on narrow and superficial evidence — especially on social mobility, self-employment and social integration. This points to a perennial

problem with successful political advisers – they can quickly become omnipotent without omniscience.

Timothy has a raw and genuine anger about the circumstances of peers he left behind – the white, working-class – firing off facts about their limited educational and employment prospects. But when he apportion blame, he falls into cliché: it is elites either sneering at or ignoring them.

Apart from the odd contrarian columnist, I have never heard a professional person speak so damningly about other people.

The difficulties that do still exist are not through lack of trying – there have been countless government initiatives to support the disadvantaged. It is because turning communities around is dreadfully difficult.

The book joins those in the post-liberal genre in blaming liberalism, or at least variants of it, for our supposed political, social and economic decay. He develops a taxonomy at the start. Essential liberalism, with its focus on individual rights and institutional accountability, gets a thumbs up. But he believes there are two ugly mutations of this philosophy which have emerged — elite liberalism and ultra-liberalism, with the latter, Janus-like, having a right-wing face in its obsessions with free markets and a left-wing face in identarian politics.

However, the distinction between these different liberalisms blurs as the book develops. As Timothy states, the leftist turn to communalism which he rightly warns about — and astutely ascribes to the rise in anti-Semitism — is not liberal. He believes rightist ultra-liberalism is in ascendancy, but the facts say otherwise: British governments in recent decades have not been shy of the state. Open borders have not been pursued. Wage floors have been adopted and

increased.

The state has spent and regulated, especially during this COVID-19 crisis.

Bashing liberalism, even its essential version, is clearly an itch that needs scratching. He attempts to expose foundational flaws. First, the worship of rationality to reveal a single truth. But liberals such as Karl Popper have long promulgated pluralism to falsify arguments and enable competing viewpoints, in a constant journey towards — rather than absolute arrival at — truth.

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**“ He develops a taxonomy at the start ... however, the distinction between these different liberalisms blurs**

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Second, making freedom the pre-eminent value, thereby neglecting relationships and responsibilities. I agree that this is tricky terrain for liberals, sometimes ignored. But within the liberal tradition there are those who want freedom to be a prime, but not necessarily exclusive, consideration in political affairs.

Indeed, he quotes liberals such as Adam Smith, Joseph Schumpeter and Isaiah Berlin all discussing the importance of dignity and community.

These important values — freedom and community — need balancing, prioritised on different issues at different points in our lives. Timothy is at his best towards the end of this book, when articulating what conservatism is, respecting and resolving the tensions between different desiderata.

He writes very beautifully: "Conservatism

>> does not place one value above all others. Individual freedom alone does not trump our obligations to others... Correspondingly, conservatism does not err too far in the opposite direction. It should not stifle or intrude upon our personal freedom. The whole is important, but so too is the individual, which is why conservatives have a respect for individuality and a tolerance for quirkiness and eccentricity."

His policy prescriptions are generally unoriginal but sometimes surprising, especially in support of the legalisation of cannabis and assisted dying. You see, sometimes we need to lean more liberally,

rather than just thinking we always need a communitarian correction.

The book, like all of us, is a bundle of contradictions: principled and poetic in places, blinkered and inconsistent in others. But Nick Timothy has a brilliant brain. The book is very much worth a read for allowing you to learn from and debate with it. 

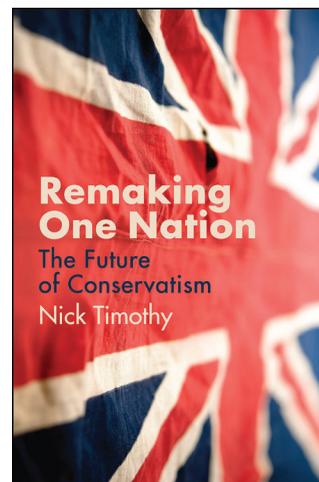
*Remaking one nation: the future of conservatism;*

Nick Timothy;

Polity;

224 pages.

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## TV: The Mandalorian

Jon Favreau's touching adventure in a galaxy far, far away dazzles

**Joseph Silke**  
Communications Officer, Bright Blue

**S**tar Wars has always been about families. To what extent familial ties determine one's destiny is one of the key questions to which the principal films strive to find an answer. The theme has been fertile ground for operatic explorations of loyalty, betrayal, redemption and love combined with laser swords. Indeed, they all revolved around successive generations of the Skywalker family, and produced one of the most iconic twists in cinematic history.

Unfortunately, Disney's final act to the *Skywalker* saga was executed with all the grace of a clown running across a minefield. I'm still not sure what was more jarring: the fact that Rey managed to bank zero character development after three feature films or the revelation that Emperor Palpatine had sex. I therefore approached *The Mandalorian*, Disney's live action *Star Wars* television series created by Jon Favreau, with some combination of

trepidation and low expectations. I must say, however, that I absolutely loved it.

Leading man Pedro Pascal, whose face you might remember getting caved in like a Kinder Egg during his time as Oberyn Martell in *Game of Thrones*, does a phenomenal job bringing the titular bounty hunter 'Mando' to life despite almost exclusively keeping his helmet on for the entire series. Clearly he wasn't taking any chances this time. The series revives the spaghetti-western-in-space vibe from the original trilogy as we follow Mando navigating a largely lawless Outer Rim, only five years after the decisive Battle of Endor in *Return of the Jedi*.

“ It has been reported that Werner Herzog ... was reduced to tears at the sight of 'Baby Yoda' on set

One of the most disappointing elements of the sequel trilogy was how we never

got a genuine glimpse of the galaxy without

The Empire. The opening scene of *The Force Awakens* literally had stormtroopers complete with their conspicuous white armour. Disney lazily reverted to a repackaged Empire vs Rebels formula. In *The Mandalorian*, however, we finally get something more interesting. The remnants of the Imperials are cast out into the wastelands like refugees, forced to hire Mando to bring in a valuable, mystery target.

This target would not only steal the show, but become a cultural titan. It has been reported that Werner Herzog, who cameos as an Imperial officer, was reduced to tears at the sight of 'Baby Yoda' on set. Yes, he really is that cute. For whom Mando is sent to retrieve is no hardened renegade, but what is referred to only as 'The Child'. The Child happens to be an infant of the



>> same species as Jedi Grand Master Yoda, hence the nickname instantly adopted by fans across the world.

Rather than hand the seemingly helpless creature over to his client, Mando opts to protect him. It is the bond that develops between these two unlikely companions that defines the series. The warmth builds organically over the episodes until Mando becomes a surrogate father for the wee Baby Yoda. It is a familial bond of choice, and it's heartwarming.

“ It was unexpected that the series would be a story about a gunslinging dad and his baby, but that's essentially what it is

A 'foundling' himself who was adopted as a child by the Mandalorian tribe, Mando and Baby Yoda form a two-person clan of

their own.

“ *The Mandalorian* gets all of the basics right ... an exciting *Star Wars* adventure which honours what came before

It was unexpected that the series would be a story about a gunslinging dad and his baby, but that's essentially what it is.

Mando and Baby Yoda go on the run from the Imperials and other bounty hunters sent to retrieve the prize that our hero failed to deliver as promised. Over the course of the episodes meet several side characters, with Kuiil played by Nick Nolte and Cara Dune played by Gina Carano as standouts. We also get the mandatory droid in the form of IG-11, marvellously voiced by Taika Waititi.

Mando has a big problem with droids,

which can be traced back to the invasion of his home planet by the Separatist army during the Clone Wars. As a child he was orphaned and taken in by the Mandalorian tribe, who raised him as one of their own. Fans of the franchise have long hoped for more insights into Mandalorian culture; this is the way!

Mando's adoption into the Mandalorian tribe mirrors his own adoption of Baby Yoda, which is a satisfying development for the character and feels like a coming-of-age moment.

The first series of *The Mandalorian* gets all of the basics right. It is an exciting *Star Wars* adventure which honours what came before it while providing something new. While not as epic in scale as the films, that allows for a more intimate experience which pays off.

After a stellar start, the Mando and Baby Yoda return to Disney+ this month. [👉](#)

## Film: The Farewell

Lulu Wang's Chinese-American comedy-drama doesn't quite hit the mark

**Alex Griffiths**

Researcher, Bright Blue

**T**he *Farewell* is a visually stunning film with a perspective on life and death not often seen in Western cinema.

However, despite brilliant acting and visuals, it is undermined by poor character development, a missed opportunity for serious political commentary and a weak ending.

*The Farewell's* premise is that Nai Nai, elderly matriarch of a Chinese family, is diagnosed with Stage Four lung cancer. As per Chinese tradition, she is not informed of her diagnosis because of a belief that it is not the disease which kills, but the fear

it induces which deals the mortal blow.

This is a film as much about a culture clash between East and West, as about grief.

Nai Nai's international family descend on the city of Changchun to bid farewell to her, under the auspices of a hastily arranged wedding designed to provide cover. Events unfold from the perspective of Billi, Nai Nai's twenty-something American granddaughter, who struggles to keep the truth from her grandmother.

This is a film with a brilliant eye for setting a scene whether it be confusion about how to enter a hospital through a wide-angle distance shot which almost loses the characters, or underlining the forced conviviality of a party game with

close, intimate focuses on each participant.

One other thing I thought the film missed, intentionally or not, was a proper critique of China. The central basis for the film, suppressing truth for stability's sake, seems a very appropriate allegory for modern China. However, the film ignores this opportunity. Only one scene addresses directly the differences between the US and China and even then, avoids sensitivities. The closest we get is an admission that America has 'opportunities' China does not.

The swerving of analysis was distracting



>> because for a film premised on the idea that a Chinese American finds it difficult to understand the rationale behind Chinese customs it was reluctant to have a deep discussion or analysis of the contrasts between the two different perspectives.

“The central basis for the film, suppressing truth for stability’s sake, seems a very appropriate allegory for modern China

For example, in one scene Billi and a woman we assume from a scene is a prostitute locked eyes outside a hotel room but this action seemed incongruous because it hinted at a darker, more honest appreciation of the problems contemporary China that had little discussion in the rest of the film. The failure to engage with the contrast was even stranger when we consider that the film is supposed to be

about the relationship between Billi and her grandmother, and yet the differences in women’s rights between China and America aren’t particularly considered.

The root of many of the film’s problems, however, is not the failure to engage in a dialogue on differences, but rather to appropriately develop the characters. Despite the amazing acting of the cast, the film would have been much improved by reducing the cast, rather than neglecting characters, with the exceptions of Nai Nai and Billi.

It is only Shuzhen Zhao’s Nai Nai, in a scene stealing performance worthy of awards, who receives any real development. In comparison Awkwafina’s Billi, the titular star of the film, is at times overshadowed by other events. The major problems she is escaping at home in America are confusingly only superficially discussed.

There are only so many times we can see Billi or a family member wrestle with

the truth before it becomes repetitive. Opportunities are missed to develop other characters, especially Billi’s cousin and his girlfriend. Considering that their marriage is the movie’s MacGuffin the film wastes the opportunity to compare the imposed lie of the marriage to the chosen deception of Nai Nai’s health.

“The film would have been much improved by reducing the cast, rather than neglecting characters

The very worst aspect of the film though, and not to spoil it, was the end. The final third of the film was rather a damp squib, failing to resolve the issues it raised.

The film covers so many topics not usually seen in homecoming movies, and as such it is a real pity that they are never properly engaged with. 

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# Climate change and the nation state

Anatol Lieven's book provides a necessary, refreshing take on an urgent crisis

**Patrick Hall**  
Researcher, Bright Blue

Over the last decade, climate change has made its way to the forefront of public debate. Anatol Lieven — a foreign policy thinker of a realist disposition — makes his contribution to this debate in his book *Climate change and the nation state: the realist case*. Climate change is a global issue that has no respect for national borders which is why, at first glance, this book seems perplexing. How does a theory such as realism, entrenched in the ideas of the nation state, sovereignty and national borders, hold the answers to an issue such as climate change?

The book is centred around the premise that we already have the scientific understanding and financial resources to tackle climate change, but what is lacking is political consensus. In some ways, this book is very much a contemporary take on combating climate change, with there being little mention of the role technology may play in future as part of societies' efforts to mitigate climate change.

Lieven picks apart left-wing intersectionality on climate change, which conflates climate change with other issues such as gender equality or anti-racism. Intersectionality claims that these issues are interconnected, and therefore to resolve one issue should be to resolve all. Laudable though campaigns to resolve these issues may be, Lieven argues that the Left politicise climate change and in doing so, create a partisan divide. The same is argued for socialist and green parties' ideological commitment to open borders, which Lieven asserts fuels the fire of right-wing populist parties that are typically sceptical of climate change. Equally, the book criticises

right-wing zealots for their almost religious commitment to the denial of science and climate-scepticism. By those on the political right, climate change is perceived to be, incorrectly, a left-wing issue. In point of fact, it is an issue regardless of one's political leanings. Ironically, left unchecked, climate change will make certain areas of the planet uninhabitable and drive mass migration on a far greater scale than what has been witnessed in Europe over the last decade. If populist parties truly fear mass migration, Lieven makes the case that they should be seeking to combat climate change now. Ultimately, the book argues for the need to depoliticise climate change, and garner commitment to combating it from all sides.

Lieven supports the idea of a Green New Deal, and believes that as part of 'saving capitalism from itself', society will be required to diverge from its materialist economy. The book reflects on Britain during the blitz and the material sacrifices made during that time.

The realist school of thought understands the power of the nation state in terms of the military. Lieven believes that climate change, not China, is the most significant security threat to the United States. In fact, the book expresses some admiration for the way in which the Chinese Government has rapidly mobilised and delivered climate policy. However, the book appears all too convenient in its assessment of China. For all of their progress on delivering climate policy, Lieven appears to gloss over the human rights violations, quashing of democracy and expansionist ambitions that are associated with China.

Some of the effects that will be felt as a result of climate change have already become inevitable. Consistent with his realist principles, Lieven calls for climate

change to be reframed as a national security issue, and to partially repurpose the military to deal with climate resilience for when these effects take hold.

This non-partisan book provides an original take on an issue which has sadly been kicked about in a game of political football. To read it, no doubt, will be challenging and possibly uncomfortable for some. It has been the most refreshing book I have read all year. [👉](#)

*Climate change and the nation state: the realist case;*  
Anatol Lieven;  
Penguin;  
220 pages.  
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