# Supreme court ruling on legal definition of woman sparks protests and abuse



The landmark Supreme Court ruling on the legal definition of a woman has triggered a wave of intense public reaction, highlighting deep divisions over sex-based rights and transgender issues in the UK. On Wednesday, five Supreme Court judges sided with campaign group For Women Scotland (FWS), which argued that protections and access to single-sex spaces should apply exclusively to individuals born female. This decision brought a long-running legal battle to a close and is anticipated to have widespread implications across Britain relating to gender identity and sex-based legislation.

Following the judgment, the campaigners behind FWS have faced an unprecedented volume of death threats and misogynistic abuse. The three women leading the campaign spoke openly about the hostile messages they have received, some mere hours after the ruling. One email said: “You’re a group of disgusting murderers and deserve death. God will rip you from your family one day and nobody will mourn you.” Another message stated: “Your inhumanity makes me vomit. You stupid women should feel deeply ashamed for being so stupid.”

Susan Smith, a representative of FWS, remarked to The Times: “It would never occur to us to send messages like this or to call our opponents ugly. But we get this every day.” Marion Calder, one of the other women involved, lamented the frequency of threats, particularly from men: “Sadly, it is almost inevitable that women who speak up for our rights will be threatened by angry men. It’s a tale as old as the hills. Ironically, this lot think they are on the side of ‘progress’, ‘kindness’ and ‘human rights’, but they have no issue using the most dehumanising, sexist abuse or threatening the most extreme violence. Thankfully, the nastiness is dwarfed by messages of love and support, many of which have brought us to tears.”

Despite the serious nature of the threats, the campaigners have not reported them to Police Scotland, where such reports would be required for investigation.

On Saturday, thousands of demonstrators gathered in central London and other cities such as Glasgow to protest against the Supreme Court ruling. In Parliament Square near the Supreme Court, many participants carried the trans Pride flag and displayed placards critical of the government, particularly singling out Health Secretary Wes Streeting. Statues including those of Winston Churchill were adorned with Pride flags taped to their hands, while the statue of suffragist Millicent Fawcett was defaced with slogans. The Metropolitan Police confirmed they are investigating acts of vandalism that took place during the protests.

At one point, the London crowd proceeded with an impromptu march around Parliament Square and Green Park, which brought traffic to a halt. Demonstrators chanted phrases such as “Wes Streeting, blood on your hands,” “F\*\*\* the judges, burn the courts,” and “Trans liberation, no assimilation.”

Separately, Justine Roberts, founder of the parenting website Mumsnet, revealed that the platform had previously been “blacklisted” from hosting UK government advertising due to its stance on transgender matters. Roberts recounted that in early 2022, the media buying agency responsible for government adverts ceased placing ads on Mumsnet. She attributed this to the company’s decision to allow debates on transgender issues, prompting accusations of “bigotry” and leading to significant commercial challenges, including at times threatening the organisation’s survival.

Roberts told The Times: “We’re not anti-trans. But we believe women have a right to raise concerns about their sex-based rights.” She added that relations with advertisers improved after she discussed the issue with Boris Johnson’s team in May 2022 during an interview, after which government advertising on Mumsnet resumed. She also confirmed that other advertisers, such as Barclays and Ocado, had withdrawn their support due to the perception of Mumsnet’s position on trans issues, although Ocado later issued an unreserved apology.

A Cabinet Office spokesperson stated: “We have never blacklisted any outlet for gender-critical views. Mumsnet has continued to be used for advertising and partnerships, including in 2022. We follow transparent criteria for where we place advertising in our ‘Safe’ framework [for ethical decision-making] published online.” However, sources familiar with internal government discussions described a period when “the ‘woke mind virus’ did infect government advertising after 2022.”

Roberts also noted that moderation of content related to sex and gender, while accounting for only about five per cent of site discussions, requires an outsized amount of effort due to attempts to inflame or derail conversations.

In the immediate aftermath of the ruling, government departments and employers have been prompted to review policies relating to dress codes, single-sex spaces, and parental leave. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), which represents around 160,000 human resources professionals across the UK, has issued guidance urging organisations to audit internal policies and ensure that their language “reflects the legal definition of sex.”

Corporate leaders are now assessing how to adapt to the new legal landscape to avoid potential disputes. Alex Mahon, chief executive of Channel 4, commented: “The impact is pretty unclear at this time for companies. We will all need to take legal advice and that will take time.”

The Supreme Court ruling, centred on whether trans women could occupy seats on boards reserved for women, has therefore set off a complex debate affecting legal frameworks, workplace policies, and public sentiment. It has also exposed the polarised nature of discussions surrounding gender identity and women’s sex-based rights in contemporary Britain.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://supremecourt.uk/uploads/uksc_2024_0042_judgment_aea6c48cee.pdf> - This official Supreme Court judgment document details the ruling in the For Women Scotland Ltd case, confirming the legal definition of 'woman' in the Equality Act 2010 as referring to biological sex, thereby corroborating the court's unanimous decision discussed in the article.
* <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/united-kingdom/article/2025/04/16/uk-supreme-court-rules-definition-of-woman-based-on-sex-at-birth_6740290_135.html> - This news article reports on the UK Supreme Court ruling that defined 'woman' based on sex at birth, its implications on transgender rights, and the public reactions including those of the campaign group For Women Scotland, supporting claims about the ruling and its societal impact.
* <https://news.sky.com/story/uk-supreme-court-makes-unanimous-decision-on-definition-of-a-woman-13349170> - Sky News covers the Supreme Court's unanimous decision on the legal definition of woman under the Equality Act 2010, including statements from Lord Hodge and the protection the Act affords transgender individuals, aligning with the legal and societal context outlined in the article.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-65366004> - BBC News discusses the backlash faced by For Women Scotland campaigners, including death threats and abuse received following the Supreme Court ruling, thereby corroborating the article's description of hostile public reaction toward the campaigners.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/apr/19/thousands-protest-uk-supreme-court-ruling-definition-woman-gender-rights> - The Guardian reports on the protests in London and Glasgow against the Supreme Court ruling, including details about demonstrators carrying Pride flags, vandalism of statues, and police investigations, supporting the article's account of the public demonstrations.